Virginity matters: power and ambiguity in the attraction of the Virgin Mary

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Virginity Matters: Power and Ambiguity in the Attraction of the Virgin Mary

Martin Warner: PhD thesis.

This thesis seeks to account for virginity as the source of Mary's power to attract.

The point of departure is the syncretistic culture of the classical world. Here, patristic use of Old Testament typology recognises the distinctive work of grace in Mary's virginity, thus allowing it to become the determining quality by which her experience is subsequently perceived and universalised.

The thesis divides its exploration into the three categories by which Mary is portrayed in the gospels - woman, spouse, mother - concluding its investigation with the end of the nineteenth century and its new understanding of human identity in gender and sexuality. In each category the thesis attempts to identify ways in which the attraction of virginity has functioned through ambiguity (Mary as virgin and mother, mother and spouse of her son) as a positive quality of potency and freedom, rather than as a strictly biological human condition with negative association in contemporary culture.

In order to assess the extent of Mary's attraction in periods that lacked the modern forms of articulating self-awareness, the thesis has considered the fabric of devotional practice in religious texts, art, drama and ritual, seeking to allow the perceptions of earlier periods of history (a medium in itself) to challenge our own. As expressions of attraction to Mary, these media have yielded an insight into the power of virginity as a statement of paradisal, heavenly life accessed by grace through male and female human experience. They have also shown virginity to be a source of power that can be exploited for political ends.

Finally, the thesis suggests that the power of Mary's virginity has been subversive and liberating in Church and society, thus indicating its neglected significance as a statement about the ambiguity of our nature as human, gendered, and sexual beings.

VIRGINITY MATTERS:

POWER AND AMBIGUITY IN THE ATTRACTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

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INTRODUCTION

> The Virgin Mary has inspired some of the loftiest architecture, some of the most moving poetry, some of the most beautiful paintings in the world; she has filled men and women with deep joy and fervent trust....But the reality her myth described is over.[1]

It is the intention of this thesis to investigate Mary's power to attract, seeking to address a question that could be regard as problematic: Does virginity matter?

For some, the power of virginity might be regarded as a culturally and historically determined category of attraction, a myth applied to Mary. And if we wished to loosen its association with her, could we perhaps qualify Mary's identity as virgin and thereby discover the woman who, as Joseph's wife and the mother of his children lives a life that enfolds the miraculous birth of the word made flesh with an experience more like our own? To what extent would we then locate Mary's power to attract in her identity as virgin, and to what extent in her experience as woman, spouse and mother?

Attraction is itself an expression of power. We therefore begin this investigation with a chapter that seeks to identify the source of Mary's power to attract. It charts what her place might be in the Christian tradition that had its formative years in the syncretistic culture of the Mediterranean. The issue that confronts us in that context is whether Mary enters Christian devotion as a figure derived from the slender and sometimes unpromising profile of her in the gospels, or from the assembly of goddesses that enchanted the ancient pagan world. But even the recognition of Mary as human and creaturely, not a goddess, does not eliminate other questions about the

[1] Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Picador, 1985) p. 338.

power of her attraction. Might she be a personification of the projection of female human experience into the life of the divine, of God? How relative might this projection be? How does it connect with the figure of Mary in the gospels?

Against these questions we set out in the first chapter the early patristic account of Mary's virginity as a scriptural sign of pre-lapsarian and heavenly life revealed in the new creation of the birth of Jesus. This account enables virginity to function as a category of earthly potential that can, through grace, have universal and heavenly significance. It is in this respect that we locate the distinctive source of Mary's power to attract in a definition of her that rapidly became absolute in her identity as the virgin. Subsequently we inquire how this definition enables Mary to function so powerfully, exploring devotion to Mary under the categories of her that we perceive in the gospels (woman, spouse, mother), and terminating our investigation with the impact of the awakening of new understandings of human identity at the end of the nineteenth century.

If virginity provides the capacity for universal identification with Mary (as the mother of Jesus, the Madonna, Mary is also claimed as "my" mother), it also initiates various modes of discourse and imagining that become characteristic of devotion to her. The most pervasive of these is ambiguity, enabling a shared identity to form that crosses the boundary between the institutional and the popular, the clerical and the lay, the sexual and the non-sexual, the heavenly and the mundane. Thus devotion to Mary can regard her as the sublime Queen of Heaven, but also identify her with the earthly desolation of the cross. More particularly, for those who do not live a life of virginity, Mary, the virgin *par excellence,* gives value to their experience because she is also mother and spouse, thus subverting tendencies towards an asceticism that is hostile towards human sexuality.

This ambiguity proves to be a particularly creative mode of discourse and devotion, determining not only the textual evidence, but also the witness of other media, such as paintings, statues, ritual, literature, music, and architecture. The historical investigation of Marian devotion will also confront us with a mode of discourse that may seem foreign: the language of the past. This is particularly true when dealing

with so sensitive a matter as virginity and the discovery that devotion to Mary the virgin can also challenge contemporary notions of sexual identity.

The first chapter, then, seeks to locate Mary's power to attract in her virginity as a dimension of human existence that through grace lends universality to her identity as woman, spouse, and mother. The attraction of this power is manifest in the history of Marian devotion through ambiguity, through multi-media forms of theological, cultural and political statement, and through ways that challenge our perception of history and the present.

In the next two chapters we seek to justify the assertion that Mary's power to attract is located in her virginal identity by inquiring into the extent to which those who differ from her have found themselves susceptible to her attraction. Other questions also arise. What is the effect on the individual lives and in the societies formed by those who recognise in Mary a source of power? Who controls Mary's power to attract?

Chapter 2, "Mary the Virgin Spouse", explores the ability of Mary as virgin spouse to attract the devotion of non-virginal spouses, while in the ambiguity of her own relationship to Jesus as spouse we also encounter a discourse about sexual identity that describes other enclosures, such as the religious life. The eradication in post-Reformation England of the figure of Mary provides us with an opportunity to consider the power of virginity from an inverse perspective. The employment of the discarded but still potent metaphor of virginity for the purpose of establishing dynastic claims and national or political hegemony, in both Protestant and Catholic contexts, is indicative of the extent to which virginity has in the past exercised a universal fascination, easily lost from sight in a sexually permissive culture that attaches little value to it.

Although life choices for single women and men were limited in the medieval era, their situation may have worsened with the loss of monasticism as a primary option. Ironically, therefore, the Reformation that sought to liberate the laity may have worsened conditions for some of them. In England, the loss of a consistent female exemplar in religion or society produced, by the nineteenth century, an oppressive

religious and social requirement to conform to marriage as a standard of acceptance and male domination. We might not be surprised, then, that the impact of the Oxford Movement, with its recovery of devotion to Mary and its talk of virginity, raised disturbing questions about notions of manliness.

It is, therefore, to an exploration of "effeminacy" and its links with class identity, and the connections between apparently antithetical categories (for example, male/female, child/adult, virgin/harlot) that we turn in chapter 3, on the attraction of Mary the virgin mother. Here we explore more thoroughly the attraction of difference as it manifests itself in the subversive quality of Mary's multi-media presentation and influence. We conclude that her power to subvert is not controlled by any human agency, in spite of various attempts to appropriate it. In such situations it can even be self-subverting, Mary appearing to undermine her own image when it is distorted by power politics.

The thesis seeks, then, to offer an account of virginity as the source of Mary's power to attract. It reads virginity as a positive, human (not simply female) category, subversively employed through the ambiguity of metaphor, and exercised creatively as a multi-media statement of human potential and heavenly beauty. This exploration of attraction to Mary as the virgin woman, spouse and mother touches on many aspects of human life. We see it crossing and blurring the boundaries of time, culture and gender. The persistence of devotion to Mary as the Virgin, a category of human identity not much valued today, therefore prompts us to inquire into the extent to which, in the Christian tradition, virginity matters.

CHAPTER 1 MARY THE VIRGIN WOMAN

It is the intention of this chapter to consider the fundamental reason why Mary exercises the powerful attraction that devotion to her has revealed since at least the second century of the Christian era and how that power is derived. Some will account for this by the identification of her with the pagan goddesses of the ancient world in which Christianity first took root. Our consideration of the question, Is Mary a goddess? leads us to believe that the identification works only at a superficial level; more serious attempts to equate Mary with a pagan cult require a distortion of the details of the cult itself, or of the Church's understanding of Mary in the scheme of salvation.

The danger of locating Mary's power to attract in something other than the potential that is intrinsic to her creatureliness, however, is investigated in this chapter's second section, Is Mary a person? Our concern in this section is not with the historical details of Mary's existence, but with how the power of her attraction might be interpreted. We use the presentation of her by feminist theologians, among others, to demonstrate that the identification of Mary as a manifestation of the life of God, for example, damages her ability to be a sign of the working of God's grace in ordinary life, the sign of which her virginity is a potent symbol.

Finally, in order to assess how the attraction of Mary the virgin woman functions to reinforce our understanding of her as a person miraculously graced by God, but accessible to all ("our sister"), we turn to the middle ages, a period considered by some to be the pinnacle of Marian fervour. In this period we investigate some of the wealth of devotion to her in order to identify the paradoxical mechanisms by which the tension of Mary's apparent oddness (her virginity) and her ordinariness (her humanity) attracts, in ways that may challenge our own notions of sexual and gender identity. In this section we begin to detect the ambiguity evident in the following two chapters that explore further how Mary's virginal attraction has drawn those different from her across boundaries we might regard as absolute.

The purpose of this first chapter, then, is to lay the foundations of our understanding that the distinctive source of Mary's power to attract is to be located in her virginity as a medium and sign of grace. Having established the place of Mary the virgin woman as integral to Christian understanding about the revealing of the new creation in Christ, and the manifestation of that revealing throughout the history of Christian culture, we shall be prepared to investigate subsequently how Mary's power as virgin woman, spouse, and mother has attracted those who differ from her. We shall also inquire what the consequences of the denial of her attraction have been, how virginity functions in that context, and its capacity to subvert.

But to begin our inquiry into this distinctive attribute of virginity, a sign of something miraculous yet human, earthly yet revelatory of the life of the new creation, we turn now to consider how the attraction of Mary the virgin woman derives its power and its place in the Christian tradition.

1. *Is Mary a goddess?*

Marina Warner describes a devotion to Mary that is also interpreted by some as a goddess myth.[1] The reason for this is not difficult to establish. It is suggested by many of the representations that any compendium of Marian art might offer,[2] and commentators not well disposed towards Christianity might be quick to offer the verdict of paganism by another name.[3] Others, more sympathetic to the Christian tradition, may also use language that suggests the status of goddess[4], while many feminists, critical of a patriarchal emphasis in Christianity, alight on the term as indicative of a forgotten tradition in which the divine is fully embodied in the feminine.

Recognising that this is an area widely divergent views, the question that confronts us is what grounds there might be for identifying the Marian cult as that of a goddess. We shall begin by looking at origins, an area already quite well documented.[5]

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[1] Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Picador, 1985) p. xxv.

[2] For example, Caroline H. Ebertshauer, Herbert Haag, Joe H Kirchberger, Dorethee Sölle (eds.), Mary: Art, Culture, and Religion through the Ages (New York: Crossroad, 1998), see "Cult sites and places of pilgrimage", pp. 200 – 205.

[3] John Singleton notes that in the midst of controversy about Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic devotion to Mary "the secularist publicist Myles McSweeny explained in a spiritualist magazine that the Virgin Mary was a relative of the goddess Venus." John Singleton, "The Virgin Mary and Religious Conflict in Victorian Britain" in Journal of Ecclesiastical History (43) no. 1. 1992, p. 28. In this respect he is echoing a view articulated three hundred years earlier in an Elizabethan tract: "When you hear of our Lady of Walsingham, our Lady of Ipswich, and such other, what is it but an imitation of the Gentiles idolaters' Diana Agrotera, Diana Coryphea, Diana Ephesia, &c., Venus Cypria, Venus Paphia, Venus Gdinia?" Quoted in Helen Hackett, Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Macmillan, 1995) p. 14.

[4] Some Marian hymnody would offer obvious examples, such as John Lingard's popular *Hail Queen of heaven, the ocean's star*: Celebration Hymnal for Everyone (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 1994) People's edition, 238.

[5] Principally, Stephen Benko, The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology (Leiden: E J Brill, 1993); Michael P Carroll, The Cult of the Virgin: Psychological Origins (Princeton University Press: 1986); Ross Shepard Kraemer, Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World (O.U.P., 1992.) The Kollyridian cult that was dominated by the worship of Mary flourished only in Thrace and attracted little attention in patristic literature (reference is made to it once by Epiphanius). Benko, Carroll, Kraemer and particularly Geoffrey Ashe, The Virgin (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1976) attach greater importance to it than the evidence suggests it warrants.

Stephen Benko offers a survey of the goddess cults of the Greco-Roman world and seeks for similarities within the Christian tradition of devotion to Mary, looking especially at the treatment in patristic writing of the woman clothed with the sun, from the book of Revelation. Benko contends that Marian devotion develops late in Christianity precisely because of Christianity's rivalry with paganism and specifically the goddess cults. He maintains that the identification of Mary with these cults is therefore present but resisted until the Council of Ephesus in 431. As the climate of opinion changes and the Church recognises that it can confidently celebrate the establishment of its influence, the moment is marked by the proclamation of Mary as the *Theotokos*, Mother of God.

This change of outlook took place against a background of significant theological ferment, as East and West engaged in Christological debate. The extent of any direct identification of Mary with any of the popular Mother Goddess cults is questionable, tempting though it might be to make the connection. The evidence from Christian sources suggests awareness of and resistance to that identification.[6] The Fathers' suspicion of the application of *Theotokos* to Mary, especially in the West for fear of confusion with paganism, is reminiscent of Justin's patient explanation of the Christian eucharist in his *Apology*, and evidence that engagement with such misunderstanding had for three hundred years characterised the climate of theological debate.[7] To be quite clear about Justin's motives, J Gresham Machen describes the approach he takes and the similar one taken by Origen as an *ad hominem* argument,[8] while Jean Daniélou and Henri Maron point to the way Justin imaginatively perceives the distortion of truth among the Greeks who in his opinion made mythological fables out of the same mysteries that the prophets used to point

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[6] Graef accounts for the Church's ambivalence towards devotion to Mary in her description of the context in which Christianity spread in the Roman Empire: "A strong emphasis on his virgin mother would have led to unfortunate comparisons and, possibly, identifications. On the other hand, the more educated pagans, especially those who were philosophically inclined, could understand Christian monotheism, but not the reality of the Incarnation." Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985) p. 33. See p. 78: Ambrose "had to develop his teaching in opposition to dangerous popular movements: Arianism, which denied the full divinity of Christ, and the pagan worship of Kybele."

[7] "The same thing in the mysteries of Mithra also, the evil demons imitated, with the addition of certain words, as you know or may learn." Justin Martyr, Apology I. lxvi in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867) vol. 2, p. 65. The similarity between the Christian eucharist and the Mithraic cult gives rise to comparisons being drawn that reflect the identification of Mary with the cult of Cybele or some other goddess.

[8] J Gresham Machen, The Virgin Birth of Christ (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1930) p. 330.

to God; "in this sense Justin does not hesitate to compare the ascension of Perseus and that of Jesus, Danäe's conception and Mary's; the former, for him, are only the distortion of the latter".[9] Clement of Alexandria explores the similar theme of preparatory (or worldly) instruction, *propaideia* or *kosmike paideia,* in book one of his *Stromateis.* Against his opponents Clement links wisdom with virtue, relating wisdom to Christ, and so rebutting the accusation that reference to philosophy (as pagan) is comparable with a woman who prostitutes herself.[10]

Evidence of the embryonic stage of Marian devotion is to be found in Benko's survey of the Fathers of East and West up to the fifth century in that they produce no consistent view of the identity of the woman in Revelation 12, identifying her initially as a representative figure of the Church, but in time also making the connection with Mary. The ambiguity of the image is itself a warning of the danger of building a case for the identification of Mary with the goddess represented by the figure behind John's vision on the patristic reading of this text. Indeed, the division of opinion on the matter may persuade us that if Mary is to be identified with the woman in this passage, then we might agree with G H Box that the image is a mythical figure crudely incorporated for the purposes of the author of the book of Revelation: "In other words, it was the gospel story which suggested the selection of the mythical representation in Rev XII. It would be easier to suppose that the Septuagint of Isaiah VII.14 had given rise to the story of the Virgin Birth than the mythical figure in Revelation."[11] However, against the uncertain identity of this mythical figure we can set the Fathers' consistent inquiry into the significance of Mary's virginity as a statement of the action of God's grace in redemption.

We are concerned with the theological significance that is gradually attached to Mary; subsequently we shall consider how that theological significance translates

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[9] J Daniélou, H Maron, The Christian Centuries (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), vol. 1, p. 93.

[10] Migne, PG 8, 718 and see below, p. 21. Annewies van den Hoek notes that in an exploration of the theme of wisdom and instruction Clement draws on the Sarah/Hagar material that represents the late first century BC Hellenistic Jewish thought of Philo. But in this context Clement also uses the imagery of the fruit-bearing earth, for example, as found in pagan contexts, and noted below, p. 13. Annewies van den Hoek, Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo in the *Stromateis* : An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model (Leiden: E J Brill, 1988) pp. 22-23; on Clement's linking of wisdom and virtue, see pp. 44, 46.

[11] G H Box, The Virgin Birth of Jesus (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1916) p. 167.

into a powerful devotion. The extent to which Mary's virginal identity has more recently come to be perceived as oppressive constitutes a line of inquiry that we also pursue later in this chapter. But for the moment our focus centres on her virginity in relation to Christology, regarded as a sign of the ability of God to act through her in a miraculous way, but also used metaphorically as a statement about freedom, and the dignity of the new creation.

The earliest reference to Mary outside the canon of the New Testament is in the letters of Ignatius. Recognising that he is writing in the context of a struggle with docetic gnosticism, we can understand the importance Ignatius attaches to the reality of Jesus's birth. Whatever the doubts cast on the authenticity of some of the letters ascribed to Ignatius, the reference to Mary's virginity is sufficiently certain to enable T J Thorburn to observe after extensive study and comparison of the texts that it provided testimony to an early second century belief in "an incarnation of God though the instrumentality of a human and virginal birth."[12]

It is also important to clarify the precise way in which we are referring to Mary as virgin. Again, the teaching of the early Fathers in both East and West presents consistent agreement on Mary's virginal conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, some Fathers will also speak of her virginity *in partu* and *post partum,* throughout and after childbirth; some will go further and argue that she never lost her virginity through sexual relations with Joseph and bearing the children referred to in the gospels as the brothers of Jesus. Graef offers a general survey of the shifting opinion on this matter,[13] but an example of the uncertainty of the question even in the mind of the most decided of men is found in Jerome.[14]

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[12] T J Thorburn, A Critical Examination of the Evidence for the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth (London: S.P.C.K., 1908) p. 69. See p. 70 on the textual variants: "That there is nevertheless *one* clear and distinct reference to the virginity of Mary in all three versions is an important point, and establishes the contention that these documents, from whatever source and age they may come, all clearly and distinctly recognize and state the peculiar and unique character of the birth of Jesus." (The versions to which Thorburn refers are the longer and shorter Greek version and the Syriac version.)

[13] Graef's survey of the Fathers reveals that Tertullian, Origen and Hilary did not hold that Mary remained a virgin *in partu*, but the Cappadocian fathers did. Jerome is silent on this specific point; Ambrose seems to shift his opinion under pressure from Jovinian. Augustine and Athanasius both speak of Mary as ever-virgin. Beyond the shifting attitude of the patristic evidence towards Mary's virginity *in partu* Graef finds no patristic evidence for belief in Mary's perpetual virginity expressed as personal sinlessness until Augustine and notes that it is on this point that a doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is based. Graef, op.cit, pp. 38 – 100. We shall consider the significance of

J N D Kelly notes that Jerome regarded the Septuagint as right in translating Isaiah 7.14 as "a virgin shall conceive", and in the context of this section of his commentary on Isaiah includes a good deal of invective against the Jews for their "blindness, immorality and greed."[15] This is an attitude that comes to be closely associated with Marian devotion in the Middle Ages, as we shall discover later in this chapter. Shortly after working on the commentary on Isaiah, Jerome began a commentary on Ezekiel. In this work his interest in the Temple leads him to describe it as a veiled sign of the coming revelation of Christ. Thus of Ezekiel 44.2 he writes that the eastern gate "shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no man may enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it", interpreting this as pointing to Mary, through whom the Lord God had passed, "and who remained a virgin before giving birth and after giving birth." Kelly notes that this passes over in silence any speculation about miraculous birth giving (virginity *in partu*).[16]

Kelly also notes that several years earlier, in a heated engagement with Helvidius Jerome likewise had defended Mary's virginity in her conception and after giving birth, and continues, "Jerome was not yet ready to support the view soon to be accepted in the west that she had retained her virginity in the process of parturition, i.e. that the act was miraculous involving no opening of her womb." However, "Many years later, doubtless influenced by Augustine and Ambrose... Jerome came to teach the virginity of Mary *in partu*."[17] A question that will lurk in the background of this investigation is what importance we attach to Mary's virginal identity in childbirth and thereafter perpetually.

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this doctrine in connection with the identification of Mary as a goddess later in this chapter. At this stage we simply note the hesitancy with which Mary's perpetual virginity comes to be defined.

[14] It is important that our assessment of the definition of Mary in terms of her virginity is disentangled from the perceived misogyny of those like Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine, for example, who are among its strongest defenders. This point is also made by Frances Young: "The much-quoted passages purporting to represent the views of a patriarchal and prejudiced male hierarchy, though certainly offensive are not necessarily wholly characteristic of the attitudes towards women even of those from whom they are quoted." Frances Young, The Making of the Creeds (London: SCM, 1991) p. 102.

[15] J N D Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (London: Duckworth, 1975) p. 301.

[16] ibid, p. 307.

[17] Kelly, op.cit, p. 106.

We have already noted that Ignatius stresses the reality of the birth of Jesus as an argument against docetism. Ignatius links the significance of the virginal conception with the soteriological nature of God's action in the incarnation. In Chapter 19 of his letter to the Ephesians he describes Mary's virginity as one of three mysteries hidden from the prince of this world, the other two being her offspring (Jesus) and the death of the Lord. Already Ignatius expresses this work of God in terms of being a new creation and something "unlike everything else," that "struck men with astonishment".[18] Given the early date of Ignatius's letters and his reference simply to Mary's virginity, we can see the impact on subsequent patristic thought of the Protoevangelium, the apocryphal gospel of James, dated to about the middle of the second century.[19] It is in all probability from this source that the notion of Mary's virginity after childbirth is derived, becoming gradually established as orthodox belief.

The account in the Protoevangelium tells how the midwife, Salome, examines Mary after she has given birth and testifies to Mary's physical virginity. This tradition, generally recognised to be Jewish in influence, is further elaborated and supported by two other texts of Eastern origin: the *Odes of Solomon* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Both refer to Mary's virginity after childbirth, and the *Odes* also speak of it as being without pain, an element that is to be of great importance in the development of medieval Marian devotion.[20] The significance of the virginal conception as a sign of grace and a statement about the nature of the new creation is also evident at this early stage in the development of patristic comment on Mary's virginity. Thus the attention of the Fathers is drawn to the signs of the first creation, Adam, Eve, the serpent, and pain in childbearing. In the cult of virginity there is the recognition of a desire by some to embody a distinctive aspect of this new dispensation.[21]

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[18] Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 19 in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867) vol 1, p. 166.

[19] Graef, op.cit, p. 35.

[20] See J Daniélou, A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicea (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) vol. 1, pp. 214 – 216. On the significance of Mary and safety in childbirth see Sara Boss, Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Cassell, 2000) pp. 191 – 196.

[21] See Augustine on the spiritual and physical aspects of virginity: "Virginity could give birth with honour only to the one who could have no equal in the manner of his birth. Truly, though, that motherhood of one holy virgin is an honour for all holy virgins. They too are Christ's mothers, along

As the Fathers begin to employ metaphors to describe their understanding of the virginity of Mary as a sign of the new creation we find them using images that also serve in other contexts to speak of birth and motherhood. One obvious example is the widely used image of the unploughed earth (employed by Tertullian, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, and Athanasius, for example) but also known in the context of pagan cults.[22] Mircea Eliade points to the description by Hesiod of heaven and earth as the divine couple who form a *leitmotif* of universal mythology. Eliade also points to the convention in the ancient world that unwanted children are left out on the ground for mother earth to care for them, and that these children often grow up to become a hero of some kind. This link with the earth as the source of nurture is also revealed in the importance attached to burial in one's homeland, still evident in Roman funerary inscriptions: *Hic natus hic situs est* ("here he was born and has come to rest").[23]

However, a reading of how this image of the virgin earth is actually used by the Fathers reveals the directive influence of Old Testament sources, particularly where those sources use imagery, such as the earth and the natural growth of plants, that is common coinage in pagan religion and provides popular material for baptism into the Christian explanation of the gospel. So in *An Answer to the Jews* Tertullian interprets the virgin birth as the fulfilment of the vision of psalm 67.6: "Elsewhere, too, the prophet predicts the fruit of this 'tree,' saying, 'The earth hath given her blessings,' – of course that virgin-earth, not yet irrigated with rains, nor fertilized with showers, out of which man was of yore first formed, out of which now Christ through the flesh has been born of a virgin."[24] In Tertullian's case the significance

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with Mary, if they do the will of his Father...On the other hand, the Church as a whole, in the saints destined to possess God's kingdom, is Christ's mother spiritually and also Christ's virgin spiritually, but as a whole she is not these things physically, Rather, in some persons she is a virgin of Christ and in others she is a mother, though not Christ's mother." Augustine, *Holy Virginity* in The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century (New York: New City Press, 1999) vol. 9, pp. 70, 71.

[22] See Benko, op.cit, pp. 211, 212. Benko makes the observation that if the symmetry of an Old Testament parallel required it, Mary's perpetual virginity may even have been disregarded (eg by Irenaeus) but was subsequently reinstated when the same reference was used again (eg by Ambrose, Augustine and Epiphanius).

[23] Mircea Eliada, Patterns in Comparative Religion (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958) p. 253. See especially chapter 7 "The Earth, Women and Fertility".

[24] Tertullian, "An Answer to the Jews" 13, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870) vol. 18, p. 248.

of Mary's virginity is located not only in this image of the virgin soil that forms the locus of the new creation,[25] but also in the freedom and disposition that this state gives her for making a choice, the outcome of which he contrasts with the same freedom and disposition given to Eve, who like Mary is also characterised by the quality of virginity: "For it was while Eve was yet a virgin, that the ensnaring word had crept into her ear which was to build the edifice of death. Into a virgin's soul, in like manner, must be introduced that Word of God which was to raise the fabric of life."[26]

Two further points about Tertullian's attitude towards Mary's virginity are worth making here. The first is that his recognition of the importance of this sign of grace in her life does not lead him to maintain her virginity after childbirth; indeed in defence of the reality of the incarnation Tertullian refers to Jesus's question, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" and points out, "nobody would have told him that his mother and brethren were standing outside, if he were not certain both that he had a mother and brethren, and that they were the very persons whom he was then announcing."[27] As Graef observes, this view is likely to have been determined by the Gnostic context in which Tertullian was writing and the consequent fear of misunderstanding.[28]

The second observation is that Tertullian makes no link between Mary's virginity and the living of that life as a sign of ascetic participation in the life of the new creation. Indeed, Hans von Campenhausen points to Tertullian's view (shared by Irenaeus, from whom Tertullian possibly derives it) that Mary marries after the birth of Jesus: "Tertullian is not in any way interested in anything that goes beyond the biblical text in glorifying Mary's human person and sanctity. There is in his writings no suspicion of any ascetic elucidation of the 'virgin' and of Mary's later marriage,

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[25] *See figure 1:* Piero della Francesca's painting, *The Nativity*. John Drury observes that "where the angels stand and the baby lies, grass and plants grow. Mary kneels on bare earth...The divine humility is realised literally. Incarnate divinity lies naked on the ground (Latin *humus*)." John Drury, Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and their Meanings (London: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 78. Drury refers here to Mary kneeling on bare earth: the image is equally capable of conveying the sense that she kneels on virgin earth.

[26] Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ" 17, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870) vol. 15 p. 200. Graef, op.cit, p. 56 notes that Zeno of Verona speaks of Christ entering through the ear of Mary, an image of the annunciation later used in art.

[27] Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ" op.cit, p. 179.

[28] Graef, op.cit, pp. 41, 42.

which, in fact, Irenaeus, too, thinks of as an actual marriage that was physically consummated."[29]

Similar treatment of the virgin birth is to be found in Irenaeus, who also alludes to Mary's virginity in terms of virgin earth.[30] More pronounced, however, is his Mary/Eve typology, drawing, like Tertullian, on the understanding of a shared status of virginity in both women.[31] Daniélou comments on the style of typological exegesis of which this is an example and maintains that Justin Martyr is the first to introduce the Eve/Mary parallel which has taken firm root in the Christian tradition.[32] The strong attraction of Old Testament typology suggests the clear intention of the Fathers to employ the terminology of the scriptures as the standard by which to define terms, possibly also used in other contexts, for the expounding of their theology about Mary.

The patristic fostering of Old Testament typology in connection with Mary flows from this period into a deep seam of devotion, perhaps most popularly expressed in the litany of Loretto. So we find Mary identified with the burning bush (Genesis 3), fleece of Gideon (Isaiah 7), the fountain and the enclosed garden in the Song of Songs, the closed gates of Ezekiel, the throne of Solomon (1 Kings 10.18), a variety of exotic fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs and Ecclesiasticus, and images of deliverance such as the staff of Moses and rod of Aaron.[33] For the most part these images relate obviously to Mary's virginity. In some instances, the staff of Moses for

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[29] Hans von Campenhausen, The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church (London: S.C.M., 1964) p. 48.

[30] See von Campenhausen's quotation from Irenaeus's work, "The Gospel of Philip": "Adam originated from two virgins – from the spirit and from the virgin earth. Therefore Christ was created from a virgin, so that he could make good the false step that had been taken in the beginning." von Campenhausen comments: "The theory of the 'two virgins' to which Adam owed his birth suggests that this idea had a most fantastically speculative and perhaps also ascetic background, which Irenaeus cuts out by giving the typology an anti-gnostic turn, limiting it to a biblical environment, and trying to interpret it only according to its Christological meaning." von Campenhausen, op.cit, p. 40.

[31] "Whence then is the substance of the first-formed (man)? From the will and the wisdom of God, and from the virgin earth...For it was necessary that...Eve should be restored in Mary, that a virgin should be a virgin's advocate, and that a virgin's obedience should undo and put away the disobedience of a virgin." Irenaeus, *Demonstration* 31 – 34, quoted in J Daniélou, A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicea (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) vol. 2, p. 183.

[32] Daniélou, History of Early Christian Doctrine, op.cit, vol. 2, p. 205; Graef is less definite about Justin's introduction of the idea; op cit, p 37 The strength of the attraction of the Mary/Eve parallel is evident throughout medieval devotion in art and liturgy.

[33] See Richard Terry Mount and Annette Grant Gash (eds.), Gonzalo de Berceo: Miracles of Our Lady (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997) pp. 11, 12.

example, they also point to her instrumentality in the work of redemption. The typology itself contains a statement about the patristic view of Mary. The Eve/Mary parallel is used to speak of the freedom of the state of virginity and the different ways in which that freedom is used. The virgin earth speaks about the originality of the new creation and is a statement about the power of virginity.

What is also significant, however, is that in the drift of patristic thought about Mary, the view of Irenaeus and Tertullian that after the birth of Jesus Mary entered a normal married life with Joseph stands curiously against the tide. What are we to make of this? Is the miracle of the virgin birth undermined by Mary's subsequent loss of her virginity, either *in partu*, or *post partum* in sexual relations with Joseph? Her perpetual virginity would appear not to be a matter of particular concern, if one's interest is in combating docetic and gnostic tendencies by making a statement about the incarnation as a miracle of the agency of God in the taking of the human into the life of the divine. But when we begin to consider the wider implications of whether human experience can relate to the agency of Mary as its purveyor in that redemptive exchange, the issue looks less straightforward.

Later in this chapter we shall consider Rosemary Radford Ruether's anxiety that perpetual virginity, as an expression of patriarchal control, separates Mary from carnal sexuality, implying the view that sex is not therefore redeemed.[34] However, the issue of the perpetual virginity surfaces again in chapter 3 (Mary the Virgin Mother) where in the context of a nineteenth century patriarchal attitude to marriage and women in society, perpetual virginity is clearly seen as a disturbing statement of freedom that is beyond male control, and as such some choose to embrace it as an expression of baptismal vocation and identity.[35] We shall, then, be giving further consideration of the implications in the drift of patristic thought towards the perpetual virginity of Mary, aware that this aspect of her identity can be employed to promote negative attitudes towards sex, but its origin need not be read as indicative of that view. Indeed, the testimony of those for whom Mary the virgin woman, mother and spouse is the source of attraction in the devotional expression of their concerns as spouses and parents, suggests that the ambiguity of this aspect of Mary's

[34] See below, pp. 40.
[35] See below, pp. 186-186.

identity argues against such a reading. At this stage, however, we suggest that there is an implicit logic in the notion of the virginal conception that leads inevitably to an understanding of Mary as perpetually virgin, thereby permitting universal identification with her as woman, mother, and spouse, since she is able to project indirect though real association with human sexuality, as we discover in greater detail in the following chapters.

The evidence of the early Fathers speaks clearly of Mary's virginity in terms of her conception of Jesus. Acceptance of her virginity after childbirth and eventually her perpetual virginity would appear to follow from the influence of the Protoevangelium. Perpetual virginity and the sense of wholeness or completeness it contains seems to be implicit in the very nature of virginity once it becomes a quality by which a person is defined. Thus temporary virginity can sound as though it is not very much like virginity at all, especially when its use as a definition is being forged in the heat of controversy and within a context in which attitudes are increasingly hostile towards the body, marriage and sex.[36] But more pressingly, the heavenly, paradisal quality associated with virginity, expressed in the Eve/Mary typology, suggests that the power of virginity to attract lies precisely in this heavenly and a-temporal category that is capable of universalising even temporal categories, such as marriage.

When we look at the way Athanasius speaks of Mary, as "virgin earth,"[37] "ever virgin,"[38] and "Mother of God"[39] we find that he felt the need to define or defend

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[36] See Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (London: Faber, 1990) pp. 62-64.

[37] In "Orations against the Arians" Athanasius writes, Jesus "assumed a body like ours, having Mary for the Mother of His Body, as it were of virgin earth." (Oration II.7) in Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature (London: Griffith, Farran and Co., 1888) p. 91.

[38] ibid, p. 165: "And, therefore, those that deny that the Son of God is properly so, of His Father's nature and substance, have as much reason to deny that He was conceived truly and properly man, of the substance of Mary ever Virgin." (Oration II.70)

[39] ibid, p. 196: "Gabriel declared this in the case of Zacharias, and he also made a similar statement with regard to Mary, the Mother of God." (Oration III.14) Frances Young notes that Athanasius has been accused of a docetic view of the incarnation. This would certainly change the way in which we read his comments on Mary and his understanding of the reality and significance of the virgin birth. However, in response to this accusation she observes that Athanasius reflects an understanding of human identity – the soul trapped in the body – typical of his time. So Young maintains that as Athanasius understood it, "the Logos had the experience because he, like us, was trapped in flesh and, like us, was tempted by it; but the subject of the experience being the Logos, he did not in the process succumb to sin, because of his very nature." Frances Young, From Nicea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background (London: S.C.M., 1983) p. 73. On the reality of the birth of Jesus

these terms, even though he writes in the context of controversy. It is clear that the motive for the use of this typology is Christological and soteriological in demonstrating the history of God's saving action in bringing about the new creation. It is also clear that the primary influence at work is not a pagan one, even though the terms drawn from the Old Testament may have had pagan provenance prior to use in scripture and may also have been used in pagan circles contemporary with the patristic era.[40] Thus Mary's virginity comes to be regarded increasingly as an absolute quality in the description of her life. As such it may be understood as a human sign of grace that at the inception of the new creation is capable of universalising the categories to which it is attached.[41]

Some who regard the historicity of the virginal conception of Jesus as problematic have explained its inclusion in the gospels of Matthew and Luke as evidence of the influence of pagan myths.[42] Gerald O'Collins notes that the contemporary systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann explains the miraculous birth tradition as expression of an already existing belief in the divine origin of Jesus by reference to a story such as the birth of Romulus and Remus; but O'Collins points out that "the parallels are by no means close."[43] Although pagan culture (philosophy) might be employed by an apologist such as Clement of Alexandria in defence of the Christian revelation, providing gentile converts to Christianity with some familiar contours,

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like us, was tempted by it; but the subject of the experience being the Logos, he did not in the process succumb to sin, because of his very nature." Frances Young, From Nicea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background (London: S.C.M., 1983) p. 73. On the reality of the birth of Jesus in flesh like all other human beings see T F Torrance, The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) p. 151.

[40] R E Clements sums up the matter in his account of the eventual divergence between Christianity and Judaism: "We can see that each was able to appeal to recognisable traits and characteristics of religious life which the Old Testament reveals to us. The study of the nature of religion in the Old Testament, therefore, and of the signs of continuity and discontinuity with older ancient Near Eastern religious life is itself a task of great theological consequence." Ronald E Clements, Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978) p. 164.

[41] Augustine offers the motive of "the honour of the Lord" for making the implication of Mary's sinlessness: "We must except the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honour to the Lord; for from Him we know what abundance of grace for overcoming sin in every particular was conferred upon her who had the merit to conceive and bear Him who undoubtedly had no sin." Augustine, "Anti-Pelagian Writings" in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1887) vol. 5, p. 135.

[42] On the influence of German liberal Protestant theologians, see below, pp. 36-37.

[43] Gerald O'Collins, Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus (O.U.P., 1995) p. 274. See also, Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions (London: S.C.M., 1990) pp. 80 – 81.

In *The Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth*, published in 1920, Vincent Taylor considered the difficulties of textual justification for this belief, and the reference to pagan influences to explain it. Taylor's conclusion was that "the ultimate considerations which determine a true estimate of the Virgin Birth tradition are doctrinal."[44] Like Moltmann, Taylor also argues that the articulation of the virgin birth in the text of the gospels may have been the crystallization of an understanding of Jesus believed but as yet unexpressed. But the catalyst identified by Taylor for this crystallization is not a pagan myth; it is Isaiah 7.14, and it is to the strand of Jewish Christianity that he directs us for the formulation of this belief. Taylor concludes his study with an outline for acceptance of both the historical and the doctrinal foundations of the virgin birth. If the doctrine were to prove "congruous with what he was and is, then admittedly, the gain is great." But if the story were to prove to be a legend,[45] Taylor maintains that even so, not all is lost. "Strangely enough, if the tradition is not historical, it thereby becomes a valuable piece of Christian apologetic... That Jewish Christians could explain the unique personality of Jesus by the miracle of a virgin birth is – if we must solve the problem so – the highest tribute they could pay."[46]

For our purposes the importance of Taylor's view is that it holds both historical and non-historical readings of the virgin birth as valid and possible. We might also recognise that in the second reading, that of the poetic for the factual, we find a

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[44] Vincent Taylor, The Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920) p. 129. However, Taylor also made a significant contribution to the debate about the texts on which the doctrine rests, as is recognised by Raymond Brown in his more recent analysis of Luke 1.34: "In my judgement Taylor has shown conclusively that the language of 34-35 is Lucan." This was in opposition to those who suggested that the concept was added as an afterthought, among whom he lists, H Usener, and T K Cheyne. See below, p. 32. See also, Raymond Brown, The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke (New York: Doubleday, 1979) p. 301.

[45] Not in the sense of being untrue, but of not being grounded in a historical event; a sense in which it is used, for example, by Moltmann, op.cit, p. 81, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jesus – God and Man (London: S.C.M., 1968) p. 141.

[46] Taylor, op.cit, p. 133. It might also be admitted that Isaiah 7.14 refers to a virgin in the perfectly natural sense of a maiden conceiving at the moment of loosing her virginity, but the text is re-interpreted by the evangelist and Christian commentators to mean something different. One way for accounting for this view is given by Rosemary Radford Ruether who maintains that "the young Mary might have been thought of as a girl who is betrothed too early an age to be fertile (a not uncommon practice at this time) and who conceives before menstruation gives the first evidence of her fertility. Rabbinic writings refer to such births as 'virgin births'." Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary – The Feminine Face of the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) pp. 34-35.

stronger affirmation of the role of Mary's virginity – "the highest tribute they could pay" – a tribute drawn from within the scriptural tradition, not derived from pagan sources. In this regard, Taylor's second view also supports the reading of the patristic understanding of Mary's virginity that we have outlined above. For as legend or highest tribute, the unquestioned acceptance of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, read from the scriptures and evident from early in the second century, develops in the tradition to become acceptance also of her perpetual virginity.

O'Collins sums up the unity of this theme in a reference to Cyril of Alexandria: "Like the original creation of the world, the new creation is divine work and pure grace – to be received on the human side, just as Mary received new life in her womb."[47] The reference to Alexandria, with the fusion of its Jewish, Greek and Christian influences, directs us to a tradition in which there is evidence of an attitude towards virginity that may prove illuminating. We have already noted that in the *Stromateis* Clement of Alexandria confidently exploits scriptural and non-scriptural material, in that he regarded the philosophy of the Greeks, like the law of Moses, as a preparatory instruction for the gospel.[48] We shall also note in the next chapter that the culture in which the understanding of Christian marriage was formed contained within it the influence of that Greek philosophy a tendency in favour of continence or celibacy.[49] It is in the context of the interaction of these influences that we should take account of Philo's expression of a Hellenistic Jewish view of virginity, recognising the extent to which from a Christian perspective Clement may have absorbed some of Philo's outlook, while at the same time reworking it.

We have already referred to the study by Annewies van den Hoek on how far Clement was influenced by Philo.[50] As we recognise the drift towards an understanding of Mary as ever-virgin, and the ambiguity that it creates in devotion to her as virgin mother and spouse, Philo may help us to account for the philosophical and theological climate that enabled Christianity to develop this absolute and defining aspect of Mary.

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[47] O'Collins, op.cit, p. 278.
[48] See above, p. 9, note 10.
[49] See below, p 72, especially note 19.
[50] As an example of "how Clement uses Philo both in a technical and theological sense in the *Stromaties*" van den Hoek cites Clement's textual borrowings from Philo's *De Congressu* in Clement's discussion of Hagar and Sara. See van den Hoek, op.cit, pp. 22, 23 – 47.

Dorothy Sly's analysis of Philo's understanding of womanhood proposes several patterns in which virginity is to be distinguished as a state that can be lost and re-gained, interrupted, one might say, by what Philo terms womanhood, that is the mode of female existence associated with menstruation, the passions, childbearing, and defilement. Philo associates the regaining of virginity with freedom from passion, union with God, giving birth to "soul-children" who are fathered by God, escape from the body. The Old Testament figures that Philo identifies as virgins include Hannah, Tamar, and Sarah "the virgin *par excellence*, for she is done with menstruation, passion, and physical intercourse."[51]

To a certain extent, the view of womanhood and virginity that Sly identifies in Philo provides some of the antitheses that we see brought together in the identity of Mary, and which result in the devotional ambiguity that is the source of her attraction and power to subvert. For example, Mary is a woman, and yet her childbearing (in flesh, not in her soul) is disconnected from "defilement"; Mary is a paradisal figure as the new Eve, and yet she is also the representative of earthly embodiment (expressed in images of her suckling the Christ child); as virgin spouse Mary inhabits an enclosure in which she is free to experience union with God (we shall find reference to her as *sponsa deitatis*), but the application of imagery from the Song of Songs permits a reading of that relationship that attracts identification with the passion of human love and desire.

In the reworking of Philo's antitheses we find grounds for maintaining that in the Christian tradition Mary's virginity is not distinguished from what Philo terms her womanhood, but identified with it. To speak of Mary's perpetual virginity can thus

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[51] Dorothy Sly, Philo's Perception of Women (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990) pp. 72, 73. Sly quotes from Philo's *De Posteritate Caini* (XL) to clarify his description of some women as "ever-virgin", a condition in which Sarah existed because she conceived after the menopause. This highlights Sarah's difference from Mary, who was not aged or barren. See Sly, op.cit, p. 81; C D Yonge (trans.), The Works of Philo (USA: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 145. The transference and reworking of ideas might further be illustrated with reference to a Mary/Sarah link by the observation that van den Hoek makes on Clement of Alexandria's reading of the person of Isaac, the offspring of Sarah. van den Hoek notes that Philo associates Sarah with wisdom and that "Isaac is enlarged by Clement to become a type of Christ". van den Hoek, op.cit, pp. 43-44. For further discussion of the Jewish context of identification of Mary with Wisdom, see the forthcoming book by Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark, 2003), especially chapter 10: "Wisdom: The Queen of Heaven".

be understood as a re-working of this Hellenised Jewish view, and a means by which the grace of God gives particular value to what had been regarded as defiled - womanhood. Mary, described as the ever-virgin woman might therefore provide both an image and language by which that aspect of womanhood that Philo had disconnected from heaven and union with God is reconnected with the female liberated body and very visibly located in heavenly union. Furthermore, the notion of a capacity for the recuperation of virginity that we discover in later medieval devotion, permitting the inclusion of matrons into the ranks of virgin saints, may similarly owe something to this strain of thought in Philo, as much as any other influence of Christian teaching that fostered negative and negating attitudes towards sex and marriage.[52]

It is with the possibility that this breadth of thought provides a framework for a positive understanding of the language and history of Mary the virgin woman that we approach with caution the question posed by Susanne Heine. She asks how the "real women of history," whom she believes we implicitly despise through our use of Mary as the ideal, could ever attain what came to Mary as the result of grace.[53] The question is surely a false one that imagines grace to produce only and ever the same result. If the grace given to Mary is that she should by motherhood (something of which she was naturally capable) be the meeting-point between heaven and earth in giving flesh to the word, then should not that same grace enable similar meetings to follow from the co-operation of nature as a result of her first *fiat*? Furthermore, subsequent chapters will endeavour to demonstrate that Mary's virginity plays a useful role in connecting issues of gender and sexuality with the significance of the incarnation. Thus we maintain that Mary is capable of presenting an ideal of human response to God's grace in such a way as to reveal through the specific condition of her virginity a universal statement about being human.

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[52] See, for example, Ruether's account of Jerome's attitude to women and marriage, in which she maintains that "he turns warm toward infants only when he can imagine them, not as the verminous offspring of defiling sex, but as candidates for virginity." Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" in Rosemary Radford Ruether (ed.), Religion and Sexism: Images of women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) pp. 173-176.

[53] Susanne Heine, Christianity and the Goddesses: Can Christianity Cope with Sexuality? (London: S.C.M., 1988) p. 144.

Benko's presentation of the syncretistic atmosphere of the centuries in which Christianity undertook its initial expansion echoes the description given by Hilda Graef[54] and points us in a helpful direction. He identifies the apocryphal gospels that were so formative of the Marian cult as symptomatic of this syncretism, describing them as the Sunday supplement literature of the early Christians, but more: "they often expressed popular beliefs which tended to become part of the body of faith."[55] He goes on to outline how, in his understanding, the Christian mind works when dealing with the formation of belief in articles of faith, linking Protestants to a one dimensional view determined by the closed canon of scripture, and Catholics to a two dimensional view in which scripture and tradition interact.

Such a neat account, however, even bolstered by a quotation from the documents of Vatican II, is not only an over simplification, in our view; it also fails to provide for the imaginative point Benko makes about the apocryphal gospels. For in that instance there are three elements involved; scripture, against which the apocryphal gospels are measured as they seek to fill in details the canonical writers omit; tradition, claiming apostolic warrant through authorship; and finally this third thing, the Sunday supplement, an external cultural element which Benko maintains draws on Jewish and pagan sources.[56]

A similar example of this process of scripture, tradition and popular culture interacting together is to be found in the development, referred to above, of epitaphs and symbols on funerary monuments and in the early representation of Jesus in primitive Christian art. F J E Raby comments on this process, indicating how Christianity fused into a distinctive art form those elements, the Jewish, Hellenistic, Roman and Christian, that were the ingredients of the syncretistic culture in which the new religion was taking root. He points out that Christian art and literature develop at a similar time, and not always with the sanction of the Church, but in an

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[54] Graef, op.cit, pp. 32, 33.
[55] Benko, op.cit, p. 200
[56] The strength and scope of the Jewish influence perhaps deserves greater attention. In the view of G H Box the strong Jewish influence in Christianity at this stage militates against identification with pagan gods: "It is difficult to see how such ideas about the sons of gods could have found entrance into primitive Christian circles – least of all *Jewish* Christian circles." The same applies therefore to Mary, and Box quotes from Harnack's *History of Dogma* in support of this view: "The idea of a birth from a virgin is a heathen myth, which was received by Christians, contradicts the entire earliest development of Christian tradition." Box, op.cit, pp, 155, 156.

area of life in which the Church's regulations are often reactive rather than prescriptive, namely the personal and the devotional.

It was through the burial societies that one such fusion of cultures took place: in the poetic form of the epitaph "the motives of many of the inscriptions and monuments resemble those of their heathen models. Thus, in the cemetery of Domitilla Orpheus appears as a type of Christ, and Amor and Psyche are represented with a reference to the Christian redemption." Even in art the images drawn from the Jewish tradition (Noah, Isaac, Moses, Jonah, Daniel, and Jesus as the shepherd[57]) were depicted in forms taken from the Hellenistic-Roman world: "Thus the figure of Christ, once it began to be more freely represented, is based on the conventional classical figure of the ideal orator or philosopher."[58] In these aspects of Christian witness the Church accepts a significant degree of cultic fluidity and uses pagan forms and images for its own theological purposes and devotion, to express distinctive Christian belief in Jesus as God and judge, the lord of life and death.[59] Although we might seek to set the theological understanding of Mary above the popular expression of devotion to her, it is important to recognise the extent to which both play a part in the development of her cult.

Michael Carroll offers a different approach to the history of this period through his consideration of the psychological perspective, basing his investigation on the demography of Spain and southern Italy where devotion to Mary is particularly strong, and the use of the Oedipal theory. Not all are persuaded by Carroll's

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[57] Neil MacGregor comments on a fourth century statue of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, that such images "hark back to ancient Greek votive figures – known as *kriophoroi* – of pagan worshippers bearing animals for sacrifice." Neil MacGregor, "Introduction" in Gabriele Finaldi (ed.), The Image of Christ (London, National Gallery Company Limited, 2000) p.12. But the difference here, of course, is that the Good Shepherd is also the sacrificial lamb he carries. *See figure 2.*

[58] F J E Raby, A History of Christian-Latin Poetry: From the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927) p. 8. Raby also quotes here the opinion of M. Brehier who sees Christianity giving to the decadent culture of the classical pagan world a "new charm and freshness", issuing not only in the art of the middle ages, but also its literature, from the vulgate the poetry of the *Stabat Mater* and the *Dies irae*. On funerary monuments see also Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price (eds.), Religions of Rome (C.U.P., 1998) vol. 1, p. 378.

[59] In the East Clement of Alexandria provides some indication of how Christianity engaged with its inherited religious and philosophical context: "Thus philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness, until the coming of the Lord. And now it assists towards true religion as a kind of preparatory training for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. . . For philosophy was a 'schoolmaster' to bring the Greek mind to Christ, as the Law brought the Hebrews." Clement of Alexandria, "*Stromateis*" I.v.28 in H Bettenson (ed.), Documents of the Christian Church (O.U.P., 1963) p. 9.

argument,[60] but he makes two points that could be helpful in our assessment of the early growth of devotion to Mary. The first is about the impact of the Council definitions in the fourth and fifth centuries and the second is about the conditioning of pagan goddess cults by the Christian cult of Mary.

Carroll makes the important point (we suspect as valid today as it was for the fourth and fifth century) that the theological definitions of the decision of a Council operate on one level of the awareness of the rank and file of the Church, while liturgical, devotional and iconographic experience operates at another.[61] So what did matter was that when, as Carroll describes it rather dramatically, "the Roman proletariat flooded into the Church they found a mother goddess who was almost completely disassociated from sexuality."[62] Benko also identifies the popular as a significant impetus in the development of devotion to Mary and suggests that through some process of assimilation a range of external elements were of significant influence. He points to an eventual reversal in the understanding of the title *Theotokos*, shifting the emphasis away from its original Christological significance to one that exalts Mary herself.[63]

This suggests that there is indeed a complex link that works at different levels to connect the theological statement about Mary that locates her significance in the realm of Christology, and the growth of popular devotion to her after the fifth century. So that what entered the theological vocabulary as a term for avoiding polytheism could be regarded as the mechanism for its subtle introduction, opening the way to Mary's divinisation through the gradual transformation of the Mother of God into the Queen of Heaven. The history of Marian devotion bears ample testimony to the outcome of that transformation, evident, for example, in the way she

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[60] Boss takes issue with Carroll's use of the Oedipal theory in connection with penitential devotion to Mary, which she locates in the worshippers' sense of guilt that "their own lives are dependent upon maternal suffering." Boss, op.cit, p. 204.

[61] A similar observation is made by Clarissa Atkinson: "Early apologists adjusted the figure of Mary to reinforce their developing doctrine of Christ, but their teachings did not always prevail in the sphere of symbolic representation – in art and worship. Mariology is an aspect of Christology; dogmatic theological assertions about Mary are derived from the implications of assertions about Christ. This is not necessarily true of expressions of devotion or of artistic and literary representations, there the primary focus is Mary herself." Clarissa W Atkinson, The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages (London: Cornell University Press, 1991) p. 108.

[62] Carroll, op.cit, p. 85.

[63] Benko, op.cit, p. 252. In support of this Benko also refers to E R Hardy and C C Richardson, Christology of the Later Fathers (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954) vol. 3, p. 31.

is depicted in the 12th century mosaic in the apse of the church of S Maria in Trastevere, and from the dedication of churches to her on the site of shrines to pagan goddesses, for example the churches of S Maria sopra Minerva and S Maria Ara Coeli.

But we should not imagine that the identification was a crude one devoid of theological understanding and its application to cultural identity. Carroll gives no account of what impact the catechetical processes would have had on the theological perceptions, even of a very basic kind, fostered in the new converts to Christianity, and there is no reason to suppose that they were not taught the theological meaning of the *Theotokos*, its similarities and differences with the goddess images and cults that may have preceded it.[64] Indeed, in his analysis of the rise of the cult of the saints in the fourth and fifth centuries, Peter Brown argues that there is good reason to question the view that supposes the tendency of the "vulgar" towards polytheism inevitably corrupts the purer monotheism of the educated classes.[65] Nor should we imagine that educated Christians were unaware of the element of pagan culture in the context of their education. Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine were all products of the same system, a fact on which Raby makes the observation that "if Christianity were to meet paganism on a common intellectual level, the Christians must avail themselves of the schools."[66]

Thus in contrast with an impression of the straightforward appropriation by one cult of another, we would present a more complex process of assessment by Christianity

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[64] On the relationship between Christian and pagan cultures and the process of conversion in third century Pontus, see Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986) pp. 533-537.

[65] Rather than a dialogue between the few and the many, Brown suggests we "attempt to see it as part of a greater whole – the lurching forward of an increasing proportion of late-antique society towards new forms of reverence... deriving its momentum from the need to play out the common preoccupation of all, the few and the 'vulgar' alike, with new forms of the exercise of power, new bonds of human dependence, new, intimate, hopes for protection and justice in a changing world." Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints: Its rise and Function in Latin Christianity (London: S.C.M., 1981) p. 21.

[66] Raby, op.cit, p. 5. He quotes Jerome's account of a dream in which finds himself receiving the terrible verdict before the seat of judgement, "Thou art a Ciceronian, not a Christian; where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." And in a similar vein, he quotes Augustine: "Truly over the door of the grammar school there hangs a curtain, yet is that curtain the shroud of falsehood, not the veil of mysteries." See also R H Markus, From Augustine to Gregory the Great: History and Christianity in Late Antiquity (London: Variorum Reprints, 1983), especially chapter V, "Paganism, Christianity and the Latin Classics in the Fourth Century".

of many classical forms and concepts, in which it recognised the pagan elements within them, and yet moulded them wherever possible and appropriate to the service of the gospel. The process is summed up in a recent study of the religions of Rome in this way: "Nor did Christians make a simple blanket rejection of all 'paganism'; there were serious debates as to what was to count as 'Christian', how far the traditional customs and festivals of Rome were to be regarded as specifically 'pagan', or how far they should be seen as the cultural inheritance of the city and its empire. To what extent, in other words, could Rome reject its 'religion of place' without jeopardizing its own cultural identity?"[67] The goddess cult can be seen as just one element in this process of rejection and continuity, bequeathing in the civic culture of its shrines the seeds of devotional habits that would eventually flower around Mary the virgin mother and queen.

Unfortunately Carroll has little evidence on which to base his suggestion that "the relatively sudden extension of Christianity to all levels of Roman society would have flooded the middle-class Church with significant numbers of the Roman proletariat."[68] Although the class issue is important for Carroll's construction of a psychological foundation for devotion to Mary, it is not our central concern. For whether the motive for devotion to a Mother goddess is Oedipal or based, as Sara Boss suggests, on a sense of guilt at life drawn from maternal suffering, the attraction remains the same.[69] It is to that attraction at a popular level that we maintain the Fathers pointed theologically, seeing in Mary one who is the embodiment of the operation of God's grace as she becomes the person through whom God shares and redeems our life in the miracle of the new creation.

Carroll does also draw attention to the dissimilarities between Mary and the pagan goddesses mainly identified with her; this dissociates Mary from the sexual activity for which many of them were known.[70] The cult that he seeks to link most closely

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[67] Beard, North and Price, op.cit, p. 365.
[68] Raby comments that the new social situation in Rome produced an upheaval that certainly made for change; in the use of practical speech rather than the literary language of the grammarians, for example. He profiles the society in these terms: "The new rich, the new official class, the swarms of provincials who invaded Rome." Raby, op.cit, p. 10.
[69] On the question of class and the recognition of Mary the virgin mother as a subversive figure, see below, p. 190-192.
[70] Carroll, op.cit, p. 41.

with devotion to Mary is that of the *Magna Mater*, the mother goddess, Cybele. Although this cult is Phrygian in origin, the themes of motherhood and fertility associated with it made it easily assimilated into other cultures. Among the Greeks the ubiquity of this mother goddess led to a conflation of cults (Gaia, Ops, Rhea, Berecynthia, Dindymene, Phrygia).[71] This fluidity of identity is also accounted for in the fact that Cybele finds no obvious place in the genealogical system of the gods. Acknowledged widely throughout the Greek world as *Meter*, this figure is "mother of all gods and all men, and doubtless mother of all life as well."[72] The frenzy associated with her cult is manifest not only in the music of its worship, but also in the self-castration of the *galli*, the priests so named after the river Gallus in Phrygia, according to Ovid.[73] The cult was officially introduced to Rome in 205 BC, where its flamboyance produced legislation to regulate its excesses,[74] although its establishment in Rome enabled both Virgil and Ovid to regard the *Magna Mater* (also known as the *Genetrix*, a name all too easily confused with *Theotokos*, in Latin, *Dei Genetrix*) as a patroness of the City.[75]

Cybele is the only goddess Carroll is prepared to consider as a virgin mother.[76] However, comparison with other goddesses is also sometimes made. The location of the Council that proclaimed Mary as *Theotokos* at Ephesus, renowned for its dedication to Diana (Artemis in Greek) suggests an obvious comparison, made by Ean Begg in his study of the cult of the Black Virgin.[77] The emphasis in the Greek cult of Artemis is on virginity, associated particularly with remote places, and in a sense that evokes the patristic imagery of virgin soil: "Artemis is the goddess of the open countryside beyond the towns and villages and beyond the fields tilled in the

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[71] H David Brumble, Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998) p. 86.
[72] Walter Burkett, Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) p. 178.
[73] Brumble, op.cit, p. 45.
[74] Beard, North, Price, op.cit, p. 97. The effeminacy associated with the *galli* draws comment from Augustine as indication of the cult's deformity and cruelty; Carroll, op.cit, p. 97.
[75] Robert E Bell, Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary (O.U.P., 1991) p. 144. On Virgil and Ovid see Brumble, op.cit, p. 87.
[76] Carroll, op cit, p. 10. This assessment is made on the basis of the verdict of Lewis Farnell, The Cults of the Greek States (O.U.P., 1907) vol. 3. But on the various manifestations of a goddss figure, the "Goddess of ten thousand names", and the danger of seeking exact comparisons with Mary therefore, see E O James, The Cult of the Mother-Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959) pp. 179-181.
[77] Ean Begg, The Cult of the Black Virgin (London: Arkana, 1985) p. 50.

works of men."[78] However, a statue of the many-breasted figure of Diana, such as that dating from second century Rome, indicates the foreignness of this cult to anything that Christianity absorbed into its devotional and imaginary life.[79] The association of virginity in the cult of Artemis is also linked with a female role in the early stages of marriage rites as celebrated in the games at Brauron near Athens.[80] Also associated with virginity is the goddess Minerva, the Greek Athena. For the Greeks this goddess is associated with strength and warlike qualities; she is an armed protectress whose aegis (goat-skin) confounds her enemies.[81] We referred above (note 3) to pejorative comparison of Mary with Venus, the Greek Aphrodite. Some aspects of her cult do invite comparison with devotion to Mary, although her associations with sexual love may make this seem unlikely. She is, however, a heavenly figure and a divine consort.[82] As the mother of Aeneas, Venus is also a mother figure for the Roman people, and one associated with purity in marriage.[83]

However, the impact of the Christian figure of Mary on the context he describes and the malleable attraction of the mother figure cult (whether Cybele, Diana, Venus or Mary[84]) provides us with a second helpful observation. In whatever ways Christianity appropriated the shrines, iconography and language of other cults, that very adoption may also condition the way those cults came to be defined – in relation to Mary.[85] Writing about a very much later application of one cult to another, Helen Hackett notes in her assessment of the identification of Elizabeth I as the Virgin Queen the capacity for transference of royal images between sacred and secular. In the Reformation the role of the monarch took on the reflection of the role of Jesus as Lord, enabling corporate identity to be vested in it in the life of the Church; in the case of a female monarch it was the role of Mary that some have

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[78] Burkett, op.cit, p. 130.

[79] The second century AD copy of the statue of Diana is illustrated in Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 35: *see figure 3*, and in comparison a painting from the Catacomb of Priscilla (fourth century or earlier) of Mary and the Christ Child, *figure 4*.

[80] Kraemer, op.cit, p. 22. Brumble notes that the association of the moon with Diana (known also in the cult of Artemis) links her with childbirth and generation. Brumble, op.cit, p. 99.

[81] Burkett, op.cit, p. 140.

[82] ibid, pp. 152-153.

[83] Bell, op.cit, p. 430.

[84] Carroll's reference to Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* is helpful here, suggesting that Isis or Mary inhabit the same persona. Carroll, op.cit, p. 32.

[85] Carroll notes that Farnell concluded that classical goddesses could not be described as "virgin mothers" and that that motif is a projection back onto their mythology by those more familiar with the cult of Mary (ibid, p. 10).

believed was appropriated.[86] The point of this reference to Elizabeth I as the Virgin Queen is that it suggests how it is possible to read back into history a process of assimilation that in fact looks more thorough going because of our familiarity with the power of the image of Mary that has developed in the Christian tradition. Thus we are inclined to identify, perhaps inaccurately, every image of a Virgin, Queen or Mother with Mary, since she is the essential personification of that image.[87]

The following conclusions about the relation between the growth of devotion to Mary and the cults of pagan goddesses can be drawn from our survey. Firstly, we can identify two fundamental theological points about Mary constantly reiterated by the Fathers that qualify any identification of her with pagan goddesses. They are that "the body of the Lord was real for it was the same as ours; for Mary is our sister"[88], and that Mary's virginity was integral to that reality for it was part of God's plan and, in the imaginative phrase of Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians, hidden from the prince of this world. This perception of Mary was a distinctive recognition of the action of grace in the life of an ordinary woman whom we can describe as "our sister", thereby marking her out as quite different from the goddesses with whom she has been identified.

Secondly, we recognise the complexity of the relationship between theological language and the context of cultic fluidity in which Mary became publicly honoured in the fifth century. We have noted that in the syncretistic world in which the cult of Mary developed, scripture and tradition interact with elements of that world, at times even assuming its guise in art and poetry, although in many instances, such as Diana of Ephesus, being quite visibly different, and not necessarily assuming the beliefs attached to images, places and customs. We also note the danger of reading back

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[86] Hackett cites Foxe's *Book of the Martyrs* and Calvin's *Institutes* in support of this view, while warning that in the complex field of symbolism usage of images need not always imply Marian identification. Hackett, op.cit, p. 24.

[87] Thorburn quotes an interesting observation from an article in The Spectator (7 October, 1906) in which that secular magazine recognises the ease with which a superficial identification can, perhaps misleadingly, be made: "That the symbolism and language of Christianity often presents striking resemblance to those of other faiths is certain, and perhaps necessary, since all human beings live in the same world, and see with the same eyes, and experience for the most part the same sensations. Although pagan and Christian art represent the *Mater Deum* and the *Madonna* in almost identical form, the fact proves nothing except that the idea of motherhood suggests everywhere the same images." Thorborn, op.cit, p. 167.

[88] Athanasius, Letter to Epictetus, 7. Migne, PG 26, 1062.

into history later perceptions that may tempt us to form a view that the historical situation does not warrant. The examples given by Helen Hackett and Peter Brown remind us of this danger. Thus the later development of devotion to Mary is not taken as evidence for the nature of its origins.

Thirdly, this survey suggests that together with the legacy of the goddesses of the pagan world the theological understanding of Mary that led to her proclamation as *Theotokos,* enabled the Church to see in Mary the role of leading us into a clearer understanding of the human nature taken from her by Jesus.[89] Such a perception implies a recovery of the theological confidence demonstrated by the Fathers, while also recognising the development of their understanding of Mary's virginity, the distinctions that should be made in the use of that concept, and that only gradually did they accept her perpetual virginity. On the basis of Carroll's inquiry into the psychological attraction of devotion to a mother figure and the point also made by Boss, we recognise that the potential for future distortion in devotion to Mary lay within the attraction of its popular foundations and the degree of pluralism accepted by the early Church in its attitude towards the civic cults of ancient Rome. In working out the balance between Mary and Jesus in devotional attitudes that develop over the thousand years that follow the Council of Ephesus, the strength of this attraction assumes greater prominence.

Finally, contemporary interest in this field takes us back to the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. At that stage, theologians in England were still reacting to the publication in 1860 of *Essays and Reviews*, which introduced the issues raised by the liberalism that was commonplace among German theologians. In particular this called into question the way in which the authority of the bible was understood, and, inevitably, the understanding of doctrinal questions too. As Bernard Reardon has observed, "The 'Higher Criticism' did not trench directly upon dogmatic questions – its field of interest was simply that of objective historical inquiry – but its concern with the human condition under which divine revelation has been

[89] James notes that "in an age in which the Goddess cult was so deeply laid the Mother of the Redeemer hardly could escape being assigned a position which in many respects corresponded to that of the Mater Magna of the pagan world. Nevertheless, to assume that the cult of Mary was merely the Christianized version of its pagan prototype is a simplification." James, op.cit. p. 202.

received almost inevitably gave rise to misgivings about the extent to which the divine might on the critics' own showing turn out to be the all too human."[90]

The virgin birth is a good example of the kind of dogmatic question raised indirectly by the 'higher criticism'. Interest in historicity turned the minds of German theologians (C Boklen, H Gunkel, H Leisegang, E Meyer, R Seydel, and perhaps most influentially in Britain, H Usener) to the comparison of the gospel story with that of other religions. Thus the birth of Alexander, Perseus, Plato, Augustus and the Buddha were all considered as parallels to the Christian story of the virgin birth. In Britain the German influence is most recognisable and accessible in the work of T K Cheyne, who was "prepared to travel as far as current radicalism would take him."[91]

The work of T J Thorburn, *A Critical Examination of the Evidence for the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth* (1908), G H Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus* (1916), and J Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930)[92] covers much of the ground explored by Benko, Carroll and Kraemer. None of the latter three makes any reference to this earlier interest in their field and it seems as though it has been forgotten. Although the specific subject is not identical (the virgin birth does not direct attention so exclusively at Mary) the arguments advanced in refutation of the parallels pointed to by the German rationalists are for the most part applicable to the parallels evinced by today's feminist rationalists.

In answer to the question with which we started (Is Mary a goddess?), consideration of the origins of devotion to Mary suggests that the identification of that devotion with the cult of pagan goddesses is complex and less strong than may at first appear. There was certainly an inheritance from those cults in the devotion to Mary as it developed, but we should also be cautious about regarding uncritical adaptation of classical paganism as the origin or motive of that development. Rather, we should recognise that any cult will draw from beyond itself to develop expressions in artistic and literary forms that perpetuate its existence and shape the outlook of its followers.

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[90] Bernard Reardon, From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain (London: Longman, 1971) p. 358

[91] ibid.

[92] In spite of some questions about his method and handling of scriptural texts, Machen offers some valuable insights.

In the case of Mary, the development of devotion to her may have filled a gap left by the decline of interest in mother goddesses,[93] raising inevitable comparisons.

But the theological climate of Christological debate in which an understanding of Mary grew was of significant influence in the shaping of devotion to her (particularly with regard to her virginity), enabling her from the fifth century onwards to become a kind of standard against which the Church's theological understanding of Jesus could be measured, perhaps even reassessed,[94] and the wonder of God's grace marvelled at. But this is only a partial answer to the question under consideration. Although the origins of devotion to Mary may be clearly theological, the development of that devotion also requires investigation before it is possible to form an informed answer and assess Mary as the virgin woman. It is to that development that we must turn, but not before considering the interpretation of Mary in the Christian tradition by feminist theologians, for whom the issues of Mary's virginity and status as a goddess are of particular interest.

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[93] Although it had been observed that the proclamation of Mary as *Theotokos* took place at Ephesus, (See Catherina Halkes in Edward Schillebeeckx and Catherina Halkes, Mary, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (London: S.C.M., 1993) p. 61) it is worth bearing in mind that the Shrine to Diana had been destroyed before the Council happened. Nor, if the Acts of the Apostles is to be taken as any kind of evidence, is it likely that Christians in that city would be ready to identify themselves with a cult easily equated with the paganism they had previously rejected with considerable force (Acts, 19.18 – 19).

[94] David Brown, Discipleship and Imagination (O.U.P., 2000) pp. 250 – 255.

2. *Is Mary a person?*

Hilda Graef has observed, "As we shall see again and again, every age unconsciously forms its image of the Virgin according to its own ideal."[95] This is no less true of our own age in which Mary has attracted the widespread interest of feminist theologians. Here we find that much of the cult of Mary is criticised for the negative impact it is perceived to have had on the place of women in the history of the Church and western society, and for its role in the perpetuation of a strongly patriarchal religion. It is also from this quarter that arguments identifying Mary with goddesses in the pagan world are most often heard, though for different reasons.[96]

In our understanding of the place of Mary in the Christian tradition established by the early Fathers there is a line that marks out her significance, and an imbalanced view of her inevitably follows when that line is crossed. We might delineate that boundary by the phrase that Athanasius used: "she is our sister." The identification of Mary with a goddess role clearly crosses the line, making her no longer our sister, but projecting into the life of the divine the nature of our humanity, differentiated by male and female genders.

The interest of some feminists in Mary arises precisely from this projection. They point to the almost exclusive use of male images (and therefore experience) in the Christian tradition projected onto the divine, and seek to balance that one-sided use of human identity by the recovery or creation of words and images that invest their experience as women with the same capacity. The question that arises from this projection, however, is whether it takes Mary seriously as a real person, or whether, in fact, it divests her of the source of her significance, that "she is our sister" and that in her humanity, her virginity stands as a statement about the power of grace at work in her. The purpose of this next section, therefore, is to give examples of how interest in Mary that seeks to reconstruct her image can also conflict with the

[95] Graef, op.cit, p. 51.
[96] For a useful though not exhaustive survey, see Maurice Hamington, Hail Mary?: The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism (London, Routledge, 1995) pp. 102 – 108.

understanding of her that we have sought to build on the earliest definitions of the Christian tradition about her.

One such example is Rosemary Radford Ruether's influential book, *Sexism and God-talk.* Her intention is not the balancing of a feminine aspect of God with the masculine, but a recovery of an older tradition of a female deity lost to the Judaeo-Christian tradition through the militant conquest of the nomadic monotheists who became the people of Israel.[97] The dualism that resulted from this conquest is identified as the cause of negative attitudes eventually towards matter, the body, women, and sex, in contrast to the positive attitudes that Christianity has fostered towards the spirit, men, and virginity.[98] In this dualism Mary functions as an expression of the "patriarchal feminine" and her perpetual virginity "represents a decisive break with carnal sexuality and reproduction."[99]

In the previous section of this chapter our survey of the patristic treatment of Mary's virginity revealed, as Ruether herself recognises,[100] that the idea of perpetual virginity was introduced in the second century under the influence of the Protoevangelium. However, Ruether is reluctant to allow for any miraculous intervention in the conception of Jesus that excludes the biological role of Joseph, or even, as implied by the imagery of the virgin earth in Tertullian, that accepts the miraculous and allows for the possibility of subsequent sexual relations in the marriage to Joseph.[101] Indeed, virginity is only an unspoken possibility in the outline she presents of "liberation Mariology: the Church as humanity redeemed from sexism." As both "subject and object" of the liberating action of God's grace we can recognise Mary's active participation through the faith of her response to Gabriel's salutation. But the specific and concrete expressions of a Church that manifests liberation from sexism and its attendant dualism are not described. The specific to which Ruether does point is the social iconoclasm she locates in Luke's gospel. This is no doubt a necessary expression of liberation Mariology in order to ensure its

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[97] For a different Old Testement exegesis see Heine, op.cit, p. 143.
[98] Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-talk: Towards a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon, 1983) pp. 144-145.
[99] ibid, pp. 149, 150.
[100] ibid, p. 277 note 17.
[101] See above, pp. 19-20.

impact on all humanity, but surely limited insofar as its scope is described by Ruether with reference to the gospel's record of liberation mainly for women.[102]

Ironically Ruether points to the likelihood of the Lucan theme of liberation for the poor grating on the ears of the Christians of North America whose affluence prevents them from hearing its true message, while women, taken to represent the poorest of the poor, are liberated by it. That Luke's gospel contains the theme of liberation for the poor is not a view that we would necessarily wish to question. But the loss of that gospel's record of Mary's virginity as the sign by which this liberation is effected seems to rob the Christian faith of its unique statement about the power of God's grace co-operating with the capacity of the woman Mary to respond freely and creatively to that grace. Might not the power of this sign of virginity so grate on the ears of those for whom it has been excised from the gospel text that they too fail to hear the message of salvation to which the gospel points? Ruether's image of the saving work of God expressed specifically through the gospel of Luke may be deficient in this respect. But her articulation of the importance to women of the positive nature of embodiment and sexuality for the apprehension of an inclusive, salvific imagery challenges us to seek a positive understanding of virginity which expresses the legitimate requirement that Ruether makes on behalf of all humanity.

Ruether's concern with "God-talk" carefully excludes Mary from a crude identification with or within the divine, although it also seems to attach no importance to the action of the divine in Mary's life expressed through the miracle of the virginal conception. However, Ruether does helpfully identify Mary as a symbol of the community of the Church. One finds hints here of how feminists might articulate a positive understanding of Mary as "our sister" both in chapter 6 of *Sexism and God-talk* ("Mary as Symbolic Ecclesiology: Repression or Liberation") and explored at greater length in *Mary – The Feminine Face of the Church.* Here Mary is helpfully seen as a woman who represents the whole of redeemed humankind "which can only be liberated and reconciled when the victims have been empowered to be persons and when power itself has been transformed."[103] Of

[102] Ruether, God-talk, op.cit, p. 156.
[103] Ruether, Feminine Face of the Church, op.cit, p. 86. See Young, op.cit, p. 101, on use of imagery of the bride of Christ, and "humanity renewed in the *ekklesia* (another feminine word) sometimes

course, this begs many questions about how such a change is brought about, and in particular the working of representational figures. It seems that if Mary can stand for the whole of humanity, male and female, that may continue to raise difficulties about the scope of representation for feminists who question whether women can be redeemed by a male saviour.[104]

Following Ruether's challenge, Elizabeth Johnson recognises in the very notion of the "feminine" a creation of patriarchy. Any attempts to include it within an essentially patriarchal deity do nothing therefore to liberate women or eliminate the dualism that is the cause of their oppression. Johnson makes the important point that the idea of God having a feminine and a masculine dimension extends human divisions to the godhead itself: "It actually ontologizes sex in God, making sexuality a dimension of divine being, rather than respecting the symbolic nature of language. We must be very clear about this. Speech about God in female metaphors does not mean that God has a feminine dimension, revealed by Mary or other women."[105]

Within this framework of understanding Johnson presents an argument for the usefulness of relating female goddesses to the role of Mary so that Mary herself stands as a metaphor for the love of God expressed through the human experience of motherhood: "Starting with the transfer to her of the iconography and devotional practices originally directed toward the Great Mother in the Mediterranean region, she is addressed as the Mother par excellence, Mother of God, Mother of Mercy, Mother of Divine Consolation, our Mother... In devotion to her as a compassionate mother who will not let one of her children be lost, what is actually being mediated

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appearing in the person of Mary, the Queen of Heaven. These may be stereotypical views of male and female relations, but they do at least highlight the non-literal nature of the language, for humanity as a whole, men included, are incorporated in Lady Church."

[104] "European and American feminist theologians have raised the problem of Jesus' "maleness" as one of the most central issues in Christology." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet (New York: Continuum, 1995) p. 34. See, Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (London: Women's Press, 1986) Chapter 3 "Beyond Christolatry: A World without Models"; Ruether, God-talk, op.cit, Chapter 5 "Christology: Can a Male Saviour Save Women?", especially pp. 116-138.

[105] Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse (New York: Crossroad, 1994) p. 54. In this respect Johnson is supported by the view taken by Heine who sees the fluidity of male and female features applied to God in the Old Testament as evidence not of gender determination but the existence of an "all in all" entity capable of bearing the different characteristics distributed among divine figures in polytheistic religions. Heine, op.cit, p. 29. See also Young, op.cit, p. 10: "The Fathers repeatedly stated that all sexual connotations were inappropriate when considering the transcendent Being of God."

is a most appealing experience of God."[106] This provides for the positive recognition of the impact of pagan goddesses on Christian devotion to Mary without implying that her significance is derived from theirs or that she is a manifestation of the divine. But Johnson also questions what value can be attached to virginity, warning that it cannot come near summing up the totality of what is possible for women's self-realization; the feminine cannot be equated exclusively with "mothering, affectivity, darkness, virginity, the virgin Mary, or the positive feminine archetype without suffocating women's potential."[107] This warning may be helpful to our purposes in seeking to gain a better understanding of Mary the virgin woman, since it implies that virginity, although recognised as a condition by which Mary is identified, need not be read as a limiting factor but one by which other aspects of her life, marriage, motherhood, and pre-eminent discipleship, are given a distinctive quality of universal significance.

Other feminists, however, follow a more direct identification with earlier pagan goddesses, often seeing in Mary a symbol of the divine female that has been twisted to the use of a cult that proclaims a male saviour and is dominated by a male celibate hierarchy. This forms the background to the historical surveys undertaken by Ashe, Benko, Carroll, Kraemer and Warner to which we have already referred. Our criticism of this view of Mary rests not only on Johnson's point about the danger of making sexuality a dimension of divine being, but also on its weak historical foundations and the dualism[108] it inevitably perpetuates. There is also a tension within the argument of some feminist theologians, advanced for example by Kraemer[109], that finds identification in gnosticism, where we also form the impression of women liberated and free of the authority structures found elsewhere in early Christianity. But as Young points out in this very connection, "the Gnostic position was hostile to a proper affirmation of the bodily and therefore feminine

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[106] Johnson, op.cit, pp. 102, 103.
[107] ibid, p. 53.
[108] That dualism is "a fundamental ground of oppression" and therefore bad, see Sara Maitland, A Map of the New Country: Women and Christianity (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) p. 19. Elaine Graham also comments: "Gender dualism is only one element in a much more comprehensive system of western thought; the male/female dichotomy must be seen as a guiding organizing category for all other pairs which all mutually reinforce each other" e.g. culture/nature, reason/intuition, production/reproduction, universal/particular, mind/body. Elaine Graham, Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) p. 12.
[109] Kraemer, op.cit, Chapter 13 "Women's Religious Leadership and Offices in Retrospect".

identity."[110] So, in the words of a feminist critic of this view, Susanne Heine, it "does not destroy the scepticism of the pessimists, for why should the goddesses be true and the Last Judgement not?"[111] But more significantly for our consideration of whether Mary is a real woman, such an identification may withdraw Mary from the realm of the human, reducing her to little more than a metaphor, stripped of her own history, and it may fail to take seriously the power of the metaphor, if such it be, of her virginity in the revelation of God's new creation.

The significance of historicity is noted by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in a chapter of her book *In Memory of Her* entitled "Toward a Feminist Model of Historical Reconstruction." Fiorenza argues against an interpretation of history as "what actually happened" and a reading of the Bible as a "historically accurate record of God's will."[112] In dealing with "androcentric texts" which have the capacity for "expressing, as well as maintaining, patriarchal historical conditions"[113] we might expect that the account of the virginal conception would attract particular scrutiny.

The German feminist theologian, Uta Ranke-Heinemann notes in her consideration of this subject that the virgin birth is not intended to be read as expressing hostility to sex and marriage, since it is not narrating a historical event or the Old Testament prophecy of a biological virgin birth. Ranke-Heinemann outlines the linguistic considerations of the Hebrew *almah* (young woman) translated in the Septuagint by the Greek *parthenos* (virgin) and concludes that even if *almah* were read as virgin, "it does not mean that the procreation of the child would take place in a supernatural fashion and would do no harm to her virginity."[114] (Interestingly, Ranke-

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[110] Young, op.cit, p. 102.

[111] Heine, op.cit, p. 147. See also p. 85. Heine's criticism of some feminists is based on their use of the sciences (social sciences, one presumes) as a means to dismiss philosophy and theology as mere speculation. A similar view is expressed in Boss, (op.cit, pp. 110 - 112), in which "the religious attitude leads one to stand transfixed before the sacred gaze of a Virgin in Majesty, while the scientific attitude leads one to look as an observer upon the clever craftsman's lifelike Virgin and Child."

[112] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (London: S.C.M., 1983) p. 68.

[113] ibid, p. 60.

[114] Uta Ranke-Heinemann, Eunuchs for the Kingdom of God: Sexuality and the Catholic Church (London: Doubleday, 1990) p. 28. Ranke-Heinemann comments that "the Hebrew word *can* mean virgin, but need not do so any more than every young woman *must* have preserved her virginity." ibid, p 29. The meaning of the words used in Matthew and Isaiah is notoriously difficult to establish at this remove from the original context. Machen maintains that *almah* is always used in the Old Testament to refer to a woman who is a virgin; he quotes C F Burney who compares the English

Heinemann identifies her line of argument with David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, published in 1835, coming from the school of German rationalists[115] whose influence we considered earlier. The influence of this school of thought is to be found also in the title of her book, *Putting Away Childish Things: The Virgin Birth, the Empty Tomb, and Other Fairy Tales You Don't Need to Believe to Have a Living Faith*, suggesting that the place of the miraculous is unlikely to find much acceptance in her reading of the gospel texts.) Our concern, however, is to inquire what place, if any, feminist theologians might allow for the virginal conception by Mary as a statement about the operation of God's grace in the life of one ordinary woman, recognising that the miraculous event of parthenogenesis may be identified as historical fact or theological truth, and in either case the foundation for the *theologoumenon* of her perpetual virginity.

In fact a positive view of the virginal conception is outlined in Mary Daly's book, Beyond God the Father, perhaps an unexpected location. But as the author points out, she regards it as an unintentionally positive statement about Mary from a Church "responsible for many confused and even irresponsible opinions on Christological questions." Daly disconnects the virgin birth from its sole significance in relation to the male saviour and male God: "Sprung free of its Christolatrous context, it says something about female autonomy. The message of *independence* in the Virgin symbol can itself be understood apart from the matter of sexual relationships with men. When this aspect of the symbol is sifted out from the patriarchal setting, then "Virgin Mother" can be heard to say something about female autonomy within the context of sexual and parental relationships."[116] Daly does, of course envisage Mary as a virgin mother goddess, derived from the ancient world, an association in which Catherina Halkes also finds signs of virginity denoting "independence, being self-contained, and not the rejection of her own sexuality" but, vitally and distinctively in Mary's case, enabling her to be "completely open to the transcendent, completely free for God." The positive aspects are, in Halkes's view, derived from the pagan cult with drastically changed significance, but emerge in the history of Christianity into a narrower, moral and ascetic aspect of the devotion: "As

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words 'maiden' and 'damsel' which "would scarcely be used of any but an unmarried woman." Machen, op.cit, pp. 288—289.

[115] Ranke-Heinemann, op.cit, p. 31.

[116] Mary Daly, op.cit, p. 85.

a result a permanent stamp is put on veneration of Mary and thus on sexual experience." [117]

The positive understanding of virginity advanced here by Daly and Halkes is in contrast to the problematic response found in Ruether to the notion of Mary's perpetual virginity. This important distinction raises again the question of whether the perpetual virginity is necessary for our understanding of Christology or whether the earliest patristic view, uninfluenced by the Protoevangelium, did not provide adequate scope for our understanding of the potency of this sign. Encouraging though we may find the consideration by Daly and Halkes of the positive dimension of Mary's virginity, it would, however, be misleading to present this as Daly's last word on the subject, since in *Gyn/Ecology*, written subsequently, she describes the Catholic Mary as a "Total Rape Victim – a pale derivative symbol disguising the conquered Goddess."[118]

Daly's reading of the annunciation and Ranke-Heinemann's rationalist approach to it need not be the only possibilities for a reading of the gospel account that feminists might consider a positive one. For example Todd Klutz imaginatively makes a connection between the annunciation, the visitation, and the prophesying of the daughters of Philip in Acts 21.9. The significance of the connection is that Mary's virginity and that of the daughters of Philip is linked to their ability to prophesy, "so that Mary the virgin is cited as speaking in a manner that not only manifests rich patterns of biblical intertextuality and parallelism (eg Luke 1.51b-54c), but also shows signs of prophetic inspiration and authority."[119] Such a reading of the gospel account yields a positive view of Mary's virginity that not only reveals her as a New Testament woman of authority in her own right,[120] but also takes seriously the

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[117] Halkes, op.cit, p. 70

[118] Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (London: The Women's Press, 1979) p. 84. *Gyn/Ecology* was written in 1978, five years after *Beyond God the Father*. The reading of the annunciation as rape has been explored in greater detail in Jane Schaberg, The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives (New York: Crossroad, 1990), quoted with approval by Hamington as an example of feminist alternative biblical exegesis. Hamington, op.cit, p. 71.

[119] Todd Klutz, "The Value of Being Virginal: Mary and Anna in the Lucan Infancy Prologue" in George J Brooks (ed.), The Birth of Jesus: Biblical and Theological Reflections (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000) p. 80.

[120] The importance feminist theologians attach to this task is evident in the interpretation of Mary Magdalen in some recent work. See, Katherine Ludwig Jansen, The Making of the Magdalen:

scriptural understanding of her that we have sought to locate in the writings of the early Fathers. The reading of scripture that we have found employed by the feminist theologians whose work we have considered has treated the story of the virgin birth as legend, with the view that in its handling by the men who have shaped its understanding it may, or may not, be capable of revealing a liberating truth for woman about salvation. All this is in the realm of *theologoumenon*, "nondoctrinal theological interpretation that cannot be verified or refuted on the basis of historical evidence"[121] and we agreed with the conclusions of Taylor in the previous section of this chapter that ultimately doctrinal considerations are the most compelling for acceptance of the doctrine of the virgin birth.

However, we also noted that Taylor did not rule out the historical as evidence, obvious though the difficulties associated with it might be. Some apologists for the virgin birth have taken this line of argument seriously, however. Thorburn, for example has an appendix on the subject of parthenogenesis. He suggests that it might be a "reversion to an earlier and more primitive mode of reproduction" claiming that at the time he was writing (1908) scientific opinion had come round to the view that "there are such deviations from the general laws of nature."[122] This subject has more recently been explored in an oratorio entitled *Parthenogenesis*, the collaborative creation of a musician (James MacMillan), writer (Michael Symons Roberts) and theologian (Rowan Williams).

Based on the story of a woman in Dresden who experiences parthenogenesis during a bombing raid, the oratorio explores in negative fashion some of the positive statements attached to the Christian understanding of Mary's virginal conception. Thus of the three characters in the oratorio, the mother (whose parenting is without love – reminiscent of some of the themes in Mary Daly's treatment of the annunciation), the daughter (the repetition of her mother), and the angel (representing an absent God/father) Rowan Williams writes that they present the artists with the opportunity to represent God through the device of playing with the "parodies, near-misses" of a religious poet such as Geoffrey Hill in the "task of

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Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 12, note 31.

[121] Richard McBrien, Catholicism (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) p. 542.

[122] Thorburn op.cit, pp. 173, 174.

touching and reworking the stuff of common human reacting and perceiving." This tentative iconography permits comparison through inversion with "the other story of virgin, angel, child," inviting us not only to pursue issues implicit in the matrix of sterile relationships created by the damaging impact of war, (for example, "What if we were in control?" – genetic engineering), but also the inverse consequences narrated in the Bible of a parthenogenesis resulting from divine love.[123]

The authors of *Parthenogenesis* make no claim for their work as an argument for the historicity of the virginal conception other than sharing a view that the doctrine is "not a piece of slightly embarrassing theological fantasy but rather a sharply challenging and uncomfortable statement about the nature of God's creativity in the world" (Williams). For the purposes of our consideration of feminist attitudes towards Mary, the work of MacMillan, Symmons Roberts and Williams raises a number of points. The first is that failure to consider the possibility of the historical reality of the virginal conception of Jesus may eliminate imaginative areas of theological discourse that could assist in forming an understanding of Mary's virginal identity that is expressive of human experience and aspirations.[124] So virginity could be understood as a statement about a woman's capacity for embodying the antithesis of power systems determined by sex, violence, and even the limitations of language.[125]

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for our consideration of the reality of Mary as a person woman, the denial of any possibility of historical truth to the virginal conception calls into question the essential level at which Mary is asked to respond in co-operation with the Holy Spirit, namely the level of a biological capacity (hers by virtue of nature and gender and no other determination) over which she can exercise sovereign free-will. Thus virginity regarded non-historically as a religious construct, is a sanitised sexual category and likely to lead us away from Mary who is human (our sister) towards Mary who is the personification of whatever image a

[123] Rowan Williams, "The Theologian" in The Bible in Transmission , Autumn 2000, pp. 8-9.
[124] Hamington observes that women and men experience Mary differently, as an objectification of male desires, but "for women the issue is ontological. Mary is a dynamic projection of every woman's experience and every woman's hope." Hamington, op.cit, p. 51.
[125] Williams, op.cit, p. 9: "By denying the facile appeal to a straight language of faith, we deny that we have a language that's actually adequate to what we want to talk about."

particular age may wish to project onto her, whether it be the goddesses of antiquity or the immaculate virgin of Catholic imperialism.

Finally, the use of an oratorio as a medium for the "myth" (Williams) through which the theme of the sterility and violence of human self-creation can be explored suggests that Christianity can authentically illuminate the testimony of the Bible in ways other than word-based, written or spoken theological discourse. The recognition of art, drama, film and music as media in which the gospel can be articulated may contribute towards helping Protestantism, noted by feminists for its lack of female imagery and role models,[126] to envisage women positively in the narration of scriptural texts by these means. The growing importance of this method of theological expression for Protestants is recognised by Jeremy Begbie who comments with approval on a remark to a vicar made by Henry Moore: "'I think that it is (only) through art that we artists can come to understand your theology.' What was true for Moore is probably true of a growing number today."[127] Thus, allowing for the historicity and authority of the scriptural text, the creators of *Parthenogenesis* may have opened up for Protestants an expression of the gospel in which feminist and Catholic issues that can be read off from the account of the virginal conception are raised in a context[128] where what might be regarded as the constructed and errant nature of Mariology, with which a feminists already engage, would be unlikely to command attention and therefore make such issues inaccessible.

Before drawing to a conclusion this exploration of the question of Mary's human personhood, we ought to note that there are others who demonstrate an interest in Mary as virgin and woman, particularly with reference to their understanding and language about God. Three examples will suffice to demonstrate that feminists are

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[126] Mary Daly notes that "on a functional level, Protestant obliteration of the Virgin ideal has to some extent served the purpose of reducing 'women's role' exclusively to that of wife and mother," placing them in "the ambiguous situation of having only Jesus as a symbol-model." Daly, Beyond God the Father, op.cit, p. 82; Hamington also observes that "the negation of (Mary's) role in Protestantism did not exonerate non-Catholic Christians from patriarchal behaviour." Hamington, op.cit, p. 10. See also Tillich's observation that "the Virgin Mother Mary reveals nothing to Protestants." Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (London: Nisbet & Co, 1951) vol. 1, p. 142.

[127] Jeremy Begbie (ed), Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000) p. xiii.

[128] *Parthenogenesis* was commissioned by the largely Protestant British and Foreign Bible Society and first performed at a festival entitled *Theology through the Arts* in Cambridge.

not alone in showing interest in this area, nor are the attitudes they form towards Mary necessarily so different from those we are about to consider.

The interest of liberation theologians in Mary is the first example, evident in Leonardo Boff's, The Maternal Face of God. The book sets out to present Mary in the context of the massive shifts taking place in understanding about male and female identity. Boff's treatment of the virginal conception recognises the positive elements of virginity in paganism ("freshness of life, stored energy, pent-up vitality"), while also stating clearly that "Mary's virginity is of another inspiration" – that of the Old Testament. In that context he acknowledges the historical significance of Mary's story and its biological reality, but in terms that emphasise her submission, requiring no heroism, but expressive of humility and serene surrender to God, rather than her courage, independence, or freedom.[129] Boff concludes with a description of Mary that seems to undermine the emphasis he has placed on the human and historical aspects of her: "Mary is hypostatically assumed by the Spirit, who eternalises the feminine in her."[130]

The identification of the Holy Spirit with Mary is not original,[131] and our observation of comments by Elizabeth Johnson indicates that among some feminists there is no support for Mary's role in eternalising the feminine, a view with which we would agree insofar as that identification removes Mary from the realm of the human as "our sister" and inappropriately projects into the eternal the dualism of gender differentiation in our understanding of God. Johnson also points to the inconsistency in Boff's presentation of Mary that characterizes her on the one hand as silent and unassuming, but in his discussion of her as a model for liberation focuses on her as prophetic in the proclamation of the Magnificat.[132]

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[129] Leonardo Boff, The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions (London: Collins, 1975) pp. 136 – 139.
[130] ibid, p. 256.
[131] The reference to the Gospel of Philip in note 28 above gives an indication of this identification.
[132] Johnson, op.cit, p. 52. Other liberation theologians also make use of the Magnificat, for example the feminists Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer. In a balanced presentation of a Catholic feminist view from South America Gebara and Bingemer recognise how indigenous Indian shrines (eg Gaudaloupe) have been absorbed into a statement of a conquered culture saved and liberated by its use for the expression of Christianity. In contrast with Boff, they conclude with this positive observation: "Mary, collective figure, symbol of the faithful people from whose womb emerges the New Creation, unfolds before human beings all their infinite horizons with their indescribable possibilities. Mary helps us rethink theological anthropology with our focus turned toward the

Secondly, from a psychoanalytical view, Jung envisages Mary as a mother archetype revealing positive qualities (femininity, magical power, solicitude, wisdom, helpfulness, fertility, sympathy) and negative qualities (secretiveness, darkness, a tendency to devour, seductiveness, and terribleness). Alternatively he sees her as part of a divine quaternity, one pair of which are revealed in male form in Protestantism (the good male, Jesus Christ / the bad male, Satan) but which is manifest in Catholicism in the Adam / Eve and Jesus / Mary pairing, and another example of which, in the Hebrew tradition is the pairing of good male, Yahweh / bad male Satan and good female, Wisdom / bad female, Lilith.[133] Our response to this projection is one that questions the dualism it presents and the false antithesis between Eve and Mary that also misleadingly equates Mary with Jesus for the sake of symmetry rather than any more obviously theological motive, in addition to the damage that it does to the presentation of Mary as a woman in a real historical context.

Finally, from a Roman Catholic position that identifies itself closely with the papacy the influence of Hans Urs von Balthasar also presents a view of Mary that comes close to the divinisation implied by feminists who project male and female gender types onto the relationship between God and the world. Brendan Leahy presents a survey of von Balthasar's thought and its particular interest in Mary. Using the analogy of the conjugal act, von Balthasar sees God's role as the male one in initiating the divine encounter with creation, while the female role is the paradigm of responsiveness.[134] Mary is thus the obvious example of this female response. An assessment of von Balthasar's work is beyond the scope of this thesis, but his influence cannot pass without note. Using the criteria we have applied to other presentations of Mary, we would expect that the dualism of this theology, with its implication of a gender definition of God as male, also renders Mary powerless to

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infinite that is God...New Eve, Mother of the living, thus is she invoked on the lips of those who seek in her the successful outcome of God's dream." Ivone Gebara and Maria ClaraBingemer, Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1987) pp. 174 – 175.

[133] Carroll, op.cit, p. 33. Carroll offers references to this pairing in Jung in C G Jung, Four Archetypes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) pp. 9 – 44; *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); The Symbolic Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[134] Brendan Leahy, The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (London: New City, 2000) pp. 52, 53.

offer women and men any point of contact with the issues of gender and sexuality as they are actually experienced today.

In exploring the question of Mary's identity as a person we recognise from a variety of contemporary sources that there is a tendency to present her in ways that call the reality of her human nature into question, seeking to use her as a means by which to read the human in the life of the divine or the ideal. The first point that we wish to make, then, is that the identification of Mary with the divine leads to a misunderstanding of her. The historical evidence for making this identification is, as we have seen, based largely on a perception of her as the Christian expression of a pagan goddess, and a misreading of the complex way images and language transfer from one cult to another, or one culture reads off the imagery of another in which it lives in order to explain its own meaning. The cultic similarity with goddesses that can be identified with Mary is no different from Paul's use of the altar to an unknown god in the Areopagus to introduce to the men of Athens the truth of the Christian gospel (Acts 17.22-23). The crucial importance for us is that Mary's distinctive character as the virgin, unlike comparison with pagan images or theories of the projection of the feminine in God, does not distort her essential human identity, or the scriptural tradition from which the Fathers drew their explanation of her significance.

We have also recognised that the definition of Mary as "ever-virgin" is problematic for feminists in a way that some earlier patristic statements of her virginal conception of Jesus need not be. However, the perpetual virginity of Mary as an emphatic statement ought not easily to be discounted on the grounds that it inhibits those who are non-virginal from identifying with her, as we shall see. It is also obvious from everything that we have discovered so far that in whatever way it is understood, virginity is the distinctive definition of Mary as a woman. That we are able to speak of her simply as the Virgin[135] itself suggests that in the use of this term we identify the universalising category that is the source of her power to attract.

[135] Warner refers to Mary as the Virgin throughout Alone of all her Sex, Warner, op.cit.

This leads us, finally, to maintain that the historicity of the story of the virginal conception be recognised as at least possible in order to connect it with the physical, emotional and biological reality that provides the vital material for Mary's co-operation with God in the mystery of salvation. Irrespective of how we regard the virginal conception (as narrative, i.e. historically true, or story i.e. not necessarily historically true) it establishes a mode of speaking about Mary as virgin that opens up the rich possibilities of metaphor. This invites us to view the action of grace in the human experience of Mary as universalised through the lens of her virginal identity and to relate that experience to the temporal and the everyday. It is to an investigation of that discourse that we now turn as we inquire into what effect the category of virginity has had in the presentation of Mary as an object of devotion.

3. *Virginity as Power and Ambiguity*

Our pursuit of the origin of Mary's power to attract has thus far shown that the early patristic interest in Mary derived from the human dimension of her virginity that was capable of functioning as a statement about the wonder of the new creation that was revealed in the incarnation. Interest in the canalising of a goddess cult was not evident, in spite of points at which cultic fluidity would entice us towards that conclusion.

The emphasis that we have placed on Mary as a person, therefore, ("our sister", as Athanasius describes her,) is now tested against the claims that are subsequently made for her in the extremes of devotion that develop towards the end of the middle ages, enabling us to see something of how the power of virginal attraction functions. When, for example, the apparent simplicity of the patristic view is measured against Mary's heavenly profile in The Golden Legend, it is virginity, regarded as a paradisal and heavenly category, that gains her access to the power sought by those who share her human, married and parental identity. The purpose of the following survey is therefore to explore ways in which devotion to Mary reveals how virginity universalises Mary's human experience and identity, and affirms it in making it the source of her power to attract in ambiguous ways, crossing boundaries between clerical and lay forms of devotion, identifying sexuality in virginal, celibate, and married states, and subverting the tendency towards what we shall discover described as an invalid form of the double standard, a dualism between matter and spirit as manifest in human sexual relations.

At the close of the era initiated by the preaching of Bernard of Clairvaux and in which we see the fruits of Cistercian, Franciscan and Dominican endeavours to promote devotion to Mary, Christianity in Europe in around 1500 presents the following characteristics. It is a coherent unit and heavily clerical, by which means the Papacy has asserted itself after the great schism, though without total control,

over the appointment of bishops, for example. [136] The Black Death took a disastrous toll of the clergy, but J C Dickinson observes that as numbers recovered "there is no doubt that the standard of education of the English clergy certainly rose during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries," due in large measure to the impact of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, and one benefit of this improvement, noted in 1450, was the "greater abundance of preaching the Word of God than was customary before our time."[137] Yet in France, as an example of the standard of Christian faith nurtured by the laity Joan of Arc can be cited: "This peasant girl from Lorraine had been taught her basic prayers – the Paternoster, the Ave Maria, and the Credo – by her mother, rather than her priest, and in French rather than in Latin... She went to mass daily, which marks her as unusually devout. But when she burst onto the public stage in 1429, she was completely illiterate." [138]

Religious guilds and fraternities played a significant role in fostering devotion: "These were voluntary associations of men and women linked together to provide mutual charitable help and communal prayers for living and dead members. Between 1350 and 1550 there are references to between 150 and 200 of these associations within the parishes of London, both inside the walls and outside in the suburbs" (Westminster and Southwark).[139] Among the most salient features William Monter identifies devotion to "the miraculous powers of the Virgin Mary, even more than to her crucified son," and devotion to Jesus tended to be focused on the ritual surrounding his passion and the veneration of items associated with it. The religion of this era was also essentially egalitarian, as was revealed in the hugely popular places of pilgrimage: "there was no great gap between popular piety and the religion of the elite. In England, the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was visited on pilgrimages by the Duke of Buckingham, Cardinal Wolsey, and even Erasmus in the early 1500s." [140]

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[136] J C Dickinson, The Later Middle Ages: From the Norman Conquest to the Eve of the Reformation (London: Adam Charles Black, 1979) p. 253; on growth of Episcopal bureaucracy, see p. 257.
[137] ibid, pp. 276, 277.
[138] William Monter, Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983) p. 9.
[139] Caroline M Barron, "The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London" in Caroline M Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill (eds.), The Church in Pre-Reformation Society (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1985) p. 13.
[140] Monter, op.cit, pp. 9, 12. See also D J Hall, English Medieval Pilgrimage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) p.114: "But, while it is true that no shrine had such consistently splendid patrons,

The places in which devotion to Mary was enshrined had by the fourteenth century become palaces of the new gothic architecture where she could be fittingly enthroned as queen. Warner lists Chartres, Paris, Coutances, and Amiens as examples in France.[141] In these greater buildings, and also in the humbler parish churches that imitated them, the opportunity for devotion found expression in a variety of visual forms. Of the statues that adorned them Dickinson observes that "it is unlikely that any parish church lacked some representation of (Mary) and many had several," marking her out as the chief among many saints.[142] Stained glass was also a means of expressing the devotional and theological themes of the Christian faith, and it is in some glass, decorative carving and paintings on walls and the panels of wooden screens that we find evidence of the impact of devotion to Mary on the lives of the people of this era.[143]

We have selected this period of history since it might be regarded as the pinnacle of devotion to Mary and a subsequent point of reference. So, for example, the popularity of the Christmas crib comes from this era, as does the legacy of a lady chapel in many cathedrals and the form in which Mary was popularly depicted in the nineteenth century gothic revival. The exaltation of Mary also exalts her virginity and the power she exercises in the life of her devotees. At times devotion to Mary can seem to substitute the mother for the son, suggesting the triumph of a subverted goddess religion. The awesomeness of her purity can cut her off from the human and the ordinary, placing her on a pedestal; it can also allow her to be used for destructive and punitive ends.[144] Atkinson notes a comment made by William Monter: "Once hailed as the supreme European contribution to the elevation of the

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the lack of documentary evidence about ordinary folk is common to most centres of pilgrimage, and one has to turn to a poet to balance the weighted impression." Obvious examples would be Langland and Chaucer.

[141] Warner, op.cit, p. 160. Begg links the building of gothic cathedrals "under the impetus of new Templar/Cistertian principles" and pilgrimage, both of which popularised the cult of the Black Virgin, and formed a part of Bernard of Clairvaux's strategy for the suppression of the Cathars. Begg, op.cit, p. 106.

[142] Dickinson, op.cit, p. 423.

[143] M D Anderson presents a fascinating study of the evidence in glass, sculpture and wall paintings of the influence of popular belief about Mary (e.g. St Anne teaching her daughter to read depicted in the stained glass of All Saints, North Street) through legends and liturgical drama for which texts may no longer exist (e.g. the enactment in Lincoln, Beverly, Norwich and Ely of the Miracle of St Theophilus). M D Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (C.U.P., 1963).

[144] Atkinson, op.cit, p. 131,

status of women, courtly love (and "chivalry" in general) has recently been perceived as the base of that "pedestal" whose shadow is the stake." Here, again, we detect something of the ambiguity of attraction to Mary at work. While her identity as virgin can function as a powerful symbol of freedom, the history of Marian devotion contains repressive expressions of presentation, around which, we shall maintain, her very ambiguity wraps subversive trends.

Familiarity with post-reformation criticism may lead us to believe that we are likely to form a negative reaction to this extreme of devotion. But as with the perception that Mary is simply a Christian substitute for a pagan goddess, so here also we believe that the truth of the matter may be more complicated. What indication might we find for the kind of attraction and point of contact that Mary's purity, her virginity, might actually have had in the lives of those who were very different from her? In order to pursue this inquiry we turn to those aspects of devotion to Mary that might have made the greatest impact on the lives of the people of the later middle ages. This will include not only the visual arts, but also the growth of drama out of liturgy and the mechanisms by which people participated in the devotion that exalted Mary as queen of every conceivable category of Christian life.

We begin with the legends about Mary, a source of popular elaboration on devotion to her. With characteristic lyricism Evelyn Underhill introduces a collection of the legends in the following terms: "They are the fairy-tales of mediaeval Catholicism... These tales bring us to the Courts of Paradise, but the atmosphere is still that of the Courts of Love. By turns homely and heroic, visionary and realistic, they do in literature that which the Gothic sculptors do in art; make a link between heaven and earth... It was amongst the people that the Mary-legends prospered, and to the people they were primarily addressed. They adorned sermons, they provided subjects for poetry, painting and sculpture, they were a part of the texture of the common life."[145] These cycles of stories form a genre not unlike that of the Mystery Plays. The introduction by Richard Mount and Annette Grant to the collection of legends by Gonzalo de Berceo names Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*) as the standard representative of the genre, the version of the

[145] Evelyn Underhill, The Miracles of Our Lady Saint Mary: Brought out of Divers Tongues and Newly Set Forth in English (London: William Heinemann, 1905), p. xiv.

legends published by Caxton in 1438.[146] The source criticism of the legends need not concern us. Our interest lies rather in how they present Mary and what the interest and interpretation of those who heard or read them might have been.

In their introduction to Berceo's work Mount and Gash make two important points about the background to the legends. The first is the recognition of the role of monasticism in fostering the climate of devotion to Mary that gave these legends their appeal. Several of the legends Berceo quotes are about monks or priests, but that need not imply that the audience was limited to monastic or clerical circles. Rather, the recognition of the monastic influence accounts for the prominence given to those ideals central to that vocation (chastity, obedience, sacrifice) and in particular to the monumental influence of Bernard of Clairvaux and his devotion to Mary. The second point made in the introduction is that in these legends Mary is given a position of prominence in the business of human salvation that makes her "very near, if not equal to that of Christ."[147] In this statement we recognise most clearly the difficult consequences of placing Mary in this position, since it threatens not only our grasp of her humanity, but it also raises the question of what view of Jesus it implies.

Looking at the legends themselves we find in Berceo's own Introduction an emphasis on Mary as the sign of Old Testament fulfilment. Many of the titles used in litanies to her are drawn from this genre. Thus she is fleece of Gideon, Fountain, Closed Gate, Virgin Daughter of Zion, Throne of Solomon, Vine, Grape, Almond, Pomegranate, Olive, Cedar, Balsam, Palm, Staff of Moses, Rod of Aaron. In these titles we see an elaboration that might appear to obfuscate, but we might also ask what affect they had on the minds of those who understood Mary through these allegories. The richness of the images stands in contrast to the world of functional legalism in which Mary's virginity has more recently been presented – as rape, in the extreme case by Daly and Schaberg quoted in the previous section. The language used her would seem, then, to locate virginity quite definitely in what Underhill

[146] Mount and Gash, op.cit, p. 7. The others listed in the same genre are, Miracles of Our Lady Rocamadour and Miracles of the Holy Virgin by Gautier de Coincy (1177 – 1230); Canticles of Holy Mary by Alphonso X the Wise (1221 – 284); Mirror of History by Vincent de Beauvais. See also Underhill, op.cit, p. xvii

[147] Mount and Gash, op.cit, p. 12.

termed the "court of love". Thus Mary the virgin woman is not presented as a juridical category, but a poetic one with whom the aspirations of the heart can be identified. The human experience thereby stands allegorically for the power of the divine love.

For the medieval reader or listener the interest of the legends is in the power that Mary can wield to influence divine judgement, appearing to be more accessible to her devoted clients than the persons of the Trinity are. Whether the legends were ever believed to be factual accounts of history must surely also be a matter of speculation. In this respect they might be compared with the claims made by contemporary advertisements that promise satisfaction on the basis of a particular and sometimes extravagant story. In a story from *The Golden Legend* we see Mary placing her hand on the scales of judgement to increase the weight of the few good deeds of a sinful man who had a devotion to her. In both religious life and in marriage Mary intervenes to call her devotees back to their vows acting as a standard bearer to safeguard virginity and chastity.

The stories engage with the inevitable failings and weaknesses of human beings, often predictably drawn; the lecherous monk or the woman tormented with images of the devil in male form. All these are clearly illustrative of Mary's own example of obedience and virginity and her influence to encourage such virtues in others. But what is perhaps most significant is that the others to whom she offers that encouragement are those who have failed, often in the very aspect of life in which Mary is herself distinctive; virginity, chastity, purity. Her continued patronage of them even after failure is an indication that what flows from this powerful virgin woman is not condemnation but encouragement.

In many of the legends we perceive that in heaven Mary is a more accessible figure than her son. In the legend about a vain and dissolute cleric, the Lord takes counsel and dispassionately pronounced the sentence of damnation. At that point it is Mary who spontaneously rises and asks for clemency, saying, "As a favour to me, let him

live, although what he really deserves in death."[148] As a member of the fallen human race she can therefore befriend the sinful in a situation that might be thought to compromise the perfect justice of God. Of course the legend raises important questions about divine compassion (and the sense of identity of priesthood, since the priest seems to be regarded as one of Mary's servants rather than a minister of the gospel). At the Reformation this distortion is tackled not so much by the clearer presentation of a compassionate redeemer and judge, but by the dismantling of a visionary perspective filled with other intermediaries before the throne of God. However, in the vision of heaven presented by the legends, Mary features prominently as a very human heavenly figure, the sinless friend of sinners.

For an unlettered people, the impact of stories in sermons must have done much to provide memorable lessons by which to interpret the visual and theological impact of the faith celebrated in the liturgy. But this return to the complex field of the popular and the formal raises the same difficulties of interpretation that we encountered in the question of whether Mary was a goddess. Here, however, we may have more material to guide us. As the period we are considering progresses, we note that there is a movement from the liturgical setting of the presentation of Mary's role in the drama of salvation to a non-liturgical one, located in the open and expressing through popular theatre some of the affective devotion found in these legends.

The origins of the drama that we eventually see in the mystery plays are uncertain. Arnold Williams locates Germanic or Celtic paganism which had rites of a dying and rising god as a possible source: "Folk customs which seem to go back to these rites lived on through the Middle Ages into modern times, the morris dance for instance."[149] E K Chambers comments that the human impulse to *mimesis* found a fresh outlet for expression in the Christian liturgy of the eucharist. The ceremonies marking particular feasts lent graphic witness to the theme of the celebration: "At Christmas a *praesepe*, or crib, might be used as an altar, perhaps with a Mary and Joseph at its side."[150] Arnold Williams also notes the parallel between the dramatic

[148] Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) vol. 1, p. 156
[149] Arnold Williams, The Drama of Medieval England (Michigan State University Press, 1961) p. 5.
[150] E K Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945) p. 2.

presentations of Easter and Christmas stories, and the fact that the latter drew on the apocryphal material of the Protoevangelium to supplement the gospel account, "with a manger instead of a sepulchre, shepherds instead of the Marys, and midwives instead of angels."[151]

The importance of this point for our interests is the graphic quality of the presentation and its impact upon the minds of those who witnessed it. Use of the apocryphal material locates the story of the birth of Jesus in a much more domestic and ordinary setting than the bare outline given in the gospel. The detail of the midwives is, for example, an indication of the reality of the story of Mary's giving birth that must have resonated in the memory of every mother in the congregation or audience, connecting particularly with the fears surrounding that dangerous, life-threatening element of a woman's life. It is here that we see the universalising effect of virginity in practice. For Mary's giving birth to Jesus, and the long association of her virginity with it[152] far from removing her from the experience of non-virginal mothers, establishes Mary as a sign of hope to all who fear the pain and threat of death.[153]

Within the description of the dramatic elaboration of the liturgy Arnold Williams makes reference to a work that was popular throughout the middle ages called *A Sermon About the Creed Against Jews, Pagans and Arians* and was attributed to St Augustine. There is a pronounced anti-Jewish character in the sermon that attempts to demonstrate that Jesus is indeed the messiah by quoting their own prophets (Isaiah 7.14), among other authorities (Nebuchadnezzar, Virgil and the Sybil), against them. The sermon was used in monastic communities at Christmas, with different voices being allocated to each of the four witnesses against the Jews and in this liturgical form Arnold Williams presents it as an example of the transition of liturgy into drama.[154]

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[151] Williams, op.cit, p. 21.
[152] On Mary's virginity *in partu* see above, pp. 15-16.
[153] On Mary associated with safety in childbirth, see below, p. 96, note 70.
[154] Arnold Williams, op.cit, p. 26. Williams also notes that between the "mature liturgical drama of about 1200 and the four English cycles of scriptural drama, which comprehend the whole of history from creation to doomsday, there lies a somewhat shadowy period of transition" ibid, p. 88.

Monter also comments on the anti-Semitism that is associated with this period, and Mary as its champion, evidence of which is to be found in the legends about her.[155] He catalogues purges against the Jews in Germany and France in the latter part of the 14th century, and most brutally and systematically in Spain throughout most of the 15th century. Following a massacre of Jews in Regensberg in the 14th century the synagogue became a shrine of the *schöne Maria* and to the battle cry of "long live the Virgin and death to the Jews" hundreds of Jews were slaughtered in Sicily in 1474.[156] This must constitute one of the greatest distortions of the image of Mary to manifest itself in the middle ages. It points to a manipulation of genuine devotion to her in the exercise of political power, and we shall see further development of this in the period that follows.

This anti-Semitism would seem to sit uneasily with the fact that Mary's Jewish identity is clearly recognised in the way she is represented in the dramas associated with her in the liturgy. Karl Young quotes an account by Philippe de Mezières of the drama for the feast of the presentation of Mary in the Temple as it was celebrated in the cathedral at Avignon in 1385 in which a three or four year old girl is taken to the altar and presented to "a cleric costumed as a Jewish high priest. After Mary, Joachim and Anna and the angels have sung certain *laudes* and psalms, Mass proceeds, Mary occupying the stall next to the cardinal."[157] Thus Mary can be entrusted by her parents to the beneficence of the Jewish high priest and brought up (according to some traditions) in the temple, while at the same time being the saint under whose patronage the Jews are massacred. This would seem the more strange in view of the fact that one such massacre (in England in 1144) was justified by the accusation of the ritual murder of a child,[158] and the suspicion that such barbarity

[155] de Voragine includes a story told against a Jew whose son had received communion , resulting in accusations of sacrilege and in his description of Mary's assumption reworks the Old Testament story of the ark going up to Jerusalem to illustrate Mary as the ark of the new covenant and the punishment she brings to disbelieving Jews. de Voragine, op.cit, p. 87.

[156] Monter, op.cit, pp. 16–18. See also Edward A Synan, The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages (New York: Macmillan, 1965) p. 130: Pope John XII sent preachers to the south of France: "Because the Jews of Novarum and Carpentras refused baptism despite this, they were exiled and their synagogues were razed. Chapels were built in their stead and dedicated to the Virgin."

[157] Karl Young, The Medieval Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) vol. 2, p. 227. This account also neatly illustrates something of the transitional stage between the setting of drama in the liturgy and its more secular context in the street theatre of the mystery plays.

[158] Monter, op.cit, p. 16

was practiced among the Jews persisted, according to Edward Synan, into the nineteenth century.[159]

How are we to account for this expression of a devotion that seems to take ambiguity to the extreme of self-negation in the presentation of a Jewish mother as the enemy of the Jews? As we shall see in a later stage of Marian devotion, distortion in the presentation of Mary can be the consequence of other theological and devotional trends; we shall identify this tendency in our consideration of the Counter-Reformation and the consequences for Marian devotion of Spanish expansionism. But in the middle ages it may have been that a vivid concentration on the terrible reality of the suffering of Jesus in the passion fostered some considerable awareness that blame could be attached to the Jews[160] and that the dedication of the site of a synagogue may then be understood as an act of reparation to the person who bears the greatest burden of grief at the crucifixion, his mother.[161] However, there remains the fact that in the popular and dramatic medieval presentation of her, Mary is far more obviously Jewish than Jesus, who is seen only at his presentation in the temple as the recipient of Jewish ministry. In popular religious drama and ritual, on the other hand, Mary is both presented in the temple, grows up in it, and is married there to a Jew who had been selected there for her. These details from the Protoevangelium became increasingly well known as devotional interest in Mary's family background developed. The Coventry cycle of plays even includes *The Betrothal of Mary.*[162]

At the same time, and as an expression of the ambiguity that features in devotion to her, Mary transcends her Jewish identity. In the description of the ceremonies at

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[159] Synan, op.cit, p. 114.
[160] ibid, p. 153.
[161] An example of this in devotional art is the late fifteenth century *Man of Sorrows* by Geertgen tot Sint Jans. *See figure 5.* The theme is also presented with greater subtlety in a late fifteenth century painting of the presentation of Christ in the Temple. Here, with its direct reference to the Jewish identity of Jesus and Mary, the altarpiece carvings "are not merely decorative, but serve both to emphasise the relationship between the old religion and Christianity, and to stress the role of the Virgin. The altarpiece shows scenes of Cain murdering Abel, Abraham sacrificing Isaac and the drunkenness of Noah, all Old Testament stories which the Church cited as parallels to Christ's Passion" and suggest grounds other than the crucifixion of Jesus as evidence of a murderous quality in Jewish character. Jill Dunkerton, Susan Foister, Dillian Gordon and Nicholas Penny, Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in The National Gallery (London: National Gallery Publications, 1991). *See figure 6.*
[162] Peter Happé, English Mystery Plays: A Selection (London: Penguin, 1975) See, the Introduction to the *Ludus Coventriae II,* p. 207.

Avignon there is a point during the *Laudes Mariae* when Anna, Joachim, and the personification of the Church, Ecclesia, offer their praise to Mary, followed by a tearful lament from the personification of Judaism, Synagoga, who is pushed down the steps of the stage, letting her banner and the tablets of the old law fall to the ground, and to the laughter of the congregation flees crying from the church.[163] The medieval attitude towards the Jews and Mary's Jewishness suggests to our contemporary reading of the situation a working ambiguity that may be illustrative of how this era held together other elements that might also appear today to be mutually contradictory. So we need not necessarily regard the exaltation of devotion to Mary the virgin saint as implicit denial of human sexuality and its enjoyment in marriage, in spite of what some texts might appear to indicate.

On the arrival of graphic liturgical rites, such as the drama of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, into a more secular setting beyond the liturgy and the confines of the church building Chambers comments: "Vernacular, once an intrusion, became its regular medium. Its organization and finance passed into the hands of civic authorities or other bodies of a lay, rather than an ecclesiastical character, although it doubtless continued to look to clerical writers for the provision of texts."[164] This transition is an important statement about the control of the image of Mary. The use of the vernacular is in itself a statement about her clear position within the realm of popular religion.

But equally, it would be a mistake to imagine that this popular context resulted in the downplaying of Mary's unique status as the virgin. No longer under the sole patronage of celibates for whom a shared investment in virginity might provide a superior claim to spiritual privilege, one might expect that the virginal profile of Mary could be subtly adapted to fit the interests of the married. No such evidence emerges from the texts of the mystery plays; rather, as Arnold Williams observes, the author gave assurances at every turn that "he was repeating the 'old story'; he fled all deviation from tradition and authority – and he succeeded in being most

[163] Young, op.cit, p. 244. The laughter is specifically mentioned: *tantum quod populus quietetur a risu.*
[164] Chambers, op.cit, p. 10.

original, most individual, most various."[165] Thus, even when a situation arises in which one might expect there to be some softening of the profile of Mary as virgin, for the sake of popularity with a married (and presumably sexually active) audience, no such amendment is made.

However, the requirement of humour and entertainment to enliven the story becomes so dominant that action has to be taken: "sometimes a play became so farcical in action, if not language, that it had to be pruned or abandoned. At York the midwives were cut out of the nativity, and the antics of Fergus at the bier of the Virgin provoked such unholy mirth that the responsible craft became unwilling to repeat them."[166] The interest of a married laity in the representation of Mary's account of the virginal conception is evident in the role of Joseph in the mystery plays. He suffers from doubts about the story of Mary's pregnancy that the angel recounts, and as such may well be a mouthpiece for all the married men of the audience who feared being cuckolded, and the women who had the power to achieve it.[167]

In a 21st century Britain that might be described as post-Christian, one would be hard pressed to locate any similar interaction between popular culture, particularly humour, and the liturgical cycle of the Church's year.[168] But in his study on sermons in medieval England G R Owst also notes the interaction between preaching and contemporary popular music. Not only is the fervour of legends, hymns and prayers to Mary paralleled by similar outbursts in sermons, but the preachers hoped "to outvie the minstrel, with his description of a lady more lovely and gentle than the loveliest dame in Camelot, of a queen more potent alike in her conquests and her miracles than the wisest of kings and magicians."[169] In addition to the music of the minstrel, we should also recognise the emotional power of the lament or *planctus*

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[165] Arnold Williams, op.cit p. 65.
[166] ibid p. 21.
[167] The Penguin edition of the plays gives the Coventry version of Joseph's disbelief and notes that it is in all the other cycles (York, Chester, and Towneley).
[168] Perhaps the closest expression of this was the film *The Life of Brian*. It carefully avoided the presentation of the Christian faith as such, but parodied films that had seriously done so. It therefore presented no material that was obviously of use for the communication of the Christian faith. In contrast Franco Zeffirelli's film *Jesus of Nazareth* was a serious attempt to portray the Christian story in a popular medium, providing material that can be used for Christian teaching purposes.
[169] G W Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961) p. 18.

Mariae. The most famous example of this devotional outpouring is the *Stabat Mater*, traditionally attributed to the Franciscan, Jacopone da Todi.

Against the personal experience of the Black Death, and with a profoundly real sense created by the visual impact of art and the liturgy of the suffering of the passion, onto Mary was projected the anguish of human grief and loss.[170] Chambers also notes that the theme of lament can be linked with the crib: "The singing is always by the Virgin to the Child, who Himself miraculously speaks from His Mother's arms or the cradle. In one carol He is rather inappropriately given the refrain:

> Moder, whyt as lyly flower,
> Your lulling lessyth my langour."[171]

The connection between crib and cross may seem rather artificial, but the emotion of grief would find no difficulty in understanding the link and appreciating from a woman's point of view, the pain it inflicted. In this context the key players, Jesus and Mary, function as universal figures. The universality of Jesus is obviously expressed by his nature as the incarnate Son of God whose death is the sacrifice that atones for our sins. In Mary the same universality is energised by the fact of her virginity; she is not anyone else's wife carnally and physically, and can therefore in some sense belong to everyone as a grieving wife and mother.

In a study of female authorship in the middle ages Marion Wynne-Davies points out how devotional writing can contain signs of women's boldness and independence of mind even when writing in quite traditional terms. So a work by Elizabeth of Toess (c.1294 – 1336, identified here as Elizabeth of Hungary) uses language of "self-aware and purposeful subjectivity" (words like "thynke", "desire", and "wylfull" used in the first person singular) to meditate on Mary's virginal conception at the annunciation, leading Wynne-Davies to observe that "in Elizabeth's version of the

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[170] See Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400 – c.1580 (London: Yale University Press, 1992) pp. 259-261. On how Boss accounts for the attraction of this devotion see above, p. 30, note 60.

[171] Chambers, op.cit p. 108. See also John R Secor, "The *Planctus Mariae* in Provencal Literature: A Subtle Blend of Courtly and Religious Traditions" in Glyn Burgess and Robert Taylor (eds.), The Spirit of the Court (Cambridge: D S Brewer, 1985). Secor comments on Mary's triple role in the *planctus* as daughter, mother, and spouse/bride of Christ; Secor,op.cit, p. 323. See also a feminist psychoanalytical view in Julia Kristeva, "*Stabat Mater*" in Toril Moi (ed.), The Kristeva Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) pp. 161-186. For a later version of this devotion, see below, p. 123; *see figure 18*.

annunciation, therefore, Mary is an active participant in the Christian narrative."[172] In a meditation written a century later, stressing Mary's bodily purity and cleanliness Dame Eleanor Hull (c.1394 – 1460, a deeply religious Lancastrian) writes in terms that were in marked contrast to the perceptions of her day about the nature of women's wombs.[173] In both these examples we find women writing about Mary who speak of her in terms that support the dignity of their womanhood while at the same time accepting the distinctive nature of Mary's virginal identity. The identity seems not to distance Mary from them or to be regarded as a means for denigrating their own experience of motherhood. For them it remained a cause of wonder and reverence.

Elizabeth of Hungary ended her life as a Dominican nun. Although she was also the mother of children, she nonetheless features in art as a saint attendant upon Mary in spite of the fact that in such gatherings the unifying theme of the picture is not so much womanhood as virginity. The saints surrounding Mary appropriately form the court of a virgin mother and queen of heaven. In such cases the virgin saints are often virgin martyrs. Depicted in the style of the era of the painting, they generally carry the symbol of their martyrdom, thus spanning the centuries in order to make immediate to the viewer the power of their Christian witness and the viewer's ability to gain access to that power through intercession, devotion and imitation of life. Such gatherings of the virgin martyrs around Mary make an emphatic statement about the power of virginity as a mechanism by which renunciation can issue in freedom, containment in riches, and mutilation (with an implied sexual abuse) in ethereal beauty.[174]

As is often the case with any didactic illustration, the point is exaggerated. Here, renunciation is the point, a sign of being dead to the obvious inclinations of the transitory world in order to gain an investment in the bliss of the eternal world. That

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[172] Marion Wynne-Davies, "Abandoned women: female authorship in the Middle Ages" in Marion Shaw (ed.), An Introduction to Women's Writing: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day (London: Prentice Hall, 1998) p. 23.
[173] Wynne-Davies, op.cit, p. 25.
[174] *See figure 7.* The virgin saints and the symbolic allusions to their martyrdoms are (right) Barbara, holding the lilly with an inverted tower behind her, and Cecilia, holding a symbol of her imprisonment (left) Catherine of Alexandria who is being united to the Christ child in a mystical marriage, and for whom the sword is the symbol of her martyrdom, and Ursula, whose gown almost totally obscures the pagan dart, symbolic of her death.

such renunciation is possible not only for women, but also for men is implied by the frequent inclusion, as the style develops, of figures such as John the Baptist, the deacon martyr Laurence, and Jerome. This theme of renunciation can be read more widely in the medieval world; not only in the depiction of the virgin martyrs attendant upon Mary, but also in the practice of pilgrimage[175] and the *memento mori* warnings of the doom paintings.[176]

In her study of the artistic and theological genre of the heavenly court of virgins, Karen Winstead points out that as the centres of cultural production monasteries played a large part in fostering the cult of those whose lives mirrored their own. But this was not without appreciation of what would attract the interest of those towards whom the stories of these female heroes were directed, both women and men. So Winstead gives a graphic example of the work of hagiographers on the cult of St Apollonia, recreating her from being an old woman into the more attractive guise of a beautiful princess.[177] However, as we see from the inclusion of St Elizabeth in the company of the virgin martyrs the reworking of the saint's identity can take a variety of forms. Daniel Boyarin observes a similar process in the presentation of St Perpetua as a virgin martyr, since she too was a mother, as the famous account of her death records. Thus, in an assessment that illustrates the theme of renunciation and freedom, Boyarin maintains that the term virgin is used in a way that relates to something other than a biological definition: "The relevant distinction from 'the female point of view' was sexual domination by a man or not, and in that sense, Perpetua was a virgin."[178]

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[175] "Pilgrimage also provided a temporary release from the constrictions and norms of ordinary living, an opportunity for profane men and women to share in the graces of renunciation and discipline which religious life, in theory at least, promised." Duffy, op.cit, p 191.

[176] "Churches contained not only the chancel-arch representation of the Day of Doom, with its threat of a terrifying reckoning down to the last farthing, but wall-paintings and windows illustrating the deadly sins...the figures of the three living and the three dead, or the related *dance macabre*. By contrast the brightly painted and beautiful statues of the saints spoke of the overflowing abundance of God's grace, even to the undeserving, from whom they required only love. This was fundamental to the ever-popular legends of the miracles of the Virgin." ibid, p. 187.

[177] Karen A Winstead, Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England (London: Cornell University Press, 1997) p. 9. On the audience: "Many virgin martyr legends were written for women and circulated among female audiences...Yet virgin martyr legends thrived among male audiences too." ibid, p. 17.

[178] Daniel Boyarin, Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) p. 67.

The importance of virginity is evident in this type of painting as a theological statement about the human capacity to find within one particular set of boundaries the ability to transcend others. But virginity functions in the middle ages in ways beyond the theological. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie describe the social value of virginity as complex; it is both the qualification for marriage (and therefore has financial value) and also the means by which marriage might be avoided. They quote the example of an early medieval poem in which a nun or maid of Christ ("Mayde cristes") asks for a love poem to "help her contemplate her heavenly bridegroom. Both this world and the men in it are changeable, inconstant and false."[179] The response of this nun is to seek eternal happiness as the treasure offered by virginity, the sign of her marriage to Jesus the eternal bridegroom.

In the middle ages it also appears that the exaltation of Mary's virginity does not function as a repudiation of the married state, but allows her to become the focus for reflection on the tensions that exist in society within and around it. So it is perhaps not surprising that we should find evidence of this in the mystery plays, where the vernacular and secular setting allow the interests of the laity to be played out. Cindy Carson makes an acute observation on the way in which the virginal conception is treated in the mystery plays. Mary's pregnancy is discovered while her virginity remains invisible; she is therefore met with insults about being unchaste. Thus, "Mary's contested and discussed virginity, dramatized in the cycles, becomes an example of that social enterprise in which what was internal to the body becomes externalised and impure."[180] The evidence of this in the N-Town cycle of plays is to be seen in the process by which Mary is put on trial in order to investigate her condition. It is the trial, the divisions caused by it and the clamour of disorderly factions, together with the use of a truth drug, that Carson points to as symbols of this external impurity.[181] But the vindication of Mary also stands as evidence that

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[179], "Introduction: The Epistemology of Virginity" in Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (eds.), Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (London: Associated University Presses, 1999) p. 19.

[180] Cindy L Carlson, "Like a Virgin: Mary and her Doubters in the N-Town Cycle" in Cindy L Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (eds.), Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages (London: Macmillan, 1999) p. 200.

[181] Carson also directs us to the "Parliament of Heaven" pageant in which the four daughters of God, Misericordia, Pax, Justicia, and Veritas find their conflicting claims reconciled through the birth of Jesus. Carson, op.cit, p. 208. Here also public resolution of a social polity mirrors the internal

her virginity is a statement about the integrity, harmony and justice to which society is called, while the trial reveals the subversion of the world's expectations; "judges are confounded, midwives are less than wise women, detractors feel the sting of their own words."[182]

Our intention in this survey has been to inquire into how Mary's virginity functions as a sign of universality in the attraction that she has for monks, nuns and clergy – all of whom seek to share in her virginal status – but also for ordinary lay people from whom she may appear to us to be so very different and remote.

On the basis of this survey of medieval Marian devotion the first observation that we can make in conclusion is about the variety of accessible media through which Mary is portrayed. The legends used in sermons and drama, and the images in glass, paintings and sculpture all offer attractive ways of presenting to ordinary unlettered people, as to the educated, a multi-dimensional image. At one level, the most obvious is the mother and child and the story of the nativity, with all the scope for comedy that the mystery plays exploit. But the immediacy of this level has beneath it the more complex engagement between the theological mystery of the hidden virginity (we remember that Ignatius used this idea) and the judgement the world brings upon itself in its response to that mystery. As Carson neatly summarises it, "accepting this miracle becomes a sign of inclusion in the portion of forgiven and redeemed humanity, rejection a sign of faction and doom."[183]

The second element of interest we have noted in this section is the interaction between sacred and secular. We discovered in the observations by Owst on sermons and by Young, Chambers, and Arnold Williams on the transition of the liturgical drama into the mystery play that Marian devotion did not hesitate to employ popular, secular mediums for the celebration of its cause. In this respect we are again in the situation we described in the first section of this chapter, in our consideration of devotion to Mary linked with popular pagan goddess cults. But we should be aware of the danger of thinking that we can apply the categories of popular and non-

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resolution of Mary's identity as virgin mother. It should be noted that the four figures personified are from Psalm 85 and are closely associated with Mary for this reason.

[182] ibid, p 213.

[183] Carson, op.cit, p. 199.

popular culture to a world that Eamon Duffy describes as characterised by "a remarkable degree of religious and imaginative homogeneity across the social spectrum, a shared repertoire of symbols, prayers, and beliefs which crossed and bridge even the gulf between the literate and illiterate."[184]

The third area of significance for us is the recognition of the fact that Mary's virginity does not form a barrier between her and those whose lives are not characterised by virginity. We have suggested that her virginity is the means by which she acquires universal significance. In this respect the particular expression of the work of grace in Mary's life, the miracle of the virginal conception and what follows from it, becomes not simply the content of Mary's story, but the source of attraction to her as a sign of participation in the life of the new creation.

[184] Duffy, op.cit, p. 3.

4. *Conclusion*

Mary's virginity is the dimension of her life that emerges from this chapter as the source of her power to attract and the root of the fascination in the myth that Marina Warner rejects.[185] We have stressed that this dimension of Mary's identity belongs to the Christian narrative that draws on Old Testament sources to elucidate its meaning, rather than canalising the cults of the goddesses of the ancient world which devotion to Mary effectively submerged.

Our consideration of the reality of Mary as a person has also led us to stress that she cannot function as a manifestation of the divine, any more or less than that could be said of a person made in the image of God and participating in the life of the new covenant through Christian discipleship. To take Mary out of the framework in which she is recognised as "our sister" is likely to result in a distorted understanding of her. Virginity emerges as a statement of the paradisal. In its association with Mary it is also fundamentally a statement about an aspect of the human condition that through grace has the capacity to reveal something fundamental about experience of the new creation. This is not to say that it is the only way to experience life in the new creation, but in the experience of Mary we do find ways in which the experiences of gendered human existence, marriage, and parenthood are able to function as metaphors of redeemed and heavenly life.

Finally, we have discovered that Mary's virginity functions in complex and paradoxical ways that enable those who differ from her, (by virtue of being physically joined in marriage, for example,) to identify with her. Thus as virgin woman Mary has assumed a universal attraction that in the history of devotion has proved capable of drawing people to her across their differences, through a wide variety of media. In this crossing of apparent boundaries we discover that virginity, used to define this woman, Mary, is a biological category and more.

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[185] See above, p. 6.

In the next chapter, on Mary the virgin spouse, we explore further the ways in which virginity functions with the ambiguity of metaphor, both when related to Mary and when separated from her and appropriated for political ends.

CHAPTER 2 MARY THE VIRGIN SPOUSE

In the previous chapter of this study we considered the emergence of virginity as the distinctive feature of Mary's identity and the source of her power to attract. It is our contention that her virginal identity provides a statement about her unique experience of the action of God's grace.

We also perceive her virginal identity to be a statement about the human capacity for participation in holiness. This statement functions ambiguously as a point of reference by which her particular experience can be given universal relevance to those who differ from her. Thus men as well as women, married and single, laity and clergy, can themselves be orientated towards that same grace that Mary experienced through the example she presents as virgin woman, spouse and mother. We have described this orientation and participation as experience of life in the new creation.

The virginal conception came to be recognised with relative ease and speed as an appropriately miraculous sign of redemption and the revelation of the new creation. However, the attraction of Mary as the virgin spouse is in many respects more complex, raising again the question of Mary's perpetual virginity and the danger of a tendency towards a negative attitude to sex that can result in a double standard of Christian dignity that denigrates the status of the married. It is only in the twelfth century that the Church seeks to codify the nature of marriage, with reference to the virginal marriage between Mary and Joseph that also brings Joseph into a new prominence.

Although this development is indicative of one respect (a technical, canonical one) in which Mary is significant, there are other aspects of the culture and experience of marriage that account not only for her popularity as the virgin spouse in the late medieval world, but also suggest that the dismantling of her cult would have significant implications for the popular understanding of the dignity of marriage.

The first part of this chapter will therefore consider the attraction that the medieval cult of Mary the virgin spouse held for both the married and religious. The second part will inquire into the rupture of the sixteenth century. We shall inquire how the gap left by the dismantling of the framework that had sustained the attraction of the virgin spouse had consequences for the popular understanding of marriage,[1] education, society, and even the image of Mary herself.

But we begin with an outline of the relationship between virginity and marriage as the medieval world inherited and understood it. We shall then look in further detail at how devotion to Mary the virgin spouse exploited that relationship in a discourse of ambiguity

[1] Eric Carlson introduces his study of marriage and the English Reformation as an investigation of "the failure of the English Reformation to share in the dramatic transformation of the status of marriage, the laws which regulated it, and the courts which enforced those laws which characterized the Protestant Reformation elsewhere." Eric Josef Carlson, Marriage and the English Reformation (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) p. 3.

1. *Marriage and the Medieval Cult of Mary*

a) Virginity, marriage, and continence.

To appreciate the attraction that Mary the virgin spouse held in the medieval period, we first have to appreciate the derivation of the value attached to virginity and the context it provided for the cult of the saints, and pre-eminently the cult of Mary. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne notes that "virginity treatises of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England construct an eternal future as heavenly brides for their audiences and propose enclosure away from historical processes as the proper position of virgin audiences on earth."[2]

Much of our assessment of the impact of devotion to Mary on the medieval understanding of the dignity of marriage will focus on the extent to which that enclosure is "porous". The high value placed on virginity that the primitive and the medieval Church presents, in contrast with contemporary attitudes, has been succinctly described by Eamon Duffy: "In our culture, it has been well said, virginity is considered less a positive virtue than an embarrassing lack of experience... Sexual purity is associated with repression and prudishness."[3]

The point is similarly made by Peter Brown who sees in texts from the early Church that express the tenderness of the relationship between Mary and the child Jesus a warmth that challenges the "icy overtones" associated with the emphasis on renunciation associated with early Christianity.[4] We should therefore take very seriously the difference of that earlier culture from our own in coming to some

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[2] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Saints' Lives and Literary Culture c. 1150 – 1300 (O.U.P., 2001) p. 19.
[3] Eamon Duffy, "Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century England" in W J Shiels and Diana Wood (eds.), Women in the Church (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) p. 187.
[4] The passage Brown quotes, from a Coptic text, reads with a sensuous tone that could be thought to point to the nuptial relationship between Mary and Jesus popular in late medieval art: "Thou, Mary, didst bend thy neck and let thy hair fall over him...He stretched out his hand, he took the breast, and drew with his mouth the milk that is sweeter than pure manna...And he, into whose face the angels dared not gaze...the holy virgin made bold to approach, intimately and without fear, calling him, "My son," and he called her also, "My mother." Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (London: Faber, 1989) p. 446.

assessment of the significance of Mary's virginity and the role that she has played in the presentation of marriage as a state of sanctification.

Turning more specifically to the Church's derivation of marriage and the value of virginity, it should firstly be appreciated that Christian marriage is not a construct of the early Church, but an adoption of something already in existence, originating in the practice of ancient Rome. Eric Carlson observes that "reliance on Roman law for ideas and language reinforced the view of marriage as a secular matter, and priests were rarely involved even in ceremonial aspects."[5] However, the Roman influence was not the only one in Christian circles. Although both Greco-Roman and Jewish marriage procedures followed a similar pattern of betrothal and marriage, Kenneth Stevenson identifies a Jewish influence in the development of the early Christian marriage rite.[6]

Although, as we shall see in the debates of the decretalists in the twelfth century, the notion of consent to the marriage bond as definitive of its existence (the Roman model) gains priority, Christopher Brooke reminds us that "a powerful tradition stemming from Judaism put carnal union at the centre of marriage, and Paul had been very specific that husband and wife should not deny themselves to one another".[7] It was in recognition of this statement that the difficulty of the conjugal debt is raised in the definition of the marriage of Mary and Joseph.[8] However, our acknowledgement of the influence of Judaism also needs to take into account

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[5] Carlson, op.cit, p. 18. Carlson here refers us to the work of Georges Duby, The Knight, The Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France (London: Allan Lane, 1984) p. 29: "In the early centuries of the Church, its leaders nearly all looked on marriage as something repugnant and did their best to keep it as far away as possible from all that was sacred."

[6] Kenneth W Stevenson, Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites (London: Alcuin Club/S.P.C.K., 1982) p. 13: "If the eucharistic prayer is derived from the *birkat ha-mazon*, then the nuptial blessing...must have been derived from the kind of blessings which appear in Tobit and are being established in the Talmud in the form of the Seven Blessings." For further information on evidence of Jewish marriage contracts from the early period of the development of Christian marriage see Mordechai Akira Friedman, Jewish Marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Geniza Study (Tel-Aviv & New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1980) vol. 1 "The Ketubba Traditions of Eretz Israel".

[7] Christopher Brooke, The Medieval Idea of Marriage (O.U.P., 1989) p. 54.

[8] On the point at which it was understood that the conjugal debt (the right to sex within marriage) came into being, see James Brundage, "Implied Consent to Intercourse" in Angeliki Laiou, (ed.), Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993) p. 249: "The conjugal debt was theologically based on St Paul's injunction to husbands and wives that each must pay the other what was owed to them, and the Apostle's further observation that each had power over the other's body (1 Cor 7:34)."

Judaism's ambivalent attitude towards sex as ritually defiling.[9] In the strict observance of the Essene community there is evidence that although marriage is not condemned and monogamy is presented as part of God's intention, among some Essenes sexual union may have been regarded as necessary solely for the purpose of procreation.[10]

The issue of virginity is raised by Stevenson in his reference to Paul's use of wedding imagery in 2 Corinthians 11:2. Here Paul speaks of Christians in a state of betrothal and, Stevenson comments, they "must remain virgin-pure, firm in the faith (cf. Joseph and Mary). To his mixed congregation at Corinth, such a distinction between betrothal and marriage would be immediately understandable, since the two stages in matrimony were practised among Hellenistic Greeks in a similar way to Jews themselves."[11] Stevenson's reference to Joseph and Mary is interesting, since it is not suggested in Paul's text, and the early patristic writers refer to Joseph as having been previously married.[12] Indeed, in no New Testament use of the bridegroom imagery is there any reference to the marriage of Mary and Joseph, although Stevenson's reference to Ephesians 5:22-33 directs us to a text that proves to be significant in the definition of marriage as a sacrament, since the Vulgate uses

[9] See Leviticus 15:18. Charles T Wood points out that this attitude is not adopted uncritically by Christianity. He quotes as an example the response of Pope Gregory I to Augustine's inquiry about the status of menstruous women "if no food were impure to him whose mind is impure, why should that which a pure-minded woman endures from natural causes be imputed to her as uncleanness?" Wood believes that there is a profound difference between Gregory's view, even allowing for the churching of women, and that of the Levitical law: "henceforth Christianity was abandoning all those demeaning taboos with which most earlier cultures had invested menstruation, thereby limiting the freedom of half of their lives." Charles T Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought" in Speculum (56) 1981, p. 726. Some Recognition of the continuing influence of the Levitical law ought to be recognised, however. In its article on impediments to marriage, The Catholic Encyclopedia observes that "the fundamental idea of an impediment to matrimony is contained implicitly in the well known prohibitions of Leviticus and some ancient canonical texts." Charles G Herbermann *et al.* (eds.) The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

[10] See W Horbury, W D Davies, J Sturdy (eds.), The Cambridge History of Judaism (C.U.P., 1999) vol 3, p. 459.

[11] Stevenson, op.cit, p. 10

[12] In a devotional work Louis Boucard points out that although Epiphanius, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom speak of Joseph as having been previously married, the apocryphal Protoevangelium on which rests the tradition of Joseph's old age and former marriage is a non-canonical work and that the tradition is vigorously opposed by Jerome, drawing in his letter against Helvidius on the authority of Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr. Louis Boucard, The Chief of Catholic Devotions (London: R & T Washbourne, 1916) p. 229.

the standard word *sacramentum* to translate Paul's Greek word for mystery as a description of the marital union between Christ and the Church.[13]

From a liturgical point of view Stevenson sees in the scant evidence of the first three centuries hints of "a gradual shift away from a domestic rite led either by a member of the family or a local cleric, to a church wedding, presided over by a bishop or presbyter."[14] The significant thing for our purposes is that the Christian rite emerged from the Graeco-Roman and Jewish practices already in existence; "it is hard to say *when* the rite becomes specifically Christian, and how far local communities distinguished a Christian marriage from a non-Christian one."[15] Although the liturgical aspect of marriage in the life of the Church eventually took on a distinctive Christian form (though one that was not regularised into a form in which it would be recognisable today until the reforms of the Council of Trent), the evidence of the influence of the philosophers of the ancient world on the thinking of the Fathers, and the laws and values that defined marriage, indicates that the Church sought to represent continuity of social practice rather than radical departure from it.

We should recognise therefore that in the formation of a Christian understanding of marriage, the Fathers do not set out from an entirely neutral starting point when they comment on the sexual values that they believed were the most appropriate way for Christians to order their lives. So when Jerome opposes Jovinian's view that in heaven the married and the virginal will receive the same reward, in support of his argument he draws on the example of secular literature which illustrates that "even among philosophers and distinguished statesmen, the virtuous are wont to be preferred by all to the voluptuous, that is to say men like Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristides, to Aristippus, Epicurus and Alcibiades." [16]

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[13] See Penny S Gold, "The Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Twelfth-Century Ideology of Marriage" in Vern L Bullough and James Brundage (eds.), Sexual Practice and the Medieval Church (New York, Buffalo, 1982) p. 105.

[14] Stevenson, op.cit, p. 20.

[15] ibid. Philip Reynolds, in his study of the Christianisation of marriage in the patristic and early medieval period supports this view: "As far as we know, members of the early Christian community got married in the same way as their non-Christian neighbours. There is no evidence that the Church required any special rite or even that Christians customarily observed one...Whether or not there was any Christian nuptial liturgy before the fourth century remains controvertible." Philip Lyndon Reynolds, Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianisation of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods (Leidein: E J Brill, 1994) pp. xviii, xix.

[16] Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum*, Migne, PL 23, 215

It is in this context that Jerome makes the statement that in heaven virgins will reap a hundred fold, chaste widows sixty fold and the married thirty fold. But Jerome refers to the parable of the sower and its promised grades of harvest with the intention of defending what he perceived to be the teaching of Jesus in the gospel, rather than initiating an attack on marriage. Indeed, Jerome, generally recognised for his vehement denunciation of sexual relations of any kind,[17] states his recognition that God's first command is to be fruitful and multiply, and that "marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled", while his allocation to widows of a reward of sixty-fold stems from a compassionate observation, perhaps rarely associated with Jerome, that "they are placed in a position of difficulty and distress."[18]

James Brundage maintains that the circulation of a new translation of Aristotle in the twelfth century reinforced in the minds of the decretalists the view that many of the Fathers shared with ancient philosophy; that "sexual activity be limited to the minimum necessary for the reproduction of humankind."[19] Against the background of a continuing debate among hellenized Romans and Greeks with some experience of Roman culture, Susan Treggiari discerns in her study of Roman marriage that "a new fusion of Greek and Jewish ideas was being created by early Christian thinkers.

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[17] J N D Kelly accounts for this pronounced characteristic in Jerome by reference to sexual adventures in early life on which Jerome looked back with loathing: "And we have (Jerome's) frank admission in 393 to Pammachius, who as his fellow student was in a position to know the truth, that if he exalted virginity to the skies, it was not because he possessed it himself but because he admired what he had lost." J N D Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (London: Duckworth, 1975) p. 21.

[18] ibid, p. 213. Further to this, in Letter 48 (to Pammachius) Jerome claims to be more generous to the married than some who allocate a hundred-fold reward to martyrs, sixty-fold to virgins, and thirty-fold to widows, with no mention of the married at all, who thereby "show that in their opinion married persons are excluded form the good ground and from the seed of the great father." Migne, PL 22, 495

[19] James Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 260. In support of this statement Brundage cites *Policraticus* by John of Salisbury who lists Zeno, Epictetus, Aristotle, and the Epicureans as the chorus of philosophers who taught that sex in marriage should be avoided as much as possible. See CCJ Webb (ed) *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Cartonensis Policratici* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) vol. 2, p. 296. Susan Treggiari also provides an appendix to her work on Roman marriage in which she charts the views of the philosophers of the ancient world on sexuality. Significant among them are the views of Ocellus of Luciana, that sexual intercourse is only for procreation, and of Musonius Rufus, that sex is justified only in marriage for the begetting of children and is unjust when it is merely for pleasure. Susan Treggiari, Roman Marriage: *Iusti Coniuges* from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) p. 511. Treggiari also points to the quotation by Jerome in his treatise Against Jovinian from the "golden book on marriage" by Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus, in which it was implied that a philosopher had no need of a wife. ibid, p. 192.

Paul and the author of 1 Peter were much influenced by the Aristotelian tradition and perhaps by a need to convince non-Christians that their views of marriage and the position of women were not revolutionary."[20] What was to prove more revolutionary was the association of virginity as a source of power with the lives not of the gods but of ordinary mortals.

In one of his sermons on the nativity Augustine outlines the role of Mary as exemplar for those, married or not, who seek a share in the rewards bestowed in the metaphorical harvest. To celebrate the birth of Jesus Augustine calls for rejoicing among "you who are chaste in marriage, living fruitfully with your husbands; guard in your hearts what you have lost in your body. Since physical integrity is no longer possible for you, let your conscience be intact in faith even as the whole Church is virginal. In Mary, consecrated virginity brought forth Christ; in Anna, aged widowhood recognised little Christ; in Elizabeth, conjugal chastity and late fertility struggled for Christ."[21] The exact connection between Mary and the life of those who are married lies in the experience of parenthood. Augustine clearly identifies the differences between Mary, Anna, and Elizabeth as corresponding to the states of virgin, widow, and spouse. But the use of virginity as a metaphor for faith ("let your conscience be intact in faith") indicates that the emphasis of the example is on their shared participation in offering to Christ what, by his grace, they were able to give: their firm believing.[22] Elizabeth and Anna participate in Mary's exemplary virginity, insofar as they relate to Mary's child. This demonstrates the value of spiritual virginity in marriage and motherhood for those who give physical birth, and those who do not, as we shall discover in medieval devotion.

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[20] Treggiari, op.cit, p. 227.

[21] *Sermo* 192, Migne, PL 38, 1012

[22] The notion of virginity as a metaphor for faith is also explored by Irvan Resnick in an article that charts the discussion by the eleventh century Peter Damian of a question originally posed by Jerome in his letter to Eustochius: "Is God able to restore the crown of lost virginity?" Resnick quotes Damian: "The God-man has been able to come forth from the womb of a virgin, while leaving intact her virginity, so will he not be able to repair the loss of that virginity which has been violated?...It is something greater to pass through closed doors than to close doors already opened." Irvan Resnick, "Peter Damian on the restoration of virginity; a problem for medieval theology" in Journal of Theological Studies (NS XXXIX) 1988, p. 129. Here a connection is being drawn between faith in the resurrection and the virgin birth; participation through faith in one leads to participation in the other. The connection is also made by Augustine. Speaking of the resurrection appearance of Jesus he writes: "He manifested his mature body to those within the house, and as an infant he came forth, a spouse from his bride-chamber, that is, from the virgin womb, leaving his mother's integrity inviolate." *Sermo* 191, Migne, PL 38, 1010.

In another sermon on the nativity, Augustine refers to these states as simply *ipsae pudicitiae,* those virtues or manifestations of chastity.[23] Dyan Elliott comments on the fluidity of the boundaries of the virtue of chastity in the introduction to her book on chaste marriages. She observes that "a reference to matrimonial chastity does not necessarily mean that absolute chastity is observed in the marriage. It may mean that the couple practised sexual fidelity... It may also signify that during the extensive penitential periods of the church, sexual continence was observed. Or it could indeed mean that the couple in question had mutually agreed to forgo sexual relations perpetually."[24] Elliott's observation suggests a fluidity in terminology that allowed virginity to function metaphorically across a surprising range of human situations.

Surveying the background to Christian marriage that we have already considered it is evident that both the Jewish tradition of ritual impurity and the philosophical tradition to which Jerome refers above recognised that marriage should not be determined by sexual activity within it. In the light of much medieval devotional practice, we shall maintain that the power of Mary's virginity provided the momentum for developing patterns of assimilation that linked her power with important aspects of family life, while always allowing for the difference in status.

In summary we can say that the structure of marriage and the recognition of the place of continence in the lives of those with philosophical or theological and ascetic aspirations indicated continuity between the ancient world and the primitive Church. The subsequent interpretation of the power of virginity, marriage and continence provided the Church with a rich seam of spiritual and mystical material for art, devotional texts, and spiritual self-understanding. Its ultimate expression was devotion to Mary. It is to the Church's exploration of that seam, and the ambiguity within it, that we now turn.

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[23] *Sermo* 196, Migne, PL 38, 1020.
[24] Dyan Elliott, Spiritual Marriages: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) p. 5.

b) Virginity and the attraction of difference.

In the first chapter of this thesis our survey of attitudes towards virginity in the ancient world provided evidence that the attraction of virginity was likely to be a statement that was entirely intelligible to the contemporary culture in which Christianity was finding its first definition.[25] In this next section we consider how that attraction is appropriated to themselves in the lives of men and women who live the Christian life in a variety of ways, as married or single. Our interest will be in how ambiguity of language and imagery permit identification with Mary's status as virgin and spouse by those who, by our contemporary standards, differ significantly from her.

It is in this context of difference that we find reference to the recuperation of virginity, recognising that the fixity with which we presently regard the category of virgin does not necessarily apply to the devotional standards and spiritual identity of Christians up to the time of the Reformation.[26] Thus virginity functions as a metaphor for the heavenly and eternal, and as such it can be descriptive of a marriage that is spiritual, physical, or sexual.

Teresa M Shaw notes that in addition to the philosophical concerns of the ancient world, "physiological or medical constructs of the human body and sexual processes...gave undeniable shape to Christian practice and discourse."[27] Shaw maintains that the understanding of the physical working of the human body that is derived largely from Galen gives rise to the observation that "'sex' in antiquity was more a fluid continuum from feminine to masculine *genders* than the modern

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[25] See above, pp. 13-14. In a similar way, the relationship between Christianity and modern science explored for example by John Polkinghorne seeks to use scientific categories as the means of expressing theological truth without implying that Christian revelation is derived from modern science.

[26] See Wogan-Browne, op.cit, p 40: "It is sometimes claimed that virginity moves from being technical to honorary in the later middle ages. But this understates the essentially rhetorical nature and endemic turbulence of virginity as a construct: there is no time at which virginity is fixed, no time at which it is not changing into honorary forms." See also, Sarah Salih, Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England (Cambridge: D S Brewer, 2001), p. 181 "Frances of Rome expressed a sense of the non-absolute nature of these categories when she reported a seeing a vision in which Mary Magdalen led the choir of virgins, while St Cecilia led the married."

fluidity helps us to think about the Christian ascetic texts that urge the female to employ physical techniques such as fasting and modifying her appearance in order to become 'manly' or 'male'."[28]

The fluidity of the profile of those described as virgins in Christian devotion is demonstrated by an example cited by Duffy: "Virginity as a symbol of sacred power, a concrete realization within this world of the divine spirit, has a very ancient pedigree within Christianity. It is already articulated in the second century Acts of Paul and Thecla."[29] In an article that surveys this fluidity in later antiquity, Elizabeth Castelli points out that Thecla renounces her betrothal, cuts her hair as a sign of renunciation of the world, and puts on a man's cloak in order to travel and teach.[30] This apparently strange behaviour does not, however, diminish the attraction of Thecla for those who follow a different course. On the diversity of interest subsequently associated with her cult as a virgin Christian hero, Peter Brown comments: "She showed far fewer qualms that did the prim ascetic priest who recorded her miracles, in engaging with the "vulgar, Jewish" hopes and fears associated with sterility, love-making, and pregnancy."[31]

The legacy of this tradition, of which Thecla is an example, is that its ambiguity provides attraction and encouragement for those who are married and are parents, and those who seek the recuperation of their virginity. Wogan-Browne notes that betrothal to a pagan tyrant, the preserving of virginity and subsequent spiritual marriage to Christ are all common elements in virgin martyr and hagiographical and popular romance literature.[32] But in the thirteenth century "an increasing number of honorary virginities join the figure of the virgin martyr,"[33] thus including within their ranks married and widowed matrons.

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[28] Shaw, op.cit, p. 407
[29] Duffy, op.cit, p. 189.
[30] Elizabeth Castelli, "'I will make Mary male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity" in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, (eds.), Body Guards: the Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 44. See also, E Hennecke and W Scheemelecher, (eds.), New Testament Apocrypha (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963) pp. 285, 289.
[31] Brown, op.cit, p. 329.
[32] Wogan-Browne, op.cit, pp. 98 – 99. Although the romance literature is a late development, the origin of the tradition that Wogan-Browne surveys is much earlier.
[33] Wogan-Brown, op.cit, p. 124.

As further evidence of this fluidity, Castelli cites a quotation from the Gospel of Thomas in which Jesus says of Mary, "I myself shall lead her so as to make her male."[34] Castelli proposes that what is innovative here is the notion that women can gain access to what is regarded as the male domain of holiness and salvation by becoming male, although it must also be admitted that this comes at the cost of the denial of the dignity of their own gender. What is also significant, however, is that in the context of betrothal and even motherhood, virginity stands as the gateway to this identity.

Although as a Gnostic text the Gospel of Thomas represents the outlook of a limited section of Christian tradition, there is evidence elsewhere of a popular non-Christian understanding of ambiguity relating to virginal identity in the ancient world. Castelli cites the example of the Vestal Virgins at Rome, described by Mary Beard as women whose virginity contributed to their sacred identity, but an identity in which they stand "on the brink of sexual categories, occupying more than one category at a time...(they) attain their sacred status from the ambiguities inherent in the ideological construction of their sexual status."[35] As we have already commented, the accepted norms of the ancient world may pass into Christian culture, but in the process are re-formulated as statements of its own theology. The ambiguity that attaches to virginity would seem to be one such norm.

What are the implications of this fluidity and ambiguity for our perception of the attractiveness of Mary as the virgin spouse? Most importantly it provides us with evidence of a capacity to cross boundaries that today we regard as absolute. Thus the presentation of Mary as virgin, wife, and mother suggests to the ancient and

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[34] Castelli, op.cit, p. 44. See: The Gospel of Thomas, logion 114, in Hennecke and Schneemelecher, op.cit, p. 299. The Gospel of Thomas is dated by Hennecke and Scheemelecher to the middle of the third century and its Gnostic origins noted: ibid, p. 278.

[35] Castelli, op.cit, p. 46. See, Mary Beard, "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins," Journal of Roman Studies (70) 1980, especially pp. 19 – 22. See also Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, Religions of Rome (C.U.P., 1998) vol. 1, p. 52: "There is an obvious parallel between Vesta, the hearth of the city, and the hearths of the houses of individual families – the priestesses of the state apparently representing the women of the household. But which women exactly?...The insistence on their virginity makes them very unlikely candidates as wives; while daughters provide an equally unlikely model for such a group of priestesses whose legal privileges were utterly different from those of a dependent child (and anyway who wore, as their priestly costume, some of the distinctive clothes of the bride or married woman). It may be that the key to the Vestals' sacred status lies precisely in its ambiguity: they are paraded as sharing the characteristics of both matrons and virgins, with even some characteristics (such as specific legal rights in the making of wills) of men too."

medieval world not an accumulation of incompatible identities, but the very combination of identities that forms an articulation of power and attraction. We can therefore maintain that the appeal of Mary the virgin spouse to spouses who enjoy a sexual relationship is not only possible, but highly likely, given virginity's capacity for polyvalent manifestation in the way it is derived by the medieval Church from its primitive origins.

What evidence is there that this is so? One of the difficulties that this question poses is how to assess the evidence. There is little that we can identify that describes the view of the married about the impact of Mary the virgin spouse on their self-understanding, given that the notion of self-understanding is a relatively modern one. However, one of the striking features of the late medieval period is the laicisation of the spirituality of the monastic and clerical world, albeit in noble and bourgeois circles, of which primers and the popularity of the little office of Our Lady are an example.[36]

We interpret this devotion as a sign of fundamental attraction, coupled with the recognition that the sheer number of the artistic, liturgical and spiritual manifestations of Mary as virgin spouse indicates an attraction that depends on more than simply the enthusiasm of the monastic Church for its own virtue. Even in one of the most stringent of documents on the subject of virginity, the *Heile Maithhad* (Letter on Virginity), the warning is clear that pride ought not to get the better of those who renounce marriage. Quoting the example of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, the author writes, "she found such favour with Our Lord more for her humility than for her virginity. For all virginity, humility is precious; and virginity without it is a poor and worthless thing, for a maiden in virginity without humility is like oil in a lamp that has not been lit."[37]

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[36] Edmund Waterton, *Pietas Mariana Britannica* (London: St Joseph's Catholic Library, 1879) part 1, pp. 122 – 139.

[37] Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), Medieval English Prose for Women: From the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse* (O.U.P., 1990) p. 41. In association with this exhortation to remember the virtues of a wife and mother the author goes on to say, "Have always in your heart the most blessed of virgins and mother of virginity, and entreat her constantly to kindle you." This theme is also found in Augustine: "Let not those women who are virgins boast; let them, rather, humble themselves in all things in proportion to their greatness." *Sermo* 196, Migne PL, 38, 1020.

So pervasive is the presence of Mary as virgin spouse and mother that at times she seems to disappear from view, since her presence is so obvious as not to require comment. But when it is recognised and assessed, the extent of its influence can be read as indicative of the enormity of its impact.[38] One small example may suffice to demonstrate Mary's influence and attraction. In his survey of Marian devotion Edmund Waterton notes that "until the time of Louis the fifteenth it was the custom in France to include in the *trousseau* of a bride a pair of beads (ie rosary beads) and a copy of the Hours of our Blessed Lady."[39] This simple convention is indicative of the extent to which the mantle of Mary embraces those who are married.

Devotion to Mary as a hallmark of married life provided the spouse with recourse to a powerful advocate at significant moments of marriage. Among these significant moments we would include the conception of children, for which Warner quotes the example of Henry III of France and his wife Louise of Lorraine who made the pilgrimage barefoot each winter to Chartres in order to pray at the shrine of Mary's chemise for the gift of a child.[40] Safety in childbirth was also a primary concern, with which Mary was closely associated. The Sarum missal provides a mass in honour of Mary specifically for women who are pregnant or about to give birth: *Missa ad honorem virginis gloriose pro mulieribus pregnantibus, aut alias in partu laborantibus* (Mass in honour of the glorious virgn for women who are pregnant, or in labour).[41]

A serious illness could also threaten the livelihood and future of the family. Thus when John Paston, a member of a wealthy Norfolk family in the fifteenth century, was taken ill in London, his wife wrote to tell him that his mother had had an image of wax of his weight sent to our Lady of Walsingham, and she herself had gone on

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[38] David Herlihy makes a similar point in relation to the wider devotion to the saints: "the evocations of motherhood, childhood , and fatherhood contained in the lives (of the saints) must bear some correspondence with the ways in which mothers, children, and fathers were viewed in the real world. These images were designed to evoke an emotional response on the part of the readers or listeners; the sentiments expressed in a devotional context must have had parallels in feelings that prevailed in the natural family, for which we have no records." David Herlihy, Medieval Households (London: Harvard University Press, 1985) p. 115.
[39] Waterton, op.cit,, p. 124.
[40] Warner, op.cit, p. 280.
[41] Waterton, op.cit, p. 120.

pilgrimage there.[42] In the evidence to which we now turn, we shall concentrate on the Church's presentation of Mary the virgin spouse of her son, reading from its exceptional richness and complexity the impact of her appeal on the largely voiceless generations of western Christendom prior to the Reformation.

One of the most abiding and pervasive indications of the power of Mary the virgin spouse is to be seen in Christian art. Among the early statements that are suggestive of Mary's identity as spouse and mother is the representation of her in the mosaics of the church of S Maria Maggiore in Rome where Mary is depicted as the consort of Jesus.[43] The impact of this image on the devotional life of generations of worshipers is incalculable, presenting a statement about marriage that is expressive both of heavenly power as symbolized by virginity and of earthly life characterised by the intimacy of personal union. On the connection between history and eternity to which such mosaics point, and of which virginity can be an expression, Sarah Salih comments that "writings on virginity proclaim its timelessness, looking back to prelapsarian wholeness, or forward to the glorified body of the resurrection. Either state is outside history: the historically situated person who practices virginity is therefore aligned with the ahistorical, divine and immutable. Saints and virgins occupy two kinds of time."[44]

S Maria Maggiore's graphic expression of marriage characterised by the state of virginity suggests that marriage too is capable of existing in these two kinds of time, the temporal and sexual thus deriving significance from the eternal and virginal. The theme is restated in the twelfth century mosaic in S Maria in Trastevere. The application of marriage imagery to Mary illustrates her capacity to function within the Christian tradition as personification and exemplar of attainment of the heavenly throne promised to all in the book of Revelation; but she is also a figure who can

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[42] James Gairdner (ed.), The Paston Letters AD 1422 – 1509 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904) vol. 2, p. 55. It is also worth noting the view of Dom David Knowles that in the family's correspondence the infrequent references to "the mass, holy communion, or devotion to our Lord's passion and to our Lady" may be an indication that by the standards of their day they were a fairly irreligious household. Dom David Knowles, "The Religion of the Pastons" Downside Review (42) 1924, p. 163.

[43] Roloff Benny, Peter Gunn, The Churches of Rome (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981) p. 69: The apsidal mosaic illustrated is from the late thirteenth century. The earliest dates from the fifth century and in the context of the adoration of the Magi depicts Mary not as mother on whose knee Jesus sits, but as consort seated beside the child king.

[44] Salih, op.cit, p. 31.

mitigate or even subvert. Salih's reference to prelapsarian wholeness accurately identifies the mosaic's association of Mary with the antithesis of that wholeness, not only as the second Eve, but also as a mother spared, according to tradition, the pains of childbirth identified as a penalty of the fall.

Mary therefore becomes the person in whom sexuality can be made explicit in a way that subverts the negative attitude towards sex found in so many of the Fathers and thus permits the married a dignity equal to that of the celibate, virginal religious and clergy. An example of this capacity can be found in Marina Warner's observation on the Trastevere presentation of the heavenly marriage. Warner notes that the text in the book held by Jesus reads "Come my chosen one I shall place thee on my throne," [45] while, more significantly, Mary holds up a phylactery that reads, "His left hand should be under my head; and his right hand should embrace me," a quotation from the highly charged and allegorically interpreted Song of Songs.[46] Although the reading of any erotic significance into this text may be reflect a more recent interpretation, the impact of the visual representation must nonetheless imply some spousal interest within which an erotic element might legitimately be identified. For example, if Mary were to be regarded as simply a queen consort, or queen mother, the manner in which she is depicted would provide expression of an older woman. But in mosaics and paintings, Mary is invariable presented as youthful, in spite of the fact that other saints, Anne, for example, conventionally bear signs of old age.[47]

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[45] Roloff Beny's photograph shows that the same text is presented by Jesus in the thirteenth century apsidal mosaic in S Maria Maggiore. John van Engen, in his study, Rupert of Deutz (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1983) makes a connection between the mosaics in S Maria in Trastevere and the contemporary commentary on The Song of Songs by Rupert of Deutz (p. 295). van Engen also points out that "readings from the Song were assigned to the feasts for Mary's Assumption (August 15) and Nativity (September 8); monks also read this book in the night office during the month of August (p. 294). Although the thirteenth century treatise, *Sigillum beatae Mariae* by Honorius Augustodunensis draws extensively on the link between liturgical texts and the Song of Songs (Migne, PL 172, 495-518), van Engen also notes that the interpretation of the Song in its entirety with reference to Mary was specifically rejected in Bede's Allegorical Exposition of the Song of Songs (Migne, PL 91, 1206). The renewed association thus marks a significant development in Marian devotion.

[46] Warner, op.cit, pp. 121 – 122. As evidence of continuing interest in this theme Warner also cites a detail from a Florentine diptych, possibly from the fourteenth century, in which "Christ clasps the right hand of his mother with the formal and legal gesture of nuptial union, *dextrarum iunctio*" . *See figure 8.*

[47] *See figure 9*: Anne with Mary and Jesus, painted by Masaccio 1424 – 1425; *figure 10*: The coronation of Mary, who here is shown not only to be youthful, but also with braided hair, a reference, perhaps, to her married dignity.

The very graphic, and the public and accessible nature of mosaics, frescoes and paintings is evidence of the extent to which a mystical spirituality that emanates from a monastic and largely celibate world permeates the development of the medieval understanding of marriage.[48] Indeed, it could be maintained that marriage is the common theme that unites the cloister and the society outside it, and in both the power of virginity exercises ambiguous attraction. The Song of Songs provides the single most influential expression of this relationship. Martin Zlatohlavek points out that Rupert of Deutz presents a new dimension in the interpretation of the text, extending the Mariological associations attached to it from as early as the writing of Ambrose and Jerome, by giving the title of his work as *In Cantica canticorum de incarnatione Domini commentarii.*[49] It is from the interpretation of this text as a reference to the marital relationship between Mary and Jesus that the image of the enclosed garden emerges, a description of Mary that contains the understanding that the garden may be both enclosed and accessible without losing its essential definition, an ambiguity that allows the presentation of marriage to relate to those within the enclosure of both cloister and the marriage bond itself.

The connection between the love-lyric and mystical exposition has been extensively explored in the writing of Bernard of Clairvaux, especially in his Sermons on the Song of Songs and his sermons on Mary.[50] M B Pranger offers an analysis of Bernard's sermons on the Praise of the Virgin Mother and the Nativity of the blessed Mary, commenting particularly on the identification between virginal religious love and the conventions expressed in the poetic form of courtly love. The elements of "secrecy, servitude, obedience by the male to the female, and love as an *ars*" and "the more extreme forms of courtly love, like the absolute inaccessibility of the lady and the withholding of the carnal union" find obvious expression in monastic

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[48] On the growth of lay piety that leads to an expansion of quasi-religious communities such as the beguines and, especially among the nobility, the prevalence of chaste marriage, see Margaret McGlynn and Richard J Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages" in Vern L Bullough and James Brundage (eds.), Handbook of Medieval Sexuality (London: Garland, 1996) p. 111.

[49] Martin Zlatohlavek, The Bride in the Enclosed Garden (Prague: National Gallery of Prague, 1995) p. 45; see Migne, PL 170, 748-797. As evidence of the close identification with Mary in Rupert's interpretation, Zlatohlavek, p. 48, points to a mid-twelfth century manuscript of Rupert's commentary from Gottwieg that illustrates in the initial O the Christ-bridegroom leaning down from a cloud to embrace Mary in a gesture that imitates the annunciation.

[50] For example, M Casey, Athirst for God; Spritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs (Kalamazoo: 1988) Cistercian Studies Series 77; G R Evans, The Mind of St Bernard of Clairvaux (O.U.P., 1983).

devotion to Mary. This identification of sacred with secular ought not to surprise us, since "a better understanding of the medieval mind makes its tendency to associate the sacred with the profane and vice versa a less shocking and more obvious state of affairs."[51] Thus within the two very different contexts of court and cloister it is possible to identify a Marian influence in the realm of love and desire.

The impact that we perceive here of Mary the virgin spouse on the life of both monastic and lay Christians would lead us to question the comment by Elliott that "the example of Mary's motherhood arguably made more obvious inroads into the spirituality of female celibates than did her virginity into that of the married."[52] Not only do we find evidence for the influence of Mary's status as virginal bride in the life of the cloister, but we find that in the desire for the recuperation of virginity, in the lives of Margery Kempe and Birgitta of Sweden, for example, virginity exercises considerable attraction for the married, while the real concerns of those who are parents, in the conceiving, bearing, and nurturing children, resonate with the images of the Mary the virgin bride who is also the virgin mother.

An early expression of this attraction is to be found in the remarkable foundation by Robert of Arbissel at the beginning of the 12th century of a monastic community at Fontevrault. Elliott emphasises Robert's intention of forming a community that was specifically geared to the needs and concerns of women and that embodied his belief in a redemption that "extended to the darkest reaches of the flesh."[53] But Elliott's contention that the cult of Mary was secondary to the cult of the Magdalen deserves cautious acceptance, since it was only one of the four houses at Fontevrault that was dedicated to Mary Magdalen.[54] Sandra Resnick Alfonsi points out that Adelaide

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[51] M B Pranger, Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams (Leiden: E J Brill, 1994) p. 139. Pranger cites C S Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A study in Medieval Tradition (O.U.P., 1936) as a work that has taken up the theory that the origin of the courtly love convention is to be found in the Cistertian movement. But Lewis (pp. 8, 20) seems to maintain that devotion to Mary was derived from that convention.

[52] Elliott, op.cit, p. 179.

[53] ibid, p. 100. Elliott includes lepers and prostitutes among the company of the community at Fontevrault, suggesting that the latter may have been the wives clergy were forced to repudiate as the discipline of celibacy was imposed.

[54] Katherine Ludwig Jansen, The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 178, note 39: "The usual attribution is: Notre Dame for nuns, Saint John the Evangelist for monks, Saint Mary Magdalen for penitents, and Saint Lazarus for lepers. Jacques Dalarun has argued that despite numerous citations in

contention that the cult of Mary was secondary to the cult of the Magdalen deserves cautious acceptance, since it was only one of the four houses at Fontevrault that was dedicated to Mary Magdalen.[54] Sandra Resnick Alfonsi points out that Adelaide Riviera gave land to Robert in 1099 in order that he might build a church to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and it was to the glorification of woman, in the organisation of the community and its patronage, that the enterprise was dedicated.[55] Both Elliott and Alfonsi remark on the unusual arrangement that an abbess presided over the male and female communities at Fontevrault, and that the first abbess was not a virgin, but a matron.[56] In this enterprise that demonstrates the cross-fertilization of spiritual life within the enclosures of marriage and cloister, the prominence of Mary is indicative of the ambiguous attitudes towards her that enabled those who had been married to find a place within monasticism.

Further evidence of this cross-fertilization is to be seen in the convention of the mystical marriage. This draws not only from the Old Testament[57] but also from other instances of personal experience of union with God, and examples of those who write of this experience would include Matilda of Magdeburg, Christina Ebner, Richard of St Victor, and Jan van Ruysbroeck.[58] Once again it is the notion of enclosure, so frequently used as a statement of Mary's status as the virgin spouse, that stands as a statement of this union in both monastic and secular contexts. We find further evidence of this in the observation by Wogan-Brown that "whether as

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[54] Katherine Ludwig Jansen, The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 178, note 39: "The usual attribution is: Notre Dame for nuns, Saint John the Evangelist for monks, Saint Mary Magdalen for penitents, and Saint Lazarus for lepers. Jacques Dalarun has argued that despite numerous citations in the scholarly literature, there is no medieval evidence supporting the theory that the convent dedicated to the Magdalen segregated the repentant prostitutes from the rest of Arbissel's followers."

[55] Sandra Resnick Alfonsi, Masculine Submission in Troubadour Lyric (New York: Peter Lang, 1986) American University Studies, Series II, vol. 34, p. 68.

[56] In fact the first Abbess, Petronille de Chemille, was a young woman aged 29. The history of the 37 Abbesses of Fontevrault between 1115 and 1792 is outlined in *Histoire de L'Ordre de Fontevrault* 1100 – 1908 (Auch: Imprimerie Leonce Cocharaux, 1913) vol 2. Perhaps not surprisingly the women elected to this position are of noble birth. Petronille de Chemille, for example, came from a distinguished family in the Maine region and was connected with the Counts of Anjou (p 17). The succession of Abbesses, however, indicates that the authority of Fontevrault was vested specifically in women, not simply by virtue of their social rank.

[57] "The religious importance of adultery arose from the fact that Jehovah himself had entered into marriage with his people Israel...This is why the prophets repeatedly refer to a conjugal communion of love between God and his people Israel, the bride or virgin, as she is frequently called – for example in Isaiah 37:22, Jeremiah31:4, and Amos 5:2." Gerhard Wehr, The Mystical Marriage: Symbol and Meaning of the Human Experience (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1990) p. 27.

[58] ibid, pp. 71-73.

The imagery of the Song of Songs suggests a fluid reading of the female figure who is Mary, personification of the virgin bride of Christ as herself, the Church, the soul. Zlatohlavek suggests that this fluid imagery has itself influenced the presentation of another image, that of Mary as mother also depicted with suggestions of the erotic relationship of a lover.[60] The presentation of Mary that is derived from bridal imagery often uses the symbol of the enclosed garden to draw these themes together. We should be aware that this imagery is most popularly presented as a commentary on the marriage of the soul, typified by Mary, with God through the virginal life of the cloister, itself an enclosure. The original provenance of this spirituality may indeed be monastic, expressed for example in manuscript illustration not generally accessible to lay people. But its use in altarpiece art, stained glass, and statuary suggests that this same spirituality dictated the iconographic material from which popular devotion was formed.

For example, a mid-fifteenth century altarpiece from Jenikov depicts an annunciation to Mary in an enclosed garden. On her lap is a unicorn and between Mary and Gabriel is a tower, one of the symbols of her virginity and chastity; it is also an allusion to the Song of Songs.[61] Although in its symbolism virginity is the emphasis of the altarpiece, the context in which those symbols are depicted is ambiguously erotic in the prominence given to the figure of the unicorn, pursued in this example,

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agent of the union (according to some accounts of the tradition the nuptial ring is Jesus's foreskin) and is depicted as such as late as the sixteenth century (1560) in a painting by Antonio del Ceraiolo in the Church of S Trinita in Florence, showing Mary standing between the adult figures of Jesus and Catherine and joining their right hands in a marriage union. In contrast to the notion of enclosure, however, Catherine's espousal coincides with a vocation to leave her solitude and serve others. In her letters, the impact of Mary's role on her marriage to Jesus is evident in the inclusion of her name at the head of most letters, and sometimes in the conclusion of them. See Suzanne Noffoke (ed.), The Letters of Catherine of Siena (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000, 2001) 2 vols.; Butler's Lives of the Saints (London: Burns & Oates, 1956) vol. 2, p. 193.

[60] "The infant Christ of the *Maddona from Strakonice* caresses her with his finger under the chin, The same situation is featured in the diptych of the *Maddona and Christ the Dolorous*, *(see figure 11)* now kept in Karlsruhe, where, moreover, the child Jesus touches the madonna's cheek with his own, and holds her thumb, which is an important erotic gesture. As a pair of lovers, Jesus and the Virgin hold hands in both the paintings, *Madonna from Rome* and the *Madonna from Zbraslav*. *See figure 12.* The latter, as the *Madonna from Rouchovany*, wears a wedding ring on her left hand." Zlatohlavek, op.cit, p. 64.

[61] "Your neck is like an ivory tower": Song of Songs 7:4.

as in others,[62] by the four dogs that represent the four virtues, truth, peace, justice and mercy.[63] Two powerful and popular themes thus receive spiritual re-working in these altarpieces: pursuit, as in that of the lover for the beloved (the central pre-occupation of troubadour culture), and the erotic image of the unicorn.[64]

It has been suggested that the troubadour culture found similar expression in Cistertian devotion to Mary, and the highly spiritualised sense of longing and fulfilment that characterised Bernard of Claivaux's writing on Mary finds echoes in the conventions of courtly love.[65] But the appeal is not restricted to one level of society. Eileen Power describes in expansive terms the attraction of Mary in popular medieval culture, suggesting that the cult of the Virgin Mary is a separate religion that outwits the limitations of the moralist in order to embrace the publican and sinner. In this cult, the powers of the son's consort tip the scales of justice in favour of her devotees: "'*Imperatrix supernorum, supernatrix infernorum,*' hell was emptied under her rule and heaven became a new place, filled with her disreputable, faulty, human lovers."[66] As we discovered in section 3 ("Virginity as Power and Ambiguity") of the previous chapter, Mary's virginity functioned in the medieval Church as a sign of difference and attraction specifically for women, and also for men.

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[62] Zlatohlavek gives two fifteenth century examples with illustrations: the Heilsberger Altar by the Master of the Allendorf altar and an altar from Southern Germany. Both these examples are in the Weimar Scholssmuseum. op.cit, pp. 66, 67.

[63] Odell Shepard notes that the vogue of the unicorn legend increase in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in parallel with devotion to Mary and was elaborated into a holy hunt tradition: "Beginning in *Physiologus* as an allegory of the Annunciation alone, the story came to comprehend in one rich and compact symbol the total life and death of Christ and to shadow forth the whole divine plan of salvation." Odell Shepard, The Lore of the Unicorn (New York: Dover Publications, 1993) p. 58. Shepard includes an illustration of an early sixteenth century woodcut of the annunciation in which Mary is depicted seated in an enclosed garden surrounded by symbols of her virginity. The unicorn is followed by Gabriel, and approaches Mary in a parody of sexual intercourse by pointing his horn directly into her lap (p. 65).

[64] Shepard, op.cit, p. 65: "The unicorn can be hunted only when a virgin puts his head with the horn in her lap, and he will thus be tamed." *See figure 13.* One of the implications of the growing influence of the doctrine of the immaculate conception was the narrower definition of Mary's virginity in moral terms. The ambiguous image of the unicorn was therefore banned at the Council of Trent. Zlatohlavek, op.cit, p. 102. See Sara Boss, Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Cassell, 2000) pp. 40-41.

[65] Warner, op.cit, p. 146.

[66] Eileen Power, English Medieval Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535 (C.U.P., 1922) p. 513. The Latin quotation ("Empress of the highest, Mistress of the lowest") is the first two lines of a hymn to Mary by Adam of St Victor. See Henry Adams, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (London: Constable, 1936) p. 94.

Inquiring into Mary's attraction as the virgin spouse, we discover that its ambiguity has the capacity for crossing boundaries between the cloister and the world, between those consecrated to virginity and those sanctified in marriage, thus providing through a devotional dispensation the means by which the rigour of the double standard might be subverted.[67] For the married, the power that attaches to Mary's virginity is sought in the context of their specific concerns that come to be expressed through the cult that Power describes. Power's description suggests an important interaction between on the one hand ecclesiastical authority dominated by an increasingly celibate and male clergy and male and female religious, and on the other hand the mass of the people in a married or single carnal and sexually active condition. That the unholy "at one blow outwitted the moralist" by inventing the cult, is surely indicative, no matter how cautiously one might agree with Power's assessment (and the association it implies between sexuality and unholiness), of the extent to which the virgin spouse was regarded by the medieval laity as capable of giving aid and therefore dignity to those whose lives might be anything but virginal.[68] But we must surely also acknowledge the extent to which the moralist and those in ecclesiastical authority provided the facilities that made the cult possible and that lay within their control.[69]

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[67] See, Kenneth Kirk, The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the *Summum Bonum* (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1931) p. 360. On the distorting influence of monastic piety in the middle ages: "For a period Christian piety...was not merely monastic in character; it was also the prerogative of the monks, who alone had leisure for it. This factor in pre-Reformation Christianity, purely accidental though it was, reinforced the theory of the double standard in its invalid form, to the practical exclusion of secular persons from all but the most formalist branches of Christian observance." The attraction of Mary the virgin spouse provides, we maintain, an ambiguity that subverts this invalid form of the double standard, employing the multi-media character of that devotion to connect with the lives of those outside the cloister.

[68] Clarissa Atkinson cites the example of Birgitta of Sweden whose son Karl became the lover of the notorious Queen Joanna of Naples. Karl died of Tuberculosis in 1372. But Birgitta "was reassured by an extraordinary vision in which the Virgin told her that she herself had stood by Karl's deathbed: "as a woman that standeth by another woman when sche childeth, to help the chylde that it dye not of flowying of blood ne be no slayne in that straight place were it cometh oute." Clarissa Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe (London: Cornell University Press, 1983) p. 177.

[69] On his reading of medieval hagiographical and romance literature, and devotional and didactic literature Neil Cartlidge comments that "the paradox which has emerged most clearly in my reading of these texts is that even while several of these authors specifically subscribe to the established anti-matrimonial discourse inherited from patristic antiquity, their work nevertheless often betrays a sensitive and flexible approach to the intellectual value and emotional impact of marriage." Neil Cartlidge, Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100 – 1300 (Cambridge: D S Brewer, 1997) p. 3.

We have already noted that in the symbolic provision of a pair of rosaries and a book of Hours as part of the wedding trousseau, devotion to Mary provided for points of contact with her in the concerns that are natural to every married couple. Central in these concerns is the begetting and birth of children, closely associated with the cult of the girdle of Mary.[70] As a sign of ambiguity Ruth Evans sees in the girdle a deeper significance. It is one that stems from its use in the York Mystery Plays and the tradition that Mary bequeaths her girdle to the apostle Thomas as she is assumed into heaven. Evans's interest is in the dramatic convention of the cross-dressing and masquerade that was standard in the mystery plays.

As in the story of the resurrection, Thomas acts at Mary's assumption as the voice that articulates the audience's doubts about the miracle. But the doubt is about more than the special effects of the staging. It is also about the man who is playing the role of a woman (Mary),[71] and "who has constructed woman as pure but who needs the reassurance of the woman's fundamental sexuality."[72] The girdle thus becomes the focus of this anxiety and an overtly sexual item, and Evans observes that "the apostles treat the girdle almost as a fetish, dwelling on its proximity to Mary's body."[73] In this realm of popular drama we see most clearly something of the interaction between doctrine and popular belief that Power was seeking to describe. The transforming of the girdle into an item of devotion connects it with the obvious concerns of the married that are identified with Mary in her motherhood. But with extraordinary confidence that identification also takes it into the heart of the marital relationship itself in the sexual attraction that the woman has for the man, yet with no implication that this diminishes Mary's status as virgin.

These popular associations of Mary as mother, but more especially as spouse, connect her with the concerns of those who are also married and have children.

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[70] "Ladies were recommended for safe delivery to wear a girdle with the *Magnificat* inscribed upon it...and the girdle of our Ladye at Westminster, not taken habitually to ladies expecting their confinement, was at least conveyed to Elizabeth of York." Waterton, op.cit, part 1, p. 91.

[71] See Meg Twycross, "'Transvestism' in the Mystery Plays" Medieval English Theatre (5:2) 1983 pp. 123 – 180.

[72] Ruth Evans, "When a body meets a body: Fergus and Mary in the York Cycle" in Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, David Lawton (eds.), New Medieval Literatures 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) p. 209.

[73] Evans, "When a body meets a body", op.cit, p. 210: James says: "She wrapped it about her stomach" (line 277) and Andrew says, "She girdled it around herself with fair blossom" (line 279).

Although she is defined as mother and spouse in relation to Jesus, the marriage to Joseph acts as a commentary or earthly sub-text to that story. Here again we find that there is ambiguity that provides access and popularity, drawing, like the mystery plays on borrowed identity.

Rosemary Drage Hale surveys the growth in popularity of devotion to Joseph in the fifteenth century and comments: "While the emergence of the Joseph cult aligns with socially constructed paradigms of behaviour for married laymen, attributes and elements from the powerful Marian cult are selectively appropriated and woven into the fabric of this holy male figure. Not only is Joseph depicted in the "Madonna pose," standing alone embracing the Christ child; he is depicted with the lily, an emblem of purity."[74] There is evidence from the early division of opinion among the fathers about Joseph's identity that the power of virginity that is so closely associated with Mary becomes as it were contagious in the context of their married life.[75] But even more significantly, when Jerome writes to defend Mary's virginity against the attack of Helvidius, he defends Joseph by extension: "You say that Mary did not remain a virgin; even more do I claim that Joseph also was virginal through Mary, in order that from a virginal marriage a virginal son might be born."[76]

Significantly, Hale also points to ways in which images fostered with the authority of the Church are supplemented by popular devotional practice, indicating the desire to extend further into the lives of lay people the articulation of the nearness of the sacred to them in the lives of the saints. An example that Hale gives is that of the cradle-rocking rituals that were particularly popular in Germany: "Mary asks Joseph to help rock the child and as he does, his performance exhorts others to "rock the cradle" privately and venerate the child publicly and communally. The performance behaviour is, of course, fundamentally maternal."[77] The significance of this for our

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[74] Rosemary Drage Hale, "Joseph as Mother: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Construction of Male Virtue" in John Carmi Parsons and Bonni Wheeler (eds.), Medieval Mothering (London: Garland Publishing, 1996) p. 102.

[75] Broucard, op.cit, p 228, lists Epiphanius, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom as having maintained that Joseph was previously married.

[76] Jerome, *Contra Helvidium*, Migne, PL 23, 190. See also, Augustine, *Sermo* 51 20: "Should not the husband accept virginally what the wife brought forth virginally? For just as she was a virginal wife, so was he a virginal husband; just as she was a virginal mother, so was he a virginal father." Migne, PL 38, 348.

[77] Hale, op.cit, p. 105.

purposes is that it further illustrates the capacity of the virginal attraction of Mary as spouse and mother to draw others across the barrier of difference.

The attraction and impact of imitation is fostered not only by plays and devotional objects, but also by spiritual writings. Evidence of the effect that this could have in the life of the medieval Christian can be found in Margery Kempe who was born in King's Lynn in the latter part of the fourteenth century. In her devotional outpouring we witness a spectacular ability to cross boundaries. Most vividly of all, Margery believes herself to participate in the events of the nativity and crucifixion. At these moments Margery seems to become another Mary and, referring to herself as 'the creature', she frequently addresses Mary in the attitude of an experience shared. Close to her emotionally in the passion is Mary Magdalen. Because of the Magdalen's association with sexual sin and Margery's own sexual desires, Margery refers to her as her sister. Karma Lochrie observes that the uncontrollable weeping that characterises Margery's behaviour "follows a model of compassion found in medieval dramatic depictions of the Virgin and Mary Magdalen" and quotes examples.[78] But other comparisons can also be made.

Gail Gibson notes of Margery Kempe's reported dialogue between Mary and the newly-risen Jesus, that "the whole scene and suggestions for mentally producing it existed in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, in the authority of a revered text and not in Margery's own psychology."[79] The important part about this observation is not that it reveals Margery Kempe as a fraud, but that it demonstrates how completely she typified a spirituality of her time, presenting a kind of middle way of Christian discipleship that drew inspiration from Mary. It was not a withdrawal into monastic virginity, nor a life lived in sexually active marriage for which Mary offered intercessory safety and consolation in the midst of family woes, but a vocation that sought within marriage a post-sexual recovery of freedom symbolized by virginity, in a manner that might be read as pre-figuring the control over her life that a woman

[78] Karma Lochrie, Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1991) pp. 183 – 190.
[79] Gail McMurray Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages (London: Chicago University Press, 1989) p. 49. See also, Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (eds.), The Book of Margery Kempe (O.U.P., 1940) pp. 196 – 197; Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B Green (eds.), Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century (Princeton: Princeton Universty Press, 1961) pp. 359 – 360.

might expect to create in contemporary society. Margery Kempe thus indicates an extent to which in her own day, as Clarissa Atkinson observes, "the appeal of such piety spread beyond the cloister."[80]

Salih's assessment of Margery Kempe's *Book* is that it "deals with the process of reformulating the self as virginal. It draws on the implications of virginity literature: that the physical loss of virginity is not insuperable, that individual efforts can remake the body."[81] Evidence of this fluidity of identity in the status of virginity is to be found in other women who, like Margery Kempe, sought a new life and identity after childbearing, expressed even in the context of a continued marriage by a commitment to continence. Atkinson cites Birgitta of Sweden as another example (on whom Margery might well have modelled herself).[82]

The example of Margery Kempe is thus indicative of how common and natural the identification with Mary is for women who differ from her in the significant respect of marriage, in either the procreation of children through sexual relations within marriage or in the renunciation of physical marriage in the life of the cloister. It suggests that Mary's virginity does not make her inaccessible. Indeed, Elliott notes that devotional identification with Mary "was essential for providing both sexually active matrons and widows with reassurance about their state and guidance towards a new vocation," one in which they shared in the status of virginity.[83] Thus the mystical marriage of the cloister, described, for example, by Catherine of Siena, finds a counterpart in the spirituality of the married themselves. Such participation spiritually in a life beyond one's own suggests not delusion but imaginative capacity that is no less worthy an expression of discipleship than slavish imitation.

This imaginative capacity determines many aspects of medieval life. Roberta Gilchrist notes that pre-reformation nunneries in England overwhelmingly favoured dedication to Mary. Perhaps that is not surprising, but she goes on to note that in a sample of 136 surviving nunnery seals, "more than half relate to the life of the

[80] Atkinson, op.cit p. 137.
[81] Salih, op.cit, p. 181.
[82] Atkinson further notes that "Birgitta, although the wife of Ulf, was the *sponsor* (or bride) of Christ, and she is usually referred to by that name in the *Revelations*. After all, the Virgin herself had been wife, widow, and virgin." Atkinson, op.cit. p. 176.
[83] Elliott, op.cit, p. 239.

virgin, with particular emphasis placed on images relating to her role as mother" and "this maternal imagery is repeated in psalters commissioned for nunneries, such as those of Amesbury and Shaftesbury."[84]

However, interest in the maternal relationship to Jesus is not necessarily distinct from interest in the spousal relationship. In Italy in the fifteenth century it was common practice for both brides and nuns to have included in their trousseaux a doll-like effigy of the infant Jesus that provided devotional play in both cloister and home.[85] Although the focus here would seem to be maternal, there is evidence to suggest that there existed a clear appreciation of the spousal relationship for which Mary is also the paradgim. Herlihy cites as examples Angela of Foligno who speaks of the relationship with Jesus in which "in a new way he wishes union and copulation (*copulam*)" and Ida of Louvain joins herself to "her husband Christ the Lord."[86]

We find here that devotional techniques are being used to articulate some kind of relationship with Jesus that brings salvation close to the concerns and status of both the married and religious. Focus on the Christ child, through the cradle-rocking ritual or identification with a holy doll, is used not only to permit Mary and Joseph to act as exemplars for spouses and parents, but also to permit the individual to stand in the relationship of spouse or parent. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber notes that the borderline between devotion and play is a narrow one, and thus the huge range of holy dolls found throughout Europe, made of all kinds of material and sometimes mass-produced, were capable of being used for many different purposes.[87] The dolls given to young brides and girls entering a convent by the girls' parents were not symbols of childhood, but a statement of matrimonial status, whether that marriage be an earthly or a mystical one.[88]

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[84] Roberta Gilchrist, Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism (London: Leicester University Press, 1995) p. 144.
[85] Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985): See, "Holy Dolls: Play and Piety in Florence in the Quattrocento", pp. 310 – 329.
[86] David Herlihy, op.cit, p. 118. Also significant among Herlihy's examples is St Hermann of Steinfeld who uses the metaphor of marriage to describe his relationship with Mary, seeing himself as Joseph (p. 119).
[87] Klapisch-Zuber, op.cit, p. 310.
[88] ibid, p. 317.

By extending the reality of the devotional *imitatio*, these dolls provided a focus for entry into the virginal relationships that surround the Christ child and form his family. It seems that Mary functions as the one who oversees the entry into the relationship, acting as a kind of matchmaker.[89] Klapisch-Zuber observes that in both the life of a nun and that of a well-born woman, the play or ritualization that surrounded these dolls "permitted young women, shut up from childhood in a convent, or subjected to a distant husband and separated from their own newborn child at birth, to identify with the mother of Christ and transmute their frustrations and tensions."[90] The relationship that these dolls elicit is thus not exclusively maternal. In Germanic countries they became known in convents as *sponserl*, "little husbands", the representation of Jesus for whom Mary is mother but also spouse.[91]

To the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century these little dolls might well have come to epitomise the extent of the Church's departure from the simplicity of holiness they heard articulated in the pages of the scriptures. But as they themselves were to discover, the translation of that holiness from the page to the routine of daily life was not such an obvious process. Having inveighed against the elaboration not only of devotional practices but also of the structure of canon law and the abuses they perceived within it, particularly with regard to marriage, the reformers themselves were to discover the need for just such a legal structure in seeking to regulate the simplicity to which they aspired.[92]

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[89] In art, the image of Mary as the matchmaker lasts into the baroque. Guerchino's painting of the mystical marriage of St Catherine of Alexandria depicts Jesus holding the wedding ring, but Mary traces its placing on Catherine's finger. Gabriele Finaldi and Michael Kitson (eds.), Discovering the Italian Baroque (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997) p. 99.

[90] Klapisch-Zuber, op.cit, p. 326. It is also noted here that, for example, in the Franciscan *Meditationes vitae Christi* the reader is exhorted to "ask our Lady to give him (Jesus) to you and allow you to pick him up" (p. 323). Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M Bell present a similar impression of the frustrations and tensions that accompanied the call to sainthood as a psychic contest between the flesh and the spirit, arising from the dualism that determined medieval life. "To the stark reality of everyday life medieval culture offered only stark alternatives – the hermitage, the crusade, the renunciation of home, of bodily warmth, of family love." For a girl this vocation could be regarded as madness, "until she could demonstrate that here was a divine madness confounding the wisdom of the world." Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Christendom 1000 – 1700 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp. 44, 45.

[91] Klapisch-Zuber, op.cit, p. 326.

[92] Eric Fuchs has observed: "Through the fear of Anabaptist anarchy, the Reformers gave the Church a juridical power that constituted canon law. They had fought against the meddlesome domination of canon law, but found themselves obliged to legislate that which fundamentally only belongs to the responsibility of each couple before God. Thus the Protestant canonical writers throughout the

We have focused our attention thus far on the notions about marriage and virginity that were to determine the devotional aspects of Mary as virgin spouse. Before moving on to consider the Reformation era and its implications for that devotional life we shall look at the twelfth century definition of marriage under codes of canon law, and the social implications of those codes for medieval men and women.

c) Defining the Enclosure of Marriage

As the virgin spouse, Mary plays a significant role in the twelfth century formulation of the codes by which medieval marriage is defined and regulated. The accommodation of her virginal identity, and that of Joseph, leads to the definition (by Gratian) of marriage in terms of both consent (*initiatum*) and consummation (*ratum*).[93] Thus in Christian marriage the attraction of Mary the virgin spouse is significant, through the influence she exercises over the definitions of the decretalists, and in the ambiguous attraction of devotion to her that we have described above. However, it is in the effect of this attraction in the work of the decretalists that we can begin to identify the origins of reformation controversies over marriage.

Jean Leclercq describes the renewal of theology in the twelfth century as both monastic and urban, the latter being centred on a particular teacher who might move from one school to another. In the development of scholarship centred on these schools, Leclercq comments that "it would be better to describe the movement of thought, at the beginning of the twelfth century, as a 'theology of *sententiae*', or as a nonscholastic theology in the schools. Its object was the practical problems raised by Christian life... It was expressed through *sententiae*, the maxims of scripture and

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seventeenth century gradually returned to notions that existed before the Reformation." Eric Fuchs, Sexual Desire and Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1983) p. 146.

[93] McGlynn and Moll, op.cit, p. 108.

the Fathers, without recourse to searching theoretical reflection; it was not systematic."[94]

A number of concerns are under consideration in the *sententiae*. There is the spiritual and mystical concern with its overt theological significance, the liturgical and public concern with its interest in the coherence of a sacramental system, the economic and social concern with its interest in the Church's influence on the moral life of society, and the personal and human concern with the growing understanding of the workings of human nature. And it is within the non-systematic theological milieu created by the *sententiae* of the decretalists that we might expect there to flourish what we have identified as the ambiguities of virginity and its function in Marian devotion. Indeed, describing the *sententiae* as a parallel development to the troubadour culture in which we have located the growth of medieval Marian devotion to the virgin spouse, Cartlidge observes that "the two 'systems' of thought share a similar consciousness and method of conception, rather than a direct relationship of cause and effect."[95]

Brundage identifies Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and the Rhineland as the main centres for the study of canon law as a discipline that begins to assert its independence from theology and civil law.[96] It is also possible to identify key authors: Gratian, Hugh of St Victor, Peter Lombard, Peter Damian, and the authority that Pope Alexander III stamped on an understanding of marriage that remained unchallenged in the Catholic Church until with the decree *Tametsi* the Council of Trent regulated the universal form for the celebration of the Catholic rite of marriage.

Although the most famous and influential work in this field is the *Decretum* of Gratian,[97] this work was not unique. Cartlidge notes that in seeking to elucidate what makes a marriage, an earlier decretalist, Ivo of Chartres, had quoted the view of Pope Leo I that "consent rather than consummation makes marriage, since even an

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[94] Jean Leclercq, "The Renewal of Theology" in Robert Benson and Giles Constable (eds.) Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) p. 72.
[95] Cartlidge, op.cit, p. 20.
[96] Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, op.cit, p. 256
[97] The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church indicates that little is known about Gratian; about 1160 is the date given for his death. F L Cross, E A Livingstone (eds.), The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (O.U.P., 1997) 3rd edition, p. 700.

unconsummated marriage fully symbolizes the relationship between Christ and the Church."[98] It is in the balance between these two aspects of the marriage contract, consent and consummation, that the case of Mary and Joseph becomes significant. It required the decretalists to assimilate the non-sexual union of Mary and Joseph into a system in which sexual union could be regarded as normal, in order to ensure that Jesus was born legitimately into a union that satisfied the criteria of an authentic and perfect marriage.[99]

By means of a subtle distinction between interior consent and verbally articulated consent Gratian explains how Mary is able to consent to marriage without damage to her vow of chastity or intention to consummate the marriage:

> The Blessed Mary proposed that she would preserve a vow of virginity in her heart, but she did not express that vow of virginity with her mouth. She subjected herself to divine disposition when she proposed that she would preserve her virginity, unless God revealed to her otherwise. Therefore, committing her virginity to divine disposition, she consented to carnal union, not by seeking it, but by obeying divine inspiration in both the one case and the other. But it was after she bore a son that she expressed with her lips what she had conceived in her heart, together with her husband, and each remained in virginity.[100]

Gold notes that although Gratian has difficulty in assimilating the marriage of Mary and Joseph into the balance between consent and coitus that he proposes as the making of marriage[101], he is able to make one direct affirmation: "that their marriage was complete because it contained all the goods of marriage, a criterion not used elsewhere in Gratian's formulation."[102] The goods of marriage were defined by

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[98] Cartlidge, op.cit, p. 16.

[99] Brooke maintains that the strand in medieval thought that claimed the marriage of Mary and Joseph to be perfect accounts for the ascetic tendency that also claimed that Etheldreda never lost her virginity even though she was married. Brooke cites the tract by Hugh of St Victor, "On the Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary", as the most eminent defence of Mary's perfect marriage. Brooke, op.cit, pp. 53, 54. Alternatively, Elliott regards reference to "Christ's brethren" and the implication of a sexual union with Joseph as the more obvious way to define the marriage of Mary. But influenced by Augustine's views on chaste marriage, it became impossible to exclude Mary's virginal union, "buttressed by the Roman notion of *consensus*" from the discussion of the formation of marriage. Elliott, op.cit, p. 63.

[100] Gratian, *Decretum*, (C27 q2 c2 dpc), quoted Elliott, op.cit, p. 178.

[101] Gratian proposed that the exchange of consent was *matrimonium initatum*, at which stage the marriage could still be dissolved, but after the consummation, *matrimonium ratum*, it could not. See, Margaret McGlynn and Richard Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages. 'It were to hire a great merite'" in Bullough and James, op.cit, p. 108. On these grounds Gratian maintains that the entrusting of Mary to John at the crucifixion and the withdrawal of Joseph is not divorce. See, Gold, op.cit, p. 105.

[102] Gold, op.cit, p. 107. Gold also notes, p. 112, that the marriage of Mary and Joseph was perfect according to the three goods of marriage. But we should also be aware of the variety of approaches

Augustine as offspring, fidelity, and sacrament in a way that remained normative throughout the middle ages.[103]

We should also recognise, however, that Gratian provided other grounds for understanding marriage that would be capable of incorporating the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. These grounds are defined by the term *maritalis affectio,* a phrase that in original Roman usage characterised marriage and its exclusive permanence in contrast with concubinage. Treggiari makes the point that according to Roman practice it was *maritalis affectio* and that established a marriage.[104] Michael Sheehan notes that Gratian developed the term in accordance with its use by Pope Leo I "to the effect that such a union was begun in God," and goes on to explain that the use of the term by Pope Alexander III opened up the notion that marriage as a sacrament was about the dynamic of a relationship: "a static notion was replaced by one implying the desirability of growth."[105] The origins of this understanding are also to be found in Roman society that acknowledged the possibility of growth in a relationship between two people, leading them from concubinage to a state of recognisable marriage, *maritalis affectio*, possibly without even a wedding ceremony.[106] These two aspects of growth in a relationship and its origin in union with God are suggestive of a conceptual framework in which it is possible to trace the transition of Mary from earth to heaven. By the time of the Counter-Reformation that transition will draw on medieval devotion (Bernardine of Siena) to envisage the passage from earth to heaven as also transition into a marital

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found among the decretalists, reflecting the outlook of the various schools from which they came. Elliott, op.cit, p. 178, notes that Peter Lombard followed Gratian's teaching on the conditional nature of Mary's vow, thereby shifting the emphasis onto the formation of marriage by consent. Peter Lombard maintained the view, typical of the Paris school of decretalists, that consent in the present tense was alone sufficient to establish the marriage bond. By contrast, however, Hugh of St Victor recognises sexual intercourse as the office of marriage, liking it with the union between Christ and the Church that results from the incarnation . In order to accommodate the non-sexual union of Mary and Joseph, Hugh envisages the possibility of marriage being established prior to consummation. So Gold observes that "Hugh's concern to reconcile Mary's virginity and her marital consent – a concern which dominated the treatise on Mary – is perfectly compatible with his commitment to the superiority of spiritual concerns over carnal ones." Gold, op.cit, p. 109.

[103] Augustine, *De bono conjugali, I.xxiv*, "Haec omnia bona sunt, propter quae nuptiae bonae sunt; proles, fides, sacramentum." Migne, PL 40, 394. On the influence of this formula, see Fuchs, op.cit, p. 116.

[104] Treggiari, op.cit, pp. 54, 55. Her reference here is to Ulpian.

[105] Michael Sheehan, Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996) pp. 268, 269.

[106] Treggiari, op.cit, p. 55.

union with God.[107] Thus from espousal as the lowly virgin of Nazareth (and an essentially earthly figure, as her espousal to Joseph implies), to the fulfilment of her destiny as the queen of heaven, the *transitus Mariae* is a notion that eventually employs bridal imagery to describe her eternal relationship with God.[108]

The marriage of Mary and Joseph thus participated in the development of the understanding of the dignity of the person in the relationship of marriage, as Brundage puts it: enabling "the decretalists to account gracefully for some anomalies in the traditional accounts of the union between the Virgin Mary and Joseph." But the notion of *maritalis affectio* offers more than simply a counterbalance to the role of sex in marriage in order to ensure the inclusion of Mary and Joseph and Brundage also identifies its importance on a wider plane of human development: "The decretalists saw marriage as a personal relationship between husband and wife, a relationship bonded by the marital affection that was essential to the matrimonial union. This enlargement of the decretalists' concept of marriage was part of a broader development in the late twelfth century that has been called the discovery of the self."[109] Cartlidge likewise sees the Church's emphasis on feelings in the marriage bond less in terms of antipathy towards the sexual, and more in terms of "the re-evaluation of the individual's role within the institutions of society."[110]

As with the ambiguity that we discovered in the attraction and assimilation of Mary's virginal status, so we also find that there is variation in the attitudes of some decretalists towards the place of sex in marriage. Brundage notes that "those who followed the Bolognese teaching considered that a sexual relationship was not merely a usual element in marriage, but an essential one" and as evidence of this he points to the twelfth century re-emergence of the marriage bed as a symbol of marriage.[111] Although in terms of canon law consent gained priority over consummation in the definition of marriage, in future the attitude towards sex in fact seems to become less negative.

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[107] See below, p. 170, note 150.
[108] In the medieval mystery plays the assumption and coronation of Mary is described as *Transitus Mariae*. Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), York Plays (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963) p. 491.
[109] Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, op.cit, p. 273.
[110] Cartlidge, op.cit, p. 15.
[111] Brundage, op.cit, p. 278.

Gold discerns a marked difference between the view taken by Aquinas, who sees marriage as essentially an act of nature that is good, and that taken by Gratian, Hugh of St Victor and Peter Lombard who subordinate the demands of the body to the life of the soul. She assesses the situation in these terms: "The next hundred years brought a new acceptance of the natural world which is reflected in many aspects of thirteenth-century culture; for example in the increased naturalism in sculpture and painting and the frank and humorous illustrations of sexuality both in manuscript marginalia and in the popular *fabliaux*."[112] Sheehan also points to the importance of manuscript decoration as evidence of contemporary views on marriage, and also to the treatment of the subject in *ad status* sermons, in which he identifies reference in the thirteenth century sermons of Guibert de Tournai to "a kind of love founded on partnership, and this is the love which husband and wife owe each other, because they are equals and partners."[113]

It has not gone without notice that the period in which marriage discipline begins to be formulated coincides with the imposition of clerical celibacy. Both Brundage and Cartlidge comment on this, and Muriel Porter links it with the flowering of Marian devotion and the growth of monasticism as a general expression of Christian repudiation of human sexuality.[114] While Porter sees this in negative terms as a denigration of women who are regarded as the epitome of sexuality, the three distinctive aspects of Christian life to which she points have a long history of being associated together. Philip Reynolds identifies this association in the work of Isidore of Seville, suggesting that Isidore was influenced by Augustine's notion that "one may divide Christians into three kinds: clerics, monks or continents, and married folk. Because of a typological interpretation of Ezekiel 14:14, exegetes reasoned

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[112] Gold, op.cit, p. 116.

[113] Sheehan, op.cit, p. 276. Sheehan cites the following study of sermon material: D L d'Avray and M L Tausche, "Marriage Sermons in *Ad status* Collections of the Central Middle Ages" in Archives d'histoire doctrinale et literature du moyen age 47 (1980): pp 71 – 119. Erik Kooper also offers an assessment of this material, concluding in support of Sheehan's view that Guibert de Tournai's additions to the sermons of Jacques de Vitry produced "a picture of marriage (that) is lighter and more optimistic." Erik Kooper, "Loving the Unequal Equal: Medieval Theologians and Marital Affection" in Robert Edwards and Stephen Spector (eds.), The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World (State of New York Press, 1991) p. 55. It is perhaps also worth noting that Guibert was a Franciscan, among whom devotion to Joseph was enthusiastically promoted, and a professor of theology at the University of Paris, preceding Jean Gerson, also a promoter of devotion to Joseph, by some hundred and forty years.

[114] Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, op.cit, p. 183; Cartlidge, op.cit, p. 14; Muriel Porter, Sex, Marriage and the Church: Patterns of Change (Victoria: Dove, 1996) p. 21.

that Noah, Daniel and Job (the three persons whom God would spare in a cursed land) respectively typified the three vocations."[115] In this context the comments of Jerome and Augustine on the three-fold rewards of the harvest quoted are indicative of a typical exploration of the nature of distinctive life-style within the Church.

Reynolds is making the important point that marriage is recognised by Isidore and Augustine as a distinctive state of life within the Church, in contrast to other secular relationships such as slavery, business partnerships or rank and order within the armed forces, or indeed other worthy vocations such as farming. Marriage can therefore be seen legitimately as "a religious vocation rather than as an honourable alternative to one."[116] Porter's failure to recognise the history of the association of these states of life therefore inhibits her from recognising the positive value that is attached to marriage and the infusion of it with a heavenly dimension by the inclusion of Mary whose ambiguous identity enables her to inhabit two of the three categories – those represented by Daniel and Job, continence and marriage.

Indeed, in the next section of this chapter we shall see that some damage is done to the dignity of marriage by the Protestant reformers' denial of it as a sacrament, at the very moment in history when it is made available to the clergy. By contrast, the process that led to the inclusion of marriage in the list of sacraments recognised its importance as an order in the life of the Church[117]; as Cartlidge observes, "churchmen sought to construct for it a distinctive status, value and ceremonial, as for a religious order."[118] However, we shall also have to inquire whether, with the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to detect in the work of the decretalists a desire so to safeguard the virginal character of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, that they sowed the seeds of dissent in the provision of the possibility of clandestine marriage. Does not the vitality of devotion to Mary by the married draw for its power on an attraction that visually and ritually promoted the value of marriage, rather than the technical one of causing the definition of marriage by consent?

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[115] Reynolds, op.cit, p. xvii.
[116] ibid.
[117] It was at the Council of Florence (1431 – 1436) that marriage was affirmed as a sacrament "and that the exchange of consent itself conferred grace in the same way that other sacraments did." Brundage, op.cit, p. 433.
[118] Cartlidge, op.cit, p. 13.

It is, however, also possible to see huge implications for the fabric of medieval society in the impact of the parallel development of canon and the cult of Mary the virgin spouse. Brundage maintains that "the decretalists' definition of marriage in terms of consent, backed by the papal influence of Alexander III, undermined paternal authority within the family and prevented it from becoming a true patriarchy."[119] Herlihy also supports this reading, elaborating the point that "the Church, in effect, affirmed that no one and no institution could interfere with the right of a man and a woman, otherwise eligible, to marry, or not marry...Perhaps most decisively, the principle undermined the authority of parents, fathers in particular, who might seek to arrange, or prevent, the marriage of their offspring."[120]

An outstanding example of a woman's ability to wield significant influence through marriage is to be seen in the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine,[121] and Eileen Power also identifies Blanche of Champagne and Blanche of Castile as "worthy granddaughters of 'the eagle', Eleanor of Aquitain" in their tenacious hold on power.[122] Given the prestige that was attached to Mary as the virgin spouse at a time when devotion and canon were sharing the same formative culture it is perhaps not surprising that some significant departures from Roman law were made by the canonists in recognition of

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[119] Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 265.

[120] Herlihy, op.cit, p. 81. One important consequence of the definition of marriage by consent was the spread of clandestine marriages. Carlson notes that although various stipulations were laid down to prevent clandestine marriages and the difficulty of identifying legitimate children born from them, nonetheless, the Church courts of the fourteenth century were still dealing with large numbers of cases that turned on clandestine unions. Carlson, op.cit, p. 19.

[121] Warner, op.cit p. 141. Eleanor provides an interesting link between the power of women that was safeguarded by the laws of inheritance and marriage, the expression of that power to be seen in the community of Fontevrault where she is buried, and the troubadour culture for which Guy Mermier identifies her as a catalyst in its movement from France to England. Guy Mermier, "The Troubadours and their songs after the Crusade" in Nancy van Deusen (ed.), The Cultural Milieu of the Troubadours and Trouveres (Ottawa: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1994) p. 143.

[122] Eileen Power, "The Position of Women" in C G Crump and E F Jacob (eds.), The Legacy of the Middle Age (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926) p. 417. The legal status of woman in England and their ability to inherit, hold, and dispose of property, is described by Pollock and Maitland in the following terms: "The law of inheritance, it is true, shows a preference for males over females; but not a very strong preference, for a daughter will exclude a brother of the dead man...The woman can hold land, even by military tenure, can own chattels, make a will, make a contract, can sue and be sued. She sues and is sued in person without the interposition of a guardian; she can plead with her own voiceif she pleases; indeed – and this is a strong case – a married woman will sometimes appear as her husband's attorney." F Pollock and F W Maitland, History of English Law before the Time of Edward I (C.U.P., 1968) 2nd edition, vol.1, p. 482. On the position of married women they note that "the main idea which governs the law of husband and wife is not that of 'unity of person' but that of guardianship, the *mund*, the profitable guardianship, which the husband has over the wife and over her property" (ibid, p. 485). Pollock and Maitland also make the point that the "nearest of kin" to English law is the custom of the French (ibid, vol. 2, p. 309).

the inner sanctity of the marriage bond to which Marian devotion pointed. So, for example, even though a man had authority over his wife, both husband and wife were empowered to sue in the Church courts.[123]

The role of Mary in the life of the married can therefore be regarded as, at least indirectly, significant in the determination of their rights, and in particular the rights and freedom of women. Not only is this evident in inheritance and property rights, but in the life of Margery Kempe and others who sought the recuperation of virginity as a statement of their aspirations to sanctity. In them we see women making a new enclosure for themselves, a physical and bodily enclosure within the enclosure of marriage. It is inspired by Mary the virgin in the enclosed garden of popular devotion, and mirrored in the mystical marriage enclosure within the cloistered enclosure of the religious life. Thus the formulations of the decretalists for the lives of ordinary married people find concrete expression in a pattern of devotion that centres on the virgin spouse. But as we shall see in late medieval and post-reformation Catholicism, the consequent development of devotion to Joseph will challenge the way in which Mary is regarded.

The growth of the popularity of devotion to Joseph owes a considerable debt to the enthusiasm of the fourteenth century French theologian and Chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, building on the popular and devotional preaching of the Franciscans, prominent among them Gerson's contemporary, Bernardine of Siena.[124] Herlihy identifies the social and political context of "raging plagues, tenacious famines, and recurrent wars" as the reason for Joseph's attractiveness as a personification of safety and protection. But if Joseph was to be the vigorous man who could serve as patron and guardian both for the holy family in its exile in Egypt (and for the Church and society of Gerson's day experiencing its own Egyptian exile and trial[125]) then Gerson "must also downplay the image of Mary."[126] Catherine

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[123] D Catherine Brown, Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson (C.U.P., 1987) p. 211. Brown specifies that in Roman law adultery was an offence only for a woman; in medieval canon law it was an offence for both women and men. Brundage similarly notes that in Gratian's view, "the sex life of the married couple was, or ought to be, an island of comparative privacy where equal rights prevailed." Brundage, op.cit, p. 255.

[124] See A G F Howell, S Bernardino of Siena (London: Methuen, 1913) p. 270.

[125] "This was, after all, the period of rising civil strife in France, the lingering unrests and conflict of the Hundred Years War, the confusion of papal schism and the emergence of reform councils, the looming threat of the Wyclifite heresy in its migration to Bohemia, and vexing frustrations resulting

Brown deals with this diminution of the profile of Mary in greater detail, noting that in Gerson's view Joseph "was the head of Our Lady, according to the rule of marriage given by God and promulgated by St Paul. And there is no doubt that her humility was so great that she rendered herself as much, or more, subject to her loyal spouse Joseph as other women should and can to their spouse."[127]

The perspective in which Mary is presented here is one of moral rectitude as an expression of spiritual heroism. Hale makes the observation that "Gerson repeatedly presents the marriage of Mary and Joseph as paradigmatic for the union of Christ and his Church," a paradigm that emphasises the submissive and earthly role of Mary. In directing the focus on Mary towards domesticity and the ideal family which Mary, Joseph and Jesus are being used to exemplify, Gerson's perspective falls somewhat short of the role of Empress of Hell or representation as the bride of heaven.[128]

However, the correlation between the social and ecclesiastical ills of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and the clamour for recognition of Joseph as a point of stability within them may seem a reasonable connection in retrospect, but the extent to which he became established in popular devotion remains uncertain. Herlihy himself notes that it was not until the sixteenth century that the name Giuseppe features in the registers of Florence.[129] And although in the fourteenth century some of the major orders inserted a feast day for Joseph into their calendar,[130] the degree to which that day may have been celebrated no doubt remained limited in comparison with other well established feasts that may have also had holidays or other celebrations associated with them. The point is well made by

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from the school debates at Paris." Mark S Burrows, Jean Gerson and *De Consolatione Theologiae* (1418) The Consolation of a Biblical and Reforming Theology for a Disordered Age (Tubingen: J C B Mohr, 1991) p. v. Steven Ozment identifies the factions in the theological faculty at Paris as Scotist, Ockhamist, and Thomist. So frustrating did Gerson find this that in 1400 he threatened to resign as chancellor. S V Ozmenet, The Age of Reform 1200 - 1500: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe (London: Yale University Press, 1980) p. 74.

[126] Herlihy, op.cit, p. 128 Elliott also maintains that the growth of the Joseph cult stimulated the development of a more submissive presentation of Mary. Elliott, op.cit, p. 180.

[127] Catherine Brown, op.cit, p. 216.

[128] Hale, op.cit, p. 108; see also p. 111.

[129] Herlihy, op.cit, p. 128.

[130] F L Filas notes that in 1324 the Servite Order established March 19 as his feast day in their calendar, the Franciscans did the same in 1399, and the Carmelites at about the same time. All three of these Orders were known for their devotion to Mary. F L Filas, The Man Nearest to Christ: The Nature and Historic Development of the Devotion to S Joseph (London: Dennis Dobson, 1944) pp. 141-142

Hardin Craig that devotion to Anne the mother of Mary eclipsed that of Joseph because the feast day of Anne (29 July) was well established and had associated with it dramas from the cycle of mystery plays.[131]

Over against this kind of popular devotion there is something of a hectoring tone in the appeals of Jean Gerson for recognition of the place of Joseph as patron and guardian. Perhaps this in part reflects Gerson's zeal as a reformer anxious to raise the spiritual temperature of the Church.[132] To propagate greater devotion to Joseph, Gerson wrote in 1413 to the Duc de Berry requesting his assistance in the establishment of a feast to commemorate the marriage between Mary and Joseph, and drew up an office for the celebration of such a feast.[133] But a speech by Gerson at the council of Constance introduces an element that may account for the sense of incongruity in Joseph's inclusion in the canon of domestic saints that are associated Mary. Gerson exhorted the Fathers of the Council to place themselves under the patronage of Joseph in order that "through the intercession of so great and powerful an advocate, who wields in a measure a kind of empire over Mary his spouse... the Church may return to one sole pontiff, the true pope, her spouse and the vicar of Christ."[134]

Against the background of a papacy that was seeking to repair the damage of the Avignon years, Gerson's comments introduce a new note of political interest that reflects the Church's difficulties with an emerging sense of national identity and autonomy that will irrupt in schism at the reformation.[135] In spite of Gerson's

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[131] Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (O.U.P., 1955) p. 79 Craig suggests that "Joseph among the Midwives" and almost certainly "The Trial of Joseph and Mary" belong to the St Anne's day play (ibid, p. 80). E K Chambers notes that in Linclon the drama of the Assumption was presented "not at the feast of the Assumption on 15 August, but at that of St Anne, the mother of the Virgin, on 26 July", and in 1483 it was accompanied by a civic procession. E K Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945) pp. 8-9.

[132] In addition to holding rigorous views on the reform of the clergy and the papacy, Gerson wrote on the reform of the education of the young and family life. See "The Reform Amongst the People" in James Connolly, Jean Gerson: Reformer and Mystic (Louvain: 1928)

[133] P Pourrat, Christian Spirituality in the Middle Ages (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1924) p. 331.

[134] ibid, p. 332.

[135] Mundy notes that between 1344 and 1390 the English government of Church and aristocracy passed laws "by means of which ... the King of England disposes of the provision and administration of the Church as if Christ had invested him as his vicar." J H Mundy, K M Woody (eds.), The Council of Constance (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1961) p. 6. Mundy also notes the strength with which at Constance England demanded recognition as a nation on equal terms with France (p. 24).

avowed and genuine pastoral interest in the needs of the laity, there would be little in such an exhortation to attract the interest of a young husband concerned for his wife's safe delivery of their first child.[136]

Catherine Brown cites an open letter to the Church, circulated in 1413, in which Gerson lists the reasons why devotion to Joseph is to be commended. He maintains that it would "encourage wives to model themselves on Mary, who loved, honoured, cherished and obeyed her seigneur, Joseph, and husbands to follow the example of Joseph, who protected, nourished and loved his wife."[137] But there remains something of a theoretical feel to this letter, particularly when it is placed alongside the *Considerations sur St Joseph*, written at a similar time, in which the perpetual virginity of Joseph is outlined. One cannot help but remember that in terms of visual and emotional impact on popular religious consciousness, an impression of Joseph that was likely to be more convincing was drawn from the liturgical drama of the mystery plays in which Joseph is a grumpy old man, only reluctantly obedient to his divine vocation.[138] The tension here is that Gerson's presentation of the holy family as the model of marriage and family life, and a type of the Church, seems to have less appeal than the images in which women dominate the scene.

In the realm of domestic life, the impact of the devotional appears to be greater than that of the canonical. Joseph, buttressed by recognition of his place in the canonical order of things, seems to struggle to assume the popularity that Mary or Anne attract,[139] and an attempt to legislate in the realm of the devotional and affective will

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[136] Ozment points out that Gerson fully appreciated the distinction between scholastic and the mystical, and which we have identified as the canonical and cultic in their association with marriage. But Ozment also points out that Gerson's pastoral aptitude lead him to see the value of the mystical over the scholastic "as the more democratic": in Gerson's words, "even young girls and simple people" could become experts in mystical theology. Ozment, op.cit, p. 74.

[137] Catherine Brown, op.cit, p. 234.

[138] In "Mother of Mercy: Joseph," from the Coventry Cycle of plays, Joseph greets the news of Mary's pregnancy with the self-interested dismay: "All men may me now despise,/And say, 'Old cuckold, thy bow is bent/Newly now, after the French guise." A theme that is to be acted out in the later play, "The Trial of Joseph and Mary." R T Davies (ed.), The Corpus Christi Play of the English Middle Ages (London: Faber, 1972) p.136. V A Kolve maintains that the mystery plays never invite laughter at God, Jesus, or Mary. With reference to the trials of Joseph and the midwives' testing of Mary plays, Kolve comments that "in neither episode is Mary a comic character – that is to say, the audience never laughs at *her*. Joseph's doubts *are* funny, because of his grumpy, aged incomprehension, and his insinuations to the audience that there have been cuckolds before him." V A Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (London: Edward Arnold, 1966) pp. 138, 139.

[139] *See figures 9 and 14,* for example..

be seen to require the force of law have dramatic consequences in the reformation upheavals of the sixteenth century. Thus, in Joseph, a figure whose sanctity is characterised by a distance from absolute virginity, we find little sign of the power to attract those who might be expected to identify more readily with him than with Mary on the basis of likeness. We take this as indicative that in the realm of sanctity, Mary's status as virgin spouse functioned with an ambiguity that gave universal attraction. From that ambiguity Joseph slowly derived grudging recognition as he was increasingly portrayed in her likeness.[140]

Meanwhile, the devotional practices of the laity indicate the continuing attraction of Mary as the virgin spouse and the association with her of women saints who connect with the concerns of the family. Ton Brandenburg notes that "around 1500 the descriptions of Anne and her relatives are used not only to spread the views on chastity and virginity, but also the value of marriage, the characteristics of the Christian family and the place of husband and wife within that family."[141] It is this strain of devotion that Duffy identifies as sanctifying "the process of procreation and the institution of marriage"[142] and in which, we suggest, the prominence of women at least indicates recognition of some kind of dignity for them in the fabric of society.

This investigation of the development of the codes by which medieval marriage was regulated indicates that there was indeed a shared culture in which the parallel development between canon and cult took place. The influence of Mary as virgin

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[140] See below, pp. 203-204, especially note 84. Filas maintains that from the beginning of twelfth century the virginity of Joseph is not questioned. Filas, op.cit, p. 25. Boniface Llamara observes that there is a subtle connection of causality between the notion of Joseph's virginity and that of Mary, in both cases orientated towards the mystery of the incarnation. Boniface Llamara, Saint Joseph (London: Herder, 1962) p.84 The subtlety it perhaps detectable in the balancing of Augustine's phraseology in a sermon that refers to Joseph's virginity: Augustine, *Sermo* 51, Migne, PL 38, 348 (quoted above, p. 88, note 74). It is perhaps also worth noting that Anne's status in a marriage characterised by an ambiguous virginity had already been established by the apocryphal account of her conception of Mary in the embrace at the golden gate. See Suzanne Stratton, The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art (C.U.P., 1994) p. 21.

[141] Ton Brandenburg, "Saint Anne: A Holy Grandmother and Her Children" in Anneke B Mulder-Bakker, Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages (New York & London: Garland, 1995) p. 59. An example of how this message is conveyed is the family tree focused on Anne, the *Arbor Annae*. Brandenburg quotes an example fifteenth century example from the Netherlands in which grouped around Anne are Mary and Jesus, her husband Joachim, and Cleophas and Salome the fathers of the other two daughters also called Mary. For another example, *see figure 14; see also figure 9.* Brandenburg notes that in some instances Anne's mother, Emerentiana, is also present. He also notes that the tradition of Anne's triple marriage, the *trimubium*, declines after 1500; see Brandenburg, pp. 41, 42, 45.

[142] Duffy, op.cit, p. 192.

spouse was significant in the thinking of the decretalists, with important consequences. The attempt within the scholastic world (expressed through the preaching of the new orders) to complement the prominence of women in the devotional affections of the married by the advancement of the cult of Joseph, seems to have met with qualified success. Gerson's promotion of a devotional justification for the recognition of the male head of the household could be regarded as preparing the way for the sixteenth century and its reformations in which the Counter-Reformation will develop the identity of Joseph, while the Protestant Reformation will equally draw greater attention to the household and the role of the husband and father as its head.[143]

d) Conclusion

The conclusion we draw from these examples of the devotional and the canonical strands that are interwoven around medieval marriage is that they provide evidence of the considerable appeal of Mary in a framework that has the benefit of a social, theological, and devotional coherence. The ambiguity of Mary's status as spouse, because she is the virgin spouse, works in a number of directions. She is the spouse and consort of her son, depicted in art as the woman in whom not age and parental honour, but youth and beauty stand as statements of paradisal and heavenly glory. But she is also the earthly wife of Joseph and takes precedence as the mother of the child entrusted to his care in the context of a virginal marriage. Her virginity functions as qualification to enter the eternal court of heaven as queen and bride, thereby universalising the maternal and domestic, material and sexual identity that makes her a sign of compassion and advocacy for those on earth who see themselves as her devotees and wayward children.

Though not all are wayward. As medieval Christians order their lives according to the regulations of new canons, we witness significant numbers living both within the

[143] "By the time of the Reformation, among those concerned to contain their devotion within authentic scriptural data, the new trinity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph was coming to rival the older one of Jesus, Mary and St Anne." John Bossy, Christianity in the West 1400 – 1700 (O.U.P., 1985) p. 10.

carnal union of marriage and beyond it in the cloister. In both contexts Mary features as an advocate and exemplar, exercising a powerful influence as the friend of spouses in the concerns of family life, and as a matchmaker for those who seek the mystical union with her son that Mary also enjoys. The power that drives this influence and attraction is Mary's virginity. It is an identity recognised by the married as a powerful source of aid and consolation. In some instances the married seek to recover it symbolically for themselves, while those consecrated to virginity might seek to apprehend it emotionally and spiritually within the cloister.

Eileen Power observed that the force of this attraction formed a devotional canon that appears to be a cult of its own. Irrespective of how we may regard the theological balance of this structure, the popular appeal of Mary the virgin spouse to those who differ from her cannot be ignored. Indeed, it is in the very nature of its popularity (we might even describe it as vulgar, as that word is used to describe an era that is Christian and of the people) that we would locate not merely the attraction of ambiguity, but also the devotional outworking of the theological claim that Mary is "our sister". However, there is a growing doubt attached to the practice of clandestine marriage in the medieval Church's code of marriage. This mechanism was symptomatic of a desire to protect the enclosure of the virgin spouse. Ultimately it caused that enclosure to be called into question in the upheavals of the reformation movements of the sixteenth century.

The question to which we now turn, therefore, is what happens to the definition of marriage and to society when the influence of an ambiguous attraction to Mary the virgin spouse is challenged and transformed. Thus far virginity has been seen as a source of power to attract, given expression in specific devotional practices that were able to delineate eternal value in the mundane condition of married and religious men and women. As Eamon Duffy has observed: "What it gave to the ordinary Christian man and woman was not so much a model to imitate, something most of them never dreamt of doing, but rather a source of power to be tapped."[144]

[144] Duffy, op.cit. p 189.

When that image ceased to function in the way that it had as a source of power, those who had used it to appropriate the dignity it bestowed might be expected to experience confusion in the competing influences that were formative of that era. The sixteenth century marked a watershed in European history in which new sources of power (intellectual, social, economic, and medical,[145] leading in the modern era to the influence of psychological and biological sciences) were opened up that prompted significant changes in the use of virginity as an emblem of potency. Its attraction was re-worked, however, rather than eliminated, as we discover in the second part of this chapter.

[145] The first printed manual for midwives was the *Rosengarten* by Eucharius Rosslin, published in 1513: see Steven Ozment, When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe (London: Harvard University Press, 1983) pp. 101 – 102. Ozment notes that Rosslin's work indicates direct experience of delivery of a child and comments that this is "clear evidence that the taboo against males in delivery rooms was breaking down in the late fifteenth century and that male physicians were beginning to take a direct role in the birthing process" (p 102).

2. Did the Virgin Spouse Survive the Sixteenth Century?

Our survey of the medieval presentation of Mary the virgin spouse has been, self-evidently, sympathetic to its subject. This has enabled us to seek the recovery of a sense of how the attraction and power of Mary's virginal identity was appropriated in the lives of ordinary people, religious and married.

We perceived virginity as the source of Mary's power to attract, drawing on its ambiguity to describe an open enclosure, for which we borrowed graphic, perhaps extravagant terms. We described it as offering "an eternal future", "a symbol of sacred power", looking back to "prelapsarian wholeness" and forward to "the glorified body of the resurrection", phrases that account for the potency of this category as it is applied to Mary, and allude to the patristic definitions we sought in the first chapter of this thesis. As virgin spouse, Mary personified the human and earthly experience of these qualities, and imbued her associated enclosures with their character, gained by grace through the incarnation.

Our exploration of the implications of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation will suggest that in the sixteenth century there was response to and collaboration with an inevitable development in western culture. Here, Steven Ozment directs us to a helpful recognition of changing fashions in assessment of the period leading up to the Reformation and its complexity as an era of history. In contrast to two nineteenth century defenders of that period (a Catholic, Johannes Janssen and a Protestant, Johannes Geffken) Ozment cites two twentieth century scholars, Joseph Lortz, who as a Catholic comments that he regards abuse as the outstanding characteristic of the fifteenth century, and Bernd Moeller, who writes from a Protestant perspective and describes this as one of the most Church minded and devout periods of the middle ages.[1]

Ozment himself poses the following question by way of an assessment of the period: "Could the problem have been that the late medieval church was "mothering" the

[1] Steven Ozment, The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth Century Germany and Switzerland (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1975) pp. 15, 16.

laity to death with religious expectations and prescribed routines which were not modelled on a clear concept of a viable lay piety but on traditional clerical ideals?"[2] Putting this question another way, we might, with reference to England, ask why the Reformation appeared to be so swift and successful.

If the power of the attraction of the virgin spouse were as great as we have suggested, it would seem reasonable to expect that some other, greater power eclipsed it. This takes us back to the matter of cultic fluidity with which we began our investigation into Mary's power to attract. If cultic imagery and power can be exchanged without transference of content, as we maintained that it could in those instances where Marian devotion subsumed pagan sites, for example, then in the upheavals of the sixteenth century we might expect that fluidity would enable similar exchange to take place.

We shall explore, therefore, ways in which sources of power emerge in the sixteenth century that will eclipse the attraction of devotion to Mary. In some instances, that power will draw from what had been hers, and a new image of virginity, disconnected from Mary as a symbol of heavenly identity, be used to function with equal ambiguity, but for largely secular interests. We shall also recognise new sources of power that change the intellectual and economic framework of Europe. In some instances, Mary is used to appropriate these sources and manipulate them through familiar channels of attraction that continue, in Catholic Europe, to offer methods of control.

But as with the conclusions we drew from the first chapter, mistaken associations with Mary as a result of cultic fluidity, and her appropriation in terms that fall outside the scriptural and patristic framework, in which we understood her to function most effectively in Christian belief, can result in distortion. So we shall expect that enclosures associated with her would take on a different character when she is no longer the point of reference for them. We shall look at marriage, education, and the arts in that connection. But we shall also recognise how new images of Mary might inhibit the capacity of her virginal identity to retain what we

[2] Ozment, op.cit, p. 21.

might term a 'vulgar' power of attraction through which she can still be evidently "our sister". The concluding chapter will then explore how the power of attraction to Mary the virgin mother makes it possible to subvert inhibiting and distorting enclosures.

But to pursue our inquiry into what became of Mary's power to attract as virgin woman and spouse, we turn to explore the changing pattern of marriage in the wake of the Reformation.

a) The Submission of Women in Marriage and Society

By the sixteenth century there is universal recognition of the difficulty and scandal caused by the continued practice of clandestine marriages, in spite of efforts to regulate them.[3] The Protestant Reformers opposed clandestine marriage on the grounds of it breaking the commandment of honour to parents,[4] while for the sake of Church order, the Catholic reform of marriage law, summed up in the decree *Tametsi* issued in 1563, required that to be valid, the traditional declaration of consent in the present tense must be made in the presence of witnesses, one of whom must be the parish priest.[5] In order to perceive the significance of Mary's role in all this, we should perhaps remind ourselves that the possibility of clandestine marriage arose because the recognition of consent as defining the initiation of marriage was influenced by the need to accommodate the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. Mary's indirect influence is that clandestine marriage freed children from the legal

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[3] With reference to the Council of Florence, see James Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 362. Lawrence Stone notes that in England it was not until the passing of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act in 1753 that the practice of clandestine marriage was finally brought under control. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 – 1800 (London: Weidnfeld and Nicholson, 1977) p. 35.

[4] For example, Martin Bucer: "But it is obvious that it is repugnant, not only to the laws of pious emperors, but also to the law of God and of nature and to every law of nations, that children who are in the power of their parents do anything of great moment outside the knowledge and will of the parents, much less emancipate themselves completely from the power of their parents and withdraw themselves from their control, as occurs in matrimony." *De Regno Christi* II.xviii in Wilhelm Pauck (ed.), Melanchthon and Bucer (London: SCM, 1969) p. 320.

[5] H Denzinger & A Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Rome: Herder, 1965) p. 417

(if not financial) control of their parents enhancing their status and autonomy, especially in the case of daughters.[6]

The efforts of reformers, Catholic and Protestant, in the sixteenth century to eradicate clandestine marriage have been blamed for the elevation of the role of the father as the head of the family, curtailing the freedom of the children, but more especially giving fathers rights over their daughters that translate into husband's rights over their wives. Fuchs cites the following quotation from Calvin's Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1561 as evidence of the Protestant reformers' establishment of authority within the family: "As for young people who have never been married, let none of them (be they sons or daughters) who have living fathers have the power to contract marriage without the authorization of their fathers unless they have reached the legal age."[7] Although in the context of a still flourishing Marian cult Gerson's *Considerations sur St Joseph* seemed to present a view of marriage that sat uneasily with the devotional mood of his time, in the sixteenth century Gerson's attitude towards marriage begins to reflect the outlook of Catholic and Protestant alike. In particular, the prominence given to the role of Joseph shifts the focus in Christian marriage towards a more domestic and earthly dimension.

That this shift happened in both Protestant and Catholic reformations is acknowledged by Jean-Louis Flandrin in his study of the family: "Like the Protestant Churches... the Church of the Counter-Reformation made the family one of the principal places of Christian life. Perhaps this was because the Reformation had helped it to take cognisance of the strength of domestic ties and of the possibilities that they offered of surveillance and educating the mass of the faithful."[8] If that were so, the Catholic reformers would have discovered that the devotional engine for such a development was already running and engaged within their own tradition. Indeed, it might be argued that the rapidity of the growth towards the emphasis on

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[6] Brundage notes that "cases from this period record several successful efforts by thirteenth-century women to assert their canonical right to refuse husbands chosen for them by their families." Brundage, op.cit, p. 364.

[7] Erich Fuchs, Sexual Desire and Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1983) p. 143. Fuchs also notes that in Germanic countries parental authority was reinforced by raising the matrimonial age, to 25 for both men and women in Strasbourg, for example (p. 144).

[8] Jean-Louis Flandrin, Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality (C.U.P., 1979) p. 120.

the family was an inevitable outcome from the life and activity of that very strand of medieval church life from which the reformers themselves were drawn: the clerical, monastic and scholarly world in which devotion to Joseph had been so enthusiastically promoted. An example that is indicative of the direction in which the Catholic devotional canon was heading is the naming of Jesus.

There is little reference to this in early medieval devotion, although among the Fathers, John Chrysostom had outlined a view of Joseph's naming of Jesus that sits very comfortably with the Reformation understanding of the family.[9] However, by the beginning of the fifteenth century the preaching of the Franciscan Bernardine of Siena was spreading the popularity of devotion to the name of Jesus.[10] Since the naming of Jesus is associated with the annunciation to Joseph in the scriptures, the development of devotion to the name of Jesus inevitably contributes towards Gerson's promotion of the profile of Joseph as the head of the holy family.[11] By the seventeenth century Francis de Sales is able to refer confidently to Joseph as the father of Jesus since Joseph is in full possession of the rights of the head of the household.[12] The focus of devotion here is on the earthly trinity of ordered family life that looks to the paradigm of the life of the Trinity, as is expressed by Bartolome Esteban Murillo's paintings of the two – earthly and heavenly – trinities.[13]

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[9] See, John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, iv.6 Migne, PG 57, 47: "Even though you contributed nothing to his generation and the virgin remained inviolate, nevertheless, what belongs to a father, without destroying the dignity of virginity, that I bestow upon you, that you name the child." Gold suggests that the notion of Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus follows Augustine's understanding of Joseph as 'spouse'. Penny S Gold, "The Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Tewlfth-Century Ideology of Marriage" in Vern L Bullouch and James Brundage (eds.), Sexual Practice and the Medieval Church (Buffalo, New York, 1982) p. 104.

[10] Bernardine of Siena is often represented in art with the IHS trigram, the symbol of devotion to the name of Jesus. See Paul Thureau-Dongin, The Life of S Bernardine of Siena (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1911) pp. 131- 136.

[11] Gerson expands on this in his *Considerations sur S Joseph* in which he asserts Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus, "since Jesus was born in the flesh and out of the flesh whose possession was truly delivered to Joseph by the right of marriage." Quoted in F L Filas, The Man Nearest to Christ: The Nature and Historic Development of the Devotion to S Joseph (London: Dennis Dobson, 1944) p. 51.

[12] Francis de Sales articulates this view of Joseph's fatherhood when he describes Jesus as conceived in Mary, regarded as Joseph's property: "I often explain that if a dove...drops a date from its beak into a garden, we say that the palm tree that grows from that date belongs to the owner of the garden." Quoted in Boniface Llamara, Saint Joseph (London: Herder, 1962) p. 83.

[13] The earlier of these two paintings is dated to around 1640-42 and is in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. In the presentation of the earthly family a young Joseph is more prominent than Mary, engaging the viewer's eye and holding the symbol of purity and Old Testament fulfilment in the flowering rod. However, as a statement of the incarnational link between them, Mary and Jesus hold hands, using their right hands in a gesture that may hint at a spousal relationship. However, as an earthly family, Joseph's hand does not connect with the extended left hand of the boy Jesus, and Joseph steps forward in a manner that Jesus imitates, establishing Joseph's role as father and head of

Murillo's idealised presentations struggle to express the full reality of both human and divine aspects of the incarnation. They give no expression to the marital relationship between Mary and Joseph, other than a shared and introspective parental pride in their child. This understanding of the holy family would find it difficult to accommodate the daring in Simone Martini's fourteenth century miniature of the finding in the temple, in which mother and father reason with a twelve-year old who clearly believes that they do not understand him.[14] The difference between these two presentations suggests a development in which the life of the holy family emerges as an ideal of marriage characterised by moral perfection and social order. Murillo's canvasses offer little scope for the ambiguity we discerned in the medieval presentation of Mary the virgin spouse, and yet they represent the intention of the Counter-Reformation to present the major themes of the Catholic faith in accessible ways, such as the use of familiar scenes based on family life.

An example of this presentation is the early seventeenth century emergence of the theme of the Christ child asleep on the cross. Xanthe Brooke notes that this was developed by Guido Reni and subsequently expanded by Murillo. Brooke also comments that "the domesticization of sacred scenes accorded with the mentality of the time, encompassing Protestant as well as Catholic Europe, as for instance exemplified in any Rembrandt *Holy Family*."[15] In the realm of the Protestant reformation this emphasis on rectitude will find expression in the understanding of marriage as a moral code that indicates the sanctity of marriage when it is no longer defined in juridical terms as a sacrament.[16] The implications of this general

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the family. Bartolome Esteban Murillo 1617 – 1682 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1983) pp. 75, 155. In the later painting (in the National Gallery, London), dated to about 1681, Murillo presents the same structure, in softer tones. Joseph remains prominent but is an older man, and in this version Jesus places his hand in Joseph's suggesting the bestowal by the boy of a blessing. Dillian Gordon suggests that the subject matter of the painting is the finding in the temple. Dillian Gordon, The National Gallery, London: 100 Great Paintings: Duccio to Picasso (London: The National Gallery, 1981) pp. 138, 139. *See figures 15 and 16.*

[14] A Guide to Pictures in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (Merseyside County Council, 1980) p. 16 (colour plate, p. ii). In this picture Mary is seated with a book on her lap, and in the open is written in Latin her question to Jesus. Joseph places an arm around the shoulders of the boy Jesus, and with the other indicates towards Mary, signalling to him her anxiety. The picture suggests a marital relationship of affection and deference to Mary. *See figure 17.*

[15] Xanthe Brooke, Murillo in Focus (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1990) p. 9. See above, p 67; *See figure 18.*

[16] Fuchs maintains that the Reformers sought to free marriage from the sacramental system in order to give it a morality of its own: "The demand for individual liberty and responsibility which

emphasis on rectitude will have consequences in the development of Catholic devotion that finds doctrinal and artistic expression in the Immaculate Conception, a device by which the ambiguity of the virgin spouse is rationalised into a new code of moral beauty and perfection.

Indicative of a general shift from a heavenly to an earthly perspective that we have suggested as characteristic of this period, Lawrence Stone describes the new Protestant outlook on the nature of the Church, not of course with reference to Mary, the personification of the heavenly bride of Christ, but in earthly and domestic terms. Stone observes that "the household was the inheritor of many of the responsibilities of the parish and the Church; the family head was the inheritor of much of the authority and many of the powers of the priest."[17] The translation of power from Church to home provides Protestants with a personification of the male exercise authority in the role of the father. But there is no obvious way of replacing what Mary had personified.

Of Luther's 1521 exposition of the *Magnificat* Ozment comments that Mary is presented as "no longer the *mater misericordiae* but now a Protestant model of faith, (who) was made to draw from her marvellous pregnancy not a sense of superiority over the common lot, but the resolve to be an even better housekeeper that she was before."[18] Whereas devotion to Mary had provided married couples with a source of power to be tapped, Protestant references to her, that logically extended the emphasis on Joseph, presented her in a way she had not previously been understood; a role model for faith, marriage and motherhood and the personification of attainable virtues and characteristics. Even in the English disarray over clandestine marriages, Mary and Joseph could be invoked as a role model, giving authority for the increase of the Church's regulation of marriage: Carlson quotes the attempt by the

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characterises the beginning of the sixteenth century finds fertile ground here. The conviction in this case is the same for Humanists as for Reformers: the moral reformation of marriage occurs via a criticism of its judicial sacramental status." Fuchs, op.cit, p. 140.

[17] Stone, op.cit, p. 141.

[18] Ozment, Reformation, op.cit, p. 66. This would reflect a view that Luther expressed elsewhere: "Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children." The Table Talk of Martin Luther (London: H G Bohn, 1857), p 299, No DCCXXV.

seventeenth century puritan, Richard Greenham, to institute a betrothal service, basing his idea on the scriptural example of the betrothal of Mary and Joseph.[19]

Mary's distinctive presence as woman in an otherwise male religion is recognised by commentators on this period. In an unsympathetic treatment of pre-reformation devotion to Mary, Charles and Mary George admit that such devotion provided "an attempt to balance the stark masculinity of Christianity and to introduce into it some of the feminine qualities familiar to the cults of paganism."[20] The difficulty for the Protestant reformers was that they did not have access to a devotional mechanism that would enable them to express in graphic form their desire to rescue women from the role of temptress, in which the culture of celibacy invariably cast them, and thus rescue marriage from disrepute.

On clerical celibacy, Luther's demand for freedom of conscience provides a positive statement about the goodness of marriage that implicitly enhances that dignity of women. In denunciation of the Fathers who write most negatively about sex and women (Jerome, for example) Luther states: "So they concluded that woman was a necessary evil, and that no household can be without such an evil. These are the words of blind heathen, who are ignorant of the fact that man and woman are God's creation."[21] But how is the positive view of marriage and women that Luther seeks to advance to be celebrated by a Church limited in its use of symbol, ritual, and visual expressions of devotion in ways that communicate with a generally unlettered society? In part, the response is an increased emphasis on the sacred nature of the family, as Stone has observed.[22]

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[19] Carlson, op.cit, p. 48.

[20] Charles H George and Kathleen George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570 – 1640 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) p. 264. In view of our recognition in the previous chapter that the early Church understood Mary theologically in a way that distinguished her clearly from the pagan goddess cults, the association of paganism with her at this point in the Church's history is, as we shall see, anachronistic.

[21] Quoted from "The Estate of Marriage" in Fuchs, op.cit, p. 141. The point is also eloquently made by Calvin in his "Commentary on the Four Last Books of Moses, also quoted by Fuchs: "Assuredly, it cannot be but that the lust of the flesh must affect the connection of husband and wife with some amount of sin; yet God not only pardons it, but covers it with the veil of holy matrimony, lest that which was sinful in itself should be so imputed; nay, he spontaneously allows them to enjoy themselves" (ibid).

[22] The attraction of this, and its popularity, must be recognised, in Robert Burns's poem, "The Cotter Saturday Night", for example James Barke (ed.), Poems and Songs of Robert Burns (London: Collins, 1976) p. 105.

The iconic weakness of the presentation of woman in the Protestant tradition is recognised in other assessments. Maria den Ouden makes a causal connection between the loss of devotion to Mary and a decline in the status of women: "Protestant communities – Calvinistic ones in particular – did more to diminish the status of women, firstly, because their system was markedly more patriarchal, and secondly because of their abrogation of the worship of the Virgin Mary."[23] Luther's reading of Ephesians 5 led him to maintain that although the marriage bond is animated by love and may freely be expressed in carnal union, "the woman must not only love her husband, but also be obedient and submissive; she must let herself be governed by him, reverence him, in brief, hold only to him and be directed by him... must remember in seeing him, this example, and think of it: My husband is the image of the true and supreme head, Christ."[24]

In a subtle analysis of the intellectual shift that takes place in the sixteenth century, Sarah Boss sees the emergence of a more masculine culture as the consequence of a de-sacralisation of the world and a divinisation of the human mind. Opposing science characterised as male, to nature characterised as female, Boss maintains that in the era that follows the close of the medieval age, "the 'male' intellect has become godlike, so 'female' nature has been cast as profane and suitable for subjugation."[25] Stone seeks to identify other reasons for the decline in the status and rights of wives in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He acknowledges not only the recognition by state and law of the subordination of the wife to the male head of the household, but also that "the end of Catholicism involved the elimination of the female religious cult of the Virgin Mary... and the closing off of the career option of life in a nunnery. Puritanism was unable to fill the same role for more than a tiny minority of educated female zealots who attached themselves to charismatic preachers, while post-Reformation English society had nothing but contempt for spinsters..."[26] This observation is one to which we shall return in the next chapter

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[23] Maria den Ouden, A Seventeenth-Century Portrayal of Women: The Role of Milton's Eve in the Light of the Epic and Biblical Traditions (Gouda: 1998) p. 99.
[24] From "Sermon for the marriage of Casper Cruciger", quoted in Fuchs, op.cit, p. 145.
[25] Sarah Boss, Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Cassell, 2000) p. 112. On the notion that some feminist scholars regard science as anti-human, see Susanne Heine, Christianity and the Goddesses: Can Christianity Cope with Sexuality? (London: SCM, 1988), p. 85.
[26] Stone, op.cit, p. 202.

when we consider the subversive influence that Mary is seen to have in nineteenth century Britain through the recognition of lives consecrated to virginity as a force for social action and reform.

Thus far, however, our consideration of the status of women and the extent to which it may have been affected by the dismantling of the cult of the virgin spouse has concentrated on theological, legal and social issues. We see a general shift towards a less ambiguous culture, but a more temporal and secular one, in which new sources of power eclipse the attraction of the virgin spouse. The evidence of this in those areas influenced by the Protestant Reformation is largely to be seen in the loss of an iconography, and the presentation of both male and female images in the focus of devotion.

Picking up on the suggestion by Boss, that this shift in devotional patterns also reflects an intellectual trend in which 'female nature' is subjected to 'male intellect', we might preface our next section, an exploration of the relation between Mary and education, with reference to an illustrative incident in 1508. When the humanist scholar John Colet opened his new schoolhouse, St Paul's, wrested from the control of the cathedral chapter and entrusted to the Mercers' Company, a picture of God the Father was displayed in the schoolroom, on the instructions of Erasmus a fellow scholar and humanist, while above the master's chair Colet hung a picture of Christ teaching. Eve Rachele Sanders makes the following observation on this minor detail: "That shift in iconography had a crucial gender dimension as well. The promotion of Christ as teacher was unmistakably a demotion of Anne and Mary from that same role."[27]

Our next step therefore is to inquire what the consequences were for women of the loss of the "career option of life in a nunnery". This distinctive aspect of Christian life draws our attention to the power of virginity in the distinctive enclosure of the cloister, capable of being read as an allegory of marriage. That power was manifest in financial and commercial management by women and men of land and property.

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[27] Eve Rachele Sanders, Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England (C.U.P., 1998) p. 9. The gesture would seem to have been more symbolic than real. There is no evidence, for example, that women taught at the school, and Mary was included in the new school's dedication. On the role of women as teachers within a household; see below, p. 130, note 35.

But recognition of what was lost in the Reformation dismantling of Marian devotion and its attendant disclosures illustrates the extent to which within the sphere of learning the icon of Mary the virgin spouse exercised significant influence.

b) The marriage enclosure of the word

In post-Reformation England, without the legitimacy derived from Mary's virginal status, we might question whether it would have been possible for a women zealot like Margery Kempe, for example, to find an enclosure beyond that of marriage and the debt attached to it. In this regard we can perceive the social impact of devotion to Mary the virgin spouse. Through the legal provisions of a medieval canon law that had cognisance of the status of the virgin spouse, the culture was created in which it was possible for Margery Kempe to pursue her aspirations, requiring, as they did, a significant degree of independence from her husband. Christopher Durston gives evidence of instances in which by contrast, two centuries later, Puritan extremists sought to experiment with patterns of social order that questioned what the status of women should be, and the extent of patriarchal power. Durston quotes from a tract by Katherine Chidley, "Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ", in which she argues that although a woman's husband has authority over his wife in "bodily and civil respects", (something Margery certainly challenged) yet he was not entitled to be "Lord over her conscience".[28] As Stone pointed out, the views of a woman like Katherine Chidley represent the individual expression of a zealot. Although she was seeking what in many respects Margery Kempe had achieved, Katherine Chidley was not to find civil or ecclesiastical support for her aspirations. Margery had had not only the legal freedom, but also the benefit of a devotional and cultural framework in which to construct the fulfilment of her 'enclosure'.

Stone makes a more generous claim for the opportunities provided by nunneries at the beginning of the sixteenth century than some might wish to support. Ozment gives graphic accounts of the damage, psychological and spiritual, inflicted on those

[28] Christopher Durston, The Family in the English Revolution (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) p. 13.

who were committed to the religious life at an early age and against their will, illustrating his point with reference to the emancipation by Leonhard Koppe of twelve nuns from Nimbschen, among them Katherine von Bora who was to become Luther's wife.[29] Although the polemical atmosphere in which Koppe's endeavour took place may suggest that we should accept the account with caution, the statistics of nuns in England between the middle of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries indicate that a significant change in attitude towards the monastic life was anyway taking place.[30]

Some part of their numerical decline may be accounted for by the late medieval laicisation of devotion that we noted in the previous section. Linked with that is also the increase of learning that was available to women. But evidence of the positive contribution that convents made to the status of women also exists, particularly in the sphere of women's education.

Sharon Strocchia describes the work of convent schools in Florence in the fifteenth century, with special reference to the Augustinian Convent at Lepo, compared with another convent school in the City, San Niccolo dei Frari. Strocchia presents evidence of the value placed on education for girls, most of whom were destined for marriage. The place of "learning the virtues" (devotional and social) was central to the nuns' curriculum, and reading, not much less that writing, was still regarded with suspicion as a skill for women. The nuns themselves reflected the social stratum of high-born merchant, banking, and professional classes from which their pupils came, and an indication of the extent of the nuns' own literacy skills is provided by the example of a contract of May 1431 "in which all sixteen nuns authenticating the document as witnesses wrote out a standard legal formula and their personal names in their own hands.[31]

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[29] Steven Ozment, When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe, (London: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 17. Ozment comments here that Luther commemorated this event in a pamphlet, "Why Nuns May Leave Cloisters with God's Blessing" published in 1523.

[30] ibid, p. 16: "Whereas, approximately 3,500 nuns had filled English convents in 1350, only 1,900 were counted in 1535."

[31] Sharon T. Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence" in Barbara J Whitehead (ed.), Women's Education in Early Modern Europe, A History 1500 – 1800 (New York & London: Garland, 1999) p. 7.

Emphasis on the place of Mary in the lives of these pupils is nothing different from what we might expect,[32] but ultimately their learning is to have greater social, rather than devotional, consequences. Strocchia notes that women's literacy in this period gave them not only an advantage in the marriage stakes, but for adult women it also gave "the ability to manage and protect personal and family property, whether in the form of dowry, real estate, or banking networks."[33]

Stone also identifies a flowering of literacy among women in England, although he describes it as short-lived and dates it to in the middle third of the sixteenth century, suggesting that it resulted from the royal patronage of Catherine of Aragon, and was supported by Thomas More.[34] The interest of Catherine of Aragon ostensibly lies in her concern for the education of her daughter Mary, but Stone's dating of this flowering of literacy among women may be misleading, since Catherine of Aragon, as the mother of noble offspring, would have found at the English court a legacy of female education and influence in both the person of Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond and the mother of Henry VII[35] and the memory of Elizabeth Woodville, the wife of Edward IV.[36]

In 1523 Catherine of Aragon employed the services of the Spanish humanist, Juan Lius Vives, whose essay, "The instruction of a Christian woman", was published that same year. Vives prescribes an approach that is similar to that of the nuns of Lepo:

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[32] Strocchia notes that catechists of the time regarded religious education and learning how to read as "synonymous", the skill of reading being acquired from learning devotions. She cites the example of the domestic education given to Alessandra de'Bari as indicative of the task undertaken by the nuns in the convent schools: Alessandra was taught "reading, then the office of the Madonna, which she was obliged to repeat every day and return thanks to Almighty God, and to the glorious Virgin Mary seven times in seven hours." (ibid, p 21.) This is reminiscent of a pattern of devotion set out by the thirteenth century manual for wives, the Goodman of Paris, which provides prayers to Mary to be said on rising in the morning. The Goodman of Paris (London: George Routledge, 1928) p. 49.

[33] ibid, p. 25.

[34] Stone, op.cit, p. 203

[35] In an article of the influence of women in Tudor politics, Barbara Harris points out that Elizabeth Beaufort raised boys and girls not necessarily her own, but entrusted to her by Henry VII. As an indication of her power, Harris also points out the Elizabeth had her third husband, Thomas Stanley, first earl of Derby, deprived by act of Parliament of any rights over her person or property and in the last years of Henry VII's reign she held a special commission to administer justice in the north of England. Barbara Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England" The Historical Journal (33:2) 1990, pp. 269, 270.

[36] Michael Alexander notes that late medieval women were motivated to learn to read by a variety of factors, a devotional one being among them. He notes that Elizabeth Woodville used books to educate her seven children, one of whom, Cecily, records her memory of her mother's instruction. Michael Alexander, The Growth of English Education 1348 – 1648: A Social and Cultural History (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990) p. 40.

"When she shall be taught to read, let those books be taken in hand that may teach good manners. And when she shall learn to write, let not her example be void verses nor wanton or trifling songs but some sad sentences, prudent and chaste, taken out of holy scripture."[37]

Michael Alexander assesses the impact of the dissolution of the monasteries as a staggering blow for education in England, and particularly for women, with the loss of the nunneries, 100 of them had schools attached.[38] The role of nuns in the education of girls is recognised by the Anglican reformer, Thomas Becon, (at one time chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer). Becon describes the nuns not in terms of consecration or virginity, but as "solitary women" and he lists "to vow chastity" as one of the abuses of nunneries. In his Catechism of 1559, tellingly presented between father and son, Becon proposes that the loss of this educational provision be made good by the establishment of schools for "virtuous bringing up of the youth of the female kind." The prescription of Becon's 'Son' in the Catechism is that "old and ancient matrons" should teach young women to be "sober minded, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, housewifely, good, obedient to their husbands,"[39] qualities that reinforce the submissive role of women in marriage. In fact it was not until the early years of the seventeenth century that the first school for girls was re-established in England.[40]

We have sought here to use the education of women as a yardstick by which to assess the impact of the dismantling of the medieval devotional framework in which virginity functioned as an enclosure where it was possible to find power and liberty through access to the skills of reading and writing. At its best, the tradition of

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[37] Foster Watson (ed.), Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women (London: Edward Arnold, 1912) p. 55. In the plan of study that Vives drew up for Catherine of Aragon he refers to "Maria, Jesus" as pronunciation examples, suggesting an approach to learning similar to that of the catechists Strocchia refers to (p. 139).

[38] The disadvantage to girls' education is underlined by Sanders: "the closures of convent schools, with few exceptions, were permanent, whereas a much greater number of schools that had been operated by monasteries were later re-established; in addition, many alternative schools with lay affiliations were available to take in boys." Sanders, op.cit, p. 18.

[39] John Ayre (ed.), The Catechism of Thomas Becon (C.U.P., 1844) pp. 376, 377.

[40] Alexander, op.cit, p. 210: "The first institution that catered exclusively for girls was the academy known as the Ladies Hall at Deptford, Kent. Exactly when the school was founded, and by whom, is unclear, but it was firmly established by 1617. Alexander notes the opening by Nicholas Ferrer in 1624 of a female academy at Little Gidding, and similar institutions subsequently at Oxford, Burchester, Westerham, Leicester, Manchester, Lydbury, and Exeter.

female monasticism exemplified this endeavour, and the preparation by Florentine nuns, through the benefit of education, of young girls for marriage is illustrative of the extent to which the patronage of Mary as virgin spouse legitimated that enclosure in both cloister and marriage.

However, Becon's hopes for women's education, as articulated in his Catechism, indicate more limited intentions for the enterprise, focusing its attention on the preparation of a woman's duties to home and husband. The transfer of education to a more secular context (Becon's matrons, as was probably the case in the first girls academies, rather than nuns) poses for us the question of whether some other subtle change might have been taking place through the Reformation reconsidering of Mary. The question would prompt us to inquire into the relationship between Mary the virgin spouse and the field of education and learning.

Alexander outlines the details of the constitution of Christ's College, Cambridge, newly endowed by Margaret Beaufort as a reconstitution of Godshouse, a society that had been founded in 1439 for training teachers. The provisions laid down by Margaret Beaufort, were influenced by John Fisher, her chaplain, and reflect the pattern of life that characterised the universities in which the decretalists had worked, and of which Gerson was a typical example.[41] Although the universities were not necessarily monastic houses, their similarity with monastic life in terms of celibacy suggests some kind of enclosure that has a common characteristic in virginal, celibate, identity.

An indication of this character, and evidence of the influential presence of Marian devotion, can be gleaned from the history of the Cambridge Colleges. An account by Thomas Fuller in 1634 of this history indicates the presence from 1200 of Carmelites (who "call themselves brethren of the order of the blessed Virgin Mary of mount Carmel"), and subsequently in the thirteenth century of Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians (who also administered the nearby Shrine of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Walsingham), in addition to the

[41] Alexander, op.cit, pp. 75-76.

presence in the parish of All Saints of the *Fratres Beatae Mariae ad Castrum*, friars known as Our Lady Friars.[42]

The relationship between Mary and learning belongs to the tradition that associates her with wisdom, and in particular the iconographic representation of her as the seat of wisdom, that is the virgin in majesty with Jesus seated on her lap. In medieval representation this is frequently linked with the adoration of the magi, who as the wise represent, among other things, the enterprise of learning. We noted in the previous section of this chapter that one of the early representations of the adoration of the magi, in the fifth century mosaics of S Maria Maggiore, Mary is depicted not as the seat of wisdom, but as consort, the virgin spouse enthroned next to her son, sign of the dignity that awaits the whole Church in heaven. A survey of the presentation of the annunciation and the virgin and child in the fifteenth the early sixteenth centuries reveals an interesting correlation between Jesus the word of God shown in his incarnation as a child, and the symbolic representation of the word of God by a book. Sometimes, when both are featured, Jesus interacts with the book as a sign of ownership of his identity and destiny, and in many instances Mary, sometimes represented as Jesus's teacher, is also portrayed as both mother and spouse.

The book often functions as a scriptural statement about Mary's identity or, in the case of Martini's Finding in the Temple, her particular part in the story. Karen Winstead's study of virgin martyrs traces a connection between these women saints, spiritual brides of Christ depicted as reading, and the aspirations of women in the late medieval period who seek to appropriate their power by means of imitation. Winstead points to the example of the seal in which Margaret, Lady Hugerford

[42] Marmaduke Prickett and Thomas Wright (eds.), The History of the University of Cambridge from the Conquest to 1634 by Thomas Fuller (C.U.P., 1840) pp. 43, 44, 65-68. Fuller records that the Carmelite House eventually became Queen's College, re-established by Margaret Beaufort. In addition, Fuller notes that from 1350 Peterhouse used the Church of *Beata Maria de Gratia* (known today as Little St Mary's) "whence the College also is so called and written for some hundreds of years, hardly recovering its own name" (p. 76), and gives an account of the foundation of Corpus Christi College from two of the townsfolk's guilds, that of Corpus Christi, centred on St Benedict's Church, and of the Blessed Virgin, centred on St Mary's Church. In settlement of the rivalry between them for the establishment of an endowment the two guilds agreed to amalgamate, and the happy ending Fuller narrates: "Thus being happily married, they were not long issueless, but a small college was erected in their united interest, which, bearing the name of both parents, was called the College of Corpus Christi and the blessed Mary" (pp. 97, 98).

portrays herself reading "in a posture then associated with virgin martyrs and the Virgin Mary."[43] But the text referred to in the book that Mary may be depicted as reading offers more than simply a commentary; in the case of the annunciation it articulates Mary's role in the incarnation and is indicative of the life that she shares with Jesus. An indication of the iconographic significance of the book as a representation of Jesus as the word of God in annunciation scenes can be found in a compilation, published by Phaidon,[44] of these scenes, dating from the fifth century to the twentieth.

We have referred to an early example of the resting of the word of God represented by a book on Mary's lap in Simone Martini's Finding in the Temple. In a later and richer expression of this symbolism, Botticelli's Madonna of the Magnificat portrays Mary with both Jesus and the book of the word of God on her lap. It is noted in the

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[43] Karen Winstead, Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Madieval England (London: Cornell University Press, 1997) p. 150. Illustrations 29 and 30 show the seal and a manuscript illumination of St Katherine reading in the same posture as Margaret has on the seal (pp. 154, 155).

[44] Annunciation (London: Phaidon, 2000) This compilation presents evidence of Mary seated and holding a book (closed) on her knee in the mosaic in S Maria in Trastevere by Pietro Cavallini, dated at the end of the thirteenth century (p. 30). In all the fourteenth century paintings, (this book offers 8, including two manuscript illustrations) Mary is depicted with a book (pp. 31 – 47). In the fifteenth century painting by Robert Campin, a book, presumably representing the Old Testament, lies open on the table to one side of Mary. Mary herself sits on the floor, and the book that she is holds in her hands, presumably representing the New Testament word to whom she gives birth, is held in a white cloth, reminiscent of the swaddling bands of the nativity (p. 48). A similar example is later fifteenth century work by Martin Schongauer, in which the book (closed) is wrapped in a red cloth and held by Mary against her shoulder, as though it were a child (p. 93). In other instances, such as Gerard David's early sixteenth century work, the posture of Mary is that of a nativity scene; she kneels in adoration of the word laid in front of her (p. 122) and sometimes uses her mantle to provide a cover for the word: in works by Matthias Grünewald (p. 126), a tapestry from the French School (p. 134), and Lucas van Leyden (p. 136). It is perhaps of incidental interest that in a twentieth century annunciation, by Andy Warhol, all that we see of Mary is her hand resting on an open book (p 241). *See figures 19 and 20.* For a comparison with other representations of Mary linking the Christ child with the symbolic image of the book, see Reindert L Falkenburg, The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450 – 1550 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994) Although Falkenburg's main interest is in the allegorical symbolism of the fruit and flowers common in the genre he considers, a symbolism that is essentially marital (pp. 77, 78), the illustrations include Jan Gossaert's Virgin and Child, from the early sixteenth century in which the Christ child steps out of the open book on Mary's knee, while embracing his mother's neck and kissing her cheek in the manner of a lover (illustration 2). And in a painting thought to be by the Master of Flemalle, from the first half of the sixteenth century, Mary is shown in an enclosure located in open landscape with the Christ child on her lap, and on either side of her, on the low wall of the enclosure is a book. One, the Old Testament, on her left, is closed and rests on the grass; the other, the New Testament, is open, and rests on her mantle, as does the child. Below the open book lies a scarcely noticeable moon, the symbol of Mary as the mother and bride of the apocalypse (illustration 10). However, G M Rushforth maintains that from the 12th century, in western art, Mary "sometimes has a book because the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew says that she studied the law of God and the Psalms." But there is no reason given for Pseudo-Matthew's influence, or why it should have been greater in the West than in the East. G M Rushforth, Medieval Christian Imagery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) p. 84.

National Gallery of London's catalogue of an exhibition on Renaissance Florence that the well-known texts in the open book suggest that the painting was intended for domestic devotional use.[45] In this painting Mary is writing the text of the Magnificat (a significant statement about the desirability of the skill of writing being made available to the well-born girls of the time[46]). Although the subject of the painting is the childhood of Jesus, the whole story of salvation is contained within it. The pomegranate is the symbol of his passion, the cause no doubt of the hint of grief in the face of Mary. Jesus, however, looks up joyfully to the tongues of heavenly light that fall over the whole scene, the pledge of resurrection and future glory. In the version of this painting that is in the Uffizi Gallery, angels hold a crown above Mary's head, the reminder that as queen of heaven she is both mother and spouse.

What assessment of the influence, and its loss, of Mary the virgin spouse, does this survey of the marriage enclosure of the word enable us to make? The first and most obvious point is that reflection on the word of God becomes more clearly word based, and the sense of theological content and communication in art is significantly weakened. Thus, in contrast with a sense of enclosure defined, albeit ambiguously through highly graphic representation of the virgin spouse, Patrick Collinson describes the Reformation era as a watershed, the leaving behind of communication through a visual, ritualised, and symbolic system, and the moving into a new world in which "we confront the invisible, abstract and didactic word: primarily the word of the printed page, on which depended the spoken words of sermon and catechism."[47] Given the pre-Reformation prominence of the spoken word in the vernacular, as outlined in Owst's study on medieval sermons, for example, and in the evidence that we have found of the use and popularity of religious drama, the loss of theological discourse through artistic images suggests little gain for those who do not have access to the benefits of education.

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[45] Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright, Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s (London: National Gallery Publications, 1999) p. 328.

[46] Strocchia notes that "the Florentine elite were among the first to indulge in the new fashion for book collecting that was burgeoning throughout Italy by mid-(fifteenth)century, which made books more available to female readers while placing literacy in a more favourable light as an assertion of status." Strocchia, op.cit, p. 25.

[47] Patrick Collinson, The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religions and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: Macmillan, 1988) p. 99.

Signs that this shift in emphasis belongs not simply to the Reformers' zeal, but to a change in cultural climate were evident among the humanists, whose hallmark was interest in Greek, introducing not only a new approach to Biblical study, but also the introduction of non-Christian influences from the ancient world[48] that were indicative of the new sources of power that would eclipse the visual attraction that Mary had exercised in this field. The new attraction of renaissance learning also raises questions about the nature of marriage for which reference to Mary would now be superfluous. Maclean succinctly illustrates the point: "Because renaissance commentators on ethics consider matrimony in relation to nature rather than to divine law, they are able to ask such questions as the relative naturalness of polygamy, polyandry, polygyny, monogamy and the community of wives, without incensing religious opinion."[49]

Subsequently our attitude towards virginity has inevitably been coloured by this intellectual freedom, inhibiting us from perceiving the attraction of the virgin spouse as one that was capable, in a different world, of promoting the freedom of learning through the skills of reading, writing, and the articulation of theological truth for women and men, lettered and unlettered alike, in art form. Thus the second conclusion we might draw is that in the English Reformation the loss of the image of Mary the virgin spouse had implications for the dignity of women with particular reference to learning, through the loss, initially, of the convent schools, but the loss also of a powerful and visible role model, whose identity as the virgin spouse stands as a metaphor of freedom and autonomy in the context of a covenanted relationship that can be likened to marriage. It must also be recognised that the more generally patriarchal climate of the sixteenth century to which we have alluded results in a general shift in the fortunes of women in both Reformed and Catholic contexts, although there are outstanding exceptions: Teresa of Avila and Elizabeth I, for example, both of whom we shall consider in this second part of the present chapter.

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[48] This trend is signified by Erasmus's production of an edition of the New Testament in Greek that had been prepared while he held the Lady Margaret chair of Divinity in Cambridge, together with the study of literature, mathematics and Aristotle, according to Erasmus's own account. V H H Green, Religion at Oxford and Cambridge (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964) pp. 83, 84.

[49] Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the fortunes of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life (C.U.P., 1980) p. 57.

The survey of the marriage enclosure of the word suggests, then, that new attractions of intellectual power weaken, in the Reformed tradition, the links between visual and written modes of theological discourse, with damaging effects particularly for women and those without access to education in the skills of reading and writing. (That link we shall explore in more detail in the third chapter of this thesis.) But the power of the images that had been associated with Mary the virgin spouse, though discarded from its application to religion, is recognised as a medium in the service of the State. It is to that deployment, and an era of cultic fluidity such as we considered in the question of the association between Mary and pagan goddesses, that we now turn.

c) Iconography and substitution

For Collinson, post-Reformation Tudor England is a land of visual anorexia, suffering from iconophobia. He describes the manifestation of this condition as a belief that all images were regarded as papist and dangerous, closely associated with a challenge from Catholic Europe to England's Protestant autonomy. Quoting Sir Owen Hopton, who wrote to the Earl of Leicester about one of the conspirators imprisoned in the Tower of London under the charge of involvement in the Ridolfi conspiracy, Collinson cites the following as an example of that iconophobia: "I have sent you a picture of Christ which was in (his) comb-case, whereby is partly seen the lewdness of his religion."[50]

Tessa Watt assesses the extent of the loss of visual images more cautiously,[51] but nonetheless concludes that iconoclasm was "a profound mental revolution... the desire to purify the mind itself of its inner idols had an influential expression in

[50] Collinson, op.cit, p. 118.

[51] Like Collinson, Watt refers to a study of household inventories by Susan Foister. Although Collinson reads this study as evidence of how few homes had pictures or works of art, (Collinson, op.cit, p. 118), Watt regards the continued ownership into the Elizabethan period of pictures of Mary and the saints as evidence that there was no "sudden break " or "total repudiation" of such images. Tessa Watt, Cheap Print and Popular Piety (C.U.P., 1991) p. 135. However, although we would agree with Watt, the impact of these personal possessions, no doubt also retained for their financial value, has little bearing upon the wider culture of iconophobia described by Collinson, who also notes that from the 1580s even Bibles ceased to be illustrated.

Calvin's Institutes: 'Man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols... the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth.'"[52] If the loss of the symbolism of Mary as the seat of wisdom and spouse of the word made flesh had subtle implications for learning, as we have suggested, then we might expect the loss of the virgin spouse as an icon of marriage to have similar implications, particularly for the notion of marriage as a sacrament.

Part of the coherence of the medieval devotion to Mary the virgin spouse was the value that it gave to marriage through iconographic ubiquity. In the visual presentation of Mary as queen of heaven, the married state, elaborated gradually by ritual into an order like other orders in the Church, found a personification that gives it status. And, as we noted of the mosaics in the basilica of S Maria Maggiore, the public and accessible nature of this icon of marriage ensured popular appeal. The Protestant reforms that set about the dismantling of Marian devotion and its presentation of woman as virginal, powerful, and married, therefore bring with them a degree of de-sacralisation in the order of marriage.

Jack Goody identifies the shift in the notion of marriage brought about by the Protestant reformation as "part of a wider process of secularisation, of the shift from ecclesiastical to civil jurisdiction."[53] In that regard we can identify some similarity with the shift in education that takes place in countries influenced by the Protestant reformation. Whereas association with the cult of the virgin spouse had established marriage as an order with a heavenly dimension and, based on Ephesians 5, had emphasised its sacramental nature, the Protestant reformers, in order to emphasis the freedom of conscience with which they sought to encourage men and women to

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[52] Watt, op.cit, p. 135. On the Protestant reformers' belief that they stood in the tradition of the iconoclasts of both East and West (Leo III and Charlemagne), see Anthony Ugolnik, "The *Libri Carolini*: Antecedents of Reformation Iconoclasm" in Clifford Davidson and Ann Eljenholm Nichols, (eds.), Iconoclasm vs. Art and Drama (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1989) pp. 1 – 32.

[53] Jack Goody, The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe (C.U.P., 1983) p. 167. The point is also made in R C Mortimer's revised edition of T A Lacey's study on marriage: T A Lacey, Marriage in Church and State (London: S.P.C.K., 1947) p. 146. Lacey also goes on to point out that the distinction between Church and State was one that was gaining ground throughout Europe (Protestant and Catholic) in the sixteenth century, over against which England stood out and "retained a medieval polity...It is difficult to say how far the nascent distinction of Church and State had penetrated into English thought; Henry determinedly put it back. He had no need to assert the independence of the State, since he was master of the whole and took care to prevent any assertion of the independence of the Church" (p. 154). However, this did not impede the progress of secularisation in other ways in England.

exercise control over their married lives, stressed among other things its functional nature, rejecting the translation of *mysterion* in Ephesians as *sacramentum* in Latin.[54] Goody goes on to note that Calvin "likened marriage to the cutting of hair, instituted by God, good and holy, but no sacrament (Institutes iv.xix.34), while Luther (Van dem Ehesachem, 1530:1) claimed that marriage was an external worldly thing, 'like clothing and food, house and property'."[55] In England, however, the process of reform is rather more cautious where the legal and sacramental status of marriage is concerned. Dermaid McCullough points to the division of opinion between Cranmer and Henry VIII over whether marriage should be listed as one of the major sacraments,[56] and Carlson sums up the situation in England that results: "at the time of Henry's death matrimony had not reached anything near the unambiguous desacramentalisation that it had in Germany."[57]

The difficulty of assessing the impact of the Reformation on the way ordinary people in England valued marriage, and why, has already been recognised.[58] Kathleen Davies makes the helpful observation that literary sources may be of limited use in helping us to make this assessment, while other evidence, such as "church courts and popular folk customs" can more clearly indicate basic attitudes.[59] The literary sources that Davies is referring to are Puritan code books, and she points out that as resources for practical piety they do not differ very greatly from similar pre-Reformation material.[60] The change that takes place is therefore to be identified by other means; it is about less tangible and less easily quantifiable elements such as

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[54] Fuchs points out that in this, Luther is following Erasmus. In "On the Babylonian Captivity" Luther writes, "Christ and the Church are, therefore, a mystery, that is, a great and secret thing which can and ought to be represented in terms of marriage as a kind of outward allegory. But marriage ought not for that reason to be called a sacrament." Fuchs, op.cit, p. 139.

[55] Goody, op.cit, p. 167.

[56] Diarmaid MacCullough, Thomas Cranmer: A Life (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 212

[57] Carlson, op.cit, p. 43.

[58] Brooke sees the history of marriage throughout this period as a "widening of the variety of sentiment" Christopher N L Brooke, "Marriage and Society in the Central Middle Ages" in R B Outhwaite (ed.), Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage (London: Europa, 1981) p. 18. Carlson maintains that "while it is not clear that marriage has suffered in popular fortunes...it is enough that the reformers believed that it had" Carlson, op.cit, p. 46.

[59] Kathleen Davies, "Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage" in R B Outhwaite, op.cit, p. 59. Davies maintains here that in fact the attitudes of the poor towards marriage remained unchanged over many centuries.

[60] "Procreation, a remedy against fornication, and mutual comfort and help. This is the order of priorities, for example, given by Smith (1591) following Bullinger ...But...in the fourteenth century the Knight of Tour-Landry praised marriage for company and protection as well as for the propagation of children" Davies, op.cit, p. 62

atmosphere and shared perceptions, factors that help create self-understanding and that may be read from points of continuity as much as from reaction and change.

Attitudes towards virginity and marriage, and the extent to which Mary is consciously attached to or detached from them, undoubtedly form an important strand in the Reformation meta-textual shift in perspective. An example of that shift that is germane to our subject is the marriage of the clergy and what we may regard as its indirect consequences in English culture. The caricature of clergy as lecherous and anything but celibate was common, and the irony of their responsibility for the cult of Mary the virgin spouse was not lost on the compiler of the Golden Legend, for example. John Witte quotes the verdict of Cranmer's chaplain, Thomas Becon, who maintained that the "evyl commaund" of clerical celibacy aided and abetted the plague of prostitution, bastardy, homosexuality and syphilis,[61] but in this he was saying little more that had been expressed more lyrically by John Gower a century earlier in verse form: "So the lecherous parson with his lustful gaze, teaches simple layfolk foul abandon's ways."[62] The case for permitting the clergy to marry may thus have been a compelling one, but the question of the cultural impact it had, and the implications for marriage should also be recognised.

The symbolic statement must surely have been a mixed one. On the one hand marriage was no longer to be regarded as a sacrament; on the other, the clergy wished to embrace it for themselves. New terminology, describing marriage as "God's ordinance" and "the holy estate of matrimony," is introduced into the marriage rite, in order to emphasize its importance.[63] But how far does this terminology supply the loss of the visual imagery that had bestowed dignity upon marriage, that had been focused in Mary the virgin spouse, and that had offered an iconic narration to the theological text? Ernst Troeltsch indicated the extent to which in his opinion Protestantism obliterated the cultural framework that we have maintained was necessary for Mary's iconic status to function: "By abolishing the

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[61] John Witte, Jnr, From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) p. 141.
[62] Quoted by Brundage, op.cit, p. 536.
[63] John Henry Blunt (ed.), The Annotated Book of Common Prayer (London: Rivingtons, 1884) p. 451. Blunt gives comparisons with the pre-Reformation York and Sarum usage in which the words "to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony" do not appear, in either the Latin or the English version.

sacramental character of the married state (Protestantism) put marriage on the basis of a more ethical and personal relation, made possible divorce and remarriage, and thus prepared the way for a freer movement of the individual. The ideal of virginity entirely disappears from religion and ethics."[64]

Mark Rose maintains that in a similar way in post-Reformation England marriage eclipses virginity in importance. In a seventeenth century encomium Rose identifies marriage described as "the seed-plot of the Church, pillar (under God) of the world", and its superiority over celibacy demonstrated in popular literature by reference to classical mythology: "Though Diana hath reapt renowne by her chastity, yet Juno hath gained more honour by her marriage."[65] As the elevation of marriage by reference to Mary the virgin spouse and heavenly queen fades in the wake of the iconoclastic reforms in England, other images of marriage assume greater prominence, focusing attention on the importance of marriage in society and national interest, but thereby also undermining its eschatological and heavenly dimension.

Quite independently of the Marian interest, Ozment reached a verdict on the consequence of clerical marriage at the Reformation with which we would readily agree: "religion was, so to speak, brought down to earth." And furthermore Ozment sees in a quotation from the Protestant reformer, Erasmus Alberus, the stated intention of thus transferring the attributes of monastic life to marriage. Ozment quotes Alberus: "Jerome's unfortunate comment, 'Virginity fills heaven, marriage the earth,' must be corrected. Let us rather say, 'Connubium replete coelum', marriage fills heaven."[66] Susanne Heine accurately captures the extent of Alberus's misunderstanding and the limitation implied within it. In response to Luther's comment on Jerome's dictum (Luther observed, "That would mean that the married forfeited heaven while the pagan Vestals would be the best Christians simply by virtue of their virginity"), Heine observes: "Thus virginity turns from being a spiritual symbol into a human ideal, from being the unpredictable gift of the birth of

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[64] Ernst Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912) pp. 93 – 94.
[65] Mark Rose, Heroic Love: Studies in Sidney and Spencer (London: Harvard University Press, 1968) p. 28. The encomium is "Matrimonial Honour" by Daniel Rogers, and the popular literature referred to is "Morando: The Tritameron of Love" by Robert Greene.
[66] Ozment, The Age of Reform, op.cit, p. 396.

God into a model to imitate."[67] Without the symbolic function of virginity that introduces the element of "an eternal future" into the life of marriage, we see the implications of the decretalists' definitions as Brundage and Cartlidge have described them above. The "discovery of the self" and the perception of marriage as an expression of the "individual's role within the institutions of society" offer two solid building blocks for the Protestant reformers' construction of the estate of marriage.

We have already maintained that Mary's status as the virgin spouse did not function as a template for imitation but was, "a source of power to be tapped." As such it had the important function of elevating the status of marriage, by its vivid representation in varied art forms. In the post-Reformation era, other sources of power emerge, in human intellect and reason, exploration of the world's uncharted territories and exploitation of its resources, and new political alliances that owe no allegiance to Rome. In the emergence of this new world order, we also detect the emergence of images of a virgin spouse in non-Marian manifestations that are indicative of a subtle de-sacralisation of marriage.

In the previous chapter we maintained that it was misleading to interpret devotion to Mary as a substitute for pagan goddess worship because such an interpretation failed to take into account the conscious distinction drawn between the two by the Fathers, their understanding of the Old Testament foundation for Marian devotion, and their perception of the new thing that God was doing in the virginal conception of Jesus. We therefore recognised the force of Helen Hackett's argument that the Marian cult, rendered unusable by the Reformation in England, is not to be identified with Elizabeth I as an obvious substitute. The implication that we draw from this is that imagery can be transferred from one subject to another, without implying the entire transfer of symbolic meaning and content.[68] We also discover that images can appear to present similar subject matter, but in fact intend to convey a very different

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[67] Heine, op.cit, p. 141.

[68] John King makes the observation that "the many vestiges of Catholic iconography in the praise of Queen Elizabeth as a wise and faithful Queen incorporate a critique of Catholic ritualism, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and even the Marian regime associated with those practices." John King, Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) p. 203.

meaning. Post-Reformation treatment of Mary the virgin spouse reveals both these possibilities.

Hackett acknowledges the ambiguity of medieval devotion to Mary the virgin spouse,[69] and the post-Reformation iconophobia that Collinson refers to, by which Marian devotion is not of itself forbidden and may be employed in the interests of the State, although the ambiguity by which earth and heaven find shared identity is denied iconographic expression.[70] Thus the "lewdness" of the religion that Sir Owen Hopton so deplored is to be located specifically in images. Their association with the subversive politics of Roman Catholicism thereby eliminates a significant channel of popular communication, while permitting many of the reformers to retain in their written work some theological regard for the place of Mary in Christianity.[71]

Beyond this localised suspicion of images, Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that the Reformation had within it a tension that was caused by the desire for a degree of popular imagery, while at the same time wanting to ensure that the dangers of idolatry were avoided, and that imagery was used to communicate an essentially scriptural subject matter; for example, presenting Mary attended by angels, but also as the "totally human maid of Nazareth."[72] Pelikan cites Albrecht Durer's "Life of

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[69] Helen Hackett, Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Macmillan, 1995) p. 17: Hackett quotes love lyrics written in praise of Mary that also use the first letter of each line to spell the name Margeret (sic).

[70] The emphasis is placed firmly on Mary's humanity, and her role as a model of faith and obedience. Hackett cites a quotation from John Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England* which refers to Mary as "that blessed and pure Virgin" from whom Jesus took flesh and "all the nature of man", and from contemporary sermons two references to Mary praise her for her civil obedience in going to Bethlehem for the census. (p. 68) Margaret Anson's study of Reformation iconoclasm in England suggests that Elizabeth attempted to place limits on parochial iconoclasm, but in the famous example of her visit to Euston Hall, the home of the Catholic, Edward Rookwood, the discovery of a statue of Mary, possible staged to frame Rookwood, results in Elizabeth ordering that the statue be burnt immediately. Margaret Anson, England's Iconoclasts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) vol. 1, pp. 316, 318.

[71] So, for example, Thomas Becon is able to say of Mary, "What exalted the most glorious Virgin Mary so high, that she became the Mother of Christ, and alone was found worthy to bear the Son of God, but her humility?" Ayre, op.cit, p. 201.

[72] Jaroslav Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 163. Karl Holtgen locates this tension in the different views taken by Luther and Calvin with regard to images: "Luther regarded the problem as marginal...Basically conservative, (Luther) appreciated more and more the use of pictures as aids to teaching and piety and encourages the growth of Lutheran Bible illustration and religious art. Calvin, on the other hand, held that images and idols were indistinguishable." Holtgen also notes that in Magdeburg 800 people were said to have died during the forced removal of images from churches. Karl Joseph Holtgen, "The English Reformation and Some Jacobean Writers on Art" in Ulrich

Mary" sequence of woodcuts as an example of iconography that indicates Protestant devotion to Mary, together with Lucas van Leyden's 1523 woodcut entitled "The Virgin with Two Angels", which is reproduced in Pelikan's study of Mary in culture.

What strikes one most forcefully about van Leyden's woodcut is not that a Protestant has chosen to actually to depict Mary and recognise her importance; there is ample evidence of the Reformers' devotion to Mary, described by Zwingli as "the highest of creatures next to her Son."[73] Rather, one is struck by what is missing from the picture when it is compared with the treatment of the same subject no more than thirty five years earlier by a similarly north European artist, Quinten Massys.[74] Massys offers a presentation of Mary that is essentially unadorned, but in which medieval symbolism determines the treatment of the subject. Mary has a conventional physical beauty, is seated on a throne that possibly identifies her with the Church; the Christ child on her lap turns the pages of a book, and she has her hair loose and falling around her shoulders. An angel on either side of her carries a musical instrument, and two angels fly above her holding a crown high above her head from which, in place of a halo there emanates a sun-burst.

In van Leyden's woodcut, however, Mary sits in an enclosure that is overgrown and semi-derelict. There is no attempt to characterise Mary as physically beautiful, and her head is decently covered. The two attendant angels are scarcely recognisable as such; wings, in the case of the older one, could be mistaken for foliage. The angels have an earth-bound quality, remitted slightly by the praying hands of the younger one. The trees in leaf suggest high summer, but in view of the garden's air of neglect, one senses that the arrival of summer has made little impact and may just as easily pass. The Christ child clutches an apple, a reference to the fall, and faces away from the viewer, his gaze turned towards his mother, suggesting the relationship between them in which he, the second Adam restores the life of Eve.

Broich, Theo Stemmler and Gerd Stratmann (eds.), Functions of Literature (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984) p. 121.

[73] Pelikan, op.cit, p. 158; see also pp. 159, 160.

[74] Both pictures are reproduced in Pelikan, op.cit: van Leyden, p. 152; Massys, p. 138. *See figures 21 and 22.*

For our purposes the significance of this comparison is not merely artistic, but emotional and cultural. It is an example of a familiar subject presenting a very different message. In the Protestant woodcut, Mary is indeed the maid of Nazareth, but the maid who reflects back to her viewer a mirror image of domesticity that makes no statement about the wonder of the incarnation as the marriage of earth with heaven. One is left to conjecture what the significance of Mary's virginity might be for the artist and viewers of this picture. Shorn of the symbols by which ambiguity functioned, the image directs attention back upon the viewer and, in the enclosure's reference to the passing of time (its decay) our mortality. These may be worthy sentiments, but they make no attempt to define the status of marriage as exemplified by Mary in the mysterious relationship she shares with her son.

Beauty, glory, the transfiguration of the mundane, and the statement that the life of the ordinary person is given a different value, these are aspirations not embraced by van Leyden's woodcut. They do not disappear from sixteenth century society, however. In England they are given post-Reformation expression in the cult of the monarch in which the destiny of the individual is bound to the welfare of the State.

We agree with Helen Hackett that in the case of Elizabeth, the identification of the monarch as a virgin spouse is the expression of a non-Marian cult, although it may draw on elements that belonged to the discarded medieval Marian devotion. Its message, however, is very different, as was that of the Theotokos that superseded the cults of pagan goddesses. Hackett does not assert that there is no connection between Elizabeth and Marian devotion, rather that "implications of universal and spontaneous worship" of Elizabeth are inaccurate, and the glorification of the monarch as the Virgin Queen "was produced by far more complex and variable processes than just a desire to replace the Virgin Mary."[75] It is for this reason that we refer to the emergence of imagery that presents Elizabeth as the virgin Queen as non-Marian,[76] and suggest that the temporal and sometimes abstract image of

[75] Hackett, op.cit, p. 241.

[76] The post-Reformation application of the cultic symbols of a saint to royalty was not unique in Elizabeth's case. Karl Holtgen notes that in the early seventeenth century the popularist Henry Peacham "depicted Prince Henry as *Meliades* (*Miles a Deo*: Knight from God), as champion of a new Protestant order of chivalry, anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic," and with the help of Inigo Jones he "created the public image of the young Prince as St George re-incarnated." Holtgen, op.cit, p. 138

Elizabeth as virgin spouse diminishes the richness of marriage imagery that the exercise of similar images by Marian devotion was able to foster.

A strong emphasis in the cult of Elizabeth that distinguishes it from that of Mary is its subtext in relation to European politics. In religious tracts of this period England is presented as a sovereign state over against those nations that are governed, albeit indirectly, by Rome. In the words of John Phillips: "Calvinism in the guise of Puritanism had helped to transfer men's political and religious allegiance from Rome to the prince."[77] The English sovereign is therefore contrasted with the Pope, and the iconographic reference for both is female, drawn from the Book of Revelation. Hackett cites John Bale, John Foxe, and John Jewel as authors who all identify Rome with Babylon, and the Pope as the whore of Babylon. Elizabeth, on the other hand, in the early years of her life, presents herself in terms of the "godly and studious Protestant princess, including emphasis on the modesty and sobriety of her apparel" thus allowing herself to be identified as the bride of the Song of Songs and, from Revelation, the woman clothed with the sun, the personification of the Church contrasted with the whore of Babylon.[78]

In this regard, Elizabeth succeeds to the role established by Henry VIII, who is eulogised by Thomas Becon in the following terms: "Henry, our most virtuous and godly king, (hath) subverted, toppled down, and overthrown a great part of anti-christ's kingdom, so that by his divine policy and godly enterprise that great whore of 'Babylon, the mother of all whoredom and abominations of the earth' hath lost her chief glory and renown".[79] Elizabeth is presented as the embodiment of everything that repudiates the system on which devotion to Mary the virgin spouse depends, specifically the abomination of idolatry. Elizabeth herself personifies a relationship with the nation, as head of Church and State, in which she functions in a way that is analogous to Mary's relationship for Catholic Christians to the Church. Unlike Marian devotion, however, that drew largely on Old Testament imagery for its iconography, texts that eulogise Elizabeth are invariably drawn from the Bible and

[77] John Phillips, The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660 (London: University of California Press, 1973) p. 205.
[78] Hackett, op.cit, pp. 69, 70.
[79] Becon, Early Works op.cit, p. 193.

non-Christian sources that refer to classical antiquity or Elizabeth's own dynastic heritage.

Although Elizabeth is also compared with various female characters from the Old Testament, such as Deborah, Judith, and Esther,[80] Hackett points to evidence that Elizabeth was associated with ambiguous imagery that was capable of bestowing on her the ability to represent Jesus in the exercise of authority in her godly realm.[81] But most importantly of all, and following the growth of the interest in classical culture as a result of the educational influence of the humanists, much of the virgin cult of Elizabeth draws on pagan sources.

In Edmund Spenser's "The Shepheardes Calender" published in 1579, the April Eclogue illustrates the multi-faceted imagery that reference to Elizabeth the virgin queen permits. Although it may be possible to detect Marian allusion, the references in fact are drawn from classical, pagan provenance. Spenser's text was printed with notes by "E K" that identify the classical references and the dynastic intention of the Eclogue that takes the form of a dialogue between two shepherds, Hobbinoll and Theonot. Of Elisa Hobbinoll sings:

> The flower of Virgins, may shee flourish long,
> in princely plight.
> For shee is *Syrinx* daughter without spotte,
> Which *Pan* the shepheards God of her begot:
> So sprong her grace
> Of heavenly race,
> No mortal blemish may her blotte.[82]

The reference to Elisa's purity as "without spotte" or "mortal blemish" is an allusion, according to E K's notes not to Mary and the purity of the immaculate virgin spouse,

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[80] Hackett, op.cit, p. 73 Roy Strong maintains that Elizabeth's entry into London in 1559 was a Protestant re-working of the medieval *speculum principis* convention of the Royal Entry, portraying "a tableau of biblical virtues and a triumph of virtue over vice" in which Elizabeth was also depicted as Deborah, bringing restoration to the house of Israel. Roy Strong, Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450 – 1650 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1973) p. 11.

[81] Examples include an illustration from Foxe's "Acts and Monuments" in which Elizabeth is shown receiving the homage of three figures, an allusion to the Magi; two portraits of Elizabeth by Nicholas Hilliard connect her with the pelican and the phoenix, both symbols that can relate to Jesus (in self-sacrifice and the resurrection) but also to Mary, in the mother feeding her young and the asexual renewal of virginity (ibid, pp 80-81).

[82] H Oskar Sommer (ed.), The Shepheardes Calender by Edmund Spenser (London: John C Nimmo, 1890) Facsimile of the 1579 edition, f13.

but to Elizabeth's parentage.[83] The intention is a statement that challenges Catholic accusations of Elizabeth's illegitimacy, and seeks to legitimise her claim to the throne. In this regard, Elizabeth is the bride of Christ, but also of the nation, and her purity is identified as contrasting with the "lewdness" of idolatry. But the emblem that distinguishes Elizabeth from Mary is flagged up in the large print of Theonot's final question and Hobbinoll's answer: "O quam te memorem virgo? O dea certe."[84]

In the latter years of Elizabeth's reign there is evidence of a shift in the interpretation and value attached to discarded medieval iconographic images and practices. A particular instance is the attention given to November 17th as a celebration of Elizabeth's Accession and the extension of those celebrations to include the feast day of St Elizabeth (November 19). Roy Strong provides an account of the Accession Day Tilts that were staged at Whitehall from 1581, for which Elizabeth would arrive in majesty.[85] In her progress to London we might identify the state's expression of the medieval pilgrimage. Hackett describes these celebrations as "a secular Catholic revival: a long enough period had passed for these terms to have nostalgic appeal for the older generation and novelty value for the younger."[86] This reference suggests that it was possible for imagery, in this case that of a virgin saint, to remain in the popular collective memory even when what produced the image had been dismantled.[87] Those who sought to eulogise Elizabeth found redundant material for

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[83] E K's note identifies not only Henry, but also Christ as Elizabeth's worthy progenitor: "By Pan is here meant the most famous and victorious King, her highnesse Father, late of worthy memorye K. Henry the eyght. And by that name, oftymes (as hereafter appeareth) be noted kings and mighty Potentates: And in some place Christ himself, who is the verye Pan and god of Shepheardes." The identification of the dynastic claim of Elizabeth is further alluded to by the reference to the mingling of red and white roses, not Marian in intent, but a reference to "the two principall houses of Lancaster and of Yorke" (ibid, f15). The clarification of this point by EK suggests awareness of the medieval use of the rose symbolism, that Falkenberg defines as "if red in colour, it was to be understood primarily as a symbol of the Virgin...White roses... were also indicative of her virginity." Falkenberg, op.cit, p. 10.

[84] "How am I to remember you, O virgin? Without doubt, as a goddess" (ibid, f14).

[85] Roy Strong, The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977) p. 136

[86] Hackett, op.cit, p. 161. The secularisation of Catholic devotion was already identified by the Catholics of the day. The point is made by Strong that to some, like the puritan Robert Wright, the observance of November 17 with prayers and a sermon would divinize Elizabeth, while to Catholics the celebrations "were a deliberate attempt to supplant the pre-Reformation cult of the Virgin" a trend noted by Edward Rushton and Nicholas Sanders in *De Origine ac Progressu Schismatis Anglicani*, published in Rome in 1586. Strong, op.cit, pp. 125, 126.

[87] An example of this can be found in a sermon preached by John Cosin in 1624. The sermon is for a wedding, and is on the text of the wedding at Cana. Cosin opens by asking who the bride and groom might have been at Cana; he then refers back to the speculative tradition of popular preaching prior to the Reformation: "They did but shoot at rovers, those old friars, that out of an old apocryphal gospel

their purposes and were able to apply it without the content of its original setting. Thus a demythologised saint's day lent its festivities to Queen Elizabeth without implying that the Queen had joined the canon of Catholic virgin saints.[88]

When one turns to the original setting of the Marian cult and its imagery, in church, one finds that a personified link with Elizabeth is missing. As Collinson argues, the identification of Elizabeth with Mary the virgin queen would be intelligible "if pictures of the queen had in fact been placed in parish churches. But the replacement of the rood imagery by the wholly abstract symbolism of the royal coat of arms meant that churchgoers were not required to look at different pictures but at no pictures at all."[89] The power of a virgin spouse is therefore made abstract and remote in the devotional lives of ordinary people. Furthermore, the presence of the new icon in their churches betokens not the *misericordia*, the pity, of the former recipient of devotion, but indicates instead the rule of civil law, [90] mercilessly applied if necessary. [91]

Acceptance of the new iconography, enforced by law, brought home to Elizabeth's subjects in England the law's identification in the monarch. But in contrast with Mary, whose status as virgin spouse was indicative of a heavenly and eternal realm, the icon of Elizabeth contained a suspicion that the new virgin queen was a temporal

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were wont to tell us the story how that St John the Evangelist was the man, and the Virgin Mary's niece was the woman." John Cosin, The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God John Cosin (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843) p. 47.

[88] Strong, op.cit p. 119: "The most essential feature of the annual triumph was bell-ringing. Bells, which many ardent Protestants had associated with popery, were now rung in honour of the Queen instead of the saints."

[89] Collinson, op.cit, p. 118.

[90] Holtgen cites as evidence of the post-Reformation elevation in England of the rule of civil law, not only the superimposing of Elizabeth's coat of arms over a medieval doom painting (the illustration given is from Tivetshall , Norfolk: Holtgen, op.cit, p. 144), but also a deliberate mistranslation by the disseminator of Italian art theory in England, Richard Haydocke. Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'Arte* was translated by Haydocke as "A Tracte of curious Paintinge" and published in 1598. Holtgen notes that Haydocke "replaced *culto divino* as the highest function of art by 'Civile discipline'. This verbal change, a deliberate mistranslation, reflects a central phenomenon of Elizabethan culture and society: the secularisation of art for the benefit of the state and its ruler" (ibid, pp. 142-143).

[91] Hackett quotes the example of John Stubbs and his publisher, whose right hands were cut off at Elizabeth's command, for the publication of a book that expressed popular misgiving at the proposal of Elizabeth's marriage to the Duke of Anjou. Hackett, op.cit, p. 95. Wallace MacCaffrey notes that in the wake of the excommunication of Elizabeth by Pius V in 1570 a series of vigorous measures were adopted by Parliament; "the importation of religious objects was forbidden under pain of forfeiture of property." Wallace MacCaffrey, Elizabeth I (London: Edward Arnold, 1993) p. 328.

and mortal one, as the death of Elizabeth demonstrates, and the following verse by John Lane recognises:

> See how our *Phoenix* mounts aboue the skies,
> And from the neast another *Phoenix* flyes,
> How happily before the change did bring
> A Mayden-*Queene*, and now a manly *King*.[92]

Medieval devotion to Mary the virgin spouse was an expression of the marriage between earth and heaven. It gave to Christians, whether married or professed in the religious life, a range of points of contact with the action of God's grace in the life of one woman, Mary; a woman whose distinctive identity as the virgin spouse was capable of irradiating their lives with hope and glory. In post-Reformation England the cult of Elizabeth is in some respects a parody of the medieval cult of Mary, but one that is inspired by temporal criteria. This is not to deny that in the spiritual life of the nation Elizabeth's reign brought to the English Church a significant degree of stability. But in the areas of life that we have considered so far, the family and society, education, and the function of iconography, we perceive the dismantling of the attraction of virginity to result in overall, if not total, loss: in the scope of Christian imagination expressed through art, music, drama, the sacred nature of marriage, and the notion of sanctified space, whether identified in the person expressed through the metaphor of virginity or geographically in a place or building.

At this stage we might inquire what the impact of the iconographic presentation of Elizabeth as the new virgin spouse might have been on those who encountered it. We discovered in the previous section of this chapter that iconographic presentation of Mary as the virgin spouse resulted in the growth of her attraction to those who were married and, because of the ambiguity of its presentation, the ability to participate in the power of her heavenly status. By contrast, the focus of the Elizabethan iconography is essentially nationalistic, lacking as it does any other point of reference, since the monarch is invested with the capacity for representing the will of God on earth.[93] In the near cultic use of coats of arms, portraiture, the

[92] Quoted by Hackett, op.cit, p. 220. In 1583 Burghley issued a defence of the government's use of torture, on which A L Rowse reflects: "Elizabeth's government was forced to cruel measures in defending itself; but oh the human tragedy of the necessity for it." A L Rowse, The England of Elizabeth: The Structure of Society (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 385.

[93] The English cult of the monarch is not of itself the product of the Reformation, though loss of other iconographic figures of devotion accentuates its prominence. An indication of its natural growth in

royal progresses and celebrations of her Accession, a sense is conveyed of the nation's bride, who offers to her people the fruits of stability and security, harvested in the crisis of the threat of Spanish invasion in 1588. These are not insignificant offerings, but they are temporal and secular.

As the sixteenth century gives way to the seventeenth, patronage of the arts in England leads to an increase in portraiture that follows this pattern of secularisation. A similar trend can be detected elsewhere in Catholic Europe, where the new patrons of the arts are not only ecclesiastical figures, but wealthy civic and commercial leaders. Jack Goody notes that new patronage inevitably results in a change in content: "The process of secularisation affecting the graphic arts was a symptom of a wider process of de-mythification, rationalization and reform, which had been stimulated by changes in ways of communicating, of exchanging and of producing."[94] In England, where marriage is depicted the story told is not that of the marriage between earth and heaven exemplified in Mary, but of the dynastic claims of the great families of the nation.

An example of this is the Great Picture of Lady Anne Clifford, commissioned in 1646. The central panel of this work shows Lady Anne's parents and her two brothers, and the two wings show Anne herself. The work tells the story of dynastic rivalry and Anne's triumph; the history of the Clifford family is illustrative of the changing fortunes of women that we have identified, and the English post-Reformation view of marriage that requires no symbolic reference beyond itself.[95]

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the soil of the sixteenth century is to be seen in the decoration of the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, designed by Henry VII in contrast to the intentions of Henry VI, the College's founder. John King observes that "the structure as we now find it honours Henry VII and the dynasty he founded; praise of the Lancastrian king was subordinated to Tudor propagandistic purposes...the Tudor rose, red dragon of Wales, greyhound of Richmond, and Beaufort portcullis. A rose in the southwest corner of the interior depicts a woman rising from a cloud against a glory; this decoration combines a device symbolic of the Blessed Virgin with both a badge of Elizabeth of York and the Tudor rose." King, op.cit, p. 31.

[94] Goody, op.cit, p. 157.

[95] Graham Parry tells the story of the Clifford family, in which "according to an entail imposed by Edward II, the Clifford Lands should always descend in the direct line, whether the heir was male or female." In 1605, when Lady Anne should have inherited the title, the entail was broken and the succession passed to Anne's uncle Francis Clifford, the 4th Earl of Cumberland. Lady Anne's first husband reflected the male ascendancy of the period and "wished her to relinquish her claim in return for a considerable sum of money, which should be paid to him rather than to his wife." As a result of the death of her two nephews, Lady Anne inherited the title in 1646. Graham Parry, "The Great Picture of Lady Anne Clifford" in David Howarth (ed.), Art and Patronage in the Caroline Courts (C.U.P., 1993) pp. 204, 205. It is worth noting that in the picture (in Appleby Castle) the young Lady

The components of an understanding of Mary the virgin spouse that linked her with the lives of ordinary people are now divided and rationalised independently of each other. The powers of Mary are vested in the monarch; the ambiguous attraction of virginity is remodelled in the form of neo-platonic love; prayers and hymns to the virgin Queen of heaven are given classical expression in eulogies of the nation's Queen, and the lavish ceremonies of public devotion become those of the state, such as the Garter ceremonies.[96]

Such ceremonies provide us with one final area of symbolism in post-Reformation England that we should consider: drama. We recognised that in the structure of medieval devotion, imitation played an important role, linked with the ritual of the liturgy and given popular expression in the mystery plays. The sixteenth century sees a transition in the nature of drama, severing the connection with the realm of the sacred and opening up the possibility of independent discourse.[97]

Our intention in looking behind the curtain of the sixteenth and seventeenth century stage is to discover whether there is a shadow that falls from medieval devotion to Mary the virgin spouse, and indicates the substitution of other players in her role. Not only do we hear echoes of this devotion in the improbable employment of the masque, by John Milton, as a vehicle for his views on chastity, but in the Jacobean theatre we also find evidence of the virtuous wife, whose power and authority fill some part of the vacuum left by the loss of the image of Mary the virgin spouse.[98]

Maryann Cale McGuire identifies the neo-platonic cult of love as the vehicle for that dramatic outworking of the theme of marriage, and the woman's power exercised through her chastity. On Walter Montague's eight-hour drama, "Shepheards

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Anne, shown aged 15, when she was disinherited, is depicted with symbols of the accomplishments of reading and music, while the mature Lady Anne, wearing black and white (the colours of virginity), stands in an enclosed space, is backed by a cloth of state, and rests her hand on two books; a composition reminiscent of many annunciation scenes.

[96] See Strong, Cult of Elizabeth op.cit, pp. 164 – 185. Holtgen notes that "the King of Denmark hesitated before accepting the Garter from Elizabeth; it still appeared somewhat Popish to him." Holtgen, op.cit, p. 138.

[97] On the Jacobean Masque Parry notes that "Queen Anne was the prime mover behind the great series of masques that were the most distinctive feature of Jacobean Court entertainment" and she established Ben Johnson and Inigo Jones as "the foremost image makers at the new Court. Graham Parry, The Golden Age Restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-42 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981) p. 40.

[98] See M Cordner, Four Restoration Marriage Plays (O.U.P., 1995).

Paradise" that rehearses the theme of the new cult, Maryann Cale Macguire comments, "Beauty is not an effective source of power by itself...Beauty needs the support of chastity. Not limited to the practice of sexual abstinence, chastity (or as it is sometimes called, virginity) is less a physical fact than a state of mind."[99]

But it is in the proliferation of the drama of the masque that we find the allusion to the chaste nature of the royal marriage as the emblem of the tranquillity of the state. In "Albion's Triumph" written by Aurelian Townshend in 1631 Charles I is depicted as Albanactus ('born in Albania'), while Alba, the goddess of Albion ("whose native beauties have an affinity with all purity and whiteness") depicts the Queen, Henrietta Maria. The masque concludes with Mercury sent to Alba to instruct her to watch the triumph of Albanactus, who himself, "subdued to love and chastity by Cupid and Diana, who descend, and having conquered the conquerer, they show him the Queen. The King yields, and presents himself a suppliant to the goddess Alba. She embraces him, and makes him co-partner of her deity." So Aurelian Townshend describes the plot. In the concluding song the blessing to Albion is described in halcyon terms:

> Arms are laid by, early and late
> The traveller goes safe to bed;
> Men eat and drink in massy plate,
> And are with dainties daily fed.

The concluding chorus is addressed to Mary-Charles, "Hymen's twin". [100]

The masque presents an apotheosis of the monarch that was evident in the cult of Elizabeth, and enthusiastically promoted by sixteenth century reformers, both Catholic and Protestant, in their reworking of medieval custom.[101] For royal

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[99] Maryann Cale McGuire, Milton's Puritan Masque (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1983) p. 132.

[100] Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong (ed.), Inigo Jones : The Theatre of the Stuart Court (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet Publications, 1973) vol. 2, p. 454; p. 457. A similar theme is explored in a masque by William Davenant, devised in 1635 and entitled "The Temple of Love". The re-establishment of the Temple of Chaste Love is accomplished as the players in the masque mount the state where the King and Queen are seated, and Amianteros (or Chaste Love) sings to them: "Whilst by a mixture thus made one You're th'emblem of my deity, And now you may in yonder throne The pattern of your union see...The benefit it doth impart Will not the barren earth improve, But fructify each barren heart And give eternal growth to love" (p 604, ll 499 – 502, 507 – 510).

[101] Strong offers the following assessment of the situation by 1600: "In countries that remained Catholic, ecclesiastical pomp in its new counter-reformation guise was to be complemented by what can only be called a liturgy of state which centred on the ruler. In the case of Protestant countries,

pageants prior to the Reformation, Mary had been a point of reference to which the temporal regency of consorts as different as Margaret of Anjou and Anne Boleyn could be related.[102] Deprived of that reference by the dismantling of the ambiguity and attraction of Mary the virgin spouse and queen of heaven, the monarchy in England elaborates itself into its own point of reference, or draws on others that seem appropriate, perhaps from the Old Testament, such as Esther or Deborah. These may be powerful, though less familiar references, suggesting a less attractive life experience and outlook than the image of Mary, woman, spouse and mother that seemed to connect easily and obviously with the general mass of the population. Thus, irrespective of what fortunes may have befallen the nation, or the high esteem with which the monarch might have been regarded, no obviously shared reference and recourse to the personification of marriage existed as a source of comfort for the woman in her first pregnancy or the young couple having difficulty in conceiving a longed-for child.

If the imagery, language and extravagance of the masque were foreign to the vast majority of the population of seventeenth century England, one concept found prominent continuity. Prior to the Reformation fear had surrounded notions of death, judgement, heaven and hell; it would continue to do so after the Reformation, the danger of failure to abide by the standards of the new orthodoxy still carrying the threat of the stake. Richard Hardin points out that for Reformers such as Cranmer and Puritans such as Milton, the notion of fear could be not only a godly thing, but relate also to the darkening of minds and hearts that characterised idolatry, to the extent that Milton could refer to the eucharist as "a dreadful idol". And equally, Hardin notes, the Laudian Bishop Matthew Wren could say without danger of contradiction when he preached before Charles I, "God is not feared, if the King be not". The response of puritan hostility to this remark lay in the suspicion that fear of the king could also imply idolatry. James I's statement, "No Bishop, no King" was echoed by the Bishops confronted by the Commonwealth: "No ceremonie, no bishop" was a statement of their anxiety at a future shorn of liturgical order.[103]

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there was not even a question of complement. It was one of total reversal. The liturgy of state ruthlessly replaced that of the medieval church." Strong, Art and Power op.cit, p. 11.

[102] Hackett, op.cit, p. 29.

[103] Richard F Hardin, Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton (London: Associated University Presses, 1992) pp. 204, 205.

It is therefore all the more extraordinary that Milton should employ the masque convention, so clearly identified with the Court and the danger of idolatry, in his presentation of the theme of chastity in Comus or A Maske at Ludlow, written for the Earl of Bridgewater in 1634. The Lady of the masque narrates her creed in terms that produce for an audience familiar with scripture a novel twist to the trinity of faith, hope, and charity:

> O welcome pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
> Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings
> And thou unblemished form of Chastity.[104]

Maguire comments that this substitution of chastity for charity is an expression of Milton's understanding of what the exercise of charity entails for the puritan: "In effect, chastity became an inclusive virtue, often used interchangeably with virginity, moderation, purity, temperance, sobriety, continence, and frugality."[105] But in an assessment of the moral and spiritual employment of these virtues, Michael Ross takes the view that the chastity of the Lady is self-regarding and impotent, for it leaves her bound by Comus's spell. It is the virginal Sabrina who breaks the spell, having been invoked in terms that draw on classical conventions that are also redolent of terms employed in Marian devotion.[106] Sabrina then cleanses the Lady with water "from my fountayne pure"[107], a reference to virginity, and in the acclamation of the achievement of liberating the Lady, Sabrina is praised in terms that again draw on traditional medieval allusion to Mary the virgin spouse, with echoes from the Song of Songs:

> may thy loftie head be Crownd
> with many a towre, and terrace round
> and here and there thy bankes vpon

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[104] John S Diekhoff (ed.), A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's Comus (Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968) p. 216, note 212. In this reproduction of the Bridgewater version of Comus these lines are among those inserted after line 212 and appeared in the 1645 edition of the masque.

[105] Maguire, op.cit, p. 142.

[106] Sabrina faire
listen where thou art sittinge
vnder the glassie, coole, transelucent wave
in twisted braides of lilies knitting
the loose traine of thy Amber-droppinge haire (lines 780 – 784)
Diekhoff, op.cit, p. 235.

[107] line 833: ibid, p. 236.

with groves of mirhe and Cynamon.[108]

Michael Ross maintains that the culmination of the masque fails to satisfy.[109] The power and attraction of virginity may fail because they are located in a literal and biological plane, although the reference illustrates an important understanding about the capacity of virginity to function in powerful ways. For the puritan Milton the difficulty lies in the inability to locate that capacity in any identifiable person, for fear of idolatry. Virginity is thus presented as a biological category, but abstracted as a moral or spiritual quality. The Maske at Ludlow is a further example of the use of the Marian cult evacuated of reference to Mary and employed with novel and secular meaning. Maguire notes that the coincidence of the terms 'charity' and 'chastity' in Milton produce a view of charity as "a chaste love of God that informs one's use of secular things." Thus in Milton's "*Eikonoklastes*" Maguire finds Charles I's dealing with the Scots at the River Tweed in 1639 described not as a truly charitable desire for concord in the signing of the 'Pacification', but in reason, conscience, and honour "straitn'd with a kind of fals virginity."[110]

We have detected the devotional eclipse in the sixteenth century of Mary the virgin spouse as a source of power to be tapped. In Milton we see her power eclipsed in the moral sphere, as virginity is given a new and abstract identity. The figure of Mary thus dismantled points more readily to the model of faith that Ozment describes as Luther's perception of her, and even with Troeltsch's description of a Protestant Reformation asceticism, that has an abstract quality to it: "This is not less asceticism because it does not take the form of monasticism, because it renounces the world inwardly and from inward motives and does not outwardly abandon it. In contrast with Catholic asceticism, which expressed itself in a life outside of and apart from the world, this may be described as "intra-mundane" asceticism."[111] The abstract nature of this renunciation is where, in many respects, it differs from the medieval Catholic presentation of Mary.

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[108] lines 855 – 858: ibid, p. 237.
[109] "The total effect of the scene...is not to lift the doctrine of virginity to the shining regions of heavenly grace but to destroy the doctrinal abstraction by *actualising* it." Michael Mackenzie Ross, Poetry and Dogma: The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry (New Brunswich, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954) p. 198.
[110] Maguire, op.cit, p. 144.
[111] Troeltsch, op.cit, p. 80.

We recognised that in the transference from the mosaics of S Maria Maggiore to the understanding of marriage, the image of Mary takes on a distinct association with the sexual through a literal reference to virginity attached to it, thereby enabling her to function as a bridge between the world of those sexually active in marriage, and those who promote the value of the renunciation of sexual activity. Viewed in this way, virginity is not regarded as a negative or idealised sexual category. As Milton explored the meaning and value of chastity in the dispassionate context of the culture of platonic love, the very specific personal example of Mary the virgin spouse and mother, articulated in spiritually erotic or crudely physical terms (the role of the midwife at the nativity in medieval devotion underlined that) might have seemed shocking to him.

Maguire presents evidence of the culture of Milton's day in a quotation from a letter written by James Howell in 1634: "The Court affords little news at present, but there is a love call'd Platonic Love, which much sways there of late; it is a Love abstracted from all corporal gross Impressions and sensual Apetite, but consists in Contemplations and Ideas of the Mind, not in any carnal Fruition."[112] Mary's virginal status does not eradicate the sexual, but in her spousal identity gives it a potent quality, contiguous with that of the flesh of the word of God incarnate in her womb. For the seventeenth century Platonist and puritan, the very specific nature of her personification as the virgin spouse, is therefore likely to be regarded as a "corporal gross impression."

The Protestant Reformation had within it a desire to present a positive view of sex in marriage, and consequently of women, though in fact its attitudes varied. Milton's translation and approval of Bucer's *De Regno Christi* articulates the ideal that "the wife must honour and obey her husband, as the Church honours and obeys Christ her head." Bucer returns to the very problem that had exercised Gratian and the early canonists: "Now the proper and ultimate end of marriage is not copulation, or

[112] Maguire, op.cit, p. 131. A L Rowse gives an assessment of Milton's views on marriage that may indicate Milton's distaste for the physicality attached to Marian devotion: "Milton was not interested in sex. His conception of marriage, as of everything else, was very high-minded; marriage was an ideal relationship, a union of spirits, a mutual meeting of minds." A L Rowse, Milton The Puritan: Portrait of a Mind (London: Macmillan, 1977) p. 70.

children, for then there were not true matrimony between Joseph and Mary the mother of Christ, nor between many holy persons more; but the full and proper and main end of marriage is the communicating of all duties, both divine and human, each to other with utmost benevolence and affection."[113] Milton's enthusiasm for Bucer's view does not, however, find acceptance in the definition of marriage articulated in the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 that follows a medieval pattern in listing the three ends of marriage as the procreation of children, a remedy against sin and the avoidance of fornication, and mutual society, help and comfort.[114]

The difficulty here is that the marriage of Mary and Joseph simply does not provide a straightforward role model. The danger that their virginal union might undermine the value of sex in marriage was avoided (unintentionally, it should be admitted) in the medieval system through the development of an ambiguity of attraction and devotion that enabled the transference of the interests and concerns of the married onto the marital union of Mary and Joseph precisely because its virginal quality also gave it universal accessibility. The point that both the decretalists and Bucer struggle with is how to avoid the marriage of Mary and Joseph being unique in regard to being both fruitful and yet without sexual relations and therefore in some sense "not true matrimony".

The evidence of our survey suggests that the virginal nature of the marital union need not imply that uniqueness excludes from true matrimony, since other unions that do not depend on a physical sexual union can be described as marital, as witnessed by St Catherine of Siena, for example, and more generally in the religious life, as well as in the secular context of the union between monarch and people. Moreover, we have also located Mary's power to attract in her identity as virgin, a human dimension irradiated by grace in particular experiences (gendered human character, marriage, and parenthood), but with no implication that this is the only way in which grace can be operative. Indeed, we find that as an expression of the

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[113] John Milton, The Judgement of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce (London: Matthew Simmons, 1646) p. 17. David Masson comments that Bucer's *De Regno Christi* was "the particular writing of Bucer's in which Milton found this extraordinary coincidence with his own views." David Masson, The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of the Time (London: Macmillan, 1875) vol. 3, p. 256.

[114] See The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony in The Book of Common Prayer (O.U.P.) p. 296.

action of grace virginity has exercised a power to attract by making a significant statement about the scope, dignity, and freedom of these conditions.

Fear of personification, and therefore of idolatry, forms a mask for Milton's fear of sexual identity that is attached to Mary the virgin spouse. The Protestant understanding of marriage that he advances consequently denies the value of sex, with a subtlety that reflects the reverse, ambiguous dispensation by which the medieval Church acknowledged the value of sex, represented through the symbol of virginity in devotion to Mary. Without some form of personification, virginity, chastity, and marriage cannot be the stuff of drama or the fine arts of painting and sculpture. Without the ability to focus graphically on Mary the virgin spouse as an expression of these human experiences, post-Reformation England located identification of them in secular and nationalistic images. The consequence was the loss of a richly liberating and sacralising element in the spheres of marriage, education, and social and cultural life, with particularly damaging results for women. In the life of the Church of England, iconophobia led to the loss of the Church's patronage of the arts, with only intermittent restoration of interest until Catholic emancipation and the revivalist interests of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century. Devotional recognition of Mary was not necessarily lost in its entirety; it merely became invisible.[115]

In this section we have explored the ways in which the dismantling of the image of Mary the virgin spouse contributed to a climate of cultic fluidity in which others sought to exploit that power of her attraction. With reference to the monarchy this

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[115] Invisible, but not unmentioned. A collection of the works of Thomas Adams, the Incumbent of St Bennet's in the City of London, described as "the summe of his sermons, meditations, and other divine and morall discourses" was published in 1629. In his "Meditation upon Some Part of the Creed" Adams speaks of Mary's blessedness as a consequence of her relation to the Trinity: "The Lord, even the whole Trinitie was with her. God the Father, in his election of her to this honour: God the Son, in his conception of her flesh: God the holy Ghost, in his obumbration of that holy vessel...But Mary was a virgin-mother, a fruitful virgin: fruitful even while she was a virgin, and continuing a virgin after she had been fruitfull...The first woman was the instrument of man's transgression; this is the instrument of his Redemption." The Works of Tho. Adams (London: Tho Harpur for John Grismond, 1629), p. 1225. A later indication of the invisibility of Mary is given in the title of John Keble's poem: "Mother out of sight". Carol Marie Engelhardt notes that in 1845 Keble was persuaded not to publish the poem "for fear that it might signal sympathy towards Roman Catholicism." Carol Marie Engelhardt, "The Paradigmatic Angel in the House: The Virgin Mary and Victorian Anglicans" in Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (eds.), Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House (London: Macmillan, 1998) p. 159. See John Keble, The Christian Year, *Lyra Innocentium* and Other Poems (O.U.P., 1914) pp. 516 – 519.

In this section we have explored the ways in which the dismantling of the image of Mary the virgin spouse contributed to a climate of cultic fluidity in which others sought to exploit that power of her attraction. With reference to the monarchy this transference should be read as one strictly of image, not of content, indicative though it might be of virginity's continuing fascination. In this respect, we see the term used in a moral sense in the seventeenth century to describe the potency of virtue, with Milton deliberately confusing the terms charity and chastity. In all this there would seem to be little change to the essential understanding of Mary as the virgin in the terms that we outlined in the first chapter. Mary, esteemed for her identity as the virgin woman, spouse (of Joseph), and mother, is invisible. Although virginity continues to function as a statement of potency, in that it is related to matters of state dynastic identity, and, for the rising middle and titled classes, the social and commercial realities of marriage, it no longer has relevance to the daily lives of ordinary people in relating them to their heavenly destiny.

The acknowledgement that power is exercised through and beyond devotion to Mary the virgin spouse prompts us to inquire what the consequences of the sixteenth century upheavals were for Roman Catholic attitudes to Mary. Some interesting parallels emerge. Although the secular influence is less overt, political and nationalistic interests, and the elimination of "corporal gross impression" by an emphasis on moral purity and heavenly embodiment, similarly combine to form a new impression of the virgin spouse.

d) Mary as the perfect work of art

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the title of John Keble's poem: "Mother out of sight". Carol Marie Engelhardt notes that in 1845 Keble was persuaded not to publish the poem "for fear that it might signal sympathy towards Roman Catholicism." Carol Marie Engelhardt, "The Paradigmatic Angel in the House: The Virgin Mary and Victorian Anglicans" in Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (eds.), Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House (London: Macmillan, 1998) p. 159. See John Keble, The Christian Year, *Lyra Innocentium* and Other Poems (O.U.P., 1914) pp. 516 – 519.

before going on to inquire into the doctrinal, political and devotional implications that underpinned the new interpretation.

The extent to which the baroque art of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be seen as harnessed to the offensive of the Counter-Reformation is a matter for debate. Fernand Braudel maintains that "baroque art smacks of propaganda" and suggests that "Jesuit" is a better term to describe this religious and artistic expansion. He continues: "in some respects it is an art done to order, with all the advantages and disadvantages that implies. Shrewd theologians and friars demanded of Rubens, Caracciolo, Domenichino, Ribera, Zubaran or Murillo the physical execution of pictures spiritually composed by themselves." [117] The patronage of the influential religious orders, together with that of the papacy and other powerful patrons is certainly evident in the content of much baroque art.[118] But H W and A F Janson make an assessment of the movement that identifies an important qualification in the use of the term 'baroque': "unlike mannerism, the new style was not specifically Italian, even though it was born in Rome in the final years of the sixteenth century. Nor was it confined to religious art. Baroque elements quickly entered the Protestant North, where they were applied to secular subjects."[119]

Although for over half the sixteenth century England was effectively isolated from the cultural centres of Europe, and in many respects became artistically sterile, it could also be said that what elements of the renaissance did filter across the English Channel largely found expression in the secular setting of the cult of monarch and nation, as we have already seen. In the seventeenth century, English patronage of the arts revives, as does confidence in the use of contemporary art and architecture in the service of the national Church, seen most famously in the work of Christopher Wren. But even here, suspicion that his employment of the baroque contained an implication of popery limited the scope of Wren's design for St Paul's Cathedral.[120]

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[117] Fernand Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World of the Age of Philip II (trans. Sian Reynolds) (London: University of Californian Press, 1995) vol. 2, p. 832.
[118] Although on the limits placed by wealthy patrons on the artistic influence of the Orders, see Francis Haskell, Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque (London: Yale University Press, 1980) pp. 63 – 72.
[119] H W Janson, A F Janson, History of Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001) p. 528.
[120] Ronald Gray, Christopher Wren and St Paul's Cathedral (C.U.P., 1979) p. 25; Kerry Downes, Sir Christopher Wren: The Design of St Paul's Cathedral (London: Trefoil Publications, 1988) p. 15.

If the linking of the baroque exhaustively to the Counter-Reformation is to be resisted, then perhaps the assessment of Rudolf Wittkower provides a more balanced view with which to proceed: "the Counter-Reformation made necessary a specific counter-reformatory iconography... It seems possible to associate a distinct style with the spirit of the reformers; a style which reveals something of their urgency and enthusiasm, of their directness of appeal and mystic depth of conviction."[121] The didactic intention of this style in its link with one particular aspect of Marian devotion is likewise identified by Braudel: "It was intended for the use of the faithful, who were to be persuaded and gripped by it, who were to be taught by active demonstration, by an early version of *verismo*, the truth of certain contested notions, whether of Purgatory or of the Immaculate Conception."[122]

Perhaps better than any other theological subject, the representation in baroque art of the Immaculate Conception illustrates the Roman Catholic Church's use of this medium to assert a complex and somewhat abstract doctrine still not universally agreed, thereby promoting not merely devotion to Mary, but the stamp of the Church's authority on that devotion in a way that introduces a new emphasis in the understanding of Mary's relation to the lives of ordinary people. And nowhere are the links between art, doctrine, and didactic enforcement to be seen more clearly than in late sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain.

In a study of what they term "militant Marianism" Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria identify the Immaculate Conception as a central issue in the fifteenth century Councils that met to address the schisms and heresies confronting the Church. The roots of the aggressive aspects of Marian devotion go back further, and are associated by Perry and Echeverria in the Spanish origins of the Dominican Order and its role in the suppression of the Cathars[123], or a particular strain of

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[121] Rudolf Wittkower, Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 – 1750 (London: Yale University Press, 1999) vol. 1, p. 16.
[122] Braudel, op.cit, p. 132.
[123] Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria, Under the Heel of Mary (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 19. Although Perry and Echeverria rightly condemn the violence and bloodshed with which the Cathars were suppressed, they attach little attention to their reference to Steven Runciman's perception of the theological issues that accounted for the inevitable invocation of Mary in the Catholic Church's response to the Albigensian heresy. Runciman observes that "the Cathars could not allow Christ to be in any way human... This doctrine made the Virgin Mary a figure of little importance, about whom

Franciscan preaching that was influential in Spain and could be identified with the preaching of St Bernardine against the Turks, finally vindicated in the minds of some by the Spanish victory at Lepanto.[124] In their assessment of the consequences of the derivation of spiritual and political legitimacy from the power of Marian devotion, Perry and Echeverria conclude that "in a world revolutionized by printing, artillery, ocean navigation and new economic practices, the broken power of Rome found vital compensation in the Iberian expansion and civilization... Indeed, we can say that Hispanic colonization was Marian colonization."[125]

Although this was also the era of the Inquisition, Henry Kamen questions the extent of its influence in isolating Spain from the rest of the world, identifying this period as a golden age for Spanish literature, art, and international influence: "its ships traversed the Atlantic and Pacific, and its language was the master tongue from central Europe to the Philippines."[126] How did Spanish promotion of the Immaculate Conception of Mary present a new image of her as the virgin spouse in ways that influenced the life of Catholic Christendom?

The new world of the sixteenth century is not simply a geographical category; it covers also economic, political, and intellectual spheres in which power could be exercised. Just as we recognised that medieval devotion to Mary the virgin spouse offered the married a source of power to be tapped, so in the emerging world order of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation era, Mary is also identified by the Roman Catholic Church as a continuing source of power in the affirmation of its identity. In this instance, however, the context to which Mary's power is related is not the private domain of an enclosure defined by the cloister or the marriage bond, but the political arenas of Church and State, reflecting in Catholic Europe – and

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various views were held. To some she was a symbol of the Church, to others an *eon* through whom the Christ-eon passed on its downward path, to others a mere woman whom the Christ-eon used for its entrance into the material world." Steven Runciman, The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy (C.U.P., 1947) p. 149.

[124] Perry and Echeverria, op.cit, p. 39. The intervention of Mary in securing the victory is graphically depicted in a late seventeenth century stucco by Giacomo Serpotta, in Vincent Cronin, Mary Portrayed (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968) p. 121.

[125] ibid, p. 31.

[126] Henry Kamen, Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985) pp. 99 – 100. Kamen also notes that as early as 1576 the Alba-Cobham agreement between Spain and England had fixed terms by which traders were protected from the Inquisition, and by the latter half of the seventeenth century "religion counted far less than the annual profit" (pp. 215, 218).

particularly in Spain – an evolution similar to that of the English cult of the monarch. During the reign of Philip III and Philip IV (1617 – 1656) Henry Lea describes Spanish interest in the question of the Immaculate Conception as "a matter of state policy, (through) long and earnest efforts with the papacy to decide it affirmatively."[127]

In Spanish politics and in its art of this period, Mary emerges as the virgin spouse of Spain as much as she is the immaculate queen of heaven.[128] Suzanne Stratton offers a survey of the treatment of the Immaculate Conception in Spanish art that reveals a union with Mary that is civic, national and dynastic. In addition to the usual inclusion of the donor who may stand as a civic representative, Stratton refers in her study to Juan de Roelas's painting, "Seville Honouring the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception in 1615" and one by Jeronimo Jacinto de Espinosa entitled "The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception Venerated by the Municipal Authorities of Valencia", noting that "the painting probably reflects a municipal vow taken to defend the doctrine. Such public vows, like that planned by the Franciscans of Seville in 1616, were frequent events."[129] In a painting by Pietro del Po and a drawing by Andres Marzo Philip IV is shown kneeling before an image of Mary who is alone, enthroned on clouds. In Marzos's drawing the figure of Pope Alexander VII, from whom between December 1664 and October 1665 Philip won the establishment of the

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[127] Henry Lea, A History of the Inquisition in Spain (London: Macmillan, 1907) vol. 4, p. 359. Lea also notes that "negotiations for combined action were carried on with France, but the Gallican court responded only with pious phrases." The political implications of this for the Papacy are to be seen in its unwillingness to make a definitive statement on the matter, in spite of the implied commitment to the doctrine given by the papacy, for example the patronage and design by Popes Sixtus IV and Paul IV of new chapels for the Basilica of S Maria Maggiore, as we discover later in this section. The political situation was further complicated by the fact that the Inquisition was under the control of the Dominicans, for whom Spanish promotion of the Immaculate Conception (a doctrine to which, following Thomas Aquinas, Dominicans were resistant) was problematic. Lea quotes the celebrations that greeted the Immaculists' triumph at the gains won by Alexander VII's Bull, *Sollicitudo*, in 1661, which forbad opposition to the doctrine. Lea describes a Valencian satire which "represented a Dominican stretched on a sick-bed watched by a Jesuit. A Franciscan opening the door inquires, 'How is the good brother?' to which the Jesuit replies, 'He is speechless, but he still lives'" (p. 360).

[128] Michael Mullett notes a similar development in Portugal where Mary was venerated "as the nation's patron whose prayers for the country in advance of a victory against Castile in 1385 had then secured Portugal's independence. Thus an entirely orthodox Catholic Marian cult fostered a sense of difference and independence against a powerful neighbour and overlord from 1581." Michael Mullett, The Catholic Reformation (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 184 – 185. Mullett also maintains that in the wake of Tridentine reforms "Mary was venerated as Queen of Poland" and the "local craftsmen created a naturalised Polish baroque or rococo timber architecture for a Polish Catholicism" (p. 189).

[129] Suzanne Stratton, The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art (C.U.P., 1994) Juan de Roelas, p. 79; Jeronimo Jacinto de Espinosa, p. 117; see p. 116.

requirement to celebrate the Immaculate Conception in Spain, Naples, Sicily and Sardinia, Flanders and Burgandy, is sketched presiding over Philip's devotion as though as Pope he was also the minister of a marriage between earthly and heavenly monarchs.[130] The marriage between Spain and the Mary the immaculate bride is further celebrated through Rubens' oil sketch entitled "Franciscan Allegory in Honour of the Immaculate Conception". Mary, standing on three orbs held aloft by St Francis, extends a hand of acceptance to Philip accompanied on the earth by his brothers and Franciscans, above whom in a heavenly chariot ride Philip's Habsburg ancestors, Charles V, Philip II, and Philip III.[131]

Although spousal imagery and symbolism is generally absent from paintings of the Immaculate Conception that follow the style of Diego de Velazquez's interpretation in 1619, traces of an earlier iconography in works prior to that of Velazquez remain.[132] In a variation on the Tree of Jesse, Stratton cites examples of a foreshortened version, showing Mary with the child Jesus supported on a blossoming pedestal that springs from figures of Joachim and Anne on either side of her.[133] However, the nuptial theme in connection with the Immaculate Conception found more popular expression through the portrayal of the embrace at the Golden Gate, an image drawn from the Protoevangelium implying the conception of Mary through the chaste kiss of her parents. In the wake of the Council of Trent's revision of the use of religious art, the Jesuit Molanus was to dismiss this image as "a fable and dark imagining", realizing also that it drew attention to the marital and physical union of Joachim and Anne. But Stratton notes that in popular devotion "the feast of the Immaculate Conception was still conflated with the feast of the Conception of St Anne and that, as late as 1622, both the Embrace at the Golden Gate and the Tree of

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[130] ibid; Pietro del Po, p. 91; Andres Marzo, p. 105.
[131] ibid, p. 91.
[132] *See figure 23*. The sealed fountain and idealized tower are evident in the foreground and middle distance of the darkened landscape.
[133] ibid, pp. 18, 19. The inscription in the example from Seville is given as a re-wording of a quotation from the Song of Songs, adding *originalis* to the text: "*Pulchra es amica mea et macula originalis non est in te* (Thou art beautiful, my friend, and there is no original spot in thee.)" According to Stratton the reference to Joachim and Anne in the context of the Jesse Tree follows the suggestion by Vasari of a solution to the difficulty of depicting the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. (p. 20).

Jesse were still considered by the patrons as acceptable representations of the Immaculate Conception."[134]

The reference to Joachim and Anne is another attempt to solve the problem of how to depict the Immaculate Conception in art. But it is also recognition of the spousal theme in Marian devotion. The prolonged use into the seventeenth century of this reference suggests that it provided a popular link between marriage in the lives of ordinary people and Mary the virgin spouse. The suggestion of Mary's spousal identity is to be located not only in transferred reference to the chaste (and possibly sexless) marriage icon of Joachim and Anne, and then applied to Mary's relation to Jesus (in this iconography Jesus is still generally represented with Mary); it is also hinted at by the *tota pulchra* pictures that present Mary without Jesus, but surrounded by the symbols that depict Old Testament references to her, among them images such as the Tower of David and Enclosed Garden that traditionally refer also to her bridal character.

However, at this stage of the development of the doctrine's representation in art, the historical reference to spousal identity from the symbolic Old Testament images depicted seems to be revised and weakened by the absence of any reference to Jesus; it is God the Father who appears above Mary. The main thrust of the paintings takes us therefore not only to the Song of Songs and the texts employed in early medieval mosaics or Bernard's sermons, but to the Wisdom literature of Ecclesiasticus and Proverbs.[135] Stratton notes that a "melding of the doctrines of the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception led to their conflation in the art of the late sixteenth century. New meaning is now fused into traditional representations."[136] Spousal imagery is thus reinvented, as representation of the Immaculate Conception moves towards a spousal association between Mary and the Trinity (depicted, for example, as her reception into heaven by all three persons of the Trinity in El Greco's

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[134] Stratton, op.cit, pp. 26 – 28; 34. On the instructions from the Council of Trent for how to represent the Immaculate Conception in art see Yrjo Hirn, The Sacred Shrine: A Study of the Poetry and Art of the Catholic Church (London: Faber, 1958) p. 174: "Only Mary herself, who alone took part of miraculous purification, should be portrayed...Anne and Joachim could no longer be brought into direct connection with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, because their relationship was viewed as one of marriage, in the proper meaning of the word."

[135] See Ecclesiasticus 24.8: "From eternity, in the beginning, he created me"; Proverbs 8.22: "Yahweh created me when his purpose first unfolded, before the oldest of his works."

[136] Stratton, op.cit, p. 58.

"Coronation of the Virgin" (1591 – 2))[137] that becomes common in much subsequent presentation of Mary. Furthermore, the links between Mary the virgin spouse and the experience of earthly marriage are weakened, as Mary is seen to participate in an idealised, almost abstract, spiritual union with the Trinity.[138]

We have already noted that in the period of the Counter-Reformation Spain dominated communication, in Europe and beyond, through trade, the use of its language, the deployment of its armies, and the influence of the religious orders, especially the Jesuits. Through these channels the treatment in art of Mary characterised by the Immaculate Conception was able to spread with ease. Influential through the new printing presses, and themselves under Spanish influence, were the Flemish Wierix family, who enjoyed Jesuit patronage of their work, not only illustrating the "now-orthodox conflation of the Virgin *tota pulchra* with the attributes of the Apocalyptic Woman"[139] but also the militant presentation of Mary who gives patronage to the defeat of error and heresy.[140]

The relation of Mary to the Trinity, characteristic of a Spanish treatment of the Immaculate Conception[141], similarly features in the art of the Italian baroque. The presentation of this subject seems to vary in the representation of Mary as virgin spouse. In the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Annibale Carracci, painted in 1591, Mary is seated centrally, flanked by God the Father and God the Son, who together hold

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[137] Stratton, op.cit, p. 57.
[138] *See figure 24.*
[139] ibid, p. 63
[140] Stephen Ostrow quotes the example of a Wierix engraving in which the four medallions that surround Mary enthroned in heaven with the infant Jesus on her knee illustrate and name the demise of those in error particularly associated with her, named as IVIANUS APOSTATA; LEO ISAVRICVS ET CORPRONYMUS; ARIVS, NESTORIUS, MANICHEVS; LUTHER, CALVINUS, MENNO. The inclusion of Julian the Apostate in this list reflects the tradition that in a vision or dream St Basil learnt that Mary had commanded the martyr St Mercurius to kill Julian. Stephen Ostrow, Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S Maria Maggiore (C.U.P., 1996) p. 229; illustration, p. 234. This story is depicted in the fresco cycle of the Pauline Chapel in S Maria Maggiore, with the inscription, VIRGO MANDAT VT IVLIANVM TELO TRANSFIGANT ("The Virgin orders that they pierce Julian with a lance") (p. 230; illustration, fig. 155, p. 203).
[141] Stratton provides the illustration of a late seventeenth century example (1682) by Valdes Leal of the elaboration of this theme. The figures of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are shadowy but conventionally portrayed in the upper right hand corner and centre of the canvas. In the upper left a ray of light shines from an enthroned mirror, piercing diagonally across the painting, through Mary and reflected in a monstrance in the lower left hand corner, into which Mary gazes and in which the host is depicted as the Christ child. Stratton's reading of this picture is that it presents Mary as "the daughter of the Father, the bride of the Holy Spirit and the mother of the Son." (Stratton, op.cit, p. 142; illustration, p. 143.)

over her head a crown, the Son looking at the Father, who in turns looks at Mary, above whom hovers God the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.[142] The painting implies an identification of Mary with the Holy Spirit in some form of union, maintaining her identity as the virgin spouse, but with the third, rather than the second person of the Trinity.

However, in a similar composition by Francesco Albani, dated to the end of the same decade as Carracci's *Coronation*, God the Father is seated centrally between God the Son and Mary.[143] God the Holy Spirit is faintly discernable in the form of a dove hovering between Father and Son, and the only distinction between the figures depicting the Trinity and Mary is that she, though equally placed in the triad, is not given an aureole. More significant, however, is the question of whose spouse Mary is. God the Son holds the cross over his left shoulder and with his right hand points to the wound in his side. The gesture is one that is highly charged, drawing not only on medieval devotion that connected the blood of the chalice with Mary's suckling of Jesus[144], but also referring to the marriage between Jesus and the Church, here personified in Mary, that John's gospel, in the Vulgate, can be understood to allude to as "consummated" (*consummatum est*)[145] in the death on the cross, of which the wound is the potent reminder.

In Albani's canvas, God the Father gazes into the middle distance and raises his hand in a blessing that embraces the whole work of redemption and the union between Son and virgin spouse who, looking evocatively at each other, form the other two figures that complete the life of the Trinity. How might its contemporary viewers have understood such a picture? In his study of the Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S Maria Maggiore Stephen Ostrow identifies early seventeenth century tension between encouragement of the presentation in art of the Immaculate Conception and papal reluctance to articulate its official definition. He notes Paul V's resistance to pressure from Philip III to issue a definition of the Immaculate Conception,

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[142] Gabrielle Finaldi and Michael Kitson (eds.), Discovering the Italian Baroque: The Denis Mahon Collection (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997) pp. 38, 39. *See figures 25 and 26.*
[143] ibid, pp. 24, 25
[144] Carol Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (London: University of California Press, 1982) pp. 132 – 133.
[145] John 19.30.

following the lack of consensus on the matter at the Council of Trent[146]: "the representation of the Virgin in the Paolina was, I submit, an endorsement of the doctrine, but one that fell short of official sanction." [147]

The politically astute might thus correctly have read in Albani's canvas an indication of the contemporary political and theological significance of Marian dogma; the observer might also have recognised the extent of European artistic cross-fertilization. If Neil Maclaren is correct in his assertion that by the end of the sixteenth century "the manner of representation (of the Immaculate Conception) had become more or less fixed in its final form by the Italians"[148], then it could also be maintained that the engine of Spanish propaganda provided a theological, conceptual and devotional driving-force that had promoted the profile of the subject in the art of the baroque. Frescoes and pendant paintings asserted what the words of papal declaration were unwilling to define.

Where ecclesiastical patronage of the arts was motivated by political interest, the message of heavily ornamented but ethereal baroque presentations of the Immaculate Conception was one of triumph for the doctrine and the cause of the Counter-Reformation. Mary is successfully harnessed as a heavenly ally in their earthly spiritual battle, and no small part of their victory is the presentation of her as the solitary, universal figure from whose absolute purity and singularity the Church derives the legitimacy for its own, at times militant offensive against error and defence of truth. Thus the virgin spouse becomes wedded to a cause: the reforming mission of the Roman Catholic Church.

Our concern with Mary as virgin spouse in the period of the Counter-Reformation has lead us to focus not on the familiar scenes (annunciation, nativity, and mother

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[146] Tanner, op.cit, p. 667; The 1476 provision of Sixtus IV that was re-affirmed at the Council allowed for a Mass and Office of the Conception of Mary, an octave to be attached to the observance, and the granting of the same Indulgence in its celebration as with that given for Corpus Christi. E Richteri and E Friedberg (eds.), Corpus Iuris Cononici (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1881) vol. 2, col. 1285

[147] Ostrow, op.cit, p. 240. Ostrow further identifies the polemical use of Mary's Immaculate Conception in the dome fresco of the Paolina as a response to Protestant Reformers, asserting, for example, Jerome's Vulgate reading of Genesis 3.15 as a prophecy of the Immaculate Conception, that "she" (Mary) not "he" (Jesus) will crush the head of the serpent (ibid, p. 238).

[148] Neil Maclaren, National Gallery Catalogues: The Spanish School (London: Trustees of the National Gallery, 1970) p. 78.

and child compositions) that continued to be represented in baroque art, but on the dominance of the new image of Mary that is distinctively the product of that era. The unambiguous emphasis on Mary's purity (*macula <originalis> non est in te*) "there is no (original) stain in you", emphasized by the new artistic achievements of perfection in scale, perspective and proportion, suggest something that de-humanizes the person of Mary, unlinking her from contamination with the world of human relationships and with reference to her identity as the virgin spouse, and placing her artistically within in her own impermeable heavenly zone. Stratton quotes from a Spaniard, Cesare Calderari, who, writing in Madrid in 1600 asserts that "painters sign their works *faciebat*, using the imperfect tense of the verb because their works are imperfect. God, however, signs this work, the Virgin Mary herself, as "tota pulchra" because all from his hand is most accomplished, most perfect."[149]

We shall inquire further in the next section of this study into a trend that represents compassion and emotion as aspects of masculine character and expression. Here, however, it would be worth observing that the scene in baroque art of Mary's heavenly espousal in the Immaculate Conception is also not without theological expression in word form. Hilda Graef cites the devotional writing of Lawrence of Brindisi who follows Bernardine of Siena in his description of Mary's marriage to God and describes Mary as "the woman who is united (*copulata*) to God...(whom) she could turn from a lion into the gentlest lamb and make God most loving to man, indeed, make him Man."[150] The scriptural allusion here may be to Esther, an Old Testament figure also used to allude to the Immaculate Conception.[151] But as we

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[149] Stratton, op.cit, p. 43.

[150] Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985) vol. 2, p. 28. Lawrence of Brindisi died in 1619. In Guido Reni's treatment of the Immaculate Conception in the dome of the Capella dell'Annunciata of the Palazzo del Quirinale (1610) he portrays Mary's arrival in heaven where she is greeted by the single figure of God the Father. The underlying theme of *sponsa Deitatis* (spouse of the Deity) is accentuated by the reference to the annunciation in the altar below. Beverley Louise Brown notes that Reni "conceived a brilliantly coherent programme that was meant to facilitate the virtues of the Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception. At the same time he created a visually unified space that soars like a musical crescendo from the altarpiece of *The Annunciation* to *The Glory of the Immaculate Virgin with God the Father* in the dome." Beverley Louise Brown (ed.), The Genius of Rome 1592-1632 (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001) p. 35, fig. 10. For an observation on the use of this technique by Pietro da Cortona in S Maria in Vallicella in Rome, see John Rupert Martin, Baroque (London: Allen Lane, 1977) pp. 164, 201.

[151] See Montgomery Carmichael, Francia's Masterpiece: An Essay on the Beginnings of the Immaculate Conception in Art (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1909), pp. 51-52. Carmichael gives an enthusiastic account of his discovery of an early sixteenth century altarpiece by Francia (Francesco Raibolini) in the church of San Frediano in Lucca, identifying an early devotion in Lucca to the Immaculate Conception, a place that claims the oldest altar dedicated to this mystery

shall discover in greater detail in the next chapter, exaggeration or distortion in Marian devotion can also produce its own counterbalance. The representation in art of the Immaculate Conception tends towards the de-humanizing of Mary, and the potential misuse of her cult.[152] We draw this section to a close by returning our attention to Spain, and to an aspect of religious expression that stood in contrast to the militant expressions of Marian devotion and art that were the particular contribution of the Counter-Reformation.

In an essay on Counter-Reformation misogyny Alison Weber describes the influence of the humanists in early sixteenth century Spain, encouraged by Cardinal Cisneros, that produced an "evangelical democratisation." One expression of this movement was the growth of the *alumbrados*, groups mainly of women who received 'illumination' by the Holy Spirit that enabled them to understand the scriptures. One of the most famous of these was a *Beata*, a holy woman, Maria de Santo Domingo, who had never learned to read or write. After two years of inquiry, a papal delegation declared in 1510 that Maria's spiritual experiences and utterances were miraculous. She was referred to as a *mujercilla*, a non-pejorative term meaning 'little woman' that would later be used less positively by the theologian Bartolome de Medina to denounce Teresa of Avila.

Weber observes of Teresa that "as a *conversa*, a woman, a reader of scripture, and a practitioner of mental prayer, she was suspect on multiple grounds and associated

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(1333), the oldest known Bull relating to it (8th December, 1387), and the oldest Confraternity of the Conception in Italy (1387). Attended by the Old Testament figures of David and Solomon, and Doctors of the Church, Anselm and Augustine, Mary is crowned, seen on the clouds in heaven kneeling before God the Father who touches her head with a sceptre. The allusion is to Esther and an un-stated scriptural text (from the Septuagint and Vulgate) indicates the subject matter as the Immaculate Conception: Ahasuerus the King says to Esther, "I am your brother. Take heart; you will not die; our order only applies to ordinary people. Come to me." He then touches her neck with his sceptre (Esther 15. 12 – 14, Latin numbering). (ibid, p.19) Mary is clearly presented here as the virgin spouse alluded to by reference to Esther, the Song of Songs (*Tota pulchra es amica mea et macula non est in te* "You are wholly beautiful, my love, and without a blemish" 4.7), and the enclosed garden and sealed fountain (Song of Songs, 4.12). As Carmichael's quotation of the opening line of Bernardino de' Busti's Sequence for the Mass of the Immaculate Conception (given papal approval in 1480) indicates, she is "*sponsa Deitatis*" (Bride of the Deity)[151].

[152] See Graef, op.cit, p. 29: "If we quote these unpleasant products of a not altogether healthy devotion we do so to make understandable the following reactions which were not, as is so often maintained, the outcome of irrational dislike of the Mother of God but of well-founded concern for a sane and balanced Marian doctrine and piety." The reactions Graef refers to are those of the Enlightenment.

inevitably with the Inquisition's ever-expanding definition of Illuminism." [153] Mary Elizabeth Perry also traces the growth of this Spanish religious movement, described as *recogimiento*, seeking God within oneself, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, focusing her attention particularly on the fate of Catalina de Jesus, imprisoned for the third and final time "under the direction of an Inquisition-appointed confessor."[154]

For the purposes of this inquiry, the most interesting observation from Perry's essay is possibly a comment that links the phenomenon of the *recogimiento*, particularly pronounced among women, the *beatas*, in the context of a male and increasingly aggressive theological climate. Perry writes: "Perhaps in reaction against male priests who seemed unlikely intermediaries with God, people prayed to Mary, the mother of Jesus."[155]

Thus, although the hierarchy sought to appropriate Mary for political ends, the power of the virgin spouse continued to attract popular response, though in a form that the Church did not control and to a certain extent regarded as subversive. This response was lay-led, was largely comprised of women, whose embrace of holy poverty distinguished it from the political establishment (in the Church and the Spanish State) that was so intent on the Marian cause. Referred to as "the brides of Christ", the *beatas* were able to embody an essentially human aspect of the character of Mary as virgin spouse that the Immaculate Conception (for which Perry gives footnote references to the *beata's* enthusiasm) may have evoked but under the direction of ecclesiastical patronage of the arts, decreasingly portrayed.[156]

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[153] Alison Weber, "Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny" in David M Luebke (ed.), The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) On Cardinal Cisneros, see p. 147; on Maria de Santo Domingo, p. 150; on Teresa, pp. 156 - 162. On Teresa's Jewish ancestry, see Alison Weber, Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) pp. 8 – 10.

[154] Mary Elizabeth Perry, "Beatas and the Inquisition in Early Modern Seville" in Stephen Haliczer (ed.), Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 160.

[155] Mary Elizabeth Perry, "Beatas and the Inquisition" op.cit, p. 151.

[156] ibid: see note 17, p. 163. Lea similarly provides evidence from contemporary Jesuit records of popular support in Spain for the Immaculate Conception: "In 1636, a man who ventured, in Madrid, to assert that the Virgin was conceived in original sin, was promptly cut down by some passing soldiers." Lea, op.cit, p. 359.

This endnote to our survey of the new and distinctive presentation of Mary the virgin spouse characterised by the Immaculate Conception leads us to conclude that even in this more rigorous climate, a degree of ambiguity continues to attach itself subversively to Marian devotion. As an example of the flowering of women's spirituality that Weber and Perry describe, not only does Teresa, described as a "virile woman" and "manly soul", elicit language of gender ambiguity that we have associated with Mary elsewhere, but as a *conversa*, a woman of Jewish descent, she also reminds us of the reference earlier in this chapter to Paul and Thecla.[157] In both instances the desire for identification with the power associated with virginity enables boundaries to be crossed. The need to identify that power in masculine terms is itself an admission of Mary's subversion of male authority through the manifestation of power beyond it, revealing a degree of incompleteness in the scope of masculinity.[158] Thus, beyond the political tensions surrounding the definition of the Immaculate Conception, there seems to be a devotional capacity to locate an ambiguity somewhere around the newly presented icon of Mary.

As Europe crosses the threshold into the modern era, Roman Catholic development of an image of Mary, alone, heavenly and remote, becomes largely normative in popular devotional art; it is an image that for many is validated by Mary's appearances at Lourdes, La Salette and Fatima.[159] Although this particular portrayal of Mary may be shaped by the motives of its origins – the offensive against the Protestant Reformation – in the uncompromising and abstract terms in which it is drawn, nevertheless its ability to elicit a more human response is indicative of the capacity for ambiguity that we have noted throughout this section as characteristic of the figure of Mary the virgin spouse.

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[157] Weber, op.cit, p. 144: see above, p. 84. We have already noted Weber's observation that it was as a *conversa* that Teresa shared some similarity with the *alumbrados*, the illuminists, though she differed from them in other ways. On the attraction of Spanish Jews to this movement, see Weber, op.cit, p. 148. This attraction also contrasts with the late medieval employment of Mary by agencies, some of which had Papal sanction, in anti-Semitic activity. See above, pp. 61-64.

[158] Antonio Perez-Romero comments on Teresa's reaction to "the complete 'masculinisation' of religion". Teresa's subversive approach to it is also illustrative of its incompleteness: "Knowing well that the means of obtaining knowledge through education and training in theology and philosophy were closed to her as a woman, she subverted the system by discarding the intellectual knowledge constructed by the male order, and by positing a higher, perfect way of enlightenment." Antonio Peez-Romero, Subversion and Liberation in the Writings of St Teresa of Avila (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1996) p. 108.

[159] Vincent Cronin locates this popular presentation of Mary in the nineteenth century visions, but the tradition in art is clearly established much earlier. Vincent Cronin, Mary Portrayed (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968) p. 156.

In relation to modern secularism, Perry and Echeverria note that the Immaculate Conception may indeed function unintentionally in a way that perpetuates the role of Mary as a sign of ambiguity that points to a greater understanding of the truth: "Seen by some as the triumph of irrationality, the definition (of the Immaculate Conception) is acknowledged by its supporters in more recent times as a master-stroke in the struggle against secular thought. 'The dogma of the Immaculate Conception killed the false optimism of the inevitable and necessary progress of man without God,' wrote Archbishop Fulton Sheen. 'Humbled in his Darwinian-Marxian-Millian pride, modern man saw his doctrine of progress evaporate.' This view is not without foundation: during the year the dogma was ratified by the Virgin in person at Lourdes (1858), Darwin published On the Origin of the Species by Natural Selection, Marx his Critique of Political Economy and John Stuart Mill the Essay on Liberty."[160]

The symbolism of the coincidence of the date of the appearance of Mary to Bernadette at Lourdes and the publications listed by Perry and Echeverria is not an argument in favour of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Nor is this an indication that the Counter-Reformation image of Mary as the virgin and immaculate bride had any distinctively beneficial impact on the laity's understanding of the sanctity of marriage, the status of women within it, or the scope of their freedom within the cloister. But it is an indication of the power of Mary's virginal and ambiguous status that enables her to mitigate or subvert, and, as we shall suggest, this capacity may even place her beyond the control of those who seek to determine her influence. It is to this function that we shall turn in the third and final chapter of this investigation of the attraction and power of the Virgin Mary.

e) Conclusion

The second part of the present chapter has sought to investigate what became of the attraction of Mary the virgin spouse that we surveyed in part one. The consequences

[160] Perry and Echeverria, op.cit, p. 118.

of the sixteenth century eclipse of her power in Reformation England have been most evident in the personal and social spheres of devotion and practice, rather than any significant challenge to Mary as understood in the terms that we defined in the first chapter. As Milton's enthusiastic translation of Bucer showed, even from unlikely quarters there seemed to be an acceptance of Mary's perpetual virginity.

In summary, the areas of life in which virginity had been seen to matter as a source of power when identified with Mary, take on a different character in the wake of the Reformation in England. Church life is more closely modelled on the family, it is more patriarchal, drawing on the marital imagery of the union between Christ and his Church in the formula of the Book of Common Prayer marriage rite, but with no mechanism to give that abstract concept concrete expression in artistic form. Indeed, the link between art and theological discourse that had allowed Mary the virgin spouse to function creatively and ambiguously in the pre-Reformation Church is dramatically severed. In consequence, not only is there lost the visual focus of devotion that had played out the earthly and heavenly relationship between male and female figures, but the loss of access to learning and theological understanding that had been promoted by that art had a detrimental effect on women's education and the communication in anything other than word form with the unlettered and unschooled mass of the population.

It is against this background in England that virginity begins to matter less, as Mary becomes invisibly esteemed and remote from devotional imagination and the concerns of daily life. However, the extent to which virginity continues to function as a source of power appropriated for political ends, illustrates a development not only in the transfer of cultic attributes from the sacred to the secular arena, but also in the new world order in which the Counter-Reformation seeks to maintain the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Here, a new understanding of Mary the virgin spouse also emerges.

The figure of absolute purity represented in the images of the Immaculate Conception, however, while being an expression of the power of virginity to attract, is also an image that calls into question the boundaries that we identified in the first chapter as essential to our understanding of Mary. Iconographic confusion in her

relation to the Trinity, coupled with the emergence of a new image in which Mary is not portrayed in any relationship that connects her to the Church on earth are two reasons for questioning whether such an image is not more suggestive of a goddess figure, and what damage that might cause to her identity as "our sister". But such concerns are dependent on more than images in art. They also arise from a wider sphere of culture and action, in this case evident in the interest of nation states, most obviously the Papal interests, but also, in this survey, those of Spain. It is in this respect that we have recognised a degree of similarity between use of the cult of virginity in the Counter-Reformation and Reformation England.

From the material that we have surveyed thus far, our conclusion is that virginity matters as a source of power, both when it is related to Mary as virgin woman and spouse, and when, disconnected from her, it functions in other, secular ways. The latter we have considered in order to assess the scope of her influence and its loss. We turn now to a consideration of how Mary's power to attract functions when her image is re-introduced into a culture in which virginity has ceased to matter. Here we find that the essential criteria that we set in the first chapter are reiterated by those who lay claim to an intention to make Mary visible again, both in art and in the manner of their living. These are that Mary is not a goddess, that her virginity is not a negative quality but a statement about the redemptive use of a category of sexual potency and its freedom, that she is like us, and that her power to attract functions in ambiguous ways through those very media (pictures, statues, devotional rituals) that had been denied at the Reformation.

Much of the Catholic revival that took place in England in the nineteenth century drew heavily on pre-Reformation material, and thereby expressed a certain desire to return to the devotional milieu of the middle ages. However, our survey of the place of Mary in that restoration is concerned with the extent to which devotion to Mary the virgin spouse touched a nerve in Victorian society, producing a reaction that in its antipathy was illustrative of the extent to which virginity was still capable of exercising power, and in so doing, making significant statements about society, gender, and sexuality.

CHAPTER 3 MARY THE VIRGIN MOTHER

In our consideration of Mary the virgin woman and spouse we have observed that the image of Mary has proved to be capable of functioning in a variety of ways. The ambiguity that attached itself to medieval devotion provided a mechanism by which gender and the enclosures of marriage and the cloister were validated and transcended through identification with Mary, the person who is fully human in her womanhood and female identity, and who as the 'sealed fountain' or 'enclosed garden' personifies heavenly, spousal enclosure as a symbol of the human experience of marriage and the Church's character and destiny.

Thus, rather than being an entirely negative category of sexual renunciation, virginity has been capable of existing as a metaphor for potency, and the freedom of God's grace in the life of the new creation, functioning through the context of devotion to Mary to mitigate negative attitudes towards sex. In the void created by the destruction of the Marian cult at the Reformation we noted the formation in England of a new, secular spousal imagery for which virginity continued to exercise some fascination. But consequent upon the loss of a consistent female personification, religious attitudes towards marriage and the family hardened into more patriarchal forms.

In the Counter-Reformation a re-working of iconic virginity, similar to that which took place in the Protestant Reformation, led to a more severely moral presentation of Mary, though this also proved capable of eliciting an ambiguity in new patterns of popular devotion. Guided by our observations on Mary the virgin woman and spouse, we shall use the exploration of Mary the virgin mother in this chapter to suggest that the image of Mary can be seen to function as a kind of theological barometer of the Church's teaching about the mystery of human experience in the light of the incarnation.

In response to the official promotion of a particular theological emphasis, the formation of patterns of popular devotion to Mary can be discerned as a complementary method of acclimatisation, providing where needed a compensatory

or subversive expression of Christian faith. In instances of negative reaction to Mary, the possibility also emerges of an imbalanced understanding of the person of Jesus, giving evidence of a different form of subversion at work, with potentially detrimental effect to Christian belief.

Pursuing a consideration of how Mary the virgin mother has functioned in the modern era, we shall seek to identify religious trends that are indicative of some particular reading of Mary that has prevailed in Church and society, and the extent to which popular devotion to her has, by way of reaction, contained a quality of subversion that could be recognised as nonetheless congruent with the teaching of Jesus in the gospels. Our point of departure is the nineteenth century and an anxiety about the nature of manliness. Under the three headings of virginity, class, and inversion we consider ways in which devotion to Mary was referred to in mid-nineteenth century England as unmanly. Each category reveals a reaction to Mary that indicates a point of contact at which she disturbs constructs of gender, power, and sexual identity. Far from being an anodyne or oppressive figure, Mary is seen in each instance as a presence whose proximity to the mystery of the incarnation challenges and subverts.

1. Expressions of unmanliness: Virginity

Against the Victorian background of an assertive definition of gender identity, the image and role of Mary as virgin mother was recognised as subversive. Carol Marie Engelhardt quotes from the writing of two Victorian clergymen, whose response to the presentation of Mary in the art that they saw in Italy is indicative of Mary's capacity to challenge their notions of authority. Of statues of Mary one writes that they "represent the Virgin Mary with the divine and omnipotent saviour as a *feeble, helpless, babe* in her arms!" Another comments that such representation made Jesus "subject to the will of Mary" when he was "the King of kings and Lord of lords."[1] Engelhardt reads in the provocation caused by the image of Mary and the Christ child a challenge to the contemporary understanding of gender roles, particularly since Mary's virginity threatened to undermine the Victorian structure of patriarchal control: "for although (Mary) had married and borne a child, her child had no human father."[2]

In the essay that explores this area of masculinity and power in Victorian society, Engelhardt maintains that Charles Kingsley, Edward Pusey, and Frederick Faber shared a patriarchal attitude towards women that was typical of their era. As evidence of this she identifies Kingsley's repudiation of Mary as "the most feminine part of this allegedly effeminate religion", i.e. Roman Catholicism; Pusey's belief that Mary's "primary purpose in life was fulfilled when she became a mother"; and Faber's understanding that Mary's "unique role as divine mother meant that her authority was not transferable to other women."[3] We accept that all three men undoubtedly exhibited shared perceptions of the place of women in the home and in society that were characteristic of their age. It is nonetheless possible for their attitudes towards Mary to suggest rather more important differences, that condition their attitudes towards self-understanding in terms of gender and sexual identity, and

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[1] Carol Marie Engelhardt, "The Paradigmatic Angel in the House: The Virgin Mary and Victorian Anglicans" in Andrew Bradstock and Anne Hogan (eds.), Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House (London: Macmillan, 1998) p. 165. Engelhardt notes that the emphasis in the first quotation, from an address in 1866 to the parishioners of Leominster, is original.
[2] Engelhardt, "Angel in the House", op.cit, p. 162.
[3] Carol Marie Engelhardt, "Victorian Masculinity and the Virgin Mary" in Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan, Sue Morgan, (eds.), Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture (London: Macmillan, 2000) pp. 47, 50, 54.

that also raise important questions about their understanding of the incarnation. These considerations lead us to question Engelhardt's verdict that "these men had more in common than any of them might have liked to admit."[4]

In an essay on Victorian women missionaries, Sean Gill discerns "ambiguous and contradictory" strains in the accounts given of these women, since the competence and authority that such women (often unmarried) demonstrated "constantly threatened to destabilize socially and theologically constructed ideals of what constituted true femininity."[5] In the life and work of the women's religious communities that Pusey was instrumental in establishing in the Church of England a combination of ability and autonomy similar to that of the missionary women is evident. The existence of such sisterhoods is the expression of an enclosure of virginity, evocative of Mary's own example, that created scope for these women's heroic endeavours.

Evidence of devotion to Mary the virgin mother in the life of the early women's communities is given by Thomas Jay Williams in his description of the devotional life of the Devonport Sisters, founded by Lydia Sellon under Pusey's direction. A contemporary account of the sisters' oratory in the Orphans' Home (where Pusey celebrated the eucharist each day during his Christmas visit in 1848) records that "sometimes, instead of the cross, an engraving of our Lady and the Holy Child stood on the altar, flanked by candles and flowers."[6] The validity of A M Allchin's description of the early sisterhoods' heroic work in social care and devotional practice as a "silent rebellion" is recognised by Engelhardt.[7] However her

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[4] Engelhardt op.cit, p. 46. The difference between Pusey and Faber is one that reflects the outlook of Ultramontane Roman Catholicism and High Church Anglicanism. An obvious example of this is the rule of priestly celibacy for the one, and the freedom of priests to marry for the other. Engelhardt convincingly argues that Pusey's view of Mary is an essentially patristic one that did not inhibit his strong disapproval of the extravagant claims of Alphonsus Liguori's The Glories of Mary (pp. 50 – 51). Allowing for a important difference of style in the Marian theology, it is nonetheless evident that in the mind of Kingsley, Pusey and Faber represent a similar view.

[5] Sean Gill, "Heroines of Missionary Adventure: The Portrayal of Victorian Women Missionaries in Popular Fiction and Biography" in Bradstock and Hogan (eds), Women of Faith, op.cit, p. 183.

[6] Thomas Jay Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon: The Restorer after Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the English Church (London: S.P.C.K., 1965) p. 55. Williams' account is from *The Guardian* 28 February, 1849.

[7] A M Allchin, The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities 1845 – 1900 (London: S.C.M., 1958) Quoted in Engelhardt, "Victorian Masculinity", op.cit, p. 50. An indication of the importance of Mary in the early women's communities is to be seen in that founded at Wantage, established, according to its founder, William Butler, on the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

observation that Lydia Sellon addressed Pusey as "Father" should be treated with caution as evidence of his patriarchal reinforcement of a role for women with which Kingsley might have been in sympathy.[8] The fact remains, that in promoting a life of virginity, Pusey differed significantly in religious and social outlook from Kingsley.

It is generally recognised that no small part of Kingsley's dislike of Roman Catholicism sprang from his distaste for the notion of celibacy in clergy and nuns. As a sign of renunciation, virginity as a chosen identity was in sharp contrast to his own attitude that regarded sex as an ingredient of the "manly *thumos*" that was the root of all virtue.[9] Gill cites the first of four published sermons on David as evidence that Kingsley regarded the monastic life, with its renunciation of sex and thereby the male drive for self-expression as "an essentially feminine life," but Gill goes on to note that "the qualities of character which (Kingsley) adduces to prove his point turn out to be identical to those which he commends as the essence of the chivalrous life:

1850, and designated The Community of St Mary the Virgin. In 1877 the architect William Butterfield designed the sisters' cross, which bears the quotation from Mary's response to Gabriel, *Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* (Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word). A Hundred Years of Blessing Within an English Community (London: S.P.C.K., 1946) pp. 10, 24. Dr Pusey is listed among those who influenced the formation of the rule of the community (p. 25).

[8] Engelhardt does not provide evidence that Lydia Sellon called Pusey "Father". A Clifton Kelway records that Lydia Sellon was accused by the Protestant Vicar of St Andrew's, Plymouth of calling Dr Pusey "Father" but that when this and other accusations were investigated by the Bishop of Exeter, his assessment of her was "gratitude and approbation". A Clifton Kelway, George Rundle Prynne: A Chapter in the Early History of the Catholic Revival (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905) p. 66. The accusation may therefore have been based on a misunderstanding, since the term "Father" seem to have been in use in the early history of the Oxford Movement. Thomas Jay Williams's familiarity with the original documents that surround the early years of the Devonport sisterhood lead him to refer to the clergy associated with that time as Mr Keble, Mr Hetling and Mr Prynne. At the same time, Sellon does not hesitate to articulate her own matriarchal status, writing to a young woman inquirer, "My dear Daughter in Christ" and signing herself, "In Him, Your affectionate Mother, P. Lydia, Ye Mr. Spr." Williams, op.cit, pp. 46 – 48, 335, 337. On Pusey's defence of Sellon's autonomy, see John Shelton Reed, Glorious Battle: the Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism (London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996) pp. 207 – 208.

[9] David Rosen, "The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness" in Donald E Hall, (ed.), Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age (C.U.P., 1994) p. 30. We should also note that generalisations about Victorian attitudes towards manliness are unwise. In a study on Godliness and Manliness David Newsome observes: "Whereas Coleridge had regarded manliness as something essentially adult, Kingsley and Hughes stressed the masculine and muscular connotations of the word and found its converse in effeminacy. In this difference of meaning, we see the distinctive features of two opposing schools of Victorian idealists." David Newsome, Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal (London: John Murray, 1961) p. 197.

'gentleness, patience, resignation, self-sacrifice and self-devotion – all that is loveliest in the ideal feminine character.'"[10]

The theme of masculine chivalry coming into vogue in the mid-nineteenth century emerges in Kingsley's novel, Yeast. The central character, Lancelot Smith, is taken on a road from unmanly Puseyite interest, evidence of which is his possession of "St Francis de Sales' Introduction to a Devout Life", to the healing influence of manly company after a fox-hunting fall when he is nursed in the Priory, the home of Squire Lavington, by Colonel Bracebridge. The signal that a moral and physical healing is taking place, that will turn Lancelot from the temptation of a life of sexual renunciation to one that will seek fulfilment in marriage, comes when "Lancelot (who) longed at first every hour to be rid of him (Bracebridge)...could not hold out against the Colonel's merry bustling kindliness, and the almost womanish tenderness of his nursing."[11] Here the Colonel's tenderness is not regarded as effeminate, since it exists in the character of a man who will stimulate desire for chivalry and marital sexual fulfilment in the aptly named Lancelot.

The first of Kingsley's sermons on David refers to the "patristic and middle ages" as the cradle of the virtues he commends as a blend of manly and womanly. But such a claim lacks historical perspective in its failure to take account, for example, of the hostility towards sex evident in some patristic writing (Jerome), the early development of monasticism (Benedict), or early medieval devotion to Mary (Bernard). Kingsley's subsequent condemnation of the monks of the middle-ages stems from what he perceives as their "aiming exclusively at the virtues of women."[12] Thus Kingsley defines the "effeminate" aspect of the monastic life (and

[10] Gill, "*Ecce Homo*: Representations of Christ as the Model of Masculinity in Victorian Art and Lives of Jesus" in Bradstock, et al. (eds.), Masculinity, op.cit, p. 170. On the popularity of the theme of chivalry, Gill notes that it provided a paradigm for the Victorian gentleman that "at the same time embodies the highest ideals of both masculine assertiveness and feminine self-abnegation." One expression of this interest is the 1849 painting by William Dyce in the Queen's Robing Room at Westminster, entitled, "Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad and His Company"; the selection of an Arthurian context neatly avoids the likelihood of Marian or Catholic reference that the later medieval conventions might have suggested.

[11] Charles Kingsley, Yeast; A Problem (London: John Parker, 1851) p. 21.

[12] Charles Kingsley, Four Sermons Preached before the University of Cambridge (London: Macmillan, 1865) p. 7.

by association, the religious tradition that perpetuates it) as consecration to virginity and the sealing of the outlet of manly *thumos*.[13]

Virginity is therefore understood as a physical condition of life (applicable to either gender), as well as a moral one and not unconnected with Kingsley's own experience of early adulthood. Owen Chadwick notes that Kingsley's self-disgust at his dissolute undergraduate life in Cambridge, and the sublimation of a "sexual obsession" through marriage to Fanny Grenfell, whom Kingsley "rescued" from becoming a nun (implying that he regarded the celibate life as equally damaging for women), are the foundation of Kingsley's "overwhelming nausea against Catholic asceticism and every form of Catholicism that went with it."[14]

The general perception that Fanny Grenfell was about to enter a convent is possibly an anachronism. Susan Chitty notes that Fanny (Frances Elizabeth) was the youngest of twelve children and that the four unmarried sisters "had wisely made a virtue of necessity and espoused the cause of Dr Pusey and voluntary virginity. They had formed themselves into a kind of sisterhood." There was little, however, to equate this grouping with the first Anglican community for women, founded nine years after Kingsley met Fanny, that undertook serious-minded work among the poor in Devonport. Fanny and her sisters "did not allow their 'hot-bed' religion to interfere with worldly pleasures. They dressed magnificently, were received at the best houses during the London season." The kernel of Kingsley's misgivings about religious communities can be detected in an unpublished letter to Fanny, dated 1843, that Chitty quotes: "You are a woman brought up from childhood in a nunnery, brought up not as a young woman should be in the hope of marriage but on the present enjoyment of sisterhood, among women who have no hope of marrying."[15]

In contrast, Mary challenges the Victorian notion of male authority within the family and the fulfilment of human potential (ie "manliness") through marriage. In a letter to a country clergyman Kingsley challenges the advice of a "Romish" priest to "go to

[13] "The heart of the matter was celibacy. It was an affront to his most deeply held beliefs about the holiness of marriage and family life. More than that, it was a crime against nature." Reed, op.cit, p. 220.
[14] Owen Chadwick, The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays (C.U.P., 1990) p. 126.
[15] Susan Chitty, The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974) p. 54.

the blessed Virgin" with a response that associates Mary's subversive power with indulgence: "If your head had once rested on a lover's shoulders...you would have learnt to go now in your sore need, not to the mother, but to the Son – not to the indulgent virgin, but to the strong *man*, Christ Jesus – stern because loving – who does not shrink from punishing, and yet does it as a man would do it, '*mighty* to save'."[16] We might recognise the strains of this attitude in the example Engelhardt quoted of the clerical travellers in Italy.

It is significant that Kingsley associates virginity with indulgence, implying that virginity lacks emotional force or engagement with passion and that by contrast it "shrinks" from such engagement, whether emotional, sexual, or moral. But R W Church expresses the very opposite view in his description of the mood among the early Tractarians, Kingsley's contemporaries. Although the Tractarians might have chosen the single life for utilitarian reasons, Church believed that they also saw it as an expression of priestly sacrifice: "To shrink from it was a mark of want of strength or intelligence, of an unmanly preference for English home life, of insensibility to the general devotion and purity of the saints."[17] By way of his reference to the purity of the saints, Church turns the attention to virginity as a category of potency, not of negation, and one that can clearly be identified with Mary the virgin mother.

For Kingsley, then, instrumental as he was in the formation of a broad swathe of Victorian sentiment, virginity is a troubling category. In the manifestation of Mary's identity as virgin mother and spouse, there is revealed an inspirational presence that invites subversion of that understanding of power that Kingsley was intent on portraying as Christian and manly. The evidence that this is so is indicated by a Victorian desire to mitigate the power of Mary's uncompromising virginity through the presentation of her as a married woman who enjoys sexual relations with Joseph after the miracle of the incarnation. Engelardt observes: "insisting that Mary had a sexual relationship with Joseph after the birth of Jesus returned her to the realm of ordinary female experience; it restored Joseph's control over her reproductive

[16] Quoted in Robert Martin, The Dust of Combat: A Life of Charles Kingsley (London: Faber, 1959) p. 240.
[17] R W Church, The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years 1833 – 1845 (London: Macmillan, 1892) pp. 369, 370.

powers and separated her from her unique relationship with the Trinity."[18] Marriage to Joseph is thus a convenient mechanism for assimilation into conventional social and personal structures. But what of those for whom that mechanism does not exist, for whom Mary the perpetually virgin mother could not provide exemplary enclosure and visibility in spiritual and iconic terms?

Where Mary is not present to absorb the opprobrium resulting from a single woman's challenge to the *status quo*, the potential of the virgin woman (in the mission field, for example) to undermine the Victorian social order is simply glossed, as Gill has pointed out, in order to contain its ambiguity in relation to the structures of society. Florence Nightingale provides an example of the frustration felt by a woman whose own spirituality as an Evangelical and as a woman active in the world did not permit access to the enclosure and recognition of the religious life in its nascent and fragile form in the Church of England. Frustrated by the expectation that a daughter who undertook to do something other than marry or look after her aged parents would be "suspected of personal rebellion", Nightingale writes, "What I complain of the Evangelical party for is the degree to which they have raised the claims upon women of 'Family' – the idol they have made of it. It is a kind of Fetichism."[19]

In correspondence with Cardinal Manning, Nightingale expressed her attraction to Catholicism and the apostolic work undertaken by the Daughters of St Vincent. So great is her exasperation with the lack of recognition she feels in the Church of England that when asked in 1852 by Dr Stanley to persuade his sister not to convert to the Roman Catholic Church, Nightingale replies, "The Church of England has for men bishoprics, archbishoprics, and a little work...For women she has – what?...I would have given her my head, my hand, my heart. She would not have them. She did not know what to do with them. She told me to go back and do crochet in my mother's drawing room; or, if I were tired of that, to marry and look well at the head

[18] Engelhardt, "Paradigmatic Angel" op.cit, p. 162. As evidence of the belief that Mary and Joseph enjoyed sexual relations in marriage Engelhardt quotes from a pamphlet entitled, "The Virgin Mary, a married woman", published anonymously in 1869 that states: "No restriction whatsoever was placed either on Joseph or on Mary when the mysterious incarnation of Christ was revealed to them, but rather the contrary: Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife" (ibid). On Patristic support for this view, see above, pp. 19-20.

[19] Quoted in Cecil Woodham-Smith, Florence Nightingage 1820 – 1910 (London: Constable, 1950) p. 93.

of my husband's table."[20] Of the "fetichism" Nightingale describes, Mary cannot be a role model, since as mother and virgin she affirms the image of the family in motherhood, but undermines patriarchal rigidity. And without Mary as a point of reference, women like Florence Nightingale were likely to be isolated, anomalous and invisible.

We conclude, then, that what distinguishes High Church men and women and Roman Catholics is their acceptance of virginity in the life of women, but also of men, as a source of subversive power, exemplified in the figure of Mary, the virgin mother. Although we are in agreement with Engelhardt's assessment of the challenge that Mary the virgin mother poses for the patriarchal structure of the Victorian family as perceived by Evangelical and Broad Church Anglicans, the grouping of Kingsley, Pusey and Faber as men who share a perception of women in society is valid only at a superficial level. The theological viewpoints these men represent indicate significantly differing attitudes towards virginity, and thereby they differ in their recognition of an autonomy that owes something to its association with Mary the virgin mother. Furthermore, there is danger in seeking to apply any category to Kingsley, a complex figure, as Chadwick points out in his sympathetic essay on Kingsley's Cambridge career. Burdened with the epithet of "muscular Christianity", a term not of his invention or choosing, Kingsley was in fact a man "who worried over the physical, who did not take body for granted."[21]

Following Kingsley's lead, many characterised the manifestation of a Catholic revival in England as effeminate because Marian devotion was central to that revival. A recognised and consecrated virginity, expressive of that devotion, had the subversive effect of making visible a challenge to the "fetichism" of marriage and its patriarchal structure. For the Church of England in the nineteenth century the newly visible presence of Mary the virgin mother, in the lives of those who personified her

[20] Woodham-Smith, op.cit, p. 98.

[21] Chadwick, op.cit, p. 130. On "muscular Christianity" see p. 129: "In 1857 (21 February) the Saturday Review printed a notice of Kingsley's Two Years Ago, and included this sentence: 'We all know by this time what is the task that Mr Kingsley had made specially his own – it is that of spreading the knowledge and fostering the love of a muscular Christianity.'" Chadwick also sees Kingsley as someone who liked to be an outlaw. Thus Rosen maintains that Kingsley's views on women were "still much more liberal than many other Victorians, such as Froude, Arnold, Tennyson, and even Maurice..., and were not out of conformity with the thought of many leading feminists of the era." Rosen, op.cit, p. 28.

enclosure of virginity, constituted a significant challenge to the understanding of the incarnation and the divine revelation of power in weakness. The profile of Mary highlighted the possibility of a Christian vocation that could be the embodiment of that revelation in distinctive forms of life other than marriage.

But there was more to it than that. The new visibility of Mary the virgin mother was not only a powerful reminder that the revelation of the word made flesh continues to subvert human and temporal categories and expectations, especially in the intensely personal dimension of sexual identity; it was also a challenge in the social dimension. We turn next to the question of what the scope of the term "effeminate" might be as a category of social class when applied by its detractors to Catholicism in Anglican or Roman form.

2. Expressions of unmanliness: Class

On all sides of the arena in which the religious revivals of the nineteenth century take place there are women and men whose lives are distinguished by physical endurance and personal heroism. That Catholicism was pejoratively described as effeminate and unmanly is not in doubt. However, in view of the fortitude with which the proponents of this revivalist movement endured persecution and social disapproval,[22] it is less clear is why these terms should have been applied to the often austere and cautious public expressions of mid-nineteenth century Tractarianism, or the Roman Catholic missions among the Irish immigrants and labouring classes. Given the disturbing and autonomous influence of Mary the virgin mother that we have already identified in the minds of some Victorians, might we not expect that the strength of hostility to Mary and the religion that promotes devotion to her stems from some anxiety about the structure of power and authority in Victorian society?

In his study of this period in England, Norman maintains that the hostility towards the expansion that leads to the restoration of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in 1850 is characterised by "suspicions about the political loyalty of Catholics and a loathing of the supposed idolatry of Catholic devotional practices," noting that two leading missioners, the Rosminian, Fr Luigi Gentili, and the Passionist, Fr Dominic Barberi, "encouraged the veneration of the Virgin, and preached the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception."[23] Thus Catholicism and devotion to Mary appear to be synonymous in the minds of those who oppose or promote this religious movement. Beyond this identification is the clear belief that Roman Catholicism was to be equated with Irish labourers and the interests of the working classes.

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[22] Evidence of the extent of social disapproval is to be found in an essay in which Walter Arnstein maintains that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert "found it possible even to extend a degree of sympathy to actual converts to Roman Catholicism like Newman and Manning, who seemed willing to sacrifice social position for religious principle, as opposed to pseudo-Catholics like the Puseyites who continued to claim their Anglican titles and privileges." But as Arnstein also points out, Victoria herself asked her new Prime Minister in 1852, Lord Derby, for an assurance that "he would not recommend '*Puseyites* or *Romanisers*' as bishops" in the Church of England. In the second half of the century the Public Worship Act (1874) that sought to curb ritualist practice is described by Arnstein as "one of the most significant examples of royal legislative initiative." Walter Arnstein, "Queen Victoria and Religion" in Gail Malmgreen, (ed.), Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760 – 1930 (London: Croom Helm, 1986) pp. 117, 99 – 100.

[23] Norman, op.cit, pp. 203, 230. Mary Heimann notes that the rosary was "the most popular Catholic devotion in England from 1850 until well beyond 1914" and that its popularity was shared by

Inquiry into the complexity of the Roman Catholic community in England and its growth in the nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this study.[24] In broad terms, however, there is evidence to support the view that the Roman Catholic community in England in the nineteenth century was formed to a significant degree from the working class population. In 1873 the self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church in England embraced willingly its role as the Church of the poor, articulated by Cardinal Manning: "The poor in England...are accustomed to see with no wonder, and with good will, our Clergy and our Sisters visiting the sick and the dying in the same neighbourhood, in the same hospital, and even in the same house where they dwell. They have learned that the Catholic religion is the religion of charity, and that the Catholic Church is the Church of the poor."[25]

Sheridan Gilley identifies the inspiration for this work among the poor as "a novel preoccupation with the ancient Catholic virtue of Holy Poverty, which introduced a new tolerance for the Irish poor, and higher standards of religious dedication for work among them."[26] It is in this context of the provision of material care that the attraction of the Catholic missions of Rosminians, Passionists, Redemptorists, etc, and their emphasis on Mary the virgin mother becomes intelligible, and Singleton documents the success of such missions in which "Catholic preachers attempted to impress upon their flocks the importance of remaining loyal to Mary, their mother in Christ."[27] But perhaps it is also here that we discover the motive for the description of Catholicism as effeminate and unmanly.

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[24] On the balance between Ultramontane and old English Catholic clergy and laity, see, Heimann, op.cit, pp. 36, 37. On the inaccuracy of identifying Irish immigrants as practising Roman Catholics familiar with Marian devotion, see John Singleton, op.cit, p. 19 and Gerard Connolly, "Irish and Catholic: Myth or Reality" in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, (eds.), The Irish in the Victorian City (London: Croom Helm, 1985) pp. 225 – 254.

[25] Synodal Letter to the Fourth Synod of Westminster, 12 August, 1873. Quoted in Heimann, op.cit, p. 159.

[26] Sheridan Gilley, "Heretic London, Holy Poverty and the Irish Poor, 1830 – 1870" Downside Review, (294) 1971 p. 64.

[27] Singleton, op.cit, p. 21. In spite of the impact caused by the spread of Roman Catholic Marian devotion in England in the nineteenth century, Singleton comments on its weakness, when compared with France, Italy or Ireland, accounting for this by the fact that in England, "the cult of the Virgin was vehemently opposed on theological and nationalistic grounds by powerful religious groups" (p. 23).

We have already identified in the influential writing of Charles Kingsley a notion of the "effeminate" as the blocking up of the flow of manly *thumos*, particularly with reference to chastity. Rosen suggests that indeed, "the idea of a core of human power that needs expression pervades mid-nineteenth century imagery,"[28] a concept that finds expression in Dickens' description of factory labour in Hard Times.[29] In spite of the physical labour undertaken by those who work for Mr Gradgrind, they do not measure up to the standard of "manliness" that is constructed from Kingsley's theories of physical prowess and social dominance.

Donald Hall describes the correlation between the male body and social status in these terms: "Of equal interest is the question of how representations of class hierarchies reflect and respond to the contours of the male body... The Victorian ruling-class male reserved for himself social decision-making power that silenced the voices of other men as well as women."[30] In Kingsley's terms, manliness is equated with the contours of the ruling-class male, effeminacy with the rest. The contrast could be described as being between self-sufficiency and dependence, attraction to Mary and her intercessory powers being regarded as detrimental to the confidence with which the "manly" Christian might approach his maker. In Kingsley's novel, Yeast, Lancelot Smith, writes to his cousin, a Tractarian curate, that "money-making is an effeminate pursuit", thereby demonstrating Lancelot's progress in assimilation into the world of squirearchy.[31]

This reference from Kingsley's novel suggests the possibility that the term "effeminate" has something of a theoretical application, its use conveying a sense that includes but extends beyond the obvious meaning of the word. Two decades after the writing of Yeast Kingsley continues to apply the term, in a letter to Sir Henry Taylor in 1868 in which with the same intention he refers to the effeminacy of

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[28] Rosen, op.cit, p 30.
[29] In Chapter 5 Dickens writes, "Is it possible...that there was any fancy in them demanding to be brought into healthy existence instead of struggling on in convulsions? That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief – some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent." Charles Dickens, Hard Times (O.U.P., 1924) pp. 31 – 32.
[30] Hall, "Introduction" in Hall (ed.), Muscular Christianity op.cit, p. 10.
[31] Yeast, op.cit, p. 38.

the middle-class.[32] We can therefore make sense of the mid-nineteenth century application of the term "effeminate" to Catholic devotion when we read it as a social categorisation. Those among whom that devotion spread were generally and unmistakably not the ruling classes.[33] Norman observes that "as an unskilled labour force (Irish labourers) sank at once to the lowest levels of social expectation, and it was the Church, again, which, through its schools and charitable institutions, set many upon the first slow steps in upward social mobility."[34]

The encouraging role that Mary played in that progress is to be discerned not only in devotional practices (the rosary), and favourite prayers to Mary, such as the *Memorare*,[35] but also in guilds and associations. An example of the beneficial and practical interest of such associations can be gleaned from the rules of the Holy Guild of St Joseph and Our Lady that was founded in Bradford in 1840. The purposes of the Guild were the advancement of the Roman Catholic religion, relief of the sick and burial of the dead. It also promoted sobriety.[36] Although nothing in the Tractarian movement was able to equal the impact of 10 tonnes of statues that were imported by a wealthy Roman Catholic in the 1840s,[37] nonetheless the appearance of any image of Mary in an Anglican Church caused the danger of Episcopal disapproval.[38] Marian devotion was also widely recognised as symptomatic of a Romish tendency among the Puseyites, whose interests similarly lay in the working-

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[32] Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memorials of his Life (London: Henry King & Co, 1877) vol. 2, p. 275. Kingsley is here speaking about those who are not part of the ruling class, however that was to be defined in terms other than "manly". He goes on to say of the shop-keeping class that "they shrink from...fatigue, danger, pain, which would be considered as sport by an average public schoolboy."

[33] Evidence of the social spread of Catholicism is to be found in Mary Heimann's study of Catholic devotion in Victorian England, charting the reaction of recusant Catholics, who are invariably counted among the ruling-class. Heimann, op.cit. Similarly, Arnstein notes that in spite of her anti-Roman Catholic views, Victoria could include old Catholic aristocracy in her household. Arnstein, op.cit, p. 117. On the appeal of Roman Catholicism to people of all social classes, see Sheridan Gilley, "Vulgar Piety and the Brompton Oratory, 1850 – 1860", Durham University Journal, (43) 1981, pp. 15 – 21.

[34] Norman, op.cit, p. 220.

[35] Heimann lists eleven forms of Catholic devotion that by the early years of the twentieth century were the most common among Roman Catholics of all backgrounds. Four of these were Marian: the Hail Mary, the *Salve Regina*, the *Regina Coeli*, and the *Memorare*. Heimann, op cit, p 90.

[36] A rising scale of fines was applied to members of the Guild found to be "tipsy" and at the fourth offence they were expelled from the Guild, thereby threatening them with the loss of the rites and ceremonies of Catholic burial. R M Kaye, The Laws and Constitutions of the Holy Guild of St Joseph and Our Blessed Lady (Bradford: 1840) pp. 11, 12. See also Heimann, op.cit, p. 133.

[37] Singleton, op.cit, p. 20.

[38] Reed, op.cit, p. 23.

class neighbourhoods of the expanding towns and cities of industrial England and Wales.[39]

The line of thought that links these strands together leads us from the appeal of Catholicism to the working class masses of nineteenth-century Britain, to the particular and ubiquitous presence of Mary the virgin mother as a hallmark of Catholic identity, and to the theory of class expounded by Kingsley and Hughes that bears the unsolicited title of muscular Christianity and that labels those who cannot conform to its norms as unmanly and therefore effeminate. In the instance of virginity and the class structure, Mary exemplifies that which Kingsley in particular opposes, since he rightly intuits that she subverts the system that he propounds.[40]

Evidence of this is to be found not only in Kingsley's writing, but also in the exercise of what David Hall has described as the reading of the male body "as a metaphor for social, nationalistic, and religious bodies, (which) at the same time... attempts to enforce a particular construction on those bodies."[41] This is a theme that is explored by Dennis Allen in a consideration of the novel set at Rugby School, Thomas Hughes's Tom Brown's Schooldays. Allen's intention is to demonstrate that although, like Kingsley, Hughes embraced the Christian Socialist ideals that are associated with F D Maurice, his equal commitment to a particular class system confronts him with a dilemma when, as a literary artist he seeks suitable representation.

Allan maintains that Hughes attempts to solve his dilemma by "positing the bourgeoisie as capable of symbolically representing the working classes", but fails to form any synthesis out of his conflicting theories, and thus the representation "finally unbalances the text." The episode through which Allen seeks to unmask Hughes's

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[39] For a demographic analysis of the influence of the Tractarian revival in the Church of England, see John Shelton Reed, Victorian Studies XXXI no. 3 (1988) pp. 375 – 404. As a statement of intent, a document signed by "some of the best laymen", among them W E Gladstone, recognises the need to respond to urban poverty and in the spirit of the Tractarian revival pledges to do so be setting up a sisterhood, so that "England may have...its Sisters of Charity". The consequence of this statement, drawn up in 1845, was "a series of experiments which resulted in many Sisterhoods". H P Liddon, Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1894) vol. 3, pp. 18 -21.

[40] Recognition of class subversion drew from the Rev'd Hobart Seymour, in a lecture given in Bath in April 1852, the description of Lydia Sellon as unladylike and unwomanly. Williams, op.cit, p. 123.

[41] Hall, "Introduction" op.cit, p. 8.

class bias and reveal the tensions of his philosophy is the rebellion against fagging that Tom and East lead, in which "by casting the younger boys in the roles of an oppressed working class, Hughes is able to reconcile his beliefs in human equality and in the hierarchy of the class system." However, the enterprise fails, according to Allen, because what Hughes calls into question is not the tyranny of the class system, but the proper administration of that system.[42] In addition to the identification of a mindset that we suggest is capable of describing Catholicism as effeminate because of its working-class identity (neatly articulated by Hughes in his novel when he equates the symbol of young boys, ie non-sexual males, with working-class aspirations), Allen's analysis of representation raises the issue of class and iconography. Crucial to this subject is the mother-son relationship and the symbolic value of family status.

In an essay on the representation of Jesus as a model of masculinity in Victorian art, Gill identifies within Victorian society an anxiety over gender identity that arises because "the qualities of love and gentleness on which the Christian character was founded were increasingly the preserve of women within the home, and were incompatible with the tasks that middle-class men were called to perform in a competitive capitalist economy."[43] There may be a temptation here to view Victorian society through the lens of a particular class, but one Victorian, F W Farrer, was content to prescribe virtue and gender identity for middle-class men on the basis of working-class experience: "Our Lord wished to show that labour is a pure and noble thing; it is the salt of life; it is the girdle of manliness; it saves the body from effeminate languor."[44] However, that prescription was an ideal that found the reality of working-class life less worthy of commendation.

The task of representation posed troublesome questions for Victorian artists. From the middle of the century the influence of the German rationalists provoked new dilemmas between social sensibilities and theological realism, and their work received English recognition in the publication in 1860 of Essays and Reviews. We have already surveyed the influence of this liberal trend on the understanding of the

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[42] Dennis W Allen, "Young England: Muscular Christianity and the Politics of the Body in 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'" in Hall, (ed.), Muscular Christianity op.cit, pp. 115, 123, 125.
[43] Gill, "*Ecce Homo*" op.cit, p. 166.
[44] F W Farrer, The Life of Christ (London: Cassell, 1874) vol.1 p. 82.

virgin birth,[45] but for artists the questions gather around anxiety over the very point that Mary's virgin motherhood makes so uncomfortably; that the human parenthood of Jesus locates him in the temporal and material context of a poor, artisan Jewish family in which headship is called into question by Mary's sexual autonomy. Gill summarises the matter:

> (The) image of Christ as the hypostatic union of gendered opposites on which the Victorian Christian male was to model his life was further destabilized by ideologies of class, race and sexuality. Both Holman Hunt and Hughes were explicit about their desire to fashion a realistic picture of Christ with which the working class could identify, yet such hegemonizing models of masculinity were premised on middle-class values and assumptions which resulted in reactions of acute discomfort when the physical realities of working-class life obtruded too obviously in their work. The portrayal of Christ as a Palestinian Jew sat uneasily beside the growing strain of Anglo-Saxon Protestant ethnocentrism and imperialism of which Hughes's fellow novelist and Christian Socialist the Rev Charles Kingsley was the leading exponent.[46]

The decision of the Pre-Raphaelites to present an image of Mary the virgin mother that conformed to the requirements of the society in which they lived may have veiled reference to her subversive identity as the virgin mother, but artists had to sell their paintings.[47] What these artists did achieve, however, was an important re-connection with an iconographic tradition, using the symbols associated with Mary that are drawn from the scriptural and apocryphal sources for patristic and medieval devotion.[48]

It is against the background of the reactions Engelhardt quoted to Italian images of Mary as the virgin mother and their subversive, effeminate, effect that we should set

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[45] See above, pp 36-37.

[46] Gill, "*Ecce Homo*", op.cit, p. 167.

[47] Sussman observes that "for the male English artist of the early and mid-Victorian period the chief drive, albeit with some conflict about serving the cause of beauty and art, was toward middle-class status as manifested in the amassing of wealth, in marriage as elegant domesticity, and particularly in the manly status to be achieved by inclusion in that new nineteenth-century formation of masculinity, the professional man." Herbert Sussman, Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art (C.U.P., 1995) p. 114. It would seem, however, that the Pre-Raphaelites were willing (or sufficiently secure financially and socially) to risk a degree of unpopularity. So a painting as anodyne (in comparison with late medieval treatment of the same subject) as Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, the annunciation, was met with hostility when exhibited in April 1850. Christopher Wood, The Pre-Raphaelites (London, Cassell, 2000) p.17.

[48] For example, *The Annunciation* by Arthur Hughes (1858) shows Mary interrupted while spinning scarlet thread, an allusion that is also evident in Holman Hunt's connection of Mary with the passion and the rending of the veil of the temple for which the scarlet thread had been used. Similarly, Burne-Jones's 1887 *The Annunciation* shows Mary at the well. Both references, scarlet thread and the well, are from the Protoevangelium (X:1, XI:1). *See figures 27 and 28.*

the Pre-Raphaelites' work, among them, and much commented on, "The Carpenter's Shop" by John Millais. As with any painting, a variety of readings is possible. Our interest is in the Pre-Raphaelites' handling of how to represent Mary in a way that satisfied the requirements of Victorian sensitivities towards gender and class but which thereby neutralised Mary's subversive power as virgin mother. The potency of sexual identity is problematic for religious art in the representation of both Mary and Jesus. Herbert Sussman observes that artistic concentration on the childhood of Jesus is a means by which the Pre-Raphaelites were able to overcome the difficulty of "presenting Jesus as a manly man, that is, as a sexual male", although this also has its problems, since before puberty, "within the Victorian notion of childhood, gender is not yet imposed."[49] Thus, as with Tom Brown's Schooldays, conflicting theoretical interests threaten the coherence of the discourse.[50]

The treatment of Mary is more subtle in its eradication of sexual potency. The most obvious statement is in the title of the picture itself: "Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)".[51] Here the dominance of Joseph is alluded to immediately, and the structure of the Victorian patriarchal household is established. The reference to Joseph is also dominant in the detail of the painting, particularly as it is revealed by the changes to the presentation of Mary made between the study for the painting and its completion. In both it is Joseph who holds the wounded hand, possibly an allusion to the passion, for which his carpenter's craft and the allusion of wood and nails, is preparing the boy.[52] In the study, a longer-haired and more feminine boy kisses his mother, embracing her cheek with his unwounded hand, thus drawing the attention away from Joseph. This is rectified in the painting, in which an ambiguous and more distant relationship exists between mother and son. The child

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[49] Sussman, op.cit, pp. 122 – 123.

[50] This tension may becomes more obvious when an artist tackles the representation of the adult figure of Jesus. Gill notes that motivated by the need to make some accommodation of the ideal of heterosexuality and marriage for which Jesus is required to stand as the paradigm, Holman Hunt's "The Shadow of Death" presents not an "erasure but rather a sublimation of erotic male energy...and provides one more element making for the destabilization and disintegration of the iconic image of masculinity which the picture seeks to project." Gill, "Ecce Homo", op.cit, p. 174.

[51] *See figure 29.*

[52] D G Rossetti solves the problem of relation between the passion, the boyhood of Jesus and his place in a patriarchal household, in his unfinished painting "The Preparation for the Passover in the Holy Family" by locating Mary and Jesus in the house of Zachariah and Elizabeth. Here Jesus (modelled on a local English schoolboy) stands centrally in the canvas. In the act of bending to gather herbs, Mary bends in homage before him, while Zechariah asserts his mastery of the household by taking blood from the bowl Jesus is holding and painting it on the lintel of the house. Leslie Parris, (ed.), The Pre-Raphaelites (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994) p. 274.

has withdrawn his unwounded hand and presses it in self-containment to himself, a gesture that may suggest the emergence of a "manly" Jesus, freed from dependency on his mother. The mother holds her cheek towards him, looking as though she is expecting a kiss, but now the boy momentarily seems to draw back. Whatever stage of maturity or future self-understanding the picture alludes to, it portrays what Sussman describes as "a normative model of bourgeois manhood, an idealized family as economic unit and centre of affective life."[53] What it denies is the capacity of Mary the virgin mother to undermine that class structure.

In his review of "The Carpenter's Shop" the point that Dickens seeks to make is as much a polemic against the "dread Tribunal" of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as any assessment of the artistic merit of the painting in which he finds "all elevating thoughts" exchanged for "the lowest depths of what is mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting."[54] Other reviewers followed suit.[55] The treatment of Mary in "The Carpenter's Shop" provides us with the indication of a degree of imbalance in the Victorian understanding of the person of Jesus, since, for all its interest in historicity, it seeks to eliminate the disturbing detail of Jesus' relation to Mary as virgin mother. Had the expression in art form of that relationship been accessible to Millais and acceptable to his viewers, it would surely have given "The Carpenter's Shop" something of the heavenly and mysterious quality of the incarnation that Dickens and his fellow reviewers so robustly claimed that the painting denied.

Surveying the debate, Gill makes a comparison with Holman Hunt's "The Shadow of the Cross" which was generally more favourably received.[56] Gill accounts for this by reference to the treatment of the detail of the dirt and tools in the workshop which Hunt "transfigured into reverence and devotion by means of allusive symbolic references to the passion."[57] Although the dirt of "The Carpenter's Workshop" may have been its undoing (irrespective of Dickens' ironic acknowledgement that the shavings were "admirably painted") Sussman points out that the use of "mimetic skills" was a conscious attempt by the artist to "differentiate this art from the

[53] Sussman, op.cit, p. 125.
[54] Charles Dickens, Household Words, 1 (1850), p. 265.
[55] The Saturday Review, 36 (December, 1873) pp. 727- 728; The Spectator, 46 (1873), p 1498, quoted by Gill, *"Ecce Homo"*, op.cit, p. 172.
[56] *See figure 30.*
[57] Gill, loc.cit.

medieval style associated with the unmanly Tractarians" and "the unmanly painterly styles of the past and present associated with monastic celibacy."[58]

An interest in the "effect of the real" is therefore motivated not by a desire for the projection of labour as in itself manly and sanctified by Jesus (to which Dickens and others took such strong exception), but by the search for a presentation of Christian faith devoid of unmanly piety. And just as Millais' painting offered no subversive account of the virgin motherhood of Mary, so Hunt's "The Shadow of the Cross" also reinforces the notions of gender, race and class that are typical of the school of muscular Christianity, and places Mary in a position in the composition of the painting that lead a critic in the Saturday Review, among others, to interpret "the portrayal of the Virgin, back to the spectator, as an anti-Romanist gesture.[59] In the quest for historicity that was a consequence of liberal biblical scholarship, the portrayal of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph would be determined by hostility towards the baroque and "effeminate" Catholic piety on the one hand, and the realism of Jewishness on the other.[60]

It is, then, unsurprising that Hunt should have chosen an English schoolboy to pose for "The Finding of Christ in the Temple",[61] since "painstaking attempts to recreate the Jesus of history would result in a portrait of him as a Palestinian Jew, a figure alien to the sympathies of the Victorian public."[62] Gill describes the treatment of race as a "kind of cultural docetism", a phrase that in relation to our interest in Mary as virgin mother accurately identifies not only her capacity to subvert through her guardianship of the essential elements that define the person of the incarnate word of

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[58] Sussman, op.cit, p. 120.

[59] But Hunt's memoirs later explain that only her "direct glance at the shadow gave the tragedy of the idea." Parris, op.cit, p. 223.

[60] After arriving in the Holy Land in 1869 Hunt read Renan's *Vie de Jesus* but records that it did not shake his Christian belief. ibid, p. 221.

[61] However, a note on the ethnic and historical study in preparation for the painting maintains that no Jewish sitter "could be persuaded to model for Christ." Parris, ibid, p. 159.

[62] Gill, "*Ecce Homo*", op.cit, p. 174. As a comment on the prevailing culture of the second half of the nineteenth century, Newsome maintains that the upper classes in England "were saturated with imperialist notions and...welcomed the spirit of aggressive patriotism which helped to allay their fears of German militarism and foreign commercial and industrial rivalry." Newsome, op.cit, p. 201. In this context, the identification of Marian devotion as foreign (reinforced by the Ultramontane spirit of English Roman Catholicism in the latter part of the century) might be taken to account for hostility towards those who propagated it, continuingly dismissed by the pejorative "effeminate".

God who is fully human and divine.[63] Mary points to the theological truth of the reality of the flesh of Jesus that has a defined historical identity as male, Jewish and probably artisan. A review in the Athanaeum recognises that the balance of "skin tone" Hunt achieves in "The Shadow of the Cross" offers the Victorian viewer reassuring compromise in the handling of racial identity, depicting "the ruddy hue of the race of men to which Christ belonged, the fairness of civilization, and the inner golden tint which delights all flesh painters."[64]

The recognition that these works of art present a specifically constructed image of Mary does not distinguish them from any other presentations of her that we have considered. Our interest here is rather in the motive for the particular construction that is under consideration. We perceive it to be an extension into the artistic imagination of those attitudes towards Mary that regarded her virgin motherhood as subversive of the patriarchal structures of Victorian family life and society. That attitude regarded devotion to Mary as "effeminate" since it was practiced by those who held a station in life or an outlook that was to be pitied and suspected of sympathies disloyal to the swell of imperial expansion to which muscular Christianity had lent support. But the Christian and social hegemony for which the novelists Kingsley and Hughes strove failed to materialise as secularism advanced and notions of manliness were called into question.[65]

We have explored two examples of Victorian "unmanliness" (virginity and class), in order to discover ways in which Mary's virgin motherhood has functioned subversively. In this exploration our attention has been focused on the cultural forces of literature and art. Though these cultural forces may have been in sympathy with the declared theological position of the Victorian Church, they were not its official organs. In order to explore a third example, we turn to a consideration of how the nineteenth century Church (Anglican and Roman Catholic) propounded its own cultural forces, of which Mary the virgin mother also proved to be subversive influence.

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[63] See above, p. 15.
[64] Athanaeum, 56 (29 November 1873), p 703, quoted by Gill, *"Ecce Homo"*, op.cit, p. 174.
[65] "In the 1860s godliness was veering towards manliness; at the same time, good learning was passing into the hands of the agnostics...the young men were reading J S Mill, listening to T H Green, emulating the ways of Walter Pater." Newsome, op.cit, p. 228.

3. Examples of unmanliness: Inversion

a) In Roman Catholicism

"The story told by the ignorant little girl, and the wonders wrought by the slender stream which have flowed from the rock beneath her hands, have gone further to confound the objections of the sceptical criticism which calls itself modern thought, than the arguments of the most learned apologists or the most subtle theologians."[66] With these words a pilgrim on the first English pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1883 described, perhaps unwittingly, the extent to which the apparition to Bernardette inverted the power-base of Roman Catholic acceptance of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. After 1858, the year of the apparition, it was not merely papal authority that defined that understanding of Marian privilege, but the testimony of one simple girl about another.

Writing on the history of English Catholicism in the nineteenth century, Edward Norman identifies a degree of tension between the Catholic hierarchy and more liberal Catholic lay opinion. As the Vatican Council of 1869 – 1870 approached, that tension focused on the question of papal infallibility. Norman observes that in England, "as a symbol of the 'Roman' influence of the nineteenth century Ultramontanes... the issue of Infallibility only too easily came to appear as a weapon of neo-triumphalism in a Papacy anxious to exercise a spiritual autocracy over a world which had stood aside while the temporal patrimony of the Church was stripped away."[67] The view of the Catholic community in an essentially non-Catholic country may assist us in making an assessment of the power politics that surrounded the First Vatican Council and led to the declaration of papal infallibility. As Norman records, following a similar observation by Cardinal Manning, "the immediate stimulus to the cause of definition (of papal infallibility) came not from the fate of the Temporal Power but from the definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854."[68]

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[66] Anonymous pamphlet, The English Pilgrimage to Lourdes, May 1883, By one of the Pilgrims (London: Burns and Oates, 1993) p. 4.
[67] Edward Norman, The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) p. 306.
[68] ibid, p. 307.

The definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pius IX could therefore be regarded as a more extreme form of the appropriation of Mary for the demonstration of papal power than the re-definition of her in the art of the baroque or the Iberian missions. It is in this context that we should set the apparition at Lourdes and the personal quality of Bernadette who was its recipient. Ruth Harris provides the following description of the plight of the Soubirous family: a "cycle of indebtedness, dispossession, malnutrition and disease that afflicted so many. They were forced first to leave two mills and reduced to living in the *cachot*, the old Lourdes prison, picking up what work they could. Bernardette, struck down in 1855 by cholera, became permanently asthmatic and weakened."[69] As with the profile of the *beatas* that we noted in the previous chapter,[70] the identification by Bernardette of the Immaculate Conception in her apparitions[71] draws into contrast with the male ethos of the hierarchy and the papacy the power of one girl (as a child, also characterised unselfconsciously by virginity) to claim and authenticate this statement of Christian faith.

The harsh incredulity and subsequent domination of Bernardette by her parish priest, Abbé Dominique Payramale,[72] prompts Harris to call into question the Abbé's belief in the veracity of the apparitions for any reason other than his own "enhanced status".[73] Whatever Peyramale might have gained, it was to be at the cost of the recognition that the power that made his gain possible came in fact from a source beyond his control.[74] Harris's assessment points to precisely the ambiguous function that we have already associated with Mary, in a form of subversion that reveals a

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[69] Ruth Harris, Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age (London: Allen Lane, 1999) p. 29. In a subsequent apparition, Mary appeared in Banneux, Belgium in 1933 to the 11 year old Mariette Beco, the daughter of an unemployed wire maker. Here poverty was a significant element in the apparition, with Mary telling Mariette, "I am the Virgin of the Poor." Anonymous pamphlet, The Virgin of the Poor: Apparitions of Our Lady at Banneux in 1933 (London: Caritas Banneux ND, 1964) p. 10.

[70] See above, pp. 171-173.

[71] For an account of Bernardette's description of the apparitions see, H C Husenbeth, Our Blessed Lady of Lourdes: A Faithful Narrative of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Rocks of Massabielle, Near Lourdes (London: Robert Washbourne, 1870)

[72] ibid, p. 34

[73] Harris, op.cit, p. 151.

[74] From a survey of twenty-two Marian apparitions ranging (with the exception of Guadalupe in the sixteenth century) from the vision of Catherine Labouré in 1830 throughout the rest of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ingo Swann observes that "the seers of the Lady herself are relatively few in number. In all cases, the seers have been children or educationally challenged adults." Ingo Swann, The Great Apparitions of Mary: An Examination of Twenty-Two Supranormal Appearances (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996) p. 11.

distinctive and female authority: "Women defended the miraculous and forced the men to take account of it. What is astonishing throughout is how little impact male figures of authority actually had, as examining physicians, the police commissioner, the prefect, the imperial prosecutor and many others came up against this resolute phalanx of women believers determined to see the apparitions sanctified."[75]

As a weapon in the armoury of ecclesiastical politics, the definition of the Immaculate Conception could be regarded as a masculinisation of Mary. As such it could be described as the theological articulation of the conquering fervour of the Iberian missions, or the older and more inconsistent employment of Mary in the justification of violence against the Jews. However, Bernardette's testimony, far from colluding with that masculinisation, undermines it with the inescapable requirement that the authority of her word be recognised as a significant validation of the newly defined doctrine. In this inversion of spiritual power, Mary's virgin motherhood is re-asserted through a renewed identification of Mary with experience at the margins of life and society. Evidence of this congruity between the virgin motherhood and marginal experience is clearly defined in the history of Marian devotional art.

Karma Lockrie notes that in late medieval art there is an emphasis on hysteria, citing the example of a lamentation group, dated to about 1465 in S Maria della Vita in Bologna,[76] and the work of Rupert of Deutz who saw a close connection between Mary's sorrow and her maternity, describing Mary's sorrow at Calvary as birth pangs, "because they were truly the pains of a woman in labour."[77] Here at death, the margin of life, and at the margins of the human emotion of grief, Mary's motherhood is graphically conveyed. A hundred years later the portrayal of hysteria at the cross is superseded by the dominance of Mary as an altogether more dispassionate figure. The Mary that emerges from the pages of the Counter-Reformation texts fits the assessment of her by Ian Maclean as a woman who "incarnates certain moral virtues which are consistent with the social and religious role of women...but (she) does not ever become a model of behaviour, so remote is

[75] Harris, op.cit, p. 359.
[76] Karma Lochrie, Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1991) pp. 189, 190.
[77] ibid, p. 180.

she from others of her sex"[78], but remote also, we might add, from others who experience human emotion. Functioning as an expression of the authority, vested almost exclusively in men, of the Roman Catholic Church, does Maclean intuit some subtle extent to which Mary is 'masculinised' through that role? Further consideration of the images in devotional art suggest that this might be so.

The figure of Joseph is an obvious example of the way in which a shift of emphasis in the constructed image of Mary provokes in a similarly constructed image the transformation of gender identity. Rosemary Drage Hale points out that in the fifteenth century Joseph is transformed from the elderly clowning figure of the mystery plays into a younger man who can function as the paradigm of behaviour for married men. Hale accurately describes an image of Joseph that is typical of most subsequent devotional representation: "Not only is Joseph widely depicted in the 'Madonna pose', standing alone and embracing the Christ child; he is depicted with the lily, an emblem of purity."[79] But what is the motive for Joseph's refashioning?

Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell provide an account of the significant increase in the number of women saints in the two hundred years leading up to the reformation era. Although women saints were still dramatically fewer in number than men saints[80] the prominence not only of Mary the virgin mother, but also of other kindred women saints,[81] provided the fifteenth century with an impression of sanctity that closely associated human and spiritual virtues with women. Weinstein and Bell account for the subsequent decline of women saints in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with reference to the character of the Counter-Reformation as "the re-affirmation of hierarchical, that is to say, of male, authority... Even the upsurge of new religious orders emphasized authority, hierarchy, and distance from the laity."[82]

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[78] Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the fortunes of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life (C.U.P., 1980) p. 23.

[79] Rosemary Drage Hale, "Joseph as Mother: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Construction of Male Virtue" in John Carmi Parsons and Bonni Wheeler (eds.), Medieval Mothering (London: Garland, 1996) p. 102. Hale's assertion that like Mary, "Joseph is often represented wearing a crown" deserves only cautious acceptance.

[80] Of the saints in their analysis, Weinstein and Bell record 27.7% in the fifteenth century, falling to 14.4% in the seventeenth century. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000 – 1700 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 220.

[81] See above, pp. 67-69, 114.

[82] Weinstein and Bell, op.cit, p, 225.

It would be possible, therefore to read the growth of devotion to Joseph as anticipating this re-affirmation of male authority.

However, the development of the Joseph cult may also be indicative of a reaction that connects with more contemporary issues. This is a reaction in which we are able to see the inversion of notions of unmanliness. For example, a dominant female profile may pose a challenge to masculine identity; is it possible that the feminisation of the figure of Joseph is a response to that challenge? Is this feminisation evidence of a complex reaction that senses in the power-wielding professionalism of Mary's position as heavenly mediatrix, a loss of something or someone identifiably and accessibly human and female? With the perceived loss of this aspect of the construction of Mary's identity, is Joseph advanced as the figure who can bear that accessible identity and the qualities perceived as female qualities attached to it?

The image of Joseph, however, is a mixed one. Joseph's appropriation of the Christ child might also be read as a statement of patriarchal authority and an outcome that is paralleled by the modern experience of a custody battle following divorce, a subject that features in contemporary popular fiction.[83] But in Joseph's appropriation of the child, as in the fictional representation of real life, the male parent is required to assume the role of both father and mother. Joseph's assimilation of this more female aspect of parenthood is represented by both the Mary-like caress of the child, and the lily with which he is often depicted, a symbol that features in the traditions associated with both Mary and Joseph and represents purity, a quality that Mary determines as integral to the character of earthly parenthood of Jesus.[84]

The late medieval formation of the Joseph figure that governs subsequent devotional imaging of him can thus be read as a statement of the patriarchal claim to authority.

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[83] Perhaps the best known example that was made into an innovative film on the subject is Avery Corman, Kramer v. Kramer (London: Fontana, 1979). A more contemporary English example of the genre is Tony Parsons, Man and Boy (London: HarperCollins, 2000).

[84] On the emergence of devotion to Joseph an exemplar of the head of the family, see above pp. 121-124 and *figures 15 and 16.* For a later representation of maternal aspects of Joseph's parenting, *Saint Joseph and the Christ* Child by Giambattista Tiepolo (1767) *see figure 31*, noting allusions to the flowering rod (Murillo included Marian references in the rod, depicting it as flowering with a lily and roses, *figure 15*) and the book, which we have also identified as associated with Mary as a reference to her fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and revealing of the word made flesh in the New Testament.

But it can also be a statement of the projection onto an accessible figure of an image of human and mundane parenthood that did not seem quite so appropriate for the increasingly distant figure of Mary, less often portrayed in her maternal relationship with Jesus as a child. Thus the inversion of iconography in the constructed images of Mary and Joseph in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be read as a paradigm of a contemporary debate about who looks after the child in a marriage in which both parents have a professional career.

Although images of Mary and Joseph may to a certain extent compete over their parental relation to Jesus as a child, the point at which Marian devotion had most powerfully expressed the compassion of Mary the virgin mother for her son was the 'marginal' experience of the crucifixion.[85] But it may be possible to discern a development in baroque art, consequent upon its new presentation of Mary, that, again, suggests a degree of inversion in the presentation of parental gender identity at that moment. As the definition and exaltation of Mary's powerful purity subsumes her capacity for maternal compassion and grief, so that capacity emerges in an increasingly tender portrayal of the relationship between God the Father and God the crucified Son. The traditional devotional image of the *pietá* provides the example of this shift of emphasis.

As a feature of north European devotion, the popular medieval figure of the *pietá* features little in renaissance and baroque art, although in addition to Michelangelo's famous retrospective example in St Peter's in Rome there are examples of the subject in the work of the Mannerists. In a study of Florentine Counter-Reformation work in S Maria Novella and S Croce, Marcia Hall provides examples that include Jacopo da Pontormo's "Deposition" in S Felecita, (1526), but we should note that Mary stands and is not in physical contact with Jesus.[86] There is also a complex *Pietá* by Giorgio Vasari (1548) in which the figure of Mary is crowded out by the throng around her, and a work by Agnolo Bronzino (a *Pietá* painted in Florence in 1545), which shows greater affinity with the medieval treatment of the subject and Hall notes that

[85] See above, p. 66.
[86] Marcia B Hall, Renovation and Counter-Reformation: Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta Maria Novella and Sta Croce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p. 41; see plate 17.

"Bronzino responded with extreme sensitivity to the tensions and uncertainties of the religious climate in his time"[87].

However, in about 1575 Girolamo Macchietti painted a "Trinity" for the Risaliti Chapel in S Croce, Florence, that survives only in drawing form, but like a *pietá* depicts the dead body of Jesus that is clasped not by Mary his mother, but by God the Father. Macchietti's painting was subsequently replaced in 1592 by one of similar construction by Ludovico Cigoli.[88] In a guide to research on Albrecht Durer, Jane Campbell Hutchison cites an article by Anna Maria Petrioli Tofani in which she "attributes a sixteenth century drawing of the Trinity to Cigoli, and points out that its composition was inspired by Durer's 1511 woodcut of the same theme."[89] Durer's woodcut is a more fluid rendering of the subject that he was also to complete as a painting in 1511, but in which the formal construction of the crucifixion held by God the Father on his knees evokes a more common medieval theme. The greater emphasis on realism in the woodcut, as God the Father holds the dead body of Jesus in his arms, re-invents the *pietá* as a familiar image of compassion, but with an entirely male iconography.[90]

Of Durer's completed painting Lionello Venturi observes that it is "a vision of heaven with two distinct horizons" and that "just as survivals from the Gothic had helped to modify the style of the Renaissance and point the way towards Mannerism and the Baroque, so medieval tradition, but for the obstacle of humanism, would certainly have been enlisted in the service of the Counter-Reformation."[91] Durer's

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[87] Hall, op.cit, p. 41; see plate 22.
[88] ibid, p. 93 note 1; see plate 81.
[89] Jane Campbell Hutchison, Albrecht Durer: A Guide to Research (London: Garland Publishing 2000) p. 307 note 844.
[90] William Kurth (ed.), The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Durer (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949) p. 264.
[91] Lionello Venturi, Renaissance Painting From Leonardo to Durer (London: Macmillan, 1979) p 101; cf illustration, p. 99. Venturi's reference to "distinct horizons" identifies an artistic device that we noted above (p. 161, note 147) was employed by Reni and Cortona to accentuate Mary's accession into a separate, self-contained zone; in this respect, the Counter-Reformation marks the medieval tradition with its own character context that takes liturgical drama into the world of grand theatre. *See figure 32.* For a comparison with Macchieti and Cigoli's treatment of Durer's woodcut, see El Greco's *The Trinity* (1577- 1579) that develops his slightly earlier *Pietá*: Philip Troutman, El Greco (London: Hamlyn, 1967) plates 9, 6. When El Greco's *Trinity* is located in its context of the altarpiece of the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, in Toledo, the reference to the Assumption of Mary below it deepens the suggestion of gender and person transference, as Mary is depicted with the outstretched arms that in the older medieval representations of the Trinity had been the gesture by which God the Father held the crucified body of his Son. *See figure 33 and 34.* As evidence of the

treatment of the subject of the deposition could thus be interpreted as the re-working of a familiar image.

Leo Steinberg traces the origin of this way of depicting the Trinity to mid-fifteenth century Flemish painting, and the work of Robert Campin or Roger van der Weyden,[92] while in his major study of the masters of this School, Erwin Panofsky provides further documentation, and an assessment that concludes, "however much indebted to the past, (they) belong to the modern times."[93] The treatment of their subject matter by the early Flemish School thus points us forward to the trends that we have already detected in the figures inhabiting the distinct horizons of earth and heaven portrayed by the huge frescoes and canvasses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[94]

What is of interest in these early images of the Trinity depicted in this form is that as he is held in the arms of God the Father, Jesus is always shown with his hand, (normally his right hand) holding the wound in his side.[95] Panofsky traces the origin of this gesture to the influence of Master Franke and locates it in the context of judgement.[96] But the peripheral details that suggest the identification with judgement are absent from many versions of this image, perhaps allowing another association, that of Jesus with Mary, to be read from this gesture that symbolizes and elicits compassion.

However, an amount of circumstantial evidence directs us towards an implied association between Mary and Jesus in, for example, the remaining wings of a triptych from a church dedicated to Mary, the Frauenkirche in Frankfort-on-the-

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influence, Troutman notes (p.25) that the influence for this painting is Rome and the Michelangelo *Pietá* that is now in Florence. *See figure 35.*

[92] Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion (New York: Pantheon, 1983) pp. 197 – 199. *See figure 36, compare figure 37.*

[93] Erwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origin and Character (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958) vol. 1, p. 151.

[94] See above, p. 167-169.

[95] Panofsky, op.cit, vol. 2, plates 93, 95. See also a later example in the work of the Master of Alkmaar in Jan Piet Filedt Kok and Annemiek Overbeek,(eds.), Netherlandish Art in the Rijksmuseum 1400 – 1600 (Amsterdam: Waanders, 2000) p. 83.

[96] "At Doomsday Christ will 'show his bitter wounds to all mankind saying: Behold what I have suffered for you; what have you suffered for me?'" Panofsky, op.cit, vol. 1 pp. 123 – 124.

Main.[97] The two wings when open show a figure of Veronica on one side and a figure of Mary suckling the Christ child on the other. On the reverse of the Veronica wing is a figure of the Trinity, God the Father holding the dead body of his son, thus effecting in Passiontide when the wings were closed a link between the two images of compassion, through which instincts thought to be maternal are transferred from the female to the male.[98]

The reason for this review of the treatment of the theme of maternal compassion is that it indicates how the religious art in the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation drew from medieval sources to produce images of compassion, and applied them across gender boundaries when it seemed appropriate to do so. Our point is that Mary the virgin mother,[99] herself undergoes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a transformation in artistic presentation that dominates much subsequent Catholic devotion. Becoming a figure of absolute purity less obviously contaminated by the emotions and physicality of motherhood, she loses those

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[97] Panofsky, op.cit, vol. 2, plate 93. Of this Trinity by the Master of Flemalle, Panofsky observes, "The picture is as harsh in treatment as it is tender in sentiment." (ibid, vol. 1, p. 169) In the detail of the wings (which alone survive) of another altarpiece Mary is shown seated in an annunciation pose in one wing, and in the other John the Baptist and the donor are represented. Above Mary there is shown a statue of God the Father standing and holding in front of him a crucifix. In the other wing Mary is depicted above a doorway, holding on her right side the Christ child. A roof beam slightly obscures the child, but the inference could reasonably be drawn from other work by the Master of Flemalle that Mary is suckling the child. (ibid, vol. 2, plate 97) A further link between these images is suggested by the Master of Flemalle's "Salting Madonna" which is in the National Gallery, London. (ibid, vol. 2, plate 90), *see figure 38.* Mary is shown offering her right breast to the Christ child who reclines on her lap, and her left elbow rests on a cabinet next to a chalice. Panofsky describes this symbol as a "discordant note" and questions its authenticity. (ibid, vol. 1, p. 163) However, as Carol Walker Bynum has pointed out, the connection between blood and milk was a familiar one in medieval devotion; "What writers of the high Middle Ages wished to say about Christ the saviour who feeds the individual soul with his own blood was precisely and concisely said in the image of the nursing mother whose milk *is* her blood, offered to the child." Bynum, op.cit, p. 133.

[98] The connection is not a novel one; Catherine Oakes comments on its origin as an illustration from the fourteenth century Dominican work, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, and observes that in this convention, "the Virgin cupping her breast in her hand is reflected by Christ cupping his wound in exactly the same position." Catherine Oakes, "Reflections on the Iconography of the Virgin as a Figure of Divine Mercy in Medieval Art" in Martin Warner (ed.), Say Yes to God: Mary and the Revealing of the Word Made Flesh (London: Tufton Books, 1999) p. 88. *See figure 39 and 40.* Avril Henry notes that due to financial constraints some versions of the *Speculum* (The Mirour of Man's Saluacioun) were printed without illustrations, but generally "the pictures are not merely decorative adjuncts to the text, they form an important part of the pattern of ideas presented to the reader." Avril Henry (ed.) The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun: A Middle English translation of *Speculum Humanis Salvationis* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1986).

[99] In her study on Jesus as mother Bynum defines the area of her research not only to a particular period, but also to a specific, monastic culture. Although our interest is in a late period of Christian history, and a wider cultural setting, the recognition of the transfer of maternal imagery across genders is indicative of the ambiguity inherent in the identity of Mary as virgin mother. Bynum, op.cit, pp. 112 – 113.

attributes that had been identified as characteristic of her female nature, provoking the transference of that emotional, compassionate identity onto other, male figures (Joseph and God the Father).

Thus, turning our attention again to the apparition to Bernardette, we see in the re-identification of Mary with that young girl's marginal social status a recovery of the location in which Mary's virgin motherhood is most readily understood. The emphasis on the purity of Mary, acknowledged in the figure of her drawn from Bernardette's vision, is made relative by its new location in a context of extreme poverty and subsequent promotion of ministry to another marginal grouping, the sick. The subversive effect is the inversion of authority that invites an understanding of Mary the virgin mother as the sign not of absolute power, but of strength in weakness.

b) In the Church of England

The Church of England experienced a similar kind of inversion in the nineteenth century as a result of the consternation that was caused in the heartland of the establishment by the spread of ritualism. Although the legal battles centred largely on the interpretation and use of the Book of Common Prayer in worship, the recognition of Mary and the saints in Christian devotion, in paintings, stained glass windows, statues, and banners,[100] formed an integral part of what was regarded as the Romanizing of the Church of England.[101] With the direct encouragement of Queen Victoria, the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 passed through Parliament onto the statute book.[102] However, ritualism continued to spread.

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[100] In the *Directorium Anglicanum* "a figure of our Blessed Lady, either bearing her holy child in her lap, or represented as crowned in glory" is recommended for representation on a banner, together with "paintings and images of our Lord, our Lady, the Angels and Saints" as ornaments of the church. Frederick Lee, (ed.), The *Directorium Anglicanum* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1865) 2nd edition, pp. 264, 272.

[101] L E Ellsworth notes that "the points at issue this time were lighted candles, undue elevation, processions with crucifix, banners and candles, the *Agnus Dei*, the sign of the cross, kissing the Prayer Book, wafer bread, vestments and the eastward position." L E Ellsworth, Charles Lowder and the Ritualist Movement (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982) p. 128.

[102] P T Marsh, The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England 1868 – 1882 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 185: Marsh quotes a letter from Disraeli to the Queen: "If this blow is dealt against the Sacerdotal school, it will be entirely through the personal will of the Sovereign." Lord Penzance, the judge appointed to preside over the court that was brought into existence by the Act, had formerly presided over the divorce court, in view of which, a radical paper,

In 1877, Arthur Tooth was imprisoned for ritualist offences under the PWR Act. P T Marsh records that after Tooth's departure from his parish of St James, Hatcham, the newly appointed protestant Churchwarden set about ridding the church of popery; he "destroyed the altar in the Lady Chapel and pulled down the crucifix in the centre of the church".[103] But of greater importance was the public perception of what Tooth's imprisonment (and ultimate loss of his living) meant. Bernard Palmer assesses the imposition of a prison sentence in these terms: "Tooth's committal to gaol changed him in a flash, in the eyes of many, from rebel priest to Christian martyr." In a survey of the attitude of the press reports towards Tooth's imprisonment, Palmer demonstrates the extent to which the exercise of the force of law and authority by the established Church resulted in the inversion of moral and spiritual authority in Tooth's favour.[104]

It would be misleading to make too close an identification between Tooth's position at the margins of the life of the Church of England (which resulted largely from his insistence on the ritual of the eucharist for the sake of the doctrine of the real presence) and the subversive effect of Marian devotion, but there is sufficient association between them for legitimate reference to be made.[105] That reference may, however, carry a more complex message that raises again the extent to which the image of Mary functions as a signifier of gender construction and its inversion.

In the conclusion to her study on Tooth and his imprisonment Joyce Coombs offers some observations on the reasons for hostility towards ritualism. She describes these as belief that it was foreign to the English way of life and disloyal to the Queen and

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the Examiner declared that the "adulterous connection between the Church and the State" (John Bright) would similarly be dissolved by his appointment (p. 189).

[103] Marsh, op.cit, p. 228. Later that same year Lord Redesdale raised an objection in the House of Lords to a book entitled The Priest in Absolution, and among other things Redesdale cited the book's reference to Mary: "Another doctrine of the Church of England is that there is but one mediator between God and man. What does this book say? 'To think of the ever-virgin Mary and her purity, and to beseech God to hear her intercession on behalf of those who long for likeness to her immaculate example.'" Hansard's Parliamentary Debates CCXXXIV vol. 3, 1743 – 1744.

[104] Bernard Palmer, Reverend Rebels: Five Victorian Clerics and their Fight against Authority (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993) pp. 133 - 134.

[105] For example, Arthur Wagner, whose enthusiastic establishment of devotion to Mary in his Brighton churches is described below, preached for Tooth at St James's, Hatcham. Wagner only rarely preached outside his own parish. H Hamilton Maughan, Some Brighton Churches (London: Faith Press, 1922) p. 29.

Parliament. But possibly more perceptive is her comment on Anglo-Catholicism's portrayal in fiction as "a tainted and subversive influence, destructive of human relationships and leading to an early death; as in Ada and Martin Chester's case described in the novel *High Church.* The nameless author quotes Cowper's words on the title page:

> ...Foppish airs,
> And histrionic mummery, that let down
> The pulpit to the level of the stage."[106]

The fictional portrayal, however, may convey a remarkably accurate assessment of an aspect of the emotional character of those for whom Mary played an important role in their devotional lives.

Picking up the allusion to foreignness noted by Coombs, David Hilliard, in an article entitled, "Unenglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality", comments: "When the Oxford and Anglo-Catholic Movements are examined as a whole, the hypothesis of the existence of a continuous current of homoerotic sentiment would appear to offer a plausible explanation of a great deal of otherwise mysterious behaviour and comment."[107] Hilliard concludes his article with the recognition that Anglo-Catholicism "provided an environment in which homosexual men could express in a socially acceptable way their dissent from heterosexual orthodoxy and from the Protestant values of those who wielded repressive power in church and state."[108] But Hilliard does not make any connection between his observations and the profile of Mary in Anglo-Catholicism.[109]

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[106] Joyce Coombs, Judgement on Hatcham: The History of a Religious Struggle 1877 – 1886 (London: Faith Press, 1969) p. 242.

[107] David Hilliard, "Unenglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality" Victorian Studies, 25 (1981 – 1982) p. 187.

[108] Hilliard, op.cit, p. 210. Hilliard does not define the society to which this form of dissent was acceptable. It terms of the wider context of Victorian society, it would seem to have been quite unacceptable. But within the society of Anglo-Catholicism an environment (or enclosure) of freedom was made available. The difficulties for those who did not, or could not, for whatever reason, avail themselves of access to this "socially acceptable" dissent are evident in the life of John Addington Symonds, who lived from 1840 to 1893. A L Rowse attributes a series of nervous breakdowns to the gap in Symonds life "between his up bringing and the facts of his own nature." Symonds' mother died when he was four; his father was a Nonconformist, "successful and prosperous...but his lights were conventional and censorious; with the usual male vanity he wanted to make Johnny a version of himself, which the boy was not." A L Rowse, Homosexuals in History: A Study of Ambivalence in Society, Literature and the Arts (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977) pp. 149, 150.

[109] The connection is recognised elsewhere. Newsome outlines the view of Tractarianism, as popularised by Kingsley, as a movement in which "Young men came to the Church for spiritual nourishment and went away perverted: they went away perverted...Scorning all earthly loves, they

However, the observations that have been made in this chapter on the subversive role of Mary the virgin mother enable us to identify a marked similarity with Hilliard's account of homosexual dissent. For example, the protest articulated by Florence Nightingale against a society that had nothing to offer the single woman arose in the context of a denial by the Established Church of acceptance or value in the role of Mary. Nightingale faced a choice, therefore, between marriage and social invisibility.[110] The protest of the Anglo-Catholics equally declared that society and the Church had nothing to offer the single woman or the single man. On the other hand, Mary did have something to offer the person confronted by the containment of "heterosexual orthodoxy": she offered the attraction of a sexually non-threatening woman who could supply the affection of maternal love (often lost to children at an early age through a mother's premature death[111]) and a relational role model of fruitful virginity that is independent of a heterosexual physical relationship.

The assessment of the extent to which ritualism attracted and fostered homosexuality is a complex matter. Part of the difficulty is the anachronistic use of criteria. Reed makes the point that "ritualism's opponents did not know about sublimated homosexuality, but many did sense that there was something not quite *right* about some young Anglo-Catholics."[112] In an essay entitled "The (Re)Gendering of High Anglicanism", Lori Miller seeks to demonstrate that there were Anglo-Catholics (she focuses on Pusey, Neal, and Carter, all married men and founders of religious

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released their frustrated emotions upon saints long dead and upon the Holy Mother of God; renouncing the love of women, they clung to each other." Newsome, op.cit, p. 207.

[110] Janet Beer draws attention to Kate Chopin's novel, The Awakening, in which the theme of subversion is explored through the description of a woman, Edna Pontellier, for whom learning to swim becomes the metaphor for an annunciation-type experience of overshadowing and enlightenment. The experience is essentially sexual, leading Edna, having failed to find fulfilment in a conventional social expression, to drown herself. Beer cites an assessment of Chopin's work that recognises the use of "the language of Catholicism even where she is apparently rejecting its moral and spiritual imperatives, as her work cannot help but be 'symbiotically intertwined' with the values she in 'inverting'." Janet Beer, "Sexuality and Ecstatic Communion in the Short Fiction of Kate Chopin" in Michael Hayes, Wendy Porter, David Tombs, (eds.), Religion and Sexuality (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) pp. 146 – 149.

[111] Two examples mentioned elsewhere in this chapter are John Addington Symonds and Frederick Faber.

[112] Reed, op.cit, p. 223.

communities for women) who attempted "to reproduce conventional norms of masculinity".[113]

But what also emerges from Miller's essay is a sense that her use of terminology lacks historical precision. Although Pusey and Carter may have been "at least one generation removed from the most extravagant Ritualists",[114] they were nonetheless regarded as leading proponents of a movement that even in the middle of the nineteenth century was branded as effeminate and unmanly, for the somewhat technical reasons we have described. Miller's essay may thus provide a useful reminder that some leaders of the ritualist movement clearly conformed to "conventional norms of masculinity" in terms of their own sexuality. It remains evident, however, that many others did not. A more intuitive assessment comes from the Wesleyan, James Rigg, writing at the end of the nineteenth century.

Rigg draws attention to the cradle of Tractarianism as a *locus* often associated with the categories of effeminacy or homosexuality, the latter a term that we should apply with caution to a context in which it would not have been used.[115] Rigg's description links the origins of the Ritualist movement with terms that we have already identified with Mary the virgin mother and spouse, observing that the friendships of "Newman and his circle were passionately deep and warm – more like those of boys in some respects than of men, perhaps still more like those of women who live aloof from the world in the seclusion of mutual intimacy."[116] The simile of boyhood as a description of the "Oxford Apostles"[117] evokes the same image of unmanliness that

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[113] Lori Miller, "The (Re)Gendering of High Anglicanism" in Bradstock, et al. (eds.), Masculinity , op.cit, p. 39.
[114] ibid.
[115] On Kingsley's attitude towards homosexuality, John Maynard notes that it was "still conceived in his day mainly as certain acts rather than as the full identity for which the word "homosexual" would be created at the turn of the century." John Maynard, Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion (C.U.P., 1993) p. 128.
[116] James H Rigg, Oxford High Anglicanism and Its Chief Leaders (London: Charles H Kelly, 1895) p. 108. But R W Church also identified some steel within them. Although the single life might be chosen for utilitarian reasons, Church believed that the first Tractarians also saw it as an expression of priestly sacrifice: "To shrink from it was a mark of want of strength or intelligence, of an unmanly preference for English home life, of insensibility to the general devotion and purity of the saints." Church, op.cit, pp. 369, 370.
[117] Geoffrey Faber's analysis of Newman and Froude draws an even closer comparison with virginity: "Psychology had not yet taught men to look for the roots of spiritual ideals in their animal nature. Love, therefore, was not an object of suspicion...Both Froude and Newman may have derived their ideal of virginity from a homosexual root; but this does not of itself justify us in sneering either at the

we detected in Hughes's Tom Brown's Schooldays as a representation of the working class with whom Marian devotion was associated, while the simile of a women's enclosure or convent is one that became familiar to us in the previous chapter on Mary the virgin spouse.

We have maintained in this study that Tractarian association with Mary the virgin mother did much to undermine Victorian norms of masculinity and the patriarchal household. However, as the nineteenth century draws to a close, the patterns of sexual behaviour and the politics of gender begin to change. This change further undermines the Church of England's ability to remain indifferent to the ambiguous attraction of Mary the virgin mother. Sue Morgan assesses the last two decades of the nineteenth century as a period in which we witness "the rise of an increasingly confident women's movement with its demands for life outside marriage, as well as the emergence of an identifiable homosexual culture." Precipitated by the suspension of the Contagious Diseases Acts, The Church of England reacted to these social trends by establishing in 1883 The Church of England Purity Society under the presidency of Archbishop Benson. Morgan observes that through the work of this organisation and its journal, The Vanguard, the Anglican hierarchy "re-encoded a divinely ordained social order, which enshrined the heterosexual family man."[118]

In the establishment of the CEPS we recognise a well-intentioned strategy to deal with the crisis of the spread of venereal disease and the emergence of new categories of sexual identity. It also sought to tackle a growing crisis of confidence among clergy and men through the promotion of "an incarnational theology which in sacralizing the male form effectively endowed an all-male clergy and CEPS members with a renewed sense of (their) own divine vocation."[119] However, an institution's appropriation of one form of human sexual identity as a buttress for its own authority is a hazardous enterprise.

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ideal or at the condition which gave rise to it." Geoffrey Faber, Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement (London: Faber, 1974) p. 218.

[118] Sue Morgan, "'Writing the Male Body': Sexual Purity and Masculinity in The Vanguard, 1884 – 1894" in Bradstock, et al. (eds.), Masculinity, op.cit, pp. 179, 180.

[119] ibid, p 190.

Earlier in this chapter we suggested that Mary's apparition to Bernardette subverted the Papacy's rigid definition of Mary's identity and its appropriation of her for the enhancement of its own authority. So in a similar way, the Church of England's attempt to define masculinity exclusively in terms of the heterosexual ideal in family life as the route to Christian virtue and "England's greatness",[120] is subverted by those whose devotion to Mary the virgin mother labels them as "effeminate", not only in the technical use of that term, but also more literally as a description of their manner and style ("un-English") and, in our own contemporary terminology, possible sexual orientation.

The enclosure of same-sex friendships, symptomatic of ritualism and its devotion to Mary,[121] thus held the potential to invert the politics of authority in the Church of England.[122] So when the Church of England sought to use its power to suppress the subversive figure of Mary the virgin mother, those at the margins of its life and social convention inverted that power through their appropriation of Mary as a figure who, subconsciously (if we may use this language anachronistically) legitimated their identity and friendships through the ambiguity of her own character. The sexuality of such friendships need not have been physical in expression, and thus Froude may have appropriately used the metaphor of virginity to describe them.[123]

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[120] As The Vanguard proclaimed in 1884: The Vanguard, vol. I, no. IV (October 1884), p. 14, quoted by Morgan, op.cit, p. 186.

[121] Hilliard also gives an account of the enforced "enclosure" of the homosexual world prior to the liberalisation of the 1960s: "Many homosexual men, unmarried and therefore outside the regular family structures, had a strong need for companionship with others like themselves...when pubs and clubs in London were difficult to find and regularly harassed by the police...Within these Anglo-Catholic congregations, homosexual men...could make contact with each other and establish discreet friendships across class barriers." Hilliard, op.cit, p. 209.

[122] The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) attributes the late nineteenth century meaning for the noun 'invert' to its use in psychology to describe "a person who exhibits instincts or behaviour characteristic of the opposite sex" and the Collins English Dictionary (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2000) notes that this is "another word for homosexual". See also Hilliard, op.cit, p. 182: "In the 1880s and 1890s...the word homosexuality entered the English language, largely through the work of Havelock Ellis." Volume 1 of Havelock Ellis's Studies in the Psychology of Sex, dealing with homosexuality, was entitled "Sexual Inversion". It was written in collaboration with John Addington Symonds and published in 1897.

[123] Within this enclosure there is also an element associated with the English Roman Catholicism of the time, particularly among those who converted to it from the Church of England. A prominent example is F W Faber. In a letter to Marchese Leopoldo Bartolommei Faber writes of his conversion to Roman Catholicism at the age of 31 and his devotion to Mary: "Some of the old Catholics say that I shall fall away and become an Apostate, because I push devotion to our Blessed Lady too far." Ronald Chapman identifies the Marian enclosure of virginal love that legitimates the warmth and a-sexual (ie youthful not adult) character of Faber's same-sex friendships as reactionary in origin. Describing the period of Faber's mid-twenties, Chapman writes: "There is the background of the adoring mother suddenly lost. There are the typical highly idealized relationships, the talk of celibacy

Furthermore, Sue Morgan's recognition of the emergence of an identifiable homosexual culture suggests that this inversion within the life of the Church resonated with a wider social trend in society. This is an impression also given by Hilliard's examples of the male friendships that in their association with the literary and artistic world of that time offered new scope for exploration.[124]

One figure in whom the cross currents of sacred and secular inversion can be detected is Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley grew up in Brighton, attending with his sister Mabel the Church of the Annunciation, founded by Arthur Douglas Wagner whose "devotion to the Blessed Virgin manifested itself in nearly everything he did...all his churches were inaugurated, opened or consecrated upon one of her festivals."[125] The Anglo-Catholic connection was maintained in London, where Beardsley found a patron in Alfred Gurney, who, having been a curate in Brighton was subsequently the vicar of St Barnabas, Pimlico.[126] Malcolm Easton identifies the imaginary richness of Catholicism as an early influence on Beardsley's spiritual and artistic temperament, producing what he describes as a "preoccupation with Madonnas and angels holding flaming hearts." The inspiration here is not merely the requirement of his clerical patron: Beardsley thought "naturally in terms of Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers."[127]

The late nineteenth century maelstrom of new sensations in religious and social experience is exemplified in the drawings and personal turmoil that make up Beardsley's short and intense life. Matthew Sturgis comments on the tension in Beardsley between his religious and his artistic interests. In 1892 when a friendship develops with Julian Sampson (whose brother was a curate at St Barnabas, Pimlico),

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and so on. But Faber's manhood, as has been said before, was delayed. He was at this time still an adolescent...Faber came of good, steady, middle-class stock, clergymen, merchants and men of business. Is it to be wondered at that his head was turned by the affection, almost the adoration, of a brilliant aristocratic boy?" Ronald Chapman, Father Faber (London: Burns & Oates, 1961) pp. 149, 48-49.

[124] Hilliard, op.cit, pp. 195 – 200. Maughan, op.cit, p. 31.

[125] Maughan, op.cit, p. 31.

[126] Beardsley was received into the Roman Catholic Church in March, 1897. R A Walker (ed.), A Beardsley Miscellany (London: The Bodley Head, 1949) p. 105. The extent of Beardsley's devotion to Mary (and the expectation therefore of his conversion and that of Mabel) is noted by Malcolm Easton: "Their early acquaintance with the Vicar of St Paul's (Brighton), as well as with Alfred Gurney's Catholic-minded community in Pimlico, had prepared Aubrey and Mabel for devotions to the Madonna of an intensity that...would have made Archbishop Tait's hair stand on end." Malcolm Easton, Aubrey and the Dying Lady (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972) p. 162. *See figure 41.*

[127] ibid, p. 165.

Beardsley becomes interested in the figure of the twin-sexed hermaphrodite and its ambiguous identity. Sampson introduces him into the homosexual world he himself inhabited, although Sturgis maintains Beardsley did not commit himself sexually. The fascination/self-containment of Beardsley's own disposition is expressed by his recognition of a connecting thread of sexuality between virginity and whoredom. Once it had been the Madonna who had filled the public eye: "but today the old Madonna has become the new Magdalen. It is she whom I see and whom I try to describe."[128]

As the categories attached to Mary (virgin, spouse, and mother) are transposed from the religious context into the social, manifesting themselves in new, antithetical forms but exercising in both contexts a subversive influence, Beardsley intuitively identifies in the social and cultural setting something of the power that had been attached to Mary in the devotional context. Bridget Elliott notes in Beardsley's drawings the element of subversion that we have identified with Mary's sexual category of virginity. His women "were drawn from categories of females whose very existence challenged middle-class feminine ideals of the dependent wife and mother, categories ranging from actresses and masqueraders to prostitutes and lesbians...Emancipated females who demanded increasing social, political, educational, and economic opportunities were considered as freakish as those who openly flaunted their sexuality in pursuit of their career. In both cases the prospect of women freeing themselves from traditional restraints threatened mainstream patriarchal power."[129]

From this assessment we could apply the term "freakish" to both devotional and social contexts, to Mary's virginity and the "flaunted sexuality" of women in the changing situations of nineteenth century England. Within the literary world this is also evident, in the assessment, for example, of the work of Christina Rossetti. Tricia Lootens notes that the critic Edmund Gosse made reference to Christina Rossetti's Italian blood, and this, like other aspects of her literary interest and background, is used to spin and thereby sanitise her writing: "As long as Rossetti

[128] Matthew Sturgis, Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography (London: HarperCollins, 1998) pp. 96, 220.
[129] Bridget Elliott, "'New'and not so 'New Women' on the London Stage: Aubrey Beardsley's Yellow Book images of Mrs Patrick Campbell and Réjane" Victorian Studies (31) 1987 p. 34. *See figure 42.*

could be metaphorically removed to the Middle Ages, her marital status was no problem: medieval saints should be chaste, after all. In a late nineteenth-century culture torn by conflicts between the (sometimes radical and feminist) spinster and her enemies, however, suspicion of celibacy rendered claims to the exemplary role of a poet-heroine deeply problematic – particularly, perhaps, when the poet in question wrote so frequently and so passionately from the perspective of single and fallen women."[130]

But in addition to the disturbing sexuality of Rossetti's work, the influence of Marian devotion is also evident in the composition of one of the most popular of Christmas carols, "In the bleak mid-winter". J R Watson describes the details as "sharp and clear as a medieval Book of Hours, or as an early Italian painting", noting that the reference to Mary is simply as "His Mother". But Watson overlooks the equally significant, and more disturbing, line, "in her maiden bliss", which asserts the virgin motherhood of Mary that was so problematic for Victorian religious sentiment.[131] None of this amounts to a claim that the restoration of devotion to Mary was alone instrumental in fostering a movement for women's freedom from the restraints of patriarchal power. However, the symbiosis of subversive movements in both religious and cultural spheres of late nineteenth century England that drew into an ambiguous relationship the categories of gender identity, sexual orientation, and the structure of society ought to be recognised.

The link between effeminacy and Marian devotion is strongly hinted at by Samuel Wilberforce's critical comments about Cuddesdon Theological College: "Our men are too *peculiar* – some, at least, of our best men... I consider it a heavy affliction... that they should walk with a peculiar step, carry their heads at a peculiar angle to the body, and read in a peculiar tone... The tendency to crowd the walls with pictures of the Mater Dolorosa, &c., and their chimney-pieces with crosses, their studies with

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[130] Tricia Lootens, Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization (London: University Press of Virginia, 1996) p. 175. In contrast to the safely married Elizabeth Barrett Browning, canonized retrospectively as the Angel in the House, the future of Rossetti's reputation is questioned by another contemporary critic, Lionel Johnson, for the influence upon her of the "Uranian muse", an ambiguous reference to heavenly and homosexual interest. (p. 169)

[131] J R Watson, The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) pp.. 457, 459.

saints, all offend me."[132] Newsome notes that by the end of the century Cuddesdon was producing "eager, back-slapping curates who were to begin their ministry by working amongst the urban poor in the diocese of Southwark or in large parishes like Portsea and Leeds," identifying their Anglo-Catholic zeal as an expression of the Christian Socialist movement. [133]

But still, at this stage, association with women, sacred or secular, who "flaunted sexuality" was regarded within the Church of England as dangerous. Stewart Headlam, a leading figure in the Christian Socialist movement, founded The Church and Stage Guild in 1879, but one of his committed supporters "squirmed" at the expression of Headlam's "anti-puritan" views evident in his interest in music hall dancers,[134] while Headlam's decision to stand bail for Oscar Wilde and accompany him to the third of his trials provoked outrage, even among Catholic-minded Christian Socialists.[135]

The controversial life of a figure like Stewart Headlam is evidence that within the Church of England a subversive movement, of which Mary the virgin mother was a potent symbol, was beginning to encourage single women and men to seek *inter alia* an alternative to the established norm of marriage, and the freedom thereby to explore the enclosure of their own identity. Furthermore, in the changing circumstances of the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, the emergence of Mary the virgin mother from invisibility into images in stained glass, pendent

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[132] R G Wilberforce, The Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce, DD (London: John Murray, 1881) vol. 2, pp. 367 – 368.

[133] Newsome, op.cit, p. 236.

[134] James Adderley, In Slums and Society: Reminiscences of Old Friends (London: Fisher Unwin, 1916) p. 205: "Archbishop Temple never could understand Headlam and his persistent belief that a dancer had a soul to be saved and that tracts were not the only means necessary to salvation. It worried the good man to be asked to go to the Alhambra and see a new *première danseuse,* who happened also to be 'a communicant in your lordship's diocese.'" Adderley is presumably referring here to Temple's time as Bishop of London. It was for a public lecture entitled "Theatres and Music-Halls" given at the Commonwealth Club in October 1877 that Headlam was deprived of his licence by Temple's predecessor, Bishop Jackson. On this incident, and a deputation from the Church and Stage Guild to Temple at Fulham Palace, see F G Bettany, Stewart Headlam: A Biography (London: John Murray, 1926) pp. 43 – 44, 65 – 70.

[135] Peter d'A Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival 1877 – 1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) p. 148. An indirect reference to Headlam's devotion to Mary comes from an account of a wary incumbent who had invited him to preach during one of the periods in which Headlam had been deprived of his licence due to accusations of inflammatory preaching. The account relates that the incumbent begged Headlam "not to talk about Bradlaugh (a local secularist preacher) or Our Lady." Bettany, op.cit, p. 53.

paintings, statues even, and Christmas carols, may have done something to challenge the dominance of male heterosexual imagery in devotional and cultural life, notionally rendering impotent the epithet "effeminate" as a mechanism for consigning the subversive to oblivion.

4. Conclusion

We have taken the nineteenth century as a staging post for entry into the modern era, since in the process of Roman Catholicism emancipation and the Catholic revival in the Church of England the contours of Church life with which we are now familiar begin to take shape. Through the emergence of these contours we have discovered ways in which the image of Mary the virgin mother has raised important issue of gender, power, and sexual orientation. Those issues have generally been raised indirectly, for the nature of Mary's influence has been to subvert categories that were hardening into forms not of enclosure, which we have discerned to be an ambiguous and positive definition, but of imprisonment. We explored this subversive power in three ways.

In virginity we saw a category turned from threat to the fetichism (sic) of marriage to freedom and autonomy. In the "unmanliness" of sharing working-class status, Mary disturbs the institutional appropriation of Christianity for male imperialist expansion by the scandalous particularity of an identity that is female, artisan and colonised by an occupying power. Thirdly, employing the language of virginity those who occupy an enclosure of same-sex friendship embrace Mary, thereby not only inverting the demands of heterosexual conformity in marriage, but also negotiating the rapids of new modes of understanding human sexuality. Thus, far from excluding Mary from areas of major concern in the modern era's exploration of the nature of human identity, the unique category of virgin motherhood can be used to lead us more deeply into an understanding of the nature of that which Mary gave to God in the incarnation. More than flesh, it is the experience of being human as a man and the nexus of relational bonds that form the content of that condition.

We have repeatedly described Mary's role in the fostering of our understanding as a subversive one. Perhaps within that description we should also seek to identify the attractive quality of her influence, locating it and its ambiguity within the language of love, as the image of the virgin spouse suggests. Here, the image of enclosure provided a metaphor by which human, erotic, sexual love was able to recover a quality of paradisal, pre-lapsarian beauty. Revealing Mary's virginal status as a category of potency and fruitfulness, the enclosure is portrayed as an ornamented,

richly fertile garden. It is not a barren prison. In Brideshead Revisited, a novel that explores the subversive nature of love and sexuality, class and Catholicism, sin and the subversive nature of faith, Evelyn Waugh perhaps describes much to which this chapter has pointed us. And in that description, we might read his account of the stirrings of an Oxford undergraduate's desires as the ambiguous description of the subversive attraction held by Mary the Virgin Mother:

> But I was in search of love in those days, and I went full of curiosity and the faint, unrecognised apprehension that here, at last, I should find that low door in the wall, which others, I knew, had found before me, which opened on an enclosed and enchanted garden.[136]

[136] Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder (London: Everyman's Library, 1993) p. 26.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to inquire into the nature of the attraction that Mary has held in Christian devotion as virgin woman, spouse, and mother. We have discovered that attraction to be ambiguous, powerful and subversive. Its irrepressible manifestation in the long spectrum of iconography, poetry, music and prayer is also indicative of an influence that is intrinsic to the tradition of Christian belief.

This view is not an unchallenged one. Marina Warner's influential study of Mary ultimately envisaged the cult of the virgin to be the manifestation in Christianity of a reality that is a pagan goddess.[1] Through this figure Christianity – the Church – is said to have manipulated the goddess myth to its own, often oppressive, ends. But, Warner opines, "the reality her myth described is over."

However, our consideration of the formative centuries of Christian faith suggested that in any period of fluid cultic imagery (such as Elizabethan England), traces of apparently shared cultic vesture should not be misinterpreted as the substitution of one reality for another. Iconic fluidity does not therefore imply that Christian devotion to Mary at some stage subtly replaced the mother of Jesus with another figure, heavenly, incomparable, inimitable, and inhuman.

Furthermore, Mary is not necessarily described exhaustively (or accurately) by these adjectives that would be appropriate for the description of a goddess. Instead, we have discovered that an element of ambiguity in the devotional understanding of Mary's unique identity as the virgin provided a medium of attraction, thus enabling her also to be appreciated as exemplar, friend, and "icon" (in the contemporary, personality cult sense) by those who are non-virginal spouses or mothers, or not women.

Indeed, even within the most extreme elaboration of devotion to Mary, it is possible to identify the woman, spouse and mother who provides the family into which Jesus

[1] See above, p. 6.

is born. These three categories outline the fundamental scriptural identity of Mary and they fasten to it her nature as essentially human. Her condition as virgin thus becomes earthly material for the revelation of the miraculous. So whatever else there might be to say, it is Mary the virgin woman, spouse (of Joseph), and mother who is the first human being with whom Jesus, the word made flesh, forms a relationship. She reveals to him the human life that he redeems. This is the reality that is at the heart of Christianity's devotion to Mary.

That there has been distortion in the presentation of Mary is not in question. In the exploration of Mary the virgin spouse and virgin mother we recognised that her relation to the Trinity and the "masculinisation" of her as a source of power exemplify areas where this has happened. But two points can be made about such distortions. The first is that they invariably took place in the wider context of shifts in theological perspective, which suggest that other important theological statements were being made at the same time.

For example, in the Reformation era, as theological debate placed new emphasis on the centrality of the sacrifice of Calvary, Mary's closer association with the Trinity could be interpreted as a Catholic response that draws attention to the soteriologial importance of the incarnation, and the consequence of the material sign of the shedding of blood which is posited in the life of the Trinity as God the Son triumphantly displays the cross or other signs of his passion in the sight of the Father.

An exploration of how the Counter-Reformation thus capitalised on existing trends in devotional art revealed a compelling discourse of Mariology in which the power of her virginal status was harnessed to the Catholic cause. But irrespective of how we might regard this treatment of her, the identity through which Mary was invoked in this ecclesial power game was that of the spouse, whose virginal character set her free from the enclosure of marriage with Joseph to function in relation to the Trinity as the bride of Christ and the image of the Church. Again, virginity was the source of power, but an ambiguous one.

The theme of shifting identity re-emerged when we turned to the appearance of Mary in the wider theological context of the Oxford Movement. But here the second point

must be made. The element of ambiguity in the construct of the presentation of Mary is a subverting, or even self-subverting, one. Devotion to Mary fuels renaissance images of the woman who in the capacity to read and write claims autonomy over her own person, while in an earlier era, the powerful dominatrix of medieval devotion is subverted by the image of the same woman of the pietà, devastated by the bloodied corpse of her son.

In order to appreciate the attraction of virginity, we have attempted to release it from the negative quality associated with it today (characterised in Chapter 2 as "less a positive virtue than an embarrassing lack of experience"[2]). Once reconfigured as a statement of potency and freedom, it becomes possible to reinterpret virginity as a dimension of human existence (universal in the condition of childhood, a significant metaphor for virginity in art and literature) through which we can distinctively understand our relationship with God. Read in this way, virginity emerges as a statement of Mary's capacity for that relationship, marking her out as a powerful and subversive figure, not manipulated but undermining, not oppressive but disturbing religious, social, and cultural forces of oppression.

The chapter on Mary the virgin mother focused our attention on the subversive quality of her presence in the life of the Church, in England mainly, but also, in one important respect, in France and Roman Catholicism. We also located her influence in the undermining of human structures of power in class and gender identity, through the uncompromising (synonymous, perhaps, in this context with the term "perpetual") quality of her status as the virgin mother. It was possible to detect a similar pattern in the undermining of pagan goddess cults, independently of which Mary determines new categories derived from scripture and elucidated by the Fathers in their search to articulate and define the Church's understanding of the person of Jesus.

Thus we have seen that the attraction of virginity has a potency that is closely associated with the exercise of power, in both Church and State, and has been exploited, as Papal interest and secular versions of a lost Marian cult revealed in

[2] See above, p. 76.

post-Reformation England. But in the case of devotion to Mary, we have discovered that only when the other aspects of her identity (such as woman, spouse, and mother) determine this category of virginity does it function effectively, and therefore subversively and disturbingly, as an expression of the work of God's grace. In this way, the humanity and creatureliness of Mary are constantly re-affirmed, even as they are employed in the description of her heavenly life.

Indeed, even an image of Mary such as we begin to see in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, in isolation, unrelated to the relationships that define her essentially human, or, sometimes, heavenly identity, may function positively by proving to be ultimately a self-subversive image. We stressed that such an image began to invert independent structures of power when reconnected with the marginal figure of the virgin mother in eliciting authentification for the authority of a Papal definition from a simple peasant girl, Bernardette.

In this way Mary returned to the context in which her true identity (poverty, among other attributes) is to be found. It cannot therefore be simply due to a scriptural, literary, or narrative convention that Luke links Gabriel's annunciation to Mary with the admonition, "Do not be afraid." His news leads not only to the prophecy of a sword in Mary's own vocation, but also to the theme of subversion in the teaching of Jesus,[3] and among his earliest disciples in the letters of Paul.[4]

The attraction of virginity thus emerges from this study as a positive category that is capable of revealing the character of gospel life. As such, like poverty or bereavement, it is not necessarily the description of a way of life that all must fully embrace, or that all can bear, or indeed that any can demand ("take by storm"[5]). However, when regarded as characteristic of the operation of God's grace in the world, those who follow Jesus Christ and believe that they are members of his family may wish once more to appropriate this term, and to a greater or lesser extent find

[3] For example, Luke, 6: 20 – 26.
[4] For example, 1 Corinthians, 1: 18 – 29.
[5] See Matthew, 11: 12.

some way to apply it to themselves, either directly, or by using the more ambiguous discourse of metaphor.[6]

Finally, there is one further area in which the figure of Mary the virgin can exercise significant influence. The patterns of Christian devotion woven around Mary have undermined, to a significant extent, the bleak rationalism of historicity in the nineteenth and twentieth century (in the debate about the virgin birth, for example), since devotion illuminated the Christian narrative with theological truth through a variety of media. An account of devotion to Mary in art, drama, architecture and the enclosures of marriage and the religious life, can therefore help us recognise that theological truth also exists in these media that function in ways that powerfully engage both heart and mind. We noted evidence of this power in the iconophobia that was consequent upon the Reformation in England, but that also sought to exploit its power for secular dynastic and nationalistic ends.

To ignore the multi-media presentation that devotion has constructed around Mary diminishes our understanding of the extension of Christian revelation and witness through time. There are episodes and emphases within that extension that in our own era we find uncomfortable. But to discount them may reveal an attitude to the past that is willing to be less than rigorous and honest about the limitations of the present. An example of this is evident in a question posed by Jürgen Moltmann: "Can there be an Ecumenical Mariology?" Moltmann rightly acknowledges that in the quest for such a Mariology there is the danger of failing to "deal with the past". The three pre-conditions that Moltmann reluctantly outlines, however, raise the possibility of that danger being realised.

The first pre-condition is that its standard is to be set solely by "the biblical witness to Miriam, the mother of Jesus, a member of the original Christian post-Easter

[6] It has been beyond the scope of this study to inquire into the appropriateness of applying the quality of virginity, its ambiguity, attraction, etc, to Jesus. But the question should be recognised. If, as we suggest, virginity is a quality of Christian life, like the blessedness of poverty or bereavement, then in what way is it exemplified in Jesus as being also a sexual category, in a manner similar to the way it manifests itself in the history of devotion to Mary? In this way we must also recognise the extent to which it is not solely a category that belongs to women. John the Baptist and John the Evangelist are also virginal figures, in art closely associated with Mary. But is the notion of their virginity derived from her or independently of themselves? Of them, as of Jesus, how does this category relate them to other, non-virginal males and to other modes of sexual identity (homosexual or harlot, for example)?

community," the second that Mary must point "away from herself and towards her Son", and the third that "there must be no confusion: it is not Mary, but the Holy Spirit who is the source of life, the Mother of believers."[7] These are hardly exceptionable requirements, but in the desire to divert attention away from the tradition of Marian devotion (the "superstructure", as Moltmann terms it) the conditions set are negative ones.

More than this, Moltmann's requirements imply that the enterprise, a return to the original Christian post-Easter community, for example, would recover authenticity, something other than the expression of an historically conditioned viewpoint. But are not Moltmann's pre-conditions the outlining of his own, equally conditioned, Marian "superstructure"? Might not his enterprise be impoverished by the reluctance to allow the history of the multi-media Marian superstructure to become the material for reconciliation and growth in new understanding?

Moltmann's prescriptions bear great similarity to the quest for historicity that in New Testament Christology is exemplified by Albert Schweitzer's The Quest of the Historical Jesus. As Sean Gill has pointed out, Schweitzer once described the attempt to undertake such a task as like "a man looking down a deep well and seeing only his own reflection."[8] The paradisal and metaphorical qualities that constitute Mary the virgin woman, mother, and spouse, likewise prove to be uncomfortably elusive to historical and rational analysis.

But the image of the Virgin Mary nonetheless presents a vision of human experience that subversively points beyond itself, articulating theological truth through media that hold a meaning impervious to history's inquiry. So, while the history of art might adequately account for the significance of Leonardo da Vinci's cartoon of the Virgin and child in the National Gallery in London, it would be hard pressed to define, beyond the technical beauty of the drawing, the ambiguity of virgin motherhood and its power to attract and fascinate.

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[7] Jürgen Moltmann, "Can there be an Ecumenical Mariology?" in Hans Kung and Jürgen Moltmann (eds.), Mary in the Churches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983) pp xii, xiv – xv.
[8] Sean Gill, "*Ecce Homo*: Representations of Christ as the Model of Masculinity in Victorian Art and Lives of Jesus" in Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan, Sue Morgan, (eds.), Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) p 176.

APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.
Piero della Francesca, *The Nativity,* 1470 – 1475.

Figure 2.
The Good Shepherd.
4th century, Roman.

Figure 3.
Diana of Ephesus,
second century AD, Roman.

Figure 4.
Mary and the Christ child,
Catacomb of Priscilla,
fourth century AD (latest).

Figure 5.
Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *The Man of Sorrows,*
Second half of the fifteenth century.

Figure 6.
The Master of the Life of
The Virgin,
The Presentation in the Temple, c. 1460-1475.

Figure 7.
Master of the St Lucy Legend
Virgin and Child with Virgin Saints, Ursula, Catherine, Barbara and Cecilia, c.1480.

Figure 8. Apsidal mosaic,
S Maria in Trastevere,
twelfth century.

Figure 9.
Masaccio, *Madonna and Child with St Anne*, 1424-1425.

Figure 10.
Jacopo di Cione, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1370-1.

Figure 11.
Madonna from Staaliche Karlsruhe Diptych, 1350-60.

Figure 12.
Madonna from St James's Church, Zbraslav, Prague, 1350-60.

Figure 13.
Altarpiece from Jeníkov (detail)
Bohemia, after 1460.

Figure 14.
Altarpiece by Wolf Truat,
Nuremberg, c. 1486-1520.

Figure 15.
Bartolomé Esteban Murillo,
The Two Trinities,
1640-1642.

Figure 16.
Bartolomé Esteban Murillo,
The Two Trinities,
1681.

Figure 17.
Simone Martini, *The Finding in the Temple,* 1342.

Figure 18.
Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *The Christ Child Asleep on the Cross,* 1670s.

Figure 19.
Martin Schongauer, *Annunciation,* c.1465-70.

Figure 20.
Gerard David, *Annunciation,* c.1510.

Figure 21.
Quentyn Massys, *Virgin and Child enthroned,* c.1490-5.

Figure 22.
Lukas van Leyden, *The Virgin with with two angels,* 1523.

Figure 23.
Diego Velázquez, *The Immaculate Conception,* c.1618.

Figure 24.
Doménico Theotocópouli, El Greco, *The Coronation of the Virgin, 1591-2.*

Figure 25.
Annibale Carracci, *The Coronation of the Virgin,* 1595.

Figure 26.
Francesco Albani, *The Trinity with the Virgin Mary and Angels,* 1598-9.

Figure 27.
Arthur Hughes, *The Annunciation,* 1858.

Figure 28.
Edward Burne-Jones, *The Annunciation,* 1887.

Figure 29.
John Everett Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents,* 1850

Figure 30.
William Holman Hunt, *The Shadow of Death,* 1870-73.

Figure 31. Gimbattista Tiepolo, *St Joseph with the Christ child,* 1767.

Figure 32. Pietro da Cortona, *The Assumption,* S Maria in Valicella, Rome, c.1640.

Figure 33. Doménico Theotokópoulos, 'El Greco', *The Trinity,* 1577-9, and *The Assumption,* 1577, in Santo Domingo el Antiguo, Toledo.

Figure 34. Albrecht Durer, *Adoration of theHoly Trinity,* 1511.

Figure 35.
Michelangelo, *Pietá,* c.1550-6.

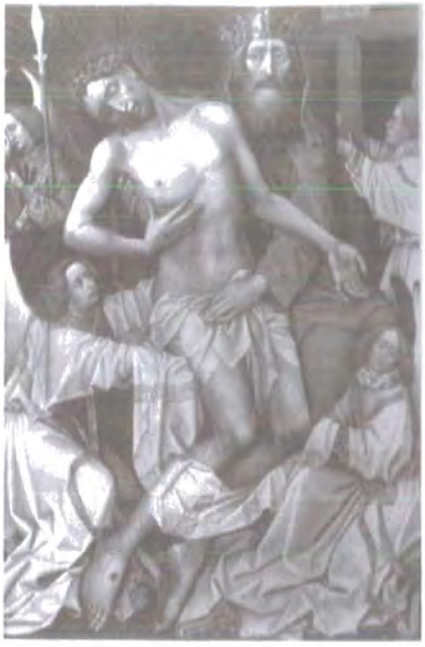

Figure 36.
Robert Campin (?) or Rogier van der Weyden, *Throne of Grace,* mid-fifteenth century.

Figure 37.
Anonymous, The Lorch *Pietá,* c.1420-30.

Figure 38.
Robert Campin, Master of Flémalle (?), *The Virgin and Child before a Firescreen (Salting Madonna)*, first quarter of the fifteenth century.

Figure 39.
The Virgin shows her breast to her son.

Figure 40.
Christ shows his breast to the Father.

Figures 39 and 40 are illustrations of The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun from *Der Spiegel der menschen Behältnis*, (Speyer: Drach, 1475).

Figure 41.
Aubrey Beardsley, *A Large Christmas Card*, issued with The Savoy, January, 1896.

Figure 42.
Aubrey Beardsley, *The Lady with the Monkey,* illustration for Mademoiselle de Maupin, 1897.

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PL Migne, J P (ed.) *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus, Series Latina* Paris, 1844 – 1865.

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