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# *The* **MAST** *Journal*

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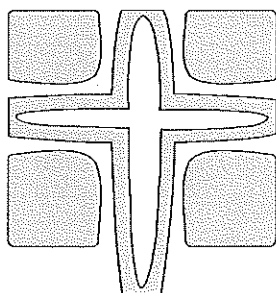
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The Journal of the  
Mercy Association in  
Scripture and Theology



Vol. 13, No. 3  
2003

Dear Sister, Associates and Friends of Mercy,

I visited Los Angeles a few of months ago and had a tour of the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. I was left wondering whether academics are the better architects of a theology of Mary, or whether artists can communicate a vision of Mary that captures the imagination in a uniquely emotional and intellectual way.

Crossing the courtyard, with its three fountains spread across the "valley" of the open space created by tan-yellow flagstone, I heard the serene sound of flowing, falling water. I faced the entrance of the cathedral as part of a group of Catholic and Jewish women. Somehow, though we were processing toward the entrance, it wasn't a line, because the space circled us together. I was feeling somewhat surprised at the contrast in myself. For months, I'd heard in the news that this cathedral was a controversial and upsetting architectural design. Now, on site, I felt a curious comfortableness and delight.

No grand steps led upwards from the courtyard to a glorious, impressive entrance into the church. I was struck by the fact that there seemed only a slight incline leading toward the massive, sculptured bronze doors, and the doorway was rather simple, not overpowering, despite the rich bas-reliefs. A glance at them made me think of the baptistry in Florence, and the doors of the cathedral in San Francisco. I was not really paying attention to the doors, despite the explanation of our guide calling attention to the innovative design by Mexican-born Los Angeles sculptor Robert Graham, with its representations of visions of Mary in the new world, and ancient sacred symbols of indigenous peoples.

My mind was being drawn elsewhere. I looked up, and there she was, not so far away. I saw her "halo," not a representation of ethereal, other-worldly light. Instead, hers was the shining of late afternoon light, ordinary day, appearing through the open crescent shape carved behind and around her head.

She was not standing regally above the clouds, holding a child, or eyes rolled up toward a distant heaven, lost in ecstasy, awaiting the next life. Rather, she seemed, in a sculpture eight feet tall, a little larger than life, but not far away, barely above the door, as at the doorway of this holy place, taking me and the other women into her broad gaze across the courtyard. I noticed her hands, then—not the manicured, delicate dispensers of rays of grace, but work-woman hands. The ambiguous gesture of her hands was, naturally, open to interpretation. I felt her a relative who comes to greet you at the door of her house, the one the family relies on, ready to embrace you strongly, then taking you in after your long journey, insisting on taking the bags and bundles from your shoulders, showing by her energy that she is not delicate and needy, but strong and available to you.

What of the blond, European Mary? Here at the Cathedral above the entrance, she is represented as a woman of color, of ethnicity. It is hard to identify whether she is Mediterranean, Asian, African, Egyptian, Indian or Hispanic, but there is an indigenous character to her face, a woman for all women. Her hair is not falling free in a river of blond waves, but tied back, braided, practical. There is no veil to conceal her face, suggest her humility, or interfere with her readiness to work. She is fearless before those who look toward her, letting herself be revealed, not bound by a dress code of religious subordination.

What age is she? She is not a girl, not androgynous, and not an aged wise woman. She is not pregnant, but her body is womanly and mature; she could have given birth already; her body suggests she could still give birth.

Her dress is formal, ceremonial, yet primitive in its design. The sleeves are wide yet short, revealing her arms just below the shoulder. Dignity is expressed in its abstract, inverted V-line, without folds or drapery. Her feet are not delicately positioned like a lady of court, or with the graceful turn of a dancer. Rather, she stands "at ease," comfortably balanced within the gentle downward curve of a crescent moon below her feet, offering herself to us as the point of equilibrium in the changing of the times and tides of earthly life.

I think this sculptor was a powerfully effective theologian, along with the beautifully varied reflectors on Mary in this volume.



*Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.*

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Editor, The MAST Journal

# Mary in the Church

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Elizabeth McMillan, R.S.M.

When we were planning this program, we were trying to find a title for this presentation that would focus what we wanted to communicate about the relationship between Mary and the Church. The title, "Mary Model of the Church" we rejected in favor of "Mary in the Church." We were then locating her precisely in the heart of the "marian question" today, I think. Since the Second Vatican Council, the marian question is *where* to locate her: above the Church or among the women on earth, who for centuries for reason of their gender have remained mute and invisible, living an existence apparently without importance.

## Mariology and the Marian Movement since Vatican II

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A vigorous debate in the decade immediately before the second Vatican Council served to focus the question of the relation of Mary and the Church, and contributed to the formulation of the first properly dogmatic text on the person and role of Mary in the economy of salvation. The final text of this document represents not only a compromise between two theological camps, but also a synthesis of two currents of thought in the Catholic Church which had been undergoing a process of definition since the era of the counter-reformation.

With the opening of Vatican II in 1960, German and French theologians conceived of the marian task as "an exact appraisal of the extent and meaning of marian doctrine"<sup>1</sup> The conciliar decision regarding the placement of Mary "above" the church with her Son, or "within" the church with the title of the most eminent of the redeemed, were played out in the debate over where to locate the marian text itself. Should it be a chapter within the dogmatic constitution on the church, or a separate document? At the beginning of the debate, the

council fathers were evenly divided on the emotional issue. At the end of the debate, they were able to arrive at almost unanimous agreement to include the marian text within the dogmatic constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium*. This final text is more consistent with an ecumenical perspective, citing more biblical and patristic texts than papal encyclicals and dogmatic declarations.

Where are we today, almost forty years later, in marian discourse? Many, as we have already suggested, demand a Mariology "from below," a Mariology in search of the poor and simple woman of Nazareth. Thus, the most recent literature is opening up space for a reinterpretation of the figure of Mary in the light of the most recent exegesis, especially feminist exegesis and the historical-critical studies of Mary of Nazareth.

Mariology today is also more conscious of its own historically situated voice. In a church that has announced an option for poor and margined people, a church in a world divided by economic, social, ethnic, and political conflicts, the subtle points of cerebral debate over Christological typing, which wants to locate Mary over the church, and ecclesiological typing, which wants to locate her within the church, seem less urgent. Because Mary is a woman, and because women represent a margined group within the church as well as within society, Mariology has as its first task to articulate the faith experience of women. Let us try, then, to situate Mary within the Church, keeping in mind that to situate Mary implies a reinterpretation of the figure of Mary.

## A Feminist Reinterpretation of the Figure of Mary

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The task of reinterpretation places one in a posture at once critical and imaginative. In the first

negative moment, we criticize the reigning interpretations with the intention of *deconstructing* them. In the second moment, we assume an imaginative posture with the intention of *reconstructing* reality, thus giving it a new interpretation. To speak of *deconstructing* and *reconstructing*, to be sure, supposes that we are the ones who construct our social and religious reality by naming and configuring it. We do this out of our lived experience, our sociocultural, religious, political, economic identity, and out of our gender.

## A reinterpretation of Mary has to be done on the basis of a feminist anthropology that expresses the eruption of women's consciousness in the present historical moment.

In his essay, *Maria de Nazaret: mujer, creyente, signo*, Miguel Rubio sketches some criteria for what he calls a demythologization of the figure of Mary. The term properly denotes the deconstructive phase of a reinterpretation. Rejecting the "ideological overload and excessive mystification," with which Mary has been adorned through the centuries, he proposes to restore the freshness of her authentic Christian identity. Although his project is not consciously feminist, he recognizes that traditional Mariology is essentially a European male construct, and this recognition serves to clear the ground, opening the way for feminist reconstructions.

The criteria that Rubio proposes are the following:

- Mary is not a myth, but an historical woman, situated within a family, and thus charged with a series of religious, sociocultural, political, and geographic conditions that have formed her human personality.
- In her case, as in the case of anyone else, the grace of God did not displace human nature. The intervention of God in her life, extraordinary as it may have been, did not take away

her essentially human responsibility for her life. Mary responded in her own way, tracing in intimate harmony with the Spirit of God, her unique destiny.

- She entered into the salvific plan of God out of her feminine identity, specifically as a woman.

Rubio notes that this last hermeneutical principle has singular importance today when we are becoming conscious of the gaps and distortions in the tradition through the absence of feminine voices. He points out that in Mary, the feminine identity is linked directly to the plan of salvation. The fact that so few women do theology "deprives reflection on revealed data of those human resonances that . . . possibly are only perceptible and explainable from the determinant of femininity. When a theologian speaks of Mary, he "explains" her as a man. But she is a woman."<sup>2</sup>

These observations are doubtless inspired by the new awareness of feminine voices that in recent decades are being heard in the community of serious theological discourse. One of the most creative voices in Latin America is that of Yvone Gebara. In the book which she wrote with Maria Clara Bingemer, *Maria, Mujer Profetica*,<sup>3</sup> she insists that a reinterpretation of Mary has to be done on the basis of a feminist anthropology that expresses the eruption of women's consciousness in the present historical moment. We have to attempt a rereading of Mary "out of the demands of our times."

We are invited, then, into a dialog with women and feminist men who have recently been reflecting on the figure of Mary. As we enter into this space, we need to recognize that for many women, the figure of Mary is so alienating that they no longer feel any affiliation with her. They have fallen mute. Some have left the Catholic Church. Surely Mary is concerned about her sisters and daughters who have left the house without ever having known her.

## **Toward a Reinterpretation of the Figure of Mary**

What is the problem? What could be so alienating in the figure of Mary that is found in the tradition of the Catholic Church? What are the aspects that have served to effectively oppress and dehumanize

Mary? Elizabeth Johnson has identified three dimensions of the problem:

- ▶ The tradition has exalted one woman at the cost of all the others; the thread of this tradition that is most ancient and most deeply rooted is that of the contrast Eve/Mary.
- ▶ The tradition has assigned ecclesial roles on the basis of gender, assigning to men the roles of initiator and director, and to women those of follower and helper.
- ▶ The tradition has distorted and reduced the ideal of feminine development and integrity.

Let's examine Johnson's first claim, that the Church has exalted Mary at the cost of all the other women. The fact that misogynous attitudes should have affected the church like any other human institution is not so remarkable in itself. But the claim that the official exaltation of Mary on the part of the Church should be the cause and the sustenance of this situation is paradoxical and even ridiculous in the eyes of some. The recognition of the Marian tradition, which like every theological tradition, is mediated by patriarchal constructs, already offers us the key to the interpretation of the figure of Mary. At the same time, it obliges us to do a critical rereading of history, to look for what is missing and what is distorted in the traditional presentations of Mary.

One of the most problematic is the tradition that contrasts Mary with Eve, a tradition that dates to the earliest centuries of the Christian era. It appears first in Justin Martyr in the second century, and is embellished by Ireneus and others, including Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine. It is found in doctrinal and liturgical texts in both the oriental and occidental churches even today. Paragraph #56 of *Lumen Gentium* expresses it thus:

For, as Saint Ireneus says, "she, being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race." Hence in their preaching, not a few of the early fathers gladly assert with him: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by her obedience. What the virgin Eve bound by her unbelief, was loosened by her faith." Comparing Mary with Eve, call her "the mother of the living," and still more often they say: "death through Eve, life through Mary."

To those who claim that this figurative language was never proposed with the intention of being taken literally, or that historical women have never

been blamed for the disobedience of Eve, permit us to cite Tertullian, who addresses us women:

Don't you know that every one of you is an Eve? The curse of God on this sex of yours lives still in our times. Culpable, you have to endure penalties. You are the gate of the devil; you have profaned the fatal tree; you are the first that transgressed the law of God; you softened up with your seductive words him against whom Satan could not win by force. Too easily you destroyed the image of God, Adam. You are the one who deserved death, and it was the Son of God who had to die.<sup>4</sup>

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children.

Johnson's second claim, that the patriarchal Marian tradition has served to ground and reinforce a system of social roles on the basis of gender, is an accusation of unjust discrimination. It consists in a tendency to represent Mary as a woman whose virtue consists in passive submission before masculine authority. There are various versions of this figure, and all depend for their cogency on the masculinity of God. A masculine God initiates and a feminine slave Mary responds. A masculine Messiah teaches and directs; the perfect disciple listens and follows. Jesus had a very active public life; Mary's glory was to have remained hidden.

Traditionally, Mary has been the model for legions of Catholic mothers whose hidden lives are consumed by serving their spouses and caring for their children. Women have been excluded not only from ordained ministry, but also from almost all the roles that carry responsibility in the public life of the church.

Johnson's third claim focuses on the very identity of woman. She says that the marian tradition has reduced the ideal for women's realization and human integrity. The traditional characterization of Mary as slave, virgin, and mother has reduced the historical Mary to a counterfeit of herself, changing her thus into an inadequate model for us.

Mary, the slave, expresses a *fiat* that

far from being seen as a radical and autonomous decision of a young woman to risk her life for the messianic project . . . has been interpreted as an inauthentic act of submission to the will of God . . . which afterwards has been used to legitimate the passive receptivity of women, not only before God, but also before their fathers, spouses and priests.<sup>5</sup>

If the figure of Mary that the Catholic tradition has left us is not the authentic Mary, then who is she? And what paths will lead us to discover her anew? What sources are trustworthy? Surely we can count on the Sacred Scriptures, especially the New Testament. We also have apocryphal texts and historical-critical studies that clarify for us the sociocultural context in which Mary of Nazareth lived.

If the true Mary of Nazareth was this woman under suspicion who suffered during her life, how is it and when was it that she acquired the figure of the royal goddess?

### **The Historical Identity of Mary of Nazareth**

As we know, the New Testament offers us very little on Mary. What it says about her is always said in reference to Jesus to communicate in the form of midrash the good news of salvation that he brings to the world. The texts were produced in communities of believers, which at a given moment were questioning the human-divine origins of Jesus. As such, they offer us some clues that help us to locate Mary in the salvific plan and in her historical context in Nazareth. Around this nucleus of facts, we can begin to trace the profile of her whom, within human history, God chose to be the mother of his only son.

She lived in Nazareth of Galilee, a northern province far from Jerusalem, the center of religious-political power. Galileans had lower social status than Judeans and were abused by the Roman conquerors. The contemporaries of Jesus said with disdain, "Did not the prophets say that the Christ would be born of the family of David, and that he would come from Bethlehem, the City of David?" (John 7:42).

Mary also suffered this disdain for the Galileans. In addition, she was a woman, raised in a culture that looked down upon women. "The world cannot exist without men and women, but happy are the men! And woe to those whose offspring are women!" A man's prayer was, "I bless God for having made me neither non-believer nor ignorant nor woman."<sup>6</sup>

We do not have reliable documents that speak to us of Mary's family, but it is easy to suppose that her family, like so many others, was a family with an abundance of children; and where there are men, the females are always the last with rights and the first with duties. The only education that is offered to Mary is that of work . . . The girl has to learn from a tender age to grind the flour, make the bread, fetch the water and the wood, card, weave, sew, and, more . . . hoe, sow, reap, sell.<sup>7</sup>

For the man, everything concerning their sexual life produced uncleanness by reason of contact with her and the fertility fluids. For her part, the adolescent woman knew that she was obligated to contract matrimony. From subjection to the authority of her father, she passed to that of her spouse, and if he should die, to that of her son. In the Hebrew cultural context, virginity was a curse; sterility merited disdain on the part of the people. Pious women longed for the honor of giving birth to the Messiah.

We know from biblical texts that Mary had entered into an engagement to marry Joseph, a promise that she had the intention to keep. Suddenly this young woman, already vulnerable in a patriarchal society, is found to be pregnant. She believes that indeed it came about through the Spirit of God, but how to explain and convince Joseph that she had not been unfaithful? And he, a just young man, has to decide how to treat her. Even if, by the same Holy Spirit, he convinces himself that she is innocent, her very condition would have put her in the category of a sinner subject to severe social penalties.

If the true Mary of Nazareth was this woman under suspicion who suffered during her life, the daughter of a poor and despised people, how is it and when was it that she acquired the figure of the royal goddess? That is the second piece of the reconstruction that awaits us, the figure of the great goddess.

## **The Figure of the Great Goddess**

Some traces of the great virgin mother goddesses can be discovered in the marian iconography. Ishtar, Isis, Juno, Athena, Ceres, all were venerated in the pre-Christian epoch in the Mediterranean world where Miriam of Nazareth was born, grew to maturity and gave birth to the Son of God. It is possible to sketch a generic profile of this figure of the virgin mother goddess. It is she who

creates life in herself; she is the cosmic womb, and the creation is the primordial act of giving birth; she controls the cycles of nature: sowing, growing, bearing fruit, withering, dying; she dominates the forces of death and life; she is the goddess of cosmic, family, and personal fertility; in her hands rest the very survival of the people.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, Christian doctrine does not attribute to Mary the creation and preservation of all forms of life, but much of popular religiosity appeals to her power over family and cosmic events. The association between Mary with the feminine deities in the popular imagination began rather early.

In the fifth century, a sanctuary dedicated to Artemis of Ephesus (known by St. Paul) was transformed into a sanctuary dedicated to Mary. The famous Cathedral of Chartres, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was built over the temple to the virgin child bearer of the Celts, who had had in that very place a pilgrimage center. Her statue is still preserved in the crypt of the cathedral. In Rome, the church of Santa Maria Antigua was built over the temple of the vestal mother; Santa Maria de Capitolio occupies the place previously dedicated to Juno. In the Acropolis of Athens the Church of the Virgin Mother of God took the place of the ancient temple of Pallas Athena.<sup>9</sup>

By the twelfth century, a good number of European cities had dedicated their cathedrals to Mary. The great master of spirituality, St. Bernard, presented Mary as symbol of the church and the uniting bond of communion.<sup>10</sup> But if it was the same Mary that the folk venerated in the various cathedrals of Europe, she had a variety of faces and postures according the devotion of the people. Thus came about the multiplication of virgins, and even the popular confusion regarding the relationship of "their" virgin with the Virgin of Nazareth, Mother of Jesus. It is a confusion that persists in the Church, and it has its roots in the confusion of the

figure of the great mother goddess and Mary. At this point, we are lacking just one more step in the deconstruction of the figure of the Virgin Mother.

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## **Psychological Analysis of the Figure of Mary in the Church**

Here, following Maria Kassel, we will make use of the categories of Karl Jung's depth psychology to analyze the way that the figure of Mary functions in the Church.<sup>11</sup> In Kassel's framework, the archetypes are figures or symbols that codify the unconscious sedimentation of centuries of collective humanization. That is, the figure or symbol of the mother is an archetype of the mother that is found in the collective cultural consciousness. Kassel proposes a problematic that juxtaposes the process through which cultural archetypes are formed, which is an unconscious process, with the developmental process of persons. This process is conscious. In the development of a person, consciousness is identified with the principle of individuation, and as an essential dimension of this, with the differentiation of gender.

In the Church, the archetypal figure of Mary functions as the Great Mother, the unconscious primordial representation of the source of life, the totality of human and divine reality. Against this unconscious cultural archetype, Kassel counters the principle of consciousness, which in the Freudian-Jungian scheme is identified with the figure of the son. The son represents the struggle for self-differentiation from the engulfing mother. He has to differentiate himself from the mother in order to achieve his own identity as a person, and thus enter upon the path of maturity and liberty.



In the light of her psychoanalytic model, Kassel answers her question about the function of the figure of Mary in the Church. She says that the figure has a function as much positive as negative. On the one hand, it promotes life; on the other, it suffocates it. Positively, the Catholic tradition preserves the presence of the feminine in a culture predominantly patriarchal. Moreover, her presence opens public space for the expression of the aesthetic and affective dimension of ecclesial life. Besides, the figure of the Virgin enhances the value of women as persons, apart from their identity as spouse or mother.

What is problematic in the marian tradition, on the other hand, is that it has produced in our collective consciousness a division in the figure of the Great Mother into two personages, Mary and Eve. It has done this in such a way that Mary has been totally identified with what is welcoming and consoling, while Eve has to carry everything in the feminine that is threatening for men.

The ethico-historical consequences of this dichotomized representation of the Great Mother are that the glorification of Mary leaves Eve with the cultural burden of the dangerous temptress, the harpy, "la gran chucha." Historical women as personifications of their progenitor Eve, represent sexual power, a threat to the personal security and the self-realization of men. The figure of the Virgin, insofar as it is associated with this distortion, and even is used to codify it culturally, becomes a countersign of the authentic woman and of authentic ecclesial communion.

In Kassel's analysis, the challenge which confronts women as well as men is that of differentiating themselves from their unconscious attachment in order to realize themselves as mature adults,

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fully conscious and responsible for their own destiny. The male child has to overcome his fear of not being able to differentiate himself from the unconscious, a fear that is expressed through his fear of real women. The challenge that confronts the girl in a patriarchal culture is two-fold. She has to overcome the guilt and shame projected on her by the unconscious male tendency to identify her with Eve the Sinner. At the same time she has to accept responsibility for her own self-realization as an autonomous person.

Analyzing the marian culture of the post-Vatican church, Kassel wonders about the apparent postponement of the marian issue. Could it be that the church is going through a regression to the unconscious out of which might arise new images of Mary and a more authentic marian presence? Could it be that there will emerge a church in which the presence of Mary is no longer a projection of the masculine unconscious that permits the marginalization of women? Could it be that we will recognize the figure of a strong woman who insists that we realize a true communion with her within history?

### **The Demanding Mother**

The authentic Mary, it seems to me, presents us with some ethical challenges. She is not only the Virgin Mother who accepts us with all our faults and debilities, but also she is the one who calls us to conversion. Specifically, the challenges that she presents to us as church have to do with the redemption of our twisted, broken, and inauthentic relationships. In place of the economic domination and abandonment of poor people, she calls us to solidarity; instead of a form of complementarity imposed by men on women, she calls us to authentic mutuality; instead of racism and ethnic domination, mutual respect and appreciation.

The reinterpretation of the Magnificat that has become common today, arising out of the experience of the suffering people of Latin America, presents Mary as a demanding woman, one who announces the subversion of oppressive relationships and the inversion of the structures of worldly power. The Magnificat was shaped in the community of Luke, which had already known martyrdom. In the context of the primitive Church, as in that of the Church of Latin America, the song of Mary is



the song of a church that is suffering, oppressed, threatened. In *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, Yvone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer bring to light the paradoxical structure of the Magnificat. In the midst of misfortune, injustice, pain, Mary expresses profound sentiments of gratitude because God has not forgotten his people. Further, "the handmaid of the Lord" takes a posture of rebellion and the overturning of oppressive politico-economic forces. In the place of alienating submission, there arises humanity actualized. The Mary of the Magnificat is the figure of a strong woman, a faithful daughter of God who is faithful to her people, the spokeswoman for its desires and hopes. She is the figure of a faithful church in the midst of a needy people.

The call to mutuality in the relations between men and women within the church is a call directed to women as well as to men. In this context, mutuality is distinguished from complementarity. Complementarity can be seen as a system of relationships between men and women in which it falls to men to assign social roles to women. Mutuality is a process in which the two genders define mutually their social roles according to the necessities of social life. In order that the reigning form of complementarity be transformed into a process of mutual growth between men and women, women have to reclaim their own destiny, and men have to have the courage to accompany them, accepting as a consequence their own conversion. The transformation has to express itself at the level of personal relationships, as well as matrimonial, familial, and communitarian relationships if it should become an expression of the Church itself. Sexist relationships can no longer be tolerated if the witness of communion is to be credible. The old inauthentic figure of Mary, whether the product of the fantasies and projections of immature persons or the result of a patriarchal history, is not the figure of a Virgin Mother fully human, fully redeemed. To know Mary is to know women as daughters of God.

Mary is model and mother of the universal Church. She takes on more and more the face of diverse cultures and historical epochs. Marian devotion represents her and venerates her with diverse titles and images. We approach this question by recalling the story of Guadalupe that everyone in the Latino world knows so well. It is a story situated in

Mary is model and mother of the universal Church. She takes on more and more the face of diverse cultures and historical epochs.

the caldron of the violent conquest of Mexico, which serves at the same time as the context of Mexico's evangelization. How many contradictions and how many scandals were played out in that historical moment! Mary, "the little dark one" in the Nahuatl language, introduces herself to Juan Diego as the mother of the true God, He who lives. And then she sends him to the Spanish archbishop to present her desire: that he construct a church in the place where previously the goddess Totinzin had been venerated. In this remarkable story there is so much to ponder having to do with respect for the native culture and the character of the authentic church. But for the moment, just two questions: Why a church? And why does Mary insist that it be the simple indigenous man who represent her before the authority of the church.

Mary herself answers the first question. She says why she wants a church:

It is my desire that you build me a church in this place where, as your pious mother, and mother of your countrymen, I might show you my loving mercy and the compassion I have for the indigenous people and for those who love me and seek me, and for all those who should seek my protection and call upon me in their works and afflictions, and where I will listen to their tears and supplications, to give them consolation and relief.<sup>12</sup>

Mary wanted to remain with the people, and be available there. For this she asks for a house, a place in this country where she could stay, where the people could find her "just in case."

And why does Mary insist that Juan Diego be her spokesman although she had so many servants? Wouldn't this be to upend the relationship of divine authority? Identifying herself with the people of that place, Mary communicated to the bishop the message that her representative is Juan Diego, that it is he who speaks on behalf of the mother of the true God, and that in this moment, in this place it is up to the bishop to obey the indigenous man.

If the mother of the Son of God is in a certain way an archetype of the human being, masculine and feminine, and if she, the Mother of the World, is calling us all to live in peace and communion, how can it be that the figure of Mary should scandalize those who are not Catholics, and thus turn into a sign of contradiction? Might it not be in part because we Catholics offend other Christians with exaggerated marian practices? Luther himself, who wrote a beautiful commentary on the Magnificat, said, "I desire that the cult paid Mary be totally abandoned solely for reason of the abuses that arise from it."<sup>13</sup> Thus, Laurentin proposes as the first rule of reconciliation an examination of conscience on the forms of marian devotion. He proposes further a return to the sources of the authentic marian tradition and a dialogue that would foster mutual understanding.

There is a story that dramatizes the presence of the church as a place of ecumenical welcome. It happened in an industrial city where my mother grew up, and where my religious congregation has maintained a presence since 1876. Twenty-five years ago, two sisters opened a ministry for street people that they called St. Peter's Center in the basement of the parish church. When they had to move, they set up the program in an abandoned church of the Hungarian Reformed congregation. They rechristened the center, "The Intersection: A Christian Center." When it was discovered that the Jews in the community felt excluded, they changed the name to "a Judeo-Christian Center." Later, some volunteers who were neither Christians nor Jews joined the community, and these people called it simply, "The Center." But informally the name that stuck was "the church." Today you can find there a restaurant, a food pantry, programs for mothers and children—and a meeting place for persons of various economic classes and religious identities. Thus the space that no longer calls itself "St. Peter's Center" while remaining ecclesial space informally becomes marian space. Mary is there, waiting for the folk as she waits for them in the Basilica of Guadalupe outside Mexico City.

Transformations in our relationships imply as well changes in our way of speaking about Mary. We have to come to recognize that the theological figures of analysis come to us charged with patriarchal language. It is time to risk a conversation nourished more by the feminine imagination than by the cate-

gories of patriarchal Mariology. It is time for a common quest for new images and new rhetorical figures.

This new mode of speaking demands also that we control every impulse to dominate the conversation in the name of the truth. It supposes an invitation to not speak at times, to suppress every instinct to respond to all that sounds strange. It supposes a posture of attentiveness in order to detect new sounds and images arising from extra-theological communities. Above all, it supposes that we maintain the hope that the voices of women speaking from the margins of the community will be heard, those who normally are not heard because the lines of communication are found to be overcharged with "theological discourse." What we may be able to hear is the silent inner voice of Mary of Nazareth, who "kept all these things in her heart" and now wants to share them with us.



## Notes

- 1 Rene Laurentin, *The Question of Mary*, Techny, IL, Divine Word Publications, p. 51.
- 2 Miguel Rubio, *Maria de Nazaret: Mujer, Creyente, Signo*, Madrid, Narcea, S.A., 1981, p. 18.
- 3 Yvone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Beryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).
- 4 *De cultu feminarum*, libri duo, 1 (PL I, 1418-19a), cited in Johnson, "The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women," *Horizons*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1985), p. 122.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 124-128.
- 6 Alberto Maggi, *Nuestra Senora de los Herejes, Maria de Nazaret*, Cordoba, ed. Almendro, 1990, p. 35.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 8 Elina Vuola, "La Virgen Maria como ideal femenino: critica feminista y nuevas interpretaciones." *Conspirando*, Sept., 1994. See also her article in *Revista Pasos*, 45, (1993), pp. 11-22.
- 9 Leonardo Boff, *El Rostro Materno de Dios*, Madrid, Ed. Paulinas, 7a ed., 1979, p. 254.
- 10 See Luis Maldonado, *Para Comprender el Catolicismo Popular*, 313200 Estella, Verbo Divino, 1990.
- 11 Maria Kassel, "Maria y la Pique Humana: Reflexiones en la Perspectiva de la Psicologia Profunda" *Concilium*, Vol. 188 (Sept.-Oct. 1983), pp. 293-304.
- 12 Donald Demerest and Coley Taylor, *The Dark Virgin*, Coley Taylor, Inc., Freeport ME and New York, 1956, p. 42.
- 13 Laurentin, op. cit., p. 56.

# María en la Iglesia

*Elizabeth Mc Millan, R.S.M.*

Cuando estábamos planificando las Jornadas tratamos de encontrar un título para esta presentación que enfocara lo que queríamos comunicar sobre la relación entre María y a Iglesia. El título "María Modelo de la Iglesia" lo rechazamos en favor de "María en la Iglesia". Entonces nos estábamos ubicando precisamente en el corazón de "la cuestión mariana" hoy, yo creo. Desde el Concilio Vaticano II la cuestión mariana es dónde colocarla: encima de la Iglesia o dentro de la Iglesia con nosotros. En estas reflexiones colocarla entre nosotras es colocarla entre las mujeres de a tierra, que por siglos por razón de su género han quedado mudas e invisibles, viviendo una existencia aparentemente sin importancia.

## **1. La mariología y el movimiento mariano desde Vaticano II**

Un debate vigoroso en la década inmediatamente antes de Vaticano II servía para enfocar la cuestión de la relación entre María y la Iglesia, y contribuyó a la formulación del primer texto propiamente dogmático sobre la persona y el rol de María en la economía de la salvación. Se encuentra en el capítulo VIII de *Lumen Gentium*, la constitución

dogmática sobre la Iglesia. El texto final de este documento representa no solamente un compromiso entre dos campos teológicos, sino una síntesis de dos corrientes de pensamiento en la Iglesia católica que iba articulándose desde la época de la contrarreforma.

Con la apertura del Vaticano II en 1960, los teólogos alemanes y franceses concibieron la tarea mariana como "una evaluación exacta de la proporción y el sentido de la doctrina mariana".<sup>1</sup> Las voces en favor del movimiento mariano, por contrario veían la posición de esos como "subversivo . . . con la tendencia de separar a María de Cristo para reducirla a ella al nivel de la Iglesia".<sup>2</sup> La decisión conciliar en cuanto la colocación de María "encima" de la Iglesia con su Hijo, o "dentro" de la Iglesia con carpeta de la redimida más eminente, se dramatizaba en el debate sobre dónde colocar el texto mariano mismo: como capítulo dentro de la constitución dogmática sobre la Iglesia o como un documento aparte. A la apertura del debate los padres conciliares se encontraron divididos a la mitad en esta cuestión emocional. Al final del debate lograron llegar a un acuerdo casi unánime de incluir el texto mariano dentro de *Lumen Gentium*. Este texto final es mas conforme con una

perspectiva ecuménica, citando mas textos bíblicos y patrísticos que encíclicas papales y declaraciones dogmáticas.

¿Dónde estamos hoy, treinta años después, en el discurso mariológico? Muchos, como ya indiqué, reclaman una mariología "desde abajo", una mariología en búsqueda de la pobre y sencilla mujer de Nazaret. Así la literatura mas reciente esta abriendo espacio para una reinterpretación de la figura de María a la luz de la exégesis más reciente, y especialmente la feminista, y los estudios histórico-criticos del contexto histórico de María de Nazaret.

La mariología hoy esta también más consciente de su propia voz históricamente situada. En una Iglesia que ha anunciado una opción por la gente pobre y marginada, una Iglesia dividida por conflictos económicos, sociales, étnicos y políticos, los puntos sutiles del debate cerebral sobre el cristotipismo que quiere colocarla a María encima de la Iglesia, y el eclesiotipismo que quiere colocarla dentro de la Iglesia, parecen menos urgentes que expresiones auténticas de la presencia de María en la comunidad. Porque María es mujer y porque las mujeres representan un grupo marginado en la Iglesia tal coma en la sociedad, la mariología tiene coma tarea prioritaria de articular la

experiencia de fe de la mujer. Tratémonos, pues, ahora de colocarla a María dentro de la Iglesia. Subrayo otra vez: calocar a María implica reinterpretar la figura de María.

## **2. Una reinterpretación feminista de la figura de María**

La tarea de reinterpretación le coloca a uno en la postura a la vez crítica e imaginativa. En el primer momento negativo criticamos las interpretaciones vigentes con el intento de desconstruirlas. En el segundo momento asumimos una postura imaginativa con el intento de reconstruir la realidad, dotándola así de una nueva interpretación. Hablar de desconstruir y reconstruir interpretaciones, claro, supone que somos nosotros los que construimos nuestra realidad social y religiosa par nombrar y configurarla. Lo hacemos desde nuestra vivencia, nuestra identidad socio-cultural, religiosa, política, económica, y desde nuestro género.

En su ensayo, *María de Nazaret: mujer, creyente, signo*, Miguel Rubio esboza unos criterios para lo que llama una desmitologización de la figura de María. El término denota propiamente la fase destructiva de una reinterpretación. Rechazando las "sobrecargas ideológicas y las mistificaciones excesivas" con qua se ha adomado a María a través los siglos, propone restaurar la frescura de su identidad cristiana auténtica. Aunque su proyecto no es conscientemente feminista,

reconoce que la mariología tradicional es esencialmente una construcción de varones europeos, y este reconocimiento sirve para limpiar el terreno, y abrir el camino para unas reconstrucciones feministas.

### **Los criterios que propone Rubio son los siguientes:**

María no es un mito, sino una mujer histórica, situada dentro de una familia, y así cargada de una serie de condiciones religiosas, socio-culturales, políticas y geográficas que han formado su personalidad humana.

En su caso, como en el caso de cualquier otro, la gracia de Dios no desplazó la naturaleza humana. La intervención de Dios en su vida, por extraordinaria que hubiera sido, no le quitó la responsabilidad esencialmente humana por su vida. María respondió a su manera, trazando en armonía íntima con el Espíritu de Dios, su destino único.

Ella entra en el plan salvífico de Dios desde su identidad femenina, específicamente como mujer. Rubio nota que su último principio hermenéutico tiene una importancia singular hoy cuando se toma conciencia de las lagunas y distorsiones en la tradición por la ausencia de voces femeninas. Señala que en María, la identidad femenina es ligada directamente al designio de salvación. El hecho de que tan pocas mujeres hacen la teología "priva además a la reflexión sobre el dato revelado de aquellas resonancias humanas que... posiblemente sólo son perceptibles y explicitables desde el determi-

nante de la feminidad. Cuando un teólogo habla de María, la 'explicita' como hombre. Pero ella es mujer."<sup>3</sup>

Estas observaciones se inspiraron sin duda de su toma de conciencia de las voces femeninas que ya en las últimas décadas se oyen en la comunidad de discurso teológico serio. Una de las voces más creativas en América Latina es la de Yvone Gebara. En el libro que escribió con María Clara Bingemer, *María, Mujer Profética*, insisten que una reinterpretación de María ha de tener a la base una antropología feminista para que exprese la irrupción de la conciencia de a mujer en éste momento histórico que vivimos. Tenemos intentar una relectura de María "desde las exigencias de nuestro tiempo."<sup>4</sup>

Les invito ahora a un diálogo con mujeres y hombres feministas que están reflexionando sobre la figura de María actualmente. Mientras entramos en este espacio, reconozcamos que para muchas mujeres la figura de María es tan alienante que ya no sienten ninguna afiliación con ella. Se han caído mudas. Unas se han ido de la Iglesia católica. Yo digo que María se preocupa de sus hermanas e hijas que se salieron de la casa sin nunca haberla conocido.

## **3. Hacia una reinterpretación de la figura de María**

¿Cuál es el problema? ¿Qué puede ser tan alienante en la figura de María que se encuentra en la tradición de la Iglesia católica? ¿Cuáles son los aspectos que han

servido efectivamente para oprimir y deshumanizar a mujeres? Elizabeth Johnson identifica tres dimensiones del problema:

La tradición ha exaltado a una Mujer a costa de todas las otras; el hilo de esa tradición que es lo más antiguo y más profundamente enraizado es el del contraste Eva-María.

Ha asignado roles eclesiales en base a género, asignando a los varones los roles de iniciador y director y a las mujeres los de seguidora y ayudante.

Ha distorsionado y reducido el ideal de desarrollo femenino y integridad.

Examinemos la primera pretensión de Johnson, que la Iglesia ha exaltado a María a Costa de todas las otras mujeres. No es tan remarcable en sí mismo el hecho de que actitudes misóginas hubieran afectado la Iglesia coma cualquier otra institución humana. Pero la pretensión de que la exaltación oficial de María por parte de la Iglesia sería la causa y la subsistencia de esta situación, eso es paradójico, y hasta ridículo en la vista de unos. El reconocimiento de la tradición mariana, que como toda la tradición teológica es mediada por las construcciones patriarcales, de repente nos ofrece la clave para la interpretación de la figura de María. A la vez nos obliga a una relectura crítica de la historia, buscando lo que falta y lo que está torcido en las presentaciones tradicionales de María.

Una de las más problemáticas es la tradición que contrasta a María con Eva, una tradición que data de los siglos más tempranos de la época cristiana. Aparece primero en Justino Mártir en el segundo siglo, y es

embellecido por Ireneo y otros, incluyendo a Crisóstomo, Jerónimo y Agustín. Se encuentra en textos doctrinales y litúrgicos tanto de las iglesias orientales como de las occidentales hasta hoy día. El párrafo #56 del capítulo VII de *Lumen Gentium* la expresa así:

Porque [María], como dice San Ireneo, "obedeciendo fue causa de la salvación propia y de la del género humano entero". Por eso no pocos Padres antiguos, en su predicación, gustosamente afirman: "El nudo de la desobediencia de Eva por la incredulidad, la Virgen María lo desató por la fe"; y comparándola con Eva, llaman a María, "Madre de los vivientes", y afirman con mayor frecuencia: "la muerte vino por Eva, por María la vida".

Al que proteste que este lenguaje figurativo nunca se propuso con el intento de que se tome a la letra, o que mujeres históricas nunca han sido responsabilizadas por la desobediencia de Eva, permítame citar a Tertuliano, que dirige esta palabra a nosotras mujeres:

¿No se dan cuenta que cada una de ustedes es una Eva? La maldición de Dios sobre este sexo suyo vive todavía en nuestros tiempos. Culpables, tienen que suportar estas penalidades. Son la entrada del diablo; han profanado el árbol fatal; son las primeras que han traicionado la ley de Dios; suavizaron con sus palabras seductivas aquello contra quien Satanás no pudo ganar por fuerza. Demasiado fácilmente destruyeron la imagen de Dios, Adán. Es aquella que mereció la muerte, y fue el Hijo de Dios que tuvo que morir.<sup>5</sup>

No todos los Padres tuvieron el don de una lengua tan vituperable, pero todos, como dice Lu-

men Gentium, gozaron de hacer el contraste entre a virtud de María y el vicio de nuestra primera madre, Eva, y juntos conspiraron para construir un esquema de doctrina y de disciplina que servirá para despreciar y marginar a la mujeres a través los siglos.

La segunda pretensión de Johnson, de que la tradición mariana patriarcal ha servido para fundar y reforzar un sistema de roles sociales a base de género es una acusación de discriminación injusta. Consiste en una tendencia de representar a María como una mujer cuya virtud consiste en sumisión pasiva ante la autoridad masculina. Hay varias versiones de esta figura, y todas dependen de la masculinidad de Dios por su fuerza. Un Dios masculino inicia, y una esclava femenina María responde. Un Mesías masculino enseña y orienta, la perfecta discípula escucha y sigue. Jesús tenía una vida pública muy activa; la gloria de María es de haber quedado escondida.

Tradicionalmente María ha sido el modelo para las legiones de madres católicas cuyas vidas escondidas se consumen en servir a sus esposos y cuidar a sus niños. Las mujeres se quedan excluidas no solamente del ministerio ordenado, sino de casi todo los roles que llevan responsabilidad en la vida pública de la Iglesia.

La tercera pretensión de Johnson enfoca la identidad misma de la mujer. Dice que la tradición mariana ha reducido el ideal de la realización e integridad humana de la mujer. La caracterización tradicional de María, esclava, virgen y madre

ha reducido la María histórica a un falsificación de sí misma, cambiándola así en un modelo inadecuado para nosotras.

María, la esclava expresa un fiat que, lejos de ser visto como la decisión radical y autónoma de una joven de arriesgar su vida en un proyecto mesiánico, . . . se ha ido interpretando como un acto [inauténtico] de sumisión a la voluntad de Dios . . ." que después se ha ido usando para legitimar la receptividad pasiva de las mujeres, no solamente ante Dios, sino también ante sus padres, sus esposos, y los sacerdotes.<sup>6</sup>

Si la figura de María que la tradición católica nos ha dejado no es la María auténtica, entonces ¿quién es ella? Y ¿qué senderos nos llevan a descubrirla de nuevo? ¿Qué fuentes son confiables? Seguramente contamos con las Sagradas Escrituras, especialmente el Nuevo Testamento. Tenemos también unos textos apócrifos y estudios histórico-críticos que nos esclarecen el contexto socio-cultural en donde María de Nazaret vivió.

#### **4. La identidad histórica de María de Nazaret**

Como sabemos, el Nuevo Testamento nos comparte muy poco sobre María. Lo que se dice de ella siempre se dice en referencia a Jesús para comunicar en forma midráshica la buena noticia de salvación que Él trae al mundo. Los textos se produjeron en comunidades de creyentes que en un momento dado se interrogaban sobre los orígenes

humano-divino de Jesús. Esos como tal nos ofrecen unas claves que nos ayudan a ubicar a María en el plan salvífico y en su contexto histórico en Nazaret. Alrededor de este núcleo de datos podemos comenzar a trazar la silueta de aquella que Dios escogió para ser madre de su Hijo único en la historia humana.

Vivía en Nazaret de Galilea, una provincia del norte lejos de Jerusalén, centro de poder político-religioso. Los galileos eran despreciados y abusados por los conquistadores romanos. Los contemporáneos de Jesús dijeron con desprecio, "¿No dicen los profetas que el Cristo nacerá de la descendencia de David, y que saldrá de Belén, la ciudad de David? (Jn 7:42)

María también sufrió este desprecio echado a los galileos. Además era mujer, crecida en una cultura que menospreciaba a las mujeres. "El mundo no puede existir sin varones y hembras, pero ¡feliz aquel cuyos hijos son varones! Y ¡ay de aquel cuya descendencia son hembras! [B.B.B. 16b,] Una oración del varón era, "Bendigo a Dios por no haberme hecho ni no creyente, ni ignorante, ni mujer."<sup>7</sup>

No tenemos documentos fiables que nos hablen de la familia de María, pero es fácil suponer que la suya, como tantas otras, fue un núcleo familiar con abundancia de hijos; y donde hay varones, las hembras son siempre las últimas en los derechos y las primeras en los deberes. La única formación que se ofrece a María es la del trabajo . . . La muchacha . . . debe

aprender desde la más tierna edad a moler a harina, hacer el pan, traer el agua y la leña, hilar, tejer, coser y, además . . . arar, sembrar, cosechar, vendimiar....<sup>8</sup>

En cuanto las relaciones de la mujer con el hombre, para el varón todo lo concerniente la vida sexual produce impureza por tener contacto con ella y los fluidos de la fertilidad. Por su lado la mujer adolescente se sabía obligada a contraer matrimonio. De la autoridad de su padre pasaba a la del esposo, y si moría él, a la del hijo. En el contexto cultural hebreo la virginidad era anti-valor; significaba la esterilidad que mereció el desprecio del pueblo. Las mujeres piadosas anhelaban el honor de dar a luz al Mesías.

Sabemos por los textos bíblicos que María había entrado en una promesa de casarse con José, una promesa que tenía la intención de cumplir. De repente esta joven, ya vulnerable en una sociedad patriarcal, se encuentra encinta. Cree que sí se realizó por el Espíritu de Dios, pero cómo explicar y convencer a su novio José de que no ha sido infiel. Y él, un joven justo, tiene que decidir como tratarla. Si por el mismo Espíritu él se convence que ella es inocente, su condición la hubiera puesto en la categoría legal de una pecadora bajo la pena de muerte.

Si la verdadera María de Nazaret era esta mujer bajo sospecha y sufrida durante su vida, la hija de un pueblo pobre y despreciado, ¿cómo es y cuándo fue que adquirió los rasgos de una Diosa Real? He aquí la segunda pieza

de reconstrucción que nos espera, la figura de la Gran Diosa.

### **5. La figura de la Gran Diosa**

En la iconografía mariana se pueden descubrir unas huellas de las antepasadas celtas de María, las grandes vírgenes madres diosas, Istar, Isis, Juno, Atenea, Ceres, todas veneradas en la época precristiana en el mundo mediterráneo donde Miriam de Nazaret nació, creció y dio a luz al Hijo de Dios. Se puede esbozar un perfil genérico de esa figura de la virgen madre diosa. Es ella que:

crea la vida en sí misma; ella es el vientre cósmico, y la creación es el acto del parto primordial; controla los ciclos de la naturaleza: sembrar, crecer, dar fruta, marchitar, morir; domina las fuerzas de la muerte como de la vida; es diosa de la fertilidad cósmica, familiar, y personal; en sus manos reposa a mera sobre vivencia del pueblo.<sup>9</sup>

Claro, a doctrina cristiana no atribuye a María la creación y preservación de todas las formas de vida, pero mucho de la religiosidad popular apela a su poder sobre acontecimientos familiares y cósmicos. Esta asociación entre María con las divinidades femeninas en la imaginación popular comenzó bastante temprano.

En el quinto siglo un santuario dedicado a Artemisa de Éfeso (conocido por San Pablo) fue transformado en santuario dedicado a María. La famosa catedral de Chartres, dedicada a la Virgen Madre, fue constituida sobre el templo de la Virgo paritura de los celtas, que en aquel mismo lugar tenían su centro de

peregrinaciones; en la cripta de la catedral se conserva todavía su estatua. En Roma, la Iglesia de Santa María Antigua se levantó sobre el templo de Vesta Mater; Santa María de Capitolio ocupa el lugar dedicado antes a Juno. En la Acrópolis de Atenas la Iglesia de la Virgen Madre de Dios sustituyó al antiguo templo de Palas Ateneas.<sup>10</sup>

En el Siglo XII un buen número de ciudades europeas hubieron dedicar sus catedrales a María. El gran maestro de la espiritualidad, San Bernardo presentó a María como símbolo de la Iglesia y vínculo unitivo de comunión.<sup>11</sup> Pero si era la misma María que la gente veneraba en las varias catedrales de Europa, ella tenía una variedad de caras y de posturas según la devoción del pueblo. Así se sucedió la multiplicación de vírgenes, e inclusive la confusión popular en cuanto la relación de "su" virgen con la Virgen de Nazaret, Madre de Jesús. Es una confusión que todavía persiste en la Iglesia, y que tiene sus raíces en la confusión de la figura de la Gran Madre Diosa y María. Así nos queda un momento más de desconstrucción de la figura de la Virgen Madre.

### **6. Análisis psicológico de la figura de María en la Iglesia**

Esta vez siguiendo a María Kassel, vamos a servirnos de las categorías de la psicología profunda de Carl Jung para analizar el funcionamiento de la figura de María en la Iglesia.<sup>12</sup> En el esquema de Kassel, los arquetipos son figuras o símbolos que codifican la sedimentación inconsciente de siglos de humaniza-

ción colectiva. O sea, la figura o el símbolo de la madre es un arquetipo de la madre que se encuentra en la conciencia colectiva de cada cultura. Kassel plantea un problema que yuxtapone el proceso por el cual los arquetipos culturales se forman, lo que es un proceso inconsciente, con el proceso del desarrollo de las personas. Este proceso es consciente. En el desarrollo de una persona, la conciencia se identifica con el principio de individualización, y como dimensión esencial de este, con la diferenciación del género.

En la Iglesia, la figura arquetípica de María funciona como la Gran Madre, la representación inconsciente primordial de la fuente de la vida, la totalidad de la realidad humana y divina. Con este arquetipo cultural inconsciente, Kassel contrapone el principio de conciencia, lo cual en la esquema freudiana-jungiana se identifica con la figura del Hijo. El hijo representa la lucha para auto-diferenciarse de la Madre englobante. Él tiene que diferenciarse de la Madre para lograr su propia identidad como persona, y así entrar en el camino de la madurez y la libertad.

A la luz de su modelo psicoanalítico, Kassel contesta a su pregunta sobre la función de la figura de María en la Iglesia. Dice que la figura tiene una función tanto positiva como negativa. Por un lado, promueve la vida; por otro, la sofoca. Positivamente la tradición católica preserva la presencia de lo femenino en la cultura dominante patriarcal. Además, su presencia



abre espacio público para la expresión de la dimensión estética y afectiva de la vida eclesial. También la figura de la Virgen valoriza a mujeres como personas, aparte de su identidad de esposa o de madre.

Lo problemático en la tradición mariana, por el contrario, es que se ha producido en nuestra consciencia colectiva una división de la figura de la Gran Madre en dos personajes, María y Eva, y eso de tal manera que María se ha sido totalmente identificada con lo que es la acogedora y la consoladora, mientras que Eva tiene que cargar todo lo femenino que es amenazante para los hombres.

Las consecuencias ético-históricas de esta representación dicotomizada de la Gran Madre son que la glorificación de María deja a Eva con la carga cultural de la tentadora peligrosa, la arpía, "la gran chucha". Las mujeres históricas, como personificaciones de su progenitora Eva, representan el poder sexual, una amenaza a la seguridad personal y la autorealización de hombres. La figura de la Virgen en cuanto se asocia con esta distorsión, y aún está usado para codificarla culturalmente, se vuelve en contrasigno de la mujer auténtica y de una auténtica comunión eclesial.

En el análisis de Kassel, el desafío esencial que enfrenta tanto a las mujeres tal como a los hombres es lo de diferenciarse de su apego inconsciente a su madre para realizarse como adultos maduros, plenamente conscientes y responsables de sus propios destinos. El niño

varón tiene que superar su miedo de no poder ser capaz de diferenciarse del inconsciente, un miedo que se expresa a través su miedo a las mujeres reales. El desafío que enfrenta la niña en una cultura patriarcal es doble. Ella tiene que superar la culpabilidad y vergüenza proyectada en ella por la tendencia masculina inconsciente de identificarla con la Eva-pecadora, y a la vez tiene que aceptar la responsabilidad de su propia autorealización como una persona autónoma.

Analizando la cultura mariana de la Iglesia post-Vaticano, Kassel se interroga sobre una aparente postergación de la cuestión mariana. ¿Será que la Iglesia pasa por un período de regreso al inconsciente de lo cual puedan surgir nuevas imágenes de María y una presencia mariana más auténtica? ¿Será que emerge una Iglesia en donde la presencia de María ya no es tanto una proyección de un inconsciente masculino que permite la marginación de mujeres? ¿Será que conoceremos la figura de una mujer fuerte que insiste en que nosotros realicemos una verdadera comunión aquí dentro de la historia?

## **7. La Madre exigente**

La María auténtica, me parece, nos presenta desafíos éticos. Ella no es solamente la Virgen Madre que nos acepta con todas nuestras faltas y debilidades, sino también ella es la que nos llama a la conversión. Específicamente los desafíos que ella nos presenta como Iglesia tienen que ver con la redención de nuestras relacio-

nes torcidas, quebradas, inauténticas. En lugar de la dominación y el abandono económico de la gente pobre, la solidaridad; en lugar de una forma de complementariedad impuesta por hombres en mujeres, la mutualidad auténtica; en lugar del racismo y la dominación étnica, el respeto y la apreciación mutua; en lugar de la intolerancia religiosa, la reconciliación y el espíritu ecuménico. Elaboremos brevemente estas formas de relación.

La relectura del Magnificat que se ha vuelto común hoy desde la experiencia del pueblo sufrido de América Latina presenta María como mujer exigente, aquella que anuncia una subversión de las relaciones opresivas, y la inversión de las estructuras de poder mundanas. El Magnificat fue forjado en la comunidad de Lucas que ya había conocido el martirio. En el contexto de la Iglesia primitiva como en el de la Iglesia de América Latina, el canto de María es la voz de la Iglesia sufrida, oprimida, amenazada. En María Mujer Profética, Yvone Gebara y María Clara Bingemer ponen en evidencia la estructura paradójica del Magnificat. En medio de la desgracia, la injusticia, el dolor, María expresa profundos sentimientos de acción de gracia porque Dios no se habla olvidado de su pueblo. Además, "la esclava del Señor" toma una postura de rebeldía contra sus circunstancias y por su obediencia rebelde abre espacio histórico para la subversión y inversión de las fuerzas político-económicas opresivas. En lugar de la sumisión alienante, la humanidad realizada. La

María del Magnificat es la figura de una mujer fuerte, hija fiel a Dios y fiel a su pueblo, la portavoz de sus deseos y esperanzas. Es la figura de una Iglesia fiel en medio del pueblo necesitado.

La llamada a una relación de mutualidad de relaciones entre hombres y mujeres dentro de la Iglesia es una llamada dirigida a las mujeres tanto como a los hombres. En este contexto, la mutualidad se distingue de la complementariedad en que la complementariedad es un sistema de relaciones entre hombres y mujeres en donde les toca a los hombres el asignar roles sociales a las mujeres, mientras que la mutualidad es un proceso en donde los dos géneros definen mutuamente los roles sociales según las necesidades de la vida social. Para que la forma vigente de complementariedad se transforme en un proceso de crecimiento mutuo entre hombres y mujeres, éstas tienen que reclamar su propio destino, y ellos han de tener la valentía de acompañarlas, aceptando como consecuencia su propia conversión. La transformación tiene que expresarse a nivel de las relaciones personales, matrimoniales, familiares y comunitarias para revelarse a nivel de la Iglesia misma. Se trata de redimir las instituciones patriarcales comenzando con la familia eclesial. Para que el testimonio de la comunión sea creíble, relaciones sexistas ya no se pueden tolerar. La antigua figura de una María producto de las fantasías y proyecciones de personas inmaduras o de una historia patriarcal, no es la figura de una Virgen Madre plenamente mujer, plenamente humana, ple-

namente redimida. Conocer a María es conocer a las mujeres como hijas de Dios.

María es modelo y Madre de la Iglesia universal. Toma un rostro cada vez más de las diversas culturas y épocas a través la historia. La devoción mariana la representa y la venera con diversas advocaciones e imágenes. Abordemos este tema para recordar la historia de Guadalupe que todos en el mundo latino conocen bien. Es una historia que se sitúa en el crisol de la conquista violenta que sirve a la vez como contexto de evangelización. ¡Cuántas contradicciones y cuántos escándalos se dramatizan en este momento histórico! María, "la Morenita" en la lengua Nahuatl, se presenta a Juan Diego como la Madre del Dios Verdadero, Él que vive. Y le manda a Juan al obispo español para presentar ante él su deseo, que éste hace construir un templo en el lugar donde anteriormente se veneraba la Diosa Totinzin. Hay tanto que meditar en esta historia tan remarcable sobre cuestiones de respeto para la cultura autóctona y sobre el carácter de la Iglesia auténtica. Pero por el momento sólo dos preguntas: ¿Por qué un templo? Y ¿Por qué insiste María que sea el sencillo indígena que le represente ante la autoridad de la Iglesia?

Es mi deseo que se me labre un templo en este sitio donde, como Madre piadosa tuya y de tus semejantes, mostraré mi clemencia amorosa y la compasión que tengo de los naturales y de aquellas que me aman y buscan, y de todos los que solicitaren mi amparo y llamaren en sus trabajos y aflicciones, y donde oiré sus

lágrimas y ruegos, para darles consuelo y alivio . . .<sup>13</sup>

Parece que María quiere quedarse con el pueblo, y allí estar disponible. Por eso pide una casa, un espacio en ese lugar en donde podía quedarse, en donde la gente podía encontrarla "por cualquier cosa".

Y ¿Por qué María insiste que sea Juan Diego su portavoz, aunque ella tenía tantos servidores? ¿No sería por invertir las relaciones de autoridad divina? Identificándose con el pueblo del lugar, María quiere comunicar al obispo el mensaje de que su representativo es Juan Diego, que es él que habla de parte de la Madre del Dios Verdadero, y que en este momento histórico en este lugar le toca al obispo obedecer al hombre indígena.

Si la Madre del Hijo de Dios es, de alguna manera, un arquetipo de la humanidad femenina y masculina, y si es la Madre del Mundo, llamándonos a todos a vivir en paz y comunión ¿Cómo puede ser que la figura de María escandalice a los no católicos, y así volverse en signo de contradicción? ¿No sería en parte porque nosotros los católicos les ofendemos a los otros cristianos con sus prácticas marianas exageradas? El mismo Lutero que escribió un comentario bonito sobre el Magnificat dijo, "Deseo que el culto a María sea totalmente abandonado solamente por razón de los abusos que surgen de éste."<sup>14</sup> Así Laurentin propone como la primera regla de una reconciliación, el examen de conciencia sobre formas de devoción mariana. Él propone además un volver a las fuentes de la auténtica tradición

mariana y un diálogo que fomentara conocimiento mutuo.

Les cuento una viñeta que dramatiza la presencia de la Iglesia como lugar de acogido ecuménico situado en la ciudad industrial donde creció mi madre y donde mi congregación ha mantenido una presencia desde 1876. Hace 25 años dos hermanas abrieron lo que llamaron el Centro San Pedro en el sótano de la Iglesia parroquial para gente de la calle. Tuvieron que salir de la Iglesia y se instalaron en un Iglesia abandonada de la Reforma Húngara. Rebautizaron el centro "La Intersección: un Centro Cristiano" Cuando se descubrió que los judíos de la comunidad se sintieron excluidos, cambiaron la inscripción a "un centro judeo-cristiano". Después, unos voluntarios que no eran ni cristianos ni judíos se adjuntaron a la comunidad, y éstas personas lo llamaban simplemente "el Centro". Pero el nombre del centro que se pegó es "La Iglesia". Hoy se encuentran allí un "restaurante", una bodega de víveres, programas para madres y niños, y más que todo, espacio de encuentro de personas de varias clases económicas e identidades religiosas. Así que la Iglesia dejó de llamarse el Centro San Pedro, mientras que quedándose como espacio eclesial se revela como "espacio mariano".

Allí está María esperando a la gente, como le espera todavía en el santuario de Guadalupe.

Transformaciones en nuestras relaciones implican también cambios en nuestra manera de hablar de María. Tenemos que reconocer que las figuras teológicas de análisis vienen cargadas de un lenguaje patriarcal. Es la hora de arriesgar una conversación nutrida más por la imaginación femenina que por las categorías de la mariología patriarcal. Se trata de una búsqueda común de nuevas imágenes y nuevas figuras retóricas.

Este nuevo estilo de hablar exige también que controlemos cada impulso de dominar la conversación en nombre de la verdad. Supone una invitación a callarse, a suprimir cada instinto de contestar a todo lo que suena extraño. Supone una postura de atención para detectar sonidos e imágenes nuevos saliendo de comunidades extra-teológicas. Más que todo, supone que nos mantengamos a la espera de las voces de mujeres hablando desde los márgenes de la comunidad, las que normalmente no se escuchan porque las líneas de comunicación se encuentran super cargadas con "discurso teológico". Lo que podemos escuchar es la voz interior de la silenciosa María de Nazarét que "guardaba todas estas cosas en su corazón" y ahora quiere compartir con nosotros.



## Notas

- 1 Rene Laurentin, *The Questión of Mary*, Techny, IL. Divine Word Publications, p. 51
- 2 Loc. cit.
- 3 Miguel Rubio, *María de Nazaret: Mujer, Creyente, Signo*, Madrid, Narcea, S.A., 1981, p. 18.
- 4 Yvone Gebara y María Clara Bingemer, *María, Mujer Profética*, Ed. Sal Tierra.
- 5 De cultu feminarum, libri duo I, 1 (PL 1, 1418b-19a), citado en Johnson, "The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women," *Horizons*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1985), p. 122.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 127-128.
- 7 Alberto Maggi, *Nuestra Señora de los Herejes. Maria y Nazaret*, Cordoba, Ed. El Almendro, 1990, p. 25.
- 8 Ibid., p. 41.
- 9 Elina Vuola, "La Virgen Maria como ideal femenino: critica feminista y nuevas interpretaciones," *Con-Spirando*, Sept., 1994. Vease tambien su articulo en *Revista Pasos*, 45 (1993), pp. 11-20.
- 10 Leonardo Boff, *El Rostro Materno de Dios*, Madrid. Ed. Paulinas, 7a ed., 1979, p. 254.
- 11 Vease Luis Maldonado, *Para Comprender el Catolicismo Popular*, 313200 Estella, Verbo Divino, 1990.
- 12 Maria Kassel, "Maria y la Psyque Humana: Reflexiones en la Perspectiva de la Psicología Profunda," *Concilium*, vol. 188 (Sept-Oct., 1983), pp. 293-304.
- 13 Donald Demarest and Coley Taylor, *The Dark Virgin*, (Freeport, ME: Coley Taylor, Inc., 1956), p. 42.
- 14 Laurentin, Op. cit., p. 56.

# Revisiting the Shape of Marian Spirituality in Liturgy

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Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

No woman in history has ever been the subject of so much veneration, study, artistic inspiration and popular sentiment as Mary, the mother of Jesus. She has been the focus for works of poets, artists and musicians throughout the Christian era. Churches have been built in her honor; theologians have debated questions relating to her privileges, and the living Church has found in her the pattern of its own holiness. The role of this woman, Miriam of Nazareth, has also been a source of pain, for over the ages she has been portrayed in ways that call women to be passive, long suffering and, at times, subservient. Depending upon the lens used, Mary can be seen as an instrument of oppression or one of liberation.

After the Second Vatican Council, Marian devotion waned as the believing community embraced a renewed understanding of the centrality of Christ and new images of God. Historically, some theologians and preachers had substituted Mary for the feminine face of the Holy. As feminist theologians assisted the faith community to reclaim the feminine images of God, the shape of Marian spirituality had to be redefined. The challenge was to understand Mary as our sister, first among disciples, as well as the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather than focusing on the divine privileges attributed to Mary, it became vital to understand her as a disciple, a very human woman like every other woman, as a person who embraced the mystery of God and lived it out in her daily experience.

While the power of Mary's witness might have been overshadowed by popular devotion, veiled by stories of miraculous appearances and apocryphal stories, the Church preserves the core witness of Mary in its official liturgy. The liturgical texts of her feasts and solemnities consistently provide a rich venue for exploration. While theologians struggle with such concepts as Mary as type of the Church, co-redemptrix and representative of the messianic

community,<sup>1</sup> the liturgy of the Church shapes the imagination of the faithful through its *lex orandi*. Within the four major Solemnities of Mary, the Immaculate Conception, the Motherhood of God, the Annunciation and the Assumption, we find the key elements of Marian spirituality. It is there that our prayer informs our understanding just as our understandings impact the form of our prayer.

## Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

There is a clear progression of thought in the Marian liturgical texts. At the beginning of the Church year, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The message of the feast is that it is through the power and desire of God that Mary is preserved from sin. Like all of us, Mary's holiness is not achieved through her efforts but, rather, through the gratuity of divine grace. The opening prayer speaks of her as one who has shared "beforehand in the salvation Christ would bring."<sup>2</sup> Whatever privileges Mary may possess flow from her relationship to Jesus. She shares in the work of redemption through the gratuitous gift of God and

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is thereby empowered by the Spirit to become a partner in the salvific act of Christ. It is the gift of God that allows Mary to live in a stance of open receptivity to the Word. Contrary to those who would see that openness as one of passive assent, the open receptivity of Mary is a dynamic, intentional choice. It is important to note that Mary was fully a woman of her time and culture. She does not stand apart from the human community but is one of and one

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with the redeemed. Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., in her work *Truly Our Sister*, carefully places Mary in the midst of the community of disciples. She is one in heart and faith with all who follow Christ Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

The alternate opening prayer for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, alluding to the "image of the Virgin . . . found in the Church," asks that God, "Trace in our actions the lines of her love, in our hearts her readiness of faith. Prepare once again a world for your Son." Mary is presented in these opening prayers not only as a partner with God, but as a type of the Church itself, a model of faith and discipleship. The origin of this understanding of Mary can be traced to the Lucan biblical understanding of Mary. Raymond Brown points out that Mary "serves as the most consistent disciple in the whole gospel narrative. This is a tremendous development in the life of the New Testament reflection on Mary. The development comes after Mark was written and begins to move us toward what will happen in the subsequent church."<sup>4</sup> Mary, the disciple, becomes for all Christians a living model of their own lives.

### **Perfect Discipleship**

The placement of Mary within the Christian community continued in John's Gospel as the evangelist made clear that physical relationship was not the

reason for Mary's greatness but rather, her witness to the gospel criterion for faithful discipleship.<sup>5</sup> In the words of *Behold Your Mother*, "As a perfect disciple, the Virgin Mary heard the Word of God and kept it, to the lasting joy of the messianic generations who called her blessed."<sup>6</sup> The preface for the Immaculate Conception echoes this concept when it prays: "You chose her from all women to be our advocate with you and our pattern of holiness."<sup>7</sup> The prayers of the preface also include the idea of Mary as sign and promise. As first among disciples, what God does for Mary, God will do for the Church. Her destiny is the destiny of all believers, the promise of what we all are to become in the fullness of time.

The scriptural readings for the day reflect the same themes. Beginning with the Genesis story of humanity's disorientation from God,<sup>8</sup> the liturgy leads the worshipping church to reflect upon Mary's witness of total orientation to God revealed in the Annunciation story. The pattern of holiness recalled in the preface is defined in the epistle from Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12 which enjoins us "to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love."

From the liturgy for the Immaculate Conception as a whole emerges a vision of our present life in Christ. Like Mary, we have been called by God, redeemed through the saving power of Christ Jesus, called to live in expectation of our final destiny, called to a life-begetting receptivity to the Word. The "yes" of Mary set into motion the most concrete expression of God's love for humankind, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God's love for us. As those who have been baptized in Christ, our "Yes" continues that manifestation of God's love in our time and place.

### **Solemnity of the Annunciation**

The Solemnity of the Annunciation amplifies what that "Yes" means. From the words of the introductory rite: "Behold! I have come to do your will, O God."<sup>9</sup> through the gospel account of Mary's Fiat, the liturgy focuses on what it means to freely respond to the invitation of God. The opening prayer indicates the messianic nature of the event. Humankind grows to completion in Christ Jesus. This process is initiated in the Annunciation and will be complete when Christ has drawn all humanity to Himself in the eschaton.

In the preface, the Church calls to mind three understandings: the redemptive mystery of Christ; Mary's response of faith which gives birth to life through the power of the Spirit; and, the fulfillment of God's promise to humankind.<sup>10</sup> The reading begins with the Isaian dialogue in which a sign confirming the fidelity of God is given.<sup>11</sup> "Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."<sup>12</sup> This proposed sign brings together themes that appear in other Marian solemnities—virginity, which is life begetting, the initiative of God in the redemptive process, and the reality of God among us. The readings outline the appropriate response to such divine initiative, a response expressed in Psalm 40, the responsorial psalm of the day's liturgy: "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will. . . to do your will, O my God, is my delight." This assent to the desire of God is a call to act upon the word in a concrete way, to place at God's disposal all of one's life.

Within the liturgy of the Annunciation, there is a binding together of the Hebrew and Christian covenants. The bridge between covenants is found within the gospel reading. There, Mary gives her consent to God's invitation in order that the new covenant of Jesus may begin. She is the faithful woman of Israel, hearer of the word and one who awaits the promise of God. The power of the feast expands when we acknowledge the human context in which God's invitation is given.

Mary is a young Jewish girl, most likely in her early teens. Like others of her age and economic status, she has gone about the normal chores of village life. She knows that a woman of Israel will be invited to be mother of the Messiah. No one knew to whom or when, only that God would come unexpectedly as the stories of Sarah, Hannah, Judith, and Esther foreshadow. God would come and would wait for a response that will make salvation rain upon the people. Attentiveness to the word was essential in order not to miss the voice of God. Mary had that type of receptivity and attentiveness. She heard the call of God and, while she had no idea of what would be the result of her "Yes" to God, Mary had the courage to embrace the invitation given to her. She gives birth to the Messiah because she believes in the power and in the fidelity of the Holy One. Her faith opens her to the action of the

Spirit and through the power of the Spirit she becomes life giving in the same way that we become life-givers through the same Spirit. This happens because "nothing is impossible with God."<sup>13</sup>

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### **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

For the Church, the willingness to entrust one's whole being, future, and hopes to God gives life. Mary's "Yes" to God makes the virgin a mother and it is the mystery of that birth that is celebrated in the third Marian feast, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The liturgical texts for the day are marked with a sense of celebration and rejoicing for the wonders brought about by God. The blessing invoked in the feast's first reading speaks of it: "A light will shine on us this day, the Lord is born for us."<sup>14</sup> The messianic light foretold by Isaiah enters human history in the person of Christ Jesus; but Jesus will come not as powerful earthly king, but rather will be a liberator of the poor and lowly. This is reflected in the gospel of the day that tells of Mary's hospitality toward the shepherds, societal outcasts. Mary's sensitivity to the poor, echoed in her Magnificat, is tied to God's love for the *anawim*. The gospel also speaks of the way of discovering God in our lives, portraying Mary as "pondering all things in her heart."<sup>15</sup> She appropriates and internalizes both Word and event. Mary not only hears the word but also seeks its meaning and in doing so gives us a model of prayer, a pattern of theological reflection.

The Solemnity of the Motherhood of Mary brings us into the heart of the Church's portrayal of Mary as both the mother of Jesus and mother of the Church. "May her prayer, the gift of a mother's love, be your people's joy through all ages. May her response, born of a humble heart, draw your Spirit

to rest on your people."<sup>16</sup> The understanding of Mary as our mother is both grace and challenge. Over the centuries, the maternal image of Mary has not only given the faithful encouragement and comfort, it has also subtly been used to position her as a necessary intercessor between suffering humankind and an angry God. She has been imaged as the one who could sway the heart of God and bring healing instead of punishment. Such imagery compensated for the image of God as a demanding judge. In the light of such a negative concept of the Divine, Mary becomes a sign of hope, comfort, and maternal intercession. When God is seen as a God who loves us passionately and longs to be in union with us, Mary resumes her place as one with us instead of one who is above us.

The second reading of the feast taken from Galatians speaks of the parenthood of God. Through Jesus all have become sons and daughters

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in the Son. The reading speaks of our status as adopted children and heirs. Proof of this adoption is the "fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the spirit of his Son which cries out 'Abba'."<sup>17</sup> Because Mary of Nazareth is the mother of Jesus, the Son, she is also the faith mother of all who have become one in the body of Christ. Our status as child and heir highlight the eschatological meaning of the Incarnation. The relationship of God and humankind has been transformed. As the Alleluia verse reminds us, no intermediary is necessary, for in the past God spoke through the prophets but now God "speaks to us through his Son."<sup>18</sup>

It is significant that the gospel selected for the feast is not the nativity story but the story of the manifestation of Jesus to the poor and lowly. Nowhere in the liturgical texts is the physical motherhood of Mary stressed. It is always the spiritual

motherhood of one who believes in the promise of God and whose faith brought forth life. It is through Christ Jesus that all humankind is called into the Body of Christ and it is Mary who gives Christ to the least of his brothers and sisters.

### **Solemnity of the Assumption**

The last of the Marian Solemnities, the Assumption, draws together the themes of the first three. The tone of the Solemnity is one of rejoicing and hope for in the exaltation of Mary lays the hope of our own entry into glory. This is made explicit in the preface: "Today the virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way."<sup>19</sup> Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, is now the pattern of the Church's life in the eschaton. Her assumption affirms the goodness of material creation, affirms that the person, made of flesh and spirit, is redeemed as flesh and spirit. Her glory is promise of the glory which awaits all believers.

The scriptures for the feast reflect the triumph of Christ over sin and death. This freedom is symbolized in Mary's assumption for: "When the corruptible frame takes on incorruptibility . . . Death is swallowed up in victory."<sup>20</sup> In a way, the readings of the day turn things upside down. Death gives way to life. In the gospel, the message of freedom and liberation resounds in the powerful words of Mary's Magnificat. The canticle paints a vision of redeemed creation. The values of the world are overturned and the poor championed. God acts to save the lowly, oppressed and forsaken. Mary proclaims the saving power of God and clearly points to God's love for those who are poor. Her blessedness, which is to be proclaimed in every generation, is the blessedness of one who knows who God is.

### **Christocentric, Spirit-Oriented, Trinitarian**

Three themes are found in the opening prayers of the Assumption liturgy: Mary as model of eschatological fulfillment; as maternal intercessor and as pattern of holiness. They are themes that are really about the faithfulness of God and about the shape of faithful discipleship.



Collectively the shape of Marian spirituality that emerges from the Church's *lex orandi* has twelve identifiable characteristics. Its spirit is marked by joy, active receptivity, freedom, and dynamism. The first three characteristics express Mary's relationship to the Holy. First and foremost, Marian spirituality is deeply Christocentric in nature. The mysteries upon which we reflect all have their origin in the Incarnation of Christ Jesus and Mary is always seen in relationship to her Son. Devotions which isolate Mary from Christ are not consistent with the liturgical portrait of Mary.

The second aspect of Marian devotion is that it is Spirit-oriented. Mary is one who is empowered by the Spirit. Her openness and receptivity to the movement of the Spirit in her life is "the prototype of all souls revived by the Spirit through grace, with willing cooperation. Thus she is the first 'New Being' in Christ."<sup>21</sup> It is this reality that calls each believer to see in Mary the promise of her or his own destiny. Like Mary, our sister, we are all born of the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit and the home of the Spirit.

The third aspect of Marian spirituality is that it is Trinitarian. Mary is in relationship with all three persons of the Trinity. She responds to our Creator God with openness and willing obedience. She gives birth to Christ Jesus and shares with him his redemptive mission. Finally, it is the Spirit who overshadows her, prays within her and who transforms her into the living temple of God among us. It is when we look at Mary's relationship to Trinity that we can more clearly discern the fallacy of seeing her as the feminine face of the Holy. Mary is one who is in loving relationship with God, not a stand-in for a God who is seen as distant, detached, or lacking in compassion.

### **Relational Bond of Mary and God**

The next characteristics of Marian spirituality are relational, defining the type of bond which existed between Mary and her God. It was a relationship that was virginal, life-giving, responsive, dynamic, liberating, and thankful. These six characteristics have to be held in union in order to avoid an over-emphasis on one to the detriment of the others.

The first two, virginal and life-giving, are best seen together. Mary's virginity is not simply physical virginity but an attitude of virginal fidelity to

God. In our Constitutions we speak of "Accepting God as our first and all-encompassing love" (#23). It is that type of love that is modeled for us in Mary. She is the person totally oriented to God and, in that loving directedness, she is transformed into the new creation in Christ. The mystics would call it spousal love, a reflection of the love God has for humankind, a mirror of the love Christ has for the Church. Mary's love is so transforming, so full that it overflows in birthing life. It bears living fruit, "the fruit of your womb, Jesus." Her love is not the barren love that centers in self but the love that transcends self. Mary's total love for God allowed her to risk death, disgrace, and an unknown future in order to give birth to Jesus.

## **Devotions which isolate Mary from Christ are not consistent with the liturgical portrait of Mary.**

Mary is both the hearer and doer of the Word, witnessing to the characteristics of responsive obedience and faithful discipleship. Throughout the scriptures and the liturgy of the Church, Mary is always seen as a woman of faith. As she lived her life, she had to listen not only to the Word in Scripture, but the Word expressed in her own life experience. The "pondering" did not stop when the shepherds and Magi left her. It happened at Cana, at Calvary and all points in-between. Mary knew she was asked to be mother of the Messiah but she had to grow in the knowledge of what that meant and who her Son really was. Hearing and acting were synonymous in the disciple Mary. All her deeds flowed from the Word heard, embraced and acted upon.

### **Thankfulness and Liberation**

Two other characteristics of Marian spirituality are also linked together, those of thankfulness and liberation. Both of these elements are found in her Magnificat, which acclaims the wonder of God's deed and proclaims a new order of things. Elizabeth Johnson tells us that: "Composed according

to the overall structure of a thanksgiving psalm, which first praises God and lists the reasons for gratitude, the Magnificat has two main stanzas or strophes. The first praises divine mercy to the speaker and the second reflects the Holy One's victorious deeds for the oppressed community"<sup>22</sup> The canticle provides a mini-summary of God's saving deeds. Placed on the tongue of one who is lowly, a peasant woman in an oppressed culture, it affirms the belief in God's justice and compassion. It is the song of the *anawim*. It shows that Mary's "Yes" to God was not one of passive submission, but one which led her to resist the powers that dehumanize her brothers and sisters. It is this song of liberation and thanksgiving that most fully resonates today in those who long for freedom from injustice, recognition of their dignity and a hope-filled future.

Marian spirituality is also eschatological and ecclesial. Mary always leads us back to the Church, which has consistently held that Mary is both its mother and type. She reflects for the Church its own call to share in the redemptive work of Christ, give witness to a life of service and contemplation, and provide for all an example of dynamic faith. In her is found the model of our prayer, the sign of our eschatological destiny, and the embodiment of discipleship. She is, in her person, what we are called to be as Church.

### Holiness of the Ordinary

Finally, Marian spirituality is profoundly ordinary. The pattern of holiness seen in Mary is rooted in the ordinary things of human experience. It is through her responsiveness to daily life, through her ability to hear the desire of God voiced within her experience, that the extraordinary enters in . . . God becomes flesh in Christ Jesus. Mary's life is not one of heroic deeds and accomplishments. It is one of centeredness in God. She listens, serves, wonders, doubts, and extends compassion to those in need around her.

The model of spirituality seen in Mary is one that is strong, vibrant, and challenging. It is not for the weak or passive. Instead, it is one which demands the daring of faith, the courage of trusting in the promises of God and the love and compassion that reaches out to all in need. Catherine

McAuley told us that, "We cannot look long and lovingly at her virtues without being incited to copy them in our lives and conduct."<sup>23</sup> To do so is to grow in the pattern of Christ Jesus, for Mary always draws us to her Son.



### Notes

- 1 Pastoral Letter of the American Bishops on the Blessed Virgin Mary *Behold Your Mother Woman of Faith*, November 21, 1973 (Washington D.C.: USCC, 1973) n.16.
- 2 Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *The Sacramentary of the Roman Missal* trans. ICEL (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1974) 752-3. All subsequent liturgical texts quoted in this article are taken from this edition.
- 3 Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, (New York: Continuum, 2003).
- 4 Raymond E. Brown, "Mary in the New Testament and in Catholic Life," *America* (May 15, 1982): 377.
- 5 Brown, 377.
- 6 *Behold Your Mother*, #78.
- 7 *Sacramentary*, 58.
- 8 Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *The Lectionary of the Roman Missal* trans. ICEL (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1970) n. 689. All readings for the Solemnities of Mary quoted in this paper are taken from this edition of the lectionary.
- 9 *Sacramentary*, 622-23
- 10 *Sacramentary*, 44.
- 11 Isaiah 7:10-14, Lectionary, #545.
- 12 Isaiah 7:14, Lectionary, #545.
- 13 Luke 1:37, Lectionary, #545.
- 14 Numbers 6:22-27, Lectionary, #18.
- 15 Luke 2:19, Lectionary, #18.
- 16 *Sacramentary*, 54.
- 17 Galatians 4:4-7, Lectionary, #18.
- 18 Hebrews 1:1-2, Lectionary, #18
- 19 *Sacramentary*, 59.
- 20 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, Lectionary, #622.
- 21 Marjorie Thompson, "God, Woman, Man Reflections on Mary and Jesus," *Worship* 55:3 (May, 1981) 240.
- 22 Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 264.
- 23 Catherine McAuley, *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley*, (St. Louis, Mo.: Vincentian Press, 1927) 85.

# The Magnificat and Incarnational Eros

Fran Repka, R.S.M.

*Given the current sexual scandals in our Church and the political, corporate scandals in our society, we are in desperate need of a deeper understanding of incarnational eros and its place in human growth, decision-making, relationships and the building up of God's Kin-dom. One way to address this need for sexual/spiritual integration is through Mary's profound song of liberation, the Magnificat.*

Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56) speaks to us of a fundamental shift in consciousness. When taken seriously, this shift requires profound changes in our assumptions, our interactions, and our ways of viewing sexuality and spirituality. In her *fiat*, Mary modeled a departure from patriarchy. Sexuality, power, and authority are no longer connected with control and domination. Jesus' birth through a woman connotes a new sexual and spiritual human image of compassion, caring, and "power with." The powerless become powerful. The blind see. The lame walk. The deaf hear. The Messiah, Jesus, who saves humanity, has little to do with patriarchal views or a hierarchical

order. A new dance has begun. Mary's radical "Yes" changed the universe, changed our way of being together forever. Her in-touchness with the fires of passion that burned within her is revelatory of the depth of sexual and spiritual integration so needed in today's society and church. It is the integration of sexuality and spirituality that is the subject of this article.

Mary's Magnificat offers a wealth of insight into the need for a healthy sense of sexual and spiritual power rooted in the Spirit. First, it is a song of love, joy, and liberation, realities which lie at the heart of sexuality and spirituality. Secondly, the Magnificat is set in the context of a journey. Our spiritual and sexual lives are a journey, that is, they are always in process. Thirdly, although the Magnificat is sung in the present, it holds its connection with the past, and looks toward the future, all important aspects of wholesome sexuality and spirituality or incarnational eros.

## **Incarnational Eros**

Incarnational eros is a term borrowed from the work of Rita Nakishima Brock and other Asian theologians. "The reality of

erotic power within connectedness means it cannot be located in a single individual. Hence what is truly Christological, that is, truly revealing of divine incarnation and salvific power in human life, must reside in connectedness . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The word "incarnate" has to do with embodied flesh and energy. Heart energy. Soul energy. Body energy. Eros is far more than sexuality, passion, or a spiritual quest for ideal beauty. Rather it is the "life force" permeating the relational lives of women and men, grounding them in reciprocity with all creation. Incarnational eros is each of us involved in a critically self-aware consciousness that unites the spiritual, sexual, political, economic spheres of life. It binds love and power. Its spiritual and sexual dynamic is relationship. In short, Incarnational eros is the divine/human power that strives for union with other. It is the connecting power that moves us towards justice for all of creation. Thus, when we are in touch with the fullness of our sexuality and spirituality, we reflect the new cosmology. All is one.

Simply put, incarnational eros is "creation ringing with connection," that is, the personal, social, political, spiritual, sexual, ecological, and economical facets of life are all connected.

Dualisms are no longer appropriate. In today's climate of fragmentation, incarnational eros must become a shaping force in decision making at any level and move people towards right relationships with each other, indeed with all of creation.

God. We have done eros a disservice by repressing it.

Repressed erotic power is dangerous. For example, under the guise of agape, we smile through our anger, ignore injustices, manipulate others in the name of love, as a church get

by contemplating the three major movements of Mary's Magnificat.

### **First Movement: Acceptance, Joy, and Gratitude**

Recall that the Angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and bear a son and name him Jesus, and that this Jesus would reign over the house of Jacob forever and His Kingdom would have no end. Mary, undoubtedly filled with both joy and confusion, excitedly and quickly sets off on the road to her cousin Elizabeth's home to share the astonishing things God has done for her. What immediately seemed important to Mary was connecting, staying in relationship. When she arrives at Elizabeth's home, Scripture tells us, the six-month-old child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy (Luke 1:44). Both Mary and Elizabeth were caught up in an intimate moment of pure delight. Mary responds with these passionate words:

*My soul magnifies the Lord  
And my spirit finds joy in God my Savior  
For God has looked with favor on the  
humbleness of God's servant and  
From this day forward all generations  
shall call me blessed  
For God has done wondrous things for me  
And holy is God's name. (Luke 1:46-49)*

In this powerful opening of her Magnificat, Mary is filled with gladness and rejoicing, not yet understanding all the implications of the message of Gabriel, but so open, so trusting, so in touch with who she was in God,

**To focus exclusively on libidinal eros fosters pathology and disease and leads to maltreatment of life. To focus exclusively on agape (without considering eros along with logos) is to numb the feelings or restrict the capacity to go deeper.**

Unfortunately under patriarchy we have ever so quietly taken "eros" out of "agape," removed eros from community living, deleted eros from decision-making and understanding the difficulties of our world.<sup>2</sup> We have done this by splitting off feelings and other emotional dimensions of ourselves. We have reduced eros to erotic or libidinal urges. Agape has become the prerogative of transcendent divine love. This split has not been helpful. To focus exclusively on libidinal eros fosters pathology and disease and leads to maltreatment of life. To focus exclusively on agape (without considering eros along with logos) is to numb the feelings or restrict the capacity to go deeper. Incarnational eros or healthy erotic power is connecting power and it is truly a gift of

more concerned about non-procreative sexual activity than violent coercive sexual activity. As a society we call missiles "peacekeepers," "bullets that kill our own soldiers," "friendly fire" and bombs that kill civilians "collateral damage." These behaviors lead to deception, dominance, control, and abuse. All of us have heard of or witnessed the tragedies of deceptive eroticization of power enshrined by patriarchy, tragedies that have led to devastating consequences such as oppression, rape, and violence, especially towards women and children. These atrocities reflect a sexuality and spirituality gone amok, and they demand our healing attention which begins with looking at the positive.

One way to go deeper into the positive aspects of incarnational eros (connecting power) is

that she could express this incredibly mysterious moment in a spirit of joy and gratitude. Immediately, Mary made herself vulnerable. There was no protest, "Gabriel, I simply cannot do what you are asking. How could I be pregnant and not married in this culture? What will people think? I'll be ousted, rejected, not believed." Nor did she ask, "Gabriel, give this task to another person, please call me to be or do something else." Mary, in all humility, was not afraid to assert herself with Gabriel: "How can I be with child when I haven't yet known a man?" (Luke 1:33). Nor was she afraid to lean into this mysterious moment, for she felt affirmed by God as a woman and trusted what arose from her deep, intimate relationship with God. She was willing to risk all: "Be it done unto me according to Your Word" (Luke 1: 38).

In effect, she said, "Let the dream begin in me. Let the dance begin!" Mary had to be puzzled, surprised, and perhaps frightened, but her intimacy with God was such that she was willing to risk everything, even her reputation. She listened with her heart and God took the initiative. Mary allowed God to lead her onto the dance floor, neither knowing the steps nor where the dance would take her. And with God doing the leading, she became swept up in the co-creation of a new dance (one never danced before) for all humankind. She connected herself to the dance—body, mind, and soul. Her sexuality and spirituality not only reflected God's work, they embodied God. God

is flesh of her flesh as expression of incarnational eros.

### **Dance of Incarnational Eros**

Like Mary, our sexuality too must be embodied in a way that our joy and gratitude are visible. It takes incarnational eros to dance with passion to what God calls us. Good dancers are alive from within. They are filled with spirit, listen well to the music (i.e., the signs of the times), and are sensitive to others. Every cell of a dancer's body is involved in the dance. Dancers are awake within themselves, awake to others on the dance floor of life, and awake to the signs of the times. They get bumped, shoved, stepped on, often by people very different from themselves, but they find a way to joyfully stay in the struggle. Difference in personality, race, color, or creed does not become division. Rather, differences become a source of relational power and relational pleasure. Mary teaches us that the joy that comes from connecting is a sure sign of a healthy sexuality rooted in the Spirit. Gratitude becomes the attitude of a wholesome sexual and spiritual life.

### **Practical Application**

But how do we enter into, own, and let ourselves flow from our inner sexual/spiritual energy? Let me suggest five ways:

#### **1. Embrace Uniqueness**

First of all, we must embrace our uniqueness in God. Mary could affirm herself as a woman and

humble servant because she knew she was affirmed by God. We are Holy Ground just as we are! Each of us is unique in all the world, and psychologists tell us that the older we get the more unique we become. There is no one who can give the world spiritually and sexually what each of us has to give in quite the same way. Let us not be afraid to love ourselves, to be ourselves. What happened to us as individuals (on one level) does not matter, but what we do with it does matter. None of us has it all together. We are each and all victims of childhood circumstances totally out of our control. We had no choice about parents (perhaps even a lack of them) or early development. Yet there are lessons to be learned from whatever experience was given to us, lessons for which we can hold gratitude.

#### **2. Mutual sharing of joyful and painful stories**

Lessons of life are best learned through telling our stories. Stories have a powerful way of connecting us with ourselves and with others. Mary and Elizabeth took time to share their respective journeys. We too must take the time to share both our joyful sexual/spiritual stories as well as our painful sexual and spiritual stories. Why, as women religious in this third millennium, are we still shy about sharing our hurts and struggles with sexuality and spirituality, and our shame? What makes us afraid to risk with each other? Yet unless we take the time to share these stories, the shadow side of gratitude (poor self-esteem, resentment, anger) will keep us from dancing

We can look at all that has led to the present moment of our existence, no matter how horrible, and see life as good, see others and self as loving persons affirmed by God.

toward right relationships with God, self, other, and indeed with all of creation. Sue Monk Kidd in *The Secret Life of Bees* writes: "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we are here."<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Honor the Totality of Your Reality

In the telling of our story, it is essential to name and accept the totality of our reality—our strengths as well as the parts of ourselves that we tend to reject. Erotic energy behind unhealed wounds turns into abuse of power and will convert itself into anger and resentment (power against) rather than compassion and caring (power with) if we do not take care of it. Healing poor self-esteem, resentment, and anger in relationships comes from knowing ourselves and not denying parts of ourselves that we do not like. Joyce Rupp in her book *The Cosmic Dance* says that we have to learn to love the snake, the pig, the lion within us—along with all the other more pleasant animals we like to think about.<sup>4</sup>

It is important that we make every effort to unearth the root causes of whatever internal pain is ours to bear, so that our core joy can be discovered. People who do not like themselves

cannot forget themselves, cannot emotionally give of themselves and subsequently have difficulty connecting, difficulty moving toward deeper relationships where true joy and gratitude are found. The good news is: there is something we can do about anything that ails us.

### 4. Healing Past Hurts

What is important for healing and wholeness is that each of us *owns* his or her respective hurts, depressions, addictions, losses, toxic secrets, resentments, and so on. Follow your wound. Dancing well takes discipline. Part of that discipline is to own our God-given strengths while at the same time allowing unpleasant feelings to surface, taking them into a new dimension. Recall that "owned" feelings, for example the fire experienced in anger, become a constitutive part of transformation and purification of the dark night. Know where your growing edges are. Do not be afraid. Take the time that healing takes and do not do it alone. Remember that on the dance floor of life there is always someone with whom we can dance—a friend, a spiritual director, a close community member who can be honest with us, a counselor. No two dances are alike, yet we can help each other in ways that may be surprising. One's

depression can transform another's ecstasy; another's ecstasy can transform one's depression and so on. We need each other.

### 5. Transformation and Gratitude

The challenge for each of us is to keep transforming our mourning into dancing. We must live in the here and now and reach beyond where we are at any moment no matter the difficulty, pain, or tragedy of past or present circumstances. In other words, we can look at all that has led to the present moment of our existence, no matter how horrible, and see life as good, see others and self as loving persons affirmed by God. The psalmists in Scripture often speak of the suffering of darkness, but with the dawn he or she is found rejoicing (Ps 30:5; 126:5–6). Rejoicing comes with staying sexually and spiritually connected. When we stay connected, we are in a better position to read the unfolding reality in relationships with discernment and sensitivity. Incarnational eros is a call to engage with self and others in a way that integrity, joy and gratitude are visible. It is in our God-given nature to turn mourning into dancing.

### A Story of Healing

Following is a story I have permission to share. Lillian (not her real name) was an excellent teacher and principal for almost fifty years. Besides teaching and administration, she involved herself in peace and justice efforts because she knew it was

right, not because her heart was in it. Lillian loved her ministry and untiringly gave of herself. Due to forced retirement because of a life-threatening illness, Lillian came to live in her order's motherhouse. After about two years there, she was found throwing things in anger when she'd get upset, being belligerent with the staff and other Sisters in community. Although she was very ill and several times taken to the hospital near death, she absolutely refused to sign any power of attorney which her order had requested all Sisters to do. In her anger and frustration, she also refused to attend community events.

Lillian was encouraged to talk with someone. She was enraged at this suggestion. She just wanted to be left alone. Nevertheless she was brought to my office by a caring, compassionate coordinator of the motherhouse. Understandably, Lillian did not want to see me, but things kept going from bad to worse for her in terms of relationships, and she finally acquiesced. She had shut down inside. She said nothing when I greeted her in the waiting room, and when we reached my office and sat down, we simply looked at each other in a long moment of silence. I acknowledged her anger and said I would be angry too if I felt forced to talk with a stranger when I didn't want to. But I also invited her to the possibility that her being here might have been a caring gesture on the part of the coordinator. Reluctantly she said she would consider that possibility.

Slowly Lillian began to share how she hated the fact that

her health was slowing her down, how she was mad at God, and how unloved she was feeling. The dance had begun. I said very little after the first session. She, to my admiration, poured out her soul. No one had to tell her that the realities of sexuality and spirituality are connected. It was like watching the self-healing of a terribly infected wound as it opens and drains potentially destructive forces of hurt, anger, shame, and grief.

Although she had contemplated being a nun since childhood, she feared she had entered for the wrong reasons, and that she would go to hell for lying about it.

After Lillian's move to the motherhouse, life moved from focusing on the external details often necessary in ministry, to her internal life. It was then that she began to encounter burdensome feelings which she had kept at bay throughout her religious life and which she did not understand. Lillian shared how she had been to spiritual directors, therapists, tried to talk to fellow Sisters in community at various times in her religious life, but nothing seemed to work. She said when she tried to share, people kept changing the subject or telling her, "The past is the past," "Let things go" or "Pay attention to the here and now" of life, of ministry, of living community. In addition, some superiors coached her to do one nice thing for someone every day, be grateful, and her

depression would lift. She tried, but could not feel the gratitude and felt like a failure when she could not say nice things to people.

We had only six sessions together. In that time Lillian did years of work and dug down to the core of what had disturbed her all her life. Lillian felt she was living a lie because at the time of entrance (those of you who entered in pre-Vatican II years will remember this) when

she was asked if she was a virgin, she said she was. What was actually happening was that she was desperate to get out of the house where her father had been sexually abusing her for years. Although she had contemplated being a nun since childhood, she feared she had entered for the wrong reasons, and that she would go to hell for lying about it. She said she had been ashamed of her body and her sexual feelings all her life and knew her spirituality was affected by this. She tried to get help, but those to whom she was sent could not hear her heart, for whatever reason. It got so that she could neither fully live nor ready herself to die.

By the fourth session, she herself initiated the signing of her power of attorney. She could now hear what her body was re-



ally trying to say: that she was very ill, and needed to let God lead her in a never-known-before dance. By the fifth session, her inner joy was outwardly visible! By the sixth session, we both knew she was ready to respond to whatever God's desire was for her. She was finished with her therapeutic process. After the last session we wept and embraced. Without needing words, we somehow knew it would be the last time we would see each other.

Lillian died peacefully ten days later, and holy is God's name in her. Like Mary, her soul magnified the Lord and her Spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. Lillian teaches us the paradox that we have to go back before we can step forward in the dance. Doing our interior work is essential for fullness of joy and gratitude, for fullness of life in community and ministry.

After Mary gives gratitude and fullness of praise to God, her heart is naturally moved with compassion for others, especially those who have less. Mary was a Jewish woman, and the Jewish outlook was that the favor of God bestowed upon any individual is to be considered as the community's blessing. It was Mary's in-touchness with incarnational eros that moved her not only to give thanks to God for the Mercy shown to her personally, but also for God's practice of helping and vindicating the poor and needy. In this second part of the Magnificat, the three great human indicators of greed—pride, power, and riches—are set forth as forces opposed to God and to the people who have a special claim on God's protection—the poor and lowly. Pride, aggressive power, and mismanaged riches are consequences of disembodied sexuality and spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

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greed—pride, power, and riches—are set  
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### **Second Movement: Mercy, Justice, and Community**

*God's Mercy is from age to age on those  
who fear God*

*God's mighty arm scatters the proud in  
their conceit*

*Pulls tyrants from their thrones and raises  
up the humble*

*God fills the starving and lets the rich go  
hungry (Luke 1:50–53).*

Mary, in her heartfelt prayer reminds us that the hungry, the homeless, the abused, the tortured, the oppressed are also part of the dance. She calls us to mourn the lack of vibrant sexuality and spirituality in our world due to abuse, neglect, and emotional deficits.

The level of violence in our world has not decreased from

Mary's time. Spirituality and sexuality are rooted in the experience of oppressed women, children, and men, not to mention the experience of fear, the far-reaching evils of nuclear build-up for the sake of national security, the pollution of our air, water, soil, food, etc. These societal ills are signs of unintegrated erotic power. Erotic power repressed and denied, produces dominance, control, and violence. Statistics are staggering. In the U.S. alone, one in every three or four women have been sexually abused sometime in their lives; every fifteen seconds, a woman is battered (American Medical Association). More than fifty percent of all women will experience some form of violence from their spouses (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence). In homes where spousal abuse occurs, children are abused at a rate 1,500 percent higher than the national average.<sup>6</sup> On the world scene, things are no better, and we can add to this list the worldwide sexual trafficking of children.

Having some kind of gut response/heart response to these statistics requires an embodied sexuality/spirituality if we are to remain committed in the struggle. Ministers in touch with incarnational eros remain attentive to these experiences, for they know that lack of integrity and inequality hurts us all. If we find ourselves not responding to, or apathetic to the aforementioned realities, including the Lillians in our midst, something is seriously wrong.

Constance Fitzgerald, O.C.D., writes that immersing ourselves

in these painful personal and societal experiences in a way that we allow our hearts to be touched often opens us into a profound impasse, a sort of dark night of the soul, a dark night of a world crying for meaning.<sup>7</sup> She goes on to tell us that while our spirituality must emerge from these concrete painful experiences, it must also return to these same situations to feed them, heal them, and enliven them (action). This dark-night process requires incarnational eros if we are not to become stuck in the impasse only to find ourselves becoming cynical, ineffectual, apathetic, and ultimately part of the problem.

How do we become part of the problem? By having all the answers, by making unilateral decisions, by refusing to listen, by not allowing the oppressed to be the judge of whether policies are working or not. Those who live and minister with incarnational eros respect the uniqueness of individuals while at the same time affirming a deep sense of oneness for the group. In a community alive with mutual love, passionate erotic forces like prejudice, favoritism, jealousy, and anger are explicitly acknowledged lest they negatively affect the group. The issue is not *whether* feelings will inform and determine our actions. They will. The question is *which* feelings will play the central role in shaping the character of our life together in community and how will these feelings be communicated. Will the decisive influence be an authentic, mutually nourishing flow of erotic power and erotic joy, or will it be a twisted eros poisoned

by isolation, talking about others not with them, jealousy, non-support and the desire to control. Healthy communication requires consciousness.

Incarnational eros is all about connection, compassion, caring about each other which naturally flows into caring with those bent over. Healthy power (power with) comes from connecting. It comes from communicating. Mary teaches us by her very being and response that incarnational eros is other-oriented energy, praxis-oriented energy. Here lies the goal of sexuality integrated with spirituality: the mature capacity to love, to be merciful to everyone because we have known God's mercy and God's love. What is healthy and wholesome for you is not just for you, it is for the community. We are all in a constant process of being wounded and healed and enter into a large circle dance with others who are also looking for hope in their woundedness.

### **Third Movement: Intimacy, Forgiveness, and the Transforming Love of God**

*God has helped her servant Israel  
In remembrance of God's Mercy  
According to the promise God made to  
our ancestors  
To Abraham and to his descendants  
forever (Luke:54-55).*

Mary knew she was part of a long line of people who helped her expand her consciousness: Abraham and Sarah, Esther, Judith, Deborah, Elizabeth, all liberators in their own right. Mary's spiritual and sexual

experience of her *fiat* fostered a personal transformation which pulled her further into the world community as a witness to nonviolent intimacy. This passionate *fiat* continues today in the Susan B. Anthonys, the Dorothy Days, the Catherine McAuleys, the Elizabeth Setons, the Julie Billiarts, and other women who take chances for the sake of justice. Carter Heyward and other feminist theologians claim that the passion in sexuality and spirituality is what awakens in us a passion for justice and right relationships across the spectrum of life and meaning.

Mary waited for and believed in the coming of a transformed vision of God. A new circle dance had begun. Jesus through Mary initiated the transformation for all the world. Of her, the words could truly be said: "I no longer live as I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). In this last movement of the Magnificat, Mary reminds us that what saves us is neither hard work, nor accomplishments, nor going out "to save" the rich and the poor, but presence, forgiveness, and connecting with each other in love.

### **Forgiveness**

The process of transformation at the very least requires forgiveness. The older we get the more life seems to be one little forgiveness after the next—forgiveness of the self, of others, of groups. It is an intensely deep process requiring incarnational eros. One of the most profound examples of forgiveness of an entire country can be seen in South Africa. Bishop Desmond Tutu who led

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission after the years of apartheid's racial cruelty and injustice says that the cycle of revenge and retaliation and counter revenge is broken only when we open ourselves to forgive. South Africa's remarkable path of reconciliation filled the people with great hope that despair, anger, and resentment would not have the last word. By choosing to forgive the years of repression, the people substantiated their claim on the holy and demonstrated their magnanimity and nobility of spirit. This is incarnational eros in its fullness.

We must see not only the crucified, dying Christ, experienced in personal and communal injustices, global poverty, pollution, oppression, and violence. We also see the rising Christ, experienced in personal and communal joy and forgiveness, mutual relating, the development of sustainable environments, socially responsible businesses, anti-sweat-shop movements, efforts at campaign finance reform, shared cultural values, systemic change, civil rights enforcement, and efforts to realize women's rights.

## Conclusion

Mary was fully aware that the paradox of personal power is its relational base: a) that life is all about participation, mutual relating, forgiveness, collective vision; b) that we involve all people in any mission, community, or project to come together to think about the same

things from different perspectives; c) that everyone's rights, accountability, and dignity are honored and supported. Each person will have a mindset that must be abandoned, and ideas important to bring forward. We learn together. We share knowledge, information, and responsibilities. We teach each other in all directions. This networking, connecting, and collaborating are not accomplished without a healthy sexuality rooted in the Spirit whether we are building local communities, neighborhoods, or global villages.

Incarnational eros, or healthy erotic spiritual power, is not a commodity possessed by a self, but is the bond which creates and sustains and is recreated and sustained by mutual relating. Intimacy will grow only through a highly interactive process of mutual recognition and validation from those around us. We need each other's light. Mary was a feminist in her time and, through her Magnificat, calls each of us to be part of a world energized by incarnational eros, marked by dialogue, mutual empowerment, compassion, interdependence, prayer, and action. Only then can transformation take hold in local community living, families, churches, corporate life, domestic legislation, and foreign policy. The call is to form circles, not pyramids. Both personal and community transformation leads our souls to magnify our God, and our spirits to find joy in God our Savior for s/he has done great things for us!

## Notes

- 1 Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988): 52. See chapter 2. Other Asian theologians maintain that erotic power is the fundamental power of existence-as-a-relational-process. Christology is centered in relationship and community. Jesus participates centrally in this community, but does not control it.
- 2 Cf. Brock, *Journeys of the Heart*, with reference to Haunani-Kay Trask, who contrasts eros with logos in *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986): 92-92.
- 3 Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees* (England: Viking/Penguin, 2002): 107.
- 4 Joyce Rupp, *The Cosmic Dance: An Invitation to Experience our Oneness* (New York: Orbis, 2002).
- 5 Mary Catherine Nolan, O.P., *Mary's Song* (Notre Dame, Indiana, Ave Maria Press, 2002): 15. The author takes the Magnificat verse by verse and explores its richness for life's various themes.
- 6 Citations for AMA and National Coalition Against Domestic Violence can be found on the web at <http://www.ncadv.org/publicpolicy/intiate.htm>. The statistics can be found in Bureau of Justice Statistic: Special Report "Intimate Partner Violence" by Callie Marie Rennison, Ph.D. and Sarah Welchans (BJS Statisticians), May 2000.
- 7 Constance Fitzgerald, *Living with Apocalypse: Spiritual Resources for social Compassion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984) 93-116.



# Commentary on the Eucharistic Prayer for the Sisters of Mercy, Regional Community of Connecticut

Terrence J. Moran, C.S.S.R.

**T**his Eucharistic Prayer was written for the celebration of "Mercy Day," the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24, 1999 for the Sisters of Mercy of the Regional Community of Connecticut. In composing this prayer, I attempted, while respecting the structure and purpose of the Eucharistic Prayer in the Roman Liturgy, to allow the voice of Mercy to speak by drawing on:

- ▶ biblical imagery important to the Mercy tradition;
- ▶ the prayers and letters of Catherine McAuley who founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831;
- ▶ the Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

In this way, I hoped to use words that resonated with familiarity for the Sisters of Mercy.

I also hoped to give voice to the generations of Sisters of Mercy who, "celebrate in Word and Sacrament the Passover of Jesus and are drawn into communion with all of creation," (Constitutions §12). While I am not a Sister of Mercy, or even, formally, a Mercy associate, I have had for many years the privilege of working together with the Sisters of Mercy and of sharing in their friendship and hospitality.

*Holy God,  
We are yours for time and eternity.  
We give you thanks and praise for the wonders of your  
Providence . . .*

*Make us delight in hope of that day when,  
with Jesus, we will come to possess you,  
our God, our All,  
in your never ending reign.*

The prayer is framed, beginning and end, with words taken from the beginning and ending of

Catherine McAuley's famous *Suscipe*. That prayer, well known to generations of the Sisters of Mercy, is particularly appropriate for a Eucharistic prayer with its focus on self-gift. In the Eucharist, the Church, moved by the Spirit, unites itself to the action of Jesus who offers himself to God.

*From the womb of your mercy all things came to be:  
our universe, wild with possibility,  
our fragile humanity, longing for wholeness.  
From the fullness of your love you sent Jesus the  
Redeemer—  
the hand of your compassion outstretched to a broken  
world.  
Anointed by the Spirit,  
he announced good news to the poor,  
offered healing to the sick,  
and taught the word of life to all who longed for truth.  
With all creation,  
we raise our voices in praise of the tenderness of your  
mercy.  
Holy, Holy, Holy . . .*

The preface recalls the history of salvation celebrated in the liturgy, the wonders of Providence in which Catherine had such great trust. The origins of creation are found in the "womb of God's mercy" adding feminine imagery to the text and recalling the tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures of seeing mercy as "womb love." We come to the Eucharist with a consciousness both of the radical goodness of creation and awareness of the woundedness of our world. The preface goes on to situate the classic formulation of the Mercy charism, "to serve the poor, sick and ignorant, (Constitutions, §2) in the ministry of Jesus.

*Holy God, intimate and awesome, we praise the splendor  
of your beauty.  
Your Holy Wisdom took flesh among us*

*and entered our world of needs and limits, of passion and promise.*

*With special love Jesus made his home  
among the littlest and the least  
that they might know themselves as chosen ones,  
daughters and sons of the promise.*

[The presider extends his hands in a gesture of blessing that includes both the bread and wine and the assembled community.]

*Pour out your Spirit upon these holy gifts*

*and upon your holy people assembled here.  
Teach us the mystery of this bread and wine:  
that by faithfulness to love and the great work of mercy  
we can transfigure the world.*

The Eucharistic Prayer continues to situate the charism of Mercy within the saving action of the Triune God in history. The transcendent God, awesome and beautiful, draws near to us and invites us to intimacy. This invitation is extended in a special way in Jesus, Wisdom made flesh, who entered human life fully. Jesus drew especially near to the poor and marginalized and longed for them to know their full dignity as daughters and sons of promise. In the same way, the Sisters of Mercy both draw near to relieve human misery by direct service and also work to address the causes of misery and alienation.

The prayer calls on the Spirit to effect the mystery of the Eucharist in us. Our tradition calls both the bread and wine of the Eucharist and the community that assembles to celebrate the Eucharist, "the body of Christ." By our sharing in this meal and by our living of the Eucharist, we hasten the coming of the reign of God. This is reinforced symbolically by the gesture of the presider, who extends his hands in blessing so as to include both the bread and wine and the assembled community.

*On the night before he died for us,  
Jesus gave us the great sign of his enduring presence in  
the world:*

*the table of welcome and bounty,  
where all people find a home  
and the broken know the kind word,  
the gentle compassionate look,  
and the patient hearing of sorrows.*

*He took bread and breaking it said:  
Take this, all of you, and eat it:*

*This is my body which will be given up for you.  
In the same way, he poured a cup of wine and gave it to  
his friends,  
saying:*

*Take this all of you and drink from it:  
This is the cup of my blood,  
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.  
It will be shed for you and for all  
so that sins may be forgiven.  
Do this in memory of me.*

The traditional words of institution are introduced by a reminder that the Eucharistic assembly continues the open table sharing that was a distinct characteristic of the ministry of Jesus. This is evoked by the lovely words of Catherine based on her experience that, more than material aid, the poor are looking for "the kind word, the gentle compassionate look, and the patient hearing of sorrows." Here, and throughout the Eucharistic prayer, the table of welcome is held up as the image of the charism of Mercy—recalling the delicate hospitality of Catherine and her "comfortable cup of tea."

*As we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
we proclaim Christ's death until he comes.  
In the body broken and the blood poured out,  
we restore to memory and hope  
the poor, the sick and the ignorant,  
all the unremembered victims of tyranny and sin.  
As we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
we long for the coming of God's reign  
where misery is relieved and all people know their full  
dignity.  
Come, life giving Spirit of our God,  
and make us one body with Christ.  
Root us in God.  
draw us into deeper bonds of friendship and  
reconciliation,  
and empower us for mission.*

In the anamnesis that follows the words of institution, we recall the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and look with joyful hope to the come of God's reign in its fullness. In imagery inspired by the writing of Janet Morley, priest of the Church of England, we also recall to memory those who experience the passion of Jesus today and to whom the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy is especially directed. We look forward to that day when the dream of the Eucharist will be fulfilled as the misery of the poor is relieved and all people know their full dignity, (Constitutions, §3). We pray in recognition that the charism of

Mercy is founded on the Eucharist; in the words of the Constitutions, §17, it roots us in God, draws us into deeper bonds of friendship and reconciliation, and empowers us for mission.

*God, in your tender mercy, you have given us one another.*

*Fill your Church with your spirit of compassion so that knowing your mercy we may ourselves be merciful.*

*We pray for N. our Pope, and N. our bishop, for all men and women who minister in your Church and seek to mend our broken world.*

*Open us to contemplate your presence in ourselves, in others, and in the universe.*

In prayer we recognize the bonds that link the Mercy community with other communities. We pray for the Church and its leaders, the Pope and the local bishop, and all who minister in the Church and the world. The Word of God continually calls the Church to conversion and calls us to contemplate the presence of God in ourselves, in others and in the universe itself, (Constitutions, §9).

*Keep us in communion with those who, healed by your mercy,*

*rejoice to sit at the table of your plenty forever.*

*Keep us in communion with Mary who sang of liberation for the poor,*

*with Catherine who walked the way of mercy through the alleys of Dublin,*

*and with the women of mercy who have gone before us.*

Our faith in the resurrection reminds us that death does not break our bonds of communion with those we love. We unite ourselves in prayer with those who sit at the table of God's plenty forever. We recall Mary, whose Magnificat shows her to be an apt patron for the women of Mercy. We recall Catherine McAuley who so faithfully pioneered the path of Mercy, "Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him," (*Original Rule*, chapter 3). This phrase also draws on the nickname of the early Sisters of Mercy as "the walking nuns." The path of Mercy requires us to draw near to and walk among and with the people. The prayer also calls to mind the deceased Sisters of Mercy, "the women of mercy who have gone before us." With the growing number of men as Mercy associates, perhaps the

text could recall the "men of mercy" as well. The option might be offered here as well of mentioning other local or cultural patrons or other significant people in Mercy history, e.g. Frances Warde.

*God of New Creations,*

*fill us with the courage to dream*

*and empower us for the work that makes dreams real.*

*Temper us with patience for the times*

*when we can take only short, careful steps.*

*Keep us mindful of the dying and rising of Jesus, companion and friend,*

*who walks before us the way of mercy.*

*In the midst of all our tripping about,*

*may our hearts be always in the same place, centered in God.*

*Make us delight in the hope of that day when,*

*with Jesus, we will come to possess you,*

*our God, our All,*

*in your never ending reign.*

*Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,*

*all glory and honor is yours, All Merciful God, forever and ever.*

*Amen.*

The final paragraphs of the Eucharistic prayer are inspired by the founding of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas on July 20, 1991 and by a general consciousness of the promise and tension of living religious life at the end of the millennium. With eyes of faith we see in the foundation of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas a new creation of God. The Institute is the fruit of prophetic imagination and calls the members to the hard work of discipleship. The words of Catherine, from a letter to de Sales White, February 28, 1841, counsel us to patience, to slow progress, to a renewed awareness of the union of our ordinary actions with Jesus' saving mystery, (Constitutions, §14). Catherine's homely image, from a letter to Sister de Sales White, December 20, 1840, pierces to the essence of Mercy spirituality. There is no possible separation between action and contemplation—all our tripping about is a journey to the center, into the heart of God, the womb of Mercy.



# Eucharistic Prayer for Sisters of Mercy of the Regional Community of Connecticut

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*Terrence J. Moran, C.S.S.J.*

## **Preface:**

*Presider: The Lord be with you.*

*All: And also with you.*

*Presider: Lift up your hearts.*

*All: We have lifted them up to the Lord.*

*Presider: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

*All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.*

*Holy God,*

*we are yours for time and eternity.*

*We give you thanks and praise for the wonders of your Providence.*

*From the womb of your mercy all things came to be:*

*our universe, wild with possibility,*

*our fragile humanity, longing for wholeness.*

*From the fullness of your love you sent us Jesus the Redeemer—*

*the hand of your compassion outstretched to a broken world.*

*Anointed by the Spirit,*

*he announced good news to the poor,*

*offered healing to the sick,*

*and taught the word of life to all who longed for truth.*

*With all creation,*

*we raise our voices in praise of the tenderness of your mercy.*

*Holy, Holy, Holy . . .*

*Holy God, intimate and awesome, we praise the splendor of your beauty.*

*Your Holy Wisdom took flesh among us  
and entered our life of needs and limits,  
of passion and promise.*

*With special love Jesus made his home  
among the littlest and the least*

*that they might know themselves as chosen ones,  
daughters and sons of the promise.*

*(The presider holds his hands in a gesture of blessing that includes the assembly and the gifts.)*

*Pour out your Spirit upon these holy gifts*

*and upon your holy people assembled here.*

*Teach us the mystery of this bread and wine:*

*that by faithfulness to love and to the great work of mercy*

*we can transfigure the world.*

*On the night before he died for us,*

*Jesus gave us the great sign of his enduring presence in the world:*

*the table of welcome and bounty,*

*where all people find a home*

*and the broken know the kind word,*

*the gentle, compassionate look,*

*and the patient hearing of sorrows.*

*He took bread and breaking it said:*

*Take this, all of you, and eat it:*

*This is my body which will be given up for you.*

*In the same way, he poured a cup of wine and gave it to his friends  
saying:*

*Take this all of you and drink from it:*

*This is the cup of my blood,*

*the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.*

*It will be shed for you and for all*

*so that sins may be forgiven.*

*Do this in memory of me.*

*Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:*

**Memorial Acclamation**

*As we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
we proclaim Christ's death until he comes.  
In the body broken and the blood poured out,  
we restore to memory and hope the poor, the sick, the ignorant,  
all the unremembered victims of tyranny and sin.  
As we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
we long for the coming of God's reign  
where misery is relieved and all people know their full dignity.  
Come, life giving Spirit  
and make us one body with Christ.  
Root us in God,  
draw us into deeper bonds of friendship and reconciliation,  
and empower us for mission.*

*God, in your tender mercy you have given us one another.  
Fill your Church with your spirit of compassion  
so that knowing your mercy we may ourselves be merciful.  
We pray for John Paul our Pope, Daniel our bishop,  
for all men and women who minister in your Church and  
seek to mend our broken world.*

*Open us to contemplate your presence in ourselves,  
in others, and in the universe.*

*Keep us in communion with all those who, healed by your mercy,  
rejoice to sit at the table of your plenty forever.*

*Keep us in communion with Mary who sang of liberation for the  
poor,  
with Catherine McAuley who walked the way of mercy through the  
alleys of Dublin,  
and with the women of mercy who have gone before us.*

*God of New Creations,  
fill us with the courage to dream  
and empower us for the work that makes dreams real.  
Temper us with patience for the times when we can take only short,  
careful steps.  
Keep us ever mindful of the dying and rising of Jesus, companion  
and friend,  
who walks before us the way of mercy.  
In the midst of all our tripping about,  
may our hearts be always in the same place,  
centered in God.  
Make us delight in hope of that day when,  
with Jesus, we will come to possess you,  
our God, our All,  
in your never ending reign.*

*Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory and honor is  
yours, All Merciful God, forever and ever.*

*All: Amen*

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THE MAST JOURNAL, begun in 1990, is published three times a year by the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology. Members of the Editorial Board are Sisters Eloise Rosenblatt, Editor (Burlingame), Doris Gottemoeller (Cincinnati), Mary Sullivan (Rochester), Patricia Talone (Merion), Mary Daly (Connecticut), Carol Rittner (Dallas), and Kathleen McAlpin (Merion). Subscriptions correspondence to Marilee Howard, R.S.M. (Auburn) at 8300 Colesville Rd., #300, Silver Spring, MD 20910, e-mail [mhoward@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:mhoward@sistersofmercy.org). Editorial correspondence to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., at 1121 Starbird Circle #4, San Jose, CA 95117, e-mail [erosen1121@cs.com](mailto:erosen1121@cs.com). Layout, design, and printing by BIBAL Press, an imprint of D. & F. Scott Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 821653, North Richland Hills, TX 76182. Back issues at \$5.00 may be ordered from BIBAL Press at (888) 788-2280 or [sales@dfscott.com](mailto:sales@dfscott.com).

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# Mary of Magdala

## Quintessential Disciple

Noel Keller, R.S.M.

Ask most people who they think Mary Magdalene is and you will receive a triune answer. For too many, she is Mary Magdalene of Bethany, the prostitute from whom seven demons were expelled, and who, after repenting, anointed Jesus' feet and became his devoted follower. It is an identity centuries of art, fiction, drama and motion pictures have maintained and promulgated. Largely it is only in the Eastern Church that the real Mary ever emerges, for here she is celebrated as the "Apostle to the Apostles."<sup>1</sup>

Recently, several authors have tried to restore Mary to her rightful place.<sup>2</sup> I add my voice to theirs. First, it is important to refer to Mary as "of Magdala" rather than calling her Mary Magdalene, since when the New Testament talks about Mary Magdalene, it means Mary from Magdala, a town a short walking distance from Capernaum. With so many Marys in the New Testament, "of Magdala" distinguishes Mary from other women such as Mary

of Nazareth or Mary of Bethany, whose identifications are also town related. Hence, Mary is known as the Magdalene in the same sense as Jesus of Nazareth is identified as the Nazarene.

Secondly, nothing in the New Testament justifies people's misconceptions about her,<sup>3</sup> but songs such as "I Don't Know How to Love Him" from the play *Jesus Christ Superstar* only reinforce popular imagination.<sup>4</sup> Listen to some of its words:

*I don't know how to take this; I don't see  
why he moves me  
He's a man, He's just a man, and I've had  
so many men before  
In very many ways, he's just one more  
Should I bring him down, should I scream  
and shout  
Should I speak of love, let my feelings out?  
I'd never thought I'd come to this, what's  
it all about?  
Don't you think it's rather funny? I  
should be in this position?  
I'm the one who's always been so calm so  
cool no lover's fool running every show  
He scares me so . . .*

Lamentably, Webber and Rice got it wrong, for Mary of Magdala does indeed know how to love Jesus, and she knew what following him was all about. Her five "Kodak Moments" in the New Testament will confirm this assertion.

### 1. During Jesus' Ministry

The first thing we learn about Mary of Magdala is that she was among Jesus' first followers, as Luke 8:1-3 indicates:

*Soon afterwards, Jesus went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means."*  
(Cf. Matt 27:55; Mark 15:41)<sup>5</sup>

Other details emerge about her:

a. Like the "Twelve," Mary traveled with Jesus as a learner, which is what the word disciple means. Learning happened on a day-to-day basis "as they went through cities and villages" (8:1a) watching what Jesus did and listening to what he had to say (8:1b), and *she did it* all the way to Jerusalem (Luke 23:49, 55).

Largely it is only in the Eastern Church that the real Mary ever emerges, for here she is celebrated as the "Apostle to the Apostles."

- b. Of all the women Jesus healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary was the most ill. As she lived in a world where illness were regarded as "demon related," to say that "seven demons had gone out of her" was to say that she had *many* infirmities.<sup>6</sup> Luke uses this number frequently and it denotes "many." For example: Anna lived with her husband seven years before he died (2:36);<sup>7</sup> Jesus walked seven miles with two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus (24:13); is grilled by the Sadducees about the woman who married seven brothers (11:29, 31, 33); and says "If your brother or sister sins against you seven times a day, and turns to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him/her" (17:4).<sup>8</sup>
- c. Mary demonstrated her gratitude (as did the other women Luke cites) by contributing financially to Jesus and his disciples' needs. As such, she/they must have had access to money and were important enough to determine how it would be spent. Joanna, e.g., is the wife of Herod Antipas's chief steward at Tiberias, a town located on the other side of Magdala, and Mary is from a fishing village of some economic renown. Luke also reports the women's action in the imperfect tense, which accentuates that these women contributed their resources *repeatedly*.<sup>9</sup> It is a hallmark of their following, and an element of early Christianity (Acts 2:42-7; 4:32-37).

Despite the danger, Mary stands bold and faithfully *with Jesus*, at the same time his other disciples hid in fear.

- d. A further aspect of Mary's discipleship is less apparent but equally present, for she is an example of "*Hearing the word of God and doing it*" which is a theme which runs like a mantra throughout Luke's gospel (Cf. 1:38; 5:5; 8:15; 8:21; 11:28).

## 2. Near Jesus' Cross

Mary of Magdala appears a second time near Jesus' cross. She is in all four gospels (Luke 23:49; John 19:25) and is the first person listed among the witnesses to his crucifixion in Matthew (27:56) and Mark (15:40), when the order of where one was placed in a narrative counted!<sup>10</sup> Being there indicates her willingness to follow Jesus not only when things go well but also when there is a price to be paid for her following.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps we forget the danger there was in standing near the cross of an executed man. Yet despite the danger, Mary stands bold and faithfully *with Jesus*, at the same time his other disciples hid in fear. As Scripture later asserts, "*Perfect love casts out fear*" (1 John 4:18).

## 3. Witness to the Burial of Jesus

Mary is the consistent witness of the burial of Jesus in the Synoptic

Gospels (Matt 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55) and although John does not explicitly state that she witnessed Jesus' burial, it is clearly implied by the fact that she knows the location of the tomb on Easter morning.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, she plays an absolute role in the gospel, for the identity of Jesus' tomb with the empty tomb depends on her testimony.

## 4. By Jesus' Empty Tomb

Mary is portrayed with others in the Synoptic accounts (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16: 1-8; Luke 23:55 - 24:1-11), but alone in John (20:1-2; 11-18). Each narrative adds to the picture of Mary, but the details change according to the point each evangelist is making. One element, however, remains constant: Mary of Magdala is an essential part of the events on Easter morning.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. In the Upper Room

A final New Testament picture of Mary is found in Acts 1:13-14. Here Luke depicts "*the disciples as well as 'certain women'*"<sup>14</sup> including Mary the Mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" gathered in Jerusalem, praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit. It is an illustration of another side to Mary's loving, and a quality of her

following: for as discipleship involves continuous learning, there will always be further understanding to wait for!<sup>15</sup>

### Learnings

Being with, faithfulness, courage in the face of setbacks and death, and an ability to wait—all these actions are characteristic elements of Mary's loving and of her discipleship. They are also facets of a discipleship to which we too have been called.

But there is another important lesson we can learn from Mary of Magdala, our sister in faith, and that is *a willingness to let go, to be open to grow in awareness*. Here we must return to the tomb, for John uses this scene (20:11–18) as an example to his community of what one needs to do in order to move from the darkness of their own misconceptions to the light of Easter faith. Consider Jesus' first words in this gospel, which he addressed to potential disciples as a backdrop:

*And he turned, and saw them following, and said to them. What are you seeking/looking for? And they said to him, 'Rabbi (which means Teacher), 'Where are you staying?' And he said to them 'Come and see.' And they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him. . . ." (1:38–39).*

Here in a nutshell, we learn that discipleship involves process, which includes coming to see where Jesus stays and then staying there.

John begins by telling us that Mary came to the tomb while it was still dark (20:1); it is the same darkness Nicodemus experienced (3:2). Here Mary comes seeking Jesus (which in this gospel is an appropriate action involving initiative, determination, and persistence); but she is preoccupied with searching for a corpse instead of turning toward the Living One (20:2–13). In response, Jesus challenges Mary's weeping/ misunderstanding and tries to refocus her distraught attention from his physical body to his person with the question "*Whom [not what] do you seek?*" (20:15).<sup>16</sup> He then calls Mary by her name, and she, recognizing the voice of the Shepherd (John 10:3–5), and his authority as Sovereign One to lay down his life and take it up again (10:15, 17–18) *turns around* [i.e., changes her course of action] and allows herself to be changed.<sup>17</sup> What is more, she addresses him with the intimate term *rabbouni* [my teacher], which expresses both a personal relationship and her willingness to be taught. Finally, she is told she is not to encounter Jesus as the earthly Jesus/what

she would wish him to be ("Do not keep clinging to me" [John 20:17]) but to allow him to ascend to the Father [where he stays] that he might be the Glorified Jesus/the Risen Lord. Having heard [been taught] and seen [recognized] the Lord, she is then free and commissioned to proclaim this Easter faith news to the community [where he may also be found].

Perhaps this lesson is wonderfully represented in Titian's *Noli Me Tangere* [Do Not Keep Clinging To Me] which hangs in the National Gallery in London. Here, Mary and Jesus are depicted in a garden, but they are standing on different ground. Mary stands on barren and desolate earth and reaches toward Jesus who remains on lush green grass.<sup>18</sup> Sheep graze in the distance, waiting to be led. There is a space between them, as also, room for the viewer of the painting to step in. A story is told about this picture that underscores what the artist is saying. During World War II, the National Gallery decided to relocate all its pictures for safekeeping. Londoners complained citing their need for encouragement and beauty. In response, the curators decided that one picture would be displayed each month. The people chose Titian's painting during the worst part of the war, for they were inspired by its portrayal of a love that endures . . .

Mary of Magdala: quintessential disciple, teach us how to follow him.



There is another important lesson we can learn from Mary of Magdala, our sister in faith, and that is *a willingness to let go, to be open to grow in awareness*.

## Notes

- 1 This assertion does not negate the fact that some Western writers did regard Mary as the "Apostle to the Apostles" (e.g., Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux), but despite this and even though the creed was recited on her feast day, which was customary for feastdays of apostles, the Western Church sustained its stereotyped understanding of her.
- 2 Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene. Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002) is a recent example.
- 3 While Mary's canonical identity was revised in the liturgical calendar in 1969 from "penitent" to "witness to the resurrection," the new lectionary did her no favors. For her Lucan introduction [8:1–3] is tagged onto a long parable involving a different woman [7:36–50] and the majority of people connect them.
- 4 In Catholic circles, for example, a "Magdalene" has also come to mean someone who has repented sexual sin.
- 5 Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation. Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 138, points out that the women followers of Jesus are mentioned in Mark 15:40–41, but they are introduced much earlier in Luke, which shows their importance to the Lukan narrator.
- 6 One of Mary's illnesses could have been as simple as a fever, for Luke has Jesus "exorcizing" Peter's mother-in-law of her high fever in 4:39. However as Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing The Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996), 126, suggests: Luke is more intent on highlighting the greatness of Jesus' power of healing than he is on telling us something about Mary.
- 7 Facts about Anna are also in multiples of seven: Married for seven years, usually at fourteen equals twenty-one, plus widowed for eighty-four years equals 105!
- 8 Here, "seven" is used as a means to communicate the complete sense of forgiveness Jesus is encouraging.
- 9 Interestingly, Luke 8:3 is the only place in the Gospels where we have any indications as to who paid for Jesus' ministry!
- 10 Although Luke does not name the people who witness Jesus' death and crucifixion, he does say the group included "the women who had followed after him from Galilee," which is a technical term for discipleship. (23:49, 55).
- 11 Even though there is a shift of characters among the Synoptics and a different listing of witnesses to the death, burial, and discovery of Jesus' tomb, Mary of Magdala remains a constant.
- 12 Sandra Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe. Encountering Jesus In The Fourth Gospel* [New York: Crossroad, 1999] 193, n11.
- 13 By contrast, there is no mention of Mary of Magdala in 1 Corinthians 15. See Mary R. Thompson S.S.M.N., *Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995) 18–23 for the discussion.
- 14 Luke does not name these women, but he surely must mean the women who had followed Jesus from the Galilee (8:1–3), and who witnessed his death (23:49), burial (23:54–56), and resurrection (24:1–10, 22).
- 15 Mary must also wait being portrayed in biblical pictures of this event, for as Elizabeth Johnson (*Truly Our Sister. A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* [New York: Continuum, 2003]) 299 points out: Traditional artistic depictions of Pentecost portray the Spirit descending upon thirteen figures, one woman, Mary, surrounded by twelve male apostles. The product of an androcentric imagination that erases women and insignificant men, this picture hardly does justice to Luke's text with its one hundred twenty persons. These must all be restored to the scene. We need especially to attend to "the women" present in the upper room. They are depicted not as extras but as an integral part of the praying community in Jerusalem. Although they are not named in this passage, biblical scholars assume, reasonably enough, that they are the women mentioned in Luke's gospel account of the passion.
- 16 Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 195.
- 17 Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory. Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002) 224.
- 18 X-ray photographs show that Christ was originally painted wearing a gardener's hat and turning away from Mary of Magdala. The landscape was also drastically altered while the work was in progress. I wonder if Titian made changes because he grew in his own understanding of the mystery he was depicting.

# They Have No Wine

## Reflections on Mary and Twenty-First Century Church Women

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Barbara Moran, R.S.M.

Readers who look forward to Elizabeth A. Johnson's feminist theological works have not been disappointed with her most recent book, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. Here Johnson sees Mary as the pre-eminent friend of God and prophet, roles she had previously applied to all Christian women and men who belong to this communion of the faithful, both living and dead. In her book, she describes Mary as "an exemplar not in the particular social condition of the life she led, but in the way in her own life she heard the word of God and kept it. By implication, responding to the word of God may take many creative forms in women's lives."<sup>1</sup> So it is that twenty-first century women see "sister" as an especially appealing role in the life of Mary as well as in their own daily lives. For too long we have called upon Mary as "virgin, mother, lady, queen," traditional titles that may apply to some of us, some of the time, but certainly not to all of us, all of the time. Mary, our "sister," on the other hand is a universal model for all women.

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### **Woman Have Different Levels of Self-Awareness and Knowledge**

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Not only different forms of response to the word of God are indicated, but also different levels of response are apparent in the lives of contemporary women—our "sisters"—as self, voice, and mind are developed. Mary Field Belenky and her collaborators describe this development as a growing awareness of kinds of knowledge. Analyzing interviews done with a broad spectrum of women, these authors group women's responses into categories of either silence or steps in the acquisition of knowledge, which they label as received, subjective, procedural, or constructive knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Basic to any role church women choose to accept is this perspective of response, whether it is silent acquiescence or developmental knowledge based on prayer, study, discussion, and collaboration through group efforts growing out of such knowledge. For twenty-first century women, this development seems essential, for our world and our Church, as well as our individual lives are sorely in need of love, compassion, comfort, and strength.

As Mary, our sister, is portrayed in Luke's infancy narrative, she is shown in various stages of gaining knowledge. Throughout her book, Johnson portrays her response to God as always beyond that of a mere silent and automatic "yes," as she questions, asks for additional information. After pondering what has happened, Mary joins with others to take a stand in her own human development, that of her son and the world in which they find themselves. Some reflection on what have been traditionally called joyful mysteries yields an interesting perspective.

### **The Joyful Mysteries: Annunciation**

Johnson cites the work of Kathleen Norris as she examines several gospel scenes which feature Mary.<sup>3</sup> Neither author presents Mary in only the guise of the usual Rosary meditation or suggests a mere devotional response. At the Annunciation, Mary, a Jewish peasant girl, who most likely had no private accommodation for her prayers, is nevertheless seen as questioning, receiving new information and seeking wisdom through consideration of the message brought to her by the angel Gabriel. Having lived in an ordinary Jewish family, close to her relatives and to the animals they most likely needed to survive as peasants, Mary is well aware of the male as well as the female role in human conception. Moreover, she knows the prescriptions regarding betrothal and marriage in the Mosaic law. But she is a faith-filled young woman who receives new knowledge offered to her and then accepts God's invitation to conceive according to the power of the Spirit.

### **Visitation**

In Luke's account of her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, Mary takes action and reaches out to the other pregnant woman with tenderhearted affection. Here the two receive mutual encouragement and support as they await the birth of their children, both of whom have been singled out for special missions from before birth. Again, Mary relies on received knowledge as she echoes words from the Hebrew scriptures, especially those of Hannah, "My heart exults in the Lord, my horn is exalted in my God."<sup>4</sup> For Johnson, Mary's Magnificat is also a prophetic prayer for all poor people across the centuries who call upon their God to fulfill their hopes and aspirations, and so she speaks for all women who band together seeking freedom of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nativity**

When she returns to Nazareth after the birth of Elizabeth's son, Mary who has made God's ways her own, marries Joseph, her betrothed, who had also received a message about God's intervention into ordinary human activities. Like Mary, he follows what was revealed to him in a dream, personal

knowledge, rather than literal compliance with a law that provided that a man in Joseph's circumstances could see that his intended wife would be punished if she were found with child before the formalities of their marriage had been completed. Some months later, immediately before the birth of her son, Mary goes with Joseph to Bethlehem in response to the dictates of civil law, as she travels with her husband to his home town in order to be counted in the census.

**Mary's Magnificat is also a prophetic prayer for all poor people across the centuries who call upon their God to fulfill their hopes and aspirations, and so she speaks for all women who band together seeking freedom of the Spirit.**

Here the birthplace of her son, a stable where she laid him in a manger and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, was undoubtedly disappointing. Yet the praise offered him by shepherds from the nearby hill country possibly more than made up for such an unexpected turn of events. Mary, like most women who are aware of civil as well as religious laws, seems to know when to question, when to accede, and when to ignore what is required; that is, when what is required seems to contradict individual conscience. Also, she can make the best of unfortunate circumstances as well as accept both praise and gifts, even when they had not been anticipated. All in all, she is a very human woman, in her role as either virgin or mother.

### **Presentation**

As Luke moves into the account of the presentation of the child in the temple, and the time for purification according to the law of Moses, Mary complies with the ordinances. Offering a sacrifice for a male that has opened her womb, she and her husband present two birds, turtledoves or pigeons, and

listen to Simeon who blesses God but foresees sorrow for both the child and his mother. This would become a source of subjective knowledge for Mary. In a similar vein, the prophetess Anna also thanked God and spoke of his wonders to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. And then Mary returned to Galilee for many years of prayer and reflection on these happenings.

The high hopes which surrounded Vatican II have mostly faded, and we have seen little improvement in the position of women in the Roman Catholic Church. Fullness of joy and delight, long symbolized by wine, seem absent as women's voices are ignored on most of the significant theological and ethical questions of the day.

### **Finding in the Temple**

Twelve years later she went back to Jerusalem with her husband and son for the celebration of the feast of Passover. Again Mary follows law and custom, until she and Joseph realize that their son is lost. Based on a kind of procedural knowledge, their journey takes them away from the group of friends and relatives returning to Nazareth, and they go back to Jerusalem to look for their son, Jesus. When they locate him in the temple, she asks why he has treated them so. Even though she does not understand his reply that he must be in his father's house, Mary returns with him and Joseph to Nazareth. She keeps all these things in her heart as Jesus increases in wisdom and stature, finding favor with God and man. So it is that Mary, as described by Luke, receives knowledge, develops herself in voice and in mind through growing subjective and procedural

knowledge, and makes ready to prepare herself for a new role with her young adult son.

### **Cana Wedding**

But it is in John's gospel that Mary's self-development is most clearly shown, especially at the wedding at Cana of Galilee, where the Mother of Jesus, as well as her son and his disciples were present. Amidst the feasting, music, and dancing usual at a Jewish wedding, the wine gave out, and Mary, noticing what had happened, mentions it to her son, who at first declines to do anything about the situation since his hour has not yet come. But Mary, now able to construct knowledge based on all she had heard, pondered, obeyed, and made her own, tells the servants to do whatever he might tell them. This incident may or may not be factually true, but the rich symbolism certainly reflects God's message of salvation, as six stone water jars are filled to the brim with water, which suddenly becomes more excellent wine than that which had been served previously to the wedding guests. Mary herself is an image of faith, albeit that of a mother who trusts her son and does something to alleviate an embarrassing situation for the bride and groom. Johnson elaborates further on the two sentences attributed to Mary, which frame the supposedly miraculous action of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

### **Has Anything Changed Since Vatican II?**

Mary speaks out saying, "They have no wine."<sup>7</sup> It is this sentence which carries a great deal of weight for contemporary Church women, for whom Mary's gradual self-development is significant. For us, the high hopes which surrounded Vatican II have mostly faded, and we have seen little improvement in the position of women in the Roman Catholic Church. Fullness of joy and delight, long symbolized by wine, seem absent as women's voices are ignored on most of the significant theological and ethical questions of the day, and women cannot even discuss ordination of themselves. Neither can we present opinions on Church teaching on sexuality, so that half of the world's population finds their experience trivialized in the hierarchical decision making process. Liturgical language is still

primarily exclusive, women are not appointed to important posts in diocesan governance structures, and the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law, written according to the male mind, has not been effectively promulgated.

Like Mary, our consciousness has been raised—we see the problems, talk to each other, write articles and books—but little has changed in official Church life during the past forty years. It seems time to advise a broader audience as Mary did, “Do whatever he tells you.”<sup>8</sup>

As has been said earlier, “The inner voice of subjective knowledge becomes all important in the process of addressing women’s concerns.”<sup>9</sup> And when we come together in group prayer or process, our public voice is acquired through the procedural knowledge fostered among women representing such diverse disciplines as theology, social science and the arts. We women listen to God, especially in the words of Jesus; we also pay attention to ourselves and to each other, and, finally, make ready to engage in full dialogue with the men who still control so much of today’s Church.

### **Listening to Our Own Voice as Women: Constructive Knowledge**

We may wonder how Mary’s words affect us, or if the visual or verbal images used by modern writers are relevant for twenty-first century women. An interesting comparison may be found in the popularity of a current bestseller, *The Secret Life of Bees*, where the Black Madonna is the focus for the spirituality of three African-American beekeepers and their friends, who figure so prominently in the growth and development of the protagonist, Lily, a fourteen-year-old motherless girl whose previous life had been so bleak.<sup>10</sup>

Tom Lucas, S.J., recounts a similar phenomenon at the recent installation of Teresa Wo Ye’s stained glass panels in the cathedral in Shanghai. Here a young Chinese said in effect when he took a look at the new windows, “They’re Chinese style! Cool.”<sup>11</sup> In both cases, viewers identified with images much like themselves; so contemporary Church women more easily look to Mary as “sister” than as “lady” or “queen” and see her as one who had roles as both virgin and mother as her life progressed.

Whether or not Mary actually uttered the exact words attributed to her in the Gospels, or if these accounts represent factual happenings, when she is described as an ordinary woman true to her own life and times, what she says and does has meaning for us who struggle to be true to our best selves and to find our own voices and minds in these our own times.

Those who remain within the  
system seem to be change  
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real progress.

We may ask how we can move on from the current stalemate. Personal prayer, contemplation, formulating our own theological and ethical questions, suggest Mary’s stance at the Annunciation, and we are certainly called to birth new life, in a variety of forms. We assist each other through visits and proffering friendship and assistance in our sisters’ needs, giving and receiving recognition to each other. While many of us find problems with both specifics of civil and ecclesiastical ordinance, on the whole, temporary compliance may foster change in important matters more readily than a blatant disregard of the law. Those who remain within the system seem to be change makers, while those who merely do as they see fit often live too far outside the systems they see need changing to achieve any real progress.

While identification with the object of one’s devotion may ease the struggle in spiritual growth, imitation of this object in daily life is often difficult. Few of us have a problem filling out census forms, but supporting unjust civil laws, voting for candidates whose values are directly opposed to those we hold, or paying taxes to support wars or rumors of wars can become problematical. Much in our current way of life as Americans seems to be far removed from the “liberty and justice for all” we proclaim as we salute our flag. Thomas Groome



suggests. "It's nigh impossible in personal life to avoid all complicity with injustice. But we can scrutinize our lifestyle for the ways we may be accomplices in structures of injustice and imagine how to resist such collusion."<sup>12</sup> From imagination grows subjective and then procedural knowledge, so that reading, speaking, and writing about unjust situations follow. We may be asked to sign petitions, contact legislators, and demonstrate for or against current civic projects, and balance is needed as we decide who, what, where, or when to support a cause or protest a decision.

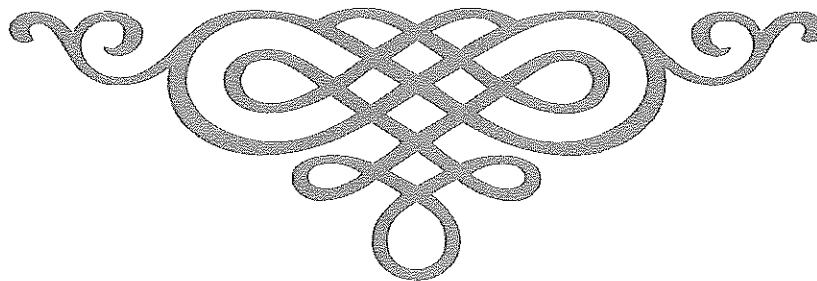
In Church matters, one's *modus operandi* may be even more difficult to determine. Although many Church women have serious problems with the hierarchical institution, as Catholics we value the sacraments, cherish times of contemplative prayer, and support gospel values and mandate of love, compassion, and justice these values require. While we generally support liturgical celebrations, the delay in official support for fully inclusive language is a difficulty, to say nothing of the miniscule role women are allowed to play in such celebrations. We generally support diocesan structures, although women have few roles of any significance in these structures; we decry certain absolutes in Church teaching in matters such as contraception, but we have little voice in the preparation of official documents dealing with this or other problematical issues. Woman's role is still one of second class citizenship, as far as the official, hierarchical Church is concerned. But we must continue to band together with other women, and some men, who support change. Only in this application of constructive knowledge will the critical mass of change makers be counted as an effective force for ecclesiastical change.

We know there is no wine in today's church—no joyous, celebratory feeling of abundance, and little, if any, sense of immediate relief. Yet, through prayer, reflection, action, and group process, we must follow the lead of Mary who is truly our "sister."



## Notes

- 1 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003) 286.
- 2 Mary Field Belenky *et al.*, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
- 3 Kathleen Norris, *Meditations on Mary* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999).
- 4 1 Sam 2:1
- 5 Johnson, 324.
- 6 Johnson, 289–291.
- 7 John 2:4
- 8 John 2:5
- 9 Barbara Moran, "Let the Women Speak," in *Where Can We Find Her?* ed. Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt (New York: Paulist, 1991) 64.
- 10 Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees* (New York: Penguin, 2002).
- 11 Tom Lucas, S.J., e-mail: hangtown52@yahoo.com, "Something to Share With You," February 8, 2004, personal email to crouleau@mercys.net.
- 12 Thomas H. Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002) 232.





## Contributors

**Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.** (Auburn), is a member of the Auburn Regional Community leadership team. She received her M.Ed. from the University of San Francisco and a masters in liturgical studies from St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. Katherine has been active in the field of religious education, retreat ministry, and spiritual direction for more than twenty years. A frequent contributor to *The MAST Journal*, Katherine's interpretive biography of Mother Mary Baptist Russell, California foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, will be published in fall of 2004.

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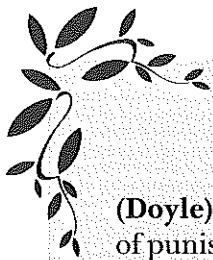
**Elizabeth McMillan, R.S.M.** (Pittsburgh), teaches theology in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and is engaged in religious vocation and formation ministry. From 1992 to 1998, she taught at the seminary of the Missionary Fraternity of Mary in Guatemala City. Previously, she taught philosophy at Carlow College and Loyola University (Chicago), and was on the health care ethics staff of Catholic Health Association. From 1974 to 1981 she served as academic dean of Carlow College. She has a B.A. in Latin from Mount Mercy (now Carlow) College in Pittsburgh, an M.A. in philosophy from Marquette, and a Ph.D. from Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. She is a member of MAST.

**Barbara Moran, R.S.M.** (Burlingame), holds a Ph.D. in English Literature and Linguistics from Catholic University of America. She was a professor at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, N.C., where she was chair of communication arts, and later taught at University of San Francisco and St. Mary's College in Moraga, California. At present, she is a docent at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. She is interested in feminist literature and theology, Asian studies, and art history. Recently, she took a museum-focused tour to Spain, visiting art collections in Madrid, Barcelona, and Bilbao.

**Fr. Terrence J. Moran, C.S.S.R.**, is a Redemptorist and director of Hispanic ministry of the diocese of Paterson, New Jersey and adjunct professor at College of St. Elizabeth, Morristown, New Jersey. He has a licentiate in moral theology from the Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome and did doctoral studies in moral theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium. He has given retreats and workshops on theology and spirituality throughout the U.S. and in twenty other countries. He is the author of *In the Spirit of St. Alphonsus* (Liguori, 2000) and contributing editor for the Classics of Western Spirituality volume on Alphonsus Liguori (Paulist Press). His publications appear in *America*, *Commonweal* and *Church*. Fr. Moran serves on the boards of directors for Hispanic Ministry and Catholic Migrant Ministry Network.

**Fran A. Repka, R.S.M.** (Cincinnati), is a licensed psychologist with a doctorate in counseling psychology from the University of Cincinnati and a master's in clinical psychology from the University of Detroit. She served as director of the Cincinnati Archdiocese Consultation Center and currently is director of Mercy Professional Services, a counseling center for the poor. Besides her clinical work of thirty years, she supervises other professionals, consults for religious congregations and gives workshops for religious communities in the U.S., Latin America, South America, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Guam. She has served as president of the Cincinnati Psychoanalytic Psychology Association, sits on several psychology boards as well as boards of agencies serving the poor. Her publications have appeared in Mercy Institute studies, *Horizon*, *Human Development*, and *Sisters Today*.





## Discussion Questions

**(Doyle)** “She has been imaged as the one who could sway the heart of God and bring healing instead of punishment. Such imagery compensated for the image of God as a demanding judge. In the light of such a negative concept of the Divine, Mary becomes a sign of hope, comfort, and maternal intercession. When God is seen as a God who loves us passionately and longs to be in union with us, Mary resumes her place as one with us instead of one who is above us.”

What role does Mary of Nazareth play in your own spirituality? For you, is Mary an instrument of oppression or liberation? How is the image of Mary closely tied to the way one imagines God?

**(Keller)** In the garden after the resurrection, Mary of Magdala’s response to Jesus portrays a love that endures beyond death. How are the gender stereotypes associated with Mary Magdalene similar to those in the devotional history associated with Mary Mother of God? How is the recovery of “the historical Mary” a resistance to the stereotype in both cases?

**(McMillan)** “Could it be that there will emerge a church in which the presence of Mary is no longer a projection of the masculine unconscious that permit the margination of women? Could it be that we will recognize the figure of a strong woman who insists that we realize a true communion with her within history?”

How do Mary’s strengths manifest themselves as women define their own strengths, and what are the historical events that challenged her to be strong?

**(B. Moran)** Constructive knowledge is a stage of mental and emotional maturity, an ability to think and speak autonomously, where women arrive after a process of self-development. What are the decisions for the good of the church that you are implementing, despite the impasse of the last forty years since Vatican II, in which little has changed for women within the church? How do political and social changes in the same period contrast with church’s, and suggest some directions for action?

**(T. Moran)** “The Sisters of Mercy both draw near to relieve human misery by direct service and also work to address the causes of misery and alienation. The prayer calls on the Spirit to effect the mystery of the Eucharist in us.”

There are fewer priests to celebrate Eucharist, and fewer living situations where Sisters can participate in daily Eucharist. What is the effect on Mercy mission of the decline in occasions to participate in a communal celebration of sacramental Eucharist? How is the mystery of Eucharist effected in us outside of the liturgy?

**(Repka)** “Mary was fully aware that the paradox of personal power is its relational base: a) that life is all about participation, mutual relation, forgiveness, collective vision; b) that we involved all people in any mission, community, or project to come together to think about the same things from different perspectives; c) that everyone’s rights, accountability and dignity are honored and supported.”

If “incarnational eros” is understood as personal power in forming relationships, what is needed for eros to be experienced as a mutual dynamic, rather than energy projected by a single person at others?



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## MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

**MAST**, the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology, and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching, and administration; and to provide a means for members to address current issues within the context of their related disciplines.

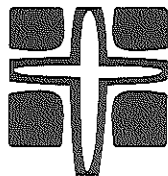
**MAST** has been meeting annually since then, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M. currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST will hold its annual meeting in Philadelphia, PA, June 13-16, 2004.

Members work on a variety of task forces related to their scholarly discipline. Present task forces include: Scripture, healthcare ethics, and spirituality. In addition, the members seek to be of service to the Institute by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

Membership dues are \$20 per year, payable to Marilee Howard, R.S.M., MAST treasurer, 8380 Colesville Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Email: [mhoward@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:mhoward@sistersofmercy.org).

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Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have taken responsibility over the years to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.



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