Campin, Robert (active by 1406–d. 1444). Triptych of the Annunciation: central panel. *Reproduced with permission of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1956. (56.70)*

Donna Spivey Ellington

From Sacred Body
to Angelic Soul

Understanding Mary in Late Medieval

and Early Modern Europe

Contents

Preface

I first began this study as an attempt to understand some of the massive changes occurring in religious perceptions in late medieval and early modern Europe. From the beginning, it seemed clear that Protestantism, even in some of its more radical forms, must be understood as a manifestation of religious trends that were affecting European religious life generally. Protestant theologians may have criticized the Catholic Church for practices and beliefs they deemed incorrect or unscriptural, but Catholic reformers as well, especially those such as Erasmus who were influenced by humanism, were also capable of mocking their fellow Catholics for their devotion to pilgrimages, the saints, and the relics associated with their cult. In short, even some loyal Catholics, independent of any Protestant critique, were beginning to back away from the material, concrete devotional forms so popular in the Middle Ages and move toward a more inward piety. How might I account for the many similarities among reformers in both camps, who otherwise were all too often prepared to view each other as heretics, responsible for leading the Church down the road to corruption and even damnation?

It was necessary first of all to select some aspect of Christian piety to act as a point of entry into the complex world of late medieval religion. There were obvious reasons for selecting devotion to the Virgin Mary as the focus for the study. The Virgin Mary was the most prominent figure in late medieval piety, after her son, and she remained at the heart of religious controversy in the sixteenth century. She could therefore serve as a powerful link between the two periods. As a woman, she could also be a means for exploring changing attitudes toward women in the period. Even more important, however, because Mary's religious significance stemmed from her bodily motherhood of Christ, she would necessarily be tied intimately to the concrete, sacramental piety of the late medieval

period. An understanding of any possible changes in Marian devotion might therefore lead to greater comprehension of the wider religious transformation taking place in European Christianity generally. There is an extensive sermon literature in both the late Middle Ages and early modern period devoted to the Virgin Mary. I chose to explore Marian devotion in these sermons largely because the popular sermon existed at the crossroads of so many avenues of religious culture, joining together the formal theology of the schools where most preachers were trained and the popular attitudes and beliefs of the people to whom they preached. Finally, however, it must be said that my choice of subject and sources allowed me to explore a topic that has intrigued me ever since I began to study the Middle Ages. Even a casual acquaintance with the depth of feeling and the beauty of imagery engendered by the Blessed Virgin in this period, whether in sermons, visual art, or music, is enough to beckon any scholar toward further inquiries. It is almost as irresistible as the faint but distinct and compelling fragrance of roses that lures a hurried traveler into the quiet of an enclosed garden. And, as with any garden, once inside there are endless beautiful objects worthy of examination and reflection. I offer the reader my own conclusions, arranged and presented after much time spent in that kind of contemplation.

My central argument asserts that the Church's portrait of the Virgin gradually changed during the sixteenth century and became less focused on her body and more on her soul as religious life in Western Europe was increasingly dominated by a piety that stressed the inner life at the expense of the concrete and the material. During the late medieval period, preachers believed Mary's chief importance to be found in her bodily relationship to Jesus. Because she was his physical mother, the Virgin and Christ shared a common flesh and humanity which allowed her to participate mystically in all aspects of his incarnate life from birth to death. As European religion began to become less centered on concrete manifestations of the holy and more concerned with inward religious experience, the public portrait of Mary in Catholic sermon literature reflected this shift. Preachers began to emphasize Mary's "spiritual" motherhood of Jesus and to play down her physical involvement in all areas of Jesus' life.

The book sets these developments in the context of the growth of literacy and literate modes of thought during the sixteenth century. It also considers additional factors contributing to an altered portrait of Mary, including changing attitudes toward the body and toward women generally in early modern Europe. And it examines the growing development of a private sense of self resulting from newer confessional practices and from increased demands by Church and state for conformity to approved ideology and to codes of bodily control and deportment.

There are two distinct sections of the book. The introduction and chapters one through three concern late medieval devotion to Mary and the importance of its expression in popular sermons delivered to a culture still primarily governed by oral means of communication. Chapters four through six focus on the presentation of Mary largely by post-Tridentine preachers, and examine the effects which printing, the movement for ecclesiastical reform, and other cultural changes brought to the Church's public portrait of Mary.

In a detailed analysis of sermons or any piece of literature, the specific words used by the author are as important and revealing as the topics which are discussed. With this in mind, I have tried to provide extensive quotations from the original sermons in the notes, preserving as much as possible the spelling and punctuation as they appear in the text. This is especially important, since many of the sermons used in this study come from collections for which there is no modern edition. Any translations from the Latin, French, and, in one instance, from the Italian, are my own.

My greatest appreciation is reserved for my husband, Steven, who has never once expressed irritation or impatience with the long hours I have needed to spend in reading sermons and writing down my conclusions. Nor has he allowed me to waver in my own commitment. This book is dedicated to him, and to the Virgin herself, who was its inspiration from the beginning: Ave, gratia plena.

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Conclusion

"AVE MARIA, GRATIA PLENA, DOMINUS TECUM." "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Through these words, Catholic Christians have long been accustomed to greet the Virgin Mary, and through them have sought the prayers of Mary on their behalf. This has never changed. But if the supplication remained unaltered, the image of the Virgin Mother held in the minds of Christians as they prayed was certainly transformed over time. No one can enter fully into the mental world of another person, and this is particularly true of persons separated from us by so great a distance into the past. Yet by examining Marian piety in the late medieval and early modern periods through the lens of popular sermons, it is possible to trace subtle alterations in the perception of the Virgin which were due, in large part, to much broader changes within European Christianity and society as a whole. As European religious life began to move away from an externalized piety which valued devotional objects such as relics, images, and material means for encountering God, a new spirituality began to emerge which magnified instead the importance of inner devotion and mental prayer, even as it continued to affirm the necessity of the sacraments and the usefulness of some traditional popular practices. European Christians, Protestant as well as Catholic, embraced an affective devotional life centered on the heart, the inward seat of the will and emotions.[1]

1. Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991). Campbell's entire book is relevant here, for Campbell believes that all religious life in the seventeenth century was affected by a more emotional and internalized spirituality, which used the heart as the supreme symbol of the affective and intentional center of the human religious personality.

A number of factors may have combined to bring about these changes. Among people of the upper and middle classes as well as the clergy, the growth of literacy after 1450 and the mental habits encouraged by extensive acquaintance with reading and writing were important tools for fashioning an interiorized spirituality. Brian Stock finds that as early as the twelfth century, the more literate clergy were beginning to trust texts more than relics and rituals, and in fact were coming to distrust the material in general. These men tended to equate the practices of the largely "oral" society with "the popular," "the inauthentic," and "the disreputable."[2] If such a transformation could already have begun among literate churchmen of the twelfth century, it would likely spread much farther once the creation of printing made it possible to disseminate such views more widely among the people, who were themselves acquiring literacy skills.

This move from orality to literacy in early modern Europe was, however, only one of the important forces for religious change. Alongside it one must place the growing intrusion into the interior world of European Christians brought about by more rigorous confessional practices and the monitoring of the individual conscience that was its necessary corollary. Altered confessional practices would touch the lives of the majority of the people of Europe, literate or not, prompting them to examine their inner inclinations and motivations more meticulously than ever, with a view toward preventing sinful behavior altogether, especially the kind which disrupted the peace and unity of the Christian community. The late medieval Church was thereby helping to create and shape an inner awareness of the self and its characteristics.

In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church after Trent began to be even more demanding in its expectations for the faithful. As members of a reinvigorated, forceful organization, Catholic Christians were now supposed to exercise the kind of moral discipline and restraint ordinarily prescribed for the clergy. Even as the growing demands of centralized governments created a need for public figures to find

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2. Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 246–50.

refuge in a private self, the same dynamic could have operated equally within the structure of the Church. As the Church called on its members, clerical and lay, to be more self-aware and committed, many may have welcomed a private, inner space as a place of retreat from the pressure.

Many people in the Church had long considered inward spirituality to be the superior form of religious experience. As a result of the current development of the interior self, the Catholic clergy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was able, through devotional societies, to encourage a movement already taking place. The Church worked to develop the interior life of the people through the many popular Marian congregations and confraternities. These societies often asked for a daily examination of conscience as well as regular recitation of the Rosary, which, as we have seen, is one aid to mental prayer.

Because so little is actually said about Mary, the mother of Christ, in the Scriptures, it has been possible for preachers to describe her and her importance in ways which enlist her as the champion of the Church, whatever its current cause may be. Predictably, therefore, the Virgin became the acknowledged defender of the Catholic Church against the Protestant movement in the sixteenth century.[3] Yet since the Church itself was undergoing the shift in religious sensibilities outlined above, its portrayal of Mary reflected that shift. Nowhere is the alteration of perspective on Mary's role more revealing than in the significance attached to her bodily relationship with Jesus.

In any period of Christian history, the Virgin Mary should be prominent as the one who bestowed a human body on the eternal Word, and who gave birth to him at a specific time and place. During the Middle Ages, that physical contribution became the springboard for the elaboration of a Marian cult which was fully integrated into the sacramental and incarnational emphases of the time. Sermons and devotional literature described her as actively present throughout Jesus' life, speaking up for

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3. Luther was equally capable of using Mary as an example of the Protestant belief that human nature is weak and sinful, unable to do anything good without the aid of God's grace. See Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 2:6–12.

her friends and vehemently protesting Jesus' unjust crucifixion. The mystical unity of their shared flesh enabled Mary to experience with her son the suffering of his Passion. Her physical presence with him in heaven after her Assumption contributed to her power to act as mediator for Christians on earth. She could add to her intercession the effectiveness of ritual gestures, reminding Jesus of their intimate relationship as she revealed the breast with which she had nursed him as an infant. Although bodily present in heaven, Mary was still accessible to the faithful through her many images and relics, scattered throughout Europe, and could be counted on to show mercy to any who sought her aid. The Virgin's body was also the ultimate source of the most powerful devotional object of the later medieval period, the host.

By the late sixteenth century, institutional and social pressures worked to modify this concretized participation of Mary in the Church's life. Still the mother of Christ, it was now her spiritual motherhood which many preachers chose to emphasize, some even saying that Jesus loved his mother not because of her physical birth-giving, but because of her spiritual purity and holiness. Mary still grieves at the Passion, but silently, her suffering the result of spiritual communication between mother and son.

When contrasting historical periods, it is necessary to avoid exaggerating the degree of change which took place. The external practices and traditional sensibilities of medieval Europe did not die overnight, and probably lingered among the people much longer than might be expected.[4]

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4. All of David Sabean's *Power in the Blood* is significant here, but see especially chapter 6, "The Sins of Unbelief," in *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 174–98. Sabean shows that as late as 1796, the Protestant villagers of Beutelsbach were not beyond the use of sympathetic magic, offering the sacrifice of a bull to end an epidemic of hoof and mouth disease. He also illustrates that the people still conceived of truth and knowledge not as systematic abstract entities, separate from life as it is lived, but as ongoing dialogue and discussion about a central issue, "social knowledge" gained from the input of the community which could be the basis for "practical action." Right belief was less important than the practical results of actions in specific situations. Robert Scribner also finds the remnants of late medieval religious piety continuing on among Lutheran pastors and people long after the Reformation. See R. W. Scribner, "Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany," *Past and Present* 110 (1986): 38–68. Scribner points out that Lutheran pastors used images and medals depicting Luther not only as examples to inspire but also as wonder-working objects, as they sought to compete with Catholics who claimed that

Growing literacy and other factors which acted to transform religious understanding also contributed to a renewed respect for the written tradition that enshrined many of the older practices, a tradition which had the support of the Tridentine decrees themselves. In spite of these reservations, there is no mistaking the attempt by Counter-Reformation clergy to establish a more passive and spiritualized Virgin—humble, obedient, prayerful, silent, and devoted to good works while on earth; interceding, still humbly, for the faithful once she reached heaven—as a model for the type of Catholic they hoped to foster after Trent. The Marian relics and images which remained were expected primarily to inspire those who viewed them with the desire to emulate Mary's spiritual virtues. Because these changes were based not solely on the program of one branch of the Church, but on broader alterations in European social and religious life, it is highly likely that private and personal perceptions of the Virgin would gradually grow in new directions to appropriate these changes for the domain of individual spirituality.

Questions concerning the significance of Marian devotion in the history of Western Christianity certainly remain. Based on the rich variety of ways in which late medieval society incorporated the Virgin into its devotional life, one can never assume that the official position of the Church after Trent, whether presented in sermons, catechisms, or other formal doctrinal statements, determined totally the ways in which individual Christians would appropriate Marian piety.

Recently, Caroline Walker Bynum, Gail McMurray Gibson, and Theresa Coletti have demonstrated that a closer scrutiny of Marian themes in specific contexts is essential for obtaining a complete picture of the rich diversity of means by which late medieval women identified with the Virgin. In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* Bynum disagrees with Marina Warner's

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their images could work miracles. Some of the same conclusions can be drawn about the Catholic world from the work of Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Holy Dolls: Play and Piety in Florence in the Quattrocento," in *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 310–29. Klapisch-Zuber finds that as late as the seventeenth century, confraternities were organized around the cult of the Christ Child, in which actual dolls representing him were washed, clothed, placed in cradles, kissed, and adorned. This was an especially popular devotion in convents of nuns, but the dolls, or "bambini," were also part of the Christmas rituals of monks as well.

view that Mary had a necessarily negative influence on women's lives. Bynum finds that, for women religious, Mary was simply not important as a "representative woman," and did not occupy center stage in women's spirituality. Mary's significance for women was found in her ability to bear the body of Christ. These women, therefore, identified more closely with Christ, who, like themselves, carried with him a weak, fleshly, "female" humanity. Instead of finding in the Virgin an impossible ideal, religious women such as St. Catherine of Siena and Hildegard of Bingen found in Mary's motherhood of Jesus a positive means to emulate the suffering of Jesus in their own lives, joining themselves, as Mary had done, to the mystery of his Passion.[5]

Gibson, too, places the cult of the Virgin firmly in its place as a part of the incarnational piety of East Anglia in the fifteenth century. Her interpretation of the laywoman Margery Kempe's life, in *The Theater of Devotion*, is also a challenge to a negative interpretation of Mary's influence on women, although from a different perspective from Bynum's. Gibson shows that Margery, in her own visionary life, sought deliberately to copy Mary's role as handmaid of the Lord by becoming a handmaid to the Virgin herself and to the Christ Child. Margery's visions clearly were inspired by the spiritual advice given to a thirteenth-century Franciscan nun in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. In her personal account of her trials and struggles, Margery did not hesitate to move from an understanding of her suffering as like that of Jesus, a theme which would support Bynum's argument, to a vision of her own service to the Christ Child as a mirror of Mary's. In either case, both Jesus and his mother were positive examples, informing Margery's religious life and giving it meaning.[6]

Theresa Coletti's article "Purity and Danger" also concludes that the medieval cult of Mary was much more than a means of ensuring that women would remain in a subordinate position by imitating the Virgin's humility. Particularly in the religious plays of the day, she argues, Mary's paradoxical status as both Virgin and mother resulted in dramatic situa-

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5. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 264–69.

6. Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 47–65.

tions which could confront and challenge the gender stereotypes and structures of society.[7]

The work of Bynum, Gibson, and Coletti dovetails nicely with the findings of this study, which have shown that Mary's birth-giving and bodily unity with Jesus were always given a central, forceful, and positive interpretation in late medieval sermons. If a laywoman like Margery Kemp could feel kinship with the Virgin in her own experience of giving birth, as well as in her mental visions, women who had taken religious vows were no less capable of using their sharing of a female nature with Mary to establish a sense of unity with the Savior, who had received his flesh from a woman. Finally, the fact that Mary was a mother, yet virginal and sinless, made it possible to question the traditional notion that motherhood and women in general need be denigrated to a secondary position. Medieval philosophy may have persistently identified men with the superior soul and women with the body, but in the concrete spirituality of the late Middle Ages, some women were able to use this to a positive advantage as they lived out their faith.

All of this concerns the medieval period, however, and the sermon evidence has shown that preachers in the sixteenth century were beginning to view the importance of the Virgin in a different way. More research will have to be done before any firm conclusions may be drawn about the place of Mary in the context of personal Catholic spirituality during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The tendency to exalt Mary's inner spirituality and passive virtue does coincide, however, with a general suspicion of the body, and of women's bodies specifically, in European society as a whole. Elizabeth Rapley suggests that one of the results of French religious education in the period was to inculcate in students "the distrust of the body which was so much a feature of the seventeenth century."[8] As we will see, this suspicion manifested itself in cultural realms as diverse as

7. Theresa Coletti, "Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body and the En-gendering of the Infancy Narrative in the English Mystery Cycles," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 66–67.

8. Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), 158.

educational treatises, witchcraft trials, art works, and Cartesian episte-
mology; and it provides one more reason why those who portrayed the
Virgin in their sermons would prefer to dwell on her soul rather than her
body.

Rapley finds that "pudeur," a rather excessive notion of modesty, best
describes the seventeenth-century French ideal of proper women's be-
havior. This ideal formed part of the education propagated by female
"dévotes," who sought to promote greater inward devotion and control
of the body among all of their pupils, but especially among their female
charges. Catholic women educators often modeled their pedagogical
techniques and goals on those of the Jesuits, thus the high value placed on
"self-discipline" of the emotions and the body. "Restraint" and "control"
were their watchwords. Just as among the Marian devotional societies,
there is the sense that the body, especially the body of a woman, is always
threatening to break free. Only constant vigilance can prevent sinful and
immodest disorder.[9]

Many historians agree that distrust of women was growing in the six-
teenth century. In her recent study of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century
French sermons, *Soldiers of Christ*, Larissa Taylor concludes that the ser-
mons of sixteenth-century French preachers express a more negative
view of women and women's nature than earlier ones, rarely praising
women or their contributions to the faith. These men often insisted on
the greater weakness of women than men, and described even Mary Mag-
dalen as an "imbecile" for seeking to touch Christ after the Resurrection.[10]

9. Ibid., 76, 149–50, 157–58.
10. Larissa Juliet Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ: Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 171–78. In the sixteenth century, Protes-
tantism perhaps did more than Catholicism to remove feminine influence from religion by
its condemnation of the saints, male and female, and by its elimination of female religious
orders. It is also true that some Catholic women of the sixteenth century were aware of the
importance of maintaining a gender balance when discussing religious matters. See Natal-
ie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," in *Society and Culture in Early Mod-
ern France: Eight Essays by Natalie Zemon Davis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 88.
Also see Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to
Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 315. Eire points to what he calls the
"masculinization of piety" in the Protestant movement. The Protestant elimination of the
Virgin and other female saints from their prominent place in religious life left worshipers
with only masculine images for devotional inspiration.

Joseph Klaits's analysis of the witch craze in the early modern period, *Servants of Satan*, attributes the sudden explosion of witchcraft trials around 1550 to what he calls a "dramatic rise in fear and hatred of women" during the era of the Reformation, a connection first made by Joan Kelley.[11] This misogyny was fueled by traditional beliefs which held that women were by nature morally weaker than men and that they possessed a stronger inclination to sexual activity. Such beliefs became deadly for women after the late fifteenth century, when a new definition of witchcraft was adopted by the clerical hierarchy primarily responsible for prosecuting witches. Whereas the witch had been seen as a person, male or female, who tampered with natural magic to harm a neighbor, the new definition specified that the witch was someone who had transferred religious loyalty and become a worshiper of Satan. Furthermore, by 1550, witches were characterized as Satan's sexual slaves, who met periodically in witches' Sabbats to engage in perverted sexual practices with each other and with the Devil.[12] This preoccupation with the sexual nature of witchcraft led to the disproportionately higher numbers of women accused of this crime.

Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum*, a famous witch-hunting manual published during the 1480's, says,

(That a woman) is more carnal than a man is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives. . . . All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is women insatiable.[13]

Without stopping to consider the theological implications of attributing to God a defect in his creative technique, the authors clearly describe the

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11. Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 52; Joan Kelley, "Early Feminist Theory and the 'Querelle des Femmes,' 1400–1789," in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 93–94.

12. Klaits, *Servants of Satan*, 50–56.

13. Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover, 1971), 41–44; quoted in Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 121.

female body as inherently perverse and the logical source of witchcraft. It is certainly true that there was nothing new in the use of the Aristotelian notion that women were biologically less perfect than men. Dominicans at least since Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas had done so. Thomas believed that woman less perfectly reflected the image of God because she was created from man. Traditionally, however, Dominicans had attributed the defects of women in the order of nature to some problem with parentage or to a bad influence on the sexual act; and, even so, such imperfections in individual natures were compensated for by the greater perfection human nature acquired by having two sexes. Here, in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the authors appear to believe that women were originally created by God to be prone to sin.[14]

Klaits also links increased concern with witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the growth of "introspective habits and preoccupation with sin" which, as we have seen, were the outcome of reforms by both Protestant and Catholic leaders. Increased intrusion by confessors and theologians into the private inner self created the psychological necessity of projecting the cause of sin and evil onto an external source. In addition, elite groups within society were becoming more insistent on bodily control and decorum in public places. Thus any "physically spontaneous" act came to appear "dangerous and low." For this reason peasant women, who were viewed as being more unrestrained in the use of their bodies than other women, were the most likely suspects for accusations of witchcraft.[15] It is also true that the often violent struggle between

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14. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C.–A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 388–92, 406–7. According to Allen, Thomas Aquinas, in his work, *On the Power of God*, specifically rejects the notion that women should be considered naturally evil since women, like men, derive from the first principle, God, who is good. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae: Latin text and English translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries*, vol. 13, *Man Made to God's Image*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988), 37; or ST: Ia, 92, 1. St. Thomas specifically denies that female nature as a whole, which derives from God, is imperfect. The imperfection lies in individual females, and for Thomas "is the result either of the debility of the active power, of some unsuitability of the material, or of some change effected by external influences, like the south wind, for example."

15. Klaits, *Servants of Satan*, 71–77.

rival religious groups following the onset of the Reformation created a climate of suspicion that fostered the tendency to look for the activity of evil in the world.

In *Carnal Knowing*, Margaret Miles describes the way in which female nakedness was used as a convention in Christian art to symbolize the sinfulness and fallen state of human nature generally. This was obviously true of depictions of Eve, but it carried over into portraits of Susanna, Mary Magdalen, and other women. New themes, however, began to occur in sixteenth-century art, according to both Miles and Klaits. For the first time, artists began to associate representations of overt sexuality with the symbols of death. Some of the Protestant artist Hans Baldung Grien's paintings of Adam and Eve actually present the Fall as occasioned by lust. Grien's famous nude paintings of witches, showing them as carnal and lascivious, were, then, the logical extension of his views on women's nature and women's bodies as a whole.[16] Recent scholars have cautioned against assuming that witch-hunting manuals such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* were the direct inspiration for the witches found in the art of Dürer or Hans Baldung Grien. There is nevertheless plenty of room to suspect that their vivid and suggestive portrayal of witches helped generate suspicions against women and may have influenced pow-

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16. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, xiv, 117–44; Klaits, *Servants of Satan*, 73–74. See also Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," *Representations* 14 (1986): 1–41. Laqueur's article is an attempt to explain the radical re-evaluation of female nature and sexuality which took place in the eighteenth century as a response to the "equally radical Enlightenment political reconstitution of 'Man.'" In the past, hierarchical views of the nature of human society and of the relationships between various creatures in the Great Chain of Being went hand in hand. Women, therefore, were considered to be a slightly less perfect form of men in the continuum of being. Descriptions of female biology pictured the female sex organs as simply an inverted form of the male. As radical eighteenth-century political philosophy began to teach the equality of all and their consequent right to participate in politics, those who wished to keep women in the private sphere were forced to redefine female biology if they wished to justify this confinement on the basis of natural law. The result was the creation of a "biology of incommensurability" that stressed the great differences between women and men in the area of reproductive biology. Laqueur is probably right in seeing politics during the Enlightenment as the major immediate cause for this new biology, but attempts by men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to link the nature of women's bodies to their participation in witchcraft shows that the ground work for viewing women's bodies as fundamentally different from men's was laid much earlier.

erful churchmen responsible for prosecuting women as witches later in the sixteenth century.[17]

Finally, in what would appear at first glance to be a completely different cultural category, Susan Bordo explains the creation of Descartes's epistemology as the result of the increased interiority and personal self-awareness of the early modern period, coupled with the distrust of the body and senses also current at the time. In *The Flight to Objectivity*, Bordo uses Descartes's *Meditations* to reconstruct the development of his epistemology, beginning with his radical epistemological doubt.[18]

Descartes's doubt about the possibility of acquiring any accurate knowledge was due in part to the overturning of the traditional understanding of the universe caused by the findings of Copernicus and the subsequent work of Galileo. Their publications had called into question the ability of the senses to provide reliable data even about the physical world itself, customarily believed to be the senses' proper sphere of operation. It was this distrust of the senses which caused Descartes to retreat into the realm of pure thought. He sought to rise above the body and its limitations, perceiving the body's passions and needs as a contamination of the mind's rationality. Bordo states that, for the first time in the Western tradition, even though it had always exhibited dualist tendencies, the "body and mind are defined in terms of mutual exclusivity."[19]

The end product of Descartes's system was a "masculine" model of knowledge which eliminated aspects of participatory knowing usually labeled "feminine," involving empathy, association, and knowledge understood as a union between knower and known. Indeed sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scientists themselves affirmed that their goal was to create a "masculine philosophy." Medieval philosophy had included the body in the process of acquiring knowledge, but by the seventeenth century, for Descartes and for other scientists, knowledge became dependent on "detachment, clarity, and transcendence of the body."[20]

17. Margaret A. Sullivan, "The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000): 375, 394-95.

18. Susan R. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 13–31, 45–58.

19. Ibid., 33–37, 76–77, 93.

20. Ibid., 8–9, 104–5. This section of Bordo's book relies heavily on the following three

Bordo then points to the usual association of women with both nature and body in masculine discourse. The belief that it is necessary to control and achieve distance from the body can be translated easily into a desire to control women, who, like the body, will be perceived as unruly, casting an impure shadow over the clarity of rationality and order. Such sentiments only added to the religious suspicion of women in the period and contributed to a climate of opinion which could support and sustain an attack on women as widespread as the witch craze.[21]

In the meantime, accusations of witchcraft were not the only means used to control women's activities in the sixteenth century. New legal restrictions in the professional sphere were used to limit women's access to public participation in business and craft guilds. These limitations eventually touched the lives of women in all social classes.[22]

What place is left for the Virgin Mary to fill in the midst of so much anxiety about women, and was she used as yet another means to try to control them? Klaits and Miles believe that Marian devotion is problematic because she is always presented as the perfect woman, and therefore automatically unlike all other women.[23] We have already seen, however, that neither the Virgin's sinlessness nor her paradoxical status as both virgin and mother prevented her from being a positive influence on the lives of late medieval women. Jesus was both perfect and of a divine-human nature, yet he was "imitated" by countless Christians of both sexes in the Middle Ages.

Miles may be correct in saying that the Virgin was used by women to form an interior self, since she embodied the "range of acceptable appearance, attitudes, and behavior" for women.[24] In the context of the six-

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works: Brian Easlea, *Witch-Hunting, Magic and the New Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Karl Stern, *The Flight from Woman* (New York: Noonday, 1965).

21. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity*, 108–11.

22. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 126–27; Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 94; Merry Weisner, "Women's Defense of Their Public Role," in *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 3.

23. Klaits, *Servants of Satan*, 66, 72; Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 120.

24. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 139.

teenth-century worldview, however, the fallen feminine nature to which the Virgin's perfection is the foil is no longer viewed as perhaps a bit weaker and more prone to sexual sin than men's but within the bounds of normal humanity. The Virgin now has to stand in contrast to the witch, whose very nature is defined in terms of unrestrained carnality and the physically grotesque.[25] The mental construction of the witch and the Virgin as polar opposites is already suggested by the fact that Jacob Sprenger, co-author of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, also founded a Rosary confraternity in Cologne in 1475 and actively promoted devotion to Mary.[26]

In the context of the Catholic Church's need to halt the rising tide of Protestantism in the late sixteenth century, Peter Canisius's statement that an "immaculate Lord Christ came forth from an immaculate Virgin" takes on a greater significance.[27] Mary's sinless body now bears the symbolic weight of the doctrinal, spiritual, and, not least, physical purity required of Catholics in general and of women in particular, as the Catholic Church does battle with the forces of Satan in the form of either heretics or witches.

Witches were usually painted as nudes, their bodies open to physical perversions just as their souls had admitted the spiritual abuse of satanic slavery. When they spoke, it was to utter blasphemies, curse their enemies, or, perhaps worse, lull others into a false sense of security through friendly and flattering words that masked the evil intent within.[28] It would seem that this aspect of the witch would have been especially frightening in a society that was beginning to question the reliability of the senses to convey accurate information about anything. When both hearing and sight were problematic under ordinary circumstances, how much easier it

25. See especially Miles, "'Carnal Abominations': The Female Body as Grotesque," chap. 5 in *Carnal Knowing*, 145–68.

26. Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 306.

27. Peter Canisius, *Meditationes seu notae in evangelicas lectiones*, 2d ed., ed. Frederick Streicher, S.J., 2 vols. (Munich: 1957), 2,1:141.

28. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 113. Douglas believes that, as perceived by the community, the primary character of the witch is defined by deception, "someone whose external appearance does not automatically betray his interior nature."

would be for someone to deliberately convey false impressions to these senses. If Mary were to represent the opposite of such creatures as witches and remain a symbol of the purity of the Church, she would have to be fully clothed, as far removed from all physical involvement as possible, and speak little. For a woman, unrestricted speech, especially in public, had traditionally been a sign of sexual laxity no less serious than an open display of her body.[29] Not surprisingly, it was during the sixteenth century that artists largely abandoned portraits of the Virgin suckling her child.[30] This historic iconographic motif gave way in the face of society's desire to suppress the public display of bodily functions and the need to distance the Virgin from as many physical associations with other women as possible.

The altered perspective on Mary's participation in the Passion is important here, for in the Middle Ages Passion sermons had been the occasion for the greatest public elaboration of Mary's individual personality. Except for her tears, there is no outward display through words or dramatic actions of her grief. By the late sixteenth century, the Virgin's speech, whether in sermons or other contexts, is largely limited to her role as intercessor and mediatrix between God and the world. She intercedes for her friends at Cana, she performs good works, and she prays. In visions, she communicates a heavenly message to those who remain on earth. But words such as Mary's laments at the cross and her involved conversations with Jesus, words which could serve to reveal her own thoughts and feelings as a particular woman, are largely absent. The Virgin neither faints nor clings to the cross. She is a model of emotional and

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29. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 165. In the same context, Miles quotes Francesco Barbaro's treatise, "On Wifely Duties," in which he states, "The speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs." Barbaro's treatise can be found, translated by Benjamin G. Kohl, in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt with Elizabeth B. Welles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 189–228. See also Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 25–26. Lochrie points out that St. Bernard in the twelfth century, and the devotional work the *Ancrene Wisse* in the thirteenth, propounded the belief that the ideal female body should be sealed completely, the mouth included.

30. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 203–4.

physical control. Even the "Aves" offered to her in the Rosary are now described by Christopher Cheffontaines as a way to bring "order" and discipline to the life of prayer.

Catholic leaders promoted the cult of the Holy Family in the seventeenth century, in which the Virgin appears as the ideal mother: humble, quiet, caring, and submissive to Joseph as well as to God.[31] Since the cult of Joseph himself had been on the rise since the fifteenth century, it was easy to portray him as the role model for fathers, authoritative and protective of wife and children.[32] Once again, there is a preference for creating a structure of patriarchal order and obedience.

The religious creativity of late medieval women cautions against the assumption that Catholic women of the post-Tridentine period could not have been equally innovative in incorporating newer models of the Virgin into their spirituality. It is easy to see how Mary might continue to be a useful exemplar, either for secluded religious, men or women, or for the prayer lives of those who had joined one of the Marian devotional societies. Beyond this, however, seventeenth-century French Catholics revealed their spiritual resourcefulness through a creative interpretation of the Visitation, through which Mary surprisingly became the inspiration for religious women who sought to become more actively involved in service to the poor and in the field of education. Against the prevailing trends of the international Church, in which the ecclesiastical hierarchy usually sought to confine religious women in convents according to the historic contemplative model, the Virgin of the Visitation came to represent the triumph of the active life of service over these restrictions. Both men such as François de Sales, Vincent de Paul, and Jean-Jacques Olier and women such as Jeanne de Chantal and Marguerite Bourgeoys appealed to the Visitation as the prototype for a women's "apostolate."[33] Elizabeth Rapley cites this remarkable passage from Jean-Jacques Olier's work, *Vie intérieure de la Très Sainte Vièrge:* "It is from the mystery of the

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31. Ibid., 190.

32. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.

33. Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 169–74.

Visitation that apostolic men and missionaries ought to draw the graces of their sublime vocation. From the moment that she (Mary) conceived and formed Him in her womb, she, first of all, went out at once to announce Him, and thus did what the Apostles later did by her example."[34] Clearly, not all Catholics allowed the greater emphasis on interior devotion in the seventeenth century to prevent them from developing a model of Mary as someone whose inner spiritual union with God allowed her the freedom to express that union in active works of love, works defined by some in ways that transgressed traditional boundaries separating men's and women's roles. In any case, the Virgin became, for many, the perfect embodiment of François de Sales's description of the proper relation between the "inner" and the "outer" man. Through her inner life of prayer Mary fulfilled the commandment to love God above all else, while through her good works and her proclamation of the arrival of her son, she fulfilled the commandment to love her neighbor as herself.

The most appropriate way to bring this study to a close is to consider one of the most widespread and popular features of Marian piety in the seventeenth century, devotion to her Sacred Heart. The ideals and practices associated with this devotion reveal both the basic transformation in European spirituality which was taking place at that time, as well as the persistence of more medieval forms of religious expression. Based on the widespread enthusiasm for the cult of the Sacred Heart of Mary in the seventeenth century, it is possible to see that European Christians were indeed increasingly attracted by a piety which stressed inner spiritual union with Christ through Mary. They nevertheless continued to be drawn to pronounced concrete and physical manifestations of that union.

The essence of the cult of the Sacred Heart is the mystical unity of love and purpose shared by the Virgin and her son, the same unity which we have seen expressed in numerous sermons of the day. As such, this devotion was closely linked to a twin devotion to the heart of Jesus. That which bound and continues to bind Mary and Jesus together is their common love for human beings, their mutual suffering to bring about hu-

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34. Ibid., 172.

man redemption, and their ongoing cooperation to further the will of God in the world.[35]

The human heart was traditionally understood to be the seat of emotion and affection. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, Europe experienced an international spiritual movement in which all religion, Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity and even Judaism, came to be influenced by what Ted Campbell has called "religions of the heart."[36] This approach promoted an inward love of and dedication to God, which was believed to be superior to organized religion, which stressed formal theology or the sacraments. Campbell accounts for this renewed emphasis on inner devotion by pointing to general dissatisfaction with the excessive rationalism of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment and to the religious division which had shattered the perceived unity of Christendom in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, a division increasingly manifest in the arena of military as well as pulpit warfare. As various Christian groups competed with each other, each basing its claims to authority on external and objective forms such as the Bible, the early Church Fathers, or Christian traditions in worship and creed, many Europeans began to sense a fundamental error in such divi-

35. Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 47. St. Jean Eudes (d. 1680) did the most to develop and popularize the cult of the Sacred Heart. He composed an Office of the Holy Heart of Mary in 1641 and organized several devotional societies dedicated to Mary's heart. According to Eudes, there were three dimensions to Mary's sacred heart: her virginal fleshly heart; her spiritual heart, which was God-like; and a heart that is actually divine and God himself, for it is the love of God dwelling in her.

36. Campbell, *Religion of the Heart*, 144–51. Campbell points to "parallels" between the development of Christian "religions of the heart" and the Hasidic movement within the Jewish faith. Like Western Christians, the Jews of Eastern Europe had experienced religious division and disillusion in the failed messianic movement of Sabbatai Tsevi. They had also suffered warfare and persecution as a result of "the Deluge," in which Poland was successively attacked by Cossacks from the Ukraine, Russians, and finally Swedes, events which parallel the horrors of the Thirty Years War in the West. In the wake of these events, Israel ben Eliezer or Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name) founded the movement which came to be known as Hasidism. He transformed the religion of Judaism by stressing not the study of Scripture but religious practice and the fervent devotion of the individual, demonstrated by emotional prayer and ecstatic trances. Campbell is not arguing for the influence of Christian movements on Judaism, but for the notion that similar conditions produce similar results for religious communities.

sion. They began to seek a means to bypass the arguments and warfare by appealing to an experience of God not determined completely by objective authorities and ecclesiastical hierarchies. In this way, Christians from apparently competing camps might foster a sense of unity in Christ existing beyond the surface division. Indeed, Campbell points out that many Christians involved in these movements, from Quakers, Moravians, and Methodists to Quietists and Jansenists, recognized and applauded the similarity of religious devotion among such seemingly disparate Christian groups in so wide a variety of cultural contexts.[37] Among the Catholic expressions of these "religions of the heart," Campbell sees the Sacred Heart devotion as both the most orthodox and the most influential.[38]

It is true that a piety centered on the Sacred Hearts of Mary and Jesus would appear to be a totally interior devotion which stresses a spiritual union between mother and son. To an extent, this is accurate. There is likewise a spiritual desire on the part of those who are dedicated to the Sacred Heart to unite their own hearts to those of Jesus and his mother in love and service. Those who participated in this movement stressed the development of an intense private prayer life as well as the performance of works of service to the community. The outward practices which this devotion inspired, however, are more reminiscent of the Middle Ages. Often, the physical hearts of those who had outstanding love for Mary were preserved after death, and were believed to possess miraculous powers as a result of their intimate union with her. The hearts of St. François de Sales and St. Jeanne de Chantal, who helped early on to popularize the Sacred Heart devotion, were kept at Chaillot and were later observed to undergo dramatic changes during times when the Church was distressed. Prominent persons desired to have their hearts preserved in shrines dedicated to Mary. The heart of James II of England was placed, at his request, near those of St. François and St. Jeanne at Chaillot.[39] In short, the Sacred Heart devotion is a blending of the current movement toward inner piety with the traditional cult of relics.

37. Ibid., 152.
38. Ibid., 36–40.
39. Perry and Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary*, 47–48.

A commonplace of modern history is the notion that the sixteenth century was a period of transition, but this concept remains empty of content without an attempt, however limited, to discover and describe some of the dynamics of the process involved. This is a task on which historians of the period have been laboring for some time, long enough to have demonstrated that religious sensibilities were undergoing a profound change, a change which eventually produced the Protestant Reformation as well as more subdued but equally significant differences in Catholic piety. This study has sought to examine some of the forces for change in the period and their impact on the Catholic faith as exhibited through popular sermons and Marian devotion. A close scrutiny of the symbols and metaphors employed by the Church's preachers to inspire its members with love for Mary shows that by the dawn of the seventeenth century she was a changed individual, no longer quite the same woman who had participated in so dramatic a way in fifteenth-century sermons, artworks, and treatises. She is more distanced from the action, more spiritualized, more passive, and much more silent.

If it had been possible for a pious Catholic layperson of the fifteenth century, devoted to the Virgin, to encounter her once again as she was presented at the opening of the seventeenth century by a preacher such as François de Sales, the experience would no doubt have been similar to that of a person who happens upon a relative whom he or she has not seen in twenty or thirty years: unsettling. The physical appearance is vaguely familiar and the network of family relationships much the same, and yet the personality has been molded both by time and experience. It would be necessary to become acquainted all over again.