

FEMINIST MARIOLOGIES: HETERONOMY/ SUBORDINATION AND THE SCANDAL OF CHRISTOLOGY

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[Feminist Mariologies are partly the reaction of a justified anger to centuries of discrimination against women enshrined in the very Scriptures, in the central theological tradition, and in the life of the Church. Mariology allows feminists to reflect on exegesis, patriarchy, equality, autonomy, obedience, sexual life, social roles, and professionalism. The rejection of all subordination, even to other women, and the maleness of Christ drive feminist Mariologies so that some move the theological location of Mariology from the gendered Christology to the ungendered Pneumatology and the reign of God.]

ALREADY IN 1981 the German feminist Elisabeth Gössmann said she feared “a new Marian maximalism” which had its origins among feminist theologians.¹ Nine years later the Scottish feminist Daphne Hampson wrote of a feminist “fixation” on Mary.² One might surmise that the interest in Mary was dictated by the number of theological lines converging in Mariology: Scripture, Christology, anthropology, discipleship, sexuality, subordination, and eschatology.³ It is possible that some feminists thought that by addressing Mariology they could address the whole of theology. Possible, but not likely. More likely anger motivated them. Elizabeth Johnson, a moderate standing in the central tradition, who has produced the most ambitious and impressive feminist Mariology to date, contends that the charge against Mariology is not irrelevancy, but “complicity in the

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¹ *Die streibaren Schwestern* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981) 99.

² *Theology and Feminism* (Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1990) 73.

³ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, 5 vols. (Munich: Hueber, 1948–1955) 5.7.

oppression of women.”⁴ Somewhat in the same vein Patricia Noone charges that Marian piety was not only complicit but “actually presided over evil and did not challenge it.”⁵ Misogyny and hatred of the body, particularly female sexuality, poisoned Mariology, according to Mary Gordon. “The Fathers did not like women.”⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether believes that the mariological tradition expresses and sustains the ideology of the patriarchal “good woman”; churches with “high Mariologies” are the very ones with a history of negativity toward women.⁷ Understandably, one finds expressions of ire in feminist Marian writing, like “the sharp and often angry struggle against oppression,” and “in the angry power of the Spirit.”⁸ Dutch theologian Catherina Halkes says feminists need “to clear away the rubbish, ask iconoclastic questions and introduce dynamite.”⁹ For these reasons, largely justified, feminist Mariologies tend first to deconstruct and then, often tardily, to reconstruct.

The present inquiry starts from a male, non-objective conviction that feminist theologians have much more than anger to offer, indeed, have made a positive, probably lasting, contribution to Mariology. My article is not concerned with the larger unproblematic areas of feminist Mariologies, but with the smaller areas still needing discussion, for example, subordination. As a male I will be looking at feminist Mariologies from the perspective of heteronomy and Christology, both of which involved subordination and submission.¹⁰ After the briefest look at Scripture and tradition

⁴ “The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women,” *Horizons* 12 (1985) 120. Here Johnson has gathered a number of these texts making the same complaint.

⁵ *Mary for Today* (Chicago: Thomas More, 1977) 152.

⁶ “Coming to Terms with Mary,” *Commonweal* 109 (1982) 11.

⁷ *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983) 149; *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 37. Tissa Balaysuria has argued: “This traditional Mary is a Mary of capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist, First World Christendom” (*Mary and Human Liberation* [Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1997] 32).

⁸ Mary Ann Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” in *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics*, Semeia 28 (1983) 116; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 346.

⁹ “Mary in My Life,” in *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 69.

¹⁰ In the definition of Paul Tillich autonomy and heteronomy exist in tension, which tension is broken when autonomous reason is united with its own depth in theonomy. The whole process is within a theological system in which revelation is presupposed (*Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951–1963] autonomy and heteronomy 1.67; 83–86; revelation, the whole of part I of book 1.71–159). Tillich does not propose absolute autonomy. In Daphne Hampson’s definition revelation is heteronomous and full human autonomy is not possible. “On Autonomy and Heteronomy,” *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologies Debate Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1996) 1–16. Here, in this article, het-

as offense, a survey will follow covering heteronomy in the Annunciation and related areas: passivity, sexuality, and then the Magnificat as proposing a non-heteronomous social iconoclasm. In the section on Christology I will look at the normativity of Christ for Mariology, and the transposition from the historically gendered Christ as the locus of Mariology to the transhistorically ungended Spirit and the ungended reign of God. Next I will consider the Christological dimensions of Mary as mother and sister, and end with reflections and conclusions.

Scripture and Tradition as Offense

One needs to distinguish between androcentrism, which is a type of social awareness, and patriarchy, which is an ideology. The former often leads to the latter. The androcentric character of the Scriptures seems evident. Tradition has ascribed the authorship of all the books to a male author, a masculine God inspired all of them; all the books were written from a male perspective, even when recounting female experience; all the books come out of a people led by men. Men created the canon; during worship men read and interpret the books. Biblical scholarship until recently was a male preserve.¹¹ The text of Scripture manifests a dominating male perspective as seen in the Decalogue, where the wife is numbered among a man's possessions, along with slaves, oxen, and donkeys (Exodus 20:17). The woman alone is blamed for the advent of sin: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (Sirach 25:24).

The postbiblical period sometimes reflects this denigration of women. Bernard Prusak and Rosemary Radford Ruether have collected some of the offending texts.¹² Thomas Aquinas can stand as a representative. "Woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence, such as the

eronomy is a principle indicating that moral agents are answerable to another, and excludes absolute, but not relative, autonomy. Patriarchy, unlike heteronomy, is both an ideology and a praxis taking the *paterfamilias* as the norm. Heteronomy and patriarchy both involve accountability beyond the moral agency of the self; both include subordination and obedience. Sandra Schneiders believes that patriarchy is not based on maleness as such, but on the role assigned to the male adult household heads in the social structure (*Beyond Patching* [New York: Paulist, 1991] 23).

¹¹ I am summarizing private conversations with Sandra Schneiders.

¹² Prusak, "Women: Seductive Siren and Source of Sin?" *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) 89–116; Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," *ibid.* 150–83.

south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] observes.”¹³ The angry reaction to the texts of Scripture and tradition denigrating women formed some of the suppositions to feminist hermeneutics, exegesis, and Mariologies.

Phyllis Trible, working within the patriarchal Scripture, focuses on interpretation of the Old Testament text.¹⁴ But Sandra Schneiders says the problem most of the time is not in the interpretation. “The problem is in the text.”¹⁵ Men see only what male experience allows them to see; they write what male consciousness allows them to write. Here Schneiders can find some support in the medieval principle “Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient” (*quidquid recipitur in modo recipientis recipitur*). No non-situated statements exist, Schneiders continues. Some texts are “morally offensive” and “intrinsically oppressive,”¹⁶ opposed to the covenantal life which is at the heart of revelation and, as such, they have to be judged as “simply unfaithful to revelation.”¹⁷ If God calls the community to liberation and justice, how can unjust anti-feminist texts be normative?¹⁸ If these are the Word of God, is God not made an “enemy and oppressor of some human beings?”¹⁹ One needs a different

¹³ *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1; see also 1, q. 92, a. 2; 1, q. 99, a. 2, ad 1. For commentary on Aquinas’s texts, see Kari Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence* (Kampen: Pharos, 1995) 141–341.

¹⁴ “Depatriarchizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973) 217–40.

¹⁵ Schneiders, *Beyond Patching* 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 66.

¹⁸ Building on Schneiders, one asks whether *herem* (the ban), the killing of all men, women and children of defeated Canaanites and idolatrous Israelites, specifically at Yahweh’s command and in fidelity to Yahweh (Deuteronomy 7:1–2; 13:16; 20:16b–17a) can really be the word of God? *Herem* was a significant part of the Deuteronomic ideal. We know that *herem* was found in other nations pre-dating the Deuteronomic editors. Jewish scholar Philip D. Stern says “it is certain that Israel borrowed the *herem* from abroad, and then adapted it to fit its own peculiar religious needs” (*The Biblical Herem* [London: Widenfeld and Nicolson, 1978] 133, xxi.). Killing all the captives is evil and immoral (like modern area bombing). How could this be the command of Yahweh? Can one conclude then that male authors of the biblical text took over *herem* from other nations as the will of Yahweh (like they did the submission of women, which also pre-dates Israel), when, in fact, it is the will of men? Later the believing community, dominated by men—so the argument goes—declared the books, in which *herem* and the submission of women appeared, to be canonical, and therefore the revealed and inspired word of God. One remembers that in relation to inerrancy *Dei Verbum* no. 11 says, “. . . the books of Scripture firmly and faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.” Are *herem* and the submission of women truths for the sake of our salvation? Or does this line of argument reduce revelation to sociology with tinsel?

¹⁹ Schneiders, *Beyond Patching* 54.

understanding of the word of God, namely, it is the totality of divine revelation, preeminently in Jesus. "The Bible is literally the word of human beings about their experience of God," and the Bible recounts mostly the experience of men.²⁰ What are at issue are not a few occasional masculine texts, but an androcentric and patriarchal bias which "pervade the text from one end to the other."²¹ Schneiders rejects the assumption of some feminist scholars that only the oppressive texts are without authority. Schneiders counters: "unless the whole biblical text is Scripture for us, none of it really is."²² Many have become increasingly aware "of the role of Scripture itself in causing and/or legitimating some of the worst developments in human history."²³ Neither Schneiders nor Mary Ann Tolbert, competent exegetes and responsible Christians, want to reject the Scriptures but to retrieve them. Still, they ask whether self-respecting women can continue allowing Scripture to norm their faith life, or for women to continue within the Christian tradition.²⁴ The measure of women's pain is here.

The Annunciation and Autonomy

In an important essay Hampson correctly sees the essential relationship between Christianity and heteronomy; if one accepts the first, one necessarily accepts the second. "... God must ultimately, by definition, be heteronomous. ... [Christians] believe in obedience to God."²⁵ Hampson, who left Christianity over the feminist issue, believes that "autonomy [self-law] is what feminism has been about. ... To be autonomous is to overcome heteronomy."²⁶ Autonomy, in Hampson's view, cannot coexist with Christology.²⁷ In a word, to be autonomous is to exclude submission and obedience, and, consequently, Christology, and Christianity. However, heteronomy as involving submission is not restricted to female subjection to male power, but has to do with the vast religious and social structures involving any submission/obedience to authority, even to women in authority.

²⁰ Ibid. 50.

²¹ Schneiders, "Living Word or Dead(ly) Letter: The Encounter Between the New Testament and Contemporary Experience," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 47 (1992) 57.

²² Ibid. 59. Børresen agrees in "Recent Research on Women in the Christian Tradition," in *From Patristics to Matristics* (Rome: Herder, 2002) 10.

²³ Schneiders, "Living Word or Dead(ly) Letter" 6.

²⁴ Ibid. 57; Tolbert, "Defining the Problem" 124.

²⁵ "On Autonomy and Heteronomy," *Swallowing the Fishbone?* 9, 1.

²⁶ Ibid. Heteronomy is also an issue in feminist economic theory. See Richard Cornwall, Lee Badgett, "Sexual Orientation," in *The Elgar Companion to Feminist Economics*, ed. J. Peterson, M. Lewis (Northampton, Mass.: Elgar, 1999) 670–81.

²⁷ *Theology and Feminism* 59.

At the beginning of theological feminism the issue was stated in terms of the patriarchy, a form of heteronomy. Theological feminism dates from the publication of Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), largely indebted to Simone de Beauvoir's secular book, *The Second Sex* (1952). Daly believes that Christianity is a form of phallicism, and coined the dictum "When God is male, then the male is God."²⁸ Among her harshest critics are other feminist theologians, yet she has had a profound influence and feminists still honor her as a frontier woman who cleared the land. Daly, in fact, initiated the feminist critique of Mariology,²⁹ in which she referred to heteronomy in the oft quoted citation of Simone de Beauvoir (who was raised Catholic) concerning the Annunciation: "For the first time in human history the mother kneels before her son: she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin."³⁰ Referring to Mary's voluntary *fiat* Daly remarks, "Like all rape victims in the male myth she submits joyously to this unspeakable degradation."³¹ Many feminist theologians would object, but Daly's remark is significant because she was a force in promoting victimization themes and the theological rhetoric of rage.

Mary's *fiat* has traditionally been interpreted in terms of patriarchy, subordination, humility, passivity, and an unlimited capacity for self-sacrifice. In Latin America this conglomerate of virtues is known derisively as "Marianismo."³² In reference to the Annunciation, *Lumen gentium* no. 56 gives classical expression to what feminists find so offensive, constituting a provocative principle in Marianismo. "In subordination to Him and along with Him, by the grace of almighty God, she served the mystery of redemption." Where *Lumen gentium* sees heteronomy and subordination in Mary's *fiat*, Ruether sees Mary's *fiat* as throwing them off, asserting freedom and autonomy. "Faith ceases to be heteronomous submission to external authorities and becomes a free act."³³ Here Ruether joins Hampson in rejecting authority beyond the moral agency of self, opposing autonomy to heteronomy. Though not all feminists would join them, radical autonomy is radical feminism's other name.

²⁸ *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon, 1973) 19.

²⁹ Gössmann, "Mariologische Thesen in der feministischen Theologie," in *Maria – für alle Frauen oder über allen Frauen?* ed. Elisabeth Gössman, Dieter R. Bauer (Freiburg: Herder, 1989) 168–69.

³⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage, 1952) 160.

³¹ Daly, *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 74.

³² Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America," in *Female and Male in Latin America*, ed. Ann Pescatello (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1973) 90–101.

³³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* 154.

If the patriarchal form of heteronomy (and its correlate subordination) is the ultimate enemy in Mariology as elsewhere, the Annunciation is where the main battle is fought. Luke indicates submission when he presents Mary as *doulē*, that is, “handmaid,” “servant,” or “female slave” (Luke 1:38). In the Magnificat Mary again calls herself “servant” or “slave” (*doulē*) (1:48). These translations of *doulē* would not be painful for women had the text not been used to demand self-sacrifice and a servanthood of women without granting dignity and rights. Are those without power exhorted to powerlessness? Jacquelyn Grant writes on “The Sin of Servanthood,” recognizing “service” and “servanthood” as component parts of Christianity, but also as belonging to the patriarchal form of heteronomy. Therefore African American women reject servanthood in favor of the empowering “discipleship,” quite justly a major theme in feminist Mariologies.³⁴ If Mary’s *fiat* is presented as passive humility, then the text is “a reification of male power over women,” and Mary is “hopelessly inadequate for feminist needs.”³⁵

Writing of the *fiat* text, Johnson notes that traditional demands for “obedience to male religious authority figures, be they God, husband, or priest, make women shudder before this text and reject it as dangerous to physical and psychological health as well as to a liberating spirituality.”³⁶ This would have to be nuanced to be in harmony with Johnson’s earlier call for both masculine and feminine images of God.³⁷ “The handmaid or slave (*doulē*) of the Lord,” continues Johnson, is “enormously problematic.”³⁸ Perhaps some of the scandal women experience would be mitigated if one remembered, as Johnson does, the Old Testament custom of naming great figures in salvation history as “slaves” of Yahweh (Moses: 2 Kings 18:12; Joshua: Judges 2:8; Abraham: Psalm 105:42; the prophets Amos: 3:7, and Zechariah: 1:6).³⁹ One could have added that Luke locates Mary among these towering figures as well as among the *anawim*. In Luke slave is a title of glory. For both men and women: better to be a slave in the house of the Lord than a prince in the palace of the king. But one needs to support Johnson in recognizing how this *fiat* text was used to instill the submission of women to places pre-assigned to them by men.

The issue however is wider. In feminist theory a woman submitting in obedience to female authority is still genuflecting in front of the heterono-

³⁴ Grant, “The Sin of Servanthood,” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspective on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 199–218.

³⁵ Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985) 201, 202.

³⁶ *Truly Our Sister* (New York: Continuum, 2003) 255.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 72–73.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 254, 255.

³⁹ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 228.

mous male tabernacle. In many respects the issue is not gender specific because what is rejected is subordination to anyone, female or male. Male authority presents special problems, but ultimately the gender of the authority is irrelevant. And in some expressions of feminist Marian piety both the subordination of Mary to her son, and the subordination of the petitioner to Mary is rejected. Many women read the subordinating Annunciation exegesis in Mariologies as uniquely directed to them. But as Schneiders remarks: "if Mary is seen as model of disciples she is equally so for men and women."⁴⁰ Men read the same Mariologies stressing submission and obedience; men heard the same retreat conferences on Mary's humility and her hidden life.

The Lukan account of the Annunciation is a literary composition structured to highlight the drama. To press over-precise questions of obedience seems inappropriate. Perhaps even Fitzmyer's suggestion that Mary's *fiat* was spoken "enthusiastically" is saying too much.⁴¹ Mary hears the Word of God addressed to her, and she responds as a true disciple, cooperating in God's plan of salvation. If the emphasis on obedience in the interpretation of the *fiat* has been too great, the role of obedience in the larger biblical text seems undoubted. In the Fourth Gospel the three texts which mention Jesus' mother (2:1-6; 6:42; 19:25-27), constituting the first, fourth, and seventh of the seven signs of Jesus' glory, all have "the central theme of obedience," as Joseph Grassi notes.⁴² Every free response to a divine invitation is a faith response, involving "the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26), that is, a faith manifesting itself in obedience. In Paul at least, obedience is a synonym for faith.⁴³ The usual term in biblical Greek for "obey" is (*hypakouō*), but (*akouō*) "hear:" is often used as a synonym (Matthew 1:15).⁴⁴ "Every one who hears my words and does them . . ."

⁴⁰ *Written That You May Believe* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1991) 97.

⁴¹ Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 341.

⁴² "Eating Jesus' Flesh and Drinking His Blood: The Centrality and Meaning of John 6:51-58," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17 (1987) 25. "After the statement about Jesus' hour, his mother tells the waiters [and the Gospel audience], 'Do whatever he tells you' (2:5). Hers appears to be an authoritative voice, in view of her special role in tradition and succession seen in the seventh sign. The emphasis is on perfect obedience to Jesus' word" *ibid.* 29.

⁴³ "What in one text is faith, in another is obedience" (Otto Kuss, "Der Glaube nach den paulinischen Hauptbriefen," in *Auslegung und Verkündigung*, 3 vols. [Regensburg: Pustet, 1963] 1.198). Also noted by Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 14.

⁴⁴ W. J. Harrelson, "Obedience," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962). For example, in the LXX translation of Isaiah 65:24, and in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* 14,24 *hypakouō* is used to mean "hear" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957] 845). A feminist friend noted that

(Matthew 7:24). Jesus is not speaking of the physical act of hearing, but of acceptance of the word and obedience to it. Obedience also seems to be part of Jesus' own experience. Luke says he was subject to his parents (Luke 1:52), and he recognized the authority of the state (Matthew 22:21). Jesus' obedience is related to the one who sent him. "He became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). One need not think of an implacable Father demanding obedience from a resisting Son. More likely the Father had an instinct of love for the salvation of the world, that the Son recognized as the wish of the Father (your wish is my command). Though he knew the horror before him, he spoke his obedient "yes" and submitted to the Father. Though "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30), "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Heteronomy and submission of some kind seem to belong to the interior life of God.

The question today is whether heteronomy and obedience in any context to anyone, male or female, is a viable possibility.⁴⁵ That authority should be exercised in the first instance by persuasion, not by command, all agree. But in the second instance, when persuasion fails in a matter of importance for the community, obedience and submission seem proper and do not represent oppressive heteronomy or the denial of autonomy. Feminist Margaret Farley, reflecting on the meaning of autonomy, holds that persons are not just means; they are ends in themselves. However, an autonomous person is situated and is not a self-determining universe.⁴⁶ Autonomy so understood seems compatible with some kind of submission.

Schneiders makes an important contribution to the discussion. In one type of authority, a unilateral claim is addressed to someone imposing an obligation to respond. If one fails to respond, one suffers sanctions. But the biblical concept of authority, Schneiders says, is dialogical and the claim is not coercive. The claim makes an appeal to the person addressed, invites the person to respond, but one is not forced to respond. One so invited can resist the claim implied in the invitation. If one says "yes" to the claim, one is initiated into the reality that discloses itself in the giving of the invitation; the reality is in dialogue and does not dominate. One is free to say "no" to

Jesus does not use the word "obedience"; the issue, however, is not whether he uses the word but whether he uses the idea. An example, "Who ever listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16), meaning not only hearing words, but obeying what is heard (See "*akouō*," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990]).

⁴⁵ Several feminist theologians suggested that obedience is an expression of patriarchy, at odds with the discipleship of equals, and therefore constitutes an outdated category.

⁴⁶ Farley, "A Feminist Version of Respect for Persons," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran et al. (New York: Paulist, 1996) 168–75, 178.

the claim, and does not suffer sanctions. However, in the “no” the self is diminished.⁴⁷ This Schneiders illustrates by the Parable of the Prodigal Son. “Not only does Jesus say plainly that God is not a patriarch but he definitively subverts any attempt to base human patriarchy on an appeal to divine institution. The power God refuses to assume over us is surely not given by God to any human being.”⁴⁸ No one person, male or female, no institution, has authority to claim what God does not claim. Except in unusual cases concerning the common good, legitimate authority should not exercise coercive power.⁴⁹ This is the divine model. Authority in dialogue inviting, persuading, “yes”; unilateral authority demanding obedience “no.” There are large unanswered questions in Schneiders’s view, such as who determines the content of the common good, but it is the basis for a new discussion of obedience.

The *Fiat* and Passivity

In Mariologies, the argument goes, passivity was seen as the other side of heteronomy and of the obedience commended to women having no control over their own bodies, raising questions of self-worth. The point of passivity is valid but has to be carefully delimited. Mary’s passivity and receptivity are not exclusive female qualities as every true disciple, female or male, has to receive in order to act.⁵⁰ And that receptivity is not a rock receiving sunshine, but an active person speaking a free *fiat*.

In the Annunciation context Luke is speaking of a peasant culture. If a Jewish scholar, writing of peasant culture at that time twice says, “we have to see Mary as completely passive,”⁵¹ it would be because peasant culture socialized her into passivity. In the Jewish village culture of the first century Jewish boys were taught to read, not girls. In the choice of a spouse the parents made the decision, often without consulting the girls or boys. Neither the Old nor New Testaments reveals the customary age for marriage, so we have no precise knowledge of Mary’s age when she said her *fiat*.

⁴⁷ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 55–59.

⁴⁸ *Women and the Word* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 47. Schneiders distinguishes between claims regarding truth, and those regarding behavior. They operate differently.

⁴⁹ *Beyond Patching* 26. It would appear that Schneiders is speaking of a style of exercising authority. If in exceptional cases legitimate authority can use coercive power, that means it is not excluded in principle, but in practice it is wise to avoid using it. Schneiders will expound obedience more expansively in her third volume on religious life.

⁵⁰ Joyce Little, “Mary and Feminist Theology,” *Thought* 62 (1987) 351.

⁵¹ Schalom Ben-Chorin, “A Jewish View of the Mother of Jesus,” in *Mary in the Churches* (New York: Seabury, 1983) 12; “. . . in the usual oriental way she remained completely passive” (ibid. 16).

Nonetheless, it is certain, says Roland de Vaux, that girls, and very likely boys, were married extremely young. In the East this had been the custom for centuries before Mary's *fiat*, and still obtains today in some places, though Westerners find it difficult to comprehend. In later times rabbis fixed the minimum marriage age at twelve for girls and thirteen for boys.⁵² The Talmud recommends girls marry between twelve and thirteen (Yebam, 626), and this is the likely age of Mary at the time of the Annunciation.⁵³

Johnson is correct in pointing out what the text does not say. "Mary is never portrayed as subject to Joseph or under control of any man. . . ."⁵⁴ But in establishing the meaning of what is not said, namely, the freedom from male control, one must recognize both the weakness of arguments from silence and the cultural conditioning just mentioned. Therefore it seems pushing the text too far to say that the passage means Mary is free "in a unique way" from parental control.⁵⁵ Nor is the view that Mary's *fiat* is "a self-determining act of personal autonomy" compelling.⁵⁶ Though it is proper to say Mary gave a free *fiat*, to stress Mary's autonomy or maturity seems inappropriate, as well as applying the term "woman" or "woman of Spirit" to a peasant girl of twelve or thirteen.⁵⁷ One notes that Paul VI said that in her peasant mores Mary is not a model for modern women.⁵⁸

Mariology and Sexuality

The preoccupation with receptivity and passivity is linked to the larger issue of sexuality and autonomy in relation to heteronomy and obedience. Joyce Little asks whether feminist theology can be reduced to the issue of sexuality.⁵⁹ At very least, sexuality is a controlling issue in feminist Mariologies. The way the Church presented the chastity of Mary counted

⁵² Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961) 29.

⁵³ The compilation of the Talmud dates to 300 years after the completion of the Gospels. Therefore the Talmud by itself cannot be used to interpret the Gospels. Yet many of the Talmudic writings rest on traditions going back to the intertestamental period. Given the continuous tradition de Vaux mentions, and the absence of contrary evidence, the Talmud numbers seem correct.

⁵⁴ Johnson, "The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women" 133; see also Johnson, *Truly Our Sister* 256.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Johnson, "The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women" 133.

⁵⁸ *Marialis cultus* no. 35; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 66 (1974) 148.

⁵⁹ "Mary and Feminist Theology," *Thought* 62 (1987) 344. Halkes agrees that feminist theology is "Dionysian." "Feminist Theology: An Interim Assessment," *Women in a Man's Church*, ed. Virgilio Elizondo, Norbert Greinacher, *Concilium* 134 (New York: Seabury, 1980) 115.

among the reasons why Marina Warner rejected her.⁶⁰ Ruether contends that Mary's quasi divine status has "vilified and demonized the sexual and maternal roles of real women."⁶¹ Virginity replaced sexuality in the Christian vocation, continues Ruether, with the result that virginity, not sexuality, became the means to rebirth to the higher life.⁶²

The absence in the Marian cult of a way to tap into sexual power is crippling for Carter Heyward.⁶³ The projection by the male authors of Mariologies of the obedient, passive Mary virgin resulted in the image of a gutless sexless stick in blue. The feminists have a point, as the sexual reflections on the biblical text came only out of the male experience. What is missing if Mary is seen only from the male perspective? Only in the last decades has it dawned that a theology of women's sexuality which is developed, taught, and enforced by men is "sheer absurdity."⁶⁴ As an antidote feminist theologians propose bringing the true lived experience of married and single women to the biblical text in a hermeneutics of suspicion.⁶⁵ Ideally this would include those whose experience of virginity, vowed and unwowed, led to integrity, wholeness, and freedom. Virginity is also about sexuality.

Mary's *fiat* is an acceptance of virginity and motherhood, both of which involve heteronomy and obedience. Though virginity is a Gospel value (Matthew 19:10-12), the *fiat* text does not set forth virginity as a moral model or ideal for others.⁶⁶ But the problem persists. Ruether notes the ambivalence between misogyny and virginity, a special reference to aberrations in the ascetic movement in the early centuries and beyond.⁶⁷ Though history always has dirty fingernails, there are other sides to the role of virginity in the Church. In the early Church virginity was "an escape route from the patriarchal household and its duty to procreate," giving entrance to a wider community of faith. In this sense virginity was liberating, suggests Lisa Sowle Cahill.⁶⁸ At least at the time the Scriptures were

⁶⁰ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1976) xxi.

⁶¹ *Sexism and God-Talk* 145. Una M. Cadegan and James L. Heft read Ruether as believing that virginity is the enemy of sexuality and eclipses full humanity. "Mary of Nazareth, Feminism and the Tradition," *Thought* 65 (1990) 181.

⁶² Ruether, *New Woman: New Earth* 40.

⁶³ *Touching Our Strength* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 3.

⁶⁴ Schneiders, *With Oil in Their Lamps* (New York: Paulist, 2000) 40.

⁶⁵ Maria Augusta Neal, "Sociology and Sexuality," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition* 243.

⁶⁶ Ivone Gebara, Maria Clara Bingemer, "Mary," in *Mysterium Liberationis*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 498.

⁶⁷ "Misogyny and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974) 150, 151-83.

⁶⁸ *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996) 153.

written virginity was a sign of rupture with Jewish culture, a gesture of freedom.⁶⁹ At the beginning of the feminist movement in the 19th century some feminists considered virginity "a slur on all the natural motherhood of the world," as the *Woman's Bible* phrased it.⁷⁰ However, the German Maria Kassel notes that the symbol of Mary's virginity is being rediscovered as liberating, as "it expresses woman's autonomy over against man," and in fact Kassel prefers virginity to motherhood, which tends to submission.⁷¹ But other feminists see the matter differently. Rita Brock believes that "wisdom involves the rejection of innocence," virginity breeding victimization, and, as Ruether contends, promotes submission.⁷²

In Luke 1:27 the accent is not on virginity as liberation, but functions as a declaration that the child conceived is God's Son and the conception is "totally God's work."⁷³ Unfortunately in the postbiblical tradition, especially around the fourth century, the attention was turned to biologism, making physical details seem an important theological issue. Even today biologism is a significant problem. But in reaction to the denigration of sexuality, and in order to promote the wider value of "integrity" and insure women "do not live 'a derivative' life as mother, daughter, spouse," Halkes wants a definition of virginity that would not include sexual abstinence.⁷⁴

Mary Usurping the Place of Mary Magdalene

Two developments in feminist theology should be noted, namely, the importance of Mary Magdalene in contrast to Mary, and the new prominence of the Magnificat. Ruether believes that the suppression of the central role of the unconventional Magdalene, to whom the Gospel text gives more attention than to Mary, may be due to the desire of the Church to assign subordinate and conventional roles to women. By replacing the Magdalene, the woman who loved Jesus, with Mary, the Church substituted "a dangerously unconventional role model with a conventional role model," the mother of Jesus.⁷⁵ The Magdalene not only challenged Mary's

⁶⁹ M. T. Bellenzier, "Mujer," in *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariologia*, ed. S. de Fiores, S. Meo (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1988) 1395.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: Arno, 1972) 114.

⁷¹ "Mary and the Human Psyche in the Light of Depth Psychology," in *Mary in the Churches* 77, 78.

⁷² Brock, "Dusting the Bible on the Floor," in *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 71, 66; Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* 144.

⁷³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977) 314.

⁷⁴ Halkes, "Maria, Die Frau," in *Mariologie und Feminismus*, ed. Walter Schöpsdau (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985) 62.

⁷⁵ Ruether, *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 39-41.

role, but, in some Gnostic writings, also Peter's, a challenge which was met, according to Elaine Pagels, by the influence of the Deuteropauline letters which gave a subordinate role to women.⁷⁶ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel suggests that the Magdalene, who is mentioned in all four Gospels, should be in the foreground instead of Mary, whose prominence is largely fed by Luke. The later tradition used Mary, symbol of feminine obedience and motherliness, to push Mary Magdalene, who promotes friendship and sisterhood over the domesticated sexuality of mother, to the background. The role of friendship, tied to no fixed conceptions of "order," was falsified and forgotten. In the early congregations the Magdalene, the intimate friend of Jesus and the one whom he loved more than all the disciples, was revered more than Mary.⁷⁷ The operative word in Moltmann-Wendel's analysis seems to be "order." Mary, as mother, stands for the heteronomous order. Friendship and sisterhood are not heteronomous relationships. The mother of Jesus has usurped the place of the Magdalene, who, as friend of Jesus, stands for freedom from the established order of heteronomy. Heteronomy cripples the obedient and motherly Mary as a model for women. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes, Mary cannot be a model because she cannot give women a transformed vision of sexuality, wholeness, equality, or leadership in the Church because the Mary myth never functioned so.⁷⁸ But the Magdalene is another matter. "Mary of Magdala was indeed a liberated woman."⁷⁹

The Magnificat and the Militant Mary

Feminist Mariologies have made a significant contribution to Marian literature by recovering the Magnificat with its spirituality of Israel's poor and lowly together with its aggressive prophetic Mary. As has been said, Ruether sees Mary's *fiat* as a dismissal of heteronomy. But, in fact, Ruether's interest is elsewhere. She begins her systematic presentation, not with Mary's *fiat*, but with her Magnificat, and its accent on "social iconoclasm," which is a reaction to the contemplative, privatized, subordinate virgin.⁸⁰ Many, indeed very many, feminists reject the churchy reticent virgin. The social iconoclast is no friend of the order to which the retiring virgin belongs. So loud is the battle cry to bring down the mighty from their

⁷⁶ *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random, 1979) 164-67.

⁷⁷ Moltmann-Wendel, "Motherhood and Friendship," in *Mary in the Churches* 17-22.

⁷⁸ "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation," in *Woman: New Dimensions*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt (New York: Paulist, 1977) 45.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 48.

⁸⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* 156-58.

thrones that Mary's *fiat* is almost forgotten,⁸¹ though it made her the most influential, painted, debated, venerated female in history.

The focus on the Magnificat is part of the emphasis on social location of Mary, especially in Ruether, Gebara, Bingemer, and Johnson, supplying the deficit of Vatican II, which paid no attention to cultural anthropology in its chapter on Mary in *Lumen gentium*.⁸² Surely this is a permanent contribution of these theologians to Mariology. Johnson has three exceptionally fine chapters on the world of the peasant woman Mary, which allows us to see her as a participant in the struggle.⁸³

Heteronomy and Christology

In the view of some feminists, to be autonomous is to be one's own law, a radically free self, unbound by anything beyond one's own moral agency. To be autonomous is to reject subordination. In this definition even Christ is compromised. Because Christology must also necessarily be heteronomous, Hampson, writing now as a post-Christian, states "there can be no Christology which is compatible with feminism."⁸⁴ If one contrasts Hampson's dictum about Christology with Michael Schmaus's classical principle representing the central tradition, that "Mariology follows Christology; Mariology is Christology unfolded,"⁸⁵ one sees how Mariology, if one followed Hampson's view, would be incompatible with Christology. An ascendant Christ, himself in a self-declared heteronomous position as regards God, and a subordinate Mary in a heteronomous position as regards her son, are more than problematic.

Kari Børresen, a born Catholic and a distinguished Norwegian medicalist, finds the relation of Christology to Mariology deadly because Mary's identity is lost in her relationship to her son. The great councils, complains Børresen, refer to Mary only in a christological context, and they describe Mary's part in the Incarnation using an "androcentric gynecology."⁸⁶ The subordination of Mary, the new Eve, to Christ, the new Adam, makes a derivative, secondary Mary, and, in fact, transposes the androcentric system from the order of creation (Adam and Eve) into the order of redemption (Christ and Mary), a fatal flaw that has been systematically incorporated into Mariology and the whole of systematics. Børresen con-

⁸¹ Regina Radlbeck-Ossmann, "Maria in der feministischen Theologie," in *Handbuch der Marienkunde*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert, Heinrich Petri, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1996) 1.446, 459.

⁸² Most feminists, including those just named, think social location is more than a matter of cultural anthropology, but involves epistemology.

⁸³ *Truly Our Sister* 137–206.

⁸⁴ *Theology and Feminism* 59.

⁸⁵ *Katholische Dogmatik* 5.5.

⁸⁶ "Mary in Catholic Theology," in *Mary in the Churches* 49.

tends, that Mary has been too hopelessly bound up with Christology and patriarchal thought forms for her to be a model for contemporary women. Further, Mary cannot be retrieved for women. If the attempt were made, Børresen concludes, Mariology would be biblical, but stripped of christological significance.⁸⁷ Others take a similar position. The excessive christologizing of Mariology is Halkes's problem.⁸⁸ The point is not just Mary's subordination to Jesus, but, in a broader context, the related contention that the biblical Jesus/Mary relation contains timeless revelation about the subordinate role of women.⁸⁹

Both maleness and social roles are discussed in the literature, and the maleness of Jesus Christ receives considerable attention. The conviction of Carter Heyward seems correct: "... there is no more fundamental and problematic ... issue for feminists than the person of Jesus."⁹⁰ Reuther asks the pointed question, often repeated in the literature: "Can a Male Savior Save Women?"⁹¹ If women have to go to the classical Christology, the answer is "no." While not representative, Mary Daly rejects the sexist assumption that women need a savior who is male and superior to women.⁹² She deplores "this fixation on Jesus." "Salvation," she complains, "comes only through the male."⁹³ For Daly, as for Hampson, Christology is beyond redemption. Of course, the tradition has Mary in a heteronomous subordinate relation to her Son. Given the problems some feminists have with the male character of classical Christology (and its heteronomy), Rita Nakashima Brock declares she is "developing a Christology not centered in Jesus."⁹⁴ Anne Carr, a learned and articulate moderate, is concerned with the abuse of Jesus' maleness by the official Church. If the New Testament and postbiblical emphasis on the full universality of redemption is to be maintained, then the appeals to the "maleness" of Jesus for exclusionary purposes are "heretical," and Schneiders agrees.⁹⁵ In calling attention to the patriarchal Christology, in which the good news of the Gospel "has been twisted into the bad news of male privilege," Johnson wonders "if anything can be saved from a tradition so hardened against women,"

⁸⁷ Ibid. 48–56. Halkes agrees in large part with Børresen. "Maria, Die Frau" 57–58.

⁸⁸ *Gott hat nicht nur starke Söhne* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1980) 97, 105.

⁸⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, "Introduction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1985) 6.

⁹⁰ *The Redemption of God* (New York: University Press of America, 1982) 196.

⁹¹ *To Change the World* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 45–56.

⁹² *Beyond God the Father* 71.

⁹³ Ibid. 70, 77.

⁹⁴ *Journeys by Heart* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 52.

⁹⁵ Carr, *Transforming Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 178; Schneiders, *Women and the Word* 55.

and contends that feminist Christologies are “arguably more coherent with the original impulse of the Christ event.”⁹⁶

While deploring the fixation on maleness in Christology, Johnson, and some feminist scholars (Schneiders, Wilson-Kastner, Ruether, Virginia Fabella, and the Philippine and Korean feminist scholars Fabella indicates), do not see the maleness of Jesus as ultimately a threat, even if one remains within the classical tradition. Again, what was assumed is humanity (*homo*), not maleness (*vir*).⁹⁷ This determination does not solve the problem because male theologians have unconsciously used the maleness of Christ to patriarchalize Christology, namely, maleness is the norm for God and humanity. This is the ultimate gall.

Some feminists find classical Christology impossible or dead, and they therefore take their own christological formulations in directions that are not peculiar to them. Some of these can be orthodox when judged by the central tradition males have constructed, but others would not stand the test. Mixed in with the wish of some feminists to avoid the maleness of Christ (even though the Word became *homo* not *vir*) is the desire to avoid the universal and unique claims made by classical Christology. The maleness of Christ seems bound up with universality and uniqueness, e.g. the Cosmic Christ. One way out is to relativize claims. The German Doris Strahm speaks of feminist Christologies that “relativize” all unique and exclusive claims, by proposing a low Christology.⁹⁸ “Neither the biblical nor the dogmatic formulations of the past can be absolute and universal norms for understanding the Christological truth, but must be subordinate to the criterion of praxis.”⁹⁹ This key word here is subordinate, and decisive is how the criterion of praxis (women’s experience) exercises its function. Is Strahm saying more than that theology is always relative to context? If Strahm relativizes exclusive claims to arrive at a low Christology, Ruether relativizes by placing Jesus among the redeemed. She wants a Christology that starts with the Synoptic Gospels and sees the Baptism of Jesus there recounted as the basis for saying that “the redeemer is one who has been

⁹⁶ “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine M. LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 118, 120; see also 116.

⁹⁷ Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” *The Special Nature of Women*, ed. Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991) 109; “The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female,” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) 462–63; Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism & the Christ* 115; Virginia Fabella, *With Passion and Compassion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 113. The point that what is assumed is humanity not maleness is important and valid, but one must recognize that humanity, undifferentiated by sex, never existed, and is a theological construct, a helpful tool of theological analysis.

⁹⁸ “Jesus Christus,” in *Wörterbuch der feministischen Theologie*, ed. E. Gössmann et al. (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1991) 204.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 27.

redeemed.”¹⁰⁰ This is indeed a low Christology. In her writing the word “unique” occurs only twice in relation to Jesus, both cases denying that quality to him.¹⁰¹ She understands Christ as a messianic prophet, but not the Messiah, as the Messiah can only be male, which is sexist. Further, to declare Jesus as the Messiah leads to anti-Semitism, the latter a considerable Ruether preoccupation. Indeed, Ruether believes that Christology is intrinsically anti-Semitic. “Theologically, anti-Judaism developed as the left hand of Christology.”¹⁰² The statement “Jesus is the Messiah” is only an affirmation that is paradigmatic for the structure of human existence, its inherent possibilities, as there are other messiahs. (Dorothee Sölle, Heyward, and McFague likewise place Jesus in relation to other messiahs.) Ruether embodies a tendency in feminist Christologies of moving away from the male Jesus to the ministry and message of Jesus, thus softening the symbol of a male messenger in a “message Christology,” such as the proclamation of the reign of God, making the message androgynous in character, sensitive to feminist needs.¹⁰³ Message blurs gender. Like Strahm and many other feminists, Schüssler-Fiorenza suggests that a feminist New Testament Christology should begin with the praxis matrix, that is, the critical liberation experience of the Ekklesia of women.¹⁰⁴

Since the Christ/Mary relationship is one of male superior to female inferior at the doctrinal level, constituting it as an anthropological paradigm in determining social roles for men and women in Church and society, some feminists understandably have a low profile masculinity in their Christologies. Though some feminists retain a relatively high Christology (Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Johnson, Carr, Bingemer) feminists who move from the Chalcedonian high Christology of patriarchy to a low Christology have other motivations operative than having to defuse the offense of a male savior. But even when defused, the savior of a low Christology is still male. However, such a savior is more manageable and functions theologically in a different manner than the in-your-face masculinity of a savior of high Christology, with a Jesus Christ who is unique, universal, and put to ecclesiastical use as reinforcing the masculine as normative in determining social roles. From this savior there is literally no escape. The mariological

¹⁰⁰ *Sexism and God-Talk* 120, 135, 138.

¹⁰¹ Mary Snyder, *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1988) 84.

¹⁰² *To Change the World* 31.

¹⁰³ Hampson criticizes Ruether's message Christology, suggesting it solves nothing, as the message cannot exist independently of the person, and one is back with the usual problems (*Theology and Feminism* 59).

¹⁰⁴ “Zur Methodenproblematik einer feministischen Christologie des Neuen Testaments,” *Vom Verlangen nach Heilwerden*, ed. Doris Strahm and Regula Stobel (Fribourg: Exodus, 1991) 141, 144.

significance of the kinder, gentler masculinity of the low Christology is also a pointer to the tendency of some feminists to move beyond a masculine Christology by adopting transhistorical categories, such as Pneumatology and the reign of God, as a way of situating Mariology, giving it an ungendered home.¹⁰⁵

At some point most feminists writing on Mary invoke the transhistorical female Wisdom/Sophia, an inclusive figure, indeed, “a foundational metaphor.”¹⁰⁶ It is embedded in the prologue of John’s Gospel, the very bastion of male Logos Christology, challenging male dominance from within. Outside of feminist Mariology it is a significant theme, as seen in Schüssler Fiorenza’s two volume *Searching the Scriptures*, where the cosmic house of Wisdom/Sophia, a feminine dwelling without walls, organizes all the 888 pages of the commentary.¹⁰⁷ Here canon and authority are not command, but creativity and freedom. None of the scholars reviewed use Wisdom/Sophia as the organizing principle for their whole Mariology.

The Move to the Transhistorical Ungendered Reign of God

By their use of cultural anthropology the Brazilians Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer have made a significant change in the way Mariology is written, thus preparing the way for Johnson’s social location of Mary. In doing so, they use the reign of God as their systematic framework. “To situate Mary in the perspective of the Kingdom of God is the only way to do theology rightly.”¹⁰⁸ The mariological use of the reign of God cannot be “simply in connection with Christology,” or in a way that would dilute a female way of living and proclaiming that reign.¹⁰⁹ The Brazilians consciously move “beyond the person of Jesus” to the reign in which both men and women have an active part.¹¹⁰ When Jesus proclaimed this reign of God he did not insist on his own person, but on God’s concrete action and the signs of God’s reign, where there are no political, cultural or gender limits. The Brazilians object to Jesus’ relation to Mary determining future

¹⁰⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza criticizes Ruether, Russell, and Tribble for moving to transhistorical categories in order to remain within the patriarchal tradition, thus reducing the ambiguity of historical struggles to theological essences and abstract, timeless principles (*In Memory of Her* 27).

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in *Freeing Theology* 127.

¹⁰⁷ *Searching the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1993–1994) 2.11–12.

¹⁰⁸ Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989) 98, 35. I wish to thank Maria Clara Bingemer for critiquing my manuscript. In an e-mail of January 9, 2005, Bingemer noted that in liberation theology reign of God is “inseparable” from Christology. Regarding the English edition’s translation of the Portuguese “reino de Deus” as “kingdom of God” she found the translation acceptable.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 37, 35.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 32.

social roles, a common feminist objection. The solution is the reign of God: "This is the end for the old limited view of Mary as subject to her Son, as women were subject to men."¹¹¹ Heteronomy is called into question. At the same time the Brazilians move away from what many feminists see as the inhibiting maleness of Christ and away from the gender specific Christology as the systematic home for Mariology. The Brazilians prefer the broader fields of the transhistorical reign of God, with its unspecified gender, as the principle of organization. Maria Pilar Aquino thinks that Gebara and Bingemer want to make the reign of God less christocentric.¹¹² Can one really do this? As Rudolph Schnackenburg remarks, the reign is "mysteriously bound up with his (Christ's) person."¹¹³ In his person the rule of God is present and active (Luke 16:16). He himself is the "secret" (Mark 4:11) of that rule. The Brazilians move from the historical Christ to the transhistorical reign, or if you will, they opt for a message Christology centered on the proclamation of the reign of God. Message has no gender. Abandoning Christology for the reign of God as the systematic environment may demand a heavy price. Here, as elsewhere, what is significant is not simply the move away from Christology, but the motive for the move, namely, to avoid confronting the gender of Christ.

Another transhistorical category is the cosmic Christ. Wilson-Kastner and McFague represent the feminist preference for transhistorical categories in cosmic Christology.¹¹⁴ The cosmic Christ tradition needs no apology, starting as it does with St. Paul and proceeding through Irenaeus, Origen, to Teilhard de Chardin.¹¹⁵ Here, too, not only the choice of the transhistorical cosmic Christ, but the motive, which operates beneath the choice's screen, is of concern, that is, attitudes toward gender. In the Resurrection glory of the cosmic Christ there is no marriage or giving in marriage. Gender is muted. According to Silvia Schroer, who proposes a Sophia Christology, the resurrected Sophia/Christ is neither male nor female, but

¹¹¹ "Mary," in *Mysterium Liberationis* 485.

¹¹² *Our Cry for Help* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 176.

¹¹³ *Sacramentum Verbi*, ed. J. B. Bauer, 3 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 2.461.

¹¹⁴ Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ* 107–14; Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 60–70.

¹¹⁵ For Paul see 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Philippians 2:6–11. For the difficulties with these texts, see John G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 59–92. See also Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V,21,1; Sources Chrétiennes (hereafter SC) 153.264; V,35,2—V,36,2; SC 153.442–466; Origen, *On First Principles* I, 2, 2–3; SC 252.112–16, and especially I, 6, 2; SC 252.196–200; Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 121–28. See also George A. Maloney, *The Cosmic Christ* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

is like God, without gender.¹¹⁶ In the glorified Sophia/Christ gender disappears.

But the temptation to obscure the gender of Christ goes beyond those who opt for a cosmic Christology. The particularity of the Incarnation binds this mystery to one person, who determines the content of the Incarnation. This very particularity issues demands that one face the maleness of Jesus. This, according to Strahm, constitutes "the continuing 'scandal' of Christology."¹¹⁷ Therefore, for some feminists it is difficult to accept "that a concrete historical person . . . mediates the once-for-all salvation, having claim to be the exclusive Incarnation of God."¹¹⁸ The conception that Jesus Christ is the definitive, exclusive, and universal salvation brought with it anti-Semitism, intolerance of other religions, racism, and, finally, the denigration and marginalization of women.¹¹⁹ Conclusion: a gender specific Incarnation must be avoided.

Other ways exist of muting gender. Mary Grey thinks that we "willfully restrict" the Incarnation by "seeing it totally encapsulated in the story of Jesus of Nazareth. What is revealed is relational power, the power of connection, which is of its essence not the private possession of an individual—as Jesus was well aware."¹²⁰ Relational Christology is for Moltmann-Wendel "the forgotten dimension of Christology."¹²¹ Like Grey and Moltmann-Wendell, Julie Hopkins understands Christology as "connectedness," a relational term.¹²² Precisely because "Jesus' maleness . . . has kept women . . . out of full participation in the Christian community," Brock, too, locates Christology in "connectedness" rather than in any single individual.¹²³ It is unclear how far Grey, Hopkins, and Brock want to move away from the particularity of the Word made flesh. Connectedness avoids the maleness of an individual, has no sex. Perhaps gender is disappearing.

One can understand this move away from gender in feminist Christologies because the male tradition and the official Church have placed maleness as the norm for God and humanity in a heteronomous culture where women are adjuncts even when they are considered worthy of praise. The two related factors, the maleness of Christ and the heteronomous character of Christology, are problematic for feminist theologians in general, wheth-

¹¹⁶ "Jesus Sophia," in *Vom Verlangen nach Heilwerden* 124.

¹¹⁷ Strahm, "Für wen haltet ihr mich?" *ibid.* 11, 27.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 11–12.

¹²⁰ Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools? Seeking Revelation for Today* (London: SPCK, 1993) 99.

¹²¹ "Beziehung—die Vergessene Dimension der Christologie," in *Vom Verlangen nach Heilwerden* 100–11.

¹²² *Toward a Feminist Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 105.

¹²³ *Journeys by Heart* xii, 52

er writing on Mary or not. These two factors also prepare the way for the move from Christology to Pneumatology as the theological home of Mariology.

From Gendered Christology to Ungendered Pneumatology

Elizabeth Johnson is one of the most productive and creative of women theologians, as seen in scholarly depth in a number of venues, and specifically in Mariology. Through her Marian articles and *Truly Our Sister* she has made a substantive contribution to the field beyond any other feminist scholar and most male scholars. Any scholar writing in the relevant future on Mariology will have to reckon with *Truly Our Sister*. Therefore, it is theologically significant when she prefers a pneumatological to a christological locus for Mariology.¹²⁴ The Spirit who is masculine in Latin, neuter in Greek, and feminine in the Semitic languages blurs gender questions.¹²⁵ Some feminists are drawn to the Syriac feminine Spirit in which there are rich unmined theological possibilities. Still, this mariological move to Pneumatology does not solve the gender problem. "The health of pneumatology is in Christology," as Yves Congar wrote.¹²⁶ If one avoids Christology as a way of norming Mariology, and moves on to Pneumatology, one is faced with a Pneumatology which is also normed by Christology. If Congar is correct, then Johnson's main full page summary of how she is structuring her presentation pneumatologically is problematic, as there is no mention of Jesus Christ, though in a shorter statement she does mention him.

As John Zizioulas has pointed out, there is in the New Testament a Christology dependent on Pneumatology, and a Pneumatology dependent on Christology.¹²⁷ However, there is no freestanding Pneumatology or Christology. Biblically the Spirit is the principle of Jesus Christ's identity.¹²⁸ Or as Raymond Brown suggests, "the NT reflection on the Spirit was part of the Christian attempt to understand Jesus."¹²⁹ Though Johnson mentions Christ in the subsequent text (as did the theology of Marian

¹²⁴ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister* 112, 104.

¹²⁵ Though what is gender specific is the *word*, not necessarily the Spirit, the pneumatology in different language groups has been affected by the various gender assignments of the word, especially in the Syriac sources.

¹²⁶ "Actualité de la Pneumatologie," in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, ed. J. S. Martins, 2 vols. (Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 1983) 1.25.

¹²⁷ "Implications ecclésiologiques de deux types de pneumatologie," in *Communio Sanctorum* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982) 141–54.

¹²⁸ Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003) 4, 13, 38–39, 96–97.

¹²⁹ Raymond E. Brown, "Diverse View of the Spirit in the New Testament," in *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 104.

privileges), these casual texts are not an adequate substitute for a systematic pneumatological/christological organizing principle.

One must recognize the complete freedom of theologians to write on the important topic of the pneumatological dimensions of Mariology. Paul VI recommended the study of "the hidden relationship" (*arcanæ necessitudinis ratio*) between the Spirit and Mary,¹³⁰ and in response many theologians had previously taken up the invitation. This relationship is not a neglected theme.¹³¹ Johnson writes on the Mary/Spirit relationship with considerable skill. But it is highly doubtful that Paul VI would support the abandonment of the christological/ecclesiological context for Mariology in favor of a pneumatological one, as he singles out the "trinitarian and christological note" (*indolem trinitariam et christologicam*) that is "intrinsic and essential" (*quae suapte natura eorum propria sit ad earumque essentiam pertineat*) to Marian devotion.¹³² Paul VI could ground this not only biblically but in the postapostolic history. If the research of Ignacio Calabuig is to be trusted, the historical origins of the Marian cult were not in popular psychic mother images, but in the memory of the Paschal mystery of Jesus.¹³³ Also, Johnson herself pointed out in 1985 "statements about [the] mother of Jesus and Mother of God, have an original and primary christological intent and need to be interpreted within that framework."¹³⁴ In *Truly Our Sister* Johnson seems to abandon this clear christological principle that she expressed, a move difficult to understand as Christology is one of Johnson's strengths.¹³⁵ Finally, the surrender of Christology as a systematic category for Mariology will exact a high price theologically and ecumenically.

To set aside Christology as a systematic category is to ignore the experience of the earliest centuries of the Church. The christological context for Mary obtained from the time of the New Testament to the Council of

¹³⁰ *Marialis cultus* no. 27; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 139.

¹³¹ Shortly after the close of the council René Laurentin published "Esprit-Saint et théologie mariale," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 89 (1967) 26–42. In 1989 the Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Mariologie held a three-day conference in Augsburg on "Maria und der Heilige Geist." In 1997 one mariological review published four articles on the topic (*Marianum* no. 152 [1997] 393–430, 431–468, 469–518, 519–544), and between 1978 and 1998 another published five articles (*Ephemerides mariologicae* 28 [1978] 151–68; 28 [1978] 169–90; 28 [1978] 191–99; 39 [1989] 205–36; 48 [1998] 223–30). Theologians have not neglected the relation between the Holy Spirit and Mary.

¹³² *Marialis cultus* no. 25; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 135.

¹³³ "Il culto alla beata Vergine," in *Maria nella Chiesa in cammino verso il duemila*, ed. Elio Peretto (Rome: Marianum, 1989) 185–313.

¹³⁴ "The Symbolic Character of Theological Statements about Mary," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (1985) 315.

¹³⁵ Johnson, *Consider Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

Ephesus (A.D. 431), and the ecclesiological/christological environment from the time of Ephesus to Bernard of Clairvaux (13th century). The period from Bernard to Vatican I was the time when Marian piety took on the theology of Marian privileges and the glorification of Mary, and from Vatican I to *Lumen gentium* of Vatican II, the autonomous, free-standing Mariology flourished.¹³⁶ Vatican II was reaffirming Mary's role in the Christian life, Mary as belonging to Catholic identity, but it turned away from the theology of Marian privileges, Marian romanticism, and from the autonomous Mariology. This it did by restoring Christology and ecclesiology as the framework for mariological reflection, a context which had obtained in the earliest centuries.

In more recent times Christ and Christology have had a difficult time maintaining their relation to Mary and Mariology. In 1962 Halkes wrote that Mariology is simply Christology, a view she had rejected when she wrote in 1977 and 1984 that Mary needed to be considered in herself.¹³⁷ She now thinks that the heteronomic relationship of Christ to Mary means Christ dominates Mariology inappropriately.¹³⁸ Johnson takes a different view. She believes Mariology has the fingerprints of patriarchy on it and needs to be "reconstructed from the ground up." In an attempt to move away from Mary's *fiat* as the basis of her relationship to Christ, Johnson asks a larger question, namely, is it "possible to build the role of Mary on the basis of her relationship to her son." She answers: it is "questionable" not only because we know next to nothing about that relationship historically, but because the relationship between Jesus and the women and men who were disciples "is paradigmatic for the existence and identity of the Christian community."¹³⁹ These disciples are defined in relation to Jesus, but not Mary.

Further, Johnson believes it is questionable to base the Mary/Jesus relationship on other biblical events involving Jesus. The infancy account (where the *fiat* is recounted) will not serve because of its special character. Nor will the symbolic Cana event (which, citing Raymond Brown, may be an "inspired fiction"). Finally, Mary beneath the cross is not useful here because it is probably a theological construct. Johnson prefers the Lukan

¹³⁶ Wolfgang Beinert, "Die Mariologische Dogmen und ihre Entfaltung," in *Handbuch der Marienkunde* 1.271.

¹³⁷ "Maria, de gelovige mens," *Ter Elfder Ure* 13 (1962) 40–41; idem, "Een andere Maria," in *Als Vrouwen aan het Woord Komen*, ed. C. Budding, C. Halkes (Kampen: Kok, 1977) 87. See also Els Maeckelberghe, *Desperately Seeking Mary* (Kampen: Pharos, 1991) 13.

¹³⁸ Halkes, *Gott hat nicht nur starke Söhne* 97, 105. Gössmann thinks that Mary needs more room so her own worth is evident (*Die streitbaren Schwestern* 100).

¹³⁹ Johnson, "Mary and Contemporary Christology: Rahner and Schillebeeckx," *Église et Théologie* 15 (1984) 179–80.

account of Pentecost (Acts 1:14–15; 2:21) where there is a shift of attention from Christ to the Spirit, and Mary is placed among the 120 disciples, women included, positioning Mary for the larger theological context of the communion of saints. But if the earlier texts do not provide sufficient historical basis to establish Mary's relationship to Jesus because of genre questions or theological constructions, then one must ask if, in this case, Johnson's approach to the Pentecost narrative could not be more nuanced. In the judgment of many, myself included, the experience of the Spirit itself is historical. But a number of scholars think the detailed narrative of the event in Acts 2 to be a theological construction, as Cardinal Kasper noted in his discussion with Cardinal Ratzinger.¹⁴⁰ Though historicity is important, Christians do not base their faith merely on what is historically verifiable, but also on what the apostolic community of witnesses, men and women, held to be the faith handed down. Even if the Cana event and the scene beneath the cross (where Mary is mother and disciple) were irrefutably theological constructs, they represent a weighty indication of the growing Marian awareness and development within the New Testament canon. In this case, the faith of the Johannine community toward the end of the apostolic age judged that theologically Mary is a factor in the beginning and in the culminating end of his public ministry (John 2:1–11; 19:25–27), giving Mariology another ineluctable Christological referent. Mary frames the ministry of Jesus. Consequently, Mary is identified principally, not exclusively, in relation to her son. This would be reinforced by the infancy accounts of Matthew and Luke as expressions of the apostolic faith of the first believers, though one recognizes the special character of the narratives. Finally, Raymond Brown sees the development of Marian reflection within the trajectory of the whole of the New Testament.¹⁴¹ Within this trajectory Mary seems to be identified principally in relation to Christ.

The distancing of Mary from Christ seems to be related to the desire for a Mary as a real woman in her own right, in opposition to the over-idealized Mary (ideal woman, ideal disciple, ideal virgin, ideal mother,

¹⁴⁰ Walter Kasper, "On the Church," *America* 184 (April 23–30, 2001) 13; Kasper, "Das Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirche: Freundschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit der Kritik von Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger," *Stimmen der Zeit* 218 (2000) 800–801. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 172–75; Richard F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) 112. I have summarized some of the reasons in "Pentecost in Relation to the Ontological and Temporal Priority of the Universal Church," in *Kirche in ökumenischer Perspektive*, ed. Peter Walter et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 2003) 104–8.

¹⁴¹ "The Contribution of Critical Exegesis to an Understanding of Mary and Marian Doctrine," in *Biblical Exegesis & Church Doctrine* 86–100.

icon). How can a plastic devotional fiction, with only superhuman qualities, be a model for contemporary women, who quarrel with their male employers and husbands, burn the roast, wreck the car, while being CEO of an advertising firm, a construction engineer, or a president of a university, while living a full sex life within marriage? Halkes says that Mary never stands on her own. She is always defined in relation to someone else.¹⁴² In the same vein, Johnson protests Mary is "first and foremost herself."¹⁴³ Johnson and Gebara/Binegmer, with their sociological and anthropological tools, let us see Mary as a peasant girl/woman living in real time, busy about village life, providing a corrective to the plastic tradition. All three set aside Christology as the systematic basis for their Mariology, though there are scattered references to Jesus. When Johnson lists the male religious authority figures (God, husband, priest) that make women shudder, Jesus Christ is not named. But is it possible that the maleness of Christ is still a factor in Johnson's non-use of Christology as the systematic framework for her Mariology, even though God became *homo* not *vir*? Why move from the gendered Christ to the ungendered Spirit? Johnson believes women are redeemed by Jesus. That is not an issue. But in a broader context feminist Gössmann notes that some feminists want a Mariology without Christology, and a Mary who is not redeemed by a man. Gössmann calls this Mary liberated from Christology "the greatest challenge to the church dogmatic conception which Mariology has experienced in this [20th] century."¹⁴⁴

Besides the maleness of Jesus Christ to which Gössmann calls attention, one suspects the subtext in Halkes and Johnson is the other issue raised by feminist Daphne Hampson, namely, heteronomy and subordination. Halkes seems to confirm this when she objects to the use of the Christ/Church typology, where Mary stands for the Church and is therefore in a heteronomous relation, "submissive" to the male Christ.¹⁴⁵ This is to dismiss an important ecclesiological element in the Marian tradition. Johnson twice seems to suggest that Mary be freed from her heteronomous relation to Christ. Mary "belongs not under Christ but at his side."¹⁴⁶ This is not

¹⁴² "Maria, Die Frau" 58.

¹⁴³ *Truly Our Sister* 100–1.

¹⁴⁴ Gössmann, "Mariologische Thesen in der feministischen Theologie" 168–69.

¹⁴⁵ "Maria, Die Frau" 58. See also Halkes, "Mary in My Life" 62–63.

¹⁴⁶ "Mary and the Image of God," in *Mary: Woman of Nazareth*, ed. Doris Donnelly (New York: Paulist, 1989) 43; "Mary and the Female Face of God," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 516. Leonardo Boff says Mary is "hypostatically united to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity," and is "Co-Redemptrix and Co-Mediatrix of salvation." For this reason "Mary is not beneath Jesus, but beside him" (*The Maternal Face of God* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987] 93, 95). In reviewing the manuscript of the present article a friend observed that feminists are

reflective of the Catholic experience, and would make ecumenical dialogue more difficult in an area already burdened with problems.

The relationship between Mariology and Christology, an immensely important ecumenical issue, is a two way street, though as streets they are unequal. The title *Theotokos*, often understood to be in praise of Mary, is a christological title, the test, or the tessera, of orthodoxy: "This name [*Theotokos*] contains the whole mystery of the Incarnation."¹⁴⁷ Still, the relation of Christology to Mariology remains an offense to some because the male Christ norms the female Mary. If some found Michael Schmaus's formulation ("Mariology follows Christology. . .") offensive, they will object more strenuously to Jürgen Moltmann's formulation. "No Mary without Christ, no Mariology without Christology. . . Mariology must serve Christology; it must neither detract from it nor become emancipated from it."¹⁴⁸ Speaking as an Orthodox Georges Florovsky contends "Mariology is to be but a chapter in the treatise on the Incarnation."¹⁴⁹ In the Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue on Mary and the Saints, in which Johnson was a participant, the Catholic members wrote: "It is Christology that is decisive."¹⁵⁰ One needs to decide if these mostly male judgments on Christology are responses to something given from above or are gender determined decisions. No Christology, no Mariology. Whatever historical aberrations existed, this seems to be the conviction of the central tradition. If Mariology is not normed by Christology, its biblical and Catholic identity is imperiled. Further, it has no ecumenical future.

Even though many feminists assert the Word assumed humanity not maleness, still the maleness of Jesus worries and drives much of the feminist discussion. In this context Schneiders counsels two things: the importance of seeing God as feminine as well as masculine, and "the urgency of the call to conversion that Jesus, in his masculinity, addresses to both men and women."¹⁵¹ In brief, she recommends that women come to terms with the maleness of Jesus Christ. But conversion appears difficult, perhaps

beginning to discuss Paul Tillich's theology of theonomy as a way of handling the issue that heteronomy raises, though she noted this discussion has not yet taken written form. Theonomy is covered in *Systematic Theology* 1.85–86; 147–150; 2.249–268.

¹⁴⁷ John of Damascus expands on this dictum in *On the Orthodox Faith* 3.12; critical text in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Patristische Texte und Studien, 12 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973) 133–36.

¹⁴⁸ "Can there be an Ecumenical Mariology," in *Mary in the Churches* xv.

¹⁴⁹ "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," in *The Mother of God*, ed. E. L. Mascall (London: Dacre, 1949) 52.

¹⁵⁰ "Catholic Perspectives," *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII, ed. H. G. Anderson et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992) para. 61, p. 45.

¹⁵¹ *Women and the Word* 55, 68.

impossible, if one cannot accommodate the male Savior. Fiorenza writes: "A feminist theologian must question whether the historical man Jesus of Nazareth can be a role model for contemporary women, since feminine psychological liberation means exactly the struggle of women to free themselves from all male internalized norms and models."¹⁵² If the maleness of Christ continues to be highly problematic for women, then feminist theologians will find it difficult to choose Christology as the locus of Mariology.

But are there other reasons beyond feminist issues for locating Mariology in the context of Christology? Paul VI says that popular devotions are "subject to the ravages (*obnoxiae*) of time."¹⁵³ Anyone who has studied the tradition will recognize that not only popular devotion but Marian theological reflection by trained theologians needs discipline. We have a few Marian biblical texts, and on this solid, but narrow base, the tradition from the 13th century until Vatican II has built a huge top-heavy tower. To change the metaphor, much of the medieval Marian theology was held together by a chain of syllogisms, which receded further and further from the biblical text in a kind of Marian rationalism, which is not entirely dead even today.¹⁵⁴ There are exceptions to this observation during the medieval period, as we have substantial works of mature theological reflection in a number of genres we want to honor and retain. But much in the Western Marian tradition is overdeveloped. This expansive development took place after the tradition had abandoned the early Church's focus on Christology and ecclesiology as the locus for Mariology. This is an essential point. The mariological reflection no longer took place within the borders of Christology and ecclesiology (Mary as a type of the Church). Having abandoned Christology, Mariology in a considerable measure, I oversimplify, was given over to pieties and syllogisms. Mariology also became self-defining. When Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary in 1950 the context-less autonomous Mariology was still in quiet possession of the terrain. The self-standing Mariology and the dominance of the exegetically thin theology of Marian privileges came to an end in 1964 with chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium*, entitled *De Beata Maria Virgine Deipara in Mysterio Christi et Ecclesiae*. This is a restoration of the ancient christological and ecclesiological locus of Mariology, but was achieved only after the council almost came to a standstill because of strong, almost bitter, disagreements, and was set in motion again only by the pleading of Cardinal Frings.¹⁵⁵ Do

¹⁵² "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic," in *The Challenge of Liberation Theology*, ed. B. Mahan, L. D. Richesin (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1981) 107.

¹⁵³ *Marialis cultus* no. 24; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 134.

¹⁵⁴ Alejandro Martínez Sierra, "La Mariología Española en los años 1950 a 2000," *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 51/2 (2001) 71.

¹⁵⁵ *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, 5 vols.

we really want to cede this ground after centuries of neglect and a great struggle at Vatican II?

Can one push further for other reasons why the Christological/ecclesiological retrieval is important? Paul VI writes of Marian "exaggerations of content and form" (*ne in sententiis et formis trans rectae de Maria Virgine doctrinae fines et ritus iretur*).¹⁵⁶ Looking at the period of overdevelopment one sees that most of the exaggerations have to do with Mary's mediation/intercession, the most controversial issue in Mariology and in ecumenical dialogue. *Lumen gentium* refers to "the one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5) seven times, twice in the chapter on Mary (60, 62) and five times in other sections (8, 14, 28, 41, 49). In introducing Mary's devotional titles (Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, Mediatrix. Note Co-Redemptrix did not make it to the list), the council's Latin text read: *Propterea B. Virgo in Ecclesia titulis Advocatae, Auxiliatricis, Adjutricis, Mediatricis invocatur* (62). The first English edition of Walter Abbott's *Documents of Vatican II* mistranslated the text to read "therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles. . ."¹⁵⁷ However the text does not say *ab Ecclesia*, "by the Church," but "*in Ecclesia*." That is, there are people in the Church who sometimes use these titles, and this devotional practice is allowed as long as the titles are "so understood that they neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator" (62). Problems have arisen in either devotional theology or praxis in relation to these and other titles involving Marian mediation/intercession. That is why Christology, in which the doctrine of Jesus Christ as the one mediator resides, is so important as the locus for Mariology. By such an insistence neither Mary herself, nor her participation in Christ's mediatorial role is diminished. That Mary touches the inner substance of the gospel is a corollary of the Incarnation. Beyond any cavil, Marian piety is integral to Catholic identity, as the long liturgical doxological tradition demonstrates. Catholics also believe she belongs to Christian identity.

We can affirm one thing, and hope for another. First, feminist theologians (Gebara and Bingemer, Johnson, Ruether, Halkes, Maeckelberghe, Radlbeck-Ossmann, Noone, etc.) are attempting to save Mariology, especially for women, by re-symbolizing her. Secondly, the wish that male and

(New York: Herder & Herder, 1967–1969) 1.134–35. Regarding the split among the fathers on the question of inserting the chapter on Mary into the schema of *De ecclesia* (1114 for insertion, 1074 against insertion) René Laurentin writes of "the harshness and sometimes the violence of the propaganda," and the "rupture of the unanimity" causing a kind of "consternation" in the council. "La Vierge Marie au Concile," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 48 (1964) 35–36.

¹⁵⁶ *Marialis cultus* no. 38; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 149–50.

¹⁵⁷ *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: Guild, 1966) 91.

female theologians will vigorously protect the christological and ecclesiological restoration of Mariology at Vatican II, won after a struggle on the floor of the council. Neither Pneumatology nor the reign of God by itself has the theological structures enabling it to patrol the boundaries and restrain excessive Marian expansions. For ourselves and for our ecumenical friends we want to be able to say: Marian piety, theology and liturgical celebrations are not embarrassments we hide, but treasures we proudly share.

Mary, Motherhood, Subordination

Just before the new wave of feminism started in the late 1960s, Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* which had great influence on feminism, secular and Christian. To the end of her life she denounced motherhood and housework. In a conversation with her biographer she said: "Babies filled me with horror."¹⁵⁸ This may have been a reaction to the patriarchal view that "woman is womb," which Rosemary Ruether correctly characterizes as "women's only claim to fame is the capacity to have babies."¹⁵⁹ Aided by the stature of de Beauvoir the feminist movement early took an anti-mother stance, but later developed beyond that opposition. Now the general feminist position is rather that motherhood is one choice among many. Clearly Christian feminists do not want motherhood to be the total definition of a woman's identity, a position also taken in May 2004 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which represents a positive development of papal/curial teaching.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Summit, 1990) 556, 170.

¹⁵⁹ *New Woman, New Earth* 59.

¹⁶⁰ "On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World" no. 13; *Origins* 34 (August 26, 2004) 174. This seems not to have been the stance of Pius XII in the 1940s and 1950s, nor of John Paul II in recent times. Christine Gudorf thinks that both popes believed that "women are understood to have been created to be mothers," and that John Paul II holds the view that "biology is destiny" ("Encountering the Other: The Modern Papacy on Women," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition* 70–74). Gudorf thinks that John Paul II's teaching on women is inadequate, but "the greater problem" is the papal teaching on men. "In an attempt to persuade women to acquiesce to traditional divisions of power that favor men, the popes have lifted women's pedestal so high as to deny in many ways the basic humanity and Christian potential of men" (Gudorf, "Encountering the Other: The Modern Papacy on Women," in *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings*, Readings in Moral Theology no. 13, ed. Charles E. Curran [New York: Paulist, 2003] 273). Edward C. Vacek, S.J., believes that John Paul II has "developed a surprisingly positive understanding of women that reverses millennia of church teaching." John Paul II has bent over so far as to reverse the dictum that man is the paradigmatic form of being human, to women fulfilling that role ("Femi-

The motherhood of Mary as a symbol differs according to cultural settings. Gebara/Bingemer recognize that in South and Central America the mother plays a large positive role as the all-embracing symbol "that almost always sends out positive energy, affection, warmth, understanding, life."¹⁶¹ In saying this they are not pointing out any particular mother, but to the innate symbolic figure of the mother and her function both in society and the religious culture of the poor. The poor are drawing on something untamed, primeval, unreflective at its deepest root; something of great force. When they come to name this innate universal maternal symbol, they call it Mary. For instance, the poor believe Our Lady of Guadalupe has universal meaning for salvation. Heteronomy and patronage are implicit in the prayers the poor pray on their knees before the image of Mary, but she is also companion—a foot in both worlds.

Though Mary as mother dominates over Mary as virgin in Catholic culture, German scholar Maria Kassels notes feminists prefer virgin, having a note of autonomy, to mother, having the taint of subordination.¹⁶² In response to the dominance of motherhood some feminist theologians do what Jesus himself did (Mark 3:35), they relativize. Male theologians can also relativize, holding that motherhood is not Mary's ultimate glory; both grace and discipleship being more primary.¹⁶³ Johnson both rightly relativizes and affirms the unique character of Mary's motherhood. Her preoccupation seems to be with the link between three elements: motherhood, mediation/intercession, the patronage model. Historically the linkage between motherhood and mediation is there at least from the *Sub tuum praesidium* with a disputed dating (fourth or possibly third century), an intercessory prayer asking Mary, *Theotokos*, "to deliver us from danger."¹⁶⁴ The link between motherhood and intercession is recognized in John Paul's *Redemptoris mater*: "Mary's mediation is intimately linked with

nism and the Vatican," *Theological Studies* 66 [2005] 159, 163, 175). He also notes that the letter "On the Collaboration of Men and Women" undercuts its teaching on collaboration as there is no acknowledgement that women were involved in the drafting of the letter (ibid. 161).

¹⁶¹ Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* 125; see also 124–27.

¹⁶² Radlbeck-Ossmann, "Maria in der feministischen Theologie," in *Handbuch der Marienkunde* 1.444.

¹⁶³ Karl Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963) 53–62, esp. 52; Edward Schillebeeckx, Catharina Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 34–38; Johnson, *Truly Our Sister* 124.

¹⁶⁴ Otto Stegmüller, "SUB TUUM PRAESIDIUM: Bemerkungen zur ältesten Überlieferung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 74 (1952) 76–82; G. Giamberardini, "Il 'Sub tuum praesidium' e il titolo 'Theotokos' nella tradizione egiziana," *Marianum* 31 (1969) 324–63. Stegmüller says the prayer is not earlier than fourth century, but Giamberardini, building on hieroglyphic uses of *Theotokos* for

her motherhood" (emphasis in the Latin original).¹⁶⁵ If one slights mediation one will slight motherhood, and vice versa. Johnson sees mediation/intercession tied to motherhood and to the excessive divinization of Mary. She ties mediation and motherhood principally to the patronage model. This, she correctly holds, is partly due to Marian devotion appropriating the imagery of the great mother goddess of the Mediterranean world. Further, Johnson sees Mary as the great intercessor who is the heteronomous projection of the patriarchal family where the mother intercedes for mercy with the fearful male head. Mary is "the zone of mercy over against Christ or the Father, angry and just judges needing to be placated," a conception that flows, writes Johnson, from a defective Christology, Pneumatology, and doctrine of God, which arose in the 12th century at the time of Bernard of Clairvaux and was promoted by Bernardine of Siena in the 15th century.¹⁶⁶ Johnson acknowledges that Christians invoked Mary as mother at least from the fourth, possibly the third century, in the *Sub tuum praesidium*. She does not oppose intercession in principle, indeed, has written in its defense, but she does oppose the emphasis on intercession, the presence of Mary's pedestal, and the implied subordination. Both the intercession and the pedestal involve subordination. Today, when the medieval deficiencies in Christology, Pneumatology, and the doctrine of God are no longer present, Johnson contends, "it makes no sense to retain Mary as a cover-up for defective notions of the divine."¹⁶⁷ Mary can step down from her pedestal and join us. Johnson's view of the pedestal is a major point in her Mariology and needs to be fully addressed.

Pedestal and throne are physical and symbolic. Historically, they are instruments of exaltation and idealization and therefore of the subordination of petitioners. Mary either keeps to her pedestal and a measure of idealization or renounces them by stepping down, ostensibly setting aside the subordination of petitioners. If Mary accepts the invitation to step down, she descends from that glorified pedestal (or throne) which removes her from the stress of being an unwed mother, dealing with the suspicion of Joseph and the scorn of neighbors, who when nine months pregnant travels in primitive conditions about a hundred miles to Bethlehem, most likely through the hill country and Jordan Valley, becoming a refugee in her own country and immigrant in a foreign land because her baby is under

the goddess Isis, later transferred to Mary in Coptic and finally to Greek, dates the prayer not earlier than the third century.

¹⁶⁵ *Redemptoris mater* no. 38; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 79 (1987) 411.

¹⁶⁶ *Truly Our Sister* 120–21; Johnson, "The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women," 128–29.

¹⁶⁷ "Mary of Nazareth: Friend of God and Prophet," *America* 182 (June 17, 2000) 9.

threat from the military of the government. In a word, she is an unlettered peasant girl facing immense distress, who becomes a woman deprived of power in a patriarchal society. The assumption is that as one receiving petitions Mary needs to put this peasant history behind her in order to keep to her pedestal, from where she regards her subordinates at a distance. On her pedestal she lives in an alienating ideal realm of plastic perfection: the perfect bride of the perfect husband with a perfect son. With some justification the claim is made that contemporary women living in real time cannot look to the pedestaled Mary as a model.

But there is another way Mary relates to pedestal (or throne). This Mary steps down to our level, making her the girl next door, or a dear sister, or companion/friend. Having given up her exalted place, where she has been pleading our cause and mediating God's protection, she becomes a fellow traveler with dust on her feet, walking at our side in an egalitarian society. With her on the same level we can converse and exchange confidences without raising our subordinate eyes to her majestic perfection. She does not receive petitions or exercise the role of intercessor, which would remove her too far from the dusty road. Each of the two ways of relating to the pedestal is somewhat caricatured here, but even in the caricature each has a truth the tradition needs to maintain.

Johnson invites Mary to reject the elevated position which a defective theology supports; invites her to step down into the real world of equals. One can support much of Johnson's position, including the rejection of excessive idealization, the angry judges, and the role of the patriarchy in her patronage model, but not the emphasis on patriarchy and heteronomy as the near absolute control, nor her rejection of some kind of pedestal in theological language and visual imaging.¹⁶⁸ The matter is more complicated. Marian piety and theology did move toward excessive idealization

¹⁶⁸ Yves Congar, in a reference to Karl Adam (*Christ Our Brother* [New York: Macmillan, 1931] 54–55), points to emphasis on the divinity of Christ in reaction to Arianism, which lead to a devaluation of Christ's humanity and an obscuring of Christ's office as mediator. The devaluation and obscuring opened "a yawning gulf between man and the purely divine Christ, and the saints were naturally called in to bridge this gulf." Congar suggests that Mary, too, was called upon to fill in "the empty space." Christ was then perceived as remote from humanity, which created a need for "a sort of human mediatorship between him and ourselves which our Lady can fill." This process had links to the view of Christ in Marian literature as the stern judge, and Mary as wholly merciful. Congar's point is Mary's role cannot be used to detract from the fullest attribution of mercy to Christ. (Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church* [New York: Longmans, Green, 1957] 68–82). Though Congar is no friend of an overdeveloped Marian doctrine, he, unlike Johnson, does not advocate that the response to the defective theology regarding Christ as stern judge should be that Mary abandons her pedestal. Congar's issue is neither heteronomy nor subordination, but a balanced Mariology normed by Christology and ecclesiology.

and divinization (and did take over goddess images). But there are a number of pedestal elements in the Marian tradition which are not a reaction to defective theologies. Among them one finds the idealizing language used of Mary by Proclus (d. 446 or 447) and Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) just prior to Ephesus (A.D. 431),¹⁶⁹ which proclaimed Mary *Theotokos*,¹⁷⁰ though Hippolytus of Rome had been using *Theotokos* around A.D. 220 (according to Hugo Rahner).¹⁷¹ Further, there are three fourth-century sarcophagi found under St. Peter's in Rome (now in the Missionary Ethnological Museum, formerly the Lateran Museum) which show Mary on a throne receiving the adoration of the Magi. One even shows Mary on a throne in the stable of Bethlehem. Three other sarcophagi or sculptures of the Adoration of the Magi from the fourth century likewise have Mary on a throne. Slightly earlier, from the middle to the later half of the third century, are three catacomb frescoes of the enthroned Mary. One is dated by some to the first half of the second century.¹⁷² There may be secular influences here, e.g. Mediterranean goddesses, but early Christians thought it appropriate to idealize Mary. Whatever the later theological defects from the time of Bernard of Clairvaux, the defects Johnson mentions were not present when Mary was given a throne and exalted in both texts and the visual arts in these early centuries. Therefore the emphasis on the intercession of Mary as mother, and a modest pedestal/throne, do not appear at this earlier date to be the support for defects in Christology, Pneumatology, or the doctrine of God. Though Johnson is right about over-idealization being harmful to Mary and to women, one needs to re-examine Johnson's invitation to Mary to step down from her pedestal.

One can praise Johnson's restoration of Mary to the simple village woman, but that should not be opposed to the accent on intercession, some kind of a pedestal. This even if a measure of subordination of petitioner to

¹⁶⁹ *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1914–1984) 1.103; Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 1.101, 111.

¹⁷⁰ In "The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women" 128, Johnson correctly cites Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* 1, esp. chaps. 4–6, in support of her position that Mary was a zone of mercy over against an angry Christ or Father. But Graef cannot be cited for the presence of those aberrations in the earlier centuries to which I refer.

¹⁷¹ Rahner, "Hippolyt von Rom als Zeuge für den Ausdruck *Theotokos*," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 59 (1935) 73–81, esp. 81.

¹⁷² Thomas Shahan, *The Blessed Virgin of the Catacombs* (Baltimore: Metropolitan, 1892) 26–30; 41–50. Two other early sarcophagi with sculpted depictions of the Adoration of the Magi and Mary enthroned are those of Adelfia (ca. 340) in the Museo archeologico regionale "Paolo Orsi" in Syracuse, Sicily; that of Flavius Julius Catervius, (ca. 325–350) in the Cathedral of Tolentino, Italy. See the art archives of the ArtStor <www.artstor.org>.

Mary, and of Mary to Christ, is involved. Decisive is Johnson's admission that when Mary accepts Johnson's invitation to step down from her pedestal to take up a horizontal relationship to the petitioner in the companionship model, many intercessory prayers addressed to her are "not workable."¹⁷³ This is a significant admission. Intercession has difficulty operating in the companionship model of equality where there is no pedestal. One asks oneself why the absence of heteronomy means intercession is not workable. One wonders about the lack of significant support for intercession in the companionship model.¹⁷⁴ So Johnson's horizontal companionship model has significant problems accommodating mediation and intercession, which are a major part of the Church's Marian experience. One wonders how viable is Johnson's presentation of Sister Mary who walks beside us as friend, prophet, and companion.

No exception is taken to the existence of the patronage model of which the pedestal is a component part, nor to the whole of Johnson's critique of it, though Johnson's critique tends to see too exact a relation between medieval fealty structures and pedestal/intercession, and she tends to suggest (though never states) that the patronage model is not really the communion of saints. Women rightly protest the alienating over-idealization of Mary, but even when one removes it, Mary has a right to her pedestal. Though Christ is our brother, he is not just our brother; though Mary is our sister and our friend, she is not just our sister and friend. Johnson is positive on Mary's motherhood, noting her uniqueness as Jesus' mother.¹⁷⁵ In other publications she is positive on mediation/intercession.¹⁷⁶ But in *Truly Our Sister*, Johnson's support for mediation/intercession is a much reduced positive. Quite rightly she believes that there is more to the cult of the saints than intercession. But because she links intercession to motherhood, and both to the patriarchal patronage model (and subordination), she pre-

¹⁷³ *Truly Our Sister* 322. See also Johnson's "Mary of Nazareth: Friend of God and Prophet" 7–13. The whole article is structured to accommodate four ways Mary steps down from her pedestal to join the rest of us in the companionship/communion model. Johnson (*Truly Our Sister* 317) quotes Jeremy Boissevain that "in Malta, as elsewhere in Europe, the saints are marching out" (*Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, ed. E. Gellner and J. Waterbury [London: Duckworth, 1977] 94). But both Stephen Wilson, (whom Johnson elsewhere quotes) and Pierre Sanchis report that devotion to the saints is very much alive in Western Europe. Wilson, "Cults of Saints in the Churches of Central Paris," in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson (New York: Cambridge University, 1983) 233–60; Sanchis, "The Portuguese romarias," *ibid.* 261–89.

¹⁷⁴ *Truly Our Sister* 317–22.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 314; see also 114–34; 305–25.

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, "May We Invoke the Saints," *Theology Today* 44 (1987–1988) 32–52; Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 131–35.

fers the horizontal sister at one's side to the pedestaled mother placed above. Johnson's opposition to heteronomy seems to control the absence of intercession when Mary is sister. On the same level with Christ in the communion of saints Mary is "a companion in memory."¹⁷⁷ One can still pray to Mary and the saints in the companionship model, but the need of an intercessor is greatly reduced when Mary and the saints walk at one's side, a real friend with whom one has "interaction."¹⁷⁸ However, in the older conception of the communion of saints, for instance in a 1908 formulation which is an expression of the patronage model, there was a pedestal and a two-way interaction: "constant interchange," "a mutual exchange."¹⁷⁹

Even if it still makes sense for Mary to be comfortable on some kind of pedestal, one can support Johnson's preference for the communion over the patronage model, as long as it does not reduce the role of intercession. The centrality of Christ is more easily maintained in the communion model than in the patronage model and the interactive communion is more evident. Before her, Paul VI commended the communion of saints, and the United States and the German national Lutheran/Catholic dialogues, as well as the Dombes Group in France, used it to theologize about the saints and Mary.¹⁸⁰ But in the ancient conception of communion, and in Paul VI's, there was Marian mediation/intercession and Mary had a pedestal—literally, symbolically and theologically.¹⁸¹ The communion model can embrace companionship, interaction, pedestal, mediation/intercession, without the estranging over-idealization. It appears that Hampson's objections to heteronomy and submission are operative in Johnson's formulation, as well as Kassel's remark on mother tending to submission.

¹⁷⁷ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister* 320.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ "Communion of Saints," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vol. (New York: Appleton, 1907–1912) 4.171.

¹⁸⁰ *Marialis cultus* no. 28, *Acta apostolicae sedis* 140; United States, *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII; Germany, *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as the Communion of Saints* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2004) para. 253–68; France, *Mary in the Plan of God and the Communion of Saints*, ed. Alain Blancy, Maurice Jourjon, for the Dombes Group (New York: Paulist, 1999).

¹⁸¹ Consult the iconography of the Virgin-Mother with Child, with Mary on a pedestal and seated on a jewel-encrusted throne (probably a borrowing from imperial usage) between St. Felix and St. Adaeuctus, ca. 528, Rome, Catacombs of Commodilla, Church of St. Felix and St. Adaeuctus (John Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* [New Haven: Yale, 1979] 127). Also Encaustic Icon with Virgin-Mother on pedestal and enthroned, flanked by two saints and two angels (late 500s, Sinai) (Kurt Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images—Sixth to Fourteenth Century* [New York: Braziller, 1978] 42).

In summary, the control in Johnson seems to be the subordination rooted in heteronomy or patriarchy.¹⁸² She seems to include motherhood and intercession in the patronage model because subordination demands it. Finally, she seems to include sisterhood and greatly reduces intercession in the companionship model because there is no heteronomy making subordination claims.

But there is a tradition of considerable force that a number of feminists interpret as a presentation of a Mary not tending to submission, namely, the Black Madonnas. This Mary, black and beautiful, intercedes for petitioners, and is widely acknowledged as a worker of miracles. Hundreds of these images dot Africa, Europe, South and North America. The Black Madonna is usually a mature woman, a personality of force, not to be pushed aside, usually on a pedestal or sitting on an inlaid throne, most often crowned as reigning queen with an orb (symbol of power) in her hand frontally presenting a crowned infant Jesus with a smaller orb. Definitely not the peasant teenager who goes to the well for water. More a patron, less a companion. Some feminists are rediscovering and promoting this idealized, exalted Queen Mary with King Jesus.¹⁸³ This gives one pause when universalizing the Mary who has stepped down from her pedestal as the only Mary contemporary liberated women find as an acceptable model. Johnson goes in this direction, but, because she is sophisticated in symbolization, does not take up this restricting position.

Because symbolization is complex Mary can have many faces. Paul VI presented Mary as both mother and sister, but giving pride of place to mother.¹⁸⁴ Johnson reverses the theological weight of mother and sister, developing the latter at some length, giving it preference over the mother theme, as seen in *Truly Our Sister*. Mary as sister has a long history in Protestantism, so the image has ecumenical significance.¹⁸⁵ The texts in

¹⁸² Johnson does not use the term heteronomy with the consequent subordination, but the two ideas pervade her texts.

¹⁸³ Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion, and Politics in Italy* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1993); Birnbaum, *Dark Mother: African Origins and Godmothers* (New York: Authors Choice, 2001); Ean Begg, *The Cult of the Black Virgin* (London: Arkana, 1985). Begg's book contains a Gazetteer giving location, history, and other information on a number of the more famous Black Madonnas (150–264). See also China Galland, *Longing for Darkness* (New York: Viking, 1990); Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary* (New York: Ballantine, 1996) 172–78; Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson, *Dancing in Flames* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996). When Czeslaw Milosz sought a powerful image to repudiate the unhealthy identification of Catholicism with Polish nationalism he wrote a poem "The Black Madonna of Czestochowa."

¹⁸⁴ *Marialis cultus* no. 56; *Acta apostolicae sedis* 163.

¹⁸⁵ Radlbeck-Ossmann, "Maria in der feministischen Theologie," in *Handbuch der Marienkunde* 1.452.

Scripture on Mary as mother are few, but represent different contexts: Annunciation, Joseph's dilemma, Visitation, Bethlehem, Presentation, flight into Egypt, return to Nazareth, finding in the temple, Cana, Mary and the brothers of Jesus come to visit, at the multiplication of loaves (John 6:42), beneath the cross, and Pentecost. Mary as sister is restricted to one scene in a remark directed primarily to others (Mark 3:34–35), and obliquely to Mary. If the suggestion is that Mariology return to the Scriptures, as Johnson recommends, this is not a strong biblical basis for preferring Mary as sister to Mary as mother.

Yet Johnson has done a service by developing the possibilities of Mary as sister. Many women, who react negatively to *Marianismo*, will welcome Sister Mary. Early in theological feminism Mary Daly pointed out the absolute centrality of sisterhood in *Beyond God the Father* (1973), indicating sisterhood means more than friendship.¹⁸⁶ Sisterhood recognizes that great social and intellectual changes are not effected by private relationships, but only when articulated and lived out in community, where it has public political roles. However, the possibility of Mary as sister being widely preferred to Mary as mother is, in my judgment, minimal. Besides the biblical evidence, the mother symbol has depths the sister symbol does not. One loves one's sister, but it is seldom that such a relationship has the resonances of mother buried in the archeology of bone, blood, and birth. In spite of the over-idealization of Mother Mary, many millions of mothers, especially poor mothers, still find in her the eradicable symbol of God's power. The astonishing hold Mother Mary has on the psyche defies all rational explanation. Unbeliever George Santayana put it well: "There is no God, and Mary is his mother."¹⁸⁷

Even Marina Warner, an ex-devotee of Mary, who now believes Mary is intrinsically oppressive to women, one of Christianity's "most polished deceptions," was "furious at the old love's enduring power to move" after Warner had rejected her, as Warner stood in Notre Dame of Paris, tears streaming down her face.¹⁸⁸

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

When one reads feminist Mariologies and other feminist theological writings one gets the impression of barely contained anger—much of it justified. Anger is highly problematic when writing theology. But there is an even more dangerous element in some feminist texts: absolute frustra-

¹⁸⁶ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, chaps. 5 and 6, 132–78. Mary Hunt, "Friendship as Inspiration: A Study in Theo-politics," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition* 287–88.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Lowell, "For George Santayana," in *Life Studies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956) 51.

¹⁸⁸ *Alone of All Her Sex* 133, xxi.

tion from which there is no exit. These particular Catholic feminists feel—whether rightly or not—that they cannot rely on Scripture, as it is hopelessly patriarchal. Nor can they look to the structural Church, dominated by old men, who will not implement even those changes in favor of women that the present Roman theology allows. These men, they say, hand out texts in praise of women while boarding up the entrance door to a range of positions and activities within the Church. These feminists say they cannot look to the tradition of the Church that has denigrated and excluded women's experience. If women cannot look to Scripture, to the organizational Church, or to the tradition, they are then left to their own resources: anger, women's experience, and the sisterhood of wounded women. Within this enclosed wall without doors they find their theological roots, while demanding equality, justice—looking to the heavens for an Exodus angel to pass over them with the promise of a pillar of fire.

Out of their frustration feminist theologians have raised a number of issues which need further discussion. Since heteronomy implies some form of submission, one wonders whether the Christ/Mary relationship is viable without submission. Is kneeling in submission before the Son of God, universal savior and cosmic victor, demeaning for Mary or any believer? Is it shame or glory? One is puzzled by the discrepancy between the centrality of Jesus Christ (the determinative and definitive content of the proclamation), and the presence of various maneuvers in feminist Mariologies to avoid Christology. One wonders what the avoidance of Christology will mean when these feminist theologians write their anthropologies, sacramental theologies, and ecclesiologies (the Body of Christ is one of many images of the Church, but it has pride of place, and is not dispensable). Is any of this possible without admitting heteronomy? While no objection can be made to transhistorical categories in themselves, one wonders whether it is wise to go back on the decision of Vatican II in order to set aside Christology for Pneumatology or the reign of God as the theological environment for Mariology. And it seems theologically appropriate to wonder about the motivation for such a move. While some feminist theologians are returning to the biblical texts, one is puzzled by the neglect of significant elements in the effective history those texts have created, e.g. the implied heteronomy in the important Christ/Church typology (where Mary stands for the Church, implying submission to the male Christ). One also speculates whether the heteronomous relation expressed in the words of Jesus "the Father is greater than I," and in Paul's words "he was obedient unto death," have any religious relevance. Should it not be possible to reject patriarchy and still embrace some form of heteronomy in Mariology and beyond? Or is heteronomy, like patriarchy, beyond redemption? If Mary's *fiat* was too heavily laden with interpretations of obedience, one wonders whether obedience to a woman or a man in all cases in Church

and society is an affront to human dignity. One wonders whether "the obedience of faith" involves a denaturing of self. One speculates whether the subordination of a petitioner seeking the intercession of her/his Mother Mary is unbecoming an autonomous person. One ponders whether Mother Mary should give way to Sister Mary. Finally, one wonders why intercessory prayers to the horizontally related Sister Mary do not work.

However, the highly trained feminist theologians writing on Mary have made a number of positive contributions. Though their trust in the Bible has been shaken, their return to the scriptural text has facilitated rediscovery of discipleship as a primary category for Mary and the social dimensions of the Magnificat. Beyond seeing Mary's biblical role as a prophet, they clearly see her immense symbolic role in Christian imagination. Mary as a peasant woman has her own identity, and her religious role is worth "saving." In so doing the feminist theologians have demonstrated how limited, indeed impoverishing, the exegetical and doctrinal traditions are when they exclude the prism of women's experience in Marian theological reflection. In approaching Marian texts they have demonstrated the necessity of a dual-gendered account of experience. They have stripped away the idealization alienating Mary from real time, as though she were a super-woman, living in the haze of abstract perfection, having no social location. These feminists have repudiated the ideology of domesticity incorporated into Mariologies, as though either the virgin's cell or the marriage bed were the exclusive definitions of womanhood. They have radically questioned the way Mary has been used in the tradition to denigrate genital sexuality, and see an active sex life within marriage as part of spirituality, indeed, of perfection. Instead of men's ham-fisted accent on obedience read into women's lives from the *fiat* text, these feminist theologians propose persuasion as the normal way of exercising authority. In addition to seeing Mary as mother, they see her as a sister among sisters, a friend among friends, and a prophet who understands because she walks beside them.

This particular male theologian is convinced that many feminist theologians, especially Johnson and the Brazilians Gebara and Bingemer, have not only positively, but possibly permanently changed Mariology. Still, until Schneiders's implicit recommendation that women come to terms with Christ's gender, Gössmann's dictum remains in force, namely, that feminists' unease with the maleness of Christ is the greatest challenge to Mariology. If this aspect of feminist theology is a threat to Mariology, it is also clear that the future of Mariology is in the hands of women scholars. At this point in time, only women can revitalize Mariology.¹⁸⁹ Men can

¹⁸⁹ "If a new Mariology is to be formed, it will be formed by women" (John L. McKenzie, "The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament," in *Mary in the Churches* 10).

stand on the side and keep the women honest; a service that women also render men. Eventually some form of the feminist insight will prevail in Mariology. Women theologians, supplying the deficit of female experience in theological reflection, will very likely make the greatest contribution to the whole of theology in the relevant future.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ As a male raised in a heavily clerical culture, my reading in feminist theory, hermeneutics, exegesis, and Mariology leaves me with a sense of inadequacy, of seeing dimly through a dark glass. The concepts are clear, but there is a way of knowing rooted in pain—a knowing possibly incommunicable. As male and as monk/priest I grope, often not knowing that what I thought were bumps on the road were, in fact, the bodies of women dying of anger and abuse. Nevertheless, one has to make a start.