

# **The Gendered Dynamics of Kenosis and Theosis in the Traditional Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Surprising Theological Possibilities for Inclusive Theologies of Gender and Sexuality**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2002, Pope John Paul 2 added five new Luminous mysteries to the traditional Rosary of the Virgin Mary, a popular Catholic devotional and meditation exercise, grounded largely in the New Testament narratives. The Pope's intent was to give a stronger Christological focus to the rosary. The essay explores the spiritual dynamics of the traditional rosary from an emic but marginalised (gay) perspective drawing on gender and queer/sexuality theory. It argues that the Mariological focus is grounded in ancient Christian mystical theologies of kenosis and divinization which would be obscured by a new Christological focus. This Mariocentrism of the rosary is itself Christocentric but in a subtle and finely balanced way that can be thrown out of kilter by attempts to impose an explicit Christological focus. Together kenosis and divinization give the Mariocentric Rosary a very queer gender dynamic that might, surprisingly, provide internal resources for a gender inclusive and queer affirming transformation of Catholicism.

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## **Introduction**

As a Catholic child of the late '50s and 60s, the rosary was, second to the Mass, one of the key hallmarks of Catholic life and culture. My family joined together almost every week to say a family rosary. A normal part of parish life was the regular parish recitation of the rosary in each other's houses on a regular rotation. The parish priest or his curate would arrive on the evening at the hosting household with the parish's statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which would be set up in the living room candles burning on either side. The priest, host family and other visiting parishioners would then say the rosary together before the statue. As a child too I remember visiting relatives in western Queensland on school holidays. Distance meant that there was no readily available church for Sunday Mass and the rosary was recited by my relatives each Sunday in place of the

Mass. It was also common practice for bereaved relatives to say the rosary together on the evening before a funeral of a deceased family member. Regular solitary recitation of the rosary was also considered a normal component of an individual adult Catholic's prayer life. A string of rosary beads was one of the most common personal possessions for a Catholic adult or child, regardless of how observant they might be.

With the reform process set in motion by the second Vatican Council in the mid-'60s, however, there began a progressive downgrading/diminution of the rosary and other things Marian in the Catholic Church. This diminution was particularly embraced by reform-minded, progressive and ecumenical Catholics, including feminists. Following Vatican II, Marian devotions and teaching were to be purified, rationalized, given a more "biblical" cloak, in part, in the hope of making 'possible a convergence with Protestants' (Spretnak, 2004: 46). The rosary and other things Marian appeared to become the preserve of the traditionalist Catholic Right, many of whom were either in virtual schism from Rome or, at least, their local hierarchy.

As a young, very much progressive Catholic, I, too, followed the downgrading path, putting Mary and the rosary aside. The Papacy of the late John Paul II was particularly frustrating for Catholics, like myself, seeking reform in the Church. I was not unusual in going into a kind of semi-detached, drifting relationship with the Church. Like many, I began to see myself as more a cultural catholic rather than an institutional one. I had also come to think that maybe the Vatican II change process might have meant no more than instituting ersatz reforms that did no more than create a Catholic Lite making the Church more amenable to Protestantism, but not really addressing the urgent questions of power, control, inclusion, participation and genuine transformation and renewal, not only of the Church but of the society it inhabits.

It was against this background that I began studying rabbinic texts in the course of my doctorate, including texts of Kabbalah and esoteric Jewish thought. In my encounter with this world of Jewish textuality, I kept being brought up against, reminded of, elements of my Catholic heritage and traditions. Seen through these Jewish lenses, they began to take on a new light, a new sense, and it began to occur to me that so much of Catholic<sup>1</sup> practices, theology and even Mariology was not, as the almost ubiquitous mythology of reformation dominant in the West would have it, a major corruption of and deviation from Christian origins and its Jewish background, but was, instead, in very much faithful continuity with it. This re-evaluation of Catholic traditions, especially things Marian, led me back to the rosary. It was not only interesting to me as a Catholic but also as a biblical scholar interested in the reception of biblical texts, the appropriation and deployment of biblical texts in (popular) culture. The rosary is an outstanding example of a broad-based popular exercise in biblical reception. About five years ago, I began experimenting with it and have now reached the stage where the rosary has become a daily meditation/prayer practice. As a gay man and scholar of sexuality and gender, as well as biblical studies, I gained new insights by bringing insights of gender and sexuality theory to my practice of the rosary. I agree with Charlene Spretnak that it is 'a brilliantly multivalent contemplative device' (2004: 130). This realisation was brought into sharper focus by the late John Paul 2's addition of a new set of mysteries to the traditional rosary in 2002 in response to longstanding pressure from some quarters to give it a more Christocentric focus (see more below). This move forced me to consider the over-all pattern of the rosary and its meaning such that I have come to believe that the point of the traditional rosary is its Mariocentrism. This Mariocentrism is itself Christocentric but in a subtle and finely balanced way that can be thrown out of kilter by attempts to impose an explicit Christological focus.

In this essay, I will explore these issues and some surprising implications for gender and sexuality in Catholicism. After first giving a brief overview of the rosary's history and development, I will locate it ideologically within the twin

Christian theological traditions of kenosis and deification (theosis). I will also highlight the biblical bases for the rosary and the theological traditions that shape it. Seen in this context, the traditional rosary encodes a profound teaching concerning Mary and her necessary role in the Catholic Christian worldview. This Mary is not the diminished or downgraded Mary of what Charlene Spretnak terms 'Lite' Catholicism or Protestantism but the 'big... biblical plus' (Spretnak, 2004: 7) Mary of Catholic tradition. Unsurprisingly, gender is a crucial part of the rosary's encoded theology and spiritual dynamics. Many would be surprised, however, by the fact that, in the traditional rosary, gender works in some very queer ways, indeed. I would argue that it is thus revealed as a major resource for a genuinely gender inclusive and queer affirming reshaping of Catholicism that is in continuity with the heart of the tradition.

### **Introducing the Rosary of the Virgin Mary**

I should first of all explain what it is I refer to in my discussion of the rosary. The rosary to which I refer to is called the Rosary of the Virgin Mary. It is the most prominent and most popular with Catholic laity of a wide variety of devotions/prayers that involve the telling of beads. These include the Franciscan Crown, the Little Rosary of the Seven Dolors of Mary, the Rosary of the Tears of Blood, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Blessed Sacrament Chaplet, the Chaplet of the Sacred Heart, the Brigidine Rosary, the Chaplet of St Michael the Archangel amongst many others (for a comprehensive listing see Various Kinds of Chaplets and Rosaries, [www.udayton.edu/mary/resources/chaplet.html](http://www.udayton.edu/mary/resources/chaplet.html)). While some of these other devotions are called rosaries, they are more commonly referred to as chaplets.

The traditional Rosary of the Virgin Mary, both in the structure of its mysteries and the pattern of its prayers, is a predominantly biblically based spiritual practice and form of worship. It comprises 15 Mysteries grouped into three categories/chaplets of five mysteries which, as will be evident later, it is important to delineate:

**Joyful Mysteries** - The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Nativity of the Lord, The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple, The Finding of Child Jesus in Temple

**Sorrowful Mysteries** - The Agony in the Garden, The Scourging at the Pillar, The Crowning with Thorns, The Carrying of the Cross, The Crucifixion

**Glorious Mysteries** - The Resurrection, The Ascension, The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, The Assumption of Mary, The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth

Each mystery consists of an Our Father (Paternoster) followed by ten or a decade of Hail Marys (Ave Maria) and concludes with the Gloria. The reader would note that, with the exception of the last two Glorious Mysteries, all the mysteries of the rosary are based on the New Testament narratives, primarily Luke/Acts. The Joyful Mysteries rely on the Lucan Infancy narratives (Lk. 1-2). The Sorrowful Mysteries are based on the Passion narrative common to all four Gospels (although the Crowning with Thorns is not found in Luke) as is the first of the Glorious Mysteries, the Resurrection. The next two Glorious, the Ascension and Descent of the Holy Spirit are based on Luke/Acts, the Pentecost story being only found in Acts while two separate Ascension accounts are found concluding Luke and opening Acts (a short Ascension account is also included in the longer ending of Mark). Only the final two 'Marian' Glorious Mysteries are not based on New Testament narratives but are drawn from tradition (later traditions have deployed a range of biblical texts to support and express these two mysteries).

Of the regular prayers of the Rosary, only the Gloria is not derived directly from the Scriptures, however it is a very ancient prayer, derived from New Testament doxologies, which came into wide use during the trinitarian controversies of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Pater Noster or Lord's Prayer comes directly from the gospel accounts in Matthew and Luke. The most common prayer of the Rosary, the Ave

Maria, is the most complex both in origin and development. The prayer is in two parts. The first part is derived from the Lucan infancy narrative being woven from the salutations given to Mary by Gabriel and Elizabeth (Lk.1.28 & 42):

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee (Lk 1.28).  
Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy  
womb (Lk 1.42), Jesus.

The recorded use of the two salutations as an antiphon began in the West during the pontificate of Gregory the Great in the 6<sup>th</sup> century but appears to have been of much older use in the Eastern churches. Nicholas Ayo (1994: 7) provides an ancient Coptic prayer from the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, which not only deploys the angelic/Elizabethan salutations but appears to be a much richer foreshadowing of the Western Ave Maria. The second part of the Ave Maria reads thus:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The first verse appears in the Syrian Church in a 6<sup>th</sup> century text and comes to the West as part of the many litanies that are developed especially from the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Ayo, 1994: 10). The second verse appears in the East in a 13<sup>th</sup> century text and in the West in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The complete form of the Western Ave appears in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was made definitive by Pope Pius V in 1568 in the reformed breviary auspiced by the Council of Trent (Ayo, 1994: 11).

### **History and Development**

The origins and development of the rosary are as complex and diverse as the Ave Maria, its characteristic prayer. According to legend, it was given to St Dominic by the Virgin Mary in a vision in 1208, at the height of the Albigensian heresy. Mary is reputed to have told Dominic that the rosary alone would be a sure proof against heresy and to win people back to orthodox belief and practice. While there may be a certain mythic truth in the legend, it is not based on

historical fact. Instead, as I will show, the rosary grew out of monastic life and then spread to the broader society of Catholic believers.

The physical "rosary" itself is not a Christian invention. It was, and is, essentially a tallying device, known in Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. It has had the same function in Christianity since antiquity, using strings of pebbles, knots tied in cords or chains or strings of beads. Originally, this tallying device served to monitor penitential exercises especially in the monasteries. Penitents used strings or little cords with knots to count the number of prayers to be recited. Beginning in Ireland, Western European monasteries began the practice of regular chanting of the 150 Psalms. The Irish also introduced the practice of dividing the Psalter into 3 groups of 50. The Triple Psalter or 'Three Fifties' (Wilkins, 1969: 35) became integral to Christian monasticism in the West, Irish monks being responsible for many monastic foundation in Western Europe in the later centuries of the first Christian millennium. By the 11th century, illiterate lay brothers and other lay associates of the monasteries had developed the practice of reciting the Pater noster as a replacement for the Psalms. Other lay people adopted it as a penitential and devotional exercise. The string of beads used as a tallying device for this exercise was called the *Paternoster* or *Pater*. Paternosters continued to be used into the 17th centuries and there existed a profession of Paternoster-Makers, specializing in the manufacture of Paternosters and, later on, rosaries.

In the 12th century, the practice of repetition of the Ave Maria developed related to contemplating the joys of Mary. At first, there were five joys identified (Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, Assumption) then seven, and then later fifteen to reflect the 15 decades of the Psalter. During the 13th and 14th centuries, a similar development unfolded regarding Mary's sorrows (five, later seven). The 14th century saw the development of the *florilegium*, a collection of pious thoughts or little poems about Mary. The stanzas, varying in number (50 - 150), rhymed with Ave and were followed by the recitation of the

Ave Maria. It is in the 15th century that the Carthusian and Dominican rosaries, both still prayed today, first make their appearance. Both were seen as forms of a Marian Psalter and were structured to parallel the 150 Psalms of the biblical Psalter. The Carthusian rosary (from Dominic the Carthusian of Trier, Germany, ca. 1410) is a succession of 150 Ave Marias with appended references to the lives of Christ and Mary (e.g. the Annunciation). The Dominican rosary (from Alain of Roche, Douai ca. 1460), structured in three groups of mysteries related to the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ, would become the Rosary of the Virgin Mary. Since the end of the 15th century, it was promoted by the Dominicans and the lay Confraternities of the Rosary, established in 1475. Nevertheless, it took about a century to arrive at the structure we know today. As already noted, the Ave Maria did not achieve its final form until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise the structure of the Rosary's mysteries were not established until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and, by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, various alternatives had passed out of use and the Rosary achieved the final form known today (for a detailed treatment of the Rosary's development see Wilkins, 1969: 25-44 and Winston-Allen (1997: 13-30); on Alain of Roche (Alanus de Rupe) see Gambero, 2000: 315-319).

### **Perceived Problems with the Rosary**

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Rosary had become a key marker of Catholic identity, especially with the religious struggles and wars following the Reformation. A hallmark of the Reformation was the major diminution of the figure of Mary and the obliteration of the Marian cult. The rosary was seen as a supreme example of that Marian cult, given its Mariocentric orientation. For the Reformers, Christian life and prayer should be Christocentric only – anything else was counted as idolatrous corruption. Concern about the 'excesses' of Marian devotions was not exclusively a Protestant one. Within Catholicism, too, there is a long history of attempts to rein in and control the Marian impulse, not always successfully. Indeed, Sarah Jane Boss (2000) points out that there has been a progressive diminution of Mary within Catholicism itself since the Reformation, despite the



apparent prominence given to her. This diminution is symptomatic of the heightened androcentrism of Western culture announced by both Renaissance and Reformation. Within Catholicism, this process came to head in Vatican II with the reform process initiated there. Charlene Spretnak observes that the Catholic modernisers were informed by the latest developments in biblical exegesis and theology, ecumenical concerns for church unity, together with the broader rational and scientific thrust of Western culture. Thus, '(l)opping off Catholicism's least "rational" and most nonbiblical element' (Mary) 'seemed to many... to be a prudent move for the Church' (Spretnak, 2004: 162).

As for the rosary there had been some suggestions at the time to add in more Christocentric, scripturally based mysteries but it was not until some 40 years later that the strongly Marianist John Paul 2 would make such a move. In October 2002, he issued the apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, in which he added a new set of 5 mysteries to the Rosary. Both ecumenism and Christological concerns are highlighted in the letter as reasons for change. While John Paul 2 was a devotee of the Rosary, he acknowledged that 'there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character' (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae* I.4). To counter that perception, the Pope sought to give a new Christocentric emphasis to the Rosary by the addition of 5 new Luminous mysteries. He said:

I believe, however, that to bring out fully the Christological depth of the Rosary it would be suitable to make an addition to the traditional pattern which, while left to the freedom of individuals and communities, could broaden it to include *the mysteries of Christ's public ministry between his Baptism and his Passion*. In the course of those mysteries we contemplate important aspects of the person of Christ as the definitive revelation of God. Declared the beloved Son of the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan, Christ is the one who announces the coming of the Kingdom, bears witness to it in his works and proclaims its demands. It is during the years of his public ministry that *the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light*: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (*Jn* 9:5).

Consequently, for the Rosary to become more fully a “compendium of the Gospel”, it is fitting to add, following reflection on the Incarnation and the hidden life of Christ (*the joyful mysteries*) and before focusing on the sufferings of his Passion (*the sorrowful mysteries*) and the triumph of his Resurrection (*the glorious mysteries*), a meditation on certain particularly significant moments in his public ministry (*the mysteries of light*). This addition of these new mysteries, without prejudice to any essential aspect of the prayer's traditional format, is meant to give it fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary's place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory. (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae* II.19)

The 5 mysteries of Light, John Paul 2 added, are: the Baptism in the Jordan, the Wedding at Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom, the Transfiguration, the Institution of the Eucharist. As he said they have a focus on the public life of Christ as opposed to the ‘private’ life of the Joyful mysteries, or the more mystically private/public of the Glorious. The Sorrowful mysteries are indeed public events, but, unlike the Luminous, they are a series of stages in a single event, the very public spectacle of the Passion. However, the Luminous mysteries are not a strongly connected set of events, as are not only the Sorrowful but also the Joyful, grounded in the Lucan infancy narrative, and even the Glorious (the first three, at least). The third Luminous mystery is not even strictly speaking a discrete event but rather could be said to comprise the bulk of the gospel narratives.

I have a problem with the new mysteries and I don't include them in my own Rosary practice. Furthermore, I disagree with the push towards a more Christocentric focus within the Rosary that resulted in the addition of these mysteries. I don't believe that the main point of the Rosary is, as in the traditional Catholic description, a “*Remembering Christ with Mary*” or a *contemplating Christ through Mary's eyes*. Instead, it is a far more subtle exercise – an identification with, through contemplation of, Mary in relationship with Christ. The Luminous mysteries are valuable, however, in that they throw into relief the linking underpinning structure of the 15 traditional mysteries, a pattern, I would suggest,

the new mysteries do not fit. What is crucial to the traditional mysteries is Mary's presence if not active involvement in one way or another in each of the events being contemplated. This characteristic obviously pertains to the Joyful mysteries, as also with the two final Glorious mysteries. Furthermore, according to Acts she is present on that first Pentecost, the subject of the third Glorious Mystery. But what of the Sorrowful mysteries and the first two Glorious, the Resurrection and Ascension?

It is here that the tradition reads Luke intertextually. Mary might be absent from the Lucan Passion narrative but she stands at the foot of the cross in John. Clearly then, she is close by, directly involved in the events of the Passion. This involvement is a strong part of Catholic tradition as is evidenced by the Stations of the Cross. It could be said that if Mary is present at the Cross then she is certainly close by at the Resurrection. But Catholic tradition has long placed her at the empty tomb that first Paschal Sunday. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Greek homilist, Peter Chrysologus, identified Mary as the 'other Mary' accompanying Mary Magdalene to the tomb in Matthew 28.1 (Gambero, 1999: 299). There is an even older tradition that the risen Jesus appeared to Mary in the garden outside the tomb, a tradition surprisingly based on the account in John's gospel. While the standard version portrays Mary Magdalene encountering Jesus, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Syriac version of John did not specify which Mary was at the tomb. It was this account that was incorporated into the Diatessaron, the gospel harmony of Tatian, which became standard in the Syrian church for several centuries. It was on this account that the Syrian church and perhaps its greatest theologian, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Marian mystic and poet, Ephrem Syrus, believed that John's gospel portrayed Jesus encountering his mother outside the empty tomb (Shoemaker, 2002: 29-30).

It is only the Ascension, then, where Mary is physically absent. However if she is directly involved at Pentecost an event following only a few days after Ascension then she can probably be understood to be in the vicinity.<sup>2</sup> Luke places Mary at

the Pentecost event and Luke gives the primary accounts of the Ascension, which occurs 10 days before Pentecost, then by extension, Mary is likewise close by on that first Ascension Thursday (as she would be for the Agony in the Garden). Hence, with the traditional mysteries Mary is directly involved or proximate in all fifteen. In fact she is the glue that binds the 15 mysteries together. I would argue that each traditional mystery serves to model the cooperative synergy of the human and divine through the interplay of Mary and Jesus. Of the Luminous mysteries, however, Mary is only directly involved in the wedding feast at Cana and, by extension from the Sorrowful mysteries, possibly close by the Institution of the Eucharist. Thus, not only are the Luminous mysteries not linked dramatically as are the other sets of mysteries but they also lack the Marian 'glue' that binds the other sets of mysteries to each other and that should link them to the Luminous. I would suggest that this Marian glue is a legacy of the monastic background to the development of the Rosary and, most importantly, to the two ancient Christian theological principles that were fundamental to monastic spirituality and practice, the principles of kenosis and deification/divinisation (theosis). In the traditional Rosary, these two principles are mediated and refracted by the gender dynamics of the mother and the son.

### **Kenosis & Theosis/Divinisation**

Kenosis means self-emptying and refers especially to the self-emptying, depropriating 'without self-interest' (Cixous, 1994: 44), of the deity required by the Christian understanding of the Incarnation. Kenotic Christologies understand the Incarnation as a self-emptying or even abasement of the divine to become human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The concept derives from the kenotic hymn Paul quotes in Philippians 2.5-11:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the

name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There are a range of kenotic approaches ranging from full kenosis (Jesus surrendered all divine powers and knowledge) through a range of partial kenotic accounts (Jesus only has access to some divine power and knowledge)<sup>3</sup> to apparent kenosis (Jesus has all the divine powers and knowledge at his disposal but opts not to use them) (Forrest, 2000: 128-130). As the Philippians hymn shows, kenosis applies not only to accounts of the Incarnation but is also understood to apply to the events of Jesus' Passion and crucifixion, whereby he willingly submitted to the powers of the world and underwent execution.

However, in that the person of Jesus is understood as the ultimate divine revelation in Christianity, kenotic Christologies are also believed to be revelatory of the nature of the deity itself, understood in Christianity as a Trinity of divine persons. Thus Doncel gives a kenotic account of the interrelationships of the divine Persons within the Trinity, whereby 'each of them... respect and leave existential place to the others' (2004: 792). He further regards kenosis as integral to the process of creation itself so that 'we can imagine the kenosis of the Creator as a self-restriction of divine being, freely realized in loving respect for the creatures that are to be created' (ibid). As Doncel points out, this kenotic understanding of divine creativity accords with the Jewish principle of *zimzum*, taught by the great Kabbalist, Isaac Luria, whereby at the start of creation the deity withdrew into itself to create a metaphysical space for the universe. Kenosis is also the principle behind the autonomy of the universe, which develops according to its own processes of cosmic and organic evolution. Likewise, Doncel sees kenosis as underpinning human free will and the problem of physical evil, citing Polkinghorne's argument, 'God neither wills the act of a murderer nor the incidence of a cancer, but allows both to happen in a world which God has endowed with the ability to be itself' (Polkinghorne, cited Doncel,

2004: 793). In other words, kenosis is the natural corollary to the fundamental Christian principle 'God is love' (1 John 4.8).

It is important to note, however, that the theme of self-emptying in Philippians 2.5-8 is followed by that of exaltation in Philippians 2.9-11. Consequently, Doncel points out that divine kenosis in relation to the world is transitory, being a process that ultimately leads to 'the glorious manifestation to the creation of God's being "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15.28) in an eschatological panentheism' (Doncel, 2004: 794). This endpoint reveals the ultimate purpose of divine kenosis behind creation, the intention 'to introduce a whole world of created persons within the being itself of God' (ibid). This statement by Doncel strikes me as one of the most succinct summaries of the Christian principle of divinisation/deification or theosis. This doctrine has in large part been forgotten in Western Christianity, by both Catholics and Protestants alike (although it is analogous to Catholic teaching on sanctification) and to many in the West sounds bizarre or even suspect (Palphrey, 2000, <http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=659>). However in the Eastern Church, it is fundamental to theology and spirituality. The great Russian theologian, Vladimir Lossky, affirmed its centrality to Eastern Christianity in words that also highlight the integral link between theosis and kenosis:

"God made Himself man, that man might become God." These powerful words...are again found in the writings of St. Athanasius, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory of Nyssa. The Fathers and Orthodox theologians have repeated them in every century with the same emphasis, wishing to sum up in this striking sentence the very essence of Christianity: an ineffable descent of God to the ultimate limit of our fallen human condition, even unto death—a descent of God which opens to men a path of ascent, the unlimited vistas of the union of created beings with the Divinity (cited Palphrey, 2000, <http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=659>)

The linkage is also recognised in a recent Catholic account of theosis by David Meconi, '(i)n Christ, God became like us; in our lives of service and sacramental worship, we are thus invited to become like God' (2006: 3). Like Lossky, Meconi affirms the importance of theosis in early Christianity, 'the early church saw

discipleship... as the faithful's taking on properly divine attributes: a blissful immortality, a fiery love, an unquenchable joy' (ibid).

As with kenosis, so too the concept of theosis is grounded in Christian scriptures. John's Gospel states that the purpose of the Logos coming into the world was to give those who received and believed in him 'the power to become children of God' (John 1.12). Likewise, 2 Peter declares, 'In making these gifts, he (Jesus) has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them you will be able to share in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4). Palphrey points out that the Greek here is unequivocal and that 'Orthodox Christians... are always puzzled by... Protestant Christians' who 'sometimes object that the passage in 2 Peter does not mean what it says' (2000, <http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=659>). Other scriptural passages underpinning theosis include Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 1 John 3:2.

Along with the scriptures and Church Fathers, kenosis and theosis are crucial components of the vision behind the monastic impulse. Christian monasticism could be seen as an exercise in kenosis on the part of its practitioners. But the goal was understood in terms of realising theosis, especially in the East. Thus, in the traditions of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, there are regular references to becoming suffused with divine light or being visibly on fire with the flames of the Spirit. These themes continued strongly in eastern monastic tradition. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great Russian saint, Seraphim of Sarov, was seen to shine and burn with the flames of the Spirit by one of his disciples. In the West, the language of theosis would appear to have been forgotten or, at least, transformed into Catholic discourses of sanctification. Nevertheless, a striking representation of theosis is found at the very heart of Catholic liturgical life, the Mass. During the Offertory, water is added by the priest to the wine that will be consecrated with the words, 'through the mystery of this mingling of water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity'. A similar ritual is found in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy. Palphrey points out that wine

and water are poured into the chalice during the *proskomedia*, the preparatory prayers prior to beginning the Divine Liturgy. 'The deacon urges the priest to bless the wine and then the water, and to bless the union of the two elements... for the Orthodox (this ritual) represents salvation, *theosis*, itself' (2000, <http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=659>). Palphrey further notes that, during the Reformation, the Reformers, in their changes to the Eucharist, 'saw little point in retaining this action, and for the most part omitted it' (ibid).

It should be clear by now that kenosis and theosis are both integrally linked and fundamental to Christian teaching and practice from its inception. Indeed, I suspect that they predate Christianity and are at play in the ancient Judaism from which it was born, especially in much of the Temple ritual and ideology. Within Christianity, kenosis and theosis generate and sustain the monastic impulse, explicitly in the East, and, eventually, implicitly in the West. As the Rosary is born out of and largely shaped by that monastic culture, then it should be possible to see in its structure a reflection of kenotic and theotic theologies. The Christ encountered in the Rosary, I would argue, reflects the Christ of the kenotic hymn in Philippians. The Joyful and Sorrowful mysteries reflect upon the kenosis of the Incarnation and the Passion, while the Glorious mysteries reveal the Exaltation that necessarily follows. But what of theosis? I believe that this principle explains the role of Mary in the Rosary, of why she is the glue that binds it together. Furthermore gender is a crucial element of her binding role.

### **Mary, Deification and the Rosary**

Sally Cunneen observes that the late John Paul 2 'referred to Mary as the highest expression of "the feminine genius"' (Cunneen, 1996: 289). However, she goes on to say that Mary had traditionally been regarded as 'a human, not merely a feminine model' (Cunneen, 1996: 290). Indeed, the late Pontiff's statement could be seen as indicative of the serious diminution of Mary in western Christian traditions, Catholic and Protestant alike, and accelerated in Catholicism post-Vatican 2.



Even to refer to Mary as a human model is to miss the significance of her traditional role. In her fascinating study of the Rosary, the very non-Catholic writer, Eithne Wilkins, stresses that Mary represents the prototypical Christian believer, she is the archetype of Christian faith and life:

In mystical writings the Virgin Mary is continually taken as the type of the perfected soul, the soul of the initiate, the one who has 'attained the rose' ... as human being Mary is... the personification of the aspiring, the ascending principle in human beings. She is of such perfection that the Wisdom can breathe within her and unite with her. She is the matrix in which human nature becomes perfect and as the human being assumed into heaven to be its queen she embodies the apotheosis towards which all strive (Wilkins, 1969: 119).

But why Mary, of all people? Even if one was to accept a germ of historical fact in the Infancy narratives that open Matthew and Luke (most of New Testament scholarship does not), Mary's appearances in the canonical gospels are brief. There is not enough information to build a detailed portrait, let alone biography, of the mother of Jesus. Nevertheless, it was precisely this hidden quality of Mary's life that Caryll Frances Houselander, writing within the heart of Catholic tradition in the 1940s, found most significant. She highlights the importance of the lack of a Marian biography:

When we are attracted to a particular saint, it is usually the little human details, which attract us. These touches bridge the immense gap between heroic virtue and our weakness. Of Our Lady such things are not recorded. We complain that so little is recorded of her personality, so few of her words, so few deeds, that we can form no picture of her, and there is nothing that we can lay hold of to imitate. But it is Our Lady – and no other saint – whom we *can* really imitate.

Each saint has his special work: one person's work. But our Lady had to include in her vocation, in her life's work the essential that was to be hidden in every other vocation, in every life... The one thing that she did and does is the one thing that we all have to do, namely to bear Christ into the world. Christ must be born from

every soul, formed in every life. If we had a picture of Our Lady's personality, we might be dazzled into thinking that only one sort of person could form Christ in himself and we should miss the meaning of our own being. Nothing but things essential for us are revealed to us about the Mother of God: the fact that she was wed to the Holy Spirit and bore Christ to the world (Houselander, cited Ayo, 1994: 167-8)

While I am uncomfortable with much of her language (especially with the notion of Mary being 'wed' to the Holy Spirit) I believe that Mary as a figure in the New Testament is sufficiently opaque such that most people can find in her a mirror reflecting back aspects of their lives in a way not possible for more finely developed characters. Furthermore, while she only makes brief appearances in the Gospels and Acts, these are crucial points in the accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The most important of these crucial points are, in fact, the basis of the traditional mysteries of the Rosary.

Furthermore, the Rosary is grounded in the reality that in Catholic

Christian theology and devotion, Mary stands for creation in relation to the Creator. More particularly, she stands for creation in what is supposed to be its right relationship with the Creator. So... Catholic theology holds that, by the grace of God, men and women can and should co-operate with God's will, and in this way assist in God's work of salvation. Accordingly, Catholic theologians typically present Mary as the finest example of one who co-operated with God. She agreed to be the mother of Christ who is God incarnate... Since Jesus had no human father, it was from Mary alone that he took his human flesh, and since the Incarnation is the beginning of the world's redemption, Mary, in giving him his flesh, made the fullest contribution that any human being could have made to that redemption (Boss, 2000: 13).

I will return to the physical relationship later but for now I want to stress Mary's co-operation and free will. Unlike Protestant and especially Calvinist accounts of the Incarnation, which, with their stress on the sovereignty of God, make Mary 'the purely receptive participant in God's salvific plan' (Migliore, 1999: 349),<sup>4</sup> Catholic theology has always stressed Mary's free consent as being integral to

the Incarnation. Mary is both the 'moral' and 'physical agent in the Incarnation and so is doubly active in the process of humanity's redemption' (Boss, 2000: 32).

These notions of co-operation and free consent to the divine are fundamental to deification theology, which stresses the willing harmonization of creature and Creator in relationship as essential to divinisation. Furthermore, Mary's relationship to the divine in the person of her son is unique in both its physical and emotional intimacy. It is that depth of intimacy that is the hallmark of divine-human intercommunion that underpins and is achieved within the process of deification. The Rosary thus models the deification process in the acts of Mary as willing participant in and thus agent of salvation (hence the impulse in Catholicism to name her co-Redemptrix) as represented in the Joyful,<sup>5</sup> Sorrowful and first three Glorious mysteries.<sup>6</sup> Hence, Mary Daly is wrong to call Mary 'a pale derivative symbol disguising the conquered Goddess' (1978: 84). Mary is greater than any goddess (even as she has drawn them into her).<sup>7</sup> As the final two mysteries of the Rosary graphically represent, she is the model and forerunner of the glorification and divinisation that are the goal of Christian hope for all humanity and for the entire cosmos.

### **Gender Dynamics**

That Mary is a woman is not incidental to this dynamic. Gender plays a most important part here. Cunneen remarks that John Paul 2's inability to recognise Mary as a human model lay in his 'tendency to see women as separate and distinct beings from men' (Cunneen, 1996: 290). I would concur and add that the late Pontiff appears to be representative of a very modern tendency to regard gender in terms of a rigidly opposing binary (men are from Mars, women are from Venus). This understanding marks a sharp divergence from the gender models of the ancient and medieval worlds from which came Christianity and the rosary respectively. While there was a binary of male and female it was understood in terms of a hierarchical continuum that was fluid and allowed for intermediacy (the

hierarchy also overlapped with other hierarchies of age, class, ethnicity). This gender continuum was also mapped onto the world and cosmos. In the symbolic order, the world, the flesh, the material, was said to *represent* the realm of the feminine, while the divine, the heavenly, the spiritual *belonged* to the realm of the masculine (see Conway, 2003: 168). It is this understanding that lies behind the final logion in the Gospel of Thomas, in which Jesus says of Mary Magdalene: 'I will guide her to make her male. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven' (Thomas 114: 2-3). While this logion implies a rejection or transcendence of the female (material) realm in favour of a new and heavenly male realm, a more androgynous possibility is found in logion 22.5: 'and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female'.

There are androgynous undercurrents in Marian traditions and with the symbolism of the rosary itself. Many of these are directly associated with the imagery of the Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage, which despite its apparent heterosexual imagery actually celebrates the fusing or leveling of the hierarchical gender continuum. Eithne Wilkins reminds us that 'in the Pythagorean tradition... 5 is symbolic of the Hieros Gamos, the sacred marriage of heaven and earth' and that the rose, from which the rosary takes its name, 'is 5 petalled, like the flower of the apple' (Wilkins, 1969: 99-100, 108). The five petalled rose also corresponds 'to the five wounds of Christ' and the rose 'is also the flower of resurrection' (Wilkins, 1969: 109). Continuing the sacred marriage associations, She also notes that Pentecost festivities in Europe 'often included... the building of arbours, which is strangely reminiscent of the arbour... of the spring-time sacred marriage... sung of in The Song of Songs' (Wilkins, 1969: 161). Both 'Pentecost, the Fifty-Day festival, and the rose-chaplet as rosary are based on the number fifty' (ibid.), while Pentecost falls any time between 11 May and 11 June, being mostly a May feast. May is traditionally the month of Mary. These strong sacred marriage themes are further reinforced by associations of Mary with the ancient Temple. In the great litanies Mary is addressed as seat of

wisdom, spiritual vessel, tower of David, tower of ivory, house of gold, ark of the covenant and gate of heaven. These are all Temple images and particularly evoke the holy of holies, within which YHWH was embodied in the ancient priest kings and the later high priests of the second Temple, ancient ritual practices that lie behind the Christian Incarnation theologies (and the Eucharist). Similar Temple imagery is found in the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine Akathist hymn (Gambero 1999: 342-51). Barker (2001) argues a continuity of Temple imagery and motifs in the Akathist hymn and traditional Marian themes. Furthermore, in Jewish tradition, the Temple itself is strongly imbued with sacred marriage associations. Weinfeld (1996) presents some provocative imagery from Jewish tradition of the erotics of the Temple in relation to the divine union of the Hieros Gamos. In esoteric Judaism still, the Temple and its rituals are understood to have been the location not merely of a general divine presence but the very place in which the cosmic sacred marriage of the Holy One and the Immanent Divine Presence in the world (the Shekhinah) was effected. It is clear from the biblical texts that the Temple also represents Eden, the primal pre-patriarchal and androgynous paradise. In Catholic Christian traditions, Mary is not only associated with the Temple but also with Eden. She represents the New Eve and the early Latin Father, Tertullian, even spoke of her as the new virgin earth of Eden, from which Christ, the new Adam, is formed (Gambero, 1999: 67).

Themes of androgynous gender slippage further mark the spirituality of the high Middle Ages, the backdrop to the development of the Rosary. Thus Caroline Walker Bynum observes that throughout 'the Middle Ages, authors found it far easier than we seem to find it to apply characteristics stereotyped as male or female to the opposite sex' (1982: 162). The most striking is the language of Jesus as mother, which, with the exception of some female mystics such as Julian of Norwich, is largely a discourse of male monks and clerics, most prominently the Cistercians. Indeed to the medieval mind, gender could be deployed such that the male was seen 'as symbol of Christ's divinity, the female as symbol of his humanity' (Bynum, 1991: 210). While women identified with the

embodiedness of Christ as brides - God in Christ having 'stooped to marry *female* flesh' (Bynum, 1991: 222, her italics) – men related to Christ as the feminized divine who had come down from the masculine sacred heights to incarnate in the feminine realm of flesh. It is a kenotic understanding of gender and the sacred here. Bynum observes that these 'sexually inverted images... were part of a tradition of using inverted language to express personal dependence... on God' (1982: 128)

From this perspective, then, as Incarnate Deity, Christ is the humanized divine and, thus, the fem(m)inized masculine. In parallel, then, Mary, by her 'yes' in the Annunciation, her life, Assumption and Coronation, represents the divinized human, the divinized material and thus the masculinized feminine. The significance of these gender shifts can be understood in terms of the dynamic behind the hierarchical gender continuum. As Irigaray points out, 'Man gives his own gender to the universe... Everything man considers of value has to be of his gender. The feminine is a marker of secondariness, of subordination to the principal gender' (1993: 173). Although she is speaking in terms of language, I believe it is an accurate description of the (male) symbolic order (ancient, medieval and modern). I would argue that the Rosary, surprisingly, offers a vision, which I believe is present in Christian origins, of an androgynous reunion or leveling of the categories, a destabilization of what is at base a male symbolic hierarchy. Both Mary and Jesus represent, each, an androgenized whole.

### **For a gender inclusive and queer affirming Catholicism**

As I said at the outset, I believe this perspective on the Rosary provides resources from the tradition for a gender inclusive and queer affirming reshaping of Catholicism. I will touch briefly on two issues, the ordination of women and the recognition of same-sex relationships.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine nun, Elisabeth of Schoenau, a younger contemporary of Hildegard, was tortured by visions urging 'her to criticize priests

and church authorities publicly for their laziness and failure to instruct the people' (Cunneen, 1999: 329). She was fearful of what people would think of her, a woman, acting that way. She overcame her fear when Mary appeared to her in priestly garb and blessed her with the sign of the cross. Elisabeth's vision confirms Ruth Vanita's observation that Mary, while 'not duplicable' is 'like Christ... imitable' and thus 'acts as a model and justification for unconventional behaviour by both women and men' (1996: 25). The vision is also in keeping with a long tradition associating Mary with the Eucharist. In the medieval period Mary was declared the patron of priests and was portrayed in priestly vestments. 'She was seen as a priest because she offered the Christchild to God in the Presentation in the Temple and because she gave him to the faithful as their source of salvation' (Bynum, 1991: 219). Mary's priesthood further confirmed her role as type of the Church, the Eucharistic Body of Christ, and as Christian prototype and model of faith. In my own practice, I have become more and more conscious of the striking Eucharistic overtones of the Rosary, of its parallels with the drama of the Mass. At the heart of both is the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which in the Rosary is represented by the Sorrowful mysteries, and in the Mass is made present at the canon in the eucharistic prayer or anaphora. Here, the bread and wine is consecrated as Christ's body and blood then offered up to God, Most High, in line with Christ's actions at the Last Supper and his atonement offering of himself on the cross. Like the priest in the Mass, Mary presides over the Rosary.

I would suggest that the kenotic and theotic androgyny of both Mary and her son challenge any appeal to a gender essentialism invoked to support a male-only priesthood. If Mary is a type of the Church, the eucharistic mystical body of Christ in the earthly (feminine) realm and woman therefore represents Christ's humanity, as the medievals recognised, then female priests most properly represent the role of the priest as *alter Christus*.<sup>8</sup> In Eastern Orthodoxy, the Mass is also understood eschatologically as sharing in the great heavenly banquet at the end of time. As Mary, through her Assumption and Coronation, represents

that glorified, deified, Christified endpoint of Christian hope, then female priests, likewise, represent the eschatological promise underpinning the Eucharist. Not a deferred eschatology – the Eucharist suspends linear time – but a real presence that in Irigaray's words would absolve

the human race... of a great offence. If a woman were to celebrate the Eucharist with her mother, giving her a share of the fruits of earth blessed by them both, she might be freed from all hatred and ingratitude toward her maternal genealogy, and be hallowed in her identity as a woman (Irigaray, 1993: 21).

Turning to same-sex relationships, the androgyny of Mary and her son strongly resonates with androgynous themes in much contemporary gay spirituality discourse. The androgyne or hermaphrodite image has been regularly evoked in such discourse as the key to homosexuality and same-sex relationships being vehicles for expressing a 'three dimensional empathic thinking', which the late Harry Hay, founder of the Radical Faeries, termed 'subject-Subject consciousness ... equal to equal' and 'thinking in terms of loving-sharing' (cited McCleary, 2004: 138). McCleary speaks of the same-sex relationship as one in which 'the couple are less moved to join as one than assist one another to realize better a union within themselves and/or with the Beyond – a kind of 'alone together' effect' (2004: 310-1). Mark Thompson celebrates the goal of such androgynous process in ecstatic terms: 'When the male and female aspects of the inner being fuse, they give birth to the child, the Divine Child, the complete being at one with all the yin and yang forces, free from conventions, barriers, burdens and definitions' (cited McCleary, 2004: 257). I would suggest that the kenotic/theotic Mary and Jesus each instantiate something of Thompson's vision. Certainly neither of them, as traditionally represented and understood, conform to heteronormative models of female and male.

### **Concluding Reflections**

I am not suggesting a return to that older hierarchical understanding of gender and nor am I arguing for an essentialising/ontologising of female/male,



feminine/masculine. However, I am arguing that the gender models framing older texts and traditions should be taken seriously and can be deployed to critique and challenge contemporary gender binaries of Western societies. At the same time, I would advocate for a restoration of the understanding of gender as a continuum in place of modern binaries of complementarity, but in an egalitarian rather than a hierarchical sense. I would argue that a vision of a leveling of the gender hierarchy is implicit in many of the texts and traditions pertaining to Mary and her son.

I am also conscious that the language of kenosis is a discourse rich with potential for abuse. To be self-giving is more often than not expected of wives rather than husbands, poor rather than rich, slaves rather than their owners, of the earth rather than her human inhabitants. The Roman Catholic and most other Christian churches have an inglorious history of selectively deploying such language to maintain the power of the strong over the weak, not least including the maintenance of ecclesiastical power structures. As noted earlier, Bynum recognised that the often extraordinary gender slippage in medieval discourse stemmed from a Christian tradition of inverting 'worldly' categories to express dependence on the divine. Nevertheless, she also points out that, at the same time as medieval monks were describing themselves in feminine terms and deploying the discourse of Jesus as mother, they were also deploying maternal imagery to describe the roles of authority figures in the Church and that this discourse accompanied 'the deterioration of the political and legal status of women in the later Middle Ages (Bynum 1982: 142-3). Indeed, what we see here exemplifies Irigaray's recognition that the patriarchal order 'has as its founding operation the appropriation of woman's body by the father or his substitutes' (1985: 189). Ironically, it might also exemplify her observation that the "Good News" ... of the Christian message ... is being constantly repressed ... misunderstood, censored, rejected, forgotten' even though the tradition has kept 'in some kind of insistent latency everything in the gospel that it refused' (Irigaray, 1991: 185-86). Indeed, Bynum reminds us that 'the Cistercian devotion to mother

Jesus' must also be located 'in the context of a Cistercian ambivalence about authority' (1982: 113). Might not kenosis denote an awareness of privilege and the need to counter it in relationship with others? Humans exist in a web of hierarchy and privilege based on gender, class, economic status, age, ethnicity, religion, ability, sexuality, even in the very dominance of our species over the planet. Kenotic accounts of creation and incarnation portray a deity who surrenders divine privilege to create a universe with 'the ability to be itself' (Polkinghorne, cited Doncel, 2004: 793) so as to enter into free relationship with it. Given that these accounts are envisaged within a male symbolic imaginary that grants maleness to the heavenly and divine realm, what might that infer for men here in the terrestrial realm? Might it not challenge us to recognise and let go of the gender privilege to which we males have become accustomed?

Another area for caution is the language of androgyny. Gay spiritual discourse invests in the androgynous vision the realization '(t)hat "multiply" might not mean "make flesh" for the Father, but rather create oneself and grow in the grace of fleshly fulfillment... (t)hat God might be engendered in love, in a fertility that goes beyond and falls short of procreation' (Irigaray, 1991: 170). However, androgyny is not a neuter. As Irigaray warns, while the feminine is a creation/category/projection of the male order, the neuter 'is reserved for specific and variable areas in different languages' and 'arises after sexual difference has been eradicated... It has only the appearance of being neuter or neutral, and in French at any rate has the same form as the masculine' (1993: 173). Consequently, she expresses concern about androgynous solutions to the hegemony of male gender asking,

how are we to identify with another gender if we have no definition of this gender as a gender? Is it all just a question of imitating a role? A division of functions? Or what? And what man today is ready to give up his power over society in order to know the social destiny that the female gender has experienced for generations? Is it possible for us spiritually to identify with the other gender, except in some idealist utopia, some new society where sex morphology is

again suppressed by more or less delusional forms? Can this androgyny blaze a trail for an intergender ethics. If it exists, this trail must use sexual difference as both its setting out point and its destination, must take advantage of sexual difference on the road to spiritual discovery and affirmation (Irigaray, 1993: 123).

An androgyny that takes no account of male privilege, of 'the primacy of the phallus and... phallogocentric ideology' (Cixous, 1994: 41) will not provide a path for Irigaray's intergender ethics. Cixous likewise warns against such androgyny (she uses the term bisexuality) 'a fantasy of complete being... Ovid's Hermaphrodite, less bisexual than asexual, not made up of two genders but of two halves... a fantasy of unity... (t)wo within one, and not even two wholes' (ibid.). Instead, she offers a wholistic androgyny that recognises 'the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the non-exclusion of difference or of a sex' (ibid.).

I believe that just such a vision is contained in Catholic Marian traditions, the (embodied) representations of Mary and her son, and that quintessential vehicle of Marian devotion, the rosary. And here I refer to the traditional Mariocentric rosary which I believe needs no major alterations or revisions. Of course, all such representations are also shaped and determined by culture, including that of the rosary. With such a complex history, widespread popularity and deployment, it should not surprise that, as well as a wholistic androgynous vision, Ovid's Hermaphrodite and phallogocentric ideologies will also be found – the paradox of incarnation. Hence, like all symbol systems it offers possibilities that require the process of sifting and re-membering, of playing with metaphors and signs. From these processes, I believe it holds a key to the reshaping of Catholicism from within its own traditions. It is just such an exercise I have attempted here not as the definitive queer reading but as an invitation to others to rediscover this practice in its traditional form and to playfully engage with and re-member it.

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<sup>1</sup> I include under Catholicism here not only the Roman Catholic Church but the Catholicisms of Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxies, of the later Independent and Old Catholic movements and the High branches of Anglicanism and Lutheranism.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the central stained glass panel of Ascension above the main altar in St Stephen's cathedral in Brisbane portrays Mary on the ground directly below a Christ soaring heavenward. At this stage I have not been able to identify any patristic or medieval readings of the ascension narratives that read Mary's presence into the account.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Rice's new novel *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005) is an interesting portrayal of Jesus from a partial kenotic perspective.

<sup>4</sup> The 'Total Rape Victim' as Mary Daly would put it (1978: 84) although she makes no distinction between Catholic and Protestant accounts.

<sup>5</sup> The Joyful mysteries also highlight Mary's uniquely intimate relationship with the divine.

<sup>6</sup> That other great Marian devotion, the Angelus, I would argue, likewise draws on themes of kenosis and theosis and enables a person to identify with, through contemplation of, Mary at that singular moment of human divine cooperation/synergy, the Incarnation.

<sup>7</sup> Just as her son has, likewise, drawn so many gods into himself. Mother and son relate to goddesses and gods kabbalistically, releasing them from the confines of human imagination, humanizing them and incorporating them within the divine pleroma.

<sup>8</sup> If by the logic of the Virgin Birth, Jesus flesh is uniquely co-substantial with the flesh of his mother, then the Body and Blood of Christ that inheres in the Eucharistically consecrated bread and wine is also in some sense the body and blood of Mary.

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