University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive | National Collegiate Honors Council

4-1-2007

The Virgin Mary: A Paradoxical Model for Roman Catholic Immigrant Women of the Nineteenth Century

Darris Catherine Saylors
University of Tennessee - Chattanooga, dcsaylors@post.harvard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcjournal

Part of the Higher Education Administration Commons

Saylors, Darris Catherine, "The Virgin Mary: A Paradoxical Model for Roman Catholic Immigrant Women of the Nineteenth Century" (2007). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive.* Paper 31.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcjournal/31

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Virgin Mary: A Paradoxical Model for Roman Catholic Immigrant Women of the Nineteenth Century

Darris Catherine Saylors
2006 NCHC Portz Scholar
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

INTRODUCTION

This paper identifies and discusses several examples of Marian paradoxes to better understand how constructions of Mary as the primary model of feminine religiosity affected Roman Catholic immigrant women. Such paradoxes include Mary's perpetual virginity juxtaposed with earthly women's commitment to family (and the sexual relationship implicit in marriage) and the classist elements inherent in the True Womanhood model related to Mary. The four cardinal virtues of the nineteenth-century American model of True Womanhood—piety, purity, submission, and domesticity—parallel nicely those emphasized in the figure of Mary. For this paper, I shall focus on the virtue of purity particularly as related to Mary's virginity.

I contend that Mary as a model of feminine religiosity is ultimately incompatible with the paradigm of True Womanhood. Because she contrasts so strongly with earthly women for whom she is alleged to be an ideal model, she over-fulfills the requirements of True Womanhood in ways that other women could never achieve, even if they are expected and strive to do so. This project examines the problematic correlation of the Virgin Mary with the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century as the two affected Roman Catholic immigrant women; thus, it explores the implications of Mary as incompatible with the paradigm of True Womanhood and of Mary as a paradoxical model of feminine religiosity in general, especially given that men and women respond differently to her.

The nineteenth century is an appropriate, even necessary context within which to examine Mary as a paradoxical model of feminine religiosity

because the True Womanhood model emerged during the nineteenth century in the U.S., Mary was declared the patron saint of the U.S. in 1854, and Catholic immigration to North America was prolific during this time. Immigrant Catholic women sought to conform to the cultural norms of their new setting. In doing so, many connected the True Womanhood model with Mary, but this equation was not without its challenges. Although discussing the twentieth century, the historian Jaroslav Pelikan sums up why it is necessary to consider the effects of the intersection between the more secular, cultural model and the religious model of Mary: "Just when the twentieth century was beginning, it was traditionally held that 'in Mary, we see in the little that is told of her what a true woman ought to be,' [and] the twentieth century's dramatic upsurge of interest in the question of exactly 'what a true woman ought to be' has likewise been unable to ignore her."[1]

TEXTUAL SOURCES ON MARY

The multitudinous social and religious traditions regarding Mary that have emerged throughout the history of Christianity are linked to what are actually very scant biblical mentions of the Mother of Christ. While these brief treatments of Mary are often popularly assumed to be the historical and theological foundations for such traditions, the canonical tradition is clearly not the sole source informing social and religious traditions extolling the Virgin. The biblical references to Mary and the living traditions revolving around Mary are by no means diametrically opposed, but various extra-canonical texts complicate the influence of the Marian texts by challenging or suggesting radically different narrative accounts compared to those of the canonical Gospels. It is important to recognize that Mary's legacy emerges from a tangled web of brief, limited insights gleaned from official church documents along with rather cursory Scriptural accounts as well as from tradition. It derives from extended, Marian-centered accounts within unofficial texts and from living traditions that simultaneously reflect, selectively coalesce, and expand upon available written sources. One contributor to *Mary in the New Testament*[2] suggests a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the derived nature of her legacy:

> In facing any issue in Christianity that has roots in the NT, one must take into account both the evidence supplied by the NT writings themselves, composed 1900 years ago, and the subsequent cultural and ecclesiastical traditions which have influenced Christian interpretations of those writings. The problem of intervening traditions is particularly acute in the instance of Mary, the mother of Jesus, for mariological attitudes in the post-Reformation West have been sharply divergent.[3]

Before exploring the emergence, formation, and implications of living Marian traditions, it is important to consider the early Christian texts that discuss Mary, both canonical and extracanonical, in order to understand the basis for constructions of the Virgin. Though scholars typically investigate thoroughly issues of authorship, chronology, gospel formation, and history alongside discussions of the extra/biblical texts' contents, I shall focus on information about Mary that early Christian sources provide internally rather than contextualizing these accounts with extrinsic information beyond the scope of this paper. I shall also give particular attention to discussions of Mary in the canonical and extracanonical texts that deal with her uniquely female attributes—as virgin, mother, and wife—in order to establish an understanding of Mary as a prime model of female religiosity.

THE CANONICAL TEXTS

Mary is discussed in all four Gospels, which collectively "constitute the major witness to Mary in the NT," but Paul does not refer to Mary by name despite the fact that his writings constitute the largest corpus of NT writings by a single author.[4] For this reason, I shall focus on references to Mary within the Gospels, relying heavily on the scholarly observations within *Mary in the New Testament* as well as in Beverly Roberts Gaventa's *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*.

Gaventa argues that "whatever the aims of Matthew's teaching gospel, the curriculum devotes scant space to Mary."[5] Matthew mentions Mary but a few times, including her in the genealogy of Jesus and in discussions of Jesus' ministry. Ultimately, Gaventa argues that "Matthew's characterization of Mary consists entirely of positioning her within the genealogy (in Matthew 1) and alongside the infant Jesus (in Matthew 2)."[6] She also notes that Mary's only role in this particular Gospel is that of mother, that her ultimate function is to fulfill the prophecy of birthing Emmanuel, and that she is the first figure in Matthew to "receive the salvation inaugurated in Jesus Christ."[7] It is also important to note that Mary's virginal conception of Jesus is mentioned only in Matthew even though the subsequent maintenance of her virginity is not addressed. Mary is no longer referred to as a virgin once the birth narrative reaches Christ's birth; instead, she is referred to as Jesus' mother, reinforcing Gaventa's claim concerning Mary's secondary, subordinate characterization. Nevertheless, the discontinuance of references to Mary as virgin does not necessarily imply any absolute conclusions about the status, length, or ultimate theological implications of Mary's virginity.

This issue is potentially problematic because other textual sources, such as the Protoevangelium of James (which will be presented later in this section), discuss Mary as a perpetual virgin, one who sustains virginity through

conception, birth, and beyond. In contrast, texts such as Matthew's Gospel refer to Mary's virginity as sustained only within the conception of Jesus and do not address the status of her virginity after this point. Furthermore, Mary is perhaps best known in various living religious traditions as the "Virgin Mary," implying the sustained status of her virginity, which is naturally called into question when textual information either does not affirm this status or does not directly confront the issue at all. The issue of perpetual virginity can become a real problem for earthly women, particularly Roman Catholic mothers, who obviously do not have the ability to sustain their virginity during conception, birth, or afterward. This fact entails a critical distinction between Mary and earthly women based on a destructive overvaluation of virginity within the realm of feminine religiosity. Mary's virginal purity is paramount to her role as the ultimate model of feminine religiosity and figurehead of the paradigm of True Womanhood, but earthly mothers are completely unable to maintain this virginal purity to the extent that extracanonical and canonical sources suggest that Mary does. Mary's virginal purity thus stands as an original yet unattainable symbol of complete and perfect Christian womanhood.

If Matthew's Gospel is as limited with regard to information about Mary as Gaventa claims, then Mark offers even less about her. The few times Mark even mentions Mary are only in relation to Jesus' family. Rather than illuminating the figure of Mary, Mark's passages serve only to raise implicit questions that complicate the biblical understanding of her. According to K. P. Donfried, the reference to Jesus' family in Mark 6:3 "gained Marian significance only in later centuries as Christians debated whether Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus."[8] The reason this issue arises is that the passages discussing Jesus' siblings do not definitively identify them as also born of Mary. The question of Mary's continuing status as virgin is not posed merely in an attempt to problematize such biblical passages out of sheer curiosity or opposition. As previously noted, this issue becomes very real when attempts fail to reconcile biblical passages that discuss Mary's virginity in equivocal terms with living religious traditions regarding Mary's virginity as a model for earthly women. Donfried notes that "the continued virginity of Mary after the birth of Jesus is not a question directly raised by the NT" and that "it cannot be said that the NT identifies them [Jesus' siblings mentioned in Mark 6:3] as blood brothers and sisters and hence as children of Mary."[9]

Though neither Mark's text nor any other New Testament text may raise the issue of Mary's virginity directly, the problems noted in the discussion of Matthew's text are compounded by Mark's mention of Jesus' family. Matthew's text does not directly address the continuing status of Mary's

virginity in relation to Jesus, nor does Mark's in relation to Jesus' siblings, all of whom were possibly and arguably born of Mary. The problem presented here is simple, but it has far-reaching implications for earthly women unlike Mary. If Mary was able to maintain her virginal purity, seemingly her most valued physical and spiritual trait, before, during, and after the birth of Jesus (or at any point during His term of gestation), then her virginal status trumps the physical and spiritual capacity of all earthly women. Moreover, if Mary was also able to maintain her virginal purity at any point before, during, and/or after the birth of any children following Jesus, whose personhood and conception/birth could be considered exceptional and not regulated by normal physiological constraints, then she and her unfailing virginity become all the more unattainable for earthly women seeking to fulfill the legacy and standards she left behind for them.

Luke's Gospel might be considered a more promising source for information on Mary as it includes several passages that depict Mary both within Jesus' infancy narrative and, more importantly, within the narrative of Jesus' public ministry. As John Reumann notes, "The Lucan Marian material is more abundant than that of any other NT writer."[10] As he also mentions later in this text, one issue of scholarly contention and narrative significance is whether Mary was one of Luke's living, first-hand sources for much of chapters One and Two of his Gospel. Because "Mary is the only human being who could have had personal knowledge of what is narrated in 1:26–38," some suggest that she is at least one of the eyewitnesses to whom Luke makes reference just before he begins the infancy narrative.[11] Despite this understandable and wishful possibility, however, "the majority of scholars today would have serious questions about the overall historicity of the Lucan infancy narrative," so these scholars tend to assume that modern audiences encounter not the memoirs of Mary herself transmitted intact by Luke but rather a narrative constructed wholly by Luke without direct reference to Mary's version of events.[12] Though this portion of the Lucan Gospel may not directly relate to issues involving Mary's virginal purity and how it affects earthly women, the scholarly debates raise important questions concerning the narrative representations of Mary and the absence of her own voice first-hand.

Christian audiences must recognize that the Mary we encounter in the biblical texts was not transmitted by the Mother of Christ herself but by limited contemporary secondary (perhaps tertiary) and later (notably male-authored) sources that likely sought and received none of their information from Mary herself. Although Mary is to be the ultimate living model of feminine religiosity and to serve as the figurehead of the True Womanhood model of nineteenth-century America, no first-hand and direct accounts of her lived experiences are to be found in the biblical texts. Women seeking to imitate

Mary must rely upon narratives that depict her at best in a secondary fashion and through the perspective of male scribes of the time. These facts raise many questions concerning the literary representation of Mary. The most important problem is that an impossible and unattainable Marian model of virginal purity was ultimately constructed and transmitted by male authors and sanctioned by church fathers. Furthermore, if the living presence of Mary's voice is absent from biblical texts, then a hazy portrait of Christian womanhood is painted with no clear place for women's lived experiences and vocal/textual traditions. Nonetheless, the supreme image of the Virgin Mary stands as an implicit reminder to Christian women of the standards they should, but ultimately cannot, fulfill.

Another central issue involving Mary within Luke's Gospel concerns the depiction of the annunciation. Some scholars have observed that the notion of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus in Luke is not as explicit as that presented in Matthew's account. As John Reumann notes:

> it is not obvious to all that Luke did intend to describe a virginal conception [. . .] This future conception could be understood to take place ". . . in the usual human way, of a child endowed with God's special favor, born at the intervention of the Spirit of God, and destined to be acknowledged as the heir to David's throne as God's Messiah and Son."[13]

Though most scholars positing this possibility assume that Luke intended to describe Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, they acknowledge that this claim cannot ultimately be demonstrated. Concerning Chapter Two of Luke, John Reumann also observes that "there is no reference to the virginal conception; and if we had just chap. 2, there would be no way of knowing that Jesus had not been conceived by Joseph and Mary in the normal way."[14] Furthermore, the idea of the virginal conception of Jesus originated, as Reumann notes, in the Lucan Gospel, and the problem in tracing this tradition back to Luke concerns how it was transmitted to Luke in the first place. Some scholars connect the Lucan virginal conception with passages in Isaiah 7, although "overall the points of contact between [. . . the two] are not specific enough for us to posit Lucan dependence upon Isaiah."[15] Because scholars cannot definitively identify a source for the tradition of Mary's virginal conception of Christ behind the Gospel narratives, they turn to "the possibility and even probability of a pre-Gospel acceptance of the virginal conception."[16] This uncertainty echoes the problems involved in imposing a ubiquitous standard of Mary's virginal purity upon all Roman Catholic single women of the nineteenth century based solely on unclear accounts and differing notions of Mary's virginal conception.

Since Mary's first-hand, personal attitude toward her virginity and virginal conception of Jesus is not revealed in these texts, it is impossible to demonstrate a simple understanding of the virginal conception tradition so often taken for granted in the later tradition. The issue of authentic voice and representation of Mary problematizes the transmission of Marian traditions to modern communities of Roman Catholic women. It is confusing and frustrating today that rigid, absolute standards of virginal purity were expected of earthly women when the origins and practical application of these standards were never addressed consistently, much less exhaustively, by the authors who gave us the Marian traditions. A more critical view suggests that early theologians and Christian practitioners unjustifiably seized upon an enigmatic and appealing, though not fully or consistently substantiated, Marian tale and tradition of unwavering virginal purity. Additionally, modern Christian communities would come to transform this Marian quality into an absolute and omnipresent standard dictating women's overall cultural participation and religious expression.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa's evaluation of the Lucan Gospel yields a more realistic portrayal of a Mary who performs three separate but interconnected religious roles: "Mary appears as a disciple, perhaps even as the first disciple [. . .] In the power words of the Magnificat, she becomes not only a disciple but also a prophet [. . .] Mary's third role in Luke–Acts, that of mother, appears to be her most direct and obvious, but in fact it emerges as the most complex."[17] Though Gaventa does not focus critically on the concept, origin, and transmission of Mary's virginal conception, she recognizes that Mary's role as mother of Jesus is as integral to her biblical and theological importance as it is complex and problematic. The fact that Gaventa seeks to complicate previously simplified notions of Mary's maternal role(s) suggests the importance of a more critical understanding of the scant biblical passages, particularly those she discusses within the Lucan Gospel. This sort of understanding might help modern theologians and faith participants not to accept at face value the daunting Marian benchmark of lasting and impeccable virginal purity. Furthermore, Gaventa's claim that Mary emerges in Luke as the first disciple holds within it the potential for Christians, particularly Roman Catholics, to dramatically re-envision Mary's typically secondary, supportive, and subordinate roles as depicted in the biblical texts—a vision that might allow women to seek a more authentic understanding of Mary's own person and voice rather than reliance on received tradition that assigns Mary narrowly to a realm of austere sexual purity. Despite these positive possibilities for a Lucan Marian vision, the Gospel of John once more reduces Mary to a secondary role without voice or active agency.

In the Gospel of John, Mary does not even appear by name but as a peripheral figure mentioned only in her maternal role in relation to Jesus. As Gaventa notes, the absence of an infancy narrative within John as found in Luke and Matthew raises the question of whether we should "infer that the evangelist is unaware of the stories about Jesus' miraculous conception."[18] Furthermore, she suggests that perhaps John thought of the stories of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus as problematic or offensive. Ultimately, the depiction of Mary in John is limited, expressed only in exclusive relation to Jesus Christ, although Gaventa notes that many, if not all, other characters in the Gospel, including males, were presented only in relation to the Messiah as well, precisely because "John's is a story solely about Jesus."[19] Nonetheless, Mary's full and individually asserted personhood is inaccessible in John's account. Her critical spiritual role as established only in relation to Jesus suggests that, for other earthly women to emulate her properly, they must fulfill Mary's already unattainable model as inactive, secondary agents of spiritual rectitude. If Mary's religiosity is affirmed in relation to Jesus, the ultimate embodiment of man, then earthly women must affirm and express their religiosity in relation to earthly men (who obviously fall short of Jesus' personhood and spiritual standards), thereby limiting women's direct and active roles as Christians. Though Jesus and presumably all Christian (Roman Catholic) men may assert their religiosity individually, the very personhood and Christian identity of women is essentially overtaken and re-directed by Christian men. For women who define the more social/cultural aspects of their Christian religiosity only with regard to or against that of men, efforts to emulate an already problematic feminine model are complicated.

K. P. Donfried also discusses elements of John's Gospel that undercut Mary's role as an individual. As he discusses the significance and implications of Jesus' address to Mary as "Woman" in John 2:4, he notes that "for Jesus to address his mother in the same way as he addresses the Samaritan woman (4:21) and Mary Magdalene (20:13) may mean that he places no special emphasis on her physical motherhood."[20] Furthermore, "the address 'Woman' has been seen as a symbolic evocation of the role of Eve in chap. 3 of Genesis," a correlation that would obviously extrapolate negative connotations of Eve's faults upon Mary.[21] Mary's character as related to Eve would be further tarnished when contrasted with the previously established features of obedience, piety, and purity she developed before, during, and shortly after Jesus' birth (depending on which textual account one consults). Not only is the Marian paradigm of virginal purity unattainable in many ways for earthly women, but even this elusive, yet positive spiritual model becomes tenuous within these passages and threatened by the seeming parallel between Eve and Mary. This suggestion places women problematically between two

extreme standards of feminine religiosity. Women should not aspire to the condition of Eve, who succumbed to her own pride and earthly desires over those of God. If Eve's sinless purity, inherent in her before the fall, is the quality thought to be represented by Mary, then this quality seems to have been lost with Eve's fall; however, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception suggests that Mary shares Eve's original pre-fall sinless-ness while, at the same time, any vestige of this quality instilled in Mary is unattainable for other earthly women. Interestingly enough, other passages in John's Gospel depict Mary as a symbol of the church; clearly, the evocation of both Eve and the church present conflicting metaphorical constructions of Mary that modern theologians and faith participants would have to reconcile in aspiring to Mary as a model of feminine religiosity.

This brief discussion of Mary in the Gospel texts does not expose the nuanced complexities involved in assessing Mary's earthly and spiritual role(s) as intended for earthly women to emulate. The passages noted, however, should appropriately acknowledge the complications that arise within these biblical constructions of the Mother of Jesus. Such depictions influence, even if they do not cause directly, often paradoxical modern Marian traditions. The Gospels' collective, interdependent depictions of Mary certainly raise more questions than they answer for modern faith participants. Mary's virginal purity has long been extolled as a ubiquitous standard of feminine religiosity, especially as co-opted by the True Womanhood model of nineteenth-century American Christian culture. However, the historical and (biblical) textual authorities specifically concerning Mary's virginal conception of Christ are far from uniform. Even if agreed upon within early Christian communities, the sustained status of Mary's virginal purity and the implications of this purity for earthly women are seldom entertained at all within the Gospel texts. Nonetheless, virginity has been upheld above all of Mary's earthly and spiritual qualities as a litmus test of feminine religiosity. It is difficult to find a functional, realistic, and practical space in which Roman Catholic women may live and express themselves as earthly women who cannot traverse the fine line between virginity and maternity in quite the seamless and simultaneous fashion that Mary seemed to have mastered. Although early Christian authors portraying Mary would clearly like us to believe she navigated this challenge with apparent heavenly blessing, ease, and impeccable grace, physiological reality denies this achievement to all others.

Additionally, Mary's own voice is at best transmitted through traditions largely dictated by men. At worst, her voice is squelched to the extent that we might admit to having neither received nor retained any vestiges of the true, historical Mary or her living Christian spirit. In the latter, more dismal case, we must rely on male constructions of the most integral and best-known

female biblical figure who inevitably became, for better or worse, the dominant religious model for Christian womanhood. Needless to say, these inconsistencies have affected the lived experiences of earthly Roman Catholic women for whom Mary is a problematic and incompatible model as the overqualified and quintessential "True Woman."

AN EXTRACANONICAL TEXT

The Protoevangelium of James is an early Christian text, an extracanonical source that speaks more of Mary than all of the canonical texts combined. Early scholars gave the text the title of "Protoevangelium" or "Proto-Gospel," "reflecting the fact that the story takes place prior to the narrations of Matthew and Luke."[22] As Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes, the text is not well known outside scholarly communities, which is unfortunate given the wealth of information it provides about Mary. Gaventa explains that the Protoevangelium demonstrates "the first evidence of Christian interest in Mary herself," especially in contrast to the New Testament, which "exhibits no interest in Mary as such, but only in Mary as a character in the story of Jesus."[23] Gaventa also cites other early Christian writings besides the New Testament texts that show little or no interest in Mary. Perhaps the most interesting and pertinent topics concerning Mary that the Protoevengelium discusses directly are those which, if addressed at all, are presented unclearly and inconsistently within the canonical texts. This extracanonical text suggests that Mary remained a virgin even as Jesus was born and seemingly affirms even her post-partum virginity.[24] The Protoevangelium maintains a refreshing focus on the Virgin Mary, tracing her life from birth to her dedication in the temple to her courtship with Joseph to her giving birth to Jesus.

Nevertheless, the text's depiction of Mary's perpetual virginal purity is problematic for earthly women. The Protoevangelium was never officially codified by church authorities for inclusion with other canonical biblical texts, but its portrayal of Mary, though perhaps more sensitive to and interested in the Virgin than any other text of its kind and time, still creates an impossible standard of feminine religiosity for women to fulfill. Even if Roman Catholic immigrant women of nineteenth-century America were ever able to turn to this text as a source of information about Mary (and it is highly doubtful that they could or did ever access the text), they would have encountered a brand of sustained virginal purity they could never physically emulate. Thus, the author of the Protoevangelium spends the time and exerts the literary and theological energy deserved by a figure such as Mary while he also further removes her as a model for Christian womanhood from a practical, earthly context in which all other earthly women must exist and func-

tion; unlike Mary, they are without the supernatural benefit and quality of (or the capacity for) perpetual virginity and resultant spiritual purity.

Gaventa observes that questions of Mary's virginity prior to conception, during birth, and following Jesus' birth became controversial later in the development of Christianity. These controversies emerged both within the Christian community and between Christians and non-Christians. Apparently, points of contention that arose concerning Mary's virginal status (as discussed in Christian sources) stemmed less from the Gospel texts than from arguments over the correct interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.[25] Discrepancies among interpretations surfaced as theologians differed over the variant renderings of this passage as presented in both the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament texts) and the Hebrew Bible (original rendering of the Old Testament texts). The Septuagint's translation of the original Hebrew passage clearly suggests that a virgin will conceive, whereas the Hebrew Bible's version of this passage suggests that she is merely a young maiden and not necessarily a virgin. Thus, the various constructions and interpretations of Mary's virginity in early Christian sources are confusing and problematic enough, and these controversies are exacerbated by tension between Christian and non-Christian interpretations. For these reasons, the same issue of unanimity concerning Mary's virginal purity emerges within discussions of the Protoevangelium as within those of the canonical Gospel texts. This fact clearly demonstrates that early Christian writers and theologians were not in ready agreement with each other over Mary's virginal status, even if later textual and lived religious traditions suggest otherwise. Once more, absolute and unrelenting standards of virginal purity imposed on Roman Catholic women are called into question by the disputed status of Mary. Despite these conflicting textual accounts and interpretations of the texts, it is obvious within the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century which view of Mary's virginal purity came to dominate Marian thought for a sustained period of time. During this time, Mary's supernatural quality would gain a pervasive influence over and set a high standard for expressions of feminine religiosity.

Implications of Received Marian Textual Traditions

Arguments over the status and theological significance of Mary's virginity still occur, and it seems that an overt connection between her virginity (whatever its status and significance) and earthly and spiritual purity has been sustained so as to link these two qualities inextricably for earthly women to emulate as one. Although current Roman Catholic Church doctrine may affirm at least Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, modern lay readers are

likely to become confused by the various complex, inconsistent, and often challenging passages concerning Mary's virginity. Women especially might be unclear concerning the exact nature and course of such heavenly virginity that they are expected to emulate. Mary's virginity is connected with notions of purity in terms of moral behavior, conventions of ritual purity, or a general spiritual attitude and demeanor.

The inconsistencies and obscurity surrounding her virginal purity, however, inevitably trickled down to the lived religious experiences of nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women. After all, these women lived in a country dominated by social conventions that co-opted the religious figure of Mary as the figurehead of America's mainstream cultural model of True Womanhood. The women had historically encountered the Virgin Mary within their native religious heritage, but they were forced in the nineteenth century to re-envision her as the ultimate paradigm for the various female cultural roles they were expected to fulfill as well. These circumstances forced women to construct both religious and secular (social and cultural) self-perceptions based on Mary as she exemplified the True Womanhood model. In this process, the simple virginity-purity models imposed on women and the controversial textual discussions of these models complicated the modes and examples of feminine religiosity available for them.

Arguments over the interpretation of Mary's virginal purity within the various texts mentioning Mary might by themselves be dismissed as mere issues of literary transmission and authorship. In the context of lived religious experience, however, these problems affect real notions and standards of cultural/social and religious purity. For better or worse, this purity has been conveniently linked with notions of biblical, Mariological virginity that are often unclear and highly debated. Furthermore, notions of Mary's virginal purity are discussed largely in relation to men and have been historically transmitted only by male authors/scribes. Though the cultural model of True Womanhood separately categorizes purity and virginity, the two are inextricably linked in the figure of Mary, the ideal model of feminine religiosity and the exemplar of True Womanhood ideals. Just as Mary's virginal purity and spiritual submission allowed her to be blessed among women so she could carry the son of God, so such standards are imposed upon subsequent generations of Christian women despite differences in historical, cultural, and even religious contexts. Thus, constructions of Mary as a paradoxical figure place women in a religious and cultural bind in which they are expected to emulate a model that was not systematically and unilaterally expressed or interpreted and that was transmitted by and largely for the benefit of men. This imposition by authority blatantly ignores the personhood, lives, experiences, and voices of Roman Catholic women themselves. Instead, it would seem that

Christian men would be the primary beneficiaries of a dual social/cultural and religious model that relegated women to the traditional domestic sphere and upheld constricting, oppressive standards concerning female sexuality.

Because Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century had little choice between a religious model and a cultural/social model when it came to assimilating into American culture, these complex and paradoxical models complicated their efforts toward social and religious naturalization. Although allegedly natural and therefore expected, women's purity and virginity as stipulated by the True Womanhood model and by Mary herself resulted in an internal struggle for Roman Catholic immigrant women. The True Woman image exemplified by Mary posed a dichotomy between a religious ideal and the reality of the earthly domestic sphere in which women were expected to operate. With the canonical and extracanonical sources of Mary as a religious backdrop, it is necessary to assess the paradoxical nature and implications that arise from the inherent tension between Mary's model of religiosity and the True Womanhood model. Mary exemplifies, complicates, and overfulfills the requirements of the nineteenth-century True Woman, a situation that problematizes Roman Catholic immigrant women's earnest attempts to assimilate American religious and cultural/social conventions, both of which refer back to (problematic) constructions of Mary. As is easily discernable already, this process produced a challenging mode of secular and religious being for these women who both could and could not fully emulate the cultural model while simultaneously emulating Mary.

EXPANSION OF TEXTUAL SOURCES: MODERN MARIAN TRADITIONS

Most living and past Marian traditions have expanded greatly upon Scriptural accounts of Mary. Often communities focus on a particular aspect of Mary's character as the galvanizing virtue of their congregational purpose, iconic veneration, and/or their religious traditions. Marian traditions that arose in America during the nineteenth century help illuminate the paradoxical role Mary came to play within Roman Catholic immigrant communities.

Marian devotion experienced considerable growth during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America, a time marked by large-scale immigration. As Susan Hill Lindley notes, "Catholic faith was central to the identity of most immigrants, but it was a faith tied to the distinctive ethnic traditions they had left. Ethnic identity was symbolized and reinforced by devotion to a particular saint," such as the Blessed Mother Mary.[26] By the mid-twentieth century, however, American Catholicism experienced a decline in devotional practices, according to some scholars. The faith tradition also experienced a shift in ideology, resulting in the emergence of distinct forms

of Mariology, according to other scholars. This section of my paper will examine selected ethnic expressions (Italian, Cuban, and American) of Marian devotion and will explore the alleged phases of popularity and subsequent decline and/or mutations of such expressions in each tradition as well as proposed explanations for these phenomena. The selected ethnic expressions include: Italian Marian devotion displayed at the annual *festa* of the Madonna of Mount Carmel in New York; Cuban devotion toward Our Lady of Charity; and American devotion toward Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Pittsburgh. Particular attention is given to the role of women in American Marian devotion because of the diverse and often contested ways in which the figure of Mary presents a model of female religiosity, a phenomenon that may be linked to the rise and decline of devotional practice.

Timothy Kelly and Joseph Kelly, in their article "Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Gender Roles, and the Decline of Devotional Practice," discuss devotional practices involving a painting of the Madonna and child. They document participation in devotion as having begun in the late nineteenth century, reaching a peak during the 1930s and 1940s, and going into a rapid decline in the 1950s. The authors speak specifically of the twenty years following 1930 when Catholic women particularly frequented St. Philomena Church in Pittsburgh's East End in order to take part in the novena to the painting of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, who was "perhaps the most popular religious icon of the twentieth century."[27] Forty-four parishes and convents in the Pittsburgh diocese were offering their own weekly novenas by 1939.[28] The Our Lady of Perpetual Help painting "was a great solace and support, a power of unequaled value to those in pain or suffering. A person resigned to suffering, or who aspired to resignation, could find no better refuge than Our Lady of Perpetual Help and no better access to her than through the weekly novena at St. Philomena parish."[29] In 1950, however, participant numbers began to decline, and attendance was reduced to only ten percent of the 1950 average over the next two decades.[30]

Kelly and Kelly suggest linking the decline in American Catholic devotional practices to "a much broader transformation in American Catholic religious sensibility that began in the wake of World War II and continued throughout the 1950s."[31] They propose that

> changes in participation levels in the Our Lady of Perpetual Help devotion indicate that American women's ideology of gender may have changed before the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s [. . .] Catholic women who once embraced a ritual that affirmed their roles as passive nurturers increasingly rejected that feminine ideal. That they did so in the years before the rebirth of feminist movement suggests that they had

> begun to redefine their lives earlier than we previously believed.[32]

Kelly and Kelly seem to suggest that a significant, observable decline occurred in Marian devotional practices with reference both to the Our Lady of Perpetual Help painting and to pan-American Catholic devotional practices. They further posit that this change resulted from a major ideological shift concerning women's views of their own religious and secular roles. Despite these claims, they admit that explaining the decline is complicated: "Catholics all across America appear to have abandoned devotional rituals by 1980, and the decline in this Pittsburgh parish likely fits this broader trend. But most studies identify the Second Vatican Council as the cause of the decline in American devotional behaviors, and thereby suggest that the decline only began after 1962."[33] However, the authors identify causes that may have led to such a decline during the decade preceding the council.

Kelly and Kelly suggest that Our Lady of Perpetual Help emerged as a devotional icon following a century's worth of heightened devotional expression in America. They also noted that the "devotional climate" of the time was dependent upon support mainly from women. In this instance, women's ideological shift during the fifties and sixties might have altered this climate to the extent that patterns of devotional practice at the very least changed and at most began to decline and even disappear. According to Kelly and Kelly, the image of the Virgin seemingly encouraged Catholic women to endure their diasporic cultural settings prior to the mid-twentieth century. Even so, they apparently began to "reject the novena's representation of power" and sought "control in the temporal world," a process that in both principle and practice eventually diverted women away from the Virgin and her influence as time progressed.[34] Kelly and Kelly claim that "only when that 'feminine' role [that Mary embodied and that her image promoted] began to change would this particular dimension of Our Lady of Perpetual Help devotion diminish in its appeal to women, and at that point it would likely begin the kind of slide from popularity that we know it experienced in the 1950s."[35] A major impetus for the shift in women's religious ideological consciousness was that "women's increased participation in the labor force began to enable women to envision a route to mastery over their material lives, and to move them to reconsider, and even shed, those cultural experiences rooted in a less autonomous life."[36] Ultimately, "the present trend toward greater equality and independence for women, implying as it does a weakening of the foundations upon which the prerogatives of male dominance in marriage were based, has led many wives to be less tolerant and long-suffering [as the image of Mary had encouraged them to be] than they have been."[37]

In his book *Madonna of 115th Street*, Robert Orsi tells the story of "a religious celebration, the annual *festa* of the Madonna of Mount Carmel on East 115th Street in New York City, and of the devotion to this Madonna which flourished among Italian immigrants and their American-born or -raised children who lived around her."[38] Apparently, "the devotion to la Madonna del Carmine" has a venerable history in southern Italy, where the annual festa is celebrated in much the same way as it is in New York," and Orsi emphasizes that "the immigrants sought to reproduce the devotion in their new home, introduced and integrated their children into it, and marched through the streets of New York behind their Madonna."[39] Indeed, "Southern Italy's strong attachment to the Madonna is related by and large to the matriarchal character of its peasant society."[40] Because the Italians of Harlem have identified the *domus* as what "the people themselves claimed, implicitly, or explicitly, as the foundation of their understanding of the good and the basis of their moral judgment," Orsi focuses on the dynamic relationship between home and family as the cultural and religious basis for their particular expressions of Marian devotion.[41] Because women have been so often relegated to the domestic sphere, especially within the nineteenth-century True Womanhood model, the connection between women and the home parallels conveniently the connection between the home and Mary. Therefore, correlative expectations are imposed upon earthly women that demand they fulfill the domestic standards set by Mary.

As Orsi previously noted, the Virgin's statue on 115th Street "was a visible link between Italy and East Harlem."[42] The procession in the *festa* was meant to foster a sensibility of remembrance of traditional religious processions in Italy, and the annual festa provided an entire week in which participants could honor this heritage and renew themselves as Catholic Italian-Americans.[43] Thus devotion to the Blessed Mother served as a mediator for religious and ethnic identity. The Madonna was approached by devotees seeking healing and help for all manner of family and household dilemmas, ranging from common, minor troubles to major life hardships. The poor sought her healing for colds and dental problems, and many families sought her guidance over (often multigenerational) familial problems.[44] "One of the central meanings of the annual *festa*, then, was the power and authority of the *domus* over the lives of individuals and its resilience to their anger."[45] As Joseph A. Varacalli notes, some scholars posit that displaying images such as the Madonna statue served "to emphasize the sacredness of the *domus*."[46]

Extending beyond the *domus*, the celebration of the *festa* also helped to establish a bridge between the home/family and the larger Italian community in East Harlem. Establishing the Madonna's image on 115th Street itself was an act that physically grounded the religious identity of Italian-

American participants in their geographical setting. This resulted in a "sacralization of Italian Harlem" because Mary resided there and because the "devotion absorbed the geography into itself so that no distinction can be made between the religious event and the setting."[47] Indeed, as Orsi notes, "By celebrating the Madonna of 115th Street, the Italians claimed the neighborhood for themselves."[48]

The devotional role of women in honoring the Madonna seems to be anchored in a connection between the devotee and the Virgin in a relationship that defined much of the Italian-American community's perceptions of women. Orsi goes so far as to say that the devotion to the Madonna of 115th Street "was a women's devotion" in that it directly involved women participants and illustrated the role of women in larger Italian culture. Varacalli's text discusses Mary as appealing particularly to Italian peasant women because of her vast knowledge and experience in "ultimate spiritual glory and earthly tragedy" and because she "was seen as the one who could best understand a mortal mother's hopes, fears, and concerns for the family and surroundings."[49] Orsi acknowledges the mixed blessings that the connection between the Madonna and Italian women produced: "at the same time that the devotion offered women . . . consolation, it reaffirmed those aspects of the culture which oppressed them: the source of their comfort was also the source of their entrapment."[50] This troubling combination of liberation and limitation resulted from a number of factors, namely the ultimate male control of women's limited opportunity to assert their private power in the public sphere and the expectation of women to bear the responsibility of penitence for the community.[51] Ultimately, the image of the Madonna and participation in devotional rituals served both to give women additional space in which to express themselves religiously and to place on them additional burdens of expected action and attitude.

Susan Hill Lindley provides another perspective from which to view models of female religiosity and Catholic women:

> The characteristics promoted by the church for the laity were those identified in the nineteenth century as natural for women: emotionalism and sentimentalism, docility and obedience to authority, represented by the church's hierarchy and clergy. Yet we should not conclude that certain religious values and activities were simply imposed on immigrant women by the church's hierarchy or by American culture. Particular familial and religious roles for women were part of the ethnic heritage of many immigrants and were embraced and endorsed by women themselves. Religious devotion to God and especially to Mary . . . helped Catholic women preserve their identity and

> provided a source of comfort, strength, and meaning in a world that was often harsh and bewildering.[52]

Thus, Lindley warns against viewing all religious values and activities as imposed on women, and she recommends understanding the traditions as also preserved by women themselves within their ethnic heritage. She views ethnically grounded roles for women more positively than the dichotomous terms in which Orsi speaks of Italian-American women's roles in relation to the Madonna; if nothing else, these two views suggest the complex implicit and explicit, and public and private, effects the Virgin had on Italian American women's roles. Depending on the perspective one assumes, Mary may be seen as liberating, limiting, or a paradoxical mixture of both. These paradoxes attest to the understanding that Mary, even as a simple and integral piece of Roman Catholic religious culture, complicated arguments for women's traditional cultural roles. Though women could perhaps look to Mary for hope and endurance, it seems apparent that the male-dominated culture looked to Mary for reinforcement of women's roles that arguably benefited men most.

The Madonna also served as an image of stability for a people experiencing inner and outer turbulence as a diasporic people. Simply knowing that her statue would remain on 115th Street provided Italian-Americans from Harlem with a reference point for their religious and cultural heritage and identity even though the community composition fluctuated over time. During the 1950s and 1960s, *cara Harlem*, referring to the religious solidarity of Italian-Americans within Harlem, began to disappear, but "what continued to exist of it, in reality and in memory, existed in relation to the Madonna."[53] Orsi notes that "continued participation in the devotion, even from a distance, offered the people who moved away some continuity and social mobility," and he suggests that "what is left of Italian Harlem seems to be clustered around the Madonna."[54]

In support of Orsi's claim, a pastor of an Italian Harlem parish is recorded as having written the following in 1953: "Many people who were once living in the neighborhood but now are far away will remember the Church which is associated with the earliest memories of their life, will remember the Statue of the Blessed Mother at whose feet they poured their hearts at the time of their first joys, their first sorrows."[55] As Orsi again notes the apparent decline during the 1950s of "the Madonna's power," he asserts that her devotees will remember her statue. As evidence of the decrease in devotional practice, he notes fewer reports concerning divine graces in bulletins of local parishes, and he states that "many of those which are printed have a crude quality of bartering about them. In 1947, for example, a woman wrote into the church from Brooklyn asking the priests to light one candle in gratitude

for a grace received and another 'because I am expecting another favor.' The fear and trembling before the holy in its place is gone, replaced by a wager."[56] These examples echo notions suggested by Kelly and Kelly of women envisioning "a route to mastery over their material lives" as they gradually discard notions of passive acceptance and endurance in favor of active pursuit of material wellbeing. In other words, women during the 1950s shifted their petitions to Mary from seeking the strength to endure to seeking for themselves material benefits that would aid them in their everyday lives.

Orsi notes that the Italian-Americans who still came to the *festa* during the 1950s and 1960s participated in a very different sort of procession. Apparently, the annual feasts of this time saw "A greater emphasis on order and decorum [. . .] as the clergy attempted to control what they saw as the less acceptable features of this devotion; and there was at last a chance of their succeeding in this. . . . The meaning of the festa is interior, controlled, a matter of the heart and not the street. The people have come not to march and eat and cry in the hot streets, but to go to church."[57] He notes again that the Madonna of East Harlem had lost her "power of the past. . . . The Madonna had been relegated to a subordinate position, the handmaid of the priest who founded the order in charge of the church on 115th Street."[58] Again, this situation seems to support Kelly and Kelly's argument for a shift in religious ideology that effected a decline in Marian devotional practices across the United States during the nineteenth century.

Salvatore Primeggia, though observant of a definite change in Italian-American Marian devotion during the mid-twentieth century, claims that "a distinct Mariology arose" that flourishes "as strong as ever among the third and fourth generations" of Italian-Americans.[59] Primeggia suggests that "throughout Italian-American parishes today, formal and cult adoration of the Madonna continues to flourish."[60] Robert Orsi explains this preservation of religious expression: "the women in the community believed that Mary had suffered the pains of childbirth, that she had menstruated, and that she worried constantly about her child. They felt that she could understand them because she had shared their most private experiences. . . "[61] Orsi posits a statement extending Primeggia's claim:

> As they insisted on a personal God who could know the hidden sorrows of their lives, the Italians of East Harlem revealed a sense of the insufficiency of a male God. Women seemed to doubt that a male God could understand their needs and hopes and so they turned to another, complementary divine figure whose life was one of suffering for her child, a story that resonated deeply with the economy of Italian-American family life.[62]

Though Primeggia does not identify a decline in devotional practices of Italian-Americans as Orsi and Kelly and Kelly do, his suggestion of "a distinct Mariology" that arose during the time that many other scholars note as a time of significant decrease in devotion seems to support Kelly and Kelly's argument of a change in "religious sensibility, a shift in ideology," though this shift certainly differs from that which they reveal in relation to the Pittsburgh Catholic community. In other words, perhaps what Primeggia defines less as a decline in devotional practice and more as the development of "a distinct Mariology" demonstrates, if not a decline in devotional practice and the support of Mary's more traditional model of female religiosity, then a shift in the religious ideology and identity of Italian-Americans that resulted in different, rather than diminished, devotional practices. Orsi's observation of the changed form and content of the annual Italian feasts also supports this conjecture.

Thomas Tweed's account of the Our Lady of Charity image presents a view of twentieth-century Marian devotion that both complements and contrasts the previous two studies because the Cuban Madonna's image was not brought to the States until September of 1961: "The statue of Our Lady of Charity that journeyed from Havana to Miami had sacred power for her dispersed devotees, even though it was not the original image."[63] Apparently, the "Golden Age" of Cuban Catholic history in general occurred from about 1750 until 1850, earlier than the swell of Catholic devotional practices for the Italian-American and Pittsburgh communities. Also, since "most observers, native and foreign, still found the [Cuban] institution extraordinarily weak" and because of the time during which the Madonna's image was brought to the States, this Cuban expression of devotional fervor experienced a surge of popularity right about the time when the other traditions' practices seem to have been declining.[64] "Cuban exiles in Key West and New York had appealed to Our Lady of Charity during the tumultuous 1890s,"[65] but in 1959 a large number of exiles and migrants fled Castro's Cuba and came to the U.S. "That almost unprecedented migration transformed the cultural landscape of Miami."[66]

The devotees of Our Lady of Charity in Miami connected her "with the collective identity of the Cuban diaspora and the fate of the island nation."[67] Tweed notes that, though "informal domestic piety" toward the Virgin continued before and after the mass migration to Miami, "organized public devotions to Our Lady of Charity . . . began shortly after the first waves of migrants arrived from Castro's Cuba."[68] After a permanent building was erected in place of the provisional chapel housing the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity, "more and more Cubans came to homage and petition the national patroness."[69]

Women's devotional patterns in the Our Lady of Charity Shrine differed from the Pittsburgh and Italian Harlem shrines in attendance and frequency. Documenting the predominantly female participation in Cuban religious practice, Tweed claims that "the patterns have altered somewhat in exile . . . *men* attend and participate more, especially at the shrine."[70] Tweed suggests that this pattern was established because of the Virgin's connections with national identity: males shared a devotional connection to the Madonna because they most often served as Cuban independence fighters. Tweed still notes, however, that "women are more likely to express other personal concerns and visit when no public ritual is scheduled."[71]

All three cultural expressions of Marian devotion—Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Pittsburgh, the Madonna of 115th Street in Italian Harlem, and Our Lady of Charity in Miami—illustrate distinctive ethnic practices. To the devotees of all of Mary's manifestations, her image seems to impart a particular sense of identity, both religious and ethnic. The older shrines in Italian Harlem and Pittsburgh suggest evidence of a shift in American Catholic ideology, particularly for women. Though Roman Catholic immigrant women could certainly turn to Mary for ethnic solidarity and religious and cultural preservation, Mary was also a common source of oppressive American cultural norms for women. These standards were succinctly embodied in the nineteenth-century True Woman, the dual cultural and religious model that often relegated and limited women's experiences to the domestic sphere. The variant manifestations of the shift in ideology enrich the complex heritage of American and immigrant expressions of Marian devotion. While the shrine from Cuba and its growing popularity seem to be more circumstantial and more related to ethnic matters of politics and society, the decades of the 1950s and 1960s are clearly a time of change for American and immigrant devotional practice, if not religious ideology. The empirical data concerning the Italian Harlem and Pittsburgh shrines point to some major, wide-ranging transformations in devotion that seems to result from a common change in ideology. Overall, these three instances of ethnic Marian devotional expression provide small pieces of the overall puzzle of American Catholic devotional practices regarding the Blessed Mother. If nothing else, they complicate previously simplified notions of Mary's role as an entirely positive exemplar for female religiosity, of the general role Mary has played in American Catholicism, of devotional practice patterns in the U.S., and of ethnic expressions of devotion.

THE TRUE WOMANHOOD MODEL OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

As Susan Hill Lindley suggests in "*You Have Stept Out of your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America*, three models dominated feminine religiosity in America in the nineteenth century. The images of the good wife, the Republican mother, and the "true woman" described and prescribed the socially and religiously acceptable roles for women.

The image of the good wife arose during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries from within the Puritan community. Portraits of the good wife come from ministerial literature of the period; these emerged during a time when women tended to exceed men in church membership and activities. For this reason, the good wife model was largely concerned with women's religious behavior in all areas of their lives under the guidance of their husbands.[72] The image and role of the Puritan good wife gradually evolved into that of the Republican mother during the time of the American Revolution. As citizens of a budding America, women needed and desired to contribute to their growing nation. According to Lindley, "Republican Motherhood represented both continuity with and change from the colonial ideal of the 'Good Wife.' "[73] A woman was expected to fulfill her social and religious roles primarily within the home by influencing the religious and moral character of her family, but, at the same time, her knowledge and insight could extend into the public and political sector during the Republican period.

Lindley suggests that the Republican Mother model of the later eighteenth century, though integral as a social and political model for women, was a transitional model for women, following the colonial good wife model and preceding the "incredibly pervasive" cult of "true womanhood"; the two later models were chiefly concerned with feminine religiosity as expressed in a larger cultural setting.[74] "The Cult of True Womanhood," the primary ideal Americans espoused during the nineteenth century, prescribed four "cardinal virtues" for women: a "true woman" aims to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. The True Womanhood model provided strict guidelines for women in the nineteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant, nuns and laity. The model was grounded in religious principles, but its application also concerned all-encompassing elements of secular, earthly, and domestic life for women as well.[75] These virtues were to be cultivated by all Christian women in America. However, the virtues were crucial for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the early to mid-nineteenth century who sought assimilation into their new American and largely Protestant environment(s).

Immigrant Catholics coming to the States between 1820 and 1850 were largely responsible for establishing Roman Catholicism as the largest Christian group in America, a fact that holds true at the present. Among some groups, Roman Catholicism has maintained traditional and cultural ties to Mary that reach back to early Christian thought concerning the Virgin. These ties have also accommodated uniquely American manifestations, particularly among immigrant communities. For this reason, Roman Catholic immigrant women claim an important role in demonstrating the connection between the True Womanhood model, largely a social and cultural paradigm, and Mary, a paradigm of feminine religiosity. In their efforts to acculturate themselves to/within the dominant social model of the time, Roman Catholic women eventually combined Mary's model of feminine religiosity with the True Womanhood model as it seemed the greater American culture wished for them to do. This blending of spiritual expectations concerning Mary with social and cultural expectations concerning the somewhat more secular True Womanhood model produced what I call a sort of dual cultural-religiosity paradigm.

Within this paradigm, cultural and religious roles for women are inextricably linked; women are expected to consolidate their interests and efforts by channeling all their energy toward a directive they cannot call wholly their own, even if this directive claims to combine their native heritage and traditions with American cultural standards in a mutually beneficial manner. This cultural-religiosity paradigm manipulated Roman Catholic immigrant women's traditional reliance upon Mary as a source of religious identity that could be used to draw these women further and further into the cultural roles that a largely prejudicial Protestant America felt were appropriate and necessary for them. This dual model seemed to function well because it seemed on the surface that these women would benefit both religiously and culturally from submitting to both models simultaneously within their new American cultural/religious setting. In this way, the paradigm touted misleadingly its ability to enable Roman Catholic women both to assimilate into American culture and to preserve their religious heritage, particularly pertaining to Mary, who was conveniently co-opted as the figurehead of the American True Woman model. In a more positive understanding, Lindley notes (as previously cited) that "Religious devotion to God and especially to Mary and the saints [. . .] helped Catholic women preserve their identity and provided a source of comfort, strength, and meaning in a world that was often harsh and bewildering."[76] As will be discussed, this dual cultural/religious model for women thwarted their ability to effectively and thoroughly emulate the virtues of the models separately; perhaps they seemed similar enough to blend seamlessly.

Despite some degree of pervasive Protestant hostility toward immigrant Roman Catholic women, Susan Hill Lindley asserts that the latter "had a unique position among American Christians, for their tradition provided not one but two respectable roles for women: wife and mother; and the honored single life of a religious sister."[77] These roles, exemplified by Mary, easily parallel the cardinal virtues prescribed by the True Woman model of the nineteenth century. Lindley later discusses Roman Catholic women's interaction with this model: "middle-class Catholic women, like their Protestant sisters, found ways to use or reinterpret the image to expand their concerns and activities, even as they insisted they agreed with the ideal."[78] Thus Roman Catholic women, particularly immigrants, utilized both the model they knew in Mary and the one to which they were introduced in True Womanhood in order to navigate their social, cultural, and religious relations with "native" American neighbors. The progression from the Puritan good wife to the True Woman of the nineteenth century culminated in a manner that necessitated the co-opting of the Virgin Mary as a model of female piety in order for Roman Catholic women to thrive in America and successfully assimilate dominant cultural value systems of the time.

This dual cultural/religious model also raised issues of male versus female spirituality, sparking debates over innate and cultivated religiosity that continue today. Over the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, popular cultural and religious views of women's spirituality changed dramatically. As Lindley discusses, the view of women as the spiritually weaker sex descended from the sinful Eve fully evolved into the view of women as innately more spiritual and moral. Although some Puritan leaders went so far as to assert that women's gender-specific experiences (of sexuality and reproduction) made them naturally more likely to participate in and respond to religious devotion, it was not until the advent of the "true woman" image that women *as women* became more devout.

The notions of submissiveness and domesticity, as Lindley notes, were not new standards for the nineteenth-century woman. But the notions of piety and purity ascribed to her are newer and more far-reaching in their implications for women. In adapting to American culture and the national True Woman ideal, immigrant Roman Catholic women learned notions of natural piety and purity that would have immediately and understandably evoked the image of Mary. Aspiring to emulate the Virgin Mary as an example of these cardinal virtues would have allowed these women to distinguish themselves from Eve's model of feminine religiosity—that of disobedience, moral impurity, and impiety. In this way, immigrant Catholic women could conform to dominant religious standards in a manner that preserved their religious heritage, particularly elements of Marian devotion, while also satisfying the

social and cultural standards of nineteenth-century America. This process entailed both benefits and risks for these women. Though preserved Marian traditions, the figure of Mary herself was manipulated as a sort of convenient pawn within American culture's move to put women in their place via the True Womanhood model.

The notion of purity was especially important for these women not only because it was one of the four cardinal virtues of True Womanhood but also because it was the motivation for and result of Mary's virginity. Barbara Welter, in her seminal article on "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," discusses the importance of purity for American women of the time: "Purity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine. Without it she was in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order."[79] Just as the religious virtues of women may be tested by earthly immorality and satanic influences, so women's purity may be threatened, even assaulted, by men's innate, voracious sexual drives and desires. In this way, the piety modeled by Mary and the purity extolled in the True Woman combined to women's seeming advantage; together these virtues and the models that best illustrated them could help Roman Catholic women define and defend themselves. This empowered women to affirm their religious identity and to seek a distinctive American identity that seemingly combined the best of both their native traditions and new American cultural standards.

MARY AS PARADOXICAL AND INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE MODEL OF THE "TRUE WOMAN"

To view Mary as paradoxical and incompatible with the model of the "True Woman" is exploratory in nature and based in part on criticism written in the twenty-first century. This understanding results from rhetorical analysis, relying on historical and ethnographic insight when available. Because primary sources from Roman Catholic immigrant women have been nearly impossible to locate, it might seem as if this paper leaves as little room for their voices as some of the texts previously noted leave for Mary's own voice. The lack of such primary sources stems in part from the fact that women religious (nuns) were the only Roman Catholic women of the nineteenth century who had the time, energy, and justification for recording personal testimonies and memoirs. This fact attests all the more to the challenging situations in which lay immigrant women found themselves. They had families to care for and domestic responsibilities to fulfill while women religious were privileged to have more individual and collective spiritual matters as their primary concern in life. Nonetheless, I do not wish to squelch lay women's voices, which are already limited in number and difficult to transmit

effectively. My analysis may appear to force upon these women a personal, cultural, social, and religious consciousness they may very well not have had the ability or inclination to cultivate. I have not found any sustained examination of how the religious paradigm and the social/cultural paradigm came together for women despite several ethnographic sources that briefly discuss Mary and the True Womanhood model in relation to one another. My sources often acknowledge the paradoxical application of both models for women but tend to treat the issue as a small part of a larger struggle for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century.

For this reason, much of the following section will expand on limited conversations about Marian paradoxes that appear in cited source materials. This section is intended only to conjecture about a more complete picture of the myriad challenges faced by these immigrant women. Much more work could and should be conducted on this topic, using primary sources from nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women themselves. This study is but the first step toward an adequate analysis of two fundamental and tangible issues concerning the real-life situations of these women and the models they were expected to fulfill.

First, as already discussed in the extra/canonical source section, it is critical to understand that the biblical portraits of Mary that have dominated many Marian traditions scantily and inconsistently portray a Mary whose virginity seems crucial to her heavenly and earthly status but is ambiguously denoted, defined and extrapolated as a model for all other women. The very fact that Mary is "a simple heroine who left no diaries or personal testimonies"[80] strongly suggests a basic problem of voice: Mary is to be the ultimate religious (and social/cultural) model for earthly women, yet she herself in no way communicates the origin and significance of the qualities that earned her all her various titles and praise. This issue of voice is reflected to some degree in one study conducted by Colleen McDannell. Discussing Catholic women's literary writings and publications within a nineteenth-century context, McDannell notes that "Catholic women, although they produced devotional poetry, analytical articles, and domestic fiction, rarely presented their own religious attitudes."[81] Furthermore, the equivocal depictions of Mary's biblical virginity beg critical questions for earthly women. They leave them with no clear answers as to the exact content and duration of Mary's virginal purity. Moreover, while the principle of Mary's virginity is widely accepted and known, it seems easier for earthly women to articulate than to emulate.

Second, the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century presented a dilemma for women whether viewed in conjunction with the Marian paradigm or not. Mixing virginal purity with expectations of fertility within

marriage further complicates an already circumstantially problematic situation. Marriage and sexual submission within that sacrament were in stark contrast with the virtue of sustained purity within the True Womanhood model. Virginal purity was expected of women prior to marriage, and they were expected eventually to marry and produce children. This tension created a fundamental dilemma for women: no segue or solid bridge was provided in transition from one to the other. Virginal purity was necessary and expected, just as was marriage, but the two logistically cannot coincide. This conflict creates a problem for women: virginity and marriage are mutually exclusive. Furthermore, this reality pits earthly women against Mary, who is extolled for apparently maintaining her virginity and maternity.

Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century may never have expressly acknowledged, understood, and dealt with these issues of Marian paradox as someone from a contemporary context might do. However, these paradoxes are inherently fixed in the biblical passages portraying Mary, in discourses theologizing Mary, and in other sources that have no clear connection to Mary herself. On a basic level, there are problems concerning both the True Womanhood model and constructions of Mary, so it is understandable that the union of the two for the interests of Roman Catholic immigrant women seeking to adapt to American culture, society, and religious norms would create only further problems.

As noted earlier, constructions of Mary's virginity provide the most complex set of paradoxical religious and cultural norms for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century and even for such women today. Theologies and doctrines that emphasize Mary's virginity filtered through the True Womanhood model codify her virginity in terms of both institutionalized religious requirements and American socio-cultural requirements for women. Despite the unclear and inconsistent nature of biblical texts regarding Mary, virginity is often claimed as a sort of prerequisite for women's ultimate spiritual development and immigrant women's efforts to exemplify the American True Woman. Hence, it is imperative to examine the implications of Mary's paradoxical virginity for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century. My purpose is to better understand how the figure of Mary influenced them and fit into both their secular and religious lives.

VIRGINITY JUXTAPOSED WITH MATERNITY: ETHNOGRAPHY, HISTORY, AND RELIGIOSITY

In order to connect constructions of Mary's virginity in official (Roman Catholic) church documents, such as the papal encyclicals, with the virginal purity characteristic of the True Womanhood model, we must turn to ethnographic, historical, and religious studies of scholars who specialize in

nineteenth-century Roman Catholic beliefs and practices in America. As Ann Taves notes, "Marian devotions [of the mid-nineteenth century] focused on Mary as simultaneously symbol of purity (virgin, immaculately conceived) and fertility (mother-hood) and as grace-filled mediator."[82] In support of this notion, Robert Orsi's research on the Madonna of 115th Street and other ethnographic studies previously cited demonstrate that a complicated Marian paradigm was indeed constructed for women within nineteenth-century Roman Catholic devotional practices. These more localized examples illustrate the problematic constructions found within the rhetoric of the papal encyclicals. Mary was presented within multiple contexts as a mixed metaphor of sexual purity and of fertility. An unquestioning responsibility to family was also thrown into the mix of rigid expectations for Catholic women.

Taves also notes a further complication for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the mid-nineteenth century. Because these women seemed more inclined to Marian devotional practices than men, they were all the more susceptible to and accepting of the multiple conflicting models of feminine religiosity presented therein. Taves discusses this complex, nuanced situation:

> At a time when women spent most of their lives enmeshed in family relationships, such devotions may have provided a source of solace and a means of repressing resentments about their familial relationships and responsibilities. The relational character of the devotions, their emphasis on obedience and devotion to idealized supernatural patrons, and their tendency to evoke feelings of dependence corresponds closely to the stereotypically "feminine" role which nineteenth-century women were expected to assume in marriage.[83]

Taves's exploration of the patterns of women's Marian devotion alludes to the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century, which dictated this "stereotypically 'feminine' role [. . .] women were expected to assume in marriage." In this way, Roman Catholic doctrine combined with American cultural standards to construct an ideal represented by the figure of Mary that was then imposed upon these immigrant women and manifested in their lived religious traditions. In other words, the emphasis of nineteenth-century Marian devotions went hand-in-hand with the more social/cultural standards of the time, both of which focused on purity and virginity as dominant modes of women's religiosity and general personhood. This melding may have benefited some men and women as they sought cultural and religious conformity and status. It is understandable that immigrant women attempted to satisfy a multitude of religious and cultural standards by aspiring to Mary in order to assimilate to American conventions. However, her pure virginity leaves

essentially no room for the physical and sexual identities Roman Catholic immigrant women assumed as earthly women conforming both to social/cultural standards of that time and to traditional religious roles as pious, dedicated mothers and wives. This combination of roles implicitly challenged and negated the status of virginity.

Mary F. Foskett notes in her article "Virginity as Purity":

> Whereas a married Jewish woman can be expected to engage in sexual intercourse with her husband without compromising her sexual purity, Mary clearly cannot. Her virginity is absolute—the liminality of her sexual status is removed. An end in itself, Mary's virginity appears to signal a particular kind of purity.[84]

Foskett notes further a major departure of Mary's "brand" of virginity from that available to earthly women. She argues that "Mary emerges less as a moral agent who must actively resist threats to her virginity and more as a sacred object that is dedicated to the Lord, celebrated by the people and protected (mostly) by men. She resembles more a cult object than a priestess in whose care the sacred things are placed."[85] Foskett's observations are profound and seductive but need some unpacking. Foskett's comparison of Mary to a married Jewish woman shows Mary to be a sort of one-of-a-kind, unattainable model of virginal purity. The Jewish woman (or, indeed, any married woman) is expected to engage in sexual intercourse as both a wife and potentially procreative being; this action and identity are expected and socially/religiously sanctioned but in conflict with a sustained notion of purity as defined solely by virginity. Furthermore, "Mary's virginity signals a particular kind of purity" because her sexual limits are removed. In essence, Mary ceases to reside upon the ambivalent line between virginal purity and expected, natural sexual engagement because her sexual status itself is removed, thereby removing any limits associated with this status. Even if earthly women remain virginally pure, they, unlike Mary, do not have a physical choice to remove from their sexual potential.

Foskett's second observation is particularly problematic because none of its nuanced implications bode well for women. Even Roman Catholic women who may have had more "moral" agency than Mary must endure and sustain themselves through threats to their virginity, the sacred object placed in their care. If this agency is interpreted as a positive, even empowering notion, then the real reason for respect afforded to these women is disembodied from them and commodified in the object of sexual purity. This disembodiment serves both to confuse the real, physical sexual expectations placed upon women and, paradoxically, to hold them responsible for an

object that will eventually be sacrificed in the course of nature. Even if this agency is to be celebrated among earthly women, their inescapable carnality inevitably separates them from their ultimate paradigmatic figure. Foskett's notion of Mary as a sacred object also reduces any vestiges of Mary's humanity, with which earthly women might feel connected, to an objectified sexual quality that is disembodied even from her. Even Mary's prized virginity and personhood are protected mostly by men, thereby further reducing female agency and female religious identity. This formula distances Mary, her virginity, and also the problematic relationship between earthly virginity and fertility from Roman Catholic women on many levels, serving to disempower them and provide overly complex and unattainable models of feminine religiosity. Furthermore, this formula objectifies women's sexuality and then places it in the protection of the very men who also might threaten and assault the virginal purity of women. According to Mary's example, Roman Catholic women are expected both to trust and distrust men, who subsume within themselves the agency denied women and then mount allegedly natural, impulsive attacks on women's defenseless, yet crucial, sexual purity. Each complex and convoluted layer of this scenario disenfranchises women. Although they are touted as privileged and blessed by their virginal purity, these women's prized quality will ultimately be either stolen by ravenous men[86] or destroyed by their husbands in marriages that replace virginity with maternity.

In reconnecting Mary's problematic virginity with the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century, it is important to return to Barbara Welter's argument concerning the paradox of virginity and fertility: "Purity, considered as a moral imperative, set up a dilemma which was hard to resolve. Woman must preserve her virtue until marriage and marriage was necessary for her happiness. Yet marriage was, literally, an end to innocence. She was told not to question this dilemma, but simply to accept it."[87] Here one can see a direct correlation between the inherent paradoxes of the True Womanhood model and the virtues extolled in Mary noted by Taves. The cultural/social model and religious model in and of themselves are in conflict. Roman Catholic immigrant women sought to merge their normative religious tradition (Mary included) with new American cultural standards in order to adapt more easily to the dominant societal norms. However, the dominant paradigms these models offered were complicated. Roman Catholic women could turn to Mary for solace in troubling times, but they could never fully exemplify the extreme, heavenly, and disembodied virginal purity for which she is extolled. Nonetheless, the True Womanhood model, combining both social/cultural and religious norms, highlights Mary as an ultimate exemplar. The True Woman herself must deal with conflicting, simultaneous pulls of

virginity and fertility, and Mary's rather de-humanized example of virginity leaves little to no room for women to be human. These institutionalized standards of virginal purity seem to have kept women of the time in an endless cycle in which they could never quite succeed, for Mary is both Queen of Heaven and an unattainable model that eludes earthly women.

THE CLASSIST NATURE OF TRUE WOMANHOOD MODEL EXEMPLIFIED BY MARY

One might expect that the Marian paradox of virginal purity and simultaneous fertility would have caused nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women to increase family sizes. After all, this would be a natural result of adhering to a model that they could fulfill only in this manner (as opposed to emulating Mary's brand of virginal purity). The immigrant status of these women, however, strongly affected their socio-economic standing within an increasingly industrialized nation shaped by a middle-class standard of living. According to Colleen McDannell,

> The nineteenth century also saw the decline of the large American family. In 1800 the average number of children born to a woman before she reached menopause was 7.04. By mid-century, this number dropped by 23 percent to 5.42, and by the end of the century, to 3.56.[88]

The fact that family sizes decreased is, according to several scholars, evidence that these women, handicapped by the classism of American culture, could not fulfill all the various, conflicting standards imposed upon them by religious figures extolling Mary and social/cultural figures extolling the True Woman. Immigrant women particularly were disadvantaged socially and economically and therefore did not have the time, energy, desire, or ability to pursue these problematic cultural-religious paradigms. Privileged, upper-class women could obviously not fulfill simultaneous standards of virginity and maternity either, but at least some of them benefited from economic resources that allowed them more time for personal spiritual development and the pursuit of such lofty ideals. For lower-class immigrant women, the socio-economic realities of American life during the nineteenth century did little to accommodate a pursuit of divine standards for women.

As Susan Hill Lindley notes:

> In its typical and most limiting form, the cult of True Womanhood was inherently class-biased. Immigrant women surely valued home and family and their roles therein, but few had the luxury of full-time domesticity, and their own ethnic

> traditions about female roles within the family did not necessarily fit an American cultural ideal. Furthermore, middle-class Catholic women, like their Protestant sisters, found ways to use or reinterpret the image to expand their concerns and activities, even as they insisted they agreed with the ideal.[89]

Thus, the inherently classist elements of the True Womanhood model, especially in combination with the paradoxes of the Marian paradigm, can be understood as profoundly problematic for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF MARY'S INCOMPATIBILITY WITH THE MODEL OF THE "TRUE WOMAN"

> "Women found the Madonna's azure cloak, so ceremoniously draped over their shoulders, a heavy one."
>
> —Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

Ultimately, Mary is highly overqualified for the nineteenth-century True Womanhood model and thus incompatible with the True Womanhood model. Mary represents the culmination of complementary religious and cultural ideals, but these ideals are wholly contradictory in practice for all other women. As figurehead of the dual paradigm of religiosity and True Womanhood, Mary offers a model for nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women that they could pursue but never fulfill. It is most important to note simply and straightforwardly that women cannot emulate Mary's simultaneous virginity and maternity. Because Mary's virginal purity seems to be the singular quality that allows her to carry Jesus, this same quality has been expected of other women in order for them to fulfill both their earthly and spiritual roles. However, because earthly women can in no way be both virgin and mother at the same time, a situation unfolds for them in which they cannot achieve on earth what they are allegedly expected to aspire to in heaven. Even if the social/cultural model of the True Woman is understood as more practical and immediately achievable for women, this model is still problematic and is represented, especially in its religious elements, by Mary herself. Mary and the True Woman are incompatible with the lives of women and with each other. .

Many scholars discuss the tendency for men to perform devotions to the Virgin Mary more often than women during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Though they document this phenomenon as a casual observation, it seems to me that this tendency was probably linked directly to Mary's serving as an overqualified model of Christian womanhood.

Though Mary was important to women devotees, the paradoxical model she provided for them complicated many aspects of their material/physical and spiritual lives. However, because the figure of Mary is constructed in the biblical texts and in Christian sources such as the papal encyclical letters only in relation to Jesus, it is understandable that men even more than women might look to her for guidance and nurturing. After all, she is a pillar of support for men, but she serves as a daunting model for women, highlighting their inability to fill the mold she left behind for them. It is also possible that Mary was more appealing to men than women because she provided justification for men's assertion of their authority over women in both secular and religious realms. As previously noted, Mary was constructed in a literary and faith tradition by men and for men. This tradition not only excludes the perspectives and experiences of women, but it engenders men's manipulation of women's consciousness-shaping and personally formative life activities. It is cruelly ironic that men might be more attracted than women to the embodiment of the figure who is supposed to offer the ultimate representation of feminine religiosity as well as social/cultural virtue. This scenario does not make sense for women on a fundamental level, and it reminds one of the complicit role Christian men played in sustaining Mary as the preeminent model for women throughout the centuries.

It is difficult to offer a provisional resolution to the difficult dilemma in which Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century seem to have found themselves. Their particular historical and cultural context gave way to new and different challenges from their Christian faith, especially concerning Mary's role in their tradition. Events such as the confirmation of Mary as patron saint of the United States in 1854 would seem to have advanced Mary's status as an exemplar of feminine religiosity. However, the institutionalization of Mary, as espoused by proponents of the True Womanhood model or as patron saint of the U.S., has reinforced traditional and often oppressive roles for Roman Catholic women. At best, Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century were given a complex and often contradictory model of social/cultural and religious being. Thus, the ubiquitous and often romantically simplified image of Mary appears to have actually complicated life and modes of religiosity for these women. The paradoxes they encountered in Mary might help contemporary Christian audiences gain understanding of how Mary is constructed for both men and women today. Though the solution does not seem to lie in disposing of Mary entirely, Marian paradoxes do necessitate re-envisioning how the Mother of Christ speaks to modern women.

As written accounts of Mary are still dominated by male interpreters, it seems crucial that women's voices concerning her should be excavated from

the past and amplified in the present so Catholic women of the future can claim a Mary—she who speaks to their own earthly and religious experience rather than to those of the men dictating the transmission and application of her tradition.

ENDNOTES

[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.

[2] This text is the result of a sustained Lutheran-Catholic dialogue that was compiled in this one-volume collaborative work. Aside from the editors themselves, many scholars contributed individual portions, often in the form of distinct chapters within the book as a whole. For this reason, I shall reference the work according to individual contributors and their individual contributions, followed by title and publication information for the collective volume itself. It is referenced on the "WORKS CITED" page according to the editors involved, while the footnote references throughout the paper will, again, refer only to specific contributors and their specific contributions.

[3] P.J. Achtemeier, "Presuppositions of the Study," in *Mary in the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John Reumann, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Fortress Press, 1978), 7.

[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 29.

[6] Ibid., 29.

[7] Ibid., 47.

[8] "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" Mark 6:3 (NKJV). K. P. Donfried, "Mary in the Gospel of Mark," in *Mary in the New Testament*, 65.

[9] Ibid., 72.

[10] John Reumann, "Mary in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles," in *Mary in the New Testament*, 106.

[11] Ibid., 109.

[12] Ibid., 110-111.

[13] Ibid., 120.

[14] Ibid., 144.

[15] Ibid., 124.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 72-73.

[18] Ibid., 79.

[19] Ibid., 96-97.

[20] K. P. Donfried, "The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John," in *Mary in the New Testament*, 189.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 106.

[23] Ibid., 100.

[24] "A virgin hath brought forth, which is a thing contrary to nature," 4:16. "Protoevangelium of James," 24-37, in *The Lost Books of the Bible* (New York: Bell Publishing Comapany, 1979), 34.

[25] "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (NKJV).
[26] Susan Hill Lindley, "*You have Stept out of your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 201.
[27] Timothy Kelly and Joseph Kelly, "Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Gender Roles, and the Decline of Devotional Practice," in *Journal of Social History,* 32, no.1 (1998): 1. Infotrac. Gale Group. 12 April 2005.
[28] Ibid., 1.
[29] Ibid., 6.
[30] Ibid., 1.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 2.
[34] Ibid., 9.
[35] Ibid., 7-8.
[36] Ibid., 8.
[37] Ibid., 9.
[38] Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), xxxix.
[39] Ibid., xlv.
[40] Joseph A. Varacalli and Salvatore Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, eds. (New York: Forum Italicum, 1999), 76.
[41] Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street,* 168.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 168-69.
[44] Ibid., 174-76.
[45] Ibid., 177.
[46] Varacalli and Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, 82.
[47] Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 180.
[48] Ibid., 182.
[49] Varacalli and Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, 76.
[50] Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 205.
[51] Ibid., 211-16.
[52] Lindley, "*You have Stept out of your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America*, 203.
[53] Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 185.
[54] Ibid., 185-86.
[55] Ibid., 72.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 72-73.
[58] Ibid., 74.
[59] Varacalli and Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, 89.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, 227.
[62] Ibid.

[63] Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15.
[64] Ibid., 16.
[65] Ibid., 31.
[66] Ibid., 27.
[67] Ibid., 31.
[68] Ibid., 32.
[69] Ibid., 38.
[70] Ibid., 61.
[71] Ibid., 63.
[72] Lindley, *"You have Stept out of your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America*, 24-25.
[73] Ibid., 51.
[74] Ibid., 52.
[75] Ibid., 52-58. Lindley's volume dwells primarily upon Protestant women in nineteenth-century America. For this reason, I thought it unnecessary to re-articulate how the Cult of True Womanhood functioned within Protestant communities. Thus, I will focus on how the True Womanhood model affected Roman Catholic women.
[76] Ibid., 203.
[77] Ibid., 197.
[78] Ibid., 198.
[79] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1800-1860," in *Dimity Convictions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 23. This essay was originally published in *American Quarterly* in 1966.
[80] Elizabeth Abbott, *A History of Celibacy* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 60.
[81] Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 137.
[82] Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 39.
[83] Ibid., 87.
[84] Mary F. Foskett, "Virginity as Purity in the *Protoevangelium of James*," in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, 67-76, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 71.
[85] Ibid., 75.
[86] As Barbara Welter notes in her argument concerning women who submit to the True Womanhood model.
[87] Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 27.
[88] McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, 8.
[89] Lindley, "*You have Stept out of your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America*, 198.

****

The author may be contacted at

darrisjane@yahoo.com