

GENDER, SANCTITY AND SAINTHOOD:  
OFFICIAL AND ALTERNATIVE SAINTS AS FEMALE EXEMPLARS  
IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM, 1939-1978

by

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## ABSTRACT

Aside from studies on the Virgin Mary, of which there are many, little research has been done on the range of women the Roman Catholic church has promoted as exemplars--female saints, for example, in particular modern female saints. I have studied the women canonized by the Roman Catholic church from 1939 to 1978 through three types of sources: papal canonization speeches, official hagiographies, and varied writings by lay Catholic women. Saints mean very different things to each of these groups of people. To popes, canonization speeches provide an opportunity to comment on politics and society--from Pope Pius XII's antifeminist remarks to Pope Paul VI's attempts to reconcile feminism and Catholicism. To hagiographers, female saints represented everything from a new Virgin Mary to a new imitation of Christ. Hagiographers did not establish a dual system of sanctity for men and for women: they did not describe all women as imitators of Mary and exemplars for other women. But they presented all female saints as, above all, obedient--and, in particular, obedient to the male hierarchy. Several lay Catholic women understood saint's lives not as examples of obedience but as examples of autonomy. Overall, I show that saints' lives are religious symbols; like other religious symbols, as Paul Ricoeur argues, their lives are polysemic--that is, subject to various interpretations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, John Mecklin declared the passing of the saint--a cultural type which, he argued, had not survived into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> For medieval scholars, the study of modern saints seems fruitless. According to John Coleman, "compared to a familiar world peopled and evoked by saints. . . our modern pantheon of saints seem narrow, cramped, and one-dimensional."<sup>2</sup> But Mecklin's and Coleman's work describes not the demise of the saint as an important part of Catholic piety, but the different role saints play in modern society. According to Mecklin, the medieval saint could thrive only in an undemocratic culture, a culture which recognized a radical differentiation between the earthly and the divine. Saints partook of the divine as well as the earthly: they were admired *because* they were different. As Eusebius said, " 'They are aristocrats.' "<sup>3</sup> Although recent scholarship has shown that medieval saints were not as distinctive as Mecklin suggests--hagiographers emphasized saints' extreme ascetism and depth of piety in order to differentiate them from an already pious laity<sup>4</sup>--, Mecklin's essential point is valid. Popular devotion to medieval saints emphasized the transcendent, not the human, dimension of saints;<sup>5</sup> popular saints of the twentieth century are venerated more for their human than their transcendent qualities, as I will discuss later in this thesis. Furthermore, modern saints have a different

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<sup>1</sup> John Mecklin, The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> John A. Coleman, S. J., "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" in John Stratton Hawley, editor, Saints and Virtues (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 205.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Mecklin, The Passing of the Saint, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, "Holiness and the Culture of Devotion: Remarks on Some Late Medieval Male Saints" in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tímea Szell, editors, Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 291.

<sup>5</sup> Brigitte Cazelles, "Introduction" in Ibid., 3.

relationship with society than medieval saints did. Medieval saints were symbols of piety for all Christians in the West; modern saints attract devotion only from Roman Catholics (although the Eastern Orthodox Church has its own tradition of saints). But these differences between medieval and modern saints and their cults do not account for the lack of scholarly attention to modern saints.

If modern saints have failed to attract their share of scholarly interest, it is not because there have been few of them or because they have not generated public cults. On the contrary, the number of papal canonizations has risen dramatically--during the thirteenth century, there were 20 papal canonizations; during the fourteenth, only twelve;<sup>6</sup> from 1800 to 1846, ten; but from 1846 to 1914, there were 74 papal canonizations, and from 1914 to 1963, there were 79 canonizations.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, public interest in the saints has not diminished: more than 250,000 people attended Maria Goretti's canonization on June 24, 1950<sup>8</sup>; Gemma Galgani and Thérèse of Lisieux achieved widespread popularity and veneration through the publication of their writings; popular biographies of saints still sell well and movies have been made about saints, including Maria Goretti, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Bernadette Soubirous, all canonized during the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Despite a decrease in interest in saints during the late 1960s, partly due to the revised liturgical calendar of 1969 when 52 saints were dropped from the list (often because their very existence was questioned), interest in saints grew during the 1970s, especially in North America with the canonization of two Americans, Elizabeth

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>7</sup>Paul Molinari, Saints: Their Place in the Church (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 174-5.

<sup>8</sup>New Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Goretti, Maria."

<sup>9</sup>Molinari, p. 180.

Seton and John Neumann, in 1975.<sup>10</sup> The focus of modern devotion was different than medieval devotion: modern devotees were interested more in the moral character of saints whereas their medieval predecessors were attracted by legends and cults.<sup>11</sup> But the interest in and devotion to saints existed all the same, despite the differences in the focus of the devotion. Both the popularity and the number of saints should suggest the need for scholarly study of modern saints.

But scholars have another, more compelling reason to study modern saints: anthropologists and feminist scholars have revitalized interest in the study of religious symbolism. From Simone de Beauvoir to Mary Daly, feminist theorists have criticized not just the Roman Catholic church's policies on birth control and the ordination of women, but also the very imagery of the church--the exaltation of Mary, the mother who subordinates herself to her male child, and the masculine identification of God as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Beauvoir calls the cult of the Virgin Mary "the supreme masculine victory"; worse yet, argues Daly, is that "women are encouraged to identify with this image of Mary, and to do so has devastating effects."<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether criticizes Christian theologians for creating a "symbolic universe based on the patriarchal hierarchy of male over female. The subordination of woman to man is replicated in the symbolic universe in the imagery of divine-human relations. God is imaged as the great patriarch over

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<sup>10</sup>Richard Kieckhefer. "The Cult of Saints as Popular Religion." *Explor* 7 (1984): 44.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>12</sup>Both quotes from Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 61.



against the earth or Creation, imaged in female terms. Likewise Christ is related to the Church as bridegroom to bride."<sup>13</sup>

Feminists have responded in two ways to their dissatisfaction with Christian and especially Catholic symbolism: some, like Mary Daly, left the church in search of female-centred forms of worship--often they focussed on "the goddess;"<sup>14</sup> others, such as Anne Carr and Rosemary Radford Ruether, have worked within Christianity to try to reclaim symbols for women. As Carr explains, feminist interpretation involves two processes: it must unmask "the illusory or ideological aspects of symbols which denigrate the humanity of women" and it must retrieve "the genuinely transcendent meaning of symbols (in) affirming the authentic selfhood and self-transcendence of women."<sup>15</sup>

Central to Carr's analysis--and to this thesis--is the work by Paul Ricoeur and Victor Turner on religious symbols. As Turner explains, symbols are polysemic--that is, they have many meanings.<sup>16</sup> And, as Ricoeur argues, the symbol is never transparent like a sign; religious symbols are not simple statements about social conditions or the way society should be structured. Caroline Walker Bynum applies Ricoeur's insights to the study of gender-related religious symbols--such as the masculinity or femininity of God--and

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<sup>13</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Feminist Critique in Religious Studies," Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal 64 (Winter 1981): 390.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, editors, Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion (San Francisco and New York: Harper and Row, 1979): 274-5. For a discussion about female-centred symbolism in the Mass--using the wine as a symbol of blood shed in menstruation and childbirth--see Elizabeth Ann Stanger, The Catholic Women's Network (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989), 67-69.

<sup>15</sup>Anne Carr, "Is a Christian Feminist Theology Possible?," Theological Studies 43 (June 1982): 286.

<sup>16</sup>Turner is discussed by Caroline Walker Bynum, "Introduction: The Complexity of Symbols" in C. Bynum, Steven Harrell, and Paula Richman, editors, Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 2.

concludes that "gender-related symbols, in their full complexity, may refer to gender in ways that affirm or reverse it, support or question it; or they may, in their basic meaning, have little at all to do with male and female roles."<sup>17</sup>

Beauvoir's and Daly's criticism of Catholic symbolism is, therefore, faulty because it rests on the assumption that symbols are merely signs--that the Virgin Mary, for example, has one "meaning" and that this meaning is transparent.

Some Catholic women have not accepted the feminist criticism of Catholic symbolism. For Anne Roche Muggeridge, for example, feminist criticism "strikes at the very heart of religion, the point at which the natural and the divine touch, at which incarnation natural and supernatural takes place."<sup>18</sup> Unlike Carr, Muggeridge argues that it is not possible to separate the ideological and transcendent aspects of Christian symbols. For Carr, the maleness of Christ, for example, is incidental; Christ's maleness should not be used theologically to argue that priests must be male because Christ was male.<sup>19</sup> Part of Muggeridge's reaction to feminist theology, particularly radical feminist theology, is visceral: "There is a real stink of brimstone at gatherings dominated by feminist nuns, especially at their liturgies, a creepy neo-paganism with strong suggestions of sexual perversion. This is no longer a secret; Mary Daly, an early radical who who has left the Church but still teaches at the Jesuit Boston College, openly preaches lesbian witchcraft."<sup>20</sup> Muggeridge has not distinguished between the different positions within the feminist critique of religion--the radical position, such as Mary Daly's, and the moderate

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Anne Roche Muggeridge, The Desolate City: The Catholic Church in Ruins (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 141.

<sup>19</sup>Anne Carr, "Is a Christian Feminist Theology Possible?": 285, 295.

<sup>20</sup>Anne Roche Muggeridge, The Desolate City, 141.

position, such as Ruether's and Carr's. Nor has she responded to Carr's argument that symbols contain both incidental and transcendent elements. Carr's insight is valuable: it is when these incidental aspects of symbols--the maleness of Christ, for example--are raised to the transcendent level that what she calls "idolatry" occurs.<sup>21</sup> To decide that all priests must be male because Christ was male is to confuse the incidental and transcendent; when theologians interpret symbols in that way--when they raise the finite to the level of the infinite--, their interpretation is based on their own ideological understanding of sex roles; they have conflated their ideology with the transcendent.

Building on recent scholarship on the complexity of religious symbols, I will examine the women canonized by the Roman Catholic church from 1939 to 1978--that is, during the reigns of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), Pope John XXIII (1958-1963), and Pope Paul VI (1963-1978). Women saints serve as Catholic symbols in two ways. First, biographers of saints--usually referred to as hagiographers--use existing symbols of sanctity to describe their subjects' lives. Most commonly, saints' lives are represented as imitations of Christ. Jesus himself was described as the new Adam, the new Moses, the new Abraham. As Donald Capps explains, "whether or not Jesus himself considered his life to be the mirroring of these well-established paradigms, his followers and supporters believed it necessary to interpret his life in terms of these primitive mythical models. His own life, in turn, may itself become an exemplary model, worthy of emulation because it has demonstrated its affinity with traditional models."<sup>22</sup> By studying the paradigms hagiographers employed to describe their subjects' sanctity, I can examine in what ways

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<sup>21</sup> Anne Carr, "Is a Christian Feminist Theology Possible?", 285.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Capps, "Lincoln's Martyrdom: A Study of Exemplary Mythic Patterns" in D. Capps and Frank E. Reynolds, editors, The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1976), 393.

hagiographers perceived their subjects as "gendered": did they, for example, model their female saints' lives after the Virgin Mary or after Christ? Studying hagiographies will enable us to determine how the hagiographers understood their subjects' lives, but not how the saints themselves understood their lives. Second, the saints' lives themselves become a symbol--or, more accurately, a myth, which Ricoeur defines as "a species of symbol, a symbol developed into narrative form."<sup>23</sup> The saints become new models of sanctity for others to imitate. I will examine in what ways these lives are "gendered"--if hagiographers have created "feminine sanctity" for women and women alone to emulate.

My purpose is two-fold: first, I plan to describe the kinds of saints the Catholic hierarchy promotes as exemplars to the Catholic laity; second, I plan to describe the ways in which these saints' lives could be and in fact were understood by Catholic women. As Gerda Lerner explains, women's history has moved beyond documenting the history of men's attitudes about how women should behave; to study only male attitudes about women--or, in this thesis, to study only how the male hierarchy portrayed female saints--would be to place women in "a male-defined conceptual framework."<sup>24</sup> Because women did not always behave in prescribed ways, because they used gender role symbolism in conventional and unconventional ways--"to maintain the social order (and) to promote its change"<sup>25</sup>--, it is necessary to study how women interpreted symbols such as female saints, not just how the Catholic hierarchy presented

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<sup>23</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought," in Walter H. Capps, editor, Ways of Understanding Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 316.

<sup>24</sup>Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," Feminist Studies III (Fall 1975): 6.

<sup>25</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women's History in Transition: The European Case," Feminist Studies III (Spring-Summer 1976): 90.

these symbols. In order to show that some Catholic women interpreted female saints' lives in unconventional ways, it was necessary to study unconventional women--often activists or feminists, or at least women who in some way challenged prescribed roles. It is not my intention to argue that unconventional Catholic women had a "better" understanding of saints' lives than the Catholic hierarchy did. Instead, I show that it is not possible to discern the meaning of saints' lives from official sources alone: it is necessary to study how Catholic women interpreted official sources.

### Sources

In examining female saints of the twentieth century, I have used three different types of sources which correspond with three different understandings of what the Catholic church is. The first source is papal speeches at canonization ceremonies--the official, authoritative interpretation of the meaning of saints' lives. Papal speeches typically give a brief history of the saint's life, then discuss the saint's relevance to contemporary circumstances. Papal speeches are not rich with symbolism as hagiographies are; these speeches do not employ paradigms of sanctity to describe the newly canonized saint. They are useful in showing how the Catholic church--the church as official institution, not as body of believers--interpreted these saints' lives and what they understood these saints' contemporary relevance to be.

The second source, hagiographies, permits us to expand our definition of the Catholic church beyond the papacy to include all those who have written hagiographies. There are two types of hagiographies. The most common is the hagiography devoted to the life of one saint--a full-length book published before beatification or canonization in order to promote the saint's cause or immediately after beatification or canonization to make the saint known to a wider audience. (Beatification occurs before canonization. Those beatified--

that is, declared blessed--can be venerated locally but are not part of the universal church. The saint's "cause" refers to the bureaucratic process candidates for sainthood must undergo before they are beatified or canonized.<sup>26</sup>) Hagiographers are often male or female members of religious orders; often, they are writing to promote the cause of their religious order's founder. Occasionally the hagiographers are lay Catholics and professional writers, such as Frances Parkinson Keyes, who published a number of hagiographies. All of these hagiographies bore the *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat*, declaring the book to be free of doctrinal error. But the other type of hagiography, the collections of saints' lives, did not always bear the *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat*. Collections are usually thematic--one collection might include only married saints or female saints, for example. The structure of these hagiographies differs sharply from the hagiographies dedicated to only one saint. Collections are similar instead to papal speeches: they include a brief biographical sketch of each saint followed by a discussion of the saint's relevance to a particular audience--married people or women, for example. But, like papal speeches, these two types of hagiographies permit us to explore the meaning of these saints' lives primarily to representatives of the institutional church, not to lay Catholics.

The third type of source--writings by twentieth-century "lay" Catholic women<sup>27</sup>--enables us not only to broaden our study of the Catholic church to include the laity, but also to broaden our understanding of sanctity itself. As I will discuss later in this thesis, Catholic women sometimes expressed

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<sup>26</sup>For information on canonization procedures, see Kenneth L. Woodward, Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why (New York, London, Toronto: Simon and Schuster, 1990), especially pp. 87-126.

<sup>27</sup>I use the term lay Catholic women to refer to women who are not members of religious orders, although technically all Catholic women are members of the laity because women cannot become priests.

frustration with the ideals represented by formally canonized saints; they interpreted canonized saints' lives in unconventional ways; and sometimes they suggested alternative saints to those officially recognized by the church. Because the body of writing by lay Catholic women during the twentieth century is so vast, I have only been able to use a fraction of the material available; most of the sources I have used were written by American Catholic lay women. Consequently, this part of my thesis is merely exploratory, not conclusive.

### The Organization of this Thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one is primarily descriptive: I present data about the women canonized from 1939 to 1978--their countries of birth, their dates of birth and death, their status as lay women or members of religious orders, and so forth. I also give brief biographical sketches of three saints to familiarize readers with a few examples before thematic discussion begins. After this chapter, which is intended to provide background information, I will focus on how saints' lives are represented and interpreted by popes, hagiographers, and lay women. I will not evaluate whether these representations are accurate accounts of these saints' lives because I am investigating *meaning*--how others understand these saints, not how these saints actually lived.

In chapter two, I will examine papal speeches during canonization ceremonies. Each of the popes interpreted newly canonized saints' lives in terms of their own political agendas. For Pius XII, canonization speeches were an opportunity to make antifeminist comments. But for Paul VI, canonization speeches were an opportunity to show that Catholicism and feminism were not mutually exclusive.

Chapters three and four are the heart of the thesis, where I explore the archetypal models used in hagiography and the new models of sanctity created by these hagiographies. I argue that hagiographers have not created a dual system of sanctity--female saints for women and male saints for men. And, despite the efforts by many hagiographers to describe female saints as passive, obedient, and subordinate, the hagiographies themselves can be interpreted differently--to affirm rather than subordinate women. In chapter four, I show that not only *can* hagiographies be understood in ways that affirm women, but that hagiographies *have* been understood in ways that affirm women. Twentieth-century lay Catholic women have already been involved in the feminist task that Anne Carr described in her 1982 article, "Is a Christian Feminist Theology Possible?": they have exposed the ideology which consigns women to subordinate roles and reinterpreted symbols and myths in feminist ways. The more we examine the ways in which lay women understood saints, not just the ways in which representatives of the institutional church understood saints, the more we see how religious symbols have been transmuted to question and even deny the official Catholic positions on gender roles and social relations.



## CHAPTER ONE

## Foundresses, Mystics, and a Martyr

From 1939 to 1978, 27 women and 40 men were canonized.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the twentieth century, women accounted for only 20 percent of all canonizations.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the centuries, the percentage of female saints rose and fell according to the types of sanctity predominant during a certain era. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, for example, the percentage of female saints was low--only approximately 12 percent of the total--because people then looked to secular leaders, usually princes and kings, for their spiritual heroes.<sup>3</sup> But the percentage of female saints during the thirteenth century nearly doubled to approximately 23 percent because of the rise of the mendicant orders, which were open to women as well as to men.<sup>4</sup> During the Catholic Reformation, the percentage of women saints declined because of the church's increased emphasis on the clerical hierarchy and the centrality of the sacraments; priests were more likely to be canonized during this period.<sup>5</sup> The percentage of women canonized during the twentieth century may have increased because of the large number of religious orders for women founded during the nineteenth century; their founders were canonized during the twentieth century. Religious orders have the organizational means and usually the funding to initiate a cause for sainthood.<sup>6</sup> Members of religious orders

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<sup>1</sup>I have excluded group canonizations from these numbers, such as the canonization of 40 English and Welsh martyrs in 1970.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Woodward, Making Saints, 117.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 221.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 225-226.

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Woodward, Making Saints, 112-114.

were usually eager to see their founders canonized; their ability to initiate and promote a cause for sainthood had two important results--an increased percentage of women saints during the twentieth century, and a high percentage of religious rather than lay female saints.

Most of the women canonized from 1939 to 1978 were founders of religious orders. Generally, saints are classified according to two basic typologies: martyrs and confessors, or those who proclaimed themselves willing to die for Christ.<sup>7</sup> The category for confessors is broken down further into categories of gender and status: men can be classified as bishops, priests, monks, founders, lay brothers, and so forth; women can be classified as virgins or "foundresses" (the church uses the term foundress for women). Of the men canonized between 1939 and 1978, none were classified as virgins; virgin is a classification reserved for women. As mentioned before, most women canonized during this period were classified as foundresses or cofoundresses--21 out of the 27 women, in fact (see table). The rest of the women were classified as virgins; one was a virgin-martyr. By contrast, only seven of the 40 men canonized were classified as founders; their ranks include hermits, lay brothers, priests, bishops, a pope, missionaries, and martyrs.

Virtually all of the female saints were born in Western Europe. All but three of the female saints from 1939 to 1978 were born in either France, Italy or Spain; the three exceptions were born in Hungary, Ecuador, and the United States (see table). Sociological reasons partly account for the high numbers of European saints: in southern Italy, for example, Catholics are more likely to pray to saints for miracles than Catholics in other countries (the Vatican

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 55.

TABLE 1  
Women Canonized, 1939-1978

*		Birth-Death	Country	Classification
			of Birth	
1940	Gemma Galgani	1878-1903	Italy	Virgin
1940	Mary Euphrasia Pelletier	1796-1868	France	Foundress
1943	Margaret of Hungary	(d. 1270)	Hungary	Virgin
1946	Frances Xavier Cabrini	1850-1917	Italy	Foundress
1947	Jeanne Elizabeth des Ages	1777-1838	France	Cofoundress
1947	Catherine Labouré	1806-1876	France	Virgin
1949	Jeanne de Lestonnac	1556-1640	France	Foundress
1949	Maria Josepha Rossello	1811-1880	Italy	Foundress
1950	Emily de Rodat	1787-1852	France	Foundress
1950	Bartolomea Capitanio	1807-1833	Italy	Cofoundress
1950	Vincenza Gerosa	1784-1847	Italy	Cofoundress
1950	Jeanne de Valois	1464-1505	France	Foundress
1950	Maria Goretti	1890-1902	Italy	Virgin-Martyr
1950	Mariana Paredes of Jesus	1618-1645	Ecuador	Virgin
1951	Maria Domenica Mazzarello	1837-1881	Italy	Cofoundress
1951	Emilie de Vialar	1797-1856	France	Foundress
1954	Maria Crocifissa di Rosa	1813-1855	Italy	Foundress
1959	Joaquina de Vedruna de Mas	1783-1854	Spain	Foundress
1961	Bertilla Boscardin	1888-1922	Italy	Virgin
1969	Julie Billiart	1751-1816	France	Foundress
1970	Maria Della Dolorato Torres Acosta	1826-1887	Spain	Foundress
1970	Thérèse Couderc	1805-1885	France	Foundress
1974	Teresa of Jesus Jornet Ibars	1843-1897	Spain	Foundress
1975	Vicenta Maria Lopes y Vicuna	1847-1890	Spain	Foundress
1975	Elizabeth Bayley Seton	1774-1821	U.S.A.	Foundress
1976	Beatrice de Silva	1424 <sup>††</sup> - 1490		Foundress
1977	Rafaela Maria Porras y Allon	1850-1925	Spain	Foundress

Sources: 1984 Catholic Almanac and the New Catholic Encyclopedia.

\* Year of canonization

<sup>††</sup> or 1426

requires proof of posthumous miracles in order for a saint to be canonized). But, more importantly, doctors in southern Italy are far more likely than doctors in, for example, Eastern Europe to cooperate with the church in confirming the existence of miracles. In several Marxist countries in Africa, doctors are prohibited from cooperating with the church, while in other Third World countries, medical facilities are inadequate to provide the necessary documentation proving the existence of a medical miracle to the Vatican. As Kenneth Woodward explains, saints come overwhelmingly from Western Europe mostly because the bureaucratic process of canonization functions more effectively in those countries.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the female saints studied in this thesis lived during the nineteenth century. Saints cannot be alive when they are canonized, nor can they have died only very recently. Although the church rescinded the law requiring that candidates for sainthood be dead at least 50 years before canonization, "bishops are warned to be especially careful in distinguishing between an authentic reputation for sanctity, manifested by prayers and other acts of devotion toward the deceased, and a reputation stimulated by the media and mere 'public opinion.'"<sup>9</sup> Whether bishops heed the warning or not, candidates for sainthood cannot pass through the canonization procedure quickly: they must be approved by their local bishop; their lives must be studied by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which, during the period studied in this thesis, used a Devil's Advocate to point out saints' shortcomings; all of their writings must be judged orthodox; miracles attributed to their intercession must be approved; and their corpses must be exhumed to ensure

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 192-193.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 79.

that misidentification of a corpse has not occurred.<sup>10</sup> All of these procedures take time: the quickest canonization since 1588 was Thérèse of Lisieux's, who died in 1897 and was canonized 28 years later in 1925.<sup>11</sup> Because of the lengthy process of creating saints, it is not surprising that most of the saints canonized from 1939 to 1978 lived and died during the nineteenth century. The most recent saint for the period studied was (depending if one uses birth or death dates) either Maria Goretti, who was born in 1890 but died young in 1902, or Rafaela Maria Porras y Allon, born in 1850, died in 1925. The earliest saint, Margaret of Hungary, died in 1270, but her case was exceptional; her canonization was an "equivalent canonization," reserved for saints whose cults have survived for centuries but who lived before there was adequate documentation to establish sanctity through the regular process. For regular canonization, the earliest saint was Beatrice de Silva, who lived during the fifteenth century.

Because the rest of the thesis is devoted to an analysis of how the saints' lives were interpreted, not to a sociological study of the types of women canonized, it is important to familiarize readers with brief biographical sketches of a few saints. These sketches will give readers a fuller understanding of how hagiographers presented the totality of these women's lives, not just their significance as female religious symbols. Hagiographers were concerned with the importance of these saints as women, but not only as women. The thematic analysis in later chapters of the saints as gendered religious symbols will be easier to follow once readers have already become familiar with a few examples of saints.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 77-86.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 107.

And, more importantly, these biographical sketches will help underscore the importance of the saints' lives as stories, as religious myth, not simply as objective representations of a life. This use of the term 'myth' does not suggest that saints' biographies were untrue. I do not use the term 'myth' in the popular sense as that which is false. Rather, I use the term in the sense that both Paul Ricoeur and Peter Berger have used it: as previously mentioned, Ricoeur defines myth as a type of symbol, a symbol in narrative form, varied in meaning; for Berger, myth is "any set of ideas that infuses transcendent meaning into the lives of men;" myth is as much a part of political ideologies as it is a part of religion.<sup>12</sup> Like political myths, the myths created and employed by hagiographers function "to meet the present needs of a social group or class;" they narrate "a meaningful and reductive past, present, and future, which serves to locate a social group in a paradigm of historical development; thereby giving it a sense of direction and historical affirmation."<sup>13</sup>

Hagiographers try to address the immediate concerns of their audience of Catholics; they demonstrate how their saint is part of a long tradition of Catholic history, how their saint struggled with and conquered opposition--opposition similar, according to hagiographers, to the kind of opposition facing contemporary Catholics. Hagiographers do not just relate the life of a saint; they try to make that life meaningful to their audience. Consequently, their hagiographies can be understood as a form of myth in the sense that Ricoeur and Berger use the term.

The three saints I have selected to describe in detail were canonized for different reasons: collectively, they represent the range in types of sanctity

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<sup>12</sup>Peter Berger, quoted in George Egerton, "Collective Security as Political Myth: Liberal Internationalism and the League of Nations in Politics and History," The International History Review 4(November 1983): 498.

<sup>13</sup>George Egerton, "Collective Security as Political Myth," 501.

exhibited by female saints from 1939 to 1978. The first, Gemma Galgani, is officially classified as a virgin, but, more specifically, she was a mystic--the only saint, male or female, from this period to receive the stigmata, the wounds of Christ.<sup>14</sup> The second, Julie Billiart, is more typical of the rest of the saints from this period: she was a French founder of a religious order. And the last, Maria Goretti, was the only female martyr canonized during this period; she was also arguably the most popular new saint of the period.

### Gemma Galgani

Gemma Galgani was born on March 12, 1878, outside of Lucca, Italy. Even as a young child, she was inclined towards piety. Her family was loving and devoted, especially her mother, who suffered from tuberculosis. As one of her hagiographers, Giuseppe Bardi, describes, "Gemma's mother was not only a good mother, she was a saint, and a perfect model for every Catholic mother. Her life was a constant prayer. Each morning she approached the Sacraments with fervent piety, nearly always going to church in great discomfort and pain and at times with a high fever."<sup>15</sup> She recognized Gemma's piety at an early age: "She loved all of her children, but above all she loved Gemma for the graces she could see God was showering upon her soul."<sup>16</sup> Another hagiographer, Margaret Munro, explains that Gemma's seven brothers and sisters did not feel jealous that their parents favoured Gemma: they, too, loved her for her gentleness and piety.<sup>17</sup> Bardi and Munro use two themes common to the hagiographies of female saints of this period: the piety of the saint as a

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>15</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani, trans. Margherita M. Repton (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), 17.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Margaret Munro, A Book of Unlikely Saints (1943; reprint, Freeport, New York: Books for Librarians Press, 1970), 186-187.

child, and one--or both--of the parents' early recognition of this piety. In the hagiographical tradition, saints are usually favoured by their parents.

In 1886, when Gemma was eight years old, her mother finally died of tuberculosis. Both hagiographers present her mother's death as the consequence of a choice made by Gemma. Bardi quotes from Gemma's writings--

I suddenly heard a voice say to me: "Will you give me your mother?" "Yes," I replied, "but only if You will take me too." "No," replied the same voice, "you must give her to Me willingly; for the present you must remain with your Daddy. I will take her to Heaven, but will you give her up willingly?" I felt obliged to say "Yes." When Mass was over I rushed home. As I looked at Mother I could not restrain my tears.<sup>18</sup>

Neither hagiographer denies the importance of tuberculosis in the death of Gemma's mother, but the timing of her death could be explained by Gemma's decision to give her mother up for Christ. This decision was the first in a long series of decisions in which Gemma chose to be a heroic victim, to share Christ's sufferings on the cross.

Her next trial was at age 13, when she lost the sense of closeness to God she had always had during prayer. According to Munro, this trial was necessary; it was God's doing: "This type of trial is absolutely necessary if our love of God is to be purged of selfishness. As long as we love God for the pleasure of His presence, we are really loving ourselves."<sup>19</sup> Gemma withstood this test--as she would withstand all tests of her faith.

Because of excessive generosity and honesty, according to Bardi, Gemma's father went bankrupt; he died of cancer soon after in 1897. Gemma went to live with her aunt--an uneasy situation because of her poverty and

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<sup>18</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani, 29.

<sup>19</sup>Margaret Munro, Unlikely Saints, 191.



dependency. When a young military officer asked to marry her, she refused him. Her relatives urged her to marry him, but, despite the relief her marriage would bring to her relatives, Gemma did not want to marry. She had another vocation: she wanted to become a nun.

Gemma never became a nun because her health failed--she developed spinal meningitis--so the Archbishop denied her admittance to the Visitation Order. Despite her disappointment, "she submitted without one murmur to the Divine Will, giving to God the fiat of her submissive resignation."<sup>20</sup> Gemma began to receive the stigmata every Thursday evening at about 8:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Friday, "the hour that Jesus died on the Cross."<sup>21</sup> Her life at her aunt's home became increasingly difficult after the stigmata began appearing because her cousins made fun of her and gossiped to others about her.

Finally, she moved to the home of the Gianninis, a well-to-do family who, apparently, were more understanding of her ecstasies. Still, as Munro points out, Gemma made herself useful in their home: "But it is important to remember that during these three years when she was undergoing a weekly crucifixion Gemma pulled her full weight in the housework."<sup>22</sup> The end of her stigmata did not bring the end of her suffering, however: "As the outward crucifixion ceased, she became more and more crucified in heart, sharing the spiritual desolation of Calvary when she no longer visibly shared the Cross."<sup>23</sup> Gemma died young--in 1903, at age 25.

In telling the story of her life, both of these hagiographers interpret the significance of Gemma's life to their contemporary readers--that she stood

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<sup>20</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani, 92.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>22</sup>Margaret Munro, Unlikely Saints, 174.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 207.

against the materialism and corruption of the twentieth century, that others must make sacrifices of themselves like she did in order to make reparation for the corruption of the world. As Bardi explains, her mortification was "a reaction against the paganism of the world that makes an idol *of the body* and often turns it into an instrument of sin."<sup>24</sup> For both hagiographers, Gemma's significance is her fundamental opposition to contemporary culture; the twentieth-century world stands for comfort, corruption, and escapism, while Gemma stands for self-sacrifice, suffering, and a willingness to acknowledge sin and atone for it.

For Bardi, Gemma's life has added significance: her life demonstrates the importance of obedience to the clergy. Throughout the hagiography, Bardi points out how Gemma always obeyed her confessor and how Jesus himself urged her to obey her confessor--

How great is the power of obedience, to which even Jesus submits Himself in confirmation of the paramount authority conferred by Him on one who represents Him. He even binds or looses His celestial favors when the directors desire it so. To Gemma, who is forever asking for the Cross, Jesus answers: "Go, tell your confessor, if he is agreeable I will give it to you always."<sup>25</sup>

According to Bardi, Jesus himself submits to clerical authority; Jesus himself bends to suit the preferences of the clergy. Eventually during Bardi's narrative, it is no longer Gemma struggling with the devil--it is no longer Gemma's faith being tested--it is her confessor who struggles with the devil for Gemma's soul. As Bardi describes, "the devil has known for a long time what a powerful adversary he has in Monsignor Volpi. . . .(The devil) loathes (Volpi's) great purity and the conquering sanctity of life, and trembling with rage he

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<sup>24</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani, 129.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 118-120.

wishes to separate him from the privileged young virgin."<sup>26</sup> According to Bardi, Gemma chose wisely when she decided to trust her confessor rather than to trust Jesus himself--the Jesus who appears to her from time to time--because the devil did once disguise himself as Jesus and tried to persuade her to disobey her confessor. Her loyalty to her confessor won; she did not disobey him.<sup>27</sup> Again, Bardi, himself a priest, uses Gemma's life to demonstrate the supreme importance of obeying the clergy, even if Jesus or Mary appears during religious ecstasies to advise the individual Catholic to disobey a priest. Only the devil would demand that a Catholic disobey the priest; Jesus himself submits to the will of the clergy.

### Julie Billiard

Born on July 12, 1751 in Cuvilly, France, Julie Billiard's life provides an ideal opportunity for her hagiographers to express anti-modern ideas; Julie's life serves as an example of the horrors of materialism, republicanism, and Enlightenment philosophy. Julie was the daughter of a small shopkeeper whose goods--the family's only assets--were stolen during a robbery in which her father's life was threatened. Afterwards, the family had to struggle simply to survive. Julie worked in the fields by day and ran errands at night; she still reserved time to help those even less fortunate than herself and to sew church vestments.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, she succumbed to a paralytic stroke and could not walk for 22 years, but paralysis brought benefits as well as hardship--she had more time to devote to spirituality.<sup>29</sup> Prior to her stroke, she had already developed an active spiritual life. Her first communion had to remain secret,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>28</sup>Sister Mary Fidelis, As Gold in the Furnace: The Life of Blessed Julie Billiard (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1957), 15-20.

<sup>29</sup>New Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Billiard, Julie."

however, because "the baneful influence of Jansenism had spread even to this remote village of Picardy. Its excessive rigorism kept innocent children from receiving their Eucharistic Lord into their hearts until they were thirteen or fourteen years of age."<sup>30</sup>

During the French Revolution, she harboured refractory clergymen, those who refused to swear the oath of loyalty to the constitution produced by the Constituent Assembly of 1790, and she refused the services of the civil clergy. Because of her antirepublican political stance, her life was in danger in Picardy, so she fled to Amiens. She became friends with Françoise Blin de Bourdon, with whom she decided to begin a religious community under the direction of Joseph Varin d'Ainville.<sup>31</sup> She was cured of her paralysis, but her trials and suffering were not yet over: she encountered resistance from members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The motif of the unjustly wronged foundress or mother superior is common to hagiographies of this period. The villain in Julie's hagiographies is Father de Sambucy, who told the bishop that Julie was an ambitious, autocratic woman who was looking for personal gain. He managed to take control of the convent and appoint as Mother Superior a woman only 23 years old who had spent just a few months as a nun.<sup>32</sup> Not only did Father de Sambucy treat her poorly, but others who heard the gossip also did. Julie responded to the gossip, mistrust, and removal of her authority the same way other saints did: she submitted to the will of Father de Sambucy without a complaint because "He that excuses himself, accuses himself."<sup>33</sup> The only possible explanation for why

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<sup>30</sup>Sister Mary Fidelis, *As Gold in the Furnace*, 11.

<sup>31</sup>*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s. v. "Billiard, Julie."

<sup>32</sup>Sister Mary Fidelis, *As Gold in the Furnace*, 92-97.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 112.

Father de Sambucy--who was, after all, a priest--would mistreat Julie is "that God, in His all-wise Providence, allowed the frayed nerves of a truly holy man to serve as a means of further testing the virtue of His loyal servant."<sup>34</sup> Julie moved to Belgium, where her religious order, the Notre Dame de Namur Sisters, thrived, while the Notre Dame sisters in France failed. She died in 1816 and was buried on April 10. Fifteen months later, in July 1817, her coffin was opened--her body was "still fresh and beautiful," with no signs of decomposition except for a slight shriveling of the fingertips.<sup>35</sup>

Julie's hagiographies are an unusually rich source of myth of the kind described by Ricoeur, Berger, and George Egerton. As Egerton explains, political ideologies incorporate political myths: the underlying myth of Bolshevism, for example, is the revolutionary class struggle resulting in a classless society; of liberalism, evolutionary progress and "a vision of free human fulfilment;" of conservatism, the organic growth of society and "the reconstruction of Christendom."<sup>36</sup> Like the exponents of these various ideologies, hagiographers employ a reductive view of history and an idealized vision of the future in order to make their ideologies--or, in this case, Catholicism--relevant and meaningful to their readers. Julie's two hagiographers used slightly different myths--slightly different reductive histories--to promote a conservative, Catholic worldview.

For Father James Clare, Julie is just one of a long history of saints called to protect the church during times of crisis and opposition from the outside world. Judith and Esther both saved their people from destruction; "even frail women (could) be the instruments for the preservation of His chosen people,"

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 197.

<sup>36</sup>George Egerton, "Collective Security as Political Myth," 501.

although the chosen people were now the "children of the holy Catholic Church."<sup>37</sup> During each period of threats to the church, God calls saints to defend the church. During the barbarian invasions of Christendom, he called Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine; during the Protestant Reformation, he called Ignatius and Teresa; during the present crisis--in 1897, when Clare was writing his preface, there was in France "the persistent effort of wicked men, who have striven to wrest out of the hands of the pastors of the Church the education of youth of both sexes, and to appoint as professors and teachers of the young persons who, if not openly hostile, are at least indifferent to all religion," against which trend God called Julie, whose religious order was a teaching order.<sup>38</sup>

In her hagiography, Sister Mary Fidelis does not address a specific contemporary political crisis, such as the secularization of schools; instead, she uses Julie's life to illustrate the general horrors of republicanism and Enlightenment philosophy, horrors which, she argues, still threaten her contemporary readers. The book begins with a description of Julie fleeing from republican persecutors; Julie, hidden in the back of a wagon underneath hay, barely escaped. Throughout the book, jabs are made at republicans and agnostics. An acquaintance's illness was more difficult to bear because he had no faith, the consequence of his having read Voltaire.<sup>39</sup> Napoleon is the target of other attacks: Sister Mary Fidelis describes Julie's disgust with two soldiers, happy to give their lives for Napoleon, "these hero-worshippers of a human ruler."<sup>40</sup> For both hagiographers, Julie Billart was more than a pious nun, more

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<sup>37</sup> James Clare, editor and author of preface, The Life of the Blessed Julie Billart: Foundress of the Insitute of Sisters of Notre Dame (1897; reprint, London: Sands and Co., 1909), xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., vxii-xix.

<sup>39</sup> Sister Mary Fidelis, As Gold in the Furnace, 52.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 175.

than a faithful practitioner of heroic virtue; she was a useful example for twentieth-century Catholics, a woman who resisted the predominant culture of unbelief and materialism, a woman whose struggles were the very same as the struggles facing contemporary Catholics.

### Maria Goretti

Maria was born on October 16, 1890, in Corinaldo, Italy, to extremely poor, pious tenant farmers. She was a pious child, the particular favourite of her parents, who saw to it that she received an early religious education. Her mother made sure she was baptized as soon as possible--the day after birth--because to her mother "original sin was a horrible reality and she wanted her free from it at the first possible moment."<sup>41</sup> Despite their extreme poverty, the Gorettis had plenty of children, confident that God would provide. The Gorettis hoped to find better farming in another part of Italy, so they moved to Nettuno, a tiny community about 30 miles southeast of Rome.

In Nettuno, the Gorettis shared a home to save money with the Serenelli family, who were also tenant farmers, but not as faithful as the Gorettis. Giovanni Serenelli was an alcoholic who occasionally stole things and managed to get both himself and Maria's father in trouble. The Gorettis were never able to pull themselves out of debt. Their poverty worsened after the death of Maria's father when she was not quite ten years old. Maria did her best to help the family. As the oldest child, she ran the household so her mother could work the fields. She volunteered to walk several miles to a market to sell eggs every Saturday--a long and arduous journey which she undertook in her bare feet, where she endured not only physical hardship but the taunting and teasing of the town children and the potential corruption from contact with

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<sup>41</sup>Marie Cecilia Buehrle, Saint Maria Goretti (1950; second reprint, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1951), 39.

town life. The corruptions of town life never had any effect on her: Maria was always outstandingly pious. When the village adults went on a pilgrimage of a couple of days' journey to a shrine for the Virgin Mary, Maria organized a procession of neighbourhood children to the local shrine. Because her own mother could not read, Maria sought instruction in the catechism from a neighbour, which enabled her to receive an early first communion.

After the death of her father, the Serenellis became increasingly abusive of the Goretti family. As Alfred MacConastair explains, "Giovanni Serenelli sensed his unlimited power over the bereaved widow and her children now that Luigi was out of the way, and he made no secret of the satisfaction it gave him."<sup>42</sup> The Serenellis demanded that the Gorettis cook their meals, launder their clothes, and clean up after them--all of these chores fell to Maria, the new mistress of the household. The Gorettis, even more impoverished after Luigi's death, felt powerless to resist because they could not afford to move. Furthermore, the Serenellis' morals were lax; Giovanni drank too much; one of the sons, Alessandro, cursed and read newspapers and magazines with photographs of scantily clad women, photographs which he placed on the walls of his bedroom.

Nineteen-year-old Alessandro was attracted to Maria. When she was just eleven years old, he began to remark on her appearance, to flirt with her. He propositioned her when she was alone in the barn doing chores. She refused him and pushed him away when he tried to kiss her. His attentions persisted: in fact, he became more threatening. He told her that she must submit to him or die, and he threatened to kill her if she told anyone. After weeks of harrassment, during which time Maria grew thin, pale, and sad,

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<sup>42</sup>Alfred MacConastair, *Lily of the Marshes: The Story of Maria Goretti* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1951), 62.



Alessandro found her alone in the house one day, in the kitchen washing up, while everyone else was in the fields working. Again, Alessandro demanded that she have sex with him; he said he would kill her if she did not. According to MacConastair, Maria had a choice--sex or death--and she consciously chose death rather than the loss of her virginity:

The dagger rose, poised. Her body shrank in terror. Voices pounded in her ears. "Nod your head! Nod your head!" But she would not.

He would take her by force then, before killing her. He threw her on the bench. She struggled violently. He could have her life but not her chastity. That she would never surrender.<sup>43</sup>

Alessandro stabbed her more than a dozen times. Her screams brought her family to the house, but not in time. Maria did not die immediately, however; she was rushed to the hospital and lived two days before dying. While Maria was in the hospital, her mother learned, to her relief, that Alessandro had not raped her. According to MacConastair, Maria's mother was uneasy till she learned this: "Something else, however, was gnawing at her mother's heart. The thoughtful doctor understood. He assured Assunta that her daughter had not lost the virginity which she had fought so bravely to defend."<sup>44</sup> After having forgiven Alessandro for stabbing her, Maria died July 6, 1902. Years later, Alessandro saw a vision of Maria while he was in prison; he then repented and became a faithful Catholic; he even served as a witness during her canonization hearings.

As with Gemma Galgani and Julie Billiart, Maria's hagiographers used her life to express anti-modern attitudes. For both Buehrle and MacConastair,

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 166.

Maria's death could be partly blamed on the influence of the media. Buehrle mentions that Alessandro was reading the *Tribuna Illustrata* the front page of which had a picture of a man with his hands around a woman's throat.<sup>45</sup> MacConastair's condemnation of the media is even stronger: he refers to the photographs of women Alessandro kept on his walls as pornography; it was these images, MacConastair argues, that encouraged Alessandro to think of trying to rape Maria. But Maria's hagiographers are less politically motivated than Julie Billiart's or Gemma Galgani's: the significance of their interpretation of Maria's life is their creation of a new type of female heroine, based in part on a new understanding of the Virgin Mary. Maria as female heroine will be discussed in chapter three.

Hagiographers understood all three of these saints not just as deeply religious women whose lives had religious relevance to the pious, but also as women whose lives had political relevance to contemporary Catholics. Politically, their lives demonstrate the importance of opposing modernity--of resisting materialism, republicanism, Enlightenment philosophy, the secularization of schools, and the popular press. The saints oppose culture; they are not portrayed as products of their societies and their times but as antitheses to their contemporary culture. Their lives are used to promote conservative--if not reactionary--political worldviews. In chapter two I will examine three popes' interpretations of these women's lives. Based on what Mary Daly and others have written about the conservatism of the papacy in particular and the Catholic church in general, we would expect to find the popes' attitudes essentially similar to the hagiographers: that these saints' lives

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<sup>45</sup>Marie Cecilia Buehrle, *Saint Maria Goretti*, 94.

provided an opportunity to express opposition to modernity in general and feminism in particular.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the papacy's position on modernity and feminism was not static, nor was John XXIII's reign the only time in which different attitudes toward modernity and feminism were expressed. In chapter two, I describe the subtle yet significant shift in the papacy's position on feminism as expressed through canonization speeches.

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<sup>46</sup>Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, 107-124. Daly did, however, describe John XXIII's reign as a refreshing if brief change from papal misogyny. But, she argues, Paul VI was a return to conservatism.

## CHAPTER TWO

From Antifeminism to Maternal Feminism:  
Papal Interpretations of Saints as Exemplars

Papal attitudes towards women began changing long before the second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the ecumenical council called by Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) which is widely believed to have initiated changes in the church's attitudes towards women.<sup>1</sup> As Richard Camp argues, popes since Leo XIII (1878-1903) increasingly sought the support of women in the lay movement known as Catholic Action, a program of social and religious reform which was founded late in the reign of Leo's predecessor, Pius IX; consequently, popes began to voice their appreciation for women's contributions outside the home.<sup>2</sup> Before the reign of Leo XIII, popes argued that women should be subordinate to men because of Eve's role in the Fall; marriage was not a union of two equal partners because the woman must always remain subordinate to her husband. Leo XIII himself did not support women's equality, but his encouragement of Catholic Action--and his moderate liberal (as opposed to Pius IX's reactionary) perspective on society--enabled his successors to develop Catholic Action into a vehicle whereby women could leave their homes to promote and defend Catholic social and spiritual values.<sup>3</sup> Benedict XV (1914-1922) supported female suffrage, and Pius XI (1922-1939), despite many traditional views he held about women, supported women's involvement in Catholic Action. As Camp argues, Pius XI's "determination to defend the Church with an organized,

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Sally Cunneen, Sex: Female: Religion: Catholic (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 10-21.

<sup>2</sup>Richard L. Camp, "From Passive Subordination to Complementary Partnership: The Papal Conception of a Woman's Place in Church and Society since 1878" The Catholic Historical Review 76(July 1990): 507.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 507-511.

disciplined laity partly overcame his traditionalist biases about a woman's place."<sup>4</sup> Pius XII (1939-1958) not only supported women's right to vote, he encouraged them to vote and involve themselves in politics and government because he hoped Catholic women voters could prevent Communist victories at the polls in Italy. And, finally, John XXIII and Paul VI (1963-1978) supported the equality of rights between the sexes.<sup>5</sup> Overall, papal views of women's position in society changed dramatically during the twentieth century--from, as Richard Camp describes it, women's passive subordination in marriage and society to women's "complementary partnership" with men in marriage and society.

Although twentieth century popes increasingly supported women's active participation in society in order to strengthen the power of the church, all of these popes argued that women were essentially different than men--that their roles should be different than men's but should be valued equally.<sup>6</sup> Papal support of women's participation in society rested on the belief that women and men have different natures; their support for women's activity outside the home was always tempered with warnings that women must not neglect their primary calling--the care of their husbands and children. Because of their belief in the fundamental difference between men's and women's natures, popes usually disagreed with feminist arguments for women's participation in society because many feminists rejected the belief in a fundamental difference between men's and women's natures. But even papal policy towards feminism changed during the twentieth century. Pius XII regarded feminism as inimical to women's best interests: feminism strips

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 515.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 516-521.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 524-525.

women of their natural dignity and encourages women to abandon their natural vocation, motherhood and marriage. But Paul VI acknowledged that feminists had legitimate complaints about the condition of women in society: rather than opposing them as Pius XII did, he tried to show feminists that, for the most part, feminist and Catholic values were not incompatible. The rest of this chapter considers each pope--Pius, John, and Paul--separately; with particular reference to papal canonization speeches and speeches on the role of women, I will explain why papal attitudes towards feminism changed from Pius's reign to Paul's reign.

#### Pope Pius XII (1939-1958)

Pope Pius XII brought a strong interest in Italian politics and an extremely conservative political orientation to the office of the Holy See. The grandson of a Vatican official under Pius IX, the son of a financial adviser to more than one pope, Pius XII, born Eugenio Pacelli, had "been groomed for (the papacy) almost from the moment his predecessor was elected or, as some of his critics felt, from birth."<sup>7</sup> Pius XII continued Pius XI's policy of trusting the political right more than the left.<sup>8</sup> Before the elections of 1948 in Italy, Pius XII tried to ally the Christian Democratic party with the right rather than the left, and he funnelled money to several right-wing candidates who were supportive of the church. A decisive victory for the Christian Democrats prevented an alliance with the neo-Fascists or the monarchists to ensure majority rule, but, had a coalition government been necessary, there is little doubt that Pius would have demanded a coalition with the right-wing parties.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Francis Xavier Murphy, The Papacy Today (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 57-58.

<sup>8</sup>Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, Papal Power: A Study of Vatican Control over Lay Catholic Elites (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980), 186.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

Pius's aversion to the left was firmly rooted in his philosophy: as Francis Xavier Murphy explains, Pius had developed "an absolute phobia against atheistic communism;" "he had nightmares that strengthened his conviction of the literally diabolical nature of the communist system, likening it to the dominations and powers of preternatural evil spoken of by St. Paul."<sup>10</sup> In opposing communism, in opposing all threats from the left, Pius's strategy was oriented not so much to appeasing discontented Catholic workers and socialists as to opposing them. For example, he removed Archbishop Charbonneau of Montreal from office because of the Archbishop's sympathies for the workers during an important strike; in 1939 he placed Catholic Action under the control of the clergy in order to keep its policies and activities right-wing; even after World War II, when the laity regained some control of Catholic Action, the clergy still held most of the power. Because many of the clergymen in charge of Catholic Action had been supporters of fascism, numbers of liberal and socialist lay people left Catholic Action.<sup>11</sup> Pius opposed socialism and communism; he did not try to persuade Catholics that communist and Catholic goals were similar: he tried to show Catholics that communists were *wrong*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Francis Xavier Murphy, The Papacy Today, 62.

<sup>11</sup>Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, Papal Power, 57, 50.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Pius's "Address to the Representatives of Italian Workers" on January 13, 1943 in Michael Chiningo, editor, The Teachings of Pope Pius XII (London: Methuen and Co., 1958), 328-329. Pius makes the following remarks about communism: "The Church, guardian and instructor of truth, in her assertion and bold defence of the rights of the working population, on various occasions opposing error, has had to put our people on guard against letting themselves be deluded by the mirage of specious and fatuous theories and visions of future well-being or by the deceitful lures and urgings of false teachers of social prosperity who call bad good and good bad and who, claiming to be the friends of the people, do not permit the mutual agreements between capital and labour and between employers and employed that maintain and promote harmony for the progress and benefit of all."

Similarly, Pius tried to point out the errors of feminism to Catholics. Feminism, he argued, strips women of their dignity and deprives Catholic girls of suitable role models:

The daughter of a woman of fashion, who sees the supervision of her home left to strangers and her mother engrossed in frivolous occupations and futile amusements, will follow her example, will want to emancipate herself as early as possible and, according to a truly sad expression, 'live her own life.' How could she conceive the desire to become some day a real '*domina*,' that is, the mistress of the house, in a happy, prosperous, worthy family? As for the working classes, obliged to earn their daily bread, the woman, if she were to reflect properly, would probably realize that the extra earnings which she secures by working outside her home are easily devoured by other expenses or even by waste, which is ruinous for the economy of the family.

In the face of theories and methods which, from different approaches, strip woman of her mission and, with the mirage of unbridled emancipation, or in the reality of a hopeless misery, divest her of her personal dignity, her woman's dignity, we have heard a cry of apprehension which invokes, as much as possible, her active presence at the domestic hearth.<sup>13</sup>

Later in the speech, Pius acknowledges that some women cannot afford not to work outside the home; because of this situation, Catholic women are called upon to improve the plight of poor women, to make sure social conditions exist whereby poor women can stay home. Men, he argued, should apply themselves to business and public affairs to improve social conditions, while women should apply themselves to "tasks which call for tact, delicate feelings, and maternal instinct, rather than administrative rigidity," such as rehabilitating discharged prisoners and delinquent girls.<sup>14</sup>

According to Pius XII, Christianity is not innately sexist; in fact, Christianity was responsible for the improvement of women's position in

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<sup>13</sup>Pope Pius XII, The Teachings of Pope Pius XII, M. Chinigo, ed., 64-65.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 65-66.



society, as the quote from Paul--that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor freeman, male nor female--demonstrates.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the church's exaltation of Mary as a model for women "shows the high esteem that Christianity nourishes for womanhood and the immense trust which the Church herself rests in woman's power for good."<sup>16</sup> Provided that women do not neglect family life, women can be involved in "politics, labor, the arts, sports."<sup>17</sup> According to Pius, Catholicism provided all women would need: they could work outside the home, as long as they did not neglect their family, which, ultimately, they would not want to do because the family provides women with a greater sense of fulfillment than anything else; feminism, by contrast, offered false promises of emancipation--a neglect of family, a loss of morality, and a consequent decline in the dignity of women.

Canonization speeches provided Pius perfect opportunities to show that Catholicism--not feminism, which he often equated with libertinism and sexual looseness--promised women the greatest opportunities for satisfaction and fulfillment. In his speech at the canonization of Maria Crocifossa Rosa, he explained how she was an appropriate example for contemporary women to imitate:

She renounced all vanity, every use of fashion, every worldly entertainment, every indulgence in material pleasures, every offer of marriage. She undertook the care of girls and ordinary women, bore criticism patiently, especially those of deluded libertines, and joyfully distributed her goods to the needy.<sup>18</sup>

As much as Pius advocated marriage and motherhood for Catholic women, he nevertheless believed that a woman who renounced marriage to enter a

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<sup>15</sup>Pope Pius XII, *The Pope Speaks* 3 (Spring 1957): 369.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>18</sup>Pope Pius XII, *The Pope Speaks* 1 (Summer 1954): 169.

convent led a still more exalted life: "Virginity is like an angelic way of life and by its excellence is a state superior to that of matrimony."<sup>19</sup> Despite their status as virgins, nuns were still, essentially, mothers: they brought their nurturing and tenderness to their vocations, carefully serving whomever required help, as Maria Crocifossa Rosa did in her service to girls. According to Pius's understanding, there was no contradiction in proposing a nun as a model for married Catholic women: both virgins and mothers could provide the same types of service to the world because both had a feminine nature, defined as nurturing, gentle, and kind.

Married women were not asked to imitate the physical austerities of some of the saints--of Margaret of Hungary, for example, a thirteenth-century nun who followed a rigorously ascetic regime. At age six, she begged to be allowed to wear a hair shirt; throughout her short life--she died at age 28--she fasted, slept little, never bathed, and performed exhausting menial labour.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, she still provided a useful example for contemporary Catholics who enjoyed comfort all too well:

And who would deny that the world needed then, and still needs now that kind of lesson which makes it blush with shame for its unbridled worship of the flesh, its longing for pleasure, its immodesty in dress, and its constant pursuit of the esteem and praise of men?<sup>21</sup>

Although Pius does not explicitly mention feminists in this speech, his criticism of them is implicit: he criticizes "immodesty in dress" and "longing for pleasure," characteristics which he ascribed in other speeches to feminists, whom he failed to distinguish from "libertines." Overall, however much Pius

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<sup>19</sup>Pope Pius XII, The Pope Speaks 5 (Summer 1958): 99.

<sup>20</sup>From preface by Benet O'Driscoll to Sister Mary Catherine, Margaret, Princess of Hungary: A Newly Canonized Saint (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1945), 7.

<sup>21</sup>Pope Pius XII, The Pope Speaks 5 (Autumn 1959): 443.

may have wanted Catholic women to leave the home to participate in Catholic Action, he did not want them to adopt the values he thought feminists were advocating--a preference for a career over family life, distaste for housework, work outside the home when it was not absolutely financially necessary, immodest dress, and greater sexual freedom. In canonizations speeches, he described newly canonized women as having rejected those values he thought feminists promoted: for Pius, saints were women who had rejected "emancipation" and dedicated themselves to a life of service or austerity, all the while maintaining their natural femininity. For Pius, saints stood in opposition to contemporary secular values.

John XXIII (1958-1963)

Born to a peasant family in Italy, Angelo Roncalli (John XXIII) did not acquire any exposure to Vatican politics until well into adulthood--a sharp contrast with Pius XII's upbringing. Relegated to insignificant Vatican diplomatic posts such as Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece, Roncalli seemed destined for a minor career in Vatican diplomacy, were it not for two unusual circumstances. In 1944, Charles de Gaulle demanded the recall of the papal nuncio to Paris, Archbishop Valerio Valeri, who had maintained diplomatic relations with the Vichy government.<sup>22</sup> The pope's first choice for nuncio was too ill to fill the appointment immediately; against Cardinal Tardini's advice, the pope appointed Roncalli, whom the pope described as the "easygoing fellow" in Istanbul.<sup>23</sup> Whoever held the post in Paris almost inevitably became a cardinal, and therefore one of the select few who were considered for the papacy.

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<sup>22</sup>Wilton Wynn, Keepers of the Keys (New York: Random House, 1988), 18.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 19.

After an unexpected rise to the position of cardinal, Roncalli experienced another unexpected elevation--to the office of the Holy See. When Pius XII died, the clear favourite for the papacy--Giovanni Montini, later Paul VI--had not yet become a cardinal and could not consequently be considered for the papacy. After Pius's relatively long 19-year reign, the conclave was eager for a shorter papacy: John was old (77 years), Italian (the conclave had been electing Italian popes for 400 years), and, to members of the conclave, he seemed to be reliable and unadventurous, unlikely to do anything unusual. The conclave thought they were electing a safe, short-term, transitional pope.<sup>24</sup>

Because of his unconventional career, John XXIII was less steeped in Vatican politics than his predecessor, so his actions and policies were not as politically explicit as Pius's. As Jean-Guy Vaillancourt explains, "Paul VI and Pius XII, by career, class origin, and the political involvement of their own families, were both predisposed to become political popes, but Paul perhaps proved a more astute conservative politician than the last of the Pius popes. In contrast, John XXIII, with his very different background and Church career, was not an Italian politician, and his perspectives can be said to have been oriented more toward religion and the international scene rather than toward the specific Italian political struggles."<sup>25</sup>

John is best known for having called Vatican II, the ecumenical church council responsible for a range of moderate church reforms. Widely remembered as a liberal, John in fact held a range of liberal and conservative views. Unlike his predecessors, he endorsed trade unions--even autonomous trade unions not under the control of the state (as they were during Mussolini's

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 20-23.

<sup>25</sup>Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, Papal Power, 232.

dictatorship) or the church;<sup>26</sup> he distinguished between "communism as an atheistic creed, and as a political, social and economic theory that one had to contend with in the historical order," thereby giving himself philosophical justification for talking with socialist leaders and journalists and members of communist governments;<sup>27</sup> his tolerance and openness had limits, however, such as when he suppressed France's worker-priest experiment--the movement in which priests laboured in factories in order to befriend the working class.<sup>28</sup> Theologically, John was more conservative: he was devoted to the saints, frequently celebrated the Mass, said his rosary, and enjoyed the Latin services and the pomp and ritual of the Catholic church.<sup>29</sup> But, although he loved the traditional church rituals and forms of piety, "he also saw that its structures and even its theological expressions were completely inadequate to the task Christ had set before it--to preach the Gospel to every creature. This vision, turned into a conviction, was behind his calling of the Council."<sup>30</sup> This vision--international and primarily religious, not political--informed John's understanding of the saints he canonized and the ways he communicated their significance to the world.

Unlike Pius XII, John did not use canonization ceremonies as opportunities to comment on the role of women in society. Instead, he emphasized the international origins of the women he beatified and canonized. At Elizabeth Bayley Seton's beatification in 1963, John described the first American-born saint as a tribute to the United States; he praised the United States because "America's citizens have explored the sea and the skies; they

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<sup>26</sup>Wilton Wynn, Keepers of the Keys, 220-221.

<sup>27</sup>Francis Xavier Murphy, The Papacy Today, 87.

<sup>28</sup>Wilton Wynn, Keepers of the Keys, 49.

<sup>29</sup>Francis Xavier Murphy, The Papacy Today, 77, 83.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

have completed excellent undertakings; they have given openhanded hospitality and employment to immigrants from every land."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, John emphasized the uniqueness of Marguerite d'Youville's geographical origins when he beatified her in 1960: "This is the first time that a flower of sanctity springing up from the very soil of Canada is blooming under the arches of St. Peter's."<sup>32</sup>

Although d'Youville led a life very similar to the lives led by saints canonized by Pius XII, John does not use her life--or other saints' lives--to make derogatory remarks about feminism, contemporary fashion, or contemporary sexual morality. His remarks are more general; about d'Youville, for example, he says the following--

She was a virtuous wife during misfortunes, a widow of dignity and courage, an exemplary mother, who had the consolation of seeing ascend the two sons who alone survived of the six children born of her union with Francois d'Youville. . . .

Supernatural love for the poor, the sick, the abandoned, was the secret strength which animated this great soul. To be good, to be simple, to be respectful and tender towards those who suffer, who are humiliated by their physical or moral condition; to spread among them smiles and the consolation of friendship; to radiate upon everyone the warmth of a charity constantly renewed by meditation on the Heart of Christ. . . , that is the lesson of her life.<sup>33</sup>

John did emphasize the important roles women play in society in his canonization speeches: at the canonization of Bertilla Boscardin, for example, he praised her mother's effectiveness in raising Bertilla, "Where there is a mother who has faith, who prays and who raises her children as Christians, heavenly grace cannot be wanting."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John XXIII, The Pope Speaks 8 (Winter 1963): 338.

<sup>32</sup> John XXIII, The Pope Speaks 6 (Summer 1960): 277.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 277-278.

<sup>34</sup> John XXIII, The Pope Speaks 7 (Summer 1961): 98.

But John does not argue that Bertilla opposed contemporary secular society in choosing to raise her children as Christians: unlike Pius, John does not place the saints he canonized in opposition to contemporary secular values. Furthermore, John does not discuss the essential femininity of married and unmarried saints: in stressing the importance of good Christian mothers, John used Bertilla's mother as an example, not Bertilla herself (who was not a mother), whereas Pius discussed the motherly qualities of nuns who served the poor, the sick, and so forth. John believed in a fundamental difference between men and women, but he did not use canonization speeches to promote the idea of the essential feminine nature of all women. John did not use canonization speeches as an opportunity to comment on the role of women in society, but to reach out to a wider audience--to Americans and Canadians, who had their first native-born citizens declared blessed by John, and to blacks, who, John hoped, would be inspired by the canonization of Martin de Porres, a seventeenth-century black from Peru, in whom "was epitomized the kind of result the Church hopes to see come from the ecumenical council."<sup>35</sup> Feminism was a less pressing political concern to John than the need to reach out to Catholics beyond Italy and Europe: his canonization speeches reflect this priority.

#### Paul VI (1963-1978)

Born to a bourgeois church-oriented family in northern Italy, Giovanni Battista Montini (Paul VI) was carefully groomed for the papacy--or at least an outstanding church career--by both his family and his association with Eugenio Pacelli, or Pius XII. His father was a banker and entrepreneur with controlling interest in a local newspaper; he also dedicated himself to promoting Catholic causes, and later in life served as a member of the Italian parliament. His

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<sup>35</sup>John XXIII, *The Pope Speaks* 8 (Spring 1962): 3.

mother was equally dedicated to the church; she was a "determined activist" for charities.<sup>36</sup> As a young man, Giovanni Montini became interested in the liberal Catholic thinkers Jacques Maritain and Jean Guitton, whose theology helped shape Montini's own theology and politics.<sup>37</sup> After graduating from the Vatican's College of Nobles, he served in the papal curia, eventually becoming secretary to Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli,<sup>38</sup> with whom he developed a "father and son" relationship.<sup>39</sup> The close relationship with the pope lasted many years--until 1953 or 1954, when relations began to strain. Wilton Wynn explains the breakdown of the relationship as the result of increasingly divergent political views between the two. Although Montini had mistrusted fascism in the 1930s--he thought fascism was a greater threat than communism--, their political differences did not become an issue for Pius until much later, when Pius grew concerned over Montini's involvement in youth movements and when the Vatican-approved journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* thoroughly criticized the ideas of Montini's intellectual mentor, Jacques Maritain.<sup>40</sup> Pius never made Montini a cardinal, so Montini was not considered for the papacy when Pius died.

But John XXIII did make Montini a cardinal, and Montini was elected pope in the belief that he would carry out John's moderate liberal reforms, despite the vehement opposition of the conservatives within the curia (who voted for the conservative Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti).<sup>41</sup> As pope, Paul has been classified as both a liberal and a conservative, depending on

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<sup>36</sup>Francis Xavier Murphy, *The Papacy Today*, 118.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>39</sup>Wilton Wynn, *Keepers of the Keys*, 25.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 25-27.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 29-30.



which of his decisions are being discussed. He did immediately abolish the Congregation of the Holy Office, with its notorious Inquisition and Index of Forbidden Books;<sup>42</sup> he negotiated with communist governments, including continental China;<sup>43</sup> he established the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, many of whose members were involved in the struggles in Latin America and were exponents of liberation theology;<sup>44</sup> and his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* acknowledged the need for revolution when a people has been subjected to prolonged and repressive dictatorship.<sup>45</sup> these decisions account for Paul's reputation as a liberal. But in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* he maintained the ban on artificial contraception as a means of birth control, despite the recommendation of his special commission endorsing the use of contraception;<sup>46</sup> in 1976, he decided to continue the ban on the ordination of women because of women's inability to "represent Christ";<sup>47</sup> during the later years of his pontificate, he began to criticize the liberals he had once supported--he retired the liberal Cardinal Lercaro of Bologna and launched a secret investigation of the progressive theologian Edward Schillebeeckx.<sup>48</sup> these decisions account for Paul's reputation as a conservative. Jean-Guy solves the dilemma of Paul's political and theological orientation by classifying him as a progressive-conservative, to the left of Pius XII and the right of John XXIII: "Unlike Pius XII, Paul VI was not a reactionary and authoritarian leader of

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<sup>42</sup>Francis Xavier Murphy, *The Papacy Today*, 121.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>44</sup>Wilton Wynn, *Keepers of the Keys*, 221-222.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, *Papal Power*, 215.

<sup>47</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, "John Paul II and the Growing Alienation of Women from the Church" in Hans Kung and Leonard Swidler, editors, *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 282.

<sup>48</sup>Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, *Papal Power*, 215.

men. He was rather a sensitive and modest liberal turned more conservative because difficult circumstances pushed him in that direction."<sup>49</sup>

Paul was faced with greater opposition both within and outside of the church than either John or Pius had faced. Within the church, the laity had become organized and angry; at the third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in 1967, lay leaders demanded greater democracy within the church.<sup>50</sup> In 1969, 40 theologians published a manifesto asking for "greater freedom of inquiry and expression" in the church.<sup>51</sup> Outside the church, the socialist party, for whom Paul had less and less sympathy, was gaining support at the expense of the Catholic church-oriented Christian Democratic party; in 1976, after the church had lobbied unsuccessfully to have a law permitting divorce in Italy rescinded, the Christian Democratic party lost another block of voters--significant numbers of working-class Catholics voted for the communists.<sup>52</sup> Faced with evidence that the Vatican's influence in Italian politics was declining, especially because of the church's failure to persuade voters to reject the divorce law, Paul tried to appeal to Catholics with a moderate reformist agenda which nevertheless fell short of Catholics'--particularly Italian Catholics'--expectations.<sup>53</sup>

Many Catholic women, especially Catholic feminists, were angry about Paul's birth control decision in 1968, his opposition to the 1970 divorce law in Italy, and his explanation in 1976 of why women could not be ordained. To win back support from disgruntled Catholic women, or at least to keep other Catholic women from becoming disgruntled, Paul VI tried to appeal to the

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 218, 243.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 243-257.

interests of Catholic women in his canonization speeches: he described new female saints as women who led active, modern lives, not unlike the lives feminists allegedly admired. When he canonized Elizabeth Bayley Seton (she had been beatified by John XXIII) in 1975, he remarked that "we are pleased to note that this event coincides with an initiative of the United Nations: International Women's Year."<sup>54</sup> According to Paul, her life was eminently worthy of emulation by modern women, women who defined themselves in "modern" terms--as active rather than passive members of society:

(International Women's Year) aims at promoting an awareness of the obligation incumbent on all to recognize the true role of women in the world and to contribute to their authentic advancement in society. And we rejoice at the bond that is established between this program and today's canonization as the Church renders the greatest honor possible to Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton and extols her personal and extraordinary contribution as a woman--a wife, a mother, a widow, and religious. May the dynamism and authenticity of her life be an example in our day--and for generations to come--of what women can and must accomplish, in the fulfillment of their role, for the good of humanity.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Paul tried to appeal to "modern" women when he argued that the Virgin was a suitable exemplar for modern women not because she was a devoted mother or pure virgin, but because she was strong and courageous: "The modern woman will note with glad surprise that Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary she did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions."<sup>56</sup> Whereas Pius XII praised the women he canonized as

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<sup>54</sup>Paul VI, The Pope Speaks 20(Winter 1975): 207.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Paul VI, The Pope Speaks 19(Spring 1974): 75.

opponents of contemporary secular values, particularly feminist values, Paul VI tried to show that the women he canonized represented some contemporary secular values--again, especially feminist values.

Feminists may not have found Paul's speeches satisfying. As Marina Warner, a feminist scholar, explained when she commented on Paul's 1974 speech on the Virgin Mary, "The Vatican cannot simply strip away a veil and reveal Mary's metamorphosis into the New Woman unless it dredges centuries of prejudice. Its incapacity to do this is complete: the teleological view that the natural law ordains that women must bear and suffer underpins the Church's continuing indefensible ban on contraception; a dualistic distaste for the material world reinforces the ideal of virginity; and an undiminished certainty that women are subordinate to men continues to make the priesthood of women unacceptable."<sup>57</sup> Paul may very well have failed to persuade Catholic feminists that he was describing feminist saints who were honoured by a feminist church, but his decision to acknowledge and try to appeal to feminists was itself significant--a clear departure from Pius's decision to oppose them. In a speech to the Italian Women's Center on December 6, 1976, Paul made his most positive remarks about feminism--that feminists, like the early Christians, were engaged in a mission to restore women's dignity as human beings: "like the Church of the first age, the Church of today cannot but be on the side of women, especially where, instead of being treated as active, responsible subjects, they are reduced to the status of passive, insignificant objects, as happens in some work situations, in degenerate exploitation of the mass media, in social relations and in the family. It might be said that for some men women are the easiest tool to use in expressing their impulses to

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<sup>57</sup>Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 338.

outrageous violence. This explains and to some extent makes intelligible the bitterness and vehemence with which various feminist groups seek to retaliate."<sup>58</sup> As "a well-organized and experienced Catholic feminist movement," Paul endorsed the efforts of the Italian Women's Center to promote the status of women<sup>59</sup>--a minor victory for the Catholic feminist movement, perhaps, but a significant one because it represented a change from earlier papal policies which opposed feminism.

Paul's policy towards feminism can be understood cynically as an effort to co-opt feminists, not to meet their demands. Jean-Guy Vaillancourt argued a similar point when he discussed Paul's policies towards the workers: his efforts to make himself thought of as the "archbishop of the workers" were motivated as much by a desire for the workers not to become communists as by a desire for social justice.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Paul's refusal to permit artificial contraception, his refusal to ordain women, as well as his occasional denunciation of "radical feminists"<sup>61</sup>--what others would call ordinary, liberal feminists--make it difficult to conclude that Paul's concerns were feminist, however much he claimed they were. At the very least, they were not feminist concerns in the way that feminists of the time would have defined them, such as members of St. Joan's International Alliance, for example, who lobbied for women's

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<sup>58</sup>Paul VI, The Pope Speaks 22(Spring 1977): 23.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>60</sup>Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, Papal Power, 210.

<sup>61</sup>See, for example, The Pope Speaks 21(summer 1976): 165; Paul VI says, "We wish also to put you on guard against some deviations which can affect the contemporary movement for the advancement of women. Equalization of rights must not be allowed to degenerate into an egalitarian and impersonal elimination of differences. The egalitarianism blindly sought by our materialistic society has but little care for the specific good of persons; contrary to appearances it is unconcerned with what is suitable or unsuitable to women. There is, thus, a danger of unduly masculinizing women or else simply depersonalizing them. In either case, the deepest things in women suffer."

ordination as early as 1967.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, in choosing to try to co-opt rather than oppose feminists, Paul adopted a conciliatory stance towards feminism which was reflected in his canonization speeches. Paul's "feminism" is best understood as maternal feminism, a conservative branch of feminism which promotes the active role of women in society because of their alleged nurturing qualities. Paul opposed what are known as equal rights or liberal feminists, those who argue for women's equality because of their status as persons, not because of any special claim they make to having nurturing, gentle qualities. But Paul did acknowledge that, in many cases, liberal feminists had legitimate grievances with society. More than Pius XII, Paul tried to persuade Catholic women that Catholicism embraced feminism, albeit only one kind of feminism - maternal feminism; Paul therefore tried to demonstrate that saints did not merely oppose secular values, but they embraced some of them.

This shift in papal policy from opposition to feminism to attempts at conciliation with feminism should not be understood as irreversible: papal attitudes towards feminism depend on who is occupying the office of the Holy See. The papacy is not generally becoming more liberal; John Paul II's reign has been conservative. John Paul II has issued more warnings about feminism than Paul VI; both believe in the idea of "complementary partnership" between men and women. John Paul II has warned against equal rights feminism because it denies the feminine part of women's nature: "In fact, (equal rights feminism) would end up being detrimental and unjust to those, the women, whom it claims to want to protect."<sup>63</sup> His canonization speeches are more reminiscent of Pius XII's than of John XXIII's or Paul VI's: he emphasizes the

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<sup>62</sup> Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, *Papal Power*, 121-122.

<sup>63</sup> John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks* 37 (January/February 1992): 330.

essential femininity of the saint rather than her "modern" qualities of activity outside the home. In a speech commemorating the 600th anniversary of St. Birgitta's canonization, he discusses the feminine qualities of the saint, not her similarity to "modern" women:

Birgitta appears to everyone who wants to know her and follow in her footsteps as the *valiant woman* who has left a special mark of her femininity on the house and court where she lived; as the *faithful spouse* who was led to a mystical marriage with Christ; as the *saintly mother* who wanted to pass on to her children the secrets of eternal salvation; as the *model Religious* who spent her life in love and was consumed with a desire to 'annihilate herself' in God.<sup>64</sup>

Although all four of the popes studied commented on saints whose lives were quite similar--most were nuns who served the poor and the sick--all four emphasized different aspects of their lives in order to promote each pope's religious or political worldview: for Pius XII, it was the essential femininity and anti-feminism of the saints; for John XXIII, the international origins of the saints; for Paul VI, the compatibility of the saints' lives with modern values, even with some aspects of feminism; for John Paul II, the essential femininity of the saints (both Paul VI and John Paul II emphasized unique geographical origins of saints when they came from countries outside of Western Europe).

Paul VI's efforts to appeal to feminists were hampered by his belief in the differences between men and women--the existence of an essential masculinity and an essential femininity--which demands that men and women perform different roles of equal value. In denying women the right to ordination, Paul VI appealed to this argument again: women have a different function than men do; only men should serve as priests. Priests, he argued,

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 39.

were representatives of Christ on earth; because Christ was male, only men could legitimately serve as priests, the representatives of Christ:

The priest is a sign, the supernatural efficacy of which derives from ordination. The meaning of the sign must be perceived and the faithful should be able to grasp it readily. The whole sacramental system is based on natural signs whose power to signify is intimately connected with the psychology of man. As St. Thomas puts it, "sacramental signs signify by reason of a natural likeness." This criterion of likeness must be applied, moreover, to persons no less than things. Since, then, Christ's role must be sacramentally represented in the Eucharist, the "natural likeness" required between Christ and his minister would be lacking if Christ were not represented by a male. Otherwise it would be difficult to perceive the image of Christ in the minister, since Christ was and remains a male.<sup>65</sup>

For Paul VI, the masculinity of Christ is of fundamental significance: women can imitate Christ but they cannot signify Christ: only men can signify Christ. Many hagiographers perceived the relationship between Christ and women--women saints, that is--differently than Paul VI did: women could not only imitate Christ, they could signify Christ. Chapter 3 explores the archetypes hagiographers used to convey the transcendent meaning of these saints' lives--if and how they were compared to Mary, to Christ, or to other religious figures. Hagiographers' understanding of the meaning of these women's lives undercuts Paul VI's argument that women cannot signify Christ. To many hagiographers, their subjects did exactly that: women signified Christ.

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<sup>65</sup>Paul VI, The Pope Speaks 22(Summer 1977): 118.



## CHAPTER THREE

Constructing Orthodox Narratives:  
Hagiographers and Their Subjects

It should surprise no one to learn that twentieth-century hagiographers used Christ's life as a model for the lives of the male and female saints they were describing: since the beginnings of Christianity, saints have been understood by Christians as imitators of and representations of Christ.<sup>1</sup> By using Christ's life as the model on which the saint's life is based, hagiographers can both implicitly and explicitly demonstrate the holiness of a saint to Christians. By structuring the life of the saint after the pattern of Christ's life--by including references, for example, to a bright star which shone at the saint's birth or a period of suffering which began at age 33, the age of Christ's crucifixion--, hagiographers can implicitly convey the transcendent significance of saints' lives by borrowing these images which are already meaningful to Christians. Saints themselves then become signifiers of holiness whose example may be invoked to demonstrate new saints' holiness: St. Francis of Assisi, for example, became a model of a particular type of holiness--of saints who experienced the stigmata. But archetypes for hagiographies are not limited to Christ and Christ-like saints: twentieth-century hagiographers also modelled their subjects' lives after the life of the Virgin Mary. In this chapter, I explain how and why these different archetypes of holiness were used to describe twentieth-century female saints; I also examine whether new

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<sup>1</sup> John Stratton Hawley, "Introduction: Saints and Virtues," in J. S. Hawley, editor, Saints and Virtues (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), xv.

archetypes of feminine sanctity were in turn created by twentieth-century hagiographers.

### The Virgin Mary as Archetype

Although Mary Daly and Simone de Beauvoir criticize the Catholic church for promoting Mary as the ideal woman, in particular the image of her as subordinate to her male child, medievalist scholars have recently argued that women themselves rarely looked to Mary as an exemplar. In her study of late medieval saints, Caroline Walker Bynum showed that "the fullest elaboration of the notion that Mary is a model for women or the notion that women are models for each other was found in biographies written by men (for example, those of Clare of Assisi and Columba of Rieti). Where we can compare the biographer's perspective with that of the subject (as we can in the case of Clare), we find that the woman herself tended to ignore the female model to discuss instead the imitation of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Establishing a dichotomy between male and female was more important to men than women, Bynum argues, mostly because this dichotomy enabled men to renounce the world: by rejecting the masculine, which meant rejecting the power, privilege and authority men enjoyed in the secular world, and embracing the feminine, men were doing what Christ called all Christians to do--to renounce worldly pursuits. As Bynum argues, "Since religious conversion meant the reversal of all earthly values, men enthusiastically adopted images of themselves as women--that is, powerless, poor, irrational, without influence or authority."<sup>3</sup> But for women, renunciation of the world could not involve gender role reversal because men had more status than women: women would be elevating

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<sup>2</sup>Caroline Walker Bynum, ". . . And Woman His Humanity: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages" in C. Walker Bynum, S. Harrell, and P. Richman, editors, Gender and Religion, 259.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 279.

themselves by thinking of themselves as men, and they would not be sacrificing anything by renouncing their gender role. Consequently, women focused not on their gender but on their humanity. Conditioned to think of themselves as representing humanity--that "man . . . signifies the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity--," women embraced the idea of their humanity, which was, ultimately, genderless.<sup>4</sup>

In the twentieth century, this tradition continues: male hagiographers are more likely than female hagiographers to use the Virgin Mary as an archetype for their books; male hagiographers are more likely to understand their subjects as gendered, as specifically feminine saints. But the selection of archetypal models depends not just on the gender of the hagiographer but also on the kind of life the saint led. Women who married and bore children--and there were very few of them among the women canonized during this period--were more likely to be described as similar to the Virgin Mary than to Christ or other saints, while women who were nuns from a young age or were mystics and ascetics were more likely to be described as similar to Christ than to Mary.

The only hagiographer to use Mary as an archetypal model in the way that Mary Daly and Simone de Beauvoir would have found most objectionable--the mother subordinating herself to her son--was Leonard Feeney, whose life of Elizabeth Bayley Seton, Mother Seton: Saint Elizabeth of New York (1774-1821), transforms his subject's life into the life of Mary as mother. Rather than concluding the book with a description of Seton's death or the miracles attributed to her intercession, as most hagiographies conclude, Feeney instead ends his book with a discussion of Seton's love for her son William, whose son became an archbishop. According to Feeney, "Mother Seton had, as we have

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 280.

seen, many loves in her life. To each of her loved ones she gave herself completely, in simplicity, undivided. But to her son, William Seton, she gave herself not merely in love, but almost in ecstasy."<sup>5</sup> Seton's life is thereby subordinated to her grandson's life: like the Virgin Mary described by Beauvoir and Daly, her significance derives from her reproductive ability, from her male offspring.

As Caroline Walker Bynum has argued, there is no reason to believe that women internalized this particular archetypal image of the Virgin Mary. Instead, Mary was important to men, in particular to Leonard Feeney, Seton's hagiographer. Feeney was an archconservative Catholic who founded the group the "slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary" in Boston in 1949. Feeney was censured by Archbishop Cushing of Boston for his right-wing activism: he organized demonstrations denouncing Jews and Protestants as "Christ-hating and Mary-hating people;" his protests occurred during the immediate post-World War II period, when knowledge of the Holocaust enhanced sensitivity about anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, his unremitting hostility towards Protestants and Jews--and his refusal to curb his public preaching that outside the church, there was no salvation--brought his excommunication. He took his cult of followers to a farm in Still River, Massachusetts, where married couples took vows of celibacy and lived separately and children were raised collectively.<sup>7</sup> According to Frances Scavullo, it was Feeney's Mary-centred worship that enabled him to defy religious authority. At the farm in Still River, "the symbolic life consisted mainly of pictures of the Madonna and statues of the

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<sup>5</sup>Leonard Feeney, Mother Seton: Saint Elizabeth of New York (1774-1821) (1938; revised edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ravensgate Press, 1975), 199.

<sup>6</sup>Frances M. Scavullo, "Leonard Feeney: The Priest Who Was More Catholic than the Pope," in David A. Halperin, editor, Psychodynamic Perspectives on Religion, Sect and Cult (Boston: John Wright-PSG Inc., 1983), 108.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 109.

Infant Jesus. God the Father was strongly absent (and deposed)."<sup>8</sup> Scavullo interprets Feeney's devotion to Mary as Oedipal: Feeney defied the father figures in the church, the pope and the archbishop, and devoted himself to a mother figure, the Virgin Mary. Scavullo does not examine how the women in the community understood their spirituality and their relationship to Mary and to Christ; it would be interesting to discover if women rejected or internalized this Madonna image. Given that the women consented to live separately and give up their roles as primary caregivers to their children, it is likely that they did not perceive of themselves as Madonnas, but as imitators of Christ in adopting celibacy and a religious life. Whatever their understanding may have been, Scavullo's analysis of Feeney's psychology is compelling: Feeney's devotion to the Virgin Mary is better understood not as an admonition to women to subordinate themselves to their sons, but as an integral part of his own piety, his understanding of his relationship to authority in the church.<sup>9</sup>

Other hagiographers used the Virgin Mary archetype to demonstrate that Christianity brought respect and dignity to women and allowed them to perform useful tasks outside the home. In his hagiography of Mother Francesca Xavier Cabrini, for example, Pietro di Donato describes Francesca as a devoted follower of Mary who advised the nuns in her order to follow Mary's example as well:

In urging imitation of Mary for her daughters, she was sharing with them one of her own most cherished devotions. Ever since her childhood, she had tried to model herself according to Saint Ambrose's description of Mary: "Her movement was not indolent, her walk was not too quick, her voice not affected or sharp; the composure of her person showed the beauty and harmony of her interior. It was a

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>9</sup>The ban of excommunication on Feeney was, incidentally, lifted in 1972.

wonderful spectacle to see with what promptness and diligence she performed her domestic duties, to which she applied herself with great solicitude, but always with tranquility and great peace. Her forehead was serene, and a modesty more celestial than terrestrial pervaded her every movement."<sup>10</sup>

Despite this traditional description of Mary and her followers as modest, serene, and diligent at domestic tasks, Donato's purpose is not to portray a passive and submissive saint, but a saint for whom the imitation of Mary brought strength and confidence sufficient to travel from Italy to America to found hospitals and schools where needed.

According to Donato, Mary is the source of the respect women receive in the Christian tradition; as he quotes Francesca Cabrini saying, "We should be grateful to Christianity, which has raised the dignity of woman. Before Mary, what was woman? With Mary, a new era arose for woman. She is no longer a chattel, but equal to man; no longer a servant, but mistress within domestic walls; no longer the subject of disdain and contempt, but elevated to Mother and Educator, on whose knee generations are built up."<sup>11</sup> A priest who tried to dissuade Mother Cabrini from becoming a missionary because she was a woman was proved wrong. He warned her that "the woman religious can be nothing but the quiet handmaiden to the towering prerogative of the Church fathers. Even after extended years an order of sisters is little empowered. . . . Let robust priests and Jesuits carry the frightful burdens of missions."<sup>12</sup> But Donato quickly shows that the the priest was wrong about women's roles: Mother Cabrini obtains Pope Leo XIII's permission to serve as a missionary and goes on to found a number of successful charities in America. Although Donato

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<sup>10</sup>Pietro di Donato, Immigrant Saint: The Life of Mother Cabrini (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill, 1960), 195.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 46.

proposes Mary as a model for women to emulate, he interprets Mary's life as liberating for women: in imitating Mary, Mother Cabrini was able to exceed contemporary expectations for women. Donato's philosophy is therefore similar to Pope Paul VI's. Like Pope Paul VI, he regards Christianity as the original source of women's equality in society; before Christianity, both argue, women were regarded as inferior and treated like slaves. Both Donato and Paul VI support maternal feminism, the type of feminism which asserts women's dignity and status because of their important roles as mothers.

Although Donato and Pope Paul VI understood the Virgin Mary as an essentially feminine archetype, not a universal archetype such as Christ (whom I will discuss later in this chapter), they and other hagiographers argued that Mary could serve as a valuable role model not just to women, but to men as well. The most extreme example of male devotion to Mary is Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1947. Although Montfort lived during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, according to one Catholic commentator, he "belongs more to our own age than he did to his. It is no mere coincidence that he was canonized and his doctrines brought into prominence during this 'Age of Mary.' He sowed the seed. Today his sowings are ripe for the harvest."<sup>13</sup> For Montfort, the Virgin Mary was a model for all Catholics, men and women; " 'We must in every action,' Montfort tells us, 'consider how Mary has done it, or how she would have done it, had she been in our place.' "<sup>14</sup> Mary's importance to Catholic piety, according to Montfort, derives from her special relationship with Christ: she gave Him the flesh to

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<sup>13</sup>James Mary Keane, "Presentation" to Joseph M. Dayet, Total Consecration to Mary: An Introduction to The True Devotion of St. Louis Mary de Montfort (Bay Shore, New York: Montfort Publications, 1956), viii.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Dayet, Total Consecration to Mary, 93-94.

make Him human.<sup>15</sup> For Montfort, Mary represented the human and earthly aspect of Christ, the flesh and blood which suffered on the cross. Although Mary provided a universal model for all Christians to emulate, her importance derived from her role as woman and mother, her ability to provide, nurture, and willingly sacrifice the flesh of her Son Jesus. Mary was, therefore, inseparable from her gender and her sex role.

Pope Pius XII also regarded Mary as synonymous with femininity. When he canonized five saints on one day in 1954, for example, he contrasted Dominic Savio's feminine spirituality with the masculine spirituality of the other three men canonized: "While the three heroes whom we have just commemorated had spent all their manly energies in the hard battle against the forces of evil, there appears before the image of Dominic Savio, the delicate adolescent, weak of body, but with a soul determined to make a pure oblation of itself to the sovereignly gentle and exacting love of Christ."<sup>16</sup> Savio's spiritual life was built on devotion to the Virgin: as Pius explains, "On December 8, 1854, he found himself uplifted in an ecstasy of love toward the Virgin Mary, and shortly afterwards he joined some of his friends in the Society of the Immaculate Conception. . ."<sup>17</sup> His reputation for sanctity was built primarily on his piety, his frequent reception of the Sacraments, his recitation of the Rosary, and his avoidance of evil.<sup>18</sup> Through his devotion to the Virgin, Savio borrowed what Pius described as feminine qualities: these feminine qualities helped Savio achieve sanctity. As Caroline Walker Bynum argues regarding medieval men, twentieth-century men partook of feminine virtues through their devotion to the Virgin because to do so entailed a symbolic reversal: an

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>16</sup>Pope Pius XII, The Pope Speaks 1 (Summer 1954): 168.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



emphasis on humility, a renunciation of the world. This idea of symbolic reversal explains Louis Montfort's devotion to Mary: because Jesus willingly submitted Himself to his earthly mother, Mary, for 30 years, so too must all Christians follow this model of humility and devotion to Mary; and Mary herself, who became Queen of Heaven, served all creatures, though as Queen she was greater than them in purity.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Vatican II's "Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests" encouraged priests to follow the Virgin's model of docility, to abandon pride and adopt humility.<sup>20</sup> Popes and hagiographers-- male hagiographers, in particular--present the Virgin as a model of feminine spirituality from which males and females may draw inspiration.

Female hagiographers tended to use the archetype of the Virgin Mary in different ways than male hagiographers did--not as a source of feminine virtues from which women could draw inspiration, but as a source of power and strength. The female hagiographer--Marie Cecilia Buehrle in her hagiography, Saint Maria Goretti--who made greatest use of the Mary archetype during this period did not emphasize Mary the mother of God, but Mary the virgin, the only woman immaculately conceived and hence free from Original Sin. The Catholic church did not officially adopt the dogma of the Immaculate Conception until 1854, during the reign of Pope Pius IX. In 1950, the church defined another Marian dogma, the Assumption of the Virgin, the belief that Mary's body was translated into heaven rather than left on earth to undergo decomposition. The period from 1850 to 1950 has been called the Marian Age, not only because of the definition of these two dogmas, but also because of the widespread apparitions of the Virgin beginning in the 1830s,

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<sup>19</sup>Joseph Dayet, Total Consecration to Mary, 8, 99-101.

<sup>20</sup>The Documents of Vatican II, editors Walter Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 570.

when she appeared to Catherine Labouré (canonized 1947) in Paris, and continuing through the early twentieth century, with appearances at Lourdes, Fatima, and Pontmain, among others.<sup>21</sup>

It was the dogma of the Immaculate Conception which informed Marie Cecilia Buehrle's hagiography of Maria Goretti, the 11 year-old virgin martyr. The Immaculate Conception was not just a dogma but an image--the Virgin Mary as New Eve, who crushed the snake and thereby avoided Original Sin. This image of Mary crushing a serpent with her foot was circulated throughout Europe on the "miraculous medal" described by Catherine Labouré, copies of which were made and distributed to Catholics throughout Europe and the United States.<sup>22</sup> Buehrle's use of the Immaculate Conception imagery enables her to describe Maria Goretti as a more powerful and sinless heroine than does another of her hagiographers, Alfred MacConastair, who does not employ Immaculate Conception imagery. Buehrle emphasizes Maria's early baptism that she might be free from the stain of Original Sin as soon as possible; also, Maria was consecrated to the Virgin. More significantly, Buehrle describes a scene in which the young Maria crushed a snake which was threatening her mother and sisters in the field; Maria therefore literally becomes Mary of the Immaculate Conception during this episode:

Quietly (Maria) approached the patch, stopping to look and listen at every step. Then she saw it, a large black snake uncoiling itself, happily with its head facing away from her. She aimed her stick at a spot just below the head, struck a forceful blow, and paralyzed it. The tail shivered; but the head could not move. She struck again and

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<sup>21</sup>Barbara Corrado Pope, "Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century," in Clarissa Atkinson, Constance Buchanan and Margaret Miles, editors, Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 173.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 173, 177.

knew that she had killed it.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after she killed the snake, her neighbour Alessandro made his first pass at her. Initially, Maria's inner strength rendered Alessandro powerless:

But (Alessandro) dared not touch her. Something within her was stronger than he. . . .

Alessandro, powerless in the face of a girl less than twelve, thwarted by a will stronger than his own, snarled with rage and grasped the dagger that lay ready on the stand at his elbow.<sup>24</sup>

Only physical force could be used against Maria: at no time was she ever tempted by Alessandro's suggestions.

By contrast, Alfred MacConastair's hagiography portrays Maria as doubtful and unsure: she struggled with internal temptation. As a young child, instead of the always confident, always pious Maria of Buehrle's hagiography, Maria instead occasionally succumbs to feelings of vanity and jealousy:

Strange longings were stirring in her young heart. She had seen girls of her own age, well-dressed, having a good time in Nettuno. Why couldn't she have a good time too? She was beautiful, she knew, for everybody told her so. Would she not look even more beautiful in fine clothes? She never had a day off, rarely left the house unless on an errand, whereas she knew other girls had parties and fun. Her heart stirred in rebellion.<sup>25</sup>

Her mother warned her that her main danger would be her beauty: because of it, she told Maria, "You will meet danger from without and weakness from within. Strange yearnings will fill your soul, and then God alone can help you. Turn to Him and His Blessed Mother."<sup>26</sup> After Alessandro first tried to seduce her, her mother's words echoed in her mind: "weakness from within; danger from without."<sup>27</sup> Although Maria never considers submitting to Alessandro in

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<sup>23</sup>Marie Cecilia Buehrle, Saint Maria Goretti, 90.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>25</sup>Alfred MacConastair, Lily of the Marshes, 75.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 134.

MacConastair's account, she is nevertheless much more vulnerable and unsure of herself than in Buehrle's account. When Alessandro finally threatens her in the final dramatic scene in which she is stabbed, MacConastair's Maria does not render Alessandro powerless even for a moment: in fact, MacConastair's Maria hears voices advising her to submit to Alessandro. Buehrle's use of the archetype of the Virgin Mary does not make her heroine submissive and weak; instead, it enables her to describe her heroine as confident and powerful, able to overcome--spiritually if not physically (although she does resist rape, if not death)--an older, physically stronger male.

According to Marina Warner, the powerful virgin is not a new image for Christian women; it existed before belief in the Immaculate Conception became Catholic dogma in 1854.<sup>28</sup> But Buehrle's life of Maria Goretti is not simply a modern retelling of the tales of the early Christian virgin martyrs--Agnes, Perpetua, Felicitas. By incorporating the imagery of the Immaculate Conception, Buehrle is able to reconcile the tension between woman as virgin and woman as mother, incompatible roles for all women save the Virgin Mary. Whereas the early virgin martyrs renounced the world to become Christians--renounced their families, their fathers and mothers, renounced suitors, and often renounced secular authorities as well,<sup>29</sup> Maria Goretti renounced no one; her life was the fulfillment of her parent's--particularly her mother's--intentions. She was baptized early to free her from Original Sin; her martyrdom therefore involved no break from her family, but the natural evolution of her parents' desires to keep her sinless. Maria's mother plays an important role in Buehrle's hagiography; it is to her--Assunta Goretti--that the book is dedicated; as Buehrle states, "To understand Maria it is necessary first

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<sup>28</sup>Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 72.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 267.

of all to know her mother."<sup>30</sup> The importance of mothers is further enhanced in Buehrle's book by her explanation of Alessandro's inclination to evil: rather than attribute Alessandro's crime to exposure to pornography, as MacConastair does, Buehrle attributes his crime to neglect, because Alessandro's mother died when he was very young. A mother's influence can create saints, such as Maria; the lack of a mother can create sinners, such as Alessandro. Marina Warner argues that the lives of the virgin martyrs, however powerful their virginity may have made them, did nothing to increase the status of women in society, women who married and lost their virginity.<sup>31</sup> But Buehrle's hagiography offers a way out of this dilemma: she conveys the power of the virgin saint as well as the importance of the mother; both virgin and mother are important, influential roles for women.

The Virgin Mary functioned as a different kind of symbol for female and male hagiographers (and popes, all of whom were, of course, men). For females, the Virgin was a source of strength and power, while for men the Virgin was a source of "feminine virtues," such as docility and humility. Furthermore, devotion to the Virgin Mary was not understood as the exclusive preserve of women; Leonard Feeney's hagiography of Elizabeth Seton, for example, is better understood as a product of Feeney's own piety rather than Seton's. Caroline Walker Bynum's observation that men were more likely than

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<sup>30</sup>Marie Cecilia Buehrle, Saint Maria Goretti.

<sup>31</sup>Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, 73. Thomas Heffernan argues that the hagiographies of early virgin martyrs did, in fact, reconcile the roles of virgin and mother. During the saint's crucifixion, the virgins were transformed into mothers; for example, in one hagiography, serpents were thrown at the saint's breasts and were transformed into children. By juxtaposing opposite images, virgin and mother, Heffernan argues, the hagiographers united these two images: "To wit, both Christian virgins and mothers beget children, albeit the one spiritual and the other biological." See Heffernan's Sacred Biography, 277-285. Buehrle's reconciliation of these two roles, virgin and mother, is less subtle than early Christian hagiographers' reconciliation and far more likely to be understood as such by her readers.

women during the late Middle Ages to understand Mary as specifically feminine--a model primarily for women, but a model from which men could draw "feminine" virtues--holds true for the twentieth century.

Male hagiographers' understanding of Mary rested on a belief in the essential femininity of Mary and of women in general and thereby limited their ability to present her--and the saints whose lives they modelled after hers--as universal archetypes not defined primarily by their gender. But hagiographers--both female and male--transcended the boundaries of gender when they used Christ's life as the archetype for their hagiographies. Not only did Christ serve as a universal archetype--neither masculine nor feminine, or sometimes both masculine and feminine--for their hagiographies, but the saints whose lives they modelled after Christ's in turn served as universal archetypes, symbols of sanctity for men and women alike.

#### Christ as Archetype

References to Christ serve two functions in the hagiographies of twentieth-century female saints: first, they convey the transcendent meaning of the saint's life to readers; second, they can transform the saint herself into a religious symbol which signifies Christ. Some hagiographers use imagery associated with Christ or make comparisons to Christ for the first reason alone: they do not transform the saint into a signifier of Christ; they merely use comparisons to Christ to demonstrate the holiness of the saint. Christ's life therefore serves as a "veritable thesaurus of established approved actions which (hagiographers could employ in their texts."<sup>32</sup> Frances Parkinson Keyes's life of Mariana Paredes of Jesus is a good example of this kind of hagiography--

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas Heffernan, Sacred Biography, 6.

using Christ's life to signify the holiness of the saint rather than using the saint's life to signify Christ.

When Mariana was born, Keyes explains, the stars shone unusually brightly; "moreover, one brighter than all the others appeared to be shedding its rays directly over the hill top, above the walls beyond the patio and across the galleries which surrounded this, so that these beams reached into the room where the woman lay in childbed, illuminating it with supernal light."<sup>33</sup> The star was a " 'Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,' like the one which, centuries before, had shone above Bethlehem, guiding the shepherds to the place where the young Child was with His Mother."<sup>34</sup> As a child, Mariana was thrown from her donkey when crossing a river; "instead of being submerged by the rushing river, the child actually seemed to rise buoyantly and triumphantly above it."<sup>35</sup> Keyes does not make an explicit comparison between this incident and Christ walking on water, but the connection would be clear to readers without making it explicit.

When Mariana chose to adopt an austere life apart from the world, except for contact with the poor, the ill, and her confessor, she was, according to Keyes, imitating Christ:

The pattern she had chosen was not only austere, it was sacrificial. From earliest childhood she had visualized herself as a *victima*: that is, it was her soul's sincere desire not only to worship God, but to make her personal 'Imitation of Christ' a literal one as far as suffering was concerned. . .<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Frances Parkinson Keyes, The Rose and the Lily: The Lives and Times of Two South American Saints (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), 172.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 172-173.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 183.

Her death was similar to Christ's: He died to atone for the sins of humanity; Mariana died to atone for the sins of the people of Ecuador. She had offered herself as a sacrifice after a sermon during Lent in 1645, a year which brought earthquakes and measles and diphtheria epidemics to Quito, Ecuador.<sup>37</sup>

Immediately she became ill. Keyes weaves references to Christ's Passion and death into her discussion of Mariana's final days. On Good Friday, for example, she was bled by her physician; the blood was poured onto a spot on the ground where, afterwards, lilies always grew. And, "on Ascension Day, she managed to rise from her bed and go to the window which looked out on the Chapel of Our Lady of the Angels. She could only glimpse, from this distance, its glory of gold and crimson, which had so enraptured her during her childhood; but she could hear Mass as it was celebrated, and she listened to it again, in the same way."<sup>38</sup> So, on Ascension Day, when Christ rose to join God in heaven, she rose to come into contact with God via the Mass. By using imagery from Christ's life to describe Mariana's life from birth to death, Keyes is able to convey the transcendent significance of Mariana's life in a meaningful way to Catholic readers. But Keyes does not transform Mariana into a religious figure whose life signifies Christ; she is, instead, a "great servant of God," a national heroine, a saint.<sup>39</sup> But hagiographers found even greater significance in the lives of Gemma Galgani and Thérèse Couderc, who not only imitated the life of Christ, but signified His presence to their hagiographers. After explaining that for many years Gemma Galgani would every Thursday receive the stigmata which did not disappear until three p.m. Friday, the hour that Jesus died, Giuseppe

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 216-217.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 220.



Bardi remarks that not only did she imitate Christ to an extraordinary degree, through her sufferings she actually symbolized Christ's presence:

Cannot one picture this frail creature bowed down with the load of sin, see her approaching her Savior panting with the weight of her burden. Does one not see a reflection of Christ Himself carrying His Cross to Calvary.<sup>40</sup>

Gemma Galgani was not the first female saint to represent the presence of the divine to her contemporaries. During the fourteenth century, for example, Catherine of Siena, a mystic like Gemma, brought her confessor, Raymond of Capua, into what he understood to be the presence of the divine: Raymond described watching Catherine's face become the face of God.<sup>41</sup>

Potentially, these female mystics could represent a threat to their confessors' authority in particular and priestly authority in general. As mentioned in chapter two, Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the church's position that women could not be ordained because they could not as women represent a male Christ. But hagiographers recognized a likeness between their subjects and Christ--not a physical likeness *per se*, but a likeness born of mutual suffering. Women readers may have found these texts more empowering and more positive about women's possibilities than the church's official statements about women's roles within the church and society. Potentially, female saints' ability to signify the presence of the Christ during their lives could undermine the church's teachings about women's roles within the church; their ability could also threaten the individual confessor's confidence in his own authority, if he lacks these same mystical experiences.

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<sup>40</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani, 138.

<sup>41</sup>John Coakley, "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography," in Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe, 237.

Hagiographers were, however, careful to show that these women did not challenge their confessors' authority or sacerdotal authority in general. Catherine's fourteenth-century hagiographer described her "as the most solid of supporters of ecclesiastical authority. The climax of the work is her martyrdom for the cause of the Roman papacy. . . . Thus her enormous charismatic power not only did not challenge but also specifically served the sacramental ministry of the church. She the saint and Raymond the priest, however awed by her he professed to be, were partners hand in hand."<sup>42</sup> Gemma's hagiographer was also careful to point out Gemma's obedience to her confessor. As I explained in chapter one, Bardi's hagiography supports the authority of the clergy; Christ Himself, who came to her periodically, put Himself at her confessor's mercy, promising to give her the cross to bear only if her confessor agreed to it.<sup>43</sup> During Gemma's life, she remained subordinate to her confessor, Monsignor Volpi; after her death--and only after her death--"she who was his spiritual daughter became his gentle protectress and he asked her for help in the great trials Our Lord imposed on him."<sup>44</sup> Hagiographers thus defused the potential challenge to sacerdotal authority which female mystics may have posed by portraying them as obedient to their confessors and as helpers in ecclesiastical causes.

Two of Thérèse Couderc's hagiographers, Eileen Surles and Henry Perroy, treat their subject not just as a successful imitator of Christ, but as a woman whose participation in Christ's suffering--whose sacrifice of her life as an heroic victim for Christ--enables her to represent Christ's presence to others. Both hagiographers use significant events from Christ's life to

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 237-238.

<sup>43</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani, 118-120.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 123.

structure their narratives of Thérèse's life: according to Henry Perroy, Thérèse's constant suffering began at age 33, Christ's age when he was crucified, and continued until her death at age 80. Other saints may share Christ's agony at Gethsemani on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, "but Mother Thérèse, although she wept more on Thursday evening and Friday, once she had entered Gethsemani she never left it."<sup>45</sup> Eileen Surles attributes a shorter period of constant suffering to Thérèse--16 years compared to 47, but her understanding of Thérèse's life is nonetheless similar to Perroy's:

For sixteen years Mother Thérèse had knelt beside Our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemani, sharing in His agony. During the last few weeks of her life on earth she shared, by a special grace, in His crucifixion.

The slightest movement in bed caused her incredible pain. Her hands and her feet were crippled and swollen with rheumatism. . .<sup>46</sup>

Thérèse's hagiographers make the same claim for her as Gemma's hagiographer did of Gemma: that she not only faithfully imitated Christ, but she signified Christ's presence. According to Perroy, Thérèse's transcendent quality was similar to the presence of God in the Eucharist:

We do not think we are guilty of excess when we compare the disposition and the action of Mother Thérèse with the disposition and action of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Her constant gaze upon the consecrated Bread, had, as it were, assimilated Mother Thérèse to this Sacrament of Love.<sup>47</sup>

Perroy has established a powerful similarity between Thérèse and Christ: Thérèse shares Christ's disposition and action in the Eucharist. Catholic

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<sup>45</sup>Henry Perroy, A Great and Humble Soul: Mother Therese Couderc, translated by John Burke (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960), 202, 168.

<sup>46</sup>Eileen Surles, Surrender to the Spirit: The Life of Mother Therese Couderc (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1951), 233.

<sup>47</sup>Henry Perroy, A Great and Humble Soul, 202.

readers may have found Thérèse's likeness to Christ to be a more convincing example of women's ability to represent Christ than they found Paul VI's argument that women's physical dissimilarity to Christ prevented them from being able to represent Christ as priests.

But Perroy is not making a political argument. Like Catherine of Siena's and Gemma Galgani's hagiographers, he is careful to show that Thérèse was always obedient to and respectful of the clergy. When Mother Thérèse was unjustly removed from her position as Mother Superior by Father Renault, Perroy explains that Thérèse never complained, but quietly and patiently accepted the new Mother Superior. Father Renault had thought he was doing what was best for the religious community: he had heard exaggerated reports of the community's debts and believed that a new Mother Superior from an affluent background--Madame de La Villeurnoy--would attract new novices who could help pay off the debts.<sup>48</sup> For Thérèse, the installation of a new Mother Superior nonetheless worked to her advantage because "out of evil God brings good. In his hands Mme. de La Villeurnoy was a marvelous instrument for the sanctification of Mother Thérèse."<sup>49</sup> When Mme. de La Villeurnoy was removed after one year and Mother Contenet installed as the new Mother Superior, Thérèse endured Contenet's spite with patience and serenity. As Eileen Surles explains, "(Mother Contenet) saw that the novices did (Thérèse's) work over again, laughed at her mountain speech, and feared no reproof for rudeness to her. But she smiled, and remained serene. God planned events. Perhaps this white fire in her mind would bring her closer to Him, teach her to pray,

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 97.

make her worthy of the gifts of wisdom."<sup>50</sup> Thérèse remained faithful and obedient to the priest who deposed her and the new Mother Superior who scorned her: despite her mystical gifts, she represented no threat to the ecclesiastical hierarchy because of her obedience.

The women most likely to be described as Christ-like were, like Gemma Galgani and Thérèse Couderc, those who had had mystical experiences. The imitation of Christ could, conceivably, take many forms--from caring for the poor and the sick, as Jesus did, to correcting injustice, as the story about Jesus and the money-lenders suggests--but hagiographers during this period identified the imitation of Christ as the imitation of his suffering on the cross. This emphasis on suffering is a longstanding hagiographical tradition. Richard Kieckhefer's work on fourteenth-century saints, for example, shows that suffering was integral to fourteenth-century piety; "(the saints) viewed suffering as the specific means God has chosen both for Christ's redemptive work and for the sanctification of those who imitate Christ. Atonement came not from charitable works, nor from prayer, nor from enlightenment, but from pain."<sup>51</sup> As inheritors of this tradition, twentieth-century hagiographers praised virtues such as obedience, patient suffering, and trust in God's will as part of their understanding of what the imitation of Christ involved. Their emphasis on these virtues cannot, therefore, be understood merely as attempts to encourage virtues which have traditionally been advocated for women. Men and women alike understood the imitation of Christ to involve suffering, patience, and submission to God's will.

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<sup>50</sup>Eileen Surles, Surrender to the Spirit, 117.

<sup>51</sup>Richard Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Saints and Their Religious Milieu (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 89.

But, because women's roles within the church were limited, women saints' *vitae* emphasized obedience and suffering to a greater degree than men's. Whereas a male saint might be a "holder of temporal or ecclesiastical power, missionary to the heathen and fiery preacher of the word, champion of public morality, heroic defender of his virtue," church regulations throughout the late medieval and early modern period prohibited women from fulfilling these roles.<sup>52</sup> During the twentieth century, these roles expanded only slightly for women: Francesca Xavier Cabrini joined the ranks of the canonized as a missionary to heathens and a world traveller with virtually no mystical experience; as one of her hagiographers explains, "In the whole Catholic hagiography there is probably no other life of a saint in which we find such marvelous exterior activity and so few signs of mystical experiences. And yet we know she prayed continuously."<sup>53</sup>

But the limitation of women's roles within the church does not completely explain why women saints' *vitae* emphasized suffering and obedience more than men's did. The emphasis on suffering by women saints is a longstanding tradition, well-documented by Caroline Walker Bynum in her book on late medieval saints.<sup>54</sup> Women experienced more pain associated with the stigmata--often self-inflicted pain; they ate little, endured illnesses, and generally suffered. Bynum argues that they underwent penitential practices not simply because they had internalized medieval misogyny and therefore regarded their bodies as something to

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<sup>52</sup>Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, Saints and Society

<sup>53</sup>Aristeo Simoni, "Introduction" to Theodore Maynard, Too Small a World: The Life of Francesca Cabrini (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1945), xiii.

<sup>54</sup>Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 208-218.

punish, but primarily for two other reasons: they wanted to rebel against the role the church was creating for women within Christianity--women as inferior beings, whose roles as mothers were acknowledged to have some spiritual significance but also excluded them from spiritual heroics, which they understood as necessary for a true imitation of Christ;<sup>55</sup> second, women saints did not understand asceticism as self-torture but as a means of fusing themselves with Christ.<sup>56</sup> Women therefore willingly underwent suffering because they saw themselves as capable of performing the spiritual heroics necessary to become one with Christ.

The emphasis on obedience can, similarly, be understood as women's desire to imitate Christ's passion. Like fourteenth-century saints, twentieth-century saints regarded obedience, or submission to God's will, as vitally important.<sup>57</sup> God often used human beings to carry out His will, so saints would submit to abuse from friends, family, and the government because they perceived this abuse to be God's will, a way of testing their patience and obedience.<sup>58</sup> Among the twentieth-century saints, Mary Joseph Rossello is a good example of this kind of piety: no matter how little money she had to feed more orphans, no matter how much others encouraged her to turn newcomers away because she could not afford to feed one more mouth, Rossello always took in whoever came because she believed God had sent the children to be cared for.<sup>59</sup> But obedience in twentieth-century hagiography includes a theme it did not have in fourteenth-century hagiography:

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 238-240.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>57</sup>Richard Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 50.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 52-56.

<sup>59</sup>Katherine Burton, Wheat for This Planting: The Biography of Saint Mary Joseph Rossello (Milwaukee: Bruce Press, 1960), 80-83, and other examples throughout text.

emphasis on the importance of obeying the clergy. In twentieth-century hagiography, obedience began at home--young women did not disobey their parents to join convents, as they did in earlier periods, particularly during the late Roman empire, but also during the late medieval period--and obedience continued throughout their lives as nuns and even as mother superiors, who had to obey the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Obedience is the theme that unites all of these twentieth-century hagiographies. Catherine Labouré, for example, obeyed her father when he initially refused to let her enter a convent. For Joseph Dirvin, Catherine's obedience was her singlemost important virtue: her "obedience is the hallmark, the strength, of (Catherine) Labouré. No matter how fiercely the gorge of rebellion rose within her, no matter how useless she knew the command to be, (Catherine) always obeyed."<sup>60</sup> Julie Billiart and Thérèse Couderc both obeyed priests who unjustly removed them from the position of Mother Superior of their orders. Francesca Xavier Cabrini obeyed orders to go to the United States as a missionary, although her real desire was to go to China--but obedience came first for her.<sup>61</sup> God prevented young Margaret of Hungary's elders from asking her to give up her ascetic practices so that Margaret could be obedient and ascetic simultaneously: "And the God who inspired her desire for penance saw to it that those in authority were literally unable to impose obedience on her in this manner. It goes without saying that she would have submitted at once to a command or even a dimly expressed wish, but our Lord never let it come to that."<sup>62</sup> And Gemma Galgani's obedience to her confessor prevented her from being ensnared by

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<sup>60</sup>Joseph Dirvin, Saint Catherine Laboure of the Miraculous Medal (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1958), 42.

<sup>61</sup>Theodore Maynard, Too Small a World, 5.

<sup>62</sup>Sister Mary Catherine, Margaret, Princess of Hungary, 28.



one of the devil's traps. As her hagiographer explains, "Satan even took the form of Jesus Himself, with all his wounds, including the scourging, to induce her to disobey her confessor who had commanded her to cease her penances. 'Oh! if you only knew,' she said, 'what trouble my poor confessor takes to make me good and particularly obedient.'" <sup>63</sup> In spite of the fact that 21 of the 27 women canonized from 1939 to 1978 were founders or cofounders of religious orders, and therefore in positions of authority within their communities for at least some of their lives, only one saint is described as someone to whom obedience is owed--Francesca Cabrini.<sup>64</sup> Overall, hagiographers defined obedience as the most important virtue these saints embraced--more important than charity, penance, justice, or any other virtue.

Obedience may have been emphasized partly as a legacy of the Catholic Reformation, when the church reacted to Martin Luther's disobedience with a reassertion of clerical and papal authority. But this explanation would not account for the increased emphasis on obedience in hagiographies about female saints. Hagiographers emphasized female saints' obedience for two reasons: first, only obedient women were judged to be authentic saints, so that only obedient women survived the canonization process; second, an emphasis on obedience provided a means of legitimizing and thereby controlling the saints' charismatic powers, particularly in the case of mystics. According to Kenneth Woodward, the Vatican still relies on the advice of Pope Benedict XIV, who reigned during the early eighteenth century, for the canonization of mystics; he advised investigators of a mystic's cause, especially if the mystic were a woman, to rely on the

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<sup>63</sup>Giuseppe Bardi, St. Gemma Galgani

<sup>64</sup>Pietro di Donato, Immigrant Saint, 177-178.

judgment of the mystic's "spiritual director (usually a priest), confessor, or other learned and pious men" to determine if the mystic's visions were authentic and if they derived from divine, not diabolical, origins.<sup>65</sup> From approximately 1850 to 1950, there were at least 15 women who could be classified as mystics and mystics alone (Thérèse Couderc had mystical experiences but she was also a founder); of these, only half were proposed for canonization, and only Gemma Galgani has yet been canonized.<sup>66</sup>

Kenneth Woodward does not offer an explanation for why these women have not been canonized. But he does argue that the church has not canonized them not because of its increased emphasis on saints who led virtuous lives rather than saints who experienced the supernatural: many priests, in fact, have encouraged devotion to mystics who, they suppose, demonstrate to contemporary Catholics the existence of the supernatural during an era of unbelief.<sup>67</sup> It is likely, therefore, that the uncanonized female mystics strayed from orthodoxy on some point and therefore failed to fulfill the criterion of obedience: as Woodward argues, "much as mystics may certify and confirm accepted beliefs on the strength of their own personal experience, they also tend to individuate and ramify particular aspects of faith--to the point, in some cases, of challenging the prevailing orthodoxy. The mere claim to direct experience of God has, often enough, put mystics under suspicion of heterodoxy."<sup>68</sup>

Female mystics who carefully listened to and obeyed their confessors would be in less danger of being considered heterodox. When the woman

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<sup>65</sup>Kenneth Woodward, Making Saints, 169.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 161.

died, her confessor usually played a major role in shaping her *vita*.<sup>69</sup> June Macklin distinguishes between "official" saints canonized by the church to promote specific virtues--often these saints have been members of the clergy, "well-born, rich, well-educated, rational and male"<sup>70</sup>--and popular saints, well-loved by the people primarily because of their willingness for self-sacrifice to perform service for others and for their mystical gifts. The church is not entirely able to choose its own saints; overwhelming popularity for a particular saint--who must, of course, always meet requirements for orthodoxy--will influence the Vatican's choice of saints. Because many of the female saints had acquired a popular following, particularly the mystics, including Mariana Paredes of Jesus in Ecuador<sup>71</sup> (and Gemma Galgani in southern Italy), the church had the task of transforming these popular saints into the kind of saints it wished to promote, namely those known primarily for their virtues, not for their mysticism.<sup>72</sup> Because hagiographies are often written to promote a candidate's cause for sainthood, they emphasized the potential saint's virtues--obedience, in particular--to make the saint more appealing to the church's Congregation for the Causes of Saints. By emphasizing the obedience of the saint, hagiographers not only legitimized the saint's cause by showing that her reputation for holiness was grounded in orthodoxy, they also presented the saint's charisma and mystical gifts as under the control of the church. As sociologist Amitai Etzioni explains, "both the Catholic Church and the Communist Party have employed a mechanism which allows them to turn deviant charismatic symbols into a focus of

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<sup>69</sup>June Macklin, "Two Faces of Sainthood: The Pious and the Popular," Journal of Latin American Lore 14 (Summer 1988): 73.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 72-76.

<sup>72</sup>Kenneth Woodward, Making Saints, 156-190.

conforming identification. In the Church, canonization has sometimes played this role; by reinterpreting the image of the deviant leader, devotion to the charismatic symbol is rechanneled to the organization and its goals. The canonization of Joan of Arc is probably the best-known example."<sup>73</sup> Mariana Paredes of Jesus and Gemma Galgani may not qualify as "deviant charismatic symbols," but their mystical visions of Jesus and their popularity were sufficient to view them as potentially threatening to orthodoxy; hagiographers, however, supplied an orthodox interpretation to their lives: the female charismatic was transformed into an instrument of the church's teaching.

Hagiographers recognized the spiritual significance of their subjects' lives--not just in these women's ability to imitate Christ in extremes of service, charity, devotion and suffering, but also in their ability to signify the presence of the holy--of the divine--on earth. Just as Raymond of Capua saw Catherine of Siena's face become the face of God, so too did Giuseppe Bardi recognize the likeness of Christ in Gemma Galgani. Although hagiographers never interpreted their subjects' lives as challenges to the church's teachings on the proper roles for women, in particular to Pope Paul VI's speech that women could not become priests because they could not represent Christ, Catholic women understood these saints' lives in ways the church never intended--as challenges to the prescribed roles for women, as liberating role models. In Anne Carr's words, Catholic women have recognized the ideological aspect of symbols--the ways in which saints' lives have been transformed into "safe" symbols of orthodoxy--and the transcendent aspect

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<sup>73</sup>Amitai Etzioni, A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 242-243.

of symbols, the ways in which saints' lives convey a sense of the divine. In the following chapter, I describe how Catholic women derive meaning in saints' lives beyond the orthodoxy of hagiography.

## CHAPTER FOUR

From Obedience to Autonomy:  
Catholic Lay Women Define Sanctity and Sainthood

Twentieth-century Catholic women both interpreted canonized saints' lives in unconventional ways and proposed alternative saints to the women who had been formally canonized. Dorothy Day (1897-1980), the American convert to Catholicism and the cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement, provides a good example of both of these tendencies. Although Day herself was a political activist who demonstrated for peace and the rights of workers, her favourite saint was a cloistered nun, Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897; canonized 1925 by Pope Pius XI), who never left the convent. Thérèse was--and is--best known for her sentimental autobiography, The Story of a Soul.<sup>1</sup> with its emphasis on the patient endurance of minor suffering, such as being splashed with dirty tub water by another nun, The Story of a Soul seems as different as possible from Dorothy Day's own autobiography, The Long Loneliness,<sup>2</sup> which chronicles Day's involvement with anarchists and communists, her arrests, and her commitment to political justice. Day found meaning in Thérèse's life to continue her political activism after her conversion: Day did not interpret Thérèse's life as an admonition to retreat from the world, but instead, paradoxically, as an example of a way to become involved with the world as a Catholic activist. In turn, Day herself came to be regarded as an unofficial saint by her followers, particularly in the United States: she served as an unconventional model of sanctity--an activist female saint--for many Americans, male and female.

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<sup>1</sup>Therese Martin, The Autobiography of Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul, translated by John Beevers (Garden City, N.Y., 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness: An Autobiography, with introduction by Daniel Berrigan (1952; reprint, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

In her 1952 autobiography, Dorothy Day said that before her formal conversion to Catholicism she wondered "where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?"<sup>3</sup> Her concern was with injustice, with changing the social order which created suffering. She wanted to discover saints who embraced a different aspect of Christ's life, not just his Passion: "Jesus said, 'Blessed are the meek,' but I could not be meek at the thought of injustice. I wanted a Lord who would scourge the money-changers out of the temple, and I wanted to help all those who raised their hand against oppression."<sup>4</sup> Day did not convert until after the birth of her child, Tamar, whom she wanted to raise in the Catholic faith; Day had already had years of experience as an activist and friend of socialists, communists, and anarchists before her conversion. But Day was frustrated with the left-wing's emphasis on materialism; she turned to Catholicism for a spiritual approach to life and the world's problems. Day's activism did not result from her Catholicism; rather, she brought her activism to Catholicism.

Initially, very soon after her conversion, Day found Thérèse of Lisieux's The Story of a Soul schoolgirlish and uninteresting. She was offended that her spiritual director, Father Zachary, could have suggested it to her; she remarked that "men, even priests, were very insulting to women, I thought, handing out what they felt suited their intelligence--in other words, pious pap."<sup>5</sup> Thérèse lacked, she thought, the heroism necessary for sainthood:

What kind of a saint was this who felt she had to practice heroic charity in eating what was put in front of her, in taking medicine,

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>5</sup>By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day, edited and with an introduction by Robert Ellsberg, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 189.

enduring cold and heat, restraint, enduring the society of mediocre souls, in following the strict regime of Carmelite nuns which she had joined at the age of fifteen? A splash of dirty water from the careless washing of a nun next to her in the laundry was mentioned as a 'mortification,' when the very root of the word meant death. And I was reading in my Daily Missal of saints stretched on the rack, burnt by flames, starving themselves in the desert, and so on.<sup>6</sup>

At that time, Joan of Arc more closely fitted Day's idea of what a saint should be--an heroic martyr who died in the service of others.<sup>7</sup>

But ultimately, Day found meaning in the ordinariness of Thérèse's life: she recognized that Thérèse had gained popularity among ordinary people themselves, among workers. "It was the masses who first proclaimed her a saint," she wrote, "It was the 'people.'"<sup>8</sup> Day found comfort in Thérèse's "little way," her understanding of herself as a little child, wholly dependent on God's will. Day and others admired Thérèse, she argued, because "she was so much like the rest of us in her ordinariness. In her lifetime there are no miracles recounted; she was just good, good as the bread which the Normans bake in huge loaves."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Day argued, Thérèse demonstrated to ordinary people that they did matter--that whatever they did, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, mattered. The "little way" was significant in the eyes of God. Thus, for Dorothy Day, Thérèse's life had a political as well as a religious message to contemporary Catholics: with twentieth-century governments becoming stronger and more centralized, ordinary people felt increasingly ineffectual--but Thérèse demonstrated that even small acts performed by a single person had significance. Thérèse is like an atom, whose

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 201.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



spirituality is "an explosive force that can transform our lives and the life of the world, once put into effect."<sup>10</sup>

Day's interpretation of the significance of Thérèse's life is shared by hagiographer Margaret Munro, who saw Thérèse as a threat to tyrannical governments: "People who can derive fuller personality from depersonalizing conditions will have outflanked tyranny in its most essential strategy. . . . Not that Thérèse had such grandiose results in view, but surely we may say that God had."<sup>11</sup> Day and Monro found a political significance to Thérèse's life--a different sort of political significance than hagiographers found in, for example, Julie Billiart's life or Maria Goretti's life. Thérèse is significant not because she stood apart from modern life, not because she rejected the modern world, but because she demonstrated to Catholics the way they must cope with the modern world--with little acts, with daily life. Thérèse therefore offered Day a way to bridge the gap between the life before and after her conversion. Before her conversion, she dedicated herself to worldly causes; after her conversion, for approximately one year, she retreated from political activity. Thérèse's example provided a way to blend her spiritual life with her concerns for justice in the world. For Day, the cause of many of the world's problems, such as homelessness, famine, and war, was sin: by following Thérèse's "little way" of sanctity, these problems could be corrected.<sup>12</sup>

Barbara Corrado Pope presents a different interpretation of why Thérèse gained so much popularity during the early twentieth century: Pope argues that Thérèse's example provided a justification for Catholics who, already uncomfortable with secular modern politics and institutions, wished

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>11</sup>Margaret Munro, *A Book of Unlikely Saints*, 218.

<sup>12</sup>William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 431.

to retreat into a purely private life. These Catholics could find Thérèse's "emphasis on personal morality to be a validation of their existence."<sup>13</sup> Pope's argument does not invalidate mine: Thérèse's life had different meanings for different groups of people. Already inclined to activism, Dorothy Day was disposed to find a political message in Thérèse's life, and, for her at least, that was the meaning of Thérèse's life; bourgeois women of late nineteenth and early twentieth century France, whom Pope discusses, may very well have found Thérèse's life a vindication of their own apolitical lives, focused on home and family.

To say that Thérèse's life had many meanings is not to destroy her significance to the people who read her autobiography and admired her: although Thérèse's life may not have fundamentally changed the way Dorothy Day or other Catholics understood their roles, Dorothy Day and others were able to find a place for themselves within Catholicism because of Thérèse. Her autobiography was, ultimately, sufficiently rich in meaning to appeal to activists and homemakers, philosophers, singers, and monks,<sup>14</sup> all of whom thought they were following in her footsteps. Whether her life was interpreted as political or apolitical, she may have been, as Pope Pius X called her, "the greatest saint of modern times;"<sup>15</sup> because of the ordinariness of her life, she appealed to contemporary Catholics; unlike medieval saints, revered because of their extreme ascetism, she was venerated for her small acts of holiness. Although many miracles were attributed to her intercession after her death, which accounted for some of the spread of her popularity,<sup>16</sup> people chose to

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<sup>13</sup>Barbara Corrado Pope, "A Heroine Without Heroics: The Little Flower of Jesus and Her Times," Church History 57 (March 1988): 58-59.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 46

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 50.

ask her for the performance of miracles because they regarded her, whom they knew primarily through her spiritual autobiography, as authentically holy. Their judgment that the "little way" was holy accounted for their decision to invoke her name; medieval Catholics would have recognized sanctity in a very different sort of woman--a Catherine of Siena or a Dorothy of Montau, for example, who were known for their extreme ascetism.

Like Thérèse, Dorothy Day's life represents a new, modern sanctity to contemporary Catholics: unlike Thérèse, Day has not been canonized, nor has a cause for her canonization been initiated.<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Woodward reports that some of Dorothy's grandchildren and some members of the Catholic Worker movement oppose her canonization on the grounds that the canonization process is too expensive: the money would be better spent on the poor, in memory of Dorothy's dedication to the poor. Furthermore, as a humble person, they argue, Dorothy would not have wished to be elevated to the status of saint: she, in fact, did not like to be called a saint when she was living.<sup>18</sup> As Woodward explains, Dorothy's followers want her to remain a "people's saint" and not be transformed into a "church saint" through the canonization process.

Day's name has appeared in a number of sources as an example of modern sanctity--an alternative saint to those formally canonized. Time magazine mentioned Day in its 1975 cover story "Saints Among Us," which described Day's fights for justice, often resulting in her arrest; "she has been jailed eight times--most recently as an illegal picketer for Cesar Chavez's

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<sup>17</sup>Kenneth Woodward, Making Saints, 39-46.

<sup>18</sup>Dorothy Day gave two reasons for not wishing to be called a saint. First, she thought that people would ignore her as somehow irrelevant if she were a saint; on this topic, see Hester Valentine, Saints for Contemporary Women, 171. Second, she did not want people to imitate her vices, particularly her conduct before conversion; on this topic, see William D. Miller, Dorothy Day: A Biography, ix.

United Farm Workers in 1973."<sup>19</sup> Her life is also described in collections of saints' lives aimed at Catholic readers, such as John Delaney's Saints are Now: Eight Portraits of Modern Sanctity and Mary Hester Valentine's Saints for Contemporary Women,<sup>20</sup> available at Catholic bookstores and libraries.

Dorothy Day's life became a model of the "activist saint" which she herself had complained did not exist: both her autobiography and the narratives written about her focus on her political activity, on her attempts to change the way society is organized, not just on her efforts to feed and clothe the poor at the Catholic Worker houses she and Peter Maurin founded. Furthermore, Delaney's and Valentine's accounts of Day's life do not emphasize her obedience, as hagiographies of canonized saints do. Valentine mentions Day's support of the cemetery workers' strike in spite of Cardinal Spellman's opposition to their union: he refused to negotiate with them as long as they affiliated with the CIO and he asked seminarians to work as grave-diggers to break the union.<sup>21</sup> Valentine never portrays Day as disobedient to the church: she does not say whether Day was asked by Spellman to withdraw her support from the union. But Valentine does portray her as a woman confident enough in her own judgment to make a political decision contrary to the Archbishop's.

If Day was not disobedient to the church, she was certainly disobedient to the state: Valentine mentions her arrest in 1973 for supporting Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers, her opposition to involvement in World War II and Vietnam, her refusal to pay income taxes which could be used to buy

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<sup>19</sup>Time, December 29, 1975, 51.

<sup>20</sup>John J. Delaney, editor, Saints Are Now: Eight Portraits of Modern Sanctity (1981; reprint, Garden City, N. Y.: Image Books, 1983). Mary Hester Valentine, Saints for Contemporary Women (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup>Mary Hester Valentine, Saints for Contemporary Women, 189.

weapons, and her refusal to comply with air raid drills.<sup>22</sup> In Dorothy Day, Catholic women could find a strong model of independence and action within Catholicism. Dorothy Day did not internalize the church's teachings on appropriate sex roles: although she was a devoted mother, she never married and raised her child by herself--with, of course, the support of the Catholic Worker community whose members lived together as a community of equals, "the very antithesis of hierarchical rank, order, and command"<sup>23</sup> which characterized the structure of the church itself. Her daughter was an important part of her life but not her life's main focus: concerned that her daughter was not getting what she needed by spending her youth in the Catholic Worker houses, she sent her to an agricultural school--Tamar was deeply interested in agriculture--in Canada, where she boarded with one of Dorothy's close friends.<sup>24</sup> Dorothy did not subordinate her family to her work, but neither did she subordinate her work to her family, as Popes Pius XII and Paul VI both advised for women who worked outside the home.

Dorothy Day lived what could be reasonably called a "feminist" life in spite of her indifference to feminism as a philosophy and political cause. Before her conversion, she marched with suffragists, despite her belief that the vote would do little--if anything--to alleviate the world's problems. She was an indifferent suffragist but a determined protester: she bit the warden who tried to arrest her for marching in support of women's right to vote; as William Miller argues, "while most of the women there probably exceeded Dorothy in the strength of their commitment to women's suffrage, none other erupted as she did to make the confrontation with (the warden) so personal

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 189-191.

<sup>23</sup>Kenneth Woodward, Making Saints, 32.

<sup>24</sup>Mary Hester Valentine, Saints for Contemporary Women, 187.

and violent."<sup>25</sup> Dorothy's actions--widely reported in the press and recorded in several narratives--have probably made a greater impression on Catholic women than her indifference; a woman who professes strong beliefs in women's suffrage but does nothing makes less of an impression than a woman who professes indifference but marches for the cause, gets arrested, and violently and determinedly resists arrest.

Catholic feminists had other worthy examples to follow besides Dorothy Day--notably Joan of Arc, the widely known fifteenth-century martyr. The secular feminist movement had already invoked Joan of Arc's example as early as 1848--at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention where delegates voted in favour of supporting women's suffrage. American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton drew the convention's attention to the importance of Joan of Arc: Joan, she argued, had trusted her own conscience and her conviction that the voices she heard were authentic. As Stanton explained, Joan of Arc demonstrated the importance of listening to the "voices" women heard: "Voices were the visitors and advisors of Joan of Arc. Do not 'voices' come to us daily from the haunts of poverty, sorrow, degradation and despair, already too long unheeded? Now is the time for women of this country, if they would save our free institutions, to defend the right (to vote)."<sup>26</sup> Stanton herself was not Catholic: she was raised as a Presbyterian and later embraced her own kind of Christianity, based on an "affectionate, androgynous God."<sup>27</sup>

But the secular feminist movement often influences religious feminist movements. Consequently, Stanton's invocation of Joan of Arc may have

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<sup>25</sup>William D. Miller, Dorothy Day: A Biography, 95.

<sup>26</sup>Elizabeth Cady Stanton, quoted by Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Joan of Arc: Heretic, Mystic, Shaman (Lewiston, NY; Queenston, Ontario: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 130.

<sup>27</sup>Elisabeth Griffith, In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), viii, 19.

helped shape Catholic suffragists' understanding of Joan. Years after the Seneca Falls Convention, Catholic feminists formed Joan's International Alliance (later St. Joan's International Alliance) to lobby for women's suffrage. In France, the *Congres Jeanne d'Arc* first met in 1896; in 1906, a majority of the delegates voted in favour of women's suffrage.<sup>28</sup> Joan of Arc's example and political convictions were sufficient to inspire many Catholic women to endorse female suffrage despite the pope's opposition: after 1919, however, when Pope Benedict XV spoke in favour of female suffrage, many more French Catholic women joined the cause.<sup>29</sup> Catholic women in England organized later than they did in France (English Catholic women founded their suffrage society in 1911), but they, too, adopted Joan of Arc as their patron.<sup>30</sup> The example of Joan of Arc alone was never sufficient to move women in favour of female suffrage: but, as with Dorothy Day, Joan's example provided Catholic suffragists with a predecessor who could legitimize their claim to being both Catholic and suffragist; after the pope endorsed female suffrage, Joan's example could be invoked at public meetings to generate enthusiasm. The existence of a Catholic female heroine like Joan enabled Catholic feminists to legitimize--to themselves if not to others--their place within Catholicism: they invoked Joan's example to claim an historical precedent for independent women who challenge secular authority but nevertheless remain devout Catholics.

But Catholic feminists--or feminists in general--have never had exclusive control over the way Joan's life has been interpreted. Before her canonization in 1920, French patriots and Catholic conservatives championed

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<sup>28</sup>Steven C. Hause and Anne R. Kenney, "The Development of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Movement in France, 1896-1922," *The Catholic Historical Review* 67 (January 1981): 20-21.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>30</sup>Francis M. Mason, "The Newer Eve: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society in England, 1911-1923," *The Catholic Historical Review* 72 (October 1986): 621.

her as a martyr for France and for God.<sup>31</sup> In 1894, for example, Isabel O'Reilly praised Joan's "gentle unassertiveness," her piety, and, most of all, her ability to spin thread; O'Reilly contrasted Joan's unselfish devotion to her country and God with the selfish motives of the "new woman."<sup>32</sup> After her canonization, Catholic conservatives continued to portray Joan not as an independent visionary, confident enough to defy secular and clerical authority, but as a humble, submissive model of femininity. In 1961, for example, Luke Farley included Joan in his collection Saints for the Modern Woman as an example of "patriotism and women in government." But Farley praised her modesty rather than her leadership abilities; for women in the armed forces, Farley encouraged Joan as an example--

For such women in the armed forces, St. Joan of Arc must be a special standard bearer and guide, not only in her courage and sacrifice, but in the innate modesty and reserve she displayed while working with men, some of them hardened by continued years of military service.

Such Catholic women in uniform can command the same respect from the men in arms if they strive honestly to emulate the modesty and virtue of their saintly military predecessor in their speech, behavior, and daily work.<sup>33</sup>

Catholic conservatives therefore often trivialized Joan's life, reducing her significance to an example of modesty and decorum for other women to follow. Joan of Arc earned respect from "the men in arms" for much more than her modesty, although her modesty and chastity were heralded at the time. But her courage, strength and military skill did as much--in fact, more--to earn respect as her modesty did.

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<sup>31</sup> Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Joan of Arc: Heretic Mystic, Shaman, 130.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>33</sup> Luke A. Farley, Saints for the Modern Woman (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), 102.



Although Catholic feminists used Joan of Arc as an example less often in the 1960s and 1970s than they had earlier in the century, their declining interest in Joan does not necessarily indicate that Catholic conservatives were successful in co-opting the image of Joan of Arc for conservative causes. The secular feminist movement abandoned Joan of Arc as a model for feminists mostly because of Simone de Beauvoir's rejection of Joan as a model of true liberation,<sup>34</sup> but Catholic feminists have continued to invoke her example to inspire Catholic women. In 1967, St. Joan's International Alliance was lobbying for women's ordination at the third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate.<sup>35</sup> Mary Hester Valentine's liberal feminist collection of saints includes Joan of Arc, not as an example of modesty and "feminine" virtues, but as an example of someone who sought to learn God's will for her and to follow it at any cost:

Her spiritual development, like that of all the saints, was a slowly awakening awareness that what she accomplished would be done, not through her, but through the guidance of God. Hers was a hard moral schooling, through obedience to her voices and her inner conscience, as well as through the asceticism which was obvious to her family.<sup>36</sup>

Although Valentine emphasizes the importance of Joan's obedience, it is not Joan's obedience to the church and to the clergy which made her a saint, but to her conscience, the voices she heard, and what she understood as the will of God. Valentine's obedient Joan is therefore very different from the obedient saints described by twentieth-century hagiographers in chapter three: Joan relies on her own judgment--her faith in the voices she hears--to discern the will of God, while Gemma Galgani, for example, relies on the judgment of her confessor.

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<sup>34</sup>Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Joan of Arc: Heretic, Mystic, Shaman, 132.

<sup>35</sup>Jean-Guy Vallaincourt, Papal Power, 121-122.

<sup>36</sup>Mary Hester Valentine, Saints for Contemporary Women, 61.

Feminist Catholics interpreted canonized women saints' lives as examples of autonomous spirituality, as women who followed what they perceived to be God's will despite opposition from others; this interpretation differs sharply from the interpretations presented by hagiographers in chapter three. Furthermore, feminist Catholics often included uncanonized women in collections of saints' lives to expand traditional conceptions of sanctity. Included in Valentine's Saints for Contemporary Women are Elizabeth Bayley Seton, canonized in 1975 (and the subject of Leonard Feeney's conservative hagiography, Mother Seton), and Simone Weil, a woman who was never even baptized. Despite traditional hagiographers' efforts to describe women saints as obedient and humble, Valentine presents them all--canonized and uncanonized--as powerful exemplars of spiritual autonomy. As her editor explains on the book's back cover,

They were activists, one and all--busy, almost compulsively driven women with scarcely enough hours in their days, or days in their lives. That alone should make them appeal to contemporary women whose own lives are filled with new challenges, new opportunities, and the stresses which these generate. Above all, these were women who distinguished themselves, for the most part, in times when it was much more a man's world than it is even today. Most of them were, in fact, criticized by the men whose lives touched theirs as stubborn extremists, who always insisted on having things their own way.

It's true that Hilda of Whitby, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Sienna, Joan of Arc, Teresa of Avila, Margaret Clitheroe, Elizabeth Seton, Theresa Gerhardinger, Edith Stein, Dorothy Day and Simone Weil were women of strong will, that they would go to extremes to carry out their visions and their duties as they saw them, and that none of them cared much for that commodity called compromise which is so much cherished today.

The sharp contrast between this interpretation and traditional hagiographers' interpretations of saints' lives cannot be explained by the differences in the saints' lives themselves: Valentine's list includes saints such as Elizabeth Seton

and Joan of Arc who were described as obedient and submissive--not as strong-willed and visionary--by conservative hagiographers. Nor can the difference be explained by when the different hagiographies appeared because conservative and feminist interpretations of women saints appeared throughout the twentieth century. Early in the twentieth century, for example, Catholic feminists invoked Joan of Arc's example to push for women's suffrage, while much later, after Vatican II, conservatives continued to interpret saints' lives as examples of femininity, obedience, and spiritual devotion for women to follow.<sup>37</sup> Although Freda Mary Oben describes Edith Stein, who was beatified in 1987 by Pope John Paul II, as a feminist, Oben's understanding of feminism is similar to, for example, Pope Paul VI's: she argues that women have a different nature than men do so they must have different vocations. According to Oben, Stein thought that "woman's unique strength" was a "spiritual maternity" which women should always use no matter whether they pursued careers or not, but "the family should always come first for the woman."<sup>38</sup> Oben presents Edith Stein as an example of maternal feminism to her readers, while Valentine presents her as an example of equal rights feminism: she mentions that Stein raised the question of women in the priesthood.<sup>39</sup> Equal rights feminists and maternal feminists have both claimed female saints as their predecessors throughout the twentieth century: their interpretations

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<sup>37</sup>Hagiographies did change through time, however. Wendy Leifeld's Mothers of the Saints: Portraits of Ten Mothers of the Saints and Three Saints Who Were Mothers (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 1991) would not have incorporated non-Catholic saints if it had been written before Vatican II, for example. Leifeld's book is aimed at Catholic mothers who seek inspiration in the saints; her book is not "feminist," but it is ecumenical, including Protestants Susanna Wesley and Amy Carmichael among the examples of outstanding mothers. A similar book written before Vatican II would probably not have included Protestants.

<sup>38</sup>Freda Mary Oben, Edith Stein: Scholar, Feminist, Saint (New York: Alba House, 1988), 22.

<sup>39</sup>Mary Hester Valentine, Saints for Contemporary Women, 159.

demonstrate that saints' lives can have more than one meaning, that hagiographies bearing the *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* have not monopolized interpretation of these women's lives, and that these saints' lives have meaning to Catholic women beyond the orthodoxy of traditional hagiography.

Recently, feminist Catholics have collected stories about Catholic women who have challenged the church's authority in order to provide an alternative to official Catholic hagiography. As Annie Lally Milhaven explains in The Inside Stories: 13 Valiant Women Challenging the Church, at one time "I loved saintly men and women who suffered ignominy in silence. Their going to their graves without vindication appealed mightily to my sense of sainthood. But now, I love courage. . . . The most engaging women I know are those Catholics who stand up to hierarchical oppression, who name the evil done them and others, and who refuse either to be victimized further or to leave their church."<sup>40</sup> According to Milhaven, her "saints" differ from "Mother Therasas" and "Little Flowers of Jesus" (Thérèse of Lisieux is known as the Little Flower) because her saints "speak with a sense of freedom, responsibility, and independence" beyond that of canonized women, including even Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila.<sup>41</sup> The book includes profiles and interviews of, among others, Theresa Kane, who asked Pope John Paul II to consider opening all ministries--including the priesthood--to women when he visited the United States, and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, who urges Catholic women not to "give too much power to the patriarchal system;" instead, she says, they should remain within the church while trying to reshape the church to "reclaim the center, a center in which *everybody* can be included with their rights, their

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<sup>40</sup>Annie Lally Milhaven, The Inside Stories: 13 Valiant Women Challenging the Church (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987), xiii.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

say, their vision, and their decision making."<sup>42</sup> For Fiorenza, women not only do not have to subordinate their wills to that of the clergy, they do not need the clergy: "I say women are church; always have been church. But because of our language, women as church is not even in women's consciousness."<sup>43</sup>

Liberal feminist Catholics are not just presenting alternative saints for women to emulate, they are articulating a different understanding of what the church is. Conservative hagiographers include the clergy and the laity in their understanding of the church, but they emphasize the importance of the clergy; it is on the clergy that women saints depend for instruction and guidance, not on themselves: sanctity is guided and legitimized by the clergy.

By contrast, liberal feminists emphasize the importance of the laity relative to the clergy. For more radical feminists, the laity are the church: because all women are lay people, they are necessarily the church. As Fiorenza argues, women should not leave the church: they are the church. By creating an alternative body of hagiography, liberal feminist Catholics create not only new kinds of female saints--strong-willed saints who defy authority and believe in themselves, in spite of what the clergy may say--but they also construct a different understanding of what the church is. Influenced by Vatican II's emphasis on an increased role for the laity in the church, they define the laity--and therefore women--as the church. By defining themselves as the church, they no longer have to legitimize themselves to the hierarchy: they are therefore free to describe the kind of saints they wish to describe without trying to satisfy the requirements of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Not only have liberal and more radical feminist Catholics created alternative saints, they have redefined the meaning of religious authority for liberal

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 63, 58.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 57.

Catholic women: they have asserted their own authority in defiance of the clergy.

## CONCLUSION

Hagiographies have always been used to communicate not just the meaning of a particular saint's life to the Christian community, but also to communicate a theology--an understanding of God, the role of the church, and the relationship between individual believer and God. Because of their narrative form, hagiographies are more effective didactic tools than formal theological arguments, which are rarely read by lay people. As Thomas Heffernan argues, hagiography can "synthesize complex ideologies in narrative form," making them an important and effective means of communicating particular theologies.<sup>1</sup> Many of the hagiographies studied in this thesis were reprinted one or two times: Marie Cecilia Buerhle's hagiography of Maria Goretti went into a second reprinting just one year after its initial publication. The popularity of hagiographies can be explained by their ability to dramatize and personalize theology: readers can readily grasp the theological meaning of hagiography because hagiography is, by its very nature, personalized.

In transforming female saints' lives into narrative, twentieth-century Catholics presented several different theological understandings of "the church" and of how women should understand their responsibilities as Catholics. The predominant theological vision was conservative. For conservative hagiographers, all women possessed characteristics fundamentally different than men possessed; women were all mothers who exercised their maternal instinct as spiritual or biological mothers; women were subordinate to the clergy, who shaped, interpreted and legitimized their spirituality; female saints

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Heffernan, Sacred Biography, 6.

were significant to other Catholics because they opposed modernity and progress. By transforming these women's lives into examples of conservative theology, conservative hagiographers described these women as instruments of the church, obedient to, and supportive of, the clergy. Despite their significance as examples of the transcendent--as representatives of Christ's presence on earth--to many lay Catholics who were devoted to them before canonization and to their confessors, conservative hagiographers carefully presented them as orthodox, obedient, and dependent on the church. The potential challenge to authority represented by the female mystic was thereby presented as an instrument of the church, not a challenge to the church.

But liberals and feminists used these women's lives to present a different kind of theology, a theology which celebrated challenges to clerical authority and emphasized the importance of the saint who followed what she understood God's will to be, not what others told her God's will was. Liberal feminist hagiography was not simply a product of Vatican II, nor did hagiography in general become more liberal and feminist after Vatican II. Feminist Catholics are influenced by trends in secular feminism as well as by events in the church: feminist Catholics had already begun to articulate a feminist hagiography before Vatican II, although Vatican II did give many women a feeling of confidence that the church supported them; afterwards, they developed a more complete and consciously feminist hagiography than before. Similarly, conservative hagiography did not disappear after Vatican II: it is still being written.

Female saints' lives were, therefore, complex enough to permit Catholics of various ideologies to find meaning in their lives. As Andrew Greeley, a Catholic sociologist explains, religious symbols *precede* religious doctrines: "religion was symbol and story long before it became theology and



philosophy."<sup>2</sup> For individuals and communities of belief, religion, he argues, is symbol and story before it becomes "creed, rite, and institution;" even after it has also become creed, rite, and institution, religion is still primarily symbol and story to believers.<sup>3</sup> When the same symbols are interpreted by different sub-groups of believers--by conservatives, liberals, and feminists, they incorporate different understandings of what faith and church mean; saints' lives represent different kinds of theology depending on the the beliefs of the hagiographer. By looking beyond the hagiographies which bore the *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* to include the various collections of lives and spiritual autobiographies of saints canonized and uncanonized, we can conclude that Catholic hagiography of the twentieth century is not a monolithic body: it does not promote a common understanding of women's roles nor a common understanding of theology. But conservative Catholics produced the greatest number of hagiographies: more than liberal and feminist Catholics, they recognize the importance of gestures, devotions, and symbols to convey religious understanding, while liberal Catholics rely more heavily on explicit argument.<sup>4</sup> Because hagiographies are such an effective way to communicate a particular theology, continued popular support for the various factions within Catholicism--conservative, liberal, and liberal feminist--may depend on how well each of these groups are able to utilize hagiography to promote and explain their theology.

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<sup>2</sup>Andrew M. Greeley, The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 37.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See Richard Kieckhefer's comments on James Hitchcock in "The Cult of Saints as Popular Religion," 45.

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