

The decline in representations of the Virgin as  
mother in early post-reformation iconography

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## ***Abstract***

As the sixteenth century drew to a close the 'mother and child' image of the Virgin was being replaced by the representation of 'Mary alone'. The move away from depicting the 'mother and child', and particularly the nursing mother, had begun. Medieval religiosity had been characterized by a physical piety which incorporated all the senses, while at the same time using this physicality as a means of penance and suffering as in the traditions of *imitatio Christi*. The decline in the representation of Mary's physical motherhood develops alongside a general growing rejection of the human body as *imago Dei* – and particularly the female body whose *imago Dei* had always been in question. Accompanying this decline in the very physical piety of the late Middle Ages was a growth in spirituality which aided and abetted both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Restoration. This new kind of spirituality looked 'inwards', making much of the examination of conscience as part of the Christian salvific journey. The Council of Trent re-affirmed the sacramental nature of the Catholic Church. The new emphasis on the Sacrament of Confession illustrated the move towards an 'interior' piety. While the establishment of the Society of Jesus by Ignatius Loyola together with the introduction of his *Spiritual Exercises*, took the faithful to an interior space where visualization became the key to the transcendent. The nature of the sacred was changing, no longer associated with this world and its holy relics. Incarnational theology, which emphasized the reconciliation of the created world to God through Christ, was making way for a theology based on the eschaton. Representations of the Virgin as the 'physical' mother of Christ were now giving way to a more interior, passive soul, whose maternal role became eclipsed by a desire to make Mary a model of 'humility' and 'obedience' – the perfect disciple. Freed from the stain of original sin, she is now represented as the Immaculate Conception, an image that became the enduring 'face' of the Marian cult.

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# ***Introduction***

## **Aim and Scope**

The aim of this study is to present evidence of a change in Marian iconography during the post-reformation period and to propose possible causes for this change. While changes were not 'absolute' or 'definitive', nor set within restrictive time-scales, nevertheless a gradual decline in the proliferation of 'mother-and-child' imagery is all too evident. The depiction of the 'nursing-Madonna' disappeared altogether. Not only is the Virgin shown 'alone', she is now also the 'young girl', humble, obedient and decidedly 'unworldly'. The emergence of this particular kind of image of the Virgin was to provide a lasting legacy for Marian iconography, and shifted the emphasis from her maternal role to that of exemplar of Christian discipleship.

The first task is to look at how the Virgin was depicted prior to the upheavals of the sixteenth-century. The late Middle Ages and early Renaissance period presented the Virgin Mary as Christ's 'physical' mother thereby assuring Christians that the Incarnation of Christ had bridged the gulf between God and humanity.<sup>1</sup> Medieval religiosity had been characterized by a physical piety which incorporated all the senses, while at the same time using this physicality as a means of penance and suffering as in the traditions of *imitatio Christi*. However, the decline in the representation of Mary's physical motherhood develops alongside a general growing rejection of the human body as *imago Dei* – and particularly the female body whose *imago Dei* had always been in question. By the beginning of the seventeenth-century major changes in how the human condition was viewed meant that 'flesh was accorded a lower status'.<sup>2</sup> The 'downgrading' of the 'created' world in favour of the 'spiritual' seems to differentiate early modern Catholicism from its medieval predecessor. Ellington has re-enforced this observation, stating that 'religious sensibilities

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<sup>1</sup> Boss, Sarah Jane. *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. (London and New York: Cassett, 2000),p.58

<sup>2</sup> Boss, 2000:61

were undergoing a profound change'.<sup>3</sup> Attempting to get to the root of the change, Eire emphasises that the nature of the sacred was being redefined,<sup>4</sup> no longer associated with this world and its holy relics. He goes on, 'The religion of immanence was replaced by the religion of transcendence.'<sup>5</sup> Incarnational theology, which emphasized the reconciliation of the created world to God through Christ, was making way for a theology based on the eschaton. Representations of the Virgin as the 'physical' mother of Christ were now giving way to a more 'interior', 'passive', soul whose maternal role became eclipsed by a desire to make Mary 'the perfect disciple'. The 'spiritual motherhood' of the *Theotokos* became the 'norm' upon which future generations of Catholics came to identify their Virgin.

My academic interest explored in this paper, pivots on the religious reformations that took place during the sixteenth-century and focuses on the Counter-Reformation and the kind of religious imagery to which it gave rise. Much debate has taken place as to the nature of what was happening within the Catholic Church during this period. Hubert Jedin's influential essay entitled, *Katholische Reformation oder Genenreformation*, addressed this problem and aimed at re-designating this period with a more appropriate terminology.<sup>6</sup> His conclusion was that it should be termed "'Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation.'" <sup>7</sup> Although this was accepted by the majority, some scholars disagreed: 'Wolfgang Reinhard, following the lead of Ernst Walter Zeeden, ... (insists) on the similarities between Catholicism and Protestantism in what he calls the "confessional age". In that age Reinhard sees the churches as expressions of the "modern world"'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Evennett has argued that, 'a new kind of spirituality lay at the heart of the Counter-Reformation.'<sup>9</sup> Such debate surrounding the nature and terminology of the period we call the Counter-Reformation

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<sup>3</sup> Ellington, Donna Spivey. *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul – Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p.263

<sup>4</sup> Eire, Carlos. *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986),p.2

<sup>5</sup> Eire, 1986:2

<sup>6</sup> See O'Malley, John W. "Was Ignatius Loyola a Church Reformer? How to look at early modern Catholicism" in *The Counter-Reformation* edited by David M. Luebke, pp.65-82, (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.,1999), p.66.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in O'Malley, 1999:66

<sup>8</sup> O'Malley, 1999:67

<sup>9</sup> Evennett, H. Outram. "Counter-Reformation Spirituality" in *The Counter-Reformation* edited by David Luebke pp.47-63, (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), p.47.

provides a broader understanding of the etymology of the word than simply, ‘the totality of Catholic efforts directed against the Protestant movements.’<sup>10</sup> For Evennett, then, the Counter-Reformation was ‘first and foremost a powerful religious movement’,<sup>11</sup> institutional reforms were secondary. In this respect, we can see that Catholicism experienced its own unique ‘restorative’ period. Acknowledging problems and abuses extant, the now ‘Roman’ Catholic Church set about re-organizing and re-enforcing its doctrinal stance. As Miles has emphasised: ‘The term “counter reformation”, which began to be used only in the nineteenth century, implies that reform within the Roman church occurred as a reaction to Protestant reform, *a highly misleading way to designate this dynamic and largely effective historical movement.*’<sup>12</sup>

### **Why this period?**

According to Johnson, ‘a glance at early modern Marian devotion, at visual art on Marian themes and at the immense corpus of Baroque Mariological literature ... suggests that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did make significant contributions to the development of Marian piety.’<sup>13</sup> He goes on, ‘New sensibilities ... which had been formed against a backdrop of humanism, the Protestant Reformation and changing attitudes to women, in turn led to important shifts in the public portrayal of the Virgin.’<sup>14</sup> While the topic of the Virgin was not of primary concern to the Protestant reformists, their emphasis on Christ as sole mediator and their rejection of intercessory prayer to the saints and cultic imagery, nevertheless ‘removed the basis for nearly all the features of the (Marian) cult as it had developed by the later Middle Ages.’<sup>15</sup> The Catholic Church’s reaction to such attacks on its practices was to stand firm and defend its doctrinal positions – especially those concerning the Virgin Mary. While not yet an official dogma of the Church, Mary’s Immaculate Conception, supported by popular piety, continued to be displayed in visual imagery if not in

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<sup>10</sup> See the *Encyclopaedia Britannica – Macropaedia, Volume 15*. (Published 1982), p.1011

<sup>11</sup> Evennett, 1999:47

<sup>12</sup> Miles, Margaret. *Image as Insight – Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p.179, footnote 2. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, Trevor “Mary in Early Modern Europe” in *Mary – The Complete Resource* edited by Sarah J. Boss pp.363-384 (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p.363

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, 2007:363

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, 2007:364

official declarations. Differences in visual presentation distinguished Catholic from Protestant churches. 'Catholic' visual imagery, as stated above, saw a change in both style and content: as Vloberg points out: 'art reacted sharply to Protestant attacks and often exploited all aesthetic possibilities as it strove to assert the prerogatives of the Mother of God.'<sup>16</sup>

This new approach, which made art an essential tool in conveying the sacramental stance of the now 'Roman' Catholic Church, became known as the *Baroque*. As Dillenberger has pointed out: 'In Roman Catholicism *the baroque* is the art of the Counter-Reformation.'<sup>17</sup> Koenigsberger et al re-affirm this sentiment: 'The new style ... seems to have successfully caught and expressed a new sensibility. While brilliantly suited to glorify the Church and its dignitaries ... it appealed at the same time both to a very personal piety and to religious mass emotion.'<sup>18</sup> As a tool of the Church, then, the baroque, which represented a revival of popular religious art, proved immensely successful in promoting Roman Catholicism, both in the face of the many Protestant factions as well as in response to the new waves of spirituality within its own ranks. 'Baroque art and architecture provided spectacular and compelling images with which the Church could reassert its presence and dazzle and indoctrinate the faithful.'<sup>19</sup> The baroque style played on the emotions through theatrical depictions of its subject matter. 'Facial expressions of rage, pain, piety or ecstasy are so explicitly rendered that they verge on caricature.'<sup>20</sup> (See Fig. i).

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<sup>16</sup> Vloberg, Maurice. "The Iconographic Types of the Virgin in Western Art" in Sarah Jane Boss (ed.), *Mary – The Complete Resource* pp.537-585 (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p.537.

<sup>17</sup> Dillenberger, John. *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987), p.76. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> Koenigsberger, H.G., George L. Mosse and G.Q. Bowler. *Europe in the Sixteenth Century – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (London and New York: Longman, 1989), p.395

<sup>19</sup> Matthews, Roy T. and Platt, F. Dewitt (eds.) *The Western Humanities – Volume II: The Renaissance to the Present*. Fifth Edition. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003), p.383

<sup>20</sup> Wallace, Robert (ed.) *The World of Bernini*. (New York: Time-Life Intd. (Nederland) B.V.,1973), p.11



Fig. i

Use of dramatic light effects and exaggerated colour marks the baroque from the harmony and balance of Renaissance composition. The success of this style depended on the use of realism which was 'intended to convey the physical presence and immediacy of the church's holiest figures.'<sup>21</sup> Art for art's sake was eschewed in favour of this 'functionality', as Dillenberger emphasises: 'The passion of art had to be an acceptable religious passion.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Matthews et al, 2003:390

<sup>22</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:78



Thus, the period which marks the beginnings of 'early modern Catholicism' is also a period of tremendous artistic change, of which Marian iconography by no means plays a minor part.

### **Methodology**

My dissertation argues for the 'physicality' of pre-reformation Christian piety and the 'spirituality' of post-reformation Christian piety – as evidenced in the changing iconography of the Virgin Mary. My approach will be from a perspective of a 'theology of the body', which reached its zenith in the late Middle Ages, to the beginnings of a 'theology of the heart' in the early post-reformation period. This latter phenomenon saw the development of a 'moral theology'. This change is demonstrated by a gradual shift in the subject-matter of religious imagery – most notably, the shift away from the 'maternal' to the 'spiritual' Virgin.

My first chapter will look at the effects of the Protestant Reformation on the Catholic Church, most notably from the perspective of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). It will take an *historical* approach. It will be concerned with a particular event, an event situated during a particular period of time. While examining the question of religious art and any influence the Council of Trent may have had on its development - the emergence, for example, of what was to be retrospectively categorized as the 'Baroque' – this chapter will not be an 'art history'. It rather uses 'art' as evidence of a means by which the church and its faithful could express a particular theological outlook – one that was undergoing considerable change during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Paintings which characterize the *Baroque*, and served to promote Roman Catholicism during the period of the Counter-Reformation, will be selected from works by Velázquez, El Greco, Zurbarán and Murillo.

Pre-Tridentine piety was particularly visual and particularly physical – the body was part of religious devotion and the body would be resurrected at the eschaton. For this reason, my

second chapter will be approached from the perspective of a *'theology of the body'*. The emphasis on Mary-as-mother, her 'physical' motherhood of Christ, stresses an 'Incarnational theology'. This latter phenomenon leads to a study of *Dualism*<sup>23</sup>, which, in early Christianity saw an opposition between 'body' and 'soul'. I shall be looking at how theories of 'Dualism' pre-Trent seem to change thereby emphasising a unity of body and soul which celebrated the created world. Without an insight into this physical modality of Christianity, it would be difficult to appreciate the changes in the visual representations of the Virgin post-Trent. I am, therefore, advocating a more complex explanation for this change than simply a change in artistic style. The underlying theology that underpins visual representation becomes the driving force in any change of subject matter and its accompanying artistic style.

In order to identify and stress the changes in Marian iconography, it will be essential to look back to the art of the late Middle Ages. What characterized late Medieval Marian imagery and what themes dominated the genre? The answers to these questions will illustrate how the theological imagination prior to the reformation was very different from that displayed in the art of the early post-reformation period. Medieval piety, as emphasised earlier, was a very 'physical' piety and this translated into visual imagery in which the human body played a primary role – hence the Virgin was often portrayed breast-feeding the Christ child, or merely bearing her breast, a sign of nourishment and support which re-enforced the true humanity of Christ. (See Fig. ii).

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<sup>23</sup> A simple definition of *Dualism* describes the concept whereby 'the world consists of two basic, opposed, and irreducible principles or substances ... that account for all that exists.' Taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica – Macropaedia Vol.5 – 15<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Chicago, Geneva, London:Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.,1982), p.1067.



Fig. ii

As Johnson emphasises:

‘Mary’s shared flesh with her Son ... had hitherto been stressed as the mystical link which enabled her to participate actively in Christ’s life and work and rendered her own body praiseworthy as the source of Christ’s suffering body on the cross and of his glorified body received in the Eucharistic host’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Johnson, 2007:363

Now there was a focus on Mary's 'spiritual' motherhood, 'united to him more closely by shared will and affection than by flesh.'<sup>25</sup> 'Gnostic' dualism viewed 'matter' as evil and 'spirit' as good.<sup>26</sup> The medieval display of a very physical piety in the late Middle Ages often eschewed the soul/body dichotomy of *Dualism*. The 'suffering' body was a means by which the human person could emulate the sufferings of Christ. In this way, both body *and* soul were instrumental in man's search for unity with the divine. This treatment of the human person as a psychosomatic unit also served to blur gender boundaries, so that Christ is often described in terms of the 'nursing' mother as He 'sheds blood' for the redemption of mankind.<sup>27</sup>

Such dualistic notions which ebb and flow throughout the history of western thought, then, will enable me to look more closely at Christian responses to Mary's physical motherhood, and to the manner in which it is presented in religious imagery, both pre and post-reformation. It will also provide a basis on which to explore the gradual rejection of this maternal imagery. Although not overtly feminist in my approach, there will be questions which bring to light an underlying misogyny which used principles of *Dualism* to equate woman/body with woman/sin, and this I will be exploring as a contributing factor in the gradual disappearance of the 'mother-and-child' iconography.

Paintings from mid-fifteenth century onwards provide sufficient material to illustrate my point, that changes in the visual representation of the Virgin by the conclusion of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century embody a new theological approach. A selection of paintings from the late Middle Ages will include: Robert Campion's *The Virgin and Child Before a Firescreen* c.1430, Parmigianino, *Madonna with Long Neck*, an illustration from the *Chevalier Hours* 1455, a triptych by Goswyn van der Weyden, work by Quirizio of Murano, and examples of the naked Christ Child will include

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<sup>25</sup> Johnson, 2007:363

<sup>26</sup> Filoramo, Giovanni. *A History of Gnosticism*. Trans. Anthony Alcock. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994),p.54

<sup>27</sup> See Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption – Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p.144.

works by Conegliano, Perugino and Corregio. Paintings of the early Renaissance will include works by Raphael. I will also introduce the early work referred to as the *Canfield Virgin*.

The turbulent years of the sixteenth-century, which experienced both the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, were driven by a new and powerful spirituality.<sup>28</sup> Evennett describes the way in which the new wave of spirituality that underpinned the Counter-Reformation was expressed in 'individual' terms rather than in 'corporate or liturgical expressions.'<sup>29</sup> This change in religiosity, which has been noted by several scholars of the period,<sup>30</sup> gave rise to what has been labelled as, a '*theology of the heart*'.<sup>31</sup> My third and final chapter, then, will be the exploration of the rise of 'individualism' and 'interior' piety and its impact on the changing iconography of the Virgin. Mental prayer, involving the examination of conscience, characterized this new 'interiority' and marked the development of moral theology. It was also accompanied by the expansion of the sacrament of confession which saw 'a great advance in the science of confessors'<sup>32</sup> My study will look at the influences of several notable figures of the period: Ignatius Loyola, (1491-1556), whose *Spiritual Exercises* epitomise the new 'spirituality'; Carlo Borromeo, ( Archbishop of Milan from 1565), the driving force behind the expansion of the sacrament of confession; Francois de Sales (1567-1622), whose writings included *An Introduction to a Devout Life* (1613); Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), who worked to introduce the reformed Carmelites of St. Teresa of Avila into France.<sup>33</sup> This new 'spiritual' movement, which focused so much on the 'inner' person, appeared in contrast to the very physical, public displays of religiosity seen in the pilgrimages, religious processions and community worship of an 'immanent' spirituality prevalent in the late Middle Ages. The Catholic Church responded to this new mode of piety by a new kind of artistic representation. As emphasised earlier, the *baroque* produced a display of highly 'emotional' religious

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<sup>28</sup> Evennett. 1999:47

<sup>29</sup> Evennett, 1999:62

<sup>30</sup> Evennett,1999; Ellington,2001: Eire,1989.

<sup>31</sup> See Campbell, Ted A. *The Religion of the Heart - A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), particularly the Introduction pp.1-14

<sup>32</sup> Evennett, 1999:59

<sup>33</sup>Chapter Three of my study will include references to St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross who collaborated from 1572-77 and provided a rich legacy of spiritual writings.

iconography – saints portrayed in moments of ecstasy or revelation. Drama pointed to the emotion of the ‘inner self’ rather than to any ‘external’ action. Images of the Virgin made a major contribution to this new artistic atmosphere. It is to the Virgin’s ‘inner’ being, rather than to her physical maternal role, to which artists now turn. According to Ellington, the Virgin Mary became a role-model for post-Tridentine Christians, ‘silent, self-controlled, and obedient’.<sup>34</sup> She was now: ‘a more individualized and distant figure than the woman whose images, relics, and bodily participation in all aspects of the life of Jesus had caused her to seem so tangible in the context of fifteenth century devotion.’<sup>35</sup> This ‘new’ Mary was translated into the changing iconography of the Counter-Reformation period in which we witness Mary as the Immaculate Conception or being assumed into heaven - no longer part of this world and its physicality, but very much part of the next.

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<sup>34</sup> Ellington, 2001:148

<sup>35</sup> Ellington, 2001:148

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## *The Council of Trent 1545-1564*

### **Introduction**

The Council met at Trent and can be divided into three distinct periods, 1545-50, 1550-52, and 1562-64.<sup>36</sup> In spite of a period of almost nineteen years elapsing between the first convening of the Council and its final session, and the fact that it was sitting for only four and a half years in total, 'the council's record is one of continuity; it was a single assembly, not a succession of three.'<sup>37</sup> As Hubert Jedin sees it, 'The Council was the church's answer to the schism brought about by the reformation, and an act of self-reflection and self-renewal ...'<sup>38</sup> He goes on to point out that the division between the Reformists' churches and the Catholic Church was already *de facto* when the Council was first convened in 1545.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he emphasises: 'The aim at the council was to strengthen those who had remained faithful to the Catholic Church and to clarify and reaffirm their faith, not to win the Protestants over.'<sup>40</sup> Although the reforms instigated by the Council of Trent have been defined in terms of a 'Catholic' reformation, rather than simply as a 'Counter' reformation,<sup>41</sup> Jedin emphasises that: 'the catholic reform would have been unthinkable without the protestant reformation.'<sup>42</sup> Rapley re-enforces this view: 'modern historiography ... now sees Reform

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<sup>36</sup> See *Encyclopaedia Britannica-Macropaedia*. Volume 15. 1982:1011

<sup>37</sup> Reardon, Bernard M.G. *Religious Thought in the Reformation*. (London and New York: Longman, 1981), p.305

<sup>38</sup> Jedin, Hubert *Crisis and Closure of the Council of Trent*. Translated by N.D. Smith. (London and Melbourne: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p.165

<sup>39</sup> Jedin emphasises that the 'lutheran national churches were firmly established in Germany ... when the German protestants appeared in Trent in 1551 and 1552, they did not take part in any conversations. They rejected the invitation to attend the third and last period of the council in 1561.' 1967:165.

<sup>40</sup> Jedin, 1967:165

<sup>41</sup> O'Malley, 1999:66.

<sup>42</sup> Jedin, 1967:167

and Counter-Reform as two thrusts of the same movement, in which the very violence of their confrontations was an indicator of a certain underlying unity.<sup>43</sup>

What, then, was achieved by the convening of this Council of Trent in the years following the great rift in the 'one, holy and Catholic'<sup>44</sup> Church? Reardon sums-up some of the fundamental changes for Catholicism: 'It was at Trent that Roman Catholicism transformed what to a large extent had been speculative theology into a scheme of rigid if not always entirely unambiguous dogma, with, in the main, Thomism as its informing spirit.'<sup>45</sup> The 'old church', as Reardon has termed it, while having its external boundaries severely reduced, especially within northern Europe, also underwent changes within its internal structures addressing administrative abuses.<sup>46</sup> As noted earlier in this study, change was propelled by a new 'spiritual' revival, evidenced in the formation of *The Society of Jesus* (1540)<sup>47</sup> and characterized by the belief in the salvific value of 'good works'. Reardon has pointed to the definition of 'good works' as, "'activism in grace": divine grace ... unconditionally necessary for the soul's health, but expressing itself, through a subdued and disciplined will, in works of charity and social service.'<sup>48</sup> Crucially for Catholicism, this divine grace was not found solely in an individual's 'interior' conviction of faith, as in the case of the Protestant reformers, but in the Church's sacramental system – most importantly in the sacrament of confession and the Eucharist.<sup>49</sup> The Tridentine Decree, therefore, upheld sacramentalism.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in contrast to the reformers' mantra of *sola scriptura*, the Council ensured that it was not only scripture upon which its faith foundation rested, but also the authority of

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<sup>43</sup> Rapley, Elizabeth. *The Devotes – Women & Church in Seventeenth-Century France*. (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990),p.10

<sup>44</sup> Words taken from the Nicene Creed – emphasising the 'single', 'united' and yet 'universal' nature of the Christian Church at the time of the Council of Nicaea (AD.325).

<sup>45</sup> Reardon,1981:302. He goes on to point out that 'doctrinal positions reached at Trent represent a thorough reassessment of the received teachings and are certainly not a mere reiteration and endorsement of medieval theologizing, much of which was eliminated ...'p.304. 'Thomism' is a term used for the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). An Italian philosopher and theologian, and a Dominican Friar – known as *The Angelic Doctor* – 'regarded as the greatest figure of scholasticism; one of his most important achievements was the introduction of the work of Aristotle to Christian western Europe'. See *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Edited by Judy Pearsall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001),p.83. The works of Aquinas include, *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*.

<sup>46</sup> Reardon, 1981:298

<sup>47</sup> The Society was incorporated by the bull of Pope Pius III – *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae*, 1540.

<sup>48</sup> Reardon, 1981:298

<sup>49</sup> Reardon, 1982:298

<sup>50</sup> A belief that by partaking of the 'sacraments', the recipient will be participating in his/her own redemption; in contrast to the Protestant belief in man's utter helplessness in relation to God.



‘tradition’.<sup>51</sup> The Council of Trent was to declare that ‘the unwritten traditions of the Church and its members were to be held in equal honour as Scripture ...’<sup>52</sup>

### **The Council and the Mother of God**

Ironically, neither the Protestant reformers nor those presiding at the Council of Trent had Mariology in the forefront of their minds – either in the demands listed by the former, or in the subjects laid down for debate by the latter. As Hilda Graef so aptly states: ‘The Council of Trent ... convoked to deal with the catastrophic situation the Reformation had brought about, had too much on its hands to deal explicitly with questions of Mariology.’<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, the Council were not prepared to promulgate an official teaching on Mary’s Immaculate Conception, albeit divided both Protestant and Catholic, as well as Catholics themselves.<sup>54</sup> The fact that it provided one of the most frequently used images of the Virgin in the counter-Reformation Church, made this avoidance of settling the debate over the Immaculate Conception all the more surprising. The Council addressed the question of ‘original sin’ in May, 1545. But as O’Carroll states: ‘The most that would be agreed on was expressed in these words: “This holy Synod declares ... that it is not its intention to include in this decree, where original sin is treated of, the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary Mother of God, but that the constitutions of Pope Sixtus IV ... are to be observed.”’<sup>55</sup> (The constitutions of Sixtus IV had made the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin a Feast in 1476, while avoiding any dogmatic definition.)<sup>56</sup> Rather, Mary’s freedom from ‘actual’ sin was

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<sup>51</sup> The Council dealt with the questions of ‘Scripture and Tradition’ in Session IV, 8 April, 1546. See Bettensen, Henry (ed.) *Documents of the Christian Church* – Second Edition. (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967),p.261/262

<sup>52</sup> Warner, 1983:245. Warner points to Owen Chadwick who comments on the Tridentine decision to uphold ‘traditions’ of the Church: “‘ it is clear that some of those who framed it were thinking not of an unwritten heritage of doctrine, but of certain practices, like the keeping of Sunday or the baptism of infants’”. *The Reformation*. (London: 1972),p.277. Warner continues: ‘whatever the intention of the councillors, the decree gave traditional beliefs, like the legends and miracles that fleshed out the shadowy Mary of Nazareth, a claim to canonical authority.’pp.245/246.

<sup>53</sup> Graef, Hilda. *Mary – A History of Doctrine and Devotion*. Vols. 1 & 2. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), p.17

<sup>54</sup> Catholics were divided between the ‘maculists’ and ‘Immaculists’, and such beliefs divided the Dominicans and Franciscans.

<sup>55</sup> O’Carroll, Michael (ed.) *Theotokos – A Theological Encyclopaedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990),p. 345

<sup>56</sup>The Immaculate Conception was finally promulgated as a dogma of the Church by Pope Pius IX in his Apostolic Constitution – *Ineffabilis Deus*: ‘the doctrine ... holds that the Virgin Mary, was, in the first instant of

declared in the Canons on Justification, which stated: “‘If anyone holds that throughout his whole life he can avoid all sins, even venial sins, except by a special privilege of God, *as the Church holds in regard to the Blessed Virgin*: let him be anathema.”<sup>57</sup> Mary’s ‘sinlessness’ was not in doubt; but her freedom from the stain of original sin from the moment of her conception remained a serious thorn in the flesh for those in the established Church who wished to show a united front. However, as is evidenced later in this study, the developments in religious iconography ensured that Mary’s ‘immaculacy’ remained overt in the eyes of the Catholic faithful. Popular devotion, together with the new baroque style in art, provided an ideal medium for describing the Virgin as such.<sup>58</sup>

Why then would the Council of Trent prove to be one of the seminal influences on the changing representation of the mother of God following the Reformation? The answer lies in one of the fundamental issues raised by the reformers during the early decades of the sixteenth-century – that of religious imagery. Moreover, as Bridget Heal reminds us:

The Virgin Mary provided a powerful focal point for religious identity. During the early modern period Mary-worship marked out one Christian confession from another, rather than Christian from Jew, as in the Middle Ages, or Catholic from secularist, as in more modern times.<sup>59</sup>

Much religious iconography consisted of images of the Virgin, and it was often these images that provided a target for the Protestant iconoclasts.<sup>60</sup> Thus, it was not doctrinal issues relating to the Virgin *per se*, that drew the Council into Marian debate, but issues raised vicariously by the attacks on popular Marian devotion and imagery. To illustrate how far

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her conception, *preserved* untouched by any taint of original guilt ...’ Cited in Bettensen, 1967:271. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in O’Carroll, 1990:345. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>58</sup> R.W. Scribner has drawn attention to a persistent dilemma in the study of religion, ‘whether to approach it as a set of held beliefs or as a set of practices. The dilemma is more acute in the case of popular belief, where the ideas behind religious practices are rarely formulated clearly and concisely in any formal conceptual structure.’ *For the Sake of Simple-Folk – Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*. (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 2004),p.95

<sup>59</sup> Heal, Bridget. “Marian Devotion and Confessional Identity in Sixteenth-Century Germany”, pp.218-227, in *The Church and Mary* edited by R.N. Swanson (Woodbridge and New York: The Bodywell Press, 2004), p.218. Although Heal’s study is concerned with Marian imagery and devotion in Germany during the upheavals of the first half of the sixteenth-century, it emphasises the point that Marian devotion defined the various religious allegiances despite the fact that the status of the Virgin was not at the *forefront* of the debate between Protestants and Catholics.

<sup>60</sup> For an in depth study of iconoclasm during the Reformation, see Eire, 1989

the cult of Mary had strayed from the authority of the official teaching of the church, one has only to reference Erasmus. In his *Familiar Colloquies* Erasmus attacks Mary's title of *Star of the Sea*:

The sailors call on Mary, chanting the *Salve Regina* ... They implored the Virgin Mother, calling her Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World, Port of Salvation and many other flattering titles which Holy Scripture nowhere applies to her.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, the Mariologist, R. Laurentin has emphasised: "One shudders to see the miserable situation in which Marian devotion found itself when the Protestant crisis broke out."<sup>62</sup>

The influence of the Council of Trent on Marian devotion, therefore, was paradoxical. The Council made it clear that the status of the mother of God would be addressed only via the Council's decrees on 'the communion of saints', 'purgatory', and 'the production and use of religious imagery'. Moreover, the Council were insistent that these questions, 'must *not* be treated ... as *dogmatic* decrees, with the entire apparatus that was required for this type of decree, but as *reform* decrees which would ... eliminate abuses, and would also strengthen the wavering by setting out the church's teaching.'<sup>63</sup> Interestingly enough, Cardinal Madruzzo, in response to objections from Cardinal Morone, who wanted to discard these decrees and refer a decision to the Pope, pointed out that, 'the religious conflict had originally broken out in connection with these very doctrines, and that, if they were neglected now, the church would give the impression that they were not properly founded and that it felt unsure about them.'<sup>64</sup> Finally, however, in its twenty-fifth session, the Council unanimously agreed:

The holy Synod commands all bishops and others who hold the office of administration ... that they above all *diligently instruct the faithful on the intercession*

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<sup>61</sup> Graef, 1965:3. Erasmus continues: 'The question is then asked what Mary has to do with the sea, since she appears never to have sailed on it, and the answer comes that once Venus was the protectress of sailors, whose place has now been taken by the blessed Virgin.'p.3

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Graef, 1965:5

<sup>63</sup> Jedin, 1967:148/9. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> Jedin, 1967:149. Cardinal Morone, according to Jedin, 'was the most experienced diplomat in the service of the curia at that time.'Ibid. He, together with five other Cardinals, Navagero, Hosius, Simonetta, Guise and Madruzzo, sat together to finalize the final schema for Church reforms during the summer of 1563. They took their lead from the work of Uditore Paleotti, who seems to have been responsible for drafting the reforms. See Jedin, 1967:122/3

*and invocation of the saints, the veneration of relics and the legitimate use of images, teaching them that the saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their prayers to God for men, and that it is good and useful to invoke them suppliantly and in order to obtain favours from God through his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who alone is our Redeemer and Saviour, to have recourse to their prayers, assistance and support.*<sup>65</sup>

More specifically, the Council continues:

that the images of Christ, of *the Virgin Mother of God*, and of the other Saints, are to be placed and retained especially in the churches and that due honour and veneration be extended to them ... because *the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent*, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we bare the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ, and venerate the Saints, whose likeness they bear.<sup>66</sup>

It is interesting that such a major point of contention between the reformers and the Catholic Church - the Virgin Mary and the use of religious images - should maintain a secondary role in the proceedings of the Council due to the simple question of 'a lack of time'.

### **The Council and Religious Iconography - 'Content' and 'Function' of Images**

In spite of the question of religious imagery playing a minor role in the proceedings of the Council, the importance of visual imagery in the great religious upheavals of the sixteenth century cannot be underestimated - both to the protestant reformists, who used it as a focus for their attacks on the established church, and to the established church itself, who re-appraised its function and style, using it as a means to uphold its doctrinal stances. Moreover, Christianity had always used the visual image to convey its message. Begbie makes a crucial observation: 'Christian doctrine has profoundly affected the form, content and development of the arts ... the arts have frequently had a decisive impact on the shape

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<sup>65</sup> Denzinger-Bannwart (ed.) *Enchiridion Symbolorum*. (DS 1821). Cited in O'Carroll, 1990:345. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>66</sup> (DS 1823), cited in O'Carroll, 1990:345. Italics my own for emphasis.

of Christian belief.<sup>67</sup> This is particularly true of the period now under discussion. As Scribner asserts:

One of the most important defining characteristics of late-medieval popular culture was that it was intensely *visual* ... In the realm of popular belief there was a strong desire for the mysteries of religion to be made visible ... More striking was the attempt to represent theological notions, such as the incarnation, in the crudest visual terms, as with statues of the Madonna whose stomach could be opened to reveal the Trinity inside.<sup>68</sup>

Margaret Miles examines this 'visual' piety and delves into the underlying theories that supported a faith that valued so highly the modality of sight. The use of visual images to assist worship and devotion was 'supported by an ancient theory of physical vision.'<sup>69</sup> This theory proposed that: 'The visual ray ... is projected from the eye to touch its object. In the act of vision, viewer and image are connected in a dynamic communication ... the life energy of the viewer goes out to and takes the shape of the object contemplated.'<sup>70</sup> Thus, 'seeing' is not passive but 'active'.<sup>71</sup> For Protestants, a faith dependent on the primacy of sight was rejected. Instead, the reformers heralded the 'passivity' of listening, where *sola fides* demonstrated a total dependence on God.<sup>72</sup> For the 'old' church, however, religious images and a liturgy based on the modality of sight, was upheld.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Begbie, Jeremy. "Christ and the Cultures: Christianity and the Arts" in Colin E. Gunton (ed.) pp.101-118 *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.101

<sup>68</sup> Scribner 2004: 3-4. Italics my own for emphasis. Scribner comments on this unorthodox Marian imagery: in popular belief, the faithful's attempt to visualize religious doctrine 'crossed the line of Christian orthodoxy (Mary was the mother of Christ, not of the Trinity), but it is doubtful whether the pious believer would have been too concerned about this.'p.95

<sup>69</sup> Miles, 1985:96

<sup>70</sup> Miles, 1985:45

<sup>71</sup> Miles, 1985:96.

<sup>72</sup> Miles, 1985:101. Martin Luther (1483-1546) had stated: "'a Christian is free from all things and over all things so that he needs no works to make him righteous and save him, since faith alone abundantly confers all these things.'" In *Three Treatises – Martin Luther*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982),p.291. The imbalance between the visual and the auditory senses in relation to Christian worship, which had been a feature of the pre-reformation Church, was also a concern for the Counter-Reformation Church. Now, the established Church began to install pulpits in the centre of their church buildings so that the homily would be heard by all present. See Miles, 1985:100.

<sup>73</sup> Miles points to the importance of liturgical practices within the Eucharist: 'The culmination of the late-medieval mass was the elevation of the consecrated bread so that it could be seen by the congregation.'1985:96. For the majority of those who were illiterate and poorly educated, the Latin mass would have been incomprehensible, requiring, not only the elevation of the host, but also the necessary ringing of bells at the point of consecration – practices still retained in the Roman Catholic liturgy today.

However, the Council did address the issue of abuses that had been levelled against the use of images in public worship and private devotion, 'such as the ascription of divinity, by the unlettered or uneducated, to works of art that portray facts and narratives of scripture, as if divinity "could be seen by the eyes of the body, or be portrayed by colours or figures."'74 Images post-Trent should no longer be solely objects of devotion, but should serve a didactic purpose.<sup>75</sup> As René Huyghe states: "The first task of the Counter Reformation in its dealings with art was to provide it with an iconography, an obligatory formula for subject matter."<sup>76</sup> Janelle re-enforces this point:

The age was a controversial one, in which Catholic belief had to be asserted against Protestant tenets; and there is a striking correspondence between the themes assigned to Catholic artists – which are uniform throughout Europe – and the decrees of the Council.<sup>77</sup>

Jedin emphasises that, religious images 'aimed to familiarize ordinary believers with the history of salvation and to stimulate them to imitate the saints by presenting them with their example.'<sup>78</sup> From this stance, one can understand that the Council laid down the dictate that such imagery should not 'contain anything that was false or anything that was immoral or lascivious.'<sup>79</sup> Thus, Tridentine decrees advocated 'a chaste art'.<sup>80</sup> 'Figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust; nor the celebration of saints and the visitation of relics to be, by any, perverted into revelings and drunkenness.'<sup>81</sup> The Council 'reacted to the excesses perpetrated in the name of art and banned the practice of endowing saints with provocative facial features.'<sup>82</sup> In spite of these dictates, however, the

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<sup>74</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:76

<sup>75</sup> Jedin, 1967:152

<sup>76</sup> See *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Renaissance and Baroque Art* Edited by René Huyghe. (Feltham, Middlesex: Paul Hamlyn, 1968),p.332. The need to formulate an appropriate catalogue of subject-matter led to several contemporary treatises such as the *Iconologia* of Cavaliere Cesare Ripa. (1968:332).

<sup>77</sup> Janelle, Pierre. *The Catholic Reformation*. (London, Sydney and Auckland: Cassell and Collier, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1977),p.168

<sup>78</sup> Jedin, 1967:152. The didactic element of religious imagery formed part of the tradition of western Christianity going back to Gregory the Great, 'via the *Libri Carolini* and right up to the late Middle Ages, but which had only recently been formulated at the religious conversations of Saint Germaine... A "sentence" which had been worked out at that time ... reaffirmed both the veneration of images and their didactic purpose. This Paris "sentence" served as a basic text for the authors of the Tridentine decree.'p.152.

<sup>79</sup> Jedin, 1967:152

<sup>80</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:76. Jeremy Begbie has drawn attention to the Augustinian distrust of physical beauty, 'for it can so quickly tug us away from the creator towards merely physical realities.' 1997:106

<sup>81</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:76. A consequence of this statement led to Paolo Veronese being called before the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition for including in his painting of the 'Last Supper', 'buffoons, drunkards, Germans ... dwarfs.'p.77. Rather than alter his painting, Veronese retitled the work – *The Feast in the House of Levi*.

<sup>82</sup> Vloberg, 2007:563

Council provided no particular instructions of how its decree on religious imagery should be put into practice, apart from the intention for a simple realism in art. Instead, artists were required to seek out artists' manuals, such as that of Antonius Possevinus, who expounded a more developed theory of the art of religious painting, in his *De Poesi et Pitura*.<sup>83</sup>

the highest pitch of art consists in imitating reality, the martyrdoms of martyrs, the tears of those who weep, the pain of those who suffer, the glory and joy of those who come to life again.<sup>84</sup>

Pacheco, Velázquez's tutor and examiner of religious paintings for Seville's Holy Inquisition in 1618, went further by laying out in detail how, for example, the Virgin should be painted:

The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception must be painted in the flower of her youth, 12 or 13 years old, as a most beautiful young girl, with fine and serious eyes, a most perfect nose and mouth and pink cheeks, wearing her most beautiful golden hair loose.<sup>85</sup>

Here we see the beginnings of a tradition which dictated that the Virgin should be painted as 'a young girl'. For Pacheco, beauty and virtue were synonymous. He believed that 'art's greatest function was the uplifting of men's souls; he saw excellent painting as encouraging virtuous living.'<sup>86</sup> In his own words, "'the aim of painting is the service of God.'"<sup>87</sup>

Thus, 'art as beautiful and sensuous image was rejected. The passion of art had to be an acceptable religious passion.'<sup>88</sup> The Catholic reformers aimed to discard the 'freedom and

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<sup>83</sup> Janelle, 1977:161. Antonius Possevinu (1533/4-1611) – theologian and papal envoy. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1559. He 'represented the literary, scientific, and diplomatic type of Jesuit, performing important political missions, establishing schools of science and letters, and applying himself to diplomatic protocols and classical authors with equal assiduity.' See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12317a.htm> Accessed: 02/11/2011.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in Janelle, 1977:161. Janelle brings our attention to the fact that in 1578 the discovery of the catacombs in Rome provided a realistic picture of the real sufferings of the Christian martyrs, who would now be portrayed in their agony rather than as triumphant. See p. 152.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in Brown, Dale (ed.) *The World of Velásquez 1599-1660* (Amsterdam: Time-Life Int. [Nederland] B.V.,1972), pp.37/38

<sup>86</sup> Brown, 1972:38

<sup>87</sup> Brown, 1972:42

<sup>88</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:78

originality' of the art of the Renaissance and replace it with a more 'scriptural' and 'doctrinal' approach.<sup>89</sup>

But what was the 'freedom and originality' that so alarmed the Catholic reformers? According to Graef, during the period of the Renaissance,<sup>90</sup> art and scholarship were no longer beholden to Christianity but became subjects 'practised in their own right, as merely "human" activities.'<sup>91</sup> How did this impact on representations of the Virgin? Vloberg points out that: 'Since humanism had sprung from pagan roots, the image of the Virgin was not always represented with the necessary purity and splendour.'<sup>92</sup> He goes on to cite Savonarola: "'You painters, you act badly ... the most pure Mary, how do you deck her out! I tell you that she was dressed simply. But you clothe the Virgin of virgins in the garments of a courtesan."<sup>93</sup> To Savonarola, the Virgin 'had lost her nobility to the point where she was rendered with greater fidelity to female beauty, an approach that almost always implies an appeal to the baser senses.'<sup>94</sup> Even the 'madonnas' of Raphael were rooted in sixteenth-century Italy, 'sensuous and entirely of this world.'<sup>95</sup> (See Figs.1 and 2).

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<sup>89</sup> Graham-Dixon, Andrew. *Caravaggio – A Life Sacred and Profane*. (London:Penguin Books, 2011),p.35

<sup>90</sup> 'This concept of a new age derives mainly from the nineteenth-century writers Jules Michelet, John Addington Symonds, and above all Jacob Burckhardt, whose classic essay *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), continues to exercise an enormous influence.' See *Encyclopaedia Britannica – Volume 15*. (1982:660). 'Wallace K. Ferguson describes the Renaissance as a period of transition between the Middle Ages and the modern era.'p.662.

<sup>91</sup> Graef, 1965:1. 'Humanism' can be defined as: 'an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters ... (also) a Renaissance cultural movement which turned away from medieval scholasticism and revived interest in ancient Greek and Roman thought.' See the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* edited by Judy Pearsall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.893

<sup>92</sup> Vloberg, 2007:561

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Vloberg, 2007:561. Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), a Dominican Friar, instigated a campaign against 'vice' in the city of Florence, only to be excommunicated and meeting a premature death for refusing to join Pope Alexander 1V's Holy League against the French.

<sup>94</sup> Vloberg, 2007:562

<sup>95</sup> Graef, 1965:2



Fig. 1





Fig. 2

Later critics had scorned these works: “for they are ambiguous; they mix veneration of the Virgin with the cult of womanhood.”<sup>96</sup> The critic Huysman speaks of, “the odious Raphael, his sickly-sweet matrons and purely human wet nurses.”<sup>97</sup> It is clear from such criticisms

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<sup>96</sup> Cited in Vloberg, 2007:564

<sup>97</sup> Cited in Vloberg, 2007:564

that the Virgin had somehow been demoted to an 'ordinary' human mother, while leaving reference to her role as the *Theotokos* somewhat diminished.<sup>98</sup> The art of the Renaissance had simply become too secular for those attempting to reassert the doctrinal positions of the Catholic Church.

Interestingly, rather than being condemned by the Church, the 'humanist' movement found support in a string of worldly popes.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, as Graef goes on: 'It needed the Sack of Rome in 1527 to put an end to the paganism of the Italy of the Renaissance which had scarcely been shaken even by the religious upheavals beyond the Alps.'<sup>100</sup> Ironically, it was not until the humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam (d.1536), began his study of scripture that the practices of popular piety came under the scrutiny of the established Church itself.<sup>101</sup> Like their Protestant counterparts, members of the Council aimed to re-focus on the truth of Scripture – using it as a more reliable source for the *content* of Catholic imagery. Moreover, they declared the Vulgate Bible as the only canonical text.<sup>102</sup>

Verifiable sources, on which to base the identity and status of the Virgin, became paramount. The Tridentine concern for a return to the canonical scriptures meant the gradual abandonment of much mythology that had been used to support a Marian iconography. Instead, the Council were in favour of a much more faithful rendition of the

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<sup>98</sup> *Theotokos* may be translated as 'God-bearer'. 'It was formally sanctioned at the Council of Ephesus ... (although) the precise origin in time of the word itself is difficult to establish. It is attested by a unique piece of evidence: the papyrus fragment in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, on which, in the vocative case, it is clearly discernible. If this papyrus can be dated in the third century, the title must have existed for some time, possibly a generation, before. A word of such significance would not be invented in a popular prayer.' O'Carroll, 1982:342

<sup>99</sup> Listed in Graef, 1965:1- Popes Nicholas V (1447-1555), Pius II (1458-64), Alexander VI (1492-1503), Julius II (1503-13) and Leo X (1513-21).

<sup>100</sup> Graef, 1965:1

<sup>101</sup> Graef, 1965:3

<sup>102</sup> The Vulgate bible refers to the Latin translation of the original Hebrew and Greek texts by St. Jerome, (c.347-420). The Council upheld this version of the Bible despite questions being raised as to the accuracy of certain texts. For our purposes here, Genesis 3:15 was used to uphold the Virgin's victory over Satan and thus re-enforce her Immaculate Conception. Later translations make a more accurate rendition whereby it is Christ who has the victory over evil.

‘scriptural’ Mary.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the ‘content’ of Marian imagery had depended on a variety of sources. Much popular Marian devotion had been built on the apocryphal text of the *Protevangelium of James*,<sup>104</sup> and myths contained in the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine.<sup>105</sup> J.K. Elliott comments on the *Protevangelium*:

Although the birth of Jesus is recounted, the main motive behind the composition is to glorify Mary by telling of her birth, childhood, and marriage. In accord with the demands of popular piety responsible for the growth of much apocryphal material, the *Protevangelium of James* sets out to satisfy curiosity about Jesus’ antecedents by filling in the gaps left in the canonical material.<sup>106</sup>

Mary’s parentage and miraculous birth, her youth and marriage, and, most importantly for the development of popular devotion, Mary’s perpetual virginity, which included her virginity *in partu*, are all found in this apocryphal text.<sup>107</sup> Thus, scenes from the *Protevangelium* had become a frequent narrative source for religious painting by the late Middle Ages. By concentrating on the canonical scriptures, however, the Council may have been using a two-edged sword. By turning its back on apocryphal sources, the Tridentine decrees deprived much Marian iconography of its variety and richness; and in its place appeared an obsessive focus on what was not yet promulgated, Mary’s ‘Immaculate

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<sup>103</sup> Albeit the canonical gospels of the *New Testament* make little reference to the mother of God, apart from the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. For a thorough investigation of Mary in the *New Testament*, see the work of Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and John Reumann (eds.) *Mary in the New Testament* (New York and Mahwah, N.J.:Paulist Press, 1978). It is interesting that the authors of this study conclude that what little reference there is to Mary in the New Testament, it is both positive and negative (compare Luke with Mark 3:20-35, for instance). Moreover, the authors ‘refused to find a “high Mariology” in the NT by using the argument of silence, i.e., the argument that authors like Mark who do not speak explicitly of the virginal conception are silent about it because they take it for granted.’ p.283

<sup>104</sup> The author of the *Protevangelium of James* is unknown. Scholars date its composition to the second half of the second century. The main sources of the text have been traced to the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament Canonical Gospels, and possibly to 1 Samuel in the Old Testament. For a translation of the complete text of the *Protevangelium*, see Elliott, J.K. (ed.) *The Apocryphal New Testament – A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.48-49.

<sup>105</sup> Jacobus de Voragine (c.1230-c.1298) – a Dominican who became archbishop of Genoa in 1292. He is famously known for the *Legenda Aurea* – a compilation of Saints and Liturgical Feasts - the book most frequently printed between 1470-1530. ‘The author deals with Marian topics in his writings on the feasts of the Nativity of Our Lord, of the Purification, Annunciation, Nativity, and especially the Assumption of Our Lady.’ O’Carroll, 1982:193.

<sup>106</sup> Elliott, 1993:50

<sup>107</sup> As Warner asserts: ‘Until the Reformation, the embrace of Joachim and Anna and all its miraculous consequences scarcely provoked a query ... and although the Council of Trent ... forbade, for the first time, the depiction of such apocryphal events ... in Christian art, the Catholic imagination is steeped too deeply in the stories ever to wash out their high colouring’ 1983:30.

Conception.<sup>108</sup> Images of the Virgin 'alone' in her purity and sinlessness were now to be the preferred iconography and in time would eventually replace images of Mary's divine motherhood.

### **The Baroque – 'house style' of early modern Catholicism**

E.H. Gombrich has noted that, 'The history of art is sometimes described as the story of a succession of various styles.'<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, the style that followed the Renaissance is termed the *Baroque*<sup>110</sup>. Mullett categorizes it as the 'house style' of the Catholic Reformation.<sup>111</sup> The Council of Trent undoubtedly exercised a primary influence on religious artistic production during the early post-reformation years. 'Art was to be the handmaiden of the Church, purged of all traces of secularism and heresy.'<sup>112</sup> The role of religious art was as 'an auxiliary of the Counter-Reformation', and the art works produced formed a 'historico-doctrinal genre'.<sup>113</sup> Hill has noted that the Catholic Church, in order to centre itself in Rome, and St. Peter's Basilica, to cultivate a renewed interest in religious painting and sculpture, produced official guide books for the first time.<sup>114</sup> He continues, 'At the close of the sixteenth century the Vatican's willingness to spend money on propagandist religious painting once more attracted artists from all over Italy and Europe ...'<sup>115</sup> As Matthews et al has emphasised:

Baroque art and architecture provided spectacular and compelling images with which the church could reassert its presence and dazzle and indoctrinate the faithful. The Baroque also offered secular rulers a magnificence and vastness that enhanced their political power. Art became a propagandist tool ...<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The use of scriptural passages, such as Genesis 3:15, to uphold Mary's *Immaculate Conception*, still remained a point of difference between Protestants and Catholics due to differences in biblical exegesis.

<sup>109</sup> Gombrich, E.H. *The Story of Art – 13<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (Oxford and New York: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1978),p.301

<sup>110</sup> This term was used in a later period as a term of derision, meaning 'absurd' or 'grotesque'. It is also a difficult artistic period to pin-down to 'one specific style'; rather it is a 'collection' of varying styles. See Gombrich, 1978:301/302

<sup>111</sup> Mullett, Michael A. *The Catholic Reformation*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.196

<sup>112</sup> Brown, 1972:37

<sup>113</sup> Vloberg, 2007:573

<sup>114</sup> Hill, Ian Barras. *Baroque and Rococo – Painting of the Western World*. (New York: Gallery Press, 1980), p.9.

<sup>115</sup> Hill, 1980:9. Caravaggio (c.1571-1610) and Annibale Caracci (b.1560) were two painters of the early baroque period to arrive in Rome.

<sup>116</sup> Matthews, Roy T. and Platt, F. Dewitt (eds.) *The Western Humanities – Volume II: The Renaissance to the Present*. Fifth Edition. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003),p.383





Fig. 3

The importance of architecture was now renewed, particularly in relation to the new Jesuit churches. It was the effect of the 'whole' that became important as different styles were put together that would alarm the classical senses of the purists. The Gesù in Rome illustrates the baroque architectural style. (See Fig. 3). Huyghe observes:

'The façade overlooking the street where the crowd passed ... became as important as the interior of the building, which in its turn had to fulfil the promise of the outside. It did not matter that the sumptuous facing no longer corresponded to the structure of the building; art was less concerned with truth than with *effect*. This is

what shocks us today, with our modern belief in functional moderation. Yet cannot the 'function' of art be spiritual as well as practical?'<sup>117</sup>

As Miguel de Molinos remarked: "The Church is the image of heaven on earth. How should it not be adorned with all that is most precious?"<sup>118</sup> Jedin has raised the question of whether or not the Tridentine decree on images resulted in a 'Tridentine style'. As Jedin emphasises: 'the council had absolutely no intention of laying down a definite direction for artistic creation to follow.'<sup>119</sup> Instead, they 'exercised prudent restraint in respect of the visual arts.'<sup>120</sup> The early counter-reformation preference for 'realism- at- all- costs' soon disseminated into the use of a multitude of styles and forms to transmit the Catholic message. Koenigsberger et al have observed that:

The sixteenth century was the greatest single century in the history of European art. Between 1500 and 1600 more of the finest paintings and frescoes of Europe were painted, and in a greater and more contrasting variety of styles, than in any other similar period.<sup>121</sup>

As during the pre-reformation period, images of the Virgin Mary abounded, and the new artistic styles provided a perfect way in which her status could be promoted. Dillenberger helps us to understand more fully the style of the period. He states: 'Baroque art in its religious forms discloses a transworldly religious understanding through the energies and vitalities of the worlds of nature and humanity.'<sup>122</sup> He goes on to elaborate: 'There is no escape from this world toward another, nor a sober or sombre looking at this world in the light of another; rather, this world itself is depicted in its active transfiguration.'<sup>123</sup> Therefore, 'nature' and 'realism' are part of the baroque, albeit they are presented in

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<sup>117</sup> Huyghe, 1968:332. Italics my own for emphasis. He also makes the point that the 'façade' was the part of the building that belonged to the 'public' space – 'the chosen field of Baroque art.'Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Cited in Huyghe, 1968:332.

<sup>119</sup> Jedin, 1967:153

<sup>120</sup> Jedin, 1967:153. Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, tried to formulate some 'ecclesiastical norms for artistic creation, and to forbid certain art forms and representations by means similar to the index of forbidden books.'1967:153

<sup>121</sup> Koenigsberger et al, 1989:387

<sup>122</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:75

<sup>123</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:75/76

‘spectacular’ modes of composition. For this reason, it is difficult to pin-down the baroque to a ‘specific’ style: as Dillenberger emphasises: ‘(the baroque) includes all the styles that convey this new Christian understanding of the vitalities and concreteness of the world and of humanity.’<sup>124</sup> There was no pressing doctrinal need to emphasise Mary’s motherhood, the Incarnation of Christ was not in dispute. To re-iterate, since art was now a ‘tool’ of the Catholic Church to indoctrinate and uphold its stance in relation to the mother of God, an emphasis on the dogmas opposed by the Protestant reformers became the artistic norm instead.

An emphasis on the doctrinal aspect of Christianity did not mean a purely academic approach to the arts. Painting did not merely reproduce a dull, didactic illustration of dogma. As mentioned earlier, one of the key characteristics of the *baroque* was its ability to show extreme emotion in its human subjects. With regards to Marian iconography: ‘Art channelled its energies into the portrayal of the Virgin’s expression and posture. She stands as if poised for flight or remains motionless, suspended in space and bathed in light.’<sup>125</sup> (See Figs. 4). No longer is there an extensive narrative in the paintings, as in the pre-reformation desire to assert Mary’s human ancestry or define her solely in relation to the events of the life of her Son. The turn towards depicting Mary ‘alone’ has begun in the aftermath of the Tridentine Council.

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<sup>124</sup> Dillenberger, 1987:76. Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio (1573-1610) produced paintings that used the realism advocated by the early counter-reformation church and turned away from art that was merely an example of ‘beauty’ and ‘sensuousness’. However, his literal use of the colloquial in art resulted in many of his works being rejected by those who had commissioned them and a thin line was drawn between the sacred and the profane. See Andrew Graham-Dixon’s *Caravaggio – A Life Sacred and Profane*. (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

<sup>125</sup> Vloberg, 2007:569





Fig. 4

### **Post-Tridentine Images of the Virgin as the *Immaculate Conception***

Spanish artists were among the most important in this new artistic movement, since Spain at this time ruled over the Netherlands and part of Italy and were a major player at the Council of Trent.<sup>126</sup> Some of the most memorable images of the Virgin were painted by El Greco and Diego Rodriguez de Silva Velázquez, Francisco Zubarán and Bartolomé Estaban Murillo. Velázquez's *The Immaculate Conception* c.1619, (see Fig.5), illustrates the use of both 'realism' and scriptural reference, benchmarks of post-Tridentine religious painting. The artist uses Revelation 12 as reference for his painting of the Virgin:

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant ... And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations ...<sup>127</sup>

The identification of the Virgin with the woman in Revelation 12 can be traced back as far as the sixth-century to the Greek author, Oecumenius.<sup>128</sup> In his commentary on the book, he identifies the 'woman' in the text as the Theotokos and states:

Rightly does the vision show her in heaven and not upon earth, as pure in soul and body, as equal to the angels, as a citizen of heaven, as having contained and given flesh to the God who reposes in heaven; for she has nothing in common with the earth and its evils but is wholly sublime, wholly worthy of heaven, even though she shares our human nature and being.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> For expansion of this point see Dillenberger, 1987:77

<sup>127</sup> Revelation 12: 1-2,5. The chapter is a complex one, so that I have taken only the verses that translate easily into the counter-reformation Marian iconography. For an in-depth study see Chapter 9 "The Battle of the Dragon with the Woman" pp.99-105 in Prévost, Jean-Pierre. *How to Read the Apocalypse*. (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1993).

<sup>128</sup> Graef, 1965:132 (Part One).

<sup>129</sup> Cited in Graef, 1965:132 (Part One).



Fig. 5

As Brown indicates, Velázquez's painting follows Tridentine dictates on religious iconography, but also shows certain freedoms of expression:

The Virgin Mary is painted to satisfy some of the rules: 12 stars surround her head, her feet are modestly covered, and she stands on a crescent moon. But she is not sublime; she seems simply a beautiful young girl who might have stepped from a Velázquez *bodegon*.<sup>130</sup>

Indeed, the girl in the painting is not possessed of the stereotypical beauty that characterizes Raphael's Italian Madonnas, for example. It is the beauty that conforms to Pacheco's call for the Virgin to be painted as a thirteen year old girl, with her 'golden' hair loose. Her face is characterized by eyes that are, perhaps, set particularly wide and her long hair falls somewhat untidily on her right shoulder.

Almost half a century later Bartolomé Esteban Murillo is painting the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with the same references albeit in a style which is softer-edged than that of Velázquez. *The Immaculate Conception of S. Maria la Blanca*, (see Fig.6), also shows the Virgin as a young girl, her finger-tips lightly touching in a gesture of prayer, as in the earlier painting by Velázquez. Her hair has a centre parting and hangs long on her shoulders, while her feet are covered by the long folds of her white dress. The crescent moon on which she stands protrudes from the material of her dress and she is silhouetted in golden light – 'clothed with the sun'.<sup>131</sup> The *Immaculate Conception* seems an impossible theme to depict in paint – the mother of God at the moment of her conception, an idea in the mind of the Creator.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Brown, 1972:50/51

<sup>131</sup> Revelation 12:1

<sup>132</sup> Vloberg, 2007:569





Fig. 6

Besides referring to Revelation 12, Murillo used several other sources to support his representation of the Virgin as the Immaculate Conception. Marie de Jésus, mother superior of the Franciscan Convent of Agreda, had committed to paper her visions of the Virgin in the *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*.<sup>133</sup> In this book she 'had drawn a minutely detailed portrait of the Virgin'.<sup>134</sup> St. Theresa of Avila had also made reference to the Virgin as a

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<sup>133</sup> Mary of Agreda (1602-1665), a sister of the Poor Clares, wrote the *Mystical City of God, The Divine History and Life of the Virgin Mother of God* – published in 1670. She claimed to have received her knowledge directly from the Virgin. The doctrine laid out in the *Mystical City of God* comprised 'the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, Mary's part in the Redemption, her universal mediation of graces, her queenship, and her role as mother and mistress of the Church... The life of Mary, as given in great detail by M., is in the manner of the Apocrypha with a great mass of added material, some of it extravagant.' O'Carroll, 1982:235

<sup>134</sup> Vloberg, 2007:570

'niña'.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, this image of the mother of God, barely out of childhood, is the epitome of post-Tridentine Marian iconography. Interestingly, Murillo painted around sixty versions of Mary as the *Immaculate Conception*, and although it has been said that 'no one penetrated the mystery of the *Purísima* with greater artistry than Murillo',<sup>136</sup> his work is often criticised for its overt sentimentality. In describing the *Aranjuez Conception*, Warner highlights its emotional and sentimental quality. She goes on: 'it is the kind of Counter-Reformation propaganda painting that makes aesthetes and non-Catholics alike shudder.'<sup>137</sup> However, she retrieves some positive factor by commenting: 'it succinctly synthesizes message and style in as remarkably communicative way as the earliest code symbols of the Church, like the Cross and the fish.'<sup>138</sup> And this is why the image of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception epitomizes post-Tridentine Catholic imagery.

The religious iconography of El Greco<sup>139</sup> is set-apart from contemporary baroque depictions by its unique style, but its subject matter promotes counter-Reformation Catholicism. In his painting of the *Immaculate Conception* (1610), which was commissioned for the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo, the detailed realism characteristic of early post-reformation painting is replaced by a simplistic style using blocks of flat colour. The figure of the Virgin materializes in simple flat forms. Her body is elongated leading the viewers' eye upwards towards an imaginary heaven. The posture of the Virgin emphasises 'mood' that illustrates the spiritual intensity which characterized the counter-reformation Church.

Finally, Francisco Zubarán's painting entitled *The Young Virgin*, c. 1632, (see Fig.7), is startling to modern eyes for the *extreme youth* with which he portrays the mother of God. Here is the Virgin, no more than a child, her theological importance hard to realize at first glance. However, true to post-Tridentine religious imagery, the subject of the painting is emphasised by the inclusion of some poignant symbolism. Mary is seated on the famous

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<sup>135</sup> Vloberg, 2007:570

<sup>136</sup> Vloberg, 2007:571

<sup>137</sup> Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p.248

<sup>138</sup> Warner, 1983:248

<sup>139</sup> Doménikos Theotokópoulos, (1541-1614), was known as 'The Greek', or more familiarly, El Greco.



Fig. 7

'half-moon' taken from the traditional reference in Revelation 12. Lilies and roses are held by the angels which flank her sides – symbolic signs of purity – while tablets inscribed with passages from the *Song of Songs* allude to her Immaculate Conception.<sup>140</sup> Though the style of the painting seems stiff and at odds with the familiar flowing style of counter-reformation baroque, its subject-matter could not be closer to the heart of Tridentine Catholicism.

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<sup>140</sup> The Church had long used verses from the OT to point to the Virgin's predestined role in humanity's redemption. As Warner emphasises: 'Since patristic times the figures of the Church and Wisdom and the Virgin were all encompassed by the smitten Shulamite of the Song of Songs, as the pre-eminent type of the bride of God. One verse in particular ... prophesied the immaculate beauty of the predestined Virgin: "Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee" (4:7). (*Tota pulchra es, amica mea; et macula non est in te*)."' Cited in Warner, 1983:247.

## Summing-up

It is clear from the proliferation of images of the Virgin as the 'Immaculate Conception' that the outcome of the Council of Trent had resulted in a change of direction for Marian iconography. Neither the Virgin nor visual imagery was of primary concern for the Council. Nonetheless, at the final hour, Tridentine decrees made some contribution to both debates. Religious imagery had suffered attack at the hands of the Protestant reformers resulting in a wave of iconoclasm in which images of the Virgin, due to their ubiquitous presence in the established church, were a primary target. Tridentine decrees now ensured that through the intercession of the saints, the mother of God would be the principal mediator on behalf of the faithful for the souls in purgatory. In addition, though making no ratification of the doctrine that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin, nonetheless the Virgin continued in the mode of popular piety to be venerated as such. To re-enforce such devotions, the Council now used the dictate that visual imagery be a tool of the Church in its stance both against Protestant attack and its resolve to put its own house in order. Religious art and architecture now characterized Christianity in all its various 'confessions of faith'. From strict Calvinism, which abhorred any form of religious decoration, to the more moderate Lutherans, and to the Roman Catholic Church itself, the presence or absence of religious iconography expressed the plurality of doctrinal approaches.

To sum up, this chapter has explored the impact of the Council of Trent on the representation of the Virgin in the early post-reformation period and has provided some of the evidence of this change. It has also looked at how artistic style changed in response to the demands of the church. The 'Baroque' became the 'house style' of the Counter-Reformation Church, re-enforcing its doctrinal stances and sacramental nature. Paradoxically, the attack on Renaissance *naturalism* for demoting Mary's 'divine motherhood' into a merely 'human womanhood', now became a call for an increased *realism*. This artistic realism would portray the martyrdom of the saints, and the sufferings of Christ. Truth to historical facts, and the portrayal of 'real' human emotion, now became the remit of religious iconography. But before taking this study further into an exploration of the changing 'face' of Mary, a view of pre-Tridentine iconographic traditions will serve to



emphasise the *extent* of this change. The following chapter will look at the theology behind late Medieval religious imagery. It will demonstrate the central role that physical piety played in the years leading-up to the Reformation, and how particular depictions of the Virgin as 'mother' re-enforced an Incarnational theology. In the late Middle Ages images of the Virgin as 'mother' – Christ's 'physical' mother - predominated. The following chapter will look at the belief systems which lay behind these popular images and what caused their eventual demise.

## Chapter Two

### *Pre-Tridentine Piety*

#### Introduction

Pre-reformation piety was characterized by both its visual and physical nature. The Christian story was told via a plethora of Christian images, and its practices required the modality of sight to satisfy their spiritual intent. Morgan comments on the Catholic visual piety of the late Middle Ages: 'The enormous visual culture of reliquaries, altarpieces, and church architecture that responded to the presence of the relic and the communion host was designed *to convert the sacred into a visual experience.*'<sup>141</sup> He goes on:

In later medieval devotional practice *the body was the means of participating in the life of God* perfectly expressed in Jesus, whose incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection were the material means of salvation. Later medieval piety and its instrument, the devotional image, seized on the body as the medium for identifying oneself with Christ.<sup>142</sup>

Not only was the act of Christian worship a 'physical' experience, but the core of the Christian message rested on an Incarnational Theology – 'Christianity is a religion of embodiment – of Incarnation – whose god entered history as a human being.'<sup>143</sup> This chapter will look at how pre-Tridentine piety was characterized by a rich tapestry of religious imagery which encompassed an incarnational theology celebrating the created world. It will also show how dualistic thought regarding 'body' and 'soul' led to a rejection of the physical, and particularly of the female, who was aligned with this physicality. In spite of a medieval propensity to merge 'body and spirit' in the Christian journey towards the eschaton, a dormant 'gnostic dualism', in which the 'material' is set against the 'spiritual',

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<sup>141</sup> Morgan, David. *Visual Piety – A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), p.60. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>142</sup> Morgan, 1999:61

<sup>143</sup> Atkinson, Clarissa W. *The Oldest Vocation – Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.5. She goes on to emphasise the *reality* of the Incarnate Christ who 'ate and drank with men and women on earth, was born and died like them.' *ibid.*

sees an alignment of 'woman' with 'flesh'. Since 'flesh' equates with 'sin' in dualistic thought, a gradual diminution of representations of Mary's 'physical' motherhood followed the upheavals of the reformation period. The final section of this chapter, then, will provide evidence of an under-lying misogyny that contributes to the gradual decline in representations of Mary-as-mother by the early post-reformation period.

But firstly, a glance back to the piety of the late Middle Ages shows a Marian iconography that was concerned to show Mary-as-mother, Christ's 'physical mother'. Atkinson has pointed-out that '*physicality* ... lies at the heart of constructions of motherhood in any society.'<sup>144</sup> Moreover, the late Middle Ages demonstrates a 'theology-of-the-body' in which the duality of body and soul, and the polarity of gender differences were merged in a general reverential regard for the Incarnate God in Christ. Questions concerning the relationship of 'body-and-soul' had occupied philosophers since Aristotle<sup>145</sup> and had been settled in the mind of Aquinas by the thirteenth century: "the soul is more like God when it is united to the body than when it is separated, because it is then more perfect."<sup>146</sup> Bynum emphasises this medieval confirmation of the 'material' in religious faith and practice:

Those who wrote about body in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were in fact concerned to bridge the gap between the material and spiritual and to give to body positive significance. Nor should we be surprised to find this so in a religion whose central tenet was the incarnation – the enfleshing – of its God.<sup>147</sup>

But, as Atkinson has observed, there is a disparity between the approach of theologians and worshippers and the artist: 'dogmatic theological assertions about Mary are derived from the implications of assertions about Christ. This is not necessarily true of expressions of devotion or of artistic and literary representations, where the primary focus is Mary

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<sup>144</sup> Atkinson, 1991:5. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>145</sup> (384-322B.C.). Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul* not only attempts to define the 'soul', but explores all the physical senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. See *The Works of Aristotle – Volume 1* in *Great Books of the Western World* editor in chief Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago, London, Toronto, Geneva, Sydney, Tokyo, Manila: William Benton, Publisher Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.,1982).

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274), cited in Bynum, 1992:386, Footnote118.

<sup>147</sup> Bynum, 1992:223

herself.<sup>148</sup> As pointed-out in Chapter One of this study, sources for a great deal of Marian imagery were non-canonical texts fuelled by the ardour of popular piety. Gambero captures the essence of medieval Marian devotion, for it ‘stressed the more human aspects of the relationship between Christ and Mary.’<sup>149</sup> The faithful ‘pictured her as Mother, smiling as her Holy Child embraces her; she nurses, guards, and protects him.’<sup>150</sup> Likewise, the grieving mother at the foot of the cross, displays human weakness. As Gambero emphasises: ‘Theologians and preachers made this new religious and psychological climate their starting point for inviting believers to a relationship with the Virgin.’<sup>151</sup>

### **‘Incarnational’ Theology**

As the Gospel of John confirms: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.(1:1) And the Word became *flesh* and lived among us ... (1:14)’<sup>152</sup> The basis of the Christian faith lies with this ‘enfleshing’ of God - the Incarnation. Mary’s role as the ‘physical’ mother of God - ‘God sent his Son, born of a woman’, (Gal: 4.4)<sup>153</sup> - comes from the need for a redeeming Godhead – a God who became ‘man’. As Ellington emphasises:

The relationship between Mary’s bodily humanity and the central doctrines of the Christian faith was an important consideration for a number of the more prominent preachers of the late Middle Ages ... bodily metaphors and symbols abounded in the religious culture of the day.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Atkinson, 1991:108. As noted earlier in this study, both the Assumption, and the Immaculate Conception were celebrated as Feasts of the Church long before they were made official doctrines in 1950 and 1854 respectively.

<sup>149</sup> Gambero, Luigi. *Mary in the Middle Ages – The Blessed Virgin Mary in the thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), p.255

<sup>150</sup> Gambero, 2000:255

<sup>151</sup> Gambero, 2000:256

<sup>152</sup> Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>153</sup> Much has been written about this verse in Galatians which on first reading appears to disregard the ‘person’ of the Virgin, failing even to name the mother of Christ. However, Paul’s stark phrase ‘born of a woman’ serves to emphasise Christ’s *humanity* taken from the physical flesh of His mother.

<sup>154</sup> Ellington, 2001:48

She cites San Bernardino of Siena: ““For the Blessed Virgin alone did more than God ... for the whole human race ... First because God formed Man from the dust of the earth; but *Mary formed him from her most pure blood and her most pure flesh.*””<sup>155</sup> The early Church Father, Tertullian, had set the precedent of speaking about the ‘unspeakable’ in his ‘reconstruction of incarnational theology that confronts the fear and loathing associated with the female body.’<sup>156</sup> He serves to address the opposing views of Marcion, who ‘regards the womb as a source of disgust.’<sup>157</sup>

“declaim against the uncleanness of the generative elements within the womb, the filthy concretion of fluid and blood, of the growth of the flesh for nine months long out of that very mire ... *a woman in travail ... ought rather to be honoured ... to be held sacred in respect of nature ...*”<sup>158</sup>

Saint Bridget of Sweden celebrates Mary’s physical motherhood of Christ in a more moderate fashion: ““His mother took him in her hands and pressed him to her breast, and with cheek and breast she warmed him ...””<sup>159</sup> Moreover, in spite of the difficulties of grasping the concept of the two natures – ‘divine’ and ‘human’ - in the one person of Christ, ‘nothing could be more tangible and physical than the conception and birth of a child.’<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:61. Italics my own for emphasis. Graef points out the irony in Bernardino’s oratory: ‘It is characteristic that the fact the Blessed Virgin herself was made by God occurs to Bernadine almost as an afterthought ... Mariology of pre-Reformation times had really in many cases become Mariolatry, and needed to be pruned of excesses which could only lead to a debased form of Christianity among people who were thus encouraged to place the blessed Virgin beside or even above God.’1985:318 (Volume 1).

<sup>156</sup> Beattie, Tina. *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*. (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p.96

<sup>157</sup> Beattie, 2002:97

<sup>158</sup> Tertullian, Vol. II pp.170-1. Cited in Beattie, 2002:97. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>159</sup> *Revelations VII* 21:16 in Birgitta of Sweden, *Life and Selected Revelations*, trans. Albert Ryle Kezat (1990),p.203.

<sup>160</sup> Ellington, 2001:62



Fig. 8

This reconciliation of the created world to God, is, indeed, the *raison d'être* of the Incarnation. Beattie re-enforces this notion: 'The incarnation refutes those who would present self-actualization as an ascent from the body to the soul, from the material to the immaterial, from the sensible to the transcendental, from the mother's body to the father's word.'<sup>161</sup> As Boss points out: 'For centuries, the marvel of the Incarnation had meant that when people looked at Mary they saw God's glory active and manifest within the created order.'<sup>162</sup> St. Anselm's prayer to Mary sums-up this sentiment:

'All nature is created by God and God is born of Mary. God created all things, and Mary gave birth to God. God who made all things made himself of Mary, and thus he refashioned everything he had made ... Mary is the mother of all that is re-established.'<sup>163</sup>

Beattie stresses the crucial part played by the mother of God in the Incarnation: 'The human flesh that unites Christ with Mary is as intrinsic to his identity as the divinity that unites him with God, *for without her there can be no true salvation of the flesh*.'<sup>164</sup> Moreover, the 'seeing' of Mary's flesh as 'the flesh of Christ' had far-reaching implications in the medieval

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<sup>161</sup> Beattie, 2002:97

<sup>162</sup> Boss, 2000:59

<sup>163</sup> 'Prayer to St. Mary (3)', lines 184 ff. cited in Boss, 2000:81

<sup>164</sup> Beattie, 2002:97. Beattie's intention throughout her work is to enrich 'fundamental beliefs and doctrines that relate to the Catholic understanding of Mary's significance in the Incarnation.'<sup>2002:15</sup>. She understands the message of the Incarnation as being one of *reconciliation*. *Ibid*.

celebration of the Mass. As Boss points out, the image of the *Canfield Virgin* (see Fig.8), was placed above the altar – a reference to the fact that to the faithful of the Middle Ages the ‘bread and wine’ of the Eucharist became the actual ‘body and blood’ of the incarnation.<sup>165</sup>

### **Anti-Dualism and the Merging of Gender Boundaries**

Bynum has concluded that this emphasis on the miracle of the Eucharist was not simply to re-enforce doctrinal ‘transubstantiation’, rather it counteracted Cathar dualism which saw the physical world as evil.<sup>166</sup> Aristotle had devoted much philosophical thought to the question of body versus soul: ‘the body cannot be the soul, the body is the subject or matter, not what is attributed to it.’<sup>167</sup> While Aquinas continued the debate: ‘To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life ... nothing corporeal can be the first principle of life.’<sup>168</sup> However, as Bynum points out, there was a distinct change of attitude in the body versus soul debate of the high Middle Ages. The body began to be seen, *not* in direct opposition to the soul, but rather as making-up the psychosomatic unit that defined personhood.<sup>169</sup> However, the need to bridge the gap between body and soul, nonetheless strived to leave the body with ‘a reality and significance of its own.’<sup>170</sup> As stated earlier, Aquinas had to conclude that both soul *and* body was essential to the integrity of the human person, and with Christ’s own ‘bodily’ resurrection: ‘*anima ... non est totus homo et anima mea non est ego.*’<sup>171</sup> Indeed, the incarnation of Christ made it necessary to somehow reconcile the centuries-old debate

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<sup>165</sup> Boss, 2000:31

<sup>166</sup> Bynum, 1992:143. The *Cathars* were a medieval sect which sought spiritual purity. (See *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990],p.177).

<sup>167</sup> Aristotle – Vol. I. “On the Soul” (De Anima). Trans. J.A. Smith (1982:649).

<sup>168</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. The English Translation. Edited by The Dominican Fathers. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1922),p.5. Q.LXXV, a.1

<sup>169</sup> Bynum, 1992:222. It should be noted that such terminology as *psychosomatic* belongs exclusively to modern times, twentieth-century and beyond, but sums-up perfectly the mode of medieval physicality as it applied to religious piety in which ‘body and soul’ were seen as a unity. See the introduction to this chapter with reference to Thomas Aquinas’s view that ‘the soul is more like God when united to the body.’

<sup>170</sup> Bynum, 1992:223

<sup>171</sup> From Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on 1 Corinthians, 15. ‘The full person does not exist until body (matter) is restored to its form at the end of time.’ Cited and translated by Bynum, 1992:228

which separated body and soul in the human person. Christ's bodily resurrection necessitated 'a theory of person in which body was integral.'<sup>172</sup>

In spite of the fact that in Aristotelian biology, the female is equated with 'matter' as opposed to the male's alignment with 'spirit' – the first principle of life<sup>173</sup> – medieval spirituality became 'increasingly to stress Christ's *humanity as manifested in the physical*.'<sup>174</sup>

Beattie sums-up the situation:

The early Church understood the incarnation not as a confirmation but as a *transformation* of Greek philosophy. It did not seek to transcend the natural world in order to find God, but rather to celebrate the reconciliation between God and nature in Christ.<sup>175</sup>

And as stressed above, in line with early concepts of generation, the Virgin supplied the 'matter' or 'human' nature to the incarnate Christ. Subsequently, as St. Bonaventure had written: "his body is from her body"<sup>176</sup> The physical humanity of Christ ignored the polarization of gender. Bynum's unique research into the blurring of gender boundaries in Medieval religious devotion develops this theme of Christ's suffering humanity being symbolized as 'female'.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, 'If the Incarnation meant that the *whole* human person was capable of redemption, then what woman was seen as being – even in the most misogynist form of the Christian tradition – was caught up into God in Christ.'<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Bynum, 1992:228

<sup>173</sup> See *Biological Treatises* Trans. by Arthur Platt in *Aristotle – Vol.11. Great Books of the Western World*. Editor in chief, Robert Maynard Hutchins. (Chicago, London, Toronto, Geneva, Sydney, Tokyo, Manila: William Benson Publisher, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.,1982). 'It is clear ... that the female contributes the material for generation'p.268. Aristotle continues: 'The female ... provides matter, the male the principle of motion. And as the products of art are made by means of the tools of the artist, or to put it more truly by means of their movement, and this is the activity of the art, and the art is the form of what is made in something else, so is it with the power of the nutritive soul.'p.281.

<sup>174</sup> Bynum, 1992:148. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>175</sup> Beattie, 2002:96. Italics my own for emphasis. See Chapters 4-7 in particular, in which Beattie considers Mary's role in the incarnation by 'a gynocentric refiguration of Marian symbolism' which aims to give the female body a 'theological significance in the story of salvation.'p.13.

<sup>176</sup> Cited in Bynum 1992:212

<sup>177</sup> Bynum, 1992:148

<sup>178</sup> Bynum, 1992:150. Italics my own for emphasis.



Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of Christ's suffering 'humanity' took centre stage in the late Middle Ages, whereby the faithful strived to emulate this physical suffering as a pathway to the divine. As Brown has so succinctly described:

The pain of Christian asceticism consisted in the fact that the present human person was an unfinished block, destined to be cut into the form of an awesome model. The body required the deep chisel-bites of permanent renunciation, if the Christian was to take on the lineaments of the risen Christ.<sup>179</sup>

But this emphasis on *the body* in late Medieval piety should not be regarded as a negative trend: 'medieval efforts to discipline and manipulate the body should be interpreted more as elaborate changes rung upon the *possibilities* provided by fleshliness than as flights from physicality.'<sup>180</sup>

This positive view of the body, reflected in the very 'physical' piety of the late Middle Ages, resulted in a merging of gender boundaries. As has been discussed earlier in this study, 'many medieval assumptions linked woman and flesh and the body of God.'<sup>181</sup> Bynum goes on to emphasise that: 'Not only was Christ enfleshed with flesh from a woman; his own flesh did womanly things; it bled, it bled food and it gave birth.'<sup>182</sup> A remarkable image of Christ 'giving birth' to the Church is found in an illustrated bible dating back to the thirteenth-century, (see Fig 9).

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<sup>179</sup> Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990), p.442. Asceticism may be defined as 'the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal... The practitioners of asceticism believe that the ascetic person has access to powers that uphold moral standards and enliven spirituality.' See *Encyclopaedia Britannica – Macropaedia Vol.1* (1982:135).

<sup>180</sup> Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast – The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987), p.6

<sup>181</sup> Bynum, 1992:101

<sup>182</sup> Bynum, 1992:101.



Fig. 9

Whereas Leo Steinberg sees Christ's gender as defining his humanity,<sup>183</sup> Bynum argues that: 'Theologians did not discuss Christ as a sexual male; they did discuss *Jesus as mother*.'<sup>184</sup> In religious symbolism, therefore, 'motherhood' encompassed many things. The prevalence of blood as a symbol of devotion in the late Middle Ages, encompasses both the idea of

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<sup>183</sup> See Steinberg, Leo. *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1983). Steinberg's thesis points out the symbolism in religious art, from c.1400 to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. He declares that depictions of the genitalia of the Christ Child and of the dead Christ symbolize 'the *humanation* of God.'p.9. Bynum disputes this argument as laid-out in the evidence which follows. (The term 'humanation' was replaced by 'incarnation' in the seventeenth-century. See Footnote 6, page 9 of Steinberg,1983.)

<sup>184</sup> Bynum, 1992:82. Italics my own for emphasis.

shedding blood to cleanse away sin, and the idea of blood as human nourishment, as in the suckling of an infant. Ancient theories of biology attributed the mother's blood as nourishment to the child in the womb, which became 'transmuted into breast milk'<sup>185</sup> for the child outside the womb. For Medieval medical theories, 'saw bleeding as feeding and as the purging away of excess.'<sup>186</sup> Hence, Christ's bleeding crucified body both atones for mans' sins as well as nourishes the soul in the eucharist.<sup>187</sup> From this symbolism it is easy to see how the medieval mind associated Christ with 'female bleeding and feeding.'<sup>188</sup>

In Medieval iconography, images of the Virgin bearing her breast juxtaposed with Christ exposing the wound in His side, illustrate the parallels between the nurturing female body and the bleeding body of the Saviour. For example, Fig.10, entitled *Man of Sorrows and Mary Incarnate with God the Father*, depicts both Mary and Christ kneeling before God the Father interceding for sinners. Mary kneels before the Father cupping her right breast in her hand, while Christ, in a parallel gesture, points to the wound in his right side. This latter image of the Son, in a posture imitative of a 'nursing mother', is also seen in *The Saviour*, (see Fig. 11). Christ's separated index and middle finger of his left hand cup the nipple of his right breast, while his head tilts to the right with eyes directed downwards as if watching a suckling infant. If the artist had not included the shadow of masculine stubble on Christ's

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<sup>185</sup> Bynum, 1992:100

<sup>186</sup> Bynum, 1992:100

<sup>187</sup> Bynum, 1992:100

<sup>188</sup> Bynum, 1992:100. The idea that 'the fetus is formed from female blood became a common image of salvation in late medieval spirituality ... hence the adult Christ was imaged sometimes as a female, sometimes as a pregnant male.' See Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.159. Bynum continues, 'Christ's body and the stuff of Mary's womb are so completely assimilated that Christ's body almost becomes blood – his mother's blood!' 2007:159





Fig. 10





Fig. 11

face, the image could well have been a nursing Madonna.



Fig. 12 (Detail)

A *Triptych of Antonius Tsgrooten*, (see Fig. 12), again emphasises the symbolic parities between the wound in Christ's side and the breast of the Virgin. In this image Christ points to the wound in his side, while the Virgin cups her breast. Both blood and milk represent spiritual nourishment. It should be noted that the appearance of St. Bernard of Clairvaux next to the Virgin verifies the symbolism of breast as spiritual food, for, according to legend, she was purported to have given him some of her breast milk.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Bynum, 1992:115.



From this crossing-over of gender boundaries in an attempt to explain the salvific consequences of the Incarnation, the medieval mind could almost be described as 'athletic'. Moreover, in the Middle Ages people did not appear to define themselves by gender.<sup>190</sup> As noted above, the 'bared breast' in the visual image was primarily interpreted as 'food' and not as a 'sexual' object.<sup>191</sup> The image of Mary nursing her child, then, is inextricably linked to an incarnational theology which celebrates the humanity of Christ. Medieval notions of the flesh of Christ and its spiritual nourishment in the form of the Eucharistic host, support the overwhelming number of mother-and-child images, including the 'feeding' Madonna, that furnish Medieval Christendom. Robert Campin's painting (Fig. 13) shows the Virgin pointing to her breast while presenting the infant Jesus to the viewer simultaneously.<sup>192</sup>



Fig.13

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<sup>190</sup> Bynum, 1992:85

<sup>191</sup> Bynum, 1992:86

<sup>192</sup> Bynum, 1992:104



Fig. 14

In a similar gesture, Parmigianino's painting entitled *The Madonna with the Long Neck* also shows the Virgin presenting her breast and the Christ child, not only to onlookers in the painting itself, but also to the viewers of the work. (See Fig. 14).





Fig. 15

An image of the Virgin and child appears in the *Chevalier Hours*, circa 1455, ( Fig. 15), which presents the Virgin enthroned and crowned but with the infant Christ suckling on a protruding breast. The image is highly incongruous to modern eyes, but theologically appropriate to medieval sensibilities.

### **Maternal Images and the Naked Christ Child**

In the late Middle Ages, not only was the Virgin represented as a 'nursing' mother, but the Christ child on her lap was often painted naked. The choice of adjective, here, is of some importance. The 'nude' in any visual image implies an accepted artistic convention. The

classical world of the Greeks, whose naturalistic sculptures of the human body conveyed the idea of human perfection, and upon which Renaissance artists modelled their own work. The 'nude' conveyed accepted artistic parameters which came to be understood by the viewer. For the body to be depicted as 'naked', there implies a human vulnerability on the one hand, or a flouting of convention on the other. 'Nakedness' in the latter sense implies a propensity to sinfulness. Depictions of the 'unclothed' Christ Child, then, speak of the vulnerability of nakedness. This 'nakedness' also symbolizes the 'humanity' of Christ.<sup>193</sup> For this reason, I have chosen to use the term 'naked' when discussing religious iconography of the 'unclothed' Christ Child.

Such images of the Christ child *naked*, on the lap of his mother, proliferated during the late Middle Ages. In an age of Incarnational theology, the *humanity* of Christ was first and foremost stressed. The plethora of mother-and-child images during the late Middle Ages may serve as evidence of this trend. It was Emile Mâle, the respected Medievalist, who first commented on the phenomenon of depicting the unclothed Christ child in visual imagery: "This nudity of Christ is, as it were, the mark of his humanity; he now resembles the children of human kind."<sup>194</sup> Although by 1400 'the Christ Child in Western painting has shed Byzantine garb to appear more or less naked'<sup>195</sup> it should be a matter of some puzzlement as to why this predilection for nakedness should be extended to paintings of 'formal' occasions – regal occasions either earthly or heaven bound.<sup>196</sup> Fig.16, *Christ Crowning Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti in Heaven*, shows the Virgin in heaven with the naked Christ child on her lap as he crowns the Duke with due ceremony.

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<sup>193</sup> Steinberg, 1983:9. He points out that: 'for a Western artist nurtured in Catholic orthodoxy ... the objective was not so much to proclaim the divinity of the babe as to declare the *humanation* of God.'Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> From *L'Art religieux* cited in Steinberg, 1983:141

<sup>195</sup> Steinberg, 1983:24

<sup>196</sup> Steinberg, 1983:24





Fig. 16

Steinberg has attacked the Renaissance artists' avowed love of naturalism, as an avoidance tactic for the real issue – that of the 'sexuality' of Christ.<sup>197</sup> But, as discussed above, it is doubtful whether Christ's 'sexuality' was at issue, but rather His 'humanity'. The portrayal of the genitalia of the child confirms His relationship with the Father – 'the glory as of a

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<sup>197</sup> Steinberg, 1983:26. Steinberg asserts: 'the progressive denuding of the infant Christ in proto-Renaissance art is commonly ascribed only to a general interest in the nude figure ... (but) No Renaissance artist was so addicted to skin as to ignore whom he stripped.'p.26/27. For an in depth study of the naked Christ Child in artistic production, Leo Steinberg's work is a remarkably thorough exploration of this subject, supported by a large selection of visual images.

father's only *son*', (John 1:14). Figs. 17-19, provide a tiny sample of this most prolific Marian image of the Virgin with the 'naked' Christ child.



Fig. 17





Fig. 18





Fig. 19

This portrayal of Mary's divine motherhood is not simply a 'naturalistic' representation of maternity, but a highly 'symbolic' depiction of the Incarnation of Christ.

### **Dualism – Irreconcilable Differences**

'In Christianity *dualistic* concepts appeared principally in its Gnostic developments.'<sup>198</sup> As emphasised earlier, Gnosticism equated 'matter' with 'evil', and 'spirit' with 'good'. This dualistic stance meant that the soul must free itself from the bondage of a material world.<sup>199</sup> Earlier, Plato had cast doubts on the possibility of a, 'harmonious, beautiful cosmos'<sup>200</sup> Filoramo goes on to explain Plato's philosophical ideas which advocated a 'doctrine of a radical opposition between the essential world of ideas and the transient, corruptible world of appearance.'<sup>201</sup> Thus, Plato's doubts about worldly harmony 'were translated ... into a concept of the human body as, if not a prison, certainly an obstacle to the free development of the life of the spirit.'<sup>202</sup> Not only did the classical world provide an understanding of this division between the material and the spiritual, but Judaism itself wielded its own deeply rooted understanding. Peter Brown has emphasised: 'Christianity brought from its Jewish background the distinctive flavour of a view of the human person that tended to peer past *the body, that restless reminder of man's enduring kinship with the beasts*, into the heart.'<sup>203</sup>

The polarization of 'opposites', which characterized Gnostic dualism, meant that the human person was seen as a 'duality', 'an irreconcilable duality of opposed elements.'<sup>204</sup> Most pertinent to the exploration of Incarnational theology and the place of Mary's divine maternity within it, is the polarization of male and female, masculine and feminine. This polarization of gender forms part of Christianity's inheritance from such diverse sources as

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<sup>198</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica – Macropaedia Vol.5*. 15<sup>th</sup> Edition. (Chicago, Geneva, London, Paris, Rome:Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1982), p.1068. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>199</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1982:1067

<sup>200</sup> Filoramo, 1994:54

<sup>201</sup> Filoramo, 1994:54

<sup>202</sup> Filoramo, 1994:54

<sup>203</sup> Brown, 1990:433. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>204</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1982:1070

Greek philosophy, gnostic dualism, and Judaism. The blurring of gender boundaries found in late medieval visual piety and devotional texts, as described in the previous section of this chapter, is a remarkable phenomenon that added a rich treasure chest of religious symbolism to the theologically difficult concept of the Incarnate Christ. However, a misogyny prevalent in the polarization of gender continued to lie beneath the surface of theological debate and begins to emerge as the turbulent years of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation signal the end of the very 'physical' piety of the late Middle Ages.

The age of scholasticism, which made the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas one of the principal foundational texts of Christian theology, re-enforced this notion of male and female as having quite 'separate' identities. Though Thomas disputes Aristotle's belief that "the female is ... a mutilated male",<sup>205</sup> he asserts that, 'woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of *generation*.'<sup>206</sup> Moreover, she is subservient to the male:

For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.<sup>207</sup>

Thomas goes on to emphasise the inherent weakness of woman's powers of reasoning and quotes from Aristotle:

'Since a woman is free, she has the capacity for understanding but her capacity is weak. The reason for this is on account of the changeableness of nature, her reason weakly adheres to plans, but quickly is removed from them because of emotions, for example, of desire, or anger, or fear.'<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> From "De Generatione Animalium". Book II Chapter 3. *The Works of Aristotle*. Volume II – Great Books of the Western World. Edited by Robert Maynard Hutchins. (Chicago, London, Toronto, Geneva, Sydney, Tokyo, Manila: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1982), p.278

<sup>206</sup> Question XCII, a.1. From *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Edited by The Dominican Fathers. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1922), p.276. Italics my own for emphasis. Woman is only fit for 'biological reproduction'.

<sup>207</sup> Question XCII, a.1. ST. 1922:276.

<sup>208</sup> Cited in Allen, Prudence. *The Concept of Woman – The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. – A.D. 1250*. Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p.399. Italics my own for clarity.



This misogynistic pattern of thought takes us forward again to Augustine,<sup>209</sup> who famously stated that woman may be used to symbolize the orientation towards temporal things, and man the orientation towards spiritual things and therefore, woman ‘symbolized *the lower orientation of the mind*’.<sup>210</sup> Augustine concluded that: ‘only man can properly speaking be described as being “*in the image of God.*”’<sup>211</sup>

Beattie draws our attention to the role of Patristic writers who took their concept of sexual difference from the Book of Genesis.<sup>212</sup> Eve remains the symbol of weakness and temptation in spite of being ‘redeemed in Mary.’<sup>213</sup> In addition, because, according to Aristotelian biology, woman was believed to play no ‘active’ role in generation, then neither did Eve play an ‘active’ role in the transmission of original sin.<sup>214</sup> Allen observes that this should be reassuring for women were it not for the fact that it implied Eve’s significance related only to her ‘generative function’ and not to any more important ‘moral role’.<sup>215</sup> The concept of ‘woman’, then, is further damaged by such beliefs which polarize gender roles into ‘active’ and ‘passive’ and allocate a hierarchy to these qualities. Thomas Aquinas had argued that the Virgin’s role in the incarnation of Christ was purely ‘passive’ since the female role in procreation was simply to supply the ‘matter/flesh’.<sup>216</sup> Allen stresses: ‘A basic principle of St. Thomas’s metaphysics was that *passivity was inferior to activity.*’<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> A.D. 354-430. In his *City of God*, XII, 17, he states: ‘Through the body the two sexes are eternally differentiated.’ Cited in Allen, 1997:219.

<sup>210</sup> Allen, 1997:222

<sup>211</sup> See Allen, 1997:222 who cites the infamous dictum of St. Augustine, (in italics). Allen argues that Augustine saw the sexes as *complementary*, since he stated that: ‘The woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image.’p.222. However, with the re- introduction of Aristotelian ideas in the work of Aquinas, which strove to separate male and female completely, this ‘sex-complementarity’ disappeared.1997:270.

<sup>212</sup> Beattie, 2002:12/13

<sup>213</sup> Beattie, 2002:103. The concept of Mary as the ‘Second Eve’ was first expounded by the early Church Fathers, notably St. Justin Martyr, St. Irenaeus and Tertullian, who wrote in a biblical context of Mary’s free assent to the Annunciation compared to Eve’s temptation, expounded in Genesis 3. (See O’Carroll, 1990:139 for a brief synopsis of the Eve-Mary parallel.)

<sup>214</sup> Allen, 1997:398

<sup>215</sup> Allen, 1997:398

<sup>216</sup> The question of whether or not the Virgin was ‘active’ or ‘passive’ in her maternity depended on which viewpoint a theologian might take. ‘Aristotle assigned to woman a *passive* role – the woman’s menstrual blood provided only unformed matter to which the male seed brought form and life. Galen – envisioned women with sexual organs that were inverted versions of the male’s organs. Galen, therefore, believed that women and men contributed in a roughly equal way to forming the child in the womb.’ See Ellington, 2001:51.

<sup>217</sup> Allen, 1997:395

This underlying disdain for women manifested itself in 1484 with the Papal Bull of Innocent VIII, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*. Jacobus Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer were then appointed as papal Inquisitors producing the notorious treatise *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486)<sup>218</sup>. Although the belief in witchcraft was by no means a new phenomenon, what differentiated it in this period was the belief that ‘the witch owed her powers to having made a deliberate pact with the Devil’<sup>219</sup> and so, according to the Church, was a heresy to be rooted-out. The fact that the *Malleus Maleficarum* devoted so much attention to ‘sexual sin’ may be attributed to the authors’ propensity for citing Thomas Aquinas: “‘since the first corruption by sin ... entered into us by way of the coital act, God granted the Devil more sorcerous power over that act than any other’”.<sup>220</sup> In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* Thomas had pointed out women’s ‘sexual incontinence.’<sup>221</sup> His words are extreme to modern sensibilities, for he states that women accord with “‘the secondary aim of nature, like decay, deformity and decrepitude.’”<sup>222</sup> The customary alignment of women with sexual depravity, also explained why witchcraft was predominantly reported as being the domain of women.<sup>223</sup> The association of women with ‘sins of the flesh’ serves also to explain the second-century Judaizing sect – the Encratites – speaking of ‘the pre-existent Soul, once it “gets effeminated by concupiscence,” drops into the carnal world.’<sup>224</sup> The sect condemned all sexual relations, ‘since generation perpetuates the soul’s state of decay in this bodily

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<sup>218</sup> The papal bull of Pope Innocent VIII was known as the ‘Hexenbulle’ or ‘Witches’ Bull’. Keith Thomas has commented on the propensity of the witch-hunts to be directed against women. This, he suggests, could be attributed to economic and social circumstances, since women were the more disadvantaged members of society. He goes on: ‘contemporary demonologists ... readily enlarged upon the deficiencies of the weaker sex and their greater susceptibility to Satan. Undoubtedly there was a strong anti-feminist streak about such monkish fantasies as the *Malleus maleficarum*, where the theme of diabolical copulation ... were thoroughly explored.’ 1980:678/9

<sup>219</sup> Thomas, 1980:521

<sup>220</sup> Cited in Ronke-Heineman, Uta. *Eunuchs For Heaven – The Catholic Church and Sexuality*. (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1990), p.204.

<sup>221</sup> Q.XCII, a.1. ST.1922:276

<sup>222</sup> Cited in Keith, 1980:165

<sup>223</sup> Keith Thomas has drawn attention to the fact that ‘witchcraft was at its height at a time when women were ... believed to be sexually more voracious than men.’ 1980:679. As late as 1621, a certain Robert Burton wrote “‘of women’s unnatural, unsatiable lust.’” Cited in Thomas, 1980:679

<sup>224</sup> See *The Encyclopaedia Britannica – Macropaedia, Vol.15*. 1982:1068. Italics my own for emphasis.

world.<sup>225</sup> Brown refers back to Augustine who believed that, ‘the bondage of the will to sexual desire spoke of the postponement of that great hope to the end of time.’<sup>226</sup>

Women’s association with the material world, which, in dualistic terms, implied the propensity to sin, meant that Mary’s physical motherhood must be seen as rising above the ordinary condition of humanity. Her painless childbirth and virginity ‘in partu’ ensured that the Virgin would be set apart from the rest of womankind. As Boss re-iterates the point, this doctrine was indicative of an outlook that abhorred normal bodily processes and failed to see them as part of God’s creation.<sup>227</sup> The Council of Chalcedon (451) received the tome of Pope Leo which stated of Mary: “‘Her virginity was as untouched in giving him birth as it was in conceiving him.’”<sup>228</sup> The ‘physical’ motherhood of Mary, then, was problematic if connected too closely with the condition of ordinary humanity. As Boss states, the idea of Mary’s *in partu* virginity accentuates the notion of ‘dualism’:

The rigid separation of Mary’s graces from the imperfections of other women maintains a *dualism* of that which is heavenly and perfect ... and that which is earthly and flawed.<sup>229</sup>

To speak of the Virgin’s ‘physical’ maternity in relation to the Incarnation was one thing, but to connect it too closely to the world of ‘sinful flesh’ was another. Beattie concludes:

The female flesh has always symbolized carnal weakness and non-godliness for both sexes, and for both sexes the attainment of holiness has to a certain extent been sought through the subjugation of the flesh with its *womanly* associations.<sup>230</sup>

Thus, the question of representing the Virgin Mary in the splendour of her physical motherhood poses a somewhat paradoxical situation in the light of late Medieval attitudes

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<sup>225</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1982:1068

<sup>226</sup> Brown, 1990:442. However, Brown does point out that although, to Augustine, hope is ‘deferred, the yearning for transfiguration still remained’ within the human spirit. (Ibid.)

<sup>227</sup> Boss, 2000:65

<sup>228</sup> Cited in Boss, 2000:188

<sup>229</sup> Boss, 200:196. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>230</sup> Beattie, 2002:73

to women and the re-emergence of dualistic tendencies in the brutal witch-hunts which began at the end of the fifteenth-century. 'The Virgin now has to stand in contrast to the witch, whose very nature is defined in terms of unrestrained carnality and the physically grotesque.'<sup>231</sup> Ellington describes how witches in visual representations were painted unclothed, 'their bodies open to physical perversions just as their souls had admitted the spiritual abuse of satanic slavery.'<sup>232</sup> In order for the Virgin to be seen as representing the opposite, she would have to be painted fully clothed: 'Not surprisingly, it was during the sixteenth-century that artists largely abandoned portraits of the Virgin suckling her child.'<sup>233</sup> Ellington continues:

This historic iconographic motif gave way in the face of society's desire to suppress the public display of bodily functions and the need to distance the Virgin from as many physical associations with other women as possible.<sup>234</sup>

As the female breast became to be regarded as a predominantly sexual sign, images of the Virgin nursing the Christ child began to diminish: 'for Christianity has always excluded from the realm of the sacred that which is understood to be predominantly sexual.'<sup>235</sup> Boss re-enforces this claim: 'The extinction of the nursing Madonna in Christian art is in part the product of changes in the cultural significance of the female body.'<sup>236</sup> As emphasised above, the Virgin suckling the Christ child represented the veracity of the Incarnation; it also signified the spiritual nourishment that would be found in Christ. The nursing Christ child represents mercy rather than judgement, and Mary bearing her breast to God the Father alongside Christ revealing the wound in his side signifies that: 'The breast and the wound

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<sup>231</sup> Ellington, 2001:257. Also see Miles, *Carnal Knowing*. Chapter 5: "[A woman] is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations." *Malleus Maleficarum* cited in Miles, 1992:145

<sup>232</sup> Ellington, 2001:257

<sup>233</sup> Ellington, 2001:258. Boss also emphasises this point: 'The extinction of the nursing Madonna in Christian art is in part the product of changes in the cultural significance of the female body; for the circumstances under which it is now acceptable to portray the naked female breast are defined according to criteria very different from those which obtained during the Middle Ages.' 2000:37

<sup>234</sup> Ellington, 2001:258

<sup>235</sup> Boss, 2000:38. The author directs us to Marilyn Yalom's publication, *A History of the Breast*. (London: Harper Collins, 1997), in which the tendency to view the breast as erotic seems to have begun in the period of the Renaissance. Moreover, according to Boss, the gradual depiction of Mary Magdalene as the penitent whore with bared breasts or completely unclothed is evidence of the now 'sexualized' female body. Gone is the Magdalene represented with the alabaster jar containing the ointment with which she anointed the feet of Christ in the Gospel story, to be replaced by a more familiar depiction to modern eyes. See Boss, 2000:39.

<sup>236</sup> Boss, 2000:37

are emblems of Christ's humanity and reassurances of his mercy.<sup>237</sup> It is interesting to see how dominant the breast appears in the following images of the nursing Madonna.(See Figs. 20 and 21).



Fig. 20

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<sup>237</sup> Boss, 2000:38



Fig. 21



## Summing-up

This chapter has been concerned with both the positive and negative trends of Christian piety in the decades leading up to the Reformation and the Council of Trent. It has sought to explain the very physical nature of this piety and the unique characteristics of its Marian iconography. Focusing on an Incarnational theology, the 'flesh' is celebrated and the Mass becomes the highlight of collective worship. To understand Marian iconography during this period it is essential to see Christianity translated into a theology-of-the-body, in which the *physical motherhood* of the Virgin was the primary source of devotion. Moreover, in the late Middle Ages, the body was seen as a way to achieve spiritual fulfilment.<sup>238</sup> By adopting the *Imago Christi* the faithful would suffer with Christ; they would eschew the effects of dualism and see the human person as a psychosomatic unit. Gender boundaries were blurred in the belief that 'body' equated with 'woman', and the incarnate Christ took his humanity from his mother. Not only was the Virgin portrayed 'nursing' her child, but metaphors of motherhood were used to describe the merciful Christ.

However, Marian iconography reflected contemporary theological debate and modes of popular piety, and therefore did not remain static. Dualistic notions of the material versus the spiritual, inherited from various sources, including gnostic dualism, seem to have been too deeply rooted in the Christian psyche to be ignored. The notion of 'woman' as somehow 'incomplete' and 'inferior' to man – rooted in Aristotelian biology and resurrected in scholastic theology – reappears in the witch-hunts of the sixteenth-century. This view of gender as being hierarchical emphasised the new mood which characterized post-Tridentine spirituality. From 'physicality' to 'interiority', the new wave of spirituality which saw the upheavals of the Reformation and the emergence of Catholic Restoration, gave rise to images of the Virgin 'alone'. The next chapter will look at how this new kind of spirituality

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<sup>238</sup> Mortification of the flesh characterizes Christian asceticism. Caroline Walker Bynum has studied the importance of food as a way of encountering God for the people of the Middle Ages in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast – The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. 1988. She cites Catherine of Sweden's hagiographer, who attributes to her the following opinion: "abstinence prolongs life, preserves chastity, pleases God, repulses demons, illumines the intellect, strengthens the mind, overcomes vices, overpowers the flesh, and stirs and inflames the heart with love of God." 1988:3. Bynum continues: 'to religious men and women, renunciation of ordinary food prepared the way for consuming (i.e., becoming) Christ, in eucharist and in mystical union.'Ibid.

emerged which rejected the 'body' in favour of the heart. Images of 'Mary- as- mother' began to be replaced by a more singular figure characterized by her passivity and introspection.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### *Post-Tridentine Piety*

#### **Introduction**

The early post-Reformation years witnessed a growth in the trend towards an 'inner' piety, a continuation of the dualism which had separated body and soul in the late medieval period. This movement towards an increasingly interiorized spirituality saw a diminution in the depiction of the Virgin-as-mother in favour of the Virgin 'alone'. What influences drove the faithful to turn 'inwards' in their search for the divine? It must be remembered that the sixteenth century caused permanent divisions in the one, united established Church. The upheavals of the Protestant Reformation, followed by the long protracted sitting of the Council of Trent, left the mood of popular piety somewhat changed from its pre-reformation character. The all-encompassing physical piety of the late Middle Ages, which saw spirituality as a very 'external' experience, gave way to a more inward-looking, reflective piety. Incarnational theology, which emphasised the 'humanity' of Christ and by implication placed the Virgin-as-mother in primary focus, gave way to a transcendent spirituality, a theology-of-the-heart. Campbell has written extensively on this notion of a 'religion of the heart', pinning down the first use of the expression to John Wesley.<sup>239</sup> It came to be used to describe pietistic movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Important spiritual leaders of the French school, François de Sales and Pierre de Bérulle personified this new spiritual era. Together with the Spanish Carmelites, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, a new wave of spirituality based on the simple virtues of humility and love came to dominate Christian piety. In the early post-reformation period there was now an emphasis on moral example, which encompassed self-discipline and the mother of Christ was to become an ideal of Christian discipleship. The new era heralded the Society of Jesus and the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. It witnessed the growth in the sacrament of confession and its pre-requisite, the examination of conscience. Carlo Borromeo instigated

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<sup>239</sup> Campbell, 1991:1, Footnote 1. The phrase appears in John Wesley's essay "Father Appeal to Men of Reason" Part II, in which he states: 'inquire into the bottom of religion, the religion of the heart.'

the now familiar Catholic ‘confessional box’ as part of the church’s interior architecture. His view of the sacrament of confession as ‘a weapon in the war on sin and evil ... a fortress of Christian virtue’<sup>240</sup> gives us some idea of the pressure of the Church’s renewed post-reformation vigour to influence the faithful in their spiritual lives. Private rather than collective prayer, humility and individual self-discipline coloured post-Tridentine spirituality.



Fig. 22

Mary, as an exemplar of Christian discipleship, was represented in visual images as the ‘Immaculate Conception’, her physical motherhood giving way to depictions of Mary ‘alone’. Previous images of Mary’s Immaculate Conception had often shown her with St. Anne, her

<sup>240</sup> Graham-Dixon, 2011:28

immaculate conception misleadingly linked somehow to her earthly parents. Fig.22 shows St. Anne enthroned with Mary *in utero*. In such imagery the Virgin is firmly rooted in this world rather than the next.

Seventeenth-century art now rejects this emphasis on the body with references to Mary's *in utero* existence, and moves beyond this world to a time before creation when Mary existed as a perfect being in the mind of God.<sup>241</sup> The very physical virgin of the late Middle Ages, with the Christ child held firmly on her lap, gives way to an image of a girl who symbolizes purity and moral fortitude. A transcendent spirituality portrayed the Virgin in an ethereal world of heaven, floating on the clouds and surrounded by angels. The task of depicting this inner quality of virtue by gesture and expression alone, led to the proliferation of post-Tridentine images which have been criticised for their purely saccharin nature.<sup>242</sup>

### **Mary as Prototype of the Church**

Upholding the Marian cult was paramount to the post-Tridentine Church of Rome. Continued intercessions to the Virgin and to the Saints marked-out the Roman Catholic church from its Protestant counterparts. A sermon of Francis Panigarola, delivered in Rome in 1589, declared that, 'Mary had designated the Roman Church as her own.'<sup>243</sup> She was the protector of the Church, and the traditions of the Rosary and the Ave Maria were upheld. Such devotions came to characterize early modern Catholicism. The fact that the Council of Trent gave equal weight to Scripture and to unwritten traditions meant that Marian doctrines, such as those of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, were upheld and celebrated.<sup>244</sup> A move away from an emphasis on Mary's physical motherhood of Christ is seen in such statements as that of Lawrence of Brindisi who claimed that Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven was 'the reward of her fullness of grace'. He goes on: 'out of spiritual affection Christ loved his mother, *not out of fleshly considerations*, but of spiritual,

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<sup>241</sup> Ellington, 2001:175

<sup>242</sup> See Chapter One of this study.

<sup>243</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:213

<sup>244</sup> Ellington, 2001:209. The author cites the decree stating that the Church accepts the truth of the gospel "in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus." Ibid.

not with respect to nature but to grace, to virtue and to holiness.’<sup>245</sup> Post-Tridentine religious sentiments, then, are directed away from the created world and firmly focused on the next. In spite of this obvious rejection of the physical piety that had coloured the late Middle Ages, the emphasis now on Mary’s bodily Assumption is somewhat paradoxical. For both Robert Bellarmine and François de Sales based the Virgin’s right to be assumed into heaven on her *bodily* motherhood of Christ. As de Sales emphasises: “‘Christ would not have allowed the body that bore him for nine months to suffer decay.’”<sup>246</sup> However, the subject of Mary’s humanity was used by Bellarmine to emphasise her weakness and to keep the faithful from elevating her position disproportionately in relation her Son. She was neither God nor angel but subject to human weakness.<sup>247</sup> Indeed, ‘The Virgin of the post-Tridentine Church (became) ... the prototype of the Church and the Saint of Saints, whose example of selfless love should be imitated by the faithful.’<sup>248</sup>

### **The Rise of the Culture of the Individual**

To imitate the Mother of God in her role as perfect disciple necessitates a re-ordering of the self. Understanding the self as ‘an individual’ is a necessary pre-requisite. The years that followed Trent, during which there was a marked increase in the type of piety we call ‘interior’, thus required a corresponding development in the concept of man as an individual. However, this was not an entirely new concept. Colin Morris has looked at the rise of the ‘individual’ during the period 1050-1200. Several contributory factors, such as the concept of ‘self-knowledge’ as a route to the divine, the beginning of ‘individual’ confession within the teaching of the Church, identification of the individual with Christ’s suffering on the cross, were all characteristics of medieval Christianity.<sup>249</sup> For example, even Bernard of Clairvaux, (1090-1153), had been “‘concerned, not with external actions but with inner motives.’”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:211. Italics my own for emphasis.

<sup>246</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:210

<sup>247</sup> Ellington, 2001:210

<sup>248</sup> Ellington, 2001:206

<sup>249</sup> Morris, Colin *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200*. (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p.160.

<sup>250</sup> Cited in Morris, 2004:74

However, it was not only the Middle Ages which saw a growth in the notion of individualism. In the period which concerns us in this study, the turbulent years of the Reformation period and the early Counter-Reformation, the influence of Erasmus (1466-1536) undoubtedly contributed to this growth in 'individualism'. Although criticising the established church, Erasmus remained loyal to the papacy. His legendary dislike of scholastic philosophy led to his dictum 'true religion comes from the heart, not the head, and all elaborate theology is superfluous.'<sup>251</sup> In spite of an emphasis on doctrine following the Council of Trent and a centralized sacramental liturgy, the rise in 'individual' piety emphasised a 'theology-of-the-heart' which pointed to an inward change that would support the overt sacramentalism of the early post-Reformation years. Indeed, the Erasmian view pervaded the Christian conscience: 'the only person who could harm a Christian was himself ... deliverance from sin lay not in some objective restitution of exterior relations, but in changing the self.'<sup>252</sup> For the Protestant reformers, then, it was a matter of 'behaviour' rather than 'belief' or doctrine; while for Catholics, 'changing self' was a preparation for participation in the sacramental life. The idea of 'discipline' put the emphasis on 'learning'; and rather than concentrating on 'doing' an act of penance, the aim was on self-control through self-knowledge. Bossy observes that this 'devout self-consciousness (was) a model of the Christian life characteristic of post-Reformation Catholicism.'<sup>253</sup> Evennett explores the development of individualism and stresses the changing position of the individual in post-reformation Christianity: 'The Counter-Reformation doctrine of Christian struggle and effort ... announced that Man – even in face of his Almighty Creator – carried, to some extent, his own fate in his own hands.'<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Cited in Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. (London: Routledge, 1996),p.502

<sup>252</sup> Bossy, John. *Christianity in the West 1400-1700*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.126

<sup>253</sup> Bossy, 1985:127

<sup>254</sup> Evennett, 1999:58/59

## **Ignatius Loyola and the *Spiritual Exercises***

Nowhere was this new emphasis on man's ability to direct his own spiritual journey better illustrated than in the *Spiritual Exercises*<sup>255</sup> devised by Ignatius Loyola. Much has been made of the influence of the Society of Jesus, from its instigation by Ignatius Loyola to its establishing itself as part of reformed Catholicism, in the late sixteenth century. O'Malley has pointed out that the Jesuits were not interested in reforming the Church as such, either regarding the papacy, the episcopacy or the pastorate.<sup>256</sup> He goes on, although the term *reformatio* was used by the Jesuits, it 'referred to the change of heart affected in individuals.'<sup>257</sup> *Reformatio* meant 'conversion', and the achievement of this included undertaking the *Spiritual Exercises*, which epitomized introspective spirituality. Other terms which were used to define the mission of the new Society of Jesus were, '*christianismum*' or '*christianitas*' translated as 'the making of a Christian'. Here the emphasis was on teaching; and so began a new era in which the laity were to look inwards to affect a new moral outlook which encouraged dependence on the 'self'.

What is remarkable about the *Spiritual Exercises* is that they were formulated for laity and religious alike.<sup>258</sup> They encompassed a form of meditation on scripture through mental image making. The emphasis was on solitude and silence, even though a spiritual director was crucial to the process.<sup>259</sup> Ignatius clarifies his intention:

For just as strolling, walking and running are exercises for the body, so 'spiritual exercises' is the name given to every way of preparing and disposing one's soul to rid herself of all disordered attachments, so that once rid of them one might seek and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one's life for the good of the soul.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Composed over many years, it consisted of a manual whereby a spiritual director would instruct others in spiritual meditation promoting growth in faith and commitment. See Scarisbrick, J.J. *The Jesuits and the Catholic Reformation*. (London: The Historical Association, 1989),p.10

<sup>256</sup> O'Malley, 1999:70

<sup>257</sup> O'Malley, 1999:71

<sup>258</sup> Scarisbrick, J.J. *The Jesuits and the Catholic Reformation*. (London: The Historical Association, 1989),p.11

<sup>259</sup> Scarisbrick, 1989:10

<sup>260</sup> Munitz, Joseph A. and Endean, Philip. (Trans. Intro. and Notes). *Saint Ignatius Loyola – Personal Writings*. (London, New York, Victoria, Ontario and Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996), p.283. These exercises were firmly rooted in scripture: 'For if a person begins contemplating with a true historical foundation, and then goes over

The visualization advocated by Ignatius required the use of all the senses. He gives examples of how this should be achieved: in the case of the nativity he reflects on the Virgin with Joseph and the Christ child, 'I watch and notice and contemplate what they are saying, and then reflect within myself to derive some profit.'<sup>261</sup> He continues, 'it is helpful to pass the five senses of the imagination over the ... contemplations.'<sup>262</sup> These five senses include not only the sense of sight, but also hearing, smell, taste and touch. To the modern mind, it may seem child-like in its simplicity with its story-like approach to the gospel truths, but the *Spiritual Exercises* became one of the key spiritual writings of counter-reformation Catholicism, as important as Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.<sup>263</sup>

The excesses of late Medieval 'exterior' piety are now turned inwards into an equally rich 'interior' religiosity. Far from the all-encompassing physical piety of pre-Tridentine spirituality, in which suffering bodily with Christ was a pathway to the divine, the exercises were to be levelled according to the ability of the participant. Ignatius, thus, laid out the following advice: "'Hence someone uneducated or of poor health should not be given things that cannot be undertaken without fatigue and from which no profit is to be derived.'"<sup>264</sup> He rejects medieval physical piety in favour of a religiosity that is concerned only with the inner man. Moreover, Scarisbrick points out that Ignatian spirituality is no longer centred on Christ's passion and death, as was characteristic of late-medieval Christian piety, but is now concentrated His resurrection. As emphasised earlier in this study, a religion of immanence was being replaced by a religion of transcendence.<sup>265</sup> This focus on individual spiritual endeavour was the trade-mark of Jesuit piety and together with Erasmian humanism served to transform Catholicism from its medieval roots. To re-iterate, humanist thought used the process of introspection to study human behaviour and draw-up definitive statements about mans' true self, such as reason being subordinate to the will; as

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the historical narrative and reflects on it personally, one may by oneself come upon things that throw more light on the history or better bring home its meaning.' Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Cited in *Saint Ignatius Loyola – Personal Writings*. Trans. Intro. and Notes by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean. (London, New York, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1996),p.307

<sup>262</sup> Cited in Munitiz & Endean, 1996:307

<sup>263</sup> Composed c.1418-1427, *The Imitation of Christ* is a spiritual handbook emphasising the 'interior' life and devotion to the Eucharist.

<sup>264</sup> Cited in Munitiz & Endean, 1996:287

<sup>265</sup> See p.2, footnote 5, Eire,1986:2

Petrarch famously stated: 'It is better to *will* the good than to *know* the truth.'<sup>266</sup> Evenett sums-up this trend: 'The spirituality of the Counter-Reformation ... may be rated humanistic in that it proceeded on the belief that each man's destiny for all eternity was partly in his own power to make or mar.'<sup>267</sup> This re-enforces the Catholic belief, as against the Protestant mantra *sola fides*, in the performance of 'good works' as a gateway to salvation.

### **Carlo Borromeo and the Sacrament of Confession**

So, a spiritual 'interiority' developed as a pre-requisite for the sacramental life of the Counter-Reformation church. This was particularly pertinent for the sacrament of confession in which regular private confession was preceded by an examination of conscience. Kenneth Clark, referring to early post-reformation Catholicism, amusingly states: 'instead of confession being followed by a simple comforting rubric which has behind it the weight of divine authority, the modern confessor must grope his way into the labyrinth of the psyche.'<sup>268</sup> The idea of 'intention' had marked a 'new psychology' in the exploration of sin and repentance. As stated above, post-Tridentine piety, then, was characterized by the most difficult of virtues, 'right intention' for which the examination of conscience served as both judge and jury for the pious penitent.<sup>269</sup>

In the late Middle Ages confession had been a social act and, as implied above, satisfaction gained by an act of public penance. Surprisingly, any feeling of sorrow or repentance was not vital to the sacrament.<sup>270</sup> Moreover, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) had made the attending of the sacrament of confession only an annual event. A move to participate in

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<sup>266</sup> Cited in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica-Vol.15*, 1982:665

<sup>267</sup> Evenett 1999:63

<sup>268</sup> Clark, Kenneth. *Civilisation* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and John Murray, 1969),p.177

<sup>269</sup> See Neuner J. and Dupuis, J. (eds.) *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. 7<sup>th</sup> and Enlarged Edition. (New York:Alba House, 2001), pp.668/669. The Fourteenth Session of the Council of Trent dealt with the Sacrament of Penance (1551). It breaks-down the sacrament into its various component parts, and here deals with *contrition*, 'the sorrow of the soul and the detestation of the sin committed, together with the resolve not to sin any more'.p.668

<sup>270</sup> Bossy, 1999:98



private confession on a more regular basis now followed the Council of Trent. As observed above, the Catholic Church now absorbed into its fabric the idea of repentance which became of greater importance than the exterior penitential act itself. A re-presentation of the Ten Commandments as an 'actual' code of ethics aided and abetted the growth in a 'devout self-consciousness'. They provided a bench-mark of behaviour by which Christians could examine their own interior intentions.<sup>271</sup>

Moreover, the Council of Trent had issued an important decree in June, 1546 which was concerned with the training of clergy. It directed them towards a greater emphasis on the reading and preaching of scripture.<sup>272</sup> A more educated clergy were to instruct the faithful in "the vices which they are to avoid and the virtues it is right for them to follow."<sup>273</sup> Not only were the laity to be encouraged in their spiritual lives, by a new emphasis on the sacrament of confession, but those hearing confessions were also to be specially instructed. Diocesan confessors were to be employed under license only from the archbishop himself. Indeed, the Fourteenth Session of the Council of Trent (1551), which had dealt with Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance, had stated that *absolution* was 'a judicial act in which the priest pronounces sentence as a judge.'<sup>274</sup> To Borromeo these confessors were of greater importance than the ordinary parish priests since, "they had the souls of the faithful in their hands."<sup>275</sup> Indeed, Borromeo described confession as "the fortress of Christian virtue."<sup>276</sup>

The ground was prepared, therefore, for the episcopate of Carlo Borromeo to introduce the confessional-box in 1565. As Bossy has commented: 'The installation of these solid ... pieces of furniture against the pillars of old churches, their incorporation into the design of new ones, conveyed the positive message that repentance was a continuous business.'<sup>277</sup> A

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<sup>271</sup> Bossy, 1985:130

<sup>272</sup> See Neuner and Dupuis, 2001:101-103. The Fourth Session of the Council (8<sup>th</sup> April, 1546) established the Vulgate translation of the Bible as 'authentic', although this did not refer to 'authorship'. The Church's authority allowed for interpretation of this 'authentic' version of Scripture.

<sup>273</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:146

<sup>274</sup> Cited in Neuner and Dupuis, 2001:671

<sup>275</sup> Graham-Dixon, 2011:28

<sup>276</sup> Graham-Dixon, 2011:28

<sup>277</sup> Bossy, 1985:134

barrier was placed between the priest and the penitent, and between the penitent and the congregation. The move to private, individual devotion was thus encouraged for all to see. Borromeo went further in his desire to promote and control individual piety in his attempt to segregate men from women in public worship. Screens were designed to be moved so that male and female worshippers were separated from one another. The tendency for sin to be identified with sexual relations echoes the dualistic thought of the late Middle Ages in which women suffered disproportionately. As discussed early, females were targeted specifically in the now popular organized witch-hunts. Matters became more extreme when Borromeo concerned himself with the dress of the faithful. Inner scrutiny of conscience was to be reflected in the dress and deportment of the congregation. Such a desire to control Christian devotional practices, illustrates how the once extravagant physical piety of the late Middle Ages had changed. The exterior demonstrations of faith by way of the *imago Christi* – identifying with the suffering Saviour by bodily denial and physical punishments, touching holy relics and images - had now given way to a controlled and private form of Christian piety, particularly characterized by the examination of conscience and private sacramental confession.

### **The Influence of François de Sales and the French School**

Undoubtedly, the spirituality of François de Sales illustrates the flavour of post-Tridentine piety. A key figure in the growth of this new spiritual movement that manifested itself after the Council of Trent,<sup>278</sup> his publication, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, advocates ‘meekness and gentleness towards our neighbours and remedies against anger.’<sup>279</sup> The inward-looking, disciplined moral outlook, already emphasised in the introduction to this chapter, is perfectly encapsulated in the writings of de Sales. He, too, lived according to Jesuit directives, undertaking the Spiritual Exercises and taking as a role model Carlo Borromeo. A theology-of-the-heart underpinned his spirituality: “only the language of the

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<sup>278</sup> Ellington, 2001:142

<sup>279</sup> Cited in Miola, Robert S. (ed.) *Early Modern Catholicism – An Anthology of Primary Sources*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007),p.314

heart can ever reach another heart.”<sup>280</sup> Like Ignatius he addressed, not only the religious, but ordinary lay people, thus devoting his life to pastoral affairs.<sup>281</sup>

Marian devotion among the laity was encouraged by the introduction of Sodalties of the Virgin. The appearance of the Society of Jesus had instigated such organizations which encouraged such practices as the recitation of the Rosary, whose final form was established by the 1560s.<sup>282</sup> Although prayed in groups, the Rosary was also a form of private meditation adding to the growth in individualized forms of piety. The development of an interior devotional life was thus encouraged by the Jesuits and other Catholic religious leaders through these Marian sodalties.<sup>283</sup> Though acknowledging the Virgin’s physical motherhood of Christ as a primary source of blessing, de Sales took her example of submissiveness and humility as an even greater reason for veneration.<sup>284</sup> François divorced himself from medieval tradition by positioning her, not alongside the enthroned Christ, but, where her prayers are joined with those of ordinary humanity.<sup>285</sup>

Although it had never been doubted that Mary was an example of how the Christian life should be lived, she was now presented in a ‘passive’ rather than ‘active’ role.<sup>286</sup> This thesis of Ellington’s may be born out in the changes in visual representations of the Virgin in the years following Trent. As pointed out earlier, the Virgin is no longer seen fainting at the foot of the cross, or cradling Christ as he is taken-down from the cross, or enthroned in heaven in a position of power. François maintained a ‘passive’ image of the Virgin, championing her “‘humility in obeying God’s will at all times.”<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Cited in Jones, Cheslyn. Wainwright, Geoffrey and Yarnold, Edward. (eds.) *The Study of Spirituality –Student Edition*. (London: SPCK, 2000),p.380

<sup>281</sup> He became Bishop of Geneva in 1602.

<sup>282</sup> The first Jesuit Marian Society was formed in 1563 and its members pledged to hear Mass and say either the Little Office of the Virgin, or the Rosary each day. See Ellington, 2001:214/5

<sup>283</sup> Ellington, 2001:226

<sup>284</sup> Ellington, 2001:142

<sup>285</sup> Ellington, 2001:221

<sup>286</sup> Ellington, 2001:143

<sup>287</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:182

Pierre de Bérulle also encouraged the faithful to engage in a Marian devotion that was “interior and spiritual, (and) in no way external and sensible.”<sup>288</sup> His emphasis was on the benefits of private prayer. Bérulle’s particular contribution to Mariology was his emphasis on the Virgin’s free consent to the Incarnation. He speaks of Mary’s humble fiat, “more powerful in consequence and effect than that which God pronounced in the creation of the world.”<sup>289</sup> His belief in the Immaculate Conception led him to speak of Mary’s abundance of grace. He refers to Mary as being in a state of “perpetual rapture,” her senses, powers, and mind seized by eminent, exalted grace.<sup>290</sup> From the strength of these Marian sentiments one can see that post-Tridentine Marian piety is as strong as its medieval predecessor in spite of it now taking on a different form. As emphasised earlier, Mary’s ‘disposition’ is now of prime importance rather than her physical motherhood. The dualistic sentiment which rejected the body, and women’s bodies in particular, now presents the Virgin in a new way. Women are encouraged to follow her example, for, “Her life is a life of silence, which adores the eternal Word.”<sup>291</sup> To re-iterate, representations of her outward display of bodily grief at the foot of the cross, (see Figs. 23, 24 and 25), now disappear from Marian iconography.

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<sup>288</sup> Cited in O’Carroll, 1982:80

<sup>289</sup> Cited in Jones et al, 2000:394

<sup>290</sup> O’Carroll, 1982:80

<sup>291</sup> Bérulle cited in Jones et al, 2000:394



Fig. 23





Fig. 24





Fig. 25

Her lack of emotional and physical control that had made her maternal role so identifiable with ordinary human womanhood was now abandoned as a form of representation. She was, instead, a model of docility and obedience. Although this study is not concerned with images of the 'holy family', it is interesting to note that the rise in the cult of Joseph at this time, encouraged the representation of patriarchal order in which the Virgin was now submissive to Joseph.

This preoccupation with order and obedience is illustrated in Bérulle's writings on the 'states' of Christ in which the individual is invited to share.<sup>292</sup> A favourite theme is the infancy of Christ. Bérulle speaks of 'spiritual infancy', implying the conferring of 'obedience and docility' on post-Tridentine souls.<sup>293</sup> The propensity for mental discipline through private prayer and examination of conscience also spilled-out into the physical sphere. Emphasis on self-discipline affected the physical control of the body so as to affect an acceptable posture during prayer. Manners and deportment became part of 'Christian civility' which was included even in the curriculum of the Catechism. This emphasis on discipline and self-control meant that in seventeenth-century France the study of religion became linked to *civilité*, interpreted by Rapley as 'the study of one's place in the world.'<sup>294</sup> An emphasis on the innocence of childhood, and the protection of girls from impure influences became an obsession. Rapley continues: 'sexual reticence was pushed to such lengths that some religious were reluctant to discuss the details of the Incarnation, or to mention the word "marriage".'<sup>295</sup> *Pudeur* or 'feminine shame' became the main characteristic of female identity post-Trent, at least in France, together with an excessive concentration on 'modesty'.<sup>296</sup> It can be seen how this idea of feminine piety was translated easily into a proliferation of visual representations of the Virgin in similar mode, as the Immaculate Conception (see Figs. 26 and 27). To re-iterate, 'humility' became the Marian virtue *par excellence*. Unsurprisingly, it concerned the deportment of women to a greater extent than men. Images such as the Virgin suckling the Christ child would no longer be acceptable in this new spirit of puritanism. Post-Tridentine references to physical piety, then, were about 'control' – control of the body. It is with some ease that we see parallels with the dualism of the late Middle Ages which viewed 'spirit' as good and 'body' as bad.

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<sup>292</sup> Jones et al, 2000:391. In 'universal' terms, the Christian is reborn in Christ's birth, cleansed from sin by Christ's suffering, and rises to everlasting life in His resurrection. By the particular, Bérulle understands certain souls being called to share in individual mysteries i.e. Christ's infancy, temptation, or agony. Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Jones et al, 2000:392

<sup>294</sup> Rapley, Elizabeth. *The Dévotes-Women and the Church in Seventeenth-Century France*. (Montreal, Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990),p.158

<sup>295</sup> Rapley, 1990:158

<sup>296</sup> Rapley, 1990:158





Fig. 26



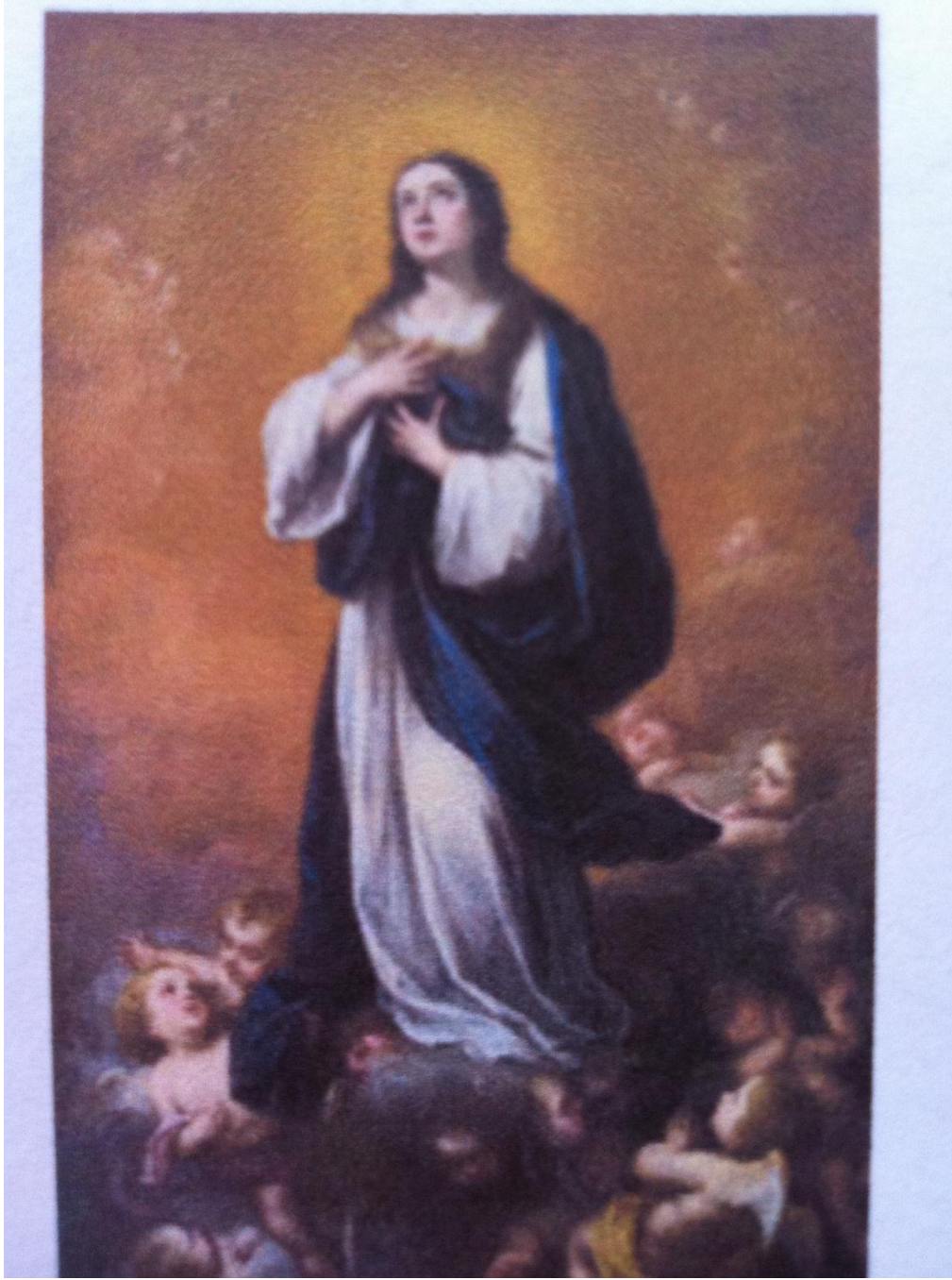


Fig. 27

### **St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross**

The contribution towards an 'interiorization' of spirituality was not just the prerogative of the French. Pierre Bérulle had managed to bring the influence of St. Teresa of Avila into the French religious community by introducing the Spanish Carmelite nuns into France.<sup>297</sup> To

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<sup>297</sup> By 1601 a group had established themselves in Paris and in the following forty years the number of Carmelite convents grew to around fifty-five. Rapley had commented that, 'the Catholic Reformation in

the Spanish mystic, St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), ‘feeling’ was superior to ‘knowing’ in the quest for God. St. Teresa rejected rigid prayer routines, instead advocating, “‘Pray as you can, for prayer doesn’t consist of thinking a great deal, but of loving a great deal.’”<sup>298</sup> She advocated, “‘emotional detachment from all created things.’”<sup>299</sup> Her belief that spiritual experiences outweighed the benefits of cerebral learning, are the key to an understanding of her works. In *The Way of Perfection* she supported the rights of women to take part in contemplative prayer ‘a vital Counter-Reformation “work”’.<sup>300</sup> She found in the New Testament evidence of Christ’s love for women: “‘you favoured them always with much pity and found in them as much love and more faith than in men.’”<sup>301</sup> Although this was one of her more radical statements, she adopted quite happily the accepted female stereotypes as a defence, for “‘little women may receive more spiritual favours from God because of their weakness, compared to learned men.’”<sup>302</sup>

She collaborated with John of the Cross between 1572 and 1577. His *Dark Night of the Soul* compares on a practical level with Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, for, according to St. John, all spiritual life depended for its regulation on a spiritual director.<sup>303</sup> Like St. Teresa he rejected the distractions of the created world. A particular poem of St. John’s states: ‘My soul is detached from everything created, And raised above itself into a life delicious, Of God alone supported.’<sup>304</sup> The total reliance of the individual soul on God is relayed in the title of St. John’s work. Rather than pessimistic in outlook, the phrase ‘dark night’ is actually indicative of ‘hope’. M.L. Haskins illustrates the point: ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’<sup>305</sup> One can compare this notion of complete dependence on God with

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France, for all its clericalism and its insistence on masculine authority bore the distinct imprint of feminine spirituality.’ 1990:5

<sup>298</sup> From *Mansions IV, i.7* cited in Jones et al, 2000:366

<sup>299</sup> *The Way of Perfection, iv, 3-4*. Cited in Jones et al, 2000:367

<sup>300</sup> Weber, Alison. “Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny” pp.144-162 in David M. Luebke (ed.) *The Counter-Reformation*. (Massachusetts, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.160

<sup>301</sup> Weber, 1999:161

<sup>302</sup> Weber, 1999:157

<sup>303</sup> See the Introduction by Fr. Benedict Zimmerman to *The Dark Night of the Soul- Saint John of the Cross* (London: Baronius Press Ltd., 2010), p.xvii

<sup>304</sup> St. John of the Cross, 2010:xxi

<sup>305</sup> Cited in Jones et al, 2000:367

François de Sales' mystical concept of 'la cime', or 'mountain-top'.<sup>306</sup> The mountain-top is as a vanishing point linking earth and heaven; the summit is where self ends and God begins, and humanity can reach this point by *a movement of love*. This place of 'the summit' is a 'place of encounter with God ... the secret place where we spin our thread of prayer.'<sup>307</sup> Spiritual piety, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, is becoming ever more turned inwards to the self.

### **Cartesian Epistemology**

Susan Bordo has attributed the increase in interiority and individual self-awareness of early modernity to Descartes' epistemology.<sup>308</sup> The continuing dualistic thought of the late Middle Ages which denigrated the body, infuses into the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650). Bordo emphasises that this dualism was now firmly established, since "body and mind are defined in terms of mutual exclusivity."<sup>309</sup> The over-turning of accepted understandings of the universe, firstly by Copernicus and then by Galileo, had left a gaping hole in man's knowledge of the world which would be filled by new philosophical investigations.<sup>310</sup> Such a radical upheaval of accepted knowledge cast doubt on the reliability of the senses to provide adequate data, not only in the sphere of the abstract but also with regard to the physical world.<sup>311</sup> Now the senses must be discarded altogether, leaving 'pure thought' as the only reliable source of knowledge.<sup>312</sup> As Ellington has emphasised, to Descartes bodily needs and desires interrupted and contaminated rational thought.<sup>313</sup> His famous dictum: '*cogito ergo sum*' - 'I think therefore I am' - firmly establishes the one certainty above everything else, reached by a process known as Cartesian doubt<sup>314</sup>, that 'I exist because I am thinking'. The 'mind' in this sense is more important than 'matter',

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<sup>306</sup> Jones et al, 2000:384

<sup>307</sup> Jones et al, 2000:385

<sup>308</sup> See Bordo, Susa R. *The Flight from Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp.13-31, 45-58.

<sup>309</sup> Cited in Ellington, 2001:255

<sup>310</sup> Ellington, 2001:255

<sup>311</sup> Ellington, 2001:255

<sup>312</sup> Ellington, 2001:255

<sup>313</sup> Ellington, 2001:255

<sup>314</sup> Descartes' conclusion was based on the fact that his ability to 'doubt' was life's only 'true' certainty.



and, more particularly '*my mind*' is more reliable than others.<sup>315</sup> It may seem paradoxical, but a 'being' whose whole essence is 'thought' has no use for material things, thus 'soul' is separate from 'body'.<sup>316</sup> However, 'thinking' in the Cartesian sense has a much broader meaning than might be conceived by us today, for 'thought' may encompass 'feeling'.<sup>317</sup> This takes us back to post-Reformation piety which came to be characterized by a 'theology-of-the-heart'.

This mutual exclusivity contained in the 'mind and body' debate, also leads to the question, where does 'woman' stand who was previously aligned with the 'body'? It seems obvious that this move away from the physical piety of the late Middle Ages, with its Aristotelian need to include 'body' as a unifying factor in the concept of 'man', pushed 'woman' further out of sight in the realm of philosophical/theological thought processes. Bordo is right in defining Descartes' epistemology as a 'masculine model of knowledge', since it depended solely on complete detachment from the body.<sup>318</sup> Fear of the female body in particular seems to be born out in the sixteenth and seventeenth century predilection for an emphasis on controlling the body through, what has been described earlier as, 'deportment'. There seems to be a connection, therefore, between the disappearance of images of the Virgin suckling her child, and, indeed, Marian images that would connect the Virgin too closely to the physicality of other women, and the growth in a purely cerebral epistemology.

### **Summing-up**

This chapter has explored changes in the way that Christian piety was expressed following the divisions in the Church that left Protestantism and Counter-Reformation Catholicism as two defining expressions of Christianity. This new post-Tridentine era profoundly affected the manner in which the Virgin Mary came to be represented in visual imagery. While the

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<sup>315</sup> Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. (London:Routledge, 1996), p.548

<sup>316</sup> Russell, 1996:548

<sup>317</sup> Russell, 1996:548

<sup>318</sup> Ellington, 2001:255

Catholic Church adopted a strong doctrinal stance, personal piety was encouraged by a new interior piety championed by such figures as Ignatius Loyola, Francois de Sales, Pierre Berulle, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. The Virgin, while represented as the Immaculate Conception, posited somewhere between heaven and earth, is painted with an emphasis on her interior mood by way of facial expression and bodily gesture. Her physical motherhood is no longer emphasised. While still remaining a primary focus of Catholic veneration, Mary's spiritual motherhood becomes the dominant trend. Physical motherhood, with its emphasis on Incarnational theology takes a step back to allow a focus on the transcendent, a looking forward to eventual fulfilment at the eschaton.

It is clear from the evidence thus presented here that the Counter-Reformation Church represented the beginnings of modern Catholicism. Carlo Borromeo's focus on the sacrament of confession, with his introduction of the confessional box and specially trained 'confessors', remained one of the key characteristics that marked Catholicism from its Protestant neighbours. The emphasis on examination of conscience, private meditation as instructed by Ignatius and the *Spiritual Exercises*, together with the spiritual movement of the French School which emphasised *civilité*, all point towards the phenomena of a spirituality which emphasised man's reliance on himself as an individual. One could define this as a 'humanistic Christianity'. But, above all, this new spiritual movement towards interiority, demonstrates the increasing rise of the culture of individualism. Right intention and a change of heart requires the need for self-knowledge. This movement away from collective prayer in favour of private prayer, from 'active' displays of penance to 'inner' repentance, is expressed in the changing image of the Virgin. She is now humble and silent, her role reduced to an example of modesty, purity and obedience. More importantly, she is 'alone', her maternal role no longer of paramount importance. There is an unmistakable connection between this increasing preference for individual expressions of Christian piety and the changing iconography of the Virgin.

In spite of this medieval propensity to merge 'body and spirit' in the Christian journey towards the eschaton, a dormant 'gnostic dualism', in which the 'material' is set against the 'spiritual', sees an alignment of 'woman' with 'flesh'. Since 'flesh' equates with 'sin' in dualistic thought, a gradual diminution of representations of Mary's 'physical' motherhood follows the upheavals of the reformation period. The final section of this chapter will attempt to provide evidence of an under-lying misogyny that contributes to the gradual decline in representations of Mary-as-mother by the early post-reformation period.

## ***Conclusion***

This study has provided evidence to show how Marian imagery changed extensively over the course of the sixteenth century during the turbulent years of the Reformation and the convening of the Council of Trent. It demonstrates a wave of changing Christian piety which in the late Middle Ages had been fed from a variety of sources. Marian iconography had depended on the *Protevangelium* which had mythologized the Virgin's parenthood and early life, as well as propagating the idea of her perpetual virginity. Following Trent, with its emphasis on scripture and the authorized traditions of the Catholic Church, religious imagery had to follow the dictates that were laid down by the ecclesiastical powers. Official doctrine was to be observed at all costs. Gone are the inventive pre-Tridentine narrative paintings of the Virgin crowned and enthroned with the Christ child. Neither do we see the Virgin in non-scriptural scenes, such as at the Deposition of Christ. 'Content' and 'realism' are the by-words of early post-Tridentine Marian iconography – though images of the Virgin engulfed by clouds and cherubin might stretch the concept of 'realism' to its limits.

Although this study does not purport to be centred on the history of art, research into the machinations of the Council of Trent has thrown up an area concerned with the function and place of images within the context of the established Church. The increasing secularization of art during the Renaissance period prior to Trent, had led to a reaction from the ecclesiastical authorities. Tridentine decrees stressed that the function of art should be a religious function. Art was used to support Catholic dogma. Emphasis on Incarnational theology declined. The humanity of Christ was no longer in question; emphasis on His 'physical' birth became of lesser concern in theological debate. On the other hand, Mary's freedom from the stain of original sin – her Immaculate Conception – became a concept to uphold against the attack of the reformers. The Catholic Church, thus, defended its Marian doctrine using every artistic means in its power to uphold its stance. It is no wonder that the representation of the Virgin as the Immaculate Conception became so dominant in the early post-reformation period, for it served as one of the distinguishing marks of the Roman

Catholic Church. Artistic representations were now characterized by what has come to be termed the *Baroque*. The realism in draughtsmanship, begun at the beginning of the sixteenth century by such artists as Raphael, was now taken a step further. Emotion became the by-word for the baroque style. Concern for the 'inner' man went hand in hand with the new interiorized spiritual movement. The Virgin's physical motherhood with the Christ child on her lap gives way to depictions of a more passive soul, lost in her own interior world.

From the evidence above, it may be seen that although changes in artistic style undoubtedly contributed to changes in Marian iconography during the sixteenth century, of far more significance are the changes in modes of piety. As explained in the introduction to this study, medieval religiosity was noted for both its physical and visual nature. Images served both as the books for the illiterate as well as objects to aid religious devotion. In an age of Incarnational theology in which Christ's physical humanity was emphasised, particularly through his suffering and death, but also through the depiction of the Christ child with Mary as his 'physical' mother, a piety which used the body and all its senses to express devotion was reflected in its religious imagery. The richness of Medieval Marian iconography is based upon the use made of the body to express theological meanings. Images of Christ bearing the wound in his side alongside the Virgin exposing her breast, serve to illustrate this point. Moreover, the Christ child is often shown naked as a mark of His 'humanity'- which, again, demonstrates a theology-of-the-body prevalent in the late Middle Ages. Thus, my research has shown that dualistic attitudes to the body were often laid aside in the late Middle Ages in order to celebrate the created world. The body was seen as a means to aid man's salvific journey. Gender boundaries were blurred as metaphors of child-birth and feeding were used to describe theological concepts. The physicality of Mary's motherhood was expressed in images of the suckling Christ child. Based on these findings, it is easy to understand how a gradual change in attitude to the body led to an accompanying change in the depictions of Mary as mother in the years that followed the Reformation.

Thus, with the re-emergence of dualistic attitudes to the body in which the physical world was once again seen as a hindrance to man's spiritual journey, we begin to see a decline in images of Mary-as-mother, and a disappearance of images of Mary breast-feeding the Christ child. Moreover, the association of the body with 'woman', meant that as the body was increasingly reviled so too were women. My research has raised the question of the witch-hunts that took place during the late sixteenth-century, that illustrate this point. Evidence of such misogyny has been taken-up by Warner. She has understood the decline in images of Mary-as-mother in favour of images of Mary alone as the Immaculate Conception, as denying the goodness of the created world, 'and of the human body.'<sup>319</sup> She is correct in her assessment for here we see the face of dualism, 'and the Virgin Mary as a symbol of that dualism'.<sup>320</sup>

This question of the denigration of the body in favour of the spirit colours the early years of the post-reformation period, for, as Ellington has pointed out: 'Medieval philosophy had included the body in the process of acquiring knowledge, but by the seventeenth century, for Descartes and for other scientists, knowledge became dependent on "detachment, clarity, and transcendence of the body."<sup>321</sup> That body/nature was associated with women in masculine discourse, meant that: 'The belief that it is necessary to control and achieve distance from the body can be translated easily into a desire to control women.'<sup>322</sup> Thus, the question needs to be asked as to what position the Virgin Mary occupies in all this misogynistic thought? The gradual decline in the image of the Virgin suckling her child, so dominant in pre-Trent Marian iconography, could be attributed to the general desire to dissociate her from any normal bodily functions associated with maternity.<sup>323</sup> In other words, by making Mary increasingly less identifiable with ordinary women, removing her from any normal human role, ordinary women became under the control of a patriarchal vision of the Virgin.<sup>324</sup> Like Warner, I believe that the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception could be viewed as detrimental to any idea of the reconciliation between man

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<sup>319</sup> Warner, 1983:254

<sup>320</sup> Warner, 1983:254

<sup>321</sup> Ellington, 2001:255

<sup>322</sup> Ellington, 2001:256

<sup>323</sup> Ellington, 2001:258

<sup>324</sup> Ellington, 2001:256



and God embodied in Incarnational theology. Though Warner refers to Mary's painless childbearing and Assumption, which lies outside the remit of this study, nevertheless, it is interesting to note Warner's continued assertion that: 'the perfection of Mary is defined as the conquest of the natural laws of childbearing and death',<sup>325</sup> thus denigrating rather than celebrating God's creation. The question of whether or not Mary's Immaculate Conception removes her from ordinary humanity or represents the true state of humanity intended by God, is an enormous question to be explored in further study.

In summing up the findings of this exploration into changes in Marian imagery, it is important to re-iterate that though there is a decline in the representation of Mary as mother, this decline is not absolute. Mary is indeed depicted 'alone' in the early counter-Reformation iconography, but images of the Virgin and child continue to be produced taking on a different form. Now the genre favours the Holy Family as the medium to convey Mary's 'physical' motherhood. The strength of the earlier images of Mary-as-mother, in which Mary's motherhood alone is celebrated centre stage, now gives way to a scene in which she becomes part of the family group. Warner's following observation serves to illustrate the notion of 'control' of women noted above: 'Catholic leaders promoted the cult of the Holy Family in the seventeenth century, in which the Virgin appears as the ideal mother: humble, quiet, caring, and submissive to Joseph as well as to God.'<sup>326</sup>

I have emphasised the nature of pre-Tridentine piety and the ebb and flow of dualistic attitudes to the body during this period. The female, who was equated with 'body' in Aristotelian thought, suffered the ignominy of inferiority because of the notion of the superiority of the 'spirit' in this debate. As the Immaculate Conception, Mary was placed above the ordinary role of 'mother' which would have, even partially, aligned her with ordinary women. The image and designation of the Virgin was thus part of the new 'transcendent' spirituality identified by Eire in his evaluation of this post-Reformation era. The Catholic Church was not only making a stand against Protestant attack, it was also using

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<sup>325</sup> Warner, 1983:254

<sup>326</sup> Warner, 1983:190

the powerful spiritual movement of the time, harnessed by Ignatius Loyola, François de Sales, and Bérulle, to present a new 'face' to Christendom. The Virgin provided this new 'face' *par excellence* in her role as the Immaculate Conception. Lost in an interior world, her physical motherhood is replaced by a more ephemeral spiritual quest. The new movement towards a more 'interior' faith, characterized by the examination of conscience and 'individual' confession, becomes the face of early modern Catholicism. A theology-of-the-heart replaced the theology-of-the-body which coloured medieval piety. A changing religious sentiment was reflected in a changing religious iconography.

To re-iterate, I have explored the question of the decline in representations of the Virgin as mother in early post-Reformation iconography, by firstly looking at the Council of Trent and the consequences of Tridentine discussions on both the place of the Virgin and the question of visual imagery within the Catholic Church. Secondly, I have examined the possible links between modes of piety and Marian iconography before the iconoclasm of the reformation period and following the deliberations of Trent. The inherent dualism of the body/spirit debates within the history of Christianity have provided a firm grounding on which to base my conclusion that the gradual decline in representations of the Virgin's physical motherhood was allied to the changing attitudes to the body during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Visual representations of the Virgin's 'physical' motherhood became part of the cult of the Holy Family, an area for future research. Indeed, the image of 'Mary-as-mother', which had contributed such an extraordinary richness to religious visual imagery, would never regain its dominant position in Marian iconography.

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