

T
h
e
r
e
'
s
s
o
m
e
t
h
i
n
g
a
b
o
u
t
M
a
r
y
!



A Liberation Theology for the 21st Century

By

Dr. T.R. Ragan

DRAFT

Copy Right 2012

Ty Ragan

Rainbow Chapel

Calgary, AB, Canada

All Rights Reserved

Cover Art from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Virgen_de_guadalupe1.jpg

Other books by Ty Ragan

Poetry:

One Voice in Protest: Poems in Hope

Non-Fiction:

The Bard's Spirit: Shakespeare's Social Gospel

Pilgrimage to the Heart of the Sacred

Ecclectica

ASQC Introductory Training Text

Fiction:

St. George's Dragon (A Tuck-Bronwyn Mystery)

Sherwood

Street Priest

DRY

Table of Contents

Forward: Fairy Tales to Robin Hood: Marian Lore for the oppressed	p.i
Preface: Missed Annunciation (A Personal Reflection)	p. a
Introduction	p. 1
Chapter One: Building on what came before	p. 3
Chapter Two: Liturgy & Pseudopigrapha	p. 11
Chapter Three: Mary's Circle Dance (Apparitions are Not Just a Catholic Thang)	p. 20
Chapter Four: The Story of the Peasant Girl who Answered God	p.33
Chapter Five: We say "YES" for Freedom	p. 49
Conclusion	p. 51
Epilogue	p.53
References	

DRAFT

Forward:

Fairy Tales to Robin Hood: Marian Lore for the Oppressed

Jack Zipes' 2012 work, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*¹ in chapter two without even trying adds to the discussion on Marian theology. It is within this chapter that he points out the idea of Fairy Tale emerged truly in France under the reign of Louis XIV, where the church's pietistic control of the crown and populace had led to a puritanical reign that needed to new meta-narrative. This was one hundred or so years after the Protestant Reformation had just begun, and the bloody wars were still raging in some parts of mainland Europe for control of the church and the ability to use the name of God to cover up one's own monarchical shenanigans (see Tudors for more on England's abuse during this period for a snapshot).

But this is just a snippet, as one will see when they reflect on the attempts to save the church from human control and the removal of mysticism. Whether it was the Gnostic (a catchall that has come about for most non-Constantine style movements within the early church) backlash, which led to bloodletting, iconoclasm, and community discord prior to the 1000 CE or the mutual ex-communications of Patriarch and Pope that caused a Christendom Schism in 1054 CE. That would see distinct streams of belief emerge, one mystical and one academic at its core, one centered on Christ's gospel, and one centered on Pauline Epistles (you dear reader can decide which).

The Western Church did not simply have one momentous reformation experience, for Lady Poverty (an analogy to Our Lady of...(insert Marian name here)) would call our Francis

¹ Zipes, Jack (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*. Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press.

Bernadone from great wealth and status to begin another restoration, a call for those left outside the expansive and inclusive table Christ set at the Last Supper, in the 1100-1200's (amongst other monastic movements during and since).

This was a counter call that all were beloved by God (Original Blessing if there ever was one) and in stark contrast to the Crusade language of the Papacy and Empire that would rage until the Plagues would come. In Fact, Francis would also show that the different religions could co-exist as he would begin centuries long dialogue of love with Islam through his meetings with the Sultan.

But it was not just historical, but Quasi-historical through the folk legends that may or may have originated within a historical context that demonstrates how the story of the Peasant Girl called by God began to emerge and shape the liberation movements of the medieval world. *The Geste of Robin Hood* outside of his appearance in *Canterbury Tales* *Piers Plowman* are among the oldest written stories, but let's be honest if they got written down at the time of the printing press, chances are they existed long before (as noted by some connecting the stories of Robin to Herne the Hunter legends in Celtic Lore).

Stephen Knight raises the theory that it was not until the romantic period² that Marian became a noble Norman (of the French invaders), rather up until then it was Devotion to the Virgin Mary that drove Robin's transformation to defender of the poor.³ For Pollard it is a Reformation correction of the texts that replaces the Virgin Mary with Maid Marian, and the

² Cawthorne, Nigel (2010). *A Brief History of Robin Hood: The True Story Behind the Legend*. London, UK: Constable & Robinson Ltd. P. 181.

³ Knight, Stephen (2003). *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*. New York, NY, USA: Cornell University Press. P.13

Prioress of Kirklees is created as the foil of Marian love.⁴ For it is through the special devotional Mass to Mary at St. Mary's in Nottingham that Robin feels moved to act.⁵ For those from the Yorkshire thread of belief in Robin Hood the acts of charity emerge after a direct vision (colloquially known as Apparitions now) that Mary gives Robin surety to act.⁶ It is within the confines of St. Mary's Abbey in York, a Benedictine Monastery⁷ where this begins for Robin who becomes a model in his prayer, devotion and work a model for modern church laity⁸. It is this fidelity to the Virgin Mary, the first of the oppressed class within the Christian Testament that bonds the Merry Men in their work against corruption.⁹ As this is a key piece of the long oath that Robin has his men and their families swear to come live in the Greenwood (an allusion itself to not only Herne, but the Green Man of yore). The oath is to resist Prince John (their anti-Christ); rob the rich to feed the poor (take back what was taken wrongly); and protect women in the name of Mary.¹⁰

The narrative of Robin and his rebellion illustrated what many within traditional confines of Christianities may feel. Robin prayed to Mary for his guidance and answers, because the traditional church construct did not care about society so the time for this establishment was nonexistent by members of the rebellion.¹¹

⁴ Pollard, A.J. (2004). *Imagining Robin Hood*. London, UK: Rutelidge. p. 14 & 27.

⁵ Knight p. 18-19. This is part of the Nottingham lore of Robin Hood, as there are two schools of Robin Hood Lore, one in Nottingham the other in York. History shows tunnels underneath the churches that connected for outlaws to move swiftly between both Shires.

⁶ Ibid p. 23

⁷ Pollard p.4

⁸ Ibid p. 132

⁹ Ibid p. 31

¹⁰ Ibid p. 177

¹¹ Cawthorne p. 91.

What is seen in the ancient stories is a meta-narrative attempting to preserve the Feminine aspect of God. It is within this tradition that the protector, nurturer emerges for all classes and that the promise within Genesis' day six creation story is lived out. Humanity is made in God's image, complete individuals containing both masculine and feminine aspects (or as Jung would state Anima/Animus) with healthy bringing balance, acceptance, and healthy to all aspects.

This church tradition shows us that as we continue to silence the matriarchal voice within the institutions of the Christianities, our church is incomplete and unhealthy. This illness then allows corruption to reign, and abuse in the name of God to become the norm instead of freedom.

Preface

(From Personal Reflections of Annunciation Sunday)

Another Advent season has begun, it is the time when we are to prepare for the birth of Jesus, and yet another Sunday where the point of the Annunciation to Mary of Nazareth by the angel Gabriel was missed. Within the Protestant tradition we have a tendency to short shift Mary and her role, we reduce her to nothing more than the test tube or incubator for Jesus, but her role was far more active than that.

Just think about this young girl barely into her menstruation, barely a teenager. Having sat there while her father cut a business deal with Joseph to purchase her (where the idea of Bride Price comes from). Mary having witnessed the brutality of the Roman Empire, the occupiers of her people where girls her age (or any age) were nothing more than property to the soldiers. Not full citizens, they could take and rape them with immunity. If pregnancy happened, even just the losing of their hymen, made them unclean and a shame for their families and in effect valueless.

Families that then had choices to either redeem fully their honour through stoning (honour killing) or to put the issue away quietly just outside the city gates where the lepers, beggars, and sex trade workers existed... a fate that would rapidly end in death by violence, exposure, or sexually transmitted disease. The problem was more compounded once the bride price or the deal had been made, because now it dishonoured two families. This was the struggle Joseph worked through in the Gospel of Matthew before the Angel Gabriel visited him in a vision.

But we come back to Mary as the Angel Gabriel comes to her (with no back story on how many girls heard this same offer before Mary and said no because they understood the horror of the stigma they were taking upon themselves). Mary stands there, knowing she was no longer her father's property, but not completely Joseph's yet (the contract made, but not yet consummated). Mary a young girl who probably bore witness to the execution of other girls dishonoured by the Romans (neigh raped) or disfigured or cast out... the struggles of the widow, the divorcee, the adulteress in this patriarchal culture that reduced the usefulness of a woman to nothing more than her ability to produce male heirs to her male masters.

A young girl who had never been treated as an equal in society. A young girl who had never had her opinion asked for, or even if it mattered. Yet here was God sending his messenger directly to her, not to Joseph or her Father, but directly to the non-citizen in both nations she existed in (Rome and Israel). And it was in this shocking, counter culture movement of empowerment, where Mary said the yes that began the shaking of the normative oppression. The yes that began the transformation of 51% of humanity from the shadows to equals (and still is continuing). The yes that a young woman for the first time firmly took her life and her life's call as her own. Blessed among women, Mary was blessed among humanity. A simple step of faith to prove what humanity views as impossible is simply how it is to be.

But we do what her culture did; we tend to relegate Mary to nothing more than a voiceless incubator.

Yet, the story of God and Mary is one of voice and empowerment of the complete image of God.

Introduction

Mary of Nazareth, Virgin Mary, and Our Lady are some of the simpler titles given to young Mary, at first look she can be almost a throw away character within the story of Christ. Yet she is the most venerated saint (at least 23 feast/celebration days within the church calendar¹², when Vatican II was convened many wanted a stronger Marian doctrine that would see her ascend to co-redeemer with Christ¹³. She is not just an incubator for the saviour of the world; she is an ongoing voice for those without voice within the world.

Background

Many claimed to have been visited by Our Lady, in such broad visitations as Fatima, Lourdes, & Rwanda. These are but a few, each time she would come to share the mystery of Christ's love opened within their context. The church would investigate to validate, yet there are many more visitations that the church will not acknowledge as true. Mary is also the subject of a novel that is used within spiritual formation circles of seminary in Canada. Dianne Schomperlane's *Our Lady of the Lost and Found* (2003) opens up the story of a Mary in need of a vacation, and takes time to visit with someone out of the blue to take a rest from the constant petitioning, and need to act as a voice¹⁴.

This is where the gap exists within Marian theology, for the Protestant (including Evangelical, Mainline, and Pentecostal with their derivatives) tend to not spend much time on the character of the mother of Christ Jesus, the one that said yes to God as

¹² Sweeney, J.M. (2006). *Strange Heaven: the Virgin Mary as woman, mother, disciple, advocate*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete, p.137-38.

¹³ O'Malley, J.W. (2008). *What happen at Vatican II*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, p. 188.

¹⁴ Schoemperlane, D. (2003). *Our Lady of the Lost and Found*. Toronto, ON: Harper Collins Canada.

recorded in the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38. While within the Roman Catholic tradition one can get caught up more in the debate over the condition of Mary's hymen pre & post birth of Christ, and whether or not Mary herself was conceived without sin, than what the story of Mary matters. This leaves our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Rites (Orthodox, Coptic, etc.) that tend towards the more mystical where Mary is revered as *Christakos*¹⁵ or even more clearly, *Theokotos*¹⁶. Each of these is simply a piece of the puzzle.

Method:

Why does Mary matter? 2,000 years of story, mythology, veneration, and being cast aside, yet still she is there. The underlying question for the disciple today needs to be built upon some foundations:

1. What is the Biblical background of Mary? (Both canonical and extra-canonical).
2. What is the Marian doctrine emerging within church silos and ecumenically?
3. What are the rampant theories of Mary existing today and yesterday?
4. What are apparitions and its purpose?

The source to answer these questions will be a critical analysis of the theory, doctrine, theology and source material available in regards to Mary of Nazareth.

Building upon these foundational questions the emergent source for this work is to simply answer the question is Marian theology a theology of liberation?

¹⁵ Christ-bearer

¹⁶ God-bearer

Chapter One

Building on What Came Before

By exploring the diversity of materials available upon Mary of Nazareth, what emerges is that the story of this peasant girl may be an allegory for every believer. McBrien's *Report on the Church: Catholicism after Vatican II* (1992) opens up the idea that the Second Vatican Council 1962-65¹⁷ and the major drive of this was a proposed theological thrust for everything being a serving church¹⁸ which grows into other beliefs about the Vatican II that while modernizing the Roman Catholic Church, the Holy Spirit was not only blowing through this church but Christendom as a whole.

O'Malley *What happened at Vatican II* (2008) was the 21st ecumenical council¹⁹ produced 16 documents²⁰ that affirmed the congregation and the priest were co-workers in the liturgy (*Lumen Gentium* – the people of God)²¹, affirmation of visions of Mary²², the Immaculate Conception from the *Protoevangelion of James* that told of Mary being born without sin and one of only two times that a statement was made by the Holy Father ex-Cathedra²³ in 1854²⁴. Yet the council stopped short of ascending Mary to a co-redeemer status²⁵. Yet this proved just how valued this child who became the Mother of God is valued not only within the Mass, Liturgy or church year but also within the service work of the church.

¹⁷ McBrien, R.P. (1992). *Report on the church: Catholicism after Vatican II*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, p. Xiii.

¹⁸ Ibid p. 139.

¹⁹ O'Malley p. 4

²⁰ Ibid p. 23

²¹ Ibid p. 52

²² Ibid p. 188

²³ Ex-Cathedra is when a Pope uses there infallibility upon a doctrine.

²⁴ Ibid p.188

²⁵ Ibid p. 188

The Vatican II²⁶ documents themselves speak to the believer or inquirer today in shaping a theology of Mary. *Lumen Gentium* 15 points out that devotion to Mary, along with the Eucharist and Episcopate draw the Roman Catholic Church closer to God. 50. Stipulates that a church in the idea of pilgrim has always venerated Mary with the holiest of Angels to inspire those who choose to imitate the power that is in the life and story of Mary. Mary released humanity from our self imposed oppression over Original Sin (a man created construct). Her life shows us Nirvana realized if you will, as perfection in charity, action, love and grace to make the Incarnation possible (52-56).

This has shaped the current Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church that others will respond to. The Catechism²⁷ states that “the church turns their eyes to Mary; in her the church is already the `all-holy” (829). As well that “Mary goes before all in the holiness that is Christ. Marian dimension of the church precedes Petrine.” (773). Not only is Mary the source of the all-holy, the Mother of God supersedes the authority of the seat of Peter (Pope), which for the discovery of apparitions in later chapters does tend to upset the apple cart. The result of this is encompassed in 973, for Mary is Mother of wherever Christ is the head of the Body. That points directly that Mary is the mother of all members of the Body of Christ (963) that her holiness birthed us and it is within this unity of womb that our salvation work of Jesus happens from conception²⁸ to death (964) to resurrection and assumption if we are to grow doctrine. Yet for a truly devout Catechist of the Catholic doctrine, one must note that Mary was born wholly of

²⁶ Flannery, Austin, O.P. ed. (2007). *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican Council II: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language, 6th printing*. Vatican City: Dominican Publications.

²⁷ Vatican (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church 2nd Edition Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday.

²⁸ The womb of Mary was sanctified by the Holy Spirit (490) which is why she is proclaimed Theo-thokos (Mother of God) by Elizabeth (495).

God's grace (490). This grace (Immaculate Conception if you will) if further deepened in her virginal motherhood which leads the church to confess this virgin status of the post-enlightenment world as real and perpetual (499) as the sign of her faith (506).

This sign of faith is used by Mary in her prayers (dialogues with God) after Christ ascended are what kick started the church into being (965) and she is the still living model of the faith and charity that is possible within Christ (967).

John Shelby Spong, former Episcopal Bishop of Newark who moves within the Progressive Christian circles presents his own thoughts on how the Marian story needs to adapt to maintain relevance today. In his 2001 work *A New Christianity for a New World: why traditional faith is dying and how a new faith is being born* he points out that the divine nature of Christ is tied to the miraculous and literal means of the Mary conception and nativity stories²⁹ Spong traces the story of Mary from what is believed the earliest Gospel source in Mark 3:20-35 & 6:1-6 where Mary leads the family to confront Jesus who has become an embarrassment to them, which with the more recent gospel stories changes to a more inclusive and celebratory relationship³⁰. This text also goes on to explore some fundamental challenges Spong saw with the Mary story. The ideal of a post partum virgin because the hymen had to be preserved³¹ which became more important with the dawning of the Enlightenment and the realization that women's wombs were not just incubators for male sperm, hence women could be a source for original sin as well³². This sin challenge meant that not only did Mary need to

²⁹ Spong, J.S. (2001). *A New Christianity for a new World: why traditional faith is dying and how a new faith is being born*, San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, p.2.

³⁰ Ibid p. 91

³¹ Ibid p. 112

³² Ibid p. 119

remain a perpetual virgin³³, but she herself could not be soiled with sin and hence the Immaculate Conception³⁴ that almost 100 years after this statement was made, then another *ex-Cathedra* proclamation in 1950 where Mary was now assumed bodily into Heaven³⁵.

Spong's exploration of Mary did not stop with his 2001 text, it continued in 2011 with *Reclaiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World* where he postulates on the outside of years Jesus lived 6 BCE to 32 CE, most probably 4 BCE to 30 CE³⁶ which lends credence to the value that Mary was between 13-15 years at time of conception, and 37-39 at time of Jesus' crucifixion. The reality of the crucifixion with the style of teaching Jesus' chose was a daily reality for a Jew raised Roman occupation³⁷ and within a small community where he was known as an illegitimate child. This was not the messiah many could cling to, yet the Annunciation text in Gospel of Matthew 1:18-21 to Joseph allows Jesus to be affixed to an earthly father³⁸ within the line of David that Paul puts forward in Romans 1:3 that gives rise to these later Nativity stories³⁹.

As one reads Spong, they need to understand that all this is a progression that sprung from his 1992 text *Born of a Woman: A Bishop rethinks the Virgin Birth and Treatment of Women by a Male dominated church*. It is in this text where he astutely points out that Fundamentalist Christians distort the Bible by taking it literally, while

³³ Ibid p.111

³⁵ Ibid p.112

³⁶ Spong, J.S. (2011). *Reclaiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World*, San Francisco, CA: Harper One p.212.

³⁷ Ibid p. 213

³⁸ Ibid p. 324

³⁹ Ibid p. 211

Liberals distort it by not taking it seriously.⁴⁰ This is why Spong stands in public when he does his theological and ethical reflections on Christendom, as a means to release Christendom from the darkness it is bonded in.⁴¹ It is this darkness of bondage that has relegated women to be defined by nothing more than their sexual function of virgin or whore; barren or birthing vehicle⁴². To begin to break the chains, Spong postulates, one first has to remove literalness of virgin from the Nativity⁴³ as the first written words of the account in Galatians 4:4-5 circa 49-55 CE do not give anything mystical outside of normal sexual birthing of a son by a couple (which is supported by Romans 1:3-4).⁴⁴

Spong asserts that it is these stories that show Jesus was born a nobody in a backwater town of Nazareth, and that in the earliest church writings no one truly knew who his father was and as such he could be illegitimate.⁴⁵ This illegitimacy was not truly cleared up in the Gospel of Matthew where the five women listed in his genealogy are all tainted by sexual impropriety of the times, and as such these could be a foreshadowing of Mary's own compromised sexual nature.⁴⁶ The writer who has taken the name Matthew attempts to tie Gospel moments to Torah moments throughout, which is why he has the Joseph (earth father) character contemplating Mary's fate after the annunciation as it will take the reader back to the story of Deuteronomy 22:23-27⁴⁷ and unfortunately to the rising new religious sect (cult) calls into question if the Messiah

⁴⁰ Spong, John Shelby (1992). *Born of a Woman: A Bishop rethinks the Virgin Birth and treatment of women in a male dominated church*, p.xvi.

⁴¹ Ibid p. xviii

⁴² Ibid p. 2

⁴³ Ibid p. 3

⁴⁴ Ibid p. 23-25

⁴⁵ Spong (1992), p.41

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 69-70

⁴⁷ Ibid p. 73

was conceived by adultery, seduction, or even rape.⁴⁸ Matthew's literary *faux pas* for the fledgling movement are compounded by Luke's account of the Annunciation that sees Mary ask how bearing a child is possible without having a husband, not Spong points out, having had sexual intercourse.⁴⁹ This device opens to the discourse on was Mary already pregnant, not by God or her betrothed but by another (with the means as noted earlier in question still).⁵⁰ The method of the time since women were consequently treated as less than human, and lower on the property totem pole than livestock led to a societal norm of women being violated and simply cast out for "their" transgression of being raped.⁵¹ This is confirmed Spong believes in the Magnificat because pregnancy by a betrothed would not be scandalous, but through rape would be, if this is not how Mary conceived, and then the Magnificat fits better in Spong's estimation within Elizabeth's story.⁵²

Spong's work takes the reader to the earliest Canonical Gospel, Mark, where in 3:32ff Jesus is referred to as the son of Mary, not Joseph or any other male. This in itself screams that Jesus was an illegitimate child and not known as even Joseph's son within his own town.⁵³

⁴⁸ Spong (1992) p. 126.

⁴⁹ Ibid p. 127

⁵⁰ Ibid p. 127

⁵¹ Ibid p. 127

⁵² Ibid p. 128

⁵³ Ibid p. 164.

Marcus Borg of the Jesus Seminar supports Spong's postulating that the Nativity story are not literal, nor historical, or even central to the earliest Christian Movement⁵⁴. What is known for truth is that Jesus was a devout, and socialized and born Jewish⁵⁵ with four known brothers and an unknown number of sisters⁵⁶. This culminates for Borg that the birth narratives are symbolic stories created by early Christians to add importance to the story of Christ⁵⁷.

John Dominic Crossan of the Jesus Seminar supports this theory in his work *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus* (1998) where he notes that historians are mute on the annunciation of Mary text because it is not a historical story, but a transcendental story.⁵⁸

A side note on the Marian history would not be full without a trip to former Anglican Priest, ex-Reporter, current author, Tom Harpur's twin works *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light* (2004) and its sequel, *Water into Wine: the Empowering Vision of the Gospels* (2007) that removes all history and essentially relegates the Gospel to nothing more than plagiarized Sumerian⁵⁹/Egyptian⁶⁰ mythology with Hebrew names instead of the deities.⁶¹ Even though this may seem a harsh reflection there is some useful things to explore. Harpur equates the *Magnificat* in Luke

⁵⁴ Borg, M.J. (1994). *Meeting Jesus again for the First Time: Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith*, Waterville, Maine: Thorndike Press p. 54-55.

⁵⁵ Ibid p. 52

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 59

⁵⁷ Ibid p. 56

⁵⁸ Crossan, J.D. (1998). *The Birth of Christianity: discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus*, San Francisco: Harper Collins p. 28.

⁵⁹ Harpur, T. (2004). *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light*, Toronto, ON: Thomas Allen p.5

⁶⁰ Ibid p. 5. Harpur leans on Timothy Freke's writings that Horus was the Egyptian Christ, and Isis was the Egyptian Mary, 1000 years before the Gospel story.

⁶¹ Harpur, T. (2004). *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light*, Toronto, ON: Thomas Allen.

Harpur, T. (2007). *Water into Wine: the Empowering Vision of the Gospels*, Toronto, ON: Thomas Allen.

as an expansion and reminder upon Hannah's song within 1 Samuel 2.⁶² Yet he follows this up in his sequel by pointing out that the Temple account in Mark when Jesus was 12 years old contradicts the annunciation narratives of Matthew and Luke.⁶³ These works may seem out of place, but it shows even those attempting to leave the faith still have to wrestle through the reality of not only the Christ, but also His mother.

Bart D. Ehrman, a leading New Testament scholar whose studies have led him from Disciple of Christ to Agnostic puts forward thoughts on Mary in his *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scriptures and the Faiths we never knew* (2003) for it is within this work that we are walked through the story of Anna and Joachim, Mary's parents within the Proto-Gospel of James from the Middle Ages that creates the Immaculate Conception of Mary in a parallel to Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1-2⁶⁴. It is within this proto-gospel that Mary manages to conceive and birth with never breaking her hymen⁶⁵ ensuring not only a virgin mother, but a perpetual virgin.

This is only a beginning as there are many other resources about Mary to explore. This includes narratives around her apparitions, the writings of the most devoted Marian Pope, John Paul II, and more writings from progressive Christians. The Literary Review will also explore other texts around her devotion, prayers, rosary, biblical, extra-biblical to name but a few during this journey of research.

⁶² Harpur (2004) p.125.

⁶³ Harpur (2007) p. 40.

⁶⁴ Ehrman, B.D. (2003). *Lost Christianities: The Battles for the scriptures and the faiths we never knew*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press p. 207-209

⁶⁵ Ibid p. 209

Chapter Two

Liturgy & Pseudopigrapha

“Mary is the rainbow of the eternal covenants of mankind’s Salvation”

-Pope Pius X⁶⁶

The cry of the Reformationists was “*Sola Scriptura*⁶⁷”; the cry of the reforming Celtic Church in England was “*Via Media*⁶⁸” and for the counter-reformation within Roman Catholicism before Vatican II it was tradition and ecumenical councils. Quite a Christian quagmire to explore the idea of the personhood of Mary of Nazareth⁶⁹, never mind the idea of theology or devotion to her. Blessed Pope John Paul II in his 1994 text *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* that Marian devotion is a remarkable expression of Christology.⁷⁰ This happens because the first time a believer can truly enter into the story of Christ, can be through the eyes of Mary. From Gabriel’s annunciation it is hard for Mary to foresee the true horror of what the Crucifixion will be for her child⁷¹. It is this journey that any veneration or devotion to the Mother of God in B.P. John Paul II’s estimation is “centered in Christ, for it is rooted in the mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, and redemption.”⁷² For the Christian then, Mary becomes yet another way into the story of Jesus. For non-Christians, such as our Muslim brothers and sisters who

⁶⁶ Ripley, Francis J. (1969). *Mary, Mother of the Church*. Rockford, IL, USA: Tan Books and Publishers Inc.

⁶⁷ Latin for Scripture alone

⁶⁸ Latin for Middle road/path. Postulated by Cardinal John Newman while still a member of the Church of England in a paper where there was a dialogue between the Clergy and Laity to discern the middle path between the Papacy and Reformationist.

⁶⁹ Please note at this point the use of “Virgin Mary” unless expressly used in the source of quotation is being dropped for the easier nomenclature of Mary of Nazareth or Mary, as the term Virgin which modern believers hold as the hymen of a woman intact, actually can simply be translated as young, unwed or adolescent.

⁷⁰ Pope John Paul II. (1994). *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Toronto, ON, CAN: Alfred Knopf. p. 45.

⁷¹ Ibid p. 67

⁷² Ibid p.213

venerate Mary as the mother of the great prophet Jesus⁷³, Mary's life and story becomes a bridge to grow the table of Communion between faiths.

This is why one needs to spend time not only on the canonical stories of Mary selected by Constanine's control scholars, but the other sources out there. This informs the cry of Only Scripture from the Reformationist. Yet for the Anglican or Catholic the scripture is also informed by tradition, reason and experience that is reflected in the Liturgy⁷⁴. B.P. John Paul II writes in his memoir, *Rise Let us be on Our way*, "follow the example of Mary, listen to the Word of God, and ponder it in your heart if we are to serve."⁷⁵

So what are ways that one can reflect or ponder upon Mary's life as they dive into the Scriptures. Here is a list of some of the Feast days of Mary⁷⁶:

January 1 - Solemnity of Mary
January 8 - Our Lady of Prompt Succor
February 2 - Presentation of the Lord
February 11 - Our Lady of Lourdes
March 25 - Annunciation
May 13 - Our Lady of Fatima
May 31 - Visitation
June 27 - Our Mother of Perpetual Help
July 16 - Our Lady of Mount Carmel
August 15 - Assumption (**One of the Main Feast Days**)
August 22 - Queenship of Mary
September 8 - Birth of Mary (**One of the Main Feast Days**)

⁷³ Ibid p. 93

⁷⁴ Latin for "work of the people".

⁷⁵ John Paul II. (2004). *Rise Let us be on Our Way*. New York, NY, USA: Warner Books, p. 43.

⁷⁶ Taken from http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_are_the_8_feast_days_of_the_Blessed_Virgin_Mary retrieved on 15 January 2013.

September 12 - The Most Holy Name of Mary
 September 15 - Our Lady of Sorrows
 September 24 - Our Lady of Walsingham, England
 October 7 - Our Lady of the Rosary
 October 8 - Our Lady of Good Remedy
 November 21 - Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
 December 8 - Immaculate Conception (**One of the Main Feast Days**)
 December 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe
 Among the most prominent Marian feast days in the Eastern Orthodox and
 Greek-Catholic liturgical calendars are:
 March 25 Annunciation of the Theotokos
 August 15 Dormition of the Theotokos
 September 8 Nativity of the Theotokos
 November 21 Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple
 December 26 Synaxis of the Theotokos

With the above noted (and many not listed) days of veneration, Mary has many prayers and services dedicated to her story both in the ancient world of Israel under Roman Occupation, but also to the modern life of Mary today through both her church accepted and laity accepted (if not church approved) apparitions to the people of God (these to be explored in that chapter).

The Staff of Leaflet Missal (1976) put together a short work on Mary, *Queen of Heaven*, that shares Pius XII thoughts that her mission was not only received from God, but her life is most closely linked to the mysteries of Jesus⁷⁷ which is why for us discovery of a deeper understanding of Marian thought on our own lives happens in the mystic dimensions of our faith. For these reasons among many, this peasant has been declared the Queen of the Universe crowned by her own son, Jesus⁷⁸ and we are called to imitation of her humility, kindness, compassion towards those whom we meet.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Staff of Leaflet Missal. (1976). *Queen of Heaven*. St. Paul, MN, USA: Leaflet Missal, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid p. 5

⁷⁹ Ibid p. 9.

Mary's story revealed within the Liturgy and the Feast Days illuminates partly the 7 sorrows (<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=248>), which are examples of living faith thru times of persecution⁸⁰ for us today. It is this lived life that led an eighteenth century Jesuit, Father Lalomhia, May as Mary's month, which today has become the Sunday of Mothering, or Mother's Day⁸¹. The rest of the short work explores Marian devotion in the 20th century, and how Mary came to be named a co-redeemer because she willingly surrendered her Son to death, while touching upon recent apparitions to show how Mary is still active in the Body of Christ today.

At the Prayer Meeting in Assisi Pope John Paul II stated that the Paschal Mystery has ended, because Mary's aid in revealing God's mercy has sealed it.⁸² For it is within her experience of the Crucifixion that no one else can know because she is the Mother of God, that she becomes a co-revealer of the Grace of the Universe.⁸³

Benedict XVI writes in 2007 to members of his church that is it within Mary that perfect fulfillment is found for the human life, for within being the Mother of God she becomes Mother to us all. This motherhood of divine love is fulfilled with her assumption bodily alive into Heaven and is humanity's hope that God will do the same for us, as how God came to Mary is how God comes to us, but it is up to us to say yes (32:101). For the freedom is being completely open to God.

The current Pontiff goes on to point out that through the rhythm of the Liturgy that Mary becomes the model for all of us on how to receive Jesus (32:104) because it is Mary that receives God unconditionally (immaculate, 32:104). It is this devotion that

⁸⁰ Ibid p. 14-15

⁸¹ Ibid p. 19.

⁸² Dormann, Johannes. (1998). *Pope John Paul II's Theological Journey to the Prayer Meeting of the Religions in Assisi, Part II Volume 2*. Kansas City: Angelus Press, p. 152-153.

⁸³ Ibid p. 155.

shows us how to live our faith through the surrender to God as we live out the sacrifice of our lives (32:103).

One can shape their Lenten and Good Friday Journey with the Living Cosmic Christ by reflection on the (Stations) Way of the Cross through Mary's eyes: <http://starcatholic.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Marys-Way-of-the-Cross.pdf> as within the story we too often lose the point that Mary was not just a believer in Christ Jesus, but was the woman who carried him in her womb, that raised him, that cared for him, that he called Mum.

For a sample of Novenas⁸⁴ to Mary I would suggest going here: http://www.albini.net/materdei/?page_id=196 . The Novenas center the individual for a time on the idea of Mary, which then as John Paul II pointed out this centering on the story of the *Theoktos* brings us into her womb to birth out the mystery of the Cosmic Christ for us.

One Novena is *Mary's Fiat* (Mary's Eyes)⁸⁵ that frames Mary rightfully as the first disciple of Christ⁸⁶. In fact, the way she becomes pregnant outside of marriage is what makes her such a strong voice for the forgotten as she has lived through being in a vulnerable and dangerous position that has opened her up to punishments ranging from simple divorce to capital punishment.⁸⁷ Yet in the midst of all this, she still says Yes to God, even while she bears witness to her son's execution.⁸⁸ Why are these structured prayer meditations important, simply as this one shows, it forces the prayer to reflect on

⁸⁴ At least nine days in succession of prayer on a set theme.

⁸⁵ O'Malley, S. and Eimer, R. (1994). *Mary's Fiat: A Marian Novena*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, p.4

⁸⁶ Ibid p. 5

⁸⁷ Ibid p. 7

⁸⁸ Ibid p. 7

the reality of Mary. As she loves on her neighbour with the visitation to Elizabeth offering aid and her services as a mid-wife that reflects to us today our need of collecting food and clothing for the needy, praying for the sick, consoling the grieving and other acts of mercy out of the love of God that frames the importance of the Annunciation to Visitation (the gestation of Christ) for the believer today.⁸⁹ This structure also takes us through the story of Mary and her many Yes' to the work of God: Nativity birth, Persecution through their flight into Egypt, Parenthood (Jesus circumcised), God's Mysterious Plan (Jesus in the Temple), Cry of the poor (wedding at Cana), Suffering (crucifixion as Mary does not run like the other Apostles), to her Son's mission.⁹⁰ It is this life lived out that led Pope Paul VI in calling Mary a star of Evangelization, as Mary keeps reflecting regardless of our own life circumstance to center our life on Christ, and our actions on the other.⁹¹

From Novenas there are also services for the main three styles check out:

1. Anglican Liturgical Texts:

<http://www.anglican.ca/resources/liturgicaltextsonline/>

2. Orthodox Liturgical Texts:

<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/liturgy/liturgy.html>

3. Roman Catholic Missal:

<http://churchmousec.wordpress.com/2009/05/28/new-roman-missal-version-online-here/>

As a trained liturgist this writer could spend copious pages dissecting the above liturgical texts to prove Marian theology as important to the faith formation of today's

⁸⁹ Ibid p. 10

⁹⁰ Ibid pp. 13-30.

⁹¹ Ibid p. 31. For other thoughts on Mary see Charles M. Magnam's (2002) *Holy Mary, Our Companion*

Christian. Yet, the Liturgy itself is the work of the people, so a challenge in formation is to be laid down in which the Novenas, and the prayer services are taken up during the calendar on these Marian feasts for each believer either individually or corporately to enter into the story of the Peasant Girl of Nazareth, and feel how the Holy Spirit shapes you⁹².

This brings us in our exploration of the foundations of Mary, to the idea of the Pseudopigrapha, which is a fancy Greek word, for Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical, which is simply a complicated way of saying the extra-Scriptural writings. One needs to approach the history of Scripture, much like the History of any literary character franchise. There are thousands of works, but which ones becomes the “canon” or that which all is measured by, and which are just fun stories. The Bible functions the same way. There were those that made the cut once Constantine started working on the church, and there was many cast aside, and many more that are simply lost to flames of the purging of antiquity.

Within these writings however we find key concepts of Mary, such as in the *Infancy Gospel of James* where the Roman Church teases out the concept of the Immaculate Conception. Here are some of these works that have survived the centuries of suppression, persecution and destruction:

1. The Nativity of Mary:

<http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/LostBooks/theGospelOfTheNativityOfMary.htm>

⁹² It is in Thompson, Augustine (2012). *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography*. Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, p. 116 that we are reminded that St. Francis called Mary the bride of the Holy Spirit.

2. Apocryphal Works on the Assumption of Mary:

<http://www.swartzentrover.com/cotor/bible/Bible/A&P/NTA&P/Acts/Acts%20of%20Philip.htm>

3. Infancy Gospel of James:

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/infancyjames.html>

4. The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of our Saviour:

[http://www.aren.org/prison/documents/religion/Pseudepigrapha/The%20Arabic%20Gospel%20of%20the%20Infancy%20of%20the%20Saviour%20%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.aren.org/prison/documents/religion/Pseudepigrapha/The%20Arabic%20Gospel%20of%20the%20Infancy%20of%20the%20Saviour%20%20(1).pdf)

As noted, this list is not exhaustive, but is a means for one to begin the exploration of the character of Mary outside the scriptures. As with scriptures, or any folk/legend/myth writing one should approach centered, with an open willingness for the Holy Spirit to bring one's own experience, the universal tradition, the words on the page and reason together to build upon understanding to discern the nature of the writing, what it means for the broader church today, but more importantly what this writing is speaking to them in this time and place.

For even though these writings have been cast out of the "canon" per se they are still used to form theology throughout the history of the church, much like the historic creeds have on the character of Mary. For it is in Mary we actually find a genesis for some common ground between two theologians that have not seen eye to eye. John Paul II, and Matthew Fox, the Dominican Priest that was defrocked during his papacy for the advent of Creation Spirituality and spear heading the beach head of wisdom's return to Christianities.

John Paul II's (1996) *Gift and Mystery* is a memoir that records the Marian thread throughout his call and the shaping of his vocation, how this thread interwove with the fabric of him to bring him to Christ.⁹³ Which finds an echo in Matthew Fox's (1988) *Coming of the Cosmic Christ* where he reminisces that as a youth his attraction lay in the Saturday Masses which were celebrations for Mary, and used wisdom texts (as in Judaism Wisdom was feminine) and cosmic language.⁹⁴ It is this Marian thread of wisdom, freedom, and mysticism we are to tug of to reveal the spiritualist heart of the Marian Liberation Theology in the 21st Century. The apparitions of Mary tie the Mother of the Christianities to an ancient apparition/manifestation heritage within the spiritual realms of this world from Eastern religions/philosophies to Indigenous Wisdom traditions and to institutionalized ritual within Mainstream Christianities. Mary shows it is no longer about climbing Jacob's Ladder to bring the Reign of God here on earth, but dancing the circle dance, stretching it ever wider...

⁹³ Pope John Paul II (1996). *Gift and Mystery*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, p. 27-28.

⁹⁴ Fox, Matthew. (1988). *Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. San Francisco, CA, USA: Harper San Francisco, p.52.

Chapter Three

Mary's Circle Dance

(Apparitions are not just a Catholic Thang)

Mary is more than just the sum of a few verses in the Canonical Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. As has been shown up to this point she has had quite the dynamic life, and is still a literary figure of much debate with theologians and historians. Beyond that her life has shaped the devotional life of billion plus followers of her son, as the one that birthed God incarnate, and as such it is through her that we connect deeper with the living Cosmic Christ.

As the wisdom traditions show us, it is through the circles created by the women to share wisdom, the dances and legends passed down to the generations while doing chores and life together, that true discipleship happens. Eastern religions and Indigenous spirituality does not just limit this to humanity or the living as vessels of speaking to us. Many in the West have taken to their own form of ancestor communication by rediscovering Pagan/Druid/Wicca traditions, or entering into the universalism found in spiritualism, where a true Medium can create a bridge between those who have passed or are waiting to pass to us.

It is within this circle that Mary continues to dance for us, as she has probably appeared as many times as there are humans currently in this world, and no, one does not need to have been a card carrying "Christian" to be privileged to her wisdom or being invited to the table of the Cosmic Christ.

James' (2010) *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* reminds us of the powerful story of Mary as we may come to believe it historically. A strong reminder in Mary's circumstance of betrothal sadly is how many women are still forced to live today. This is nothing more than a legal arrangement made between her Father and the suitor (Joseph) that is a binding contract as much as the actual marriage ceremony is, and even includes the exchanging of money with the main outcome of the business contract for her to be the incubator for Joseph's sperm to produce sons.⁹⁵ This does create a quandary for a young woman already sold and paid for to appear pregnant by another outside of the betrothal contract, and even outside of the marriage consummation when it was not the purchaser vouching for the growing baby in uteri.⁹⁶

This new reality with Mary having stepped outside of her cultural customs and norms, in her brilliance of saying YES to God, now opens Mary up to the shame reactions from not only her family, but her purchaser. The parents if she was still her property would well be within their rights for an "honour killing" in current vernacular, but because she was destined to be fully Joseph's property her fate was in his hands: Death or Divorce.⁹⁷ Death would entail the men of the village (12 year olds and up) taking her, beating her, mocking her, and delivering her outside the city gates where the outcasts were and stoning her to death as prescribed in Levitical Law. Divorce would mean she could not go back to her family, she as a pregnant woman would be outside the protection of the village, and more than likely would be a beggar, but under the Roman Empire would become a sex trade worker or be rounded up in one of the culls.

⁹⁵ James, Carolyn Custis (2010). *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women*. Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, p.144.

⁹⁶ Ibid p. 145

⁹⁷ Ibid p. 145

Yet Joseph joins his young property, in a drastic about face for an aged labourer and devout Israelite, Joseph chooses Mary for her YES to God.⁹⁸ This is the character of the man that would raise the Messiah with his mother, Mary.

As Jesus grew up, it was his mother that he would seek to care for as a good Jewish lad. Let's be honest, after the Temple seen when he was 12 years old Joseph vanishes from the story. Some have said he died of natural causes because he was much older than Mary, some have reported he may have been killed by a Roman...but at the very least between age of 12 to 30 years old Joseph was gone from the story and Mary was now a widow, the first apostle for the Cosmic Christ, she was now a widow in the world.⁹⁹ Yet Mary had a strong voice in Jesus' egalitarian community¹⁰⁰, otherwise how can James' her other son's meteoric rise to Bishop of Jerusalem happen so quickly after his conversion to The Way. In fact, by the Fourth Century C.E. Mary had become so firmly rooted within the Christian mythos that worship of her became equated by Epiphanius as akin to the worship of the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah that aided Israel in being sent into exile.¹⁰¹ Scratch the surface with Epiphanius' was a misogynist who wanted to silence the role of women within the church as the Marian stream of belief (part of the Christianities lost to antiquity) was truly egalitarian in that priests were both male and female and Marian worship was part of the normal worship of Christ, yet there is no record of when Marian worship began.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ James, p. 146

⁹⁹ Kraemer, Ross Shepherd (1992). *Her Share of Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid p. 141

¹⁰¹ Ibid p. 166

¹⁰² Ibid p. 166

Yet this struggle that Epiphanius attempted to put down for the 51% of humanity's striving for equality within the Body of Christ. An equality that God created humanity with, and Jesus' community lived out, that once Constantine truly brought the religion into the fore of the Empire, it was lost. Joanna Manning (1999) in *Is the Pope Catholic: A woman confronts her church* challenges why the Body of Christ recoils at the concept of Mother or feminine language being used for the Holy Mystery.¹⁰³ Manning's frame of reference is Roman Catholicism in their suppression of women¹⁰⁴, because even though Mary is the Mother of God, God cannot be a Mother or effeminate or feminine, but only a male because it is within man that God's inner life is reflected.¹⁰⁵ Where the purchase of what we today would see as a child bride in First Century CE Israel was to produce sons for the purchaser, the church is still teaching that the ultimate fulfillment of womanhood is motherhood. To which Manning retorts "if motherhood, is women's supreme fulfillment & destiny, women are made in God's image, doesn't it also follow that motherhood has its source in God."¹⁰⁶

Manning hits a home run of the greatest travesty of the Christianities since Constantine, and that is the loss within the Holy Mystery of the Divine Feminine. Or as Graham Phillips (2005) in *The Virgin Mary Conspiracy: The True Father of Christ and the Tomb of the Virgin* that there is intense speculation of a connection between the

¹⁰³ Manning, Joanna. (1999). *Is the Pope Catholic? A Woman Confronts her Church*. Toronto, ON, CAN: Malcolm Lester Books, p.69.

¹⁰⁴ Most conservative or evangelical Christianities can relate to this, but within Liberal Christianities there are many still oppressed groups and this is who Mary, or the Feminine becomes. Who would be Mary in your church's tale: another race, culture, LGBTTIQ, Differently Abled, a certain generation?

¹⁰⁵ Manning, p. 69

¹⁰⁶ Ibid p. 69

Holy Grail and the Holy Mother.¹⁰⁷ The Holy Grail is what allegedly the Knights Templar guard, it is seen as some as the source of eternal life, the divine connection to the living Christ (ala the chalice from the Last Supper). The connection of Mary with Grail lore is brilliant for the simple reason that in Grandmother Wisdom, it is through the power of the woman that the sacred is birthed. The sacred in Panentheism is that we exist continually in the Holy Mystery and the Holy Mystery within us.

The constant presence of Mary within the ancient stories and within the ancient church is to remind us of the completeness each member of humanity holds within our *Imageo Dei*¹⁰⁸. Estes (2011) continues to build this foundation for understanding the current apparitions of Our Lady in her work, *Untie the Strong Woman* that reminds the reader that Mary is a specialist in love lessons that do not weaken or demean or make a woman less than, but rather it is a love lesson that strengthens and empowers and individual because her story is not a fence that divides or keeps out, but a gate that welcomes in.¹⁰⁹ It is within the story of Mary that protection to the vulnerable, no exceptions emerges as a baseline within the love of God, a lesson that needs to be taught and passed down through the familial ties.¹¹⁰

This is what reminds us why Mary is the most prominent female figure in the Christianities and is considered the female overseer of Heaven.¹¹¹ These are the beliefs that have shaped a people in their faith, and why it is Mary that continues to speak to millions today. Let's be honest as a church universal, sadly too many have co-opted the

¹⁰⁷ Phillips, Graham (2005). *The Virgin Mary Conspiracy: The True Father of Christ and the Tomb of the Virgin*. Rochester, NY, USA: Bear & Company p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Latin for Image of God, how humanity was created within the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁰⁹ Estes, Clarissa Pinkola (2011). *Untie the Strong Woman*. Boulder, CO, USA: Sounds True, p. 19.

¹¹⁰ Ibid p. 39-67.

¹¹¹ Virtue, Doreen (2012). *Mary, Queen of Angels*. Carlsbad, CA, USA: Hay House Inc., p. xiii-xv

name of Jesus and God to do great evils or vile corruptions upon this creation, it is when Mary speaks to those praying with their Mind's Eye that a song of liberation comes through for dancing the circle.¹¹²

The dance of Mary has produced miracles that even the sceptical church fathers of modernity cannot dismiss, or sideline. In Lourdes there have been 67 healings recorded and validated (just a snippet of healings that have been going on for centuries).¹¹³ The healings are not just the run of the mill physical healings, but have been on the level of emotional healings (spiritual as well).¹¹⁴ Connell's (2009) *The Secrets of Mary: Gifts from the Blessed Mother* expands more on these topics from Virtue, as it tracks 2000 years of writings, art and prayer to reveal the prophet that is about to be discussed in the following and preceding pages: Mary of Nazareth.

Mary is tenacious. She is willing to work with the traditions of a people to shine through to ensure a justice is done or an injustice is corrected or a miracle happens. Bernadette of Lourdes first saw the appearing Mary as a figure of Light¹¹⁵ which when revealed to the people of Lourdes allowed them the ability to connect Mary to what they already understood and that being a tradition of Fairy Queens and blessed virgins appearing to children.¹¹⁶

It is children Mary likes to appear and talk to the most. Could this be a continued living of the Gospel teaching Christ to come as a child? Or is it simply that when it

¹¹² Virtue p. 11

¹¹³ Ibid p. 21

¹¹⁴ Ibid p. 37

¹¹⁵ Taylor, Therese (2003). *Bernadette of Lourdes: her Life, Death and Visions*. London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.60.

¹¹⁶ Ibid p. 65

comes to apparitions¹¹⁷ that children are more open to the supernatural and spiritual than cynical adults?

Connell (2007) in *The Visions of the Children: The apparitions of the Blessed Mother at Medjugorje* recalls the visions that began in 1981 and that it was Mary most humble of all His servants elected to be the messenger.¹¹⁸ These Ukrainian apparitions in 1987 was seen by ½ million people, 100,000 saw her in the former Yugoslavia.¹¹⁹ Mary took the name in Medjugorje Queen of Peace and her message was quite simple, bring an end to war and hatred (a very necessary message for the area) where she has been making daily appearances since 1982.¹²⁰

Anderson & Chavez's (2009) *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love* records a historical fact of the appearance of Our Lady to the Aztec Catholics whom the missionaries were withholding the sacraments from due to distrust of their conversion.¹²¹ Juan Diego was who Our Lady appeared in the midst and in spite of the brutalities, genocides and cannibalism the church had foisted on the people, Mary bore no admonishments but rather L-O-V-E.¹²² The love that Mary brought to Juan was a love that brought dignity at a personal level that acted as an antidote for spiritual illness created from turning away from love as it shifted love from a relational emotion to a

¹¹⁷ Please note: With the millions, even billions of apparitions of Our Lady throughout history that when it comes to Apparitions of Mary this is just a taste, and the author encourages your own research for what liberation calls resonate most for you.

¹¹⁸ Connell, Janice T. (2007). *The Visions of the Children: The apparitions of the Blessed Mother at Medjugorje*. New York, NY, USA: St. Martin's Press, p. xiv.

¹¹⁹ Ibid p. xvi-xxx

¹²⁰ Ibid p. 16-29.

¹²¹ Anderson, Carl and Msgr. Eduardo Chavez. (2009). *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, p. xiv-xv.

¹²² Ibid p. xvi

sacred practice.¹²³ It was on a hilltop in December 9, 1531 CE that Our Lady shining as the Sun first appeared to Diego using both Nahuatl and Spanish Mary explained the oneness and universality of God.¹²⁴

The shining lady continues to discourse with individuals in Guadalupe and reaffirming the sacrament of love, but discloses her name to Diego's elderly uncle, Juan Bernadrone as "The Perfect Virgin Holy Mary of Guadalupe".¹²⁵ The true confirmation that the message was from God Him/Herself as the Theoktos had come to spread the new-old commandment anew. This shows that the messenger had to be outside of the much aligned name of Christ, who at this time in the Reformation era of bloody war and power struggles had become a tool of genocide himself sadly, but his Mum, had a clean image.

It is Mary's errand of Love for God in 16th century Mexico apparition of Our Lady was a dramatic invitation to humanity to understand the Holy Mystery by delving deeply into the Mystery through the living of love.¹²⁶ Mary shattered the control of the abusive missionaries' top-down evangelization and control methodology, by bringing God directly to the people rooted in a highly personal relationship independent of imposed political and social hierarchies.¹²⁷ Mary the ultimate archetype of a believer, disciple, and apostle, the breathing archetype of the church itself with no contradiction between her in the scriptures and her apparitions...this Mary with a simple message of love

¹²³ Anderson & Chavez p. xvi.

¹²⁴ Ibid p. 6-8. The oneness and universality referred to is also echoed by Matthew Fox in the concept of one river, but many wells to drink from of the Holy Mystery.

¹²⁵ Ibid p. 20

¹²⁶ Ibid pp. 59-70

¹²⁷ Ibid p. 78

brought 9 million Aztecs into transformational relationship with God through igniting of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁸

Powerful, the church as the form of oppressor, truly the opiates of the masses as Marx stipulated. Mary breaking through and redeeming the name, life and story of her son from the evil it was used by men for. But this is not the last apparition to touch upon.

Rwanda. A country's name that still sends shivers down many persons spines. The true atrocity of colonisation lived out in a genocide crafted by colonisers, finally actualized in the 1990's by machete. Yet what is lost is the story that Ilibagiza and Erwin (2008) share in *Our Lady of Kibeho: Mary speaks to the World from the Heart of Africa* in which Our Lady and her Son attempted to heal a nation before the land ran crimson with the blood of God's children.

The truth of Power for God can never be told to humanity in terms that we can understand.¹²⁹ It was this understanding of power that the apparitions centered on during the actual genocide within the village of Kibeho, God's power in love¹³⁰ a different choice than murder. This was growing out of the earlier message to visionaries centered on God's love, how this will lead to living better lives, and more effective prayer, for if the hatred in the heart of Rwanda and the world was not surrendered the world would tip into the darkness of the abyss.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid pp. 78-160.

¹²⁹ Ilibagiza, Immaculee and Erwin, Steve (2008). *Our Lady of Kibeho: Mary speaks to the World from the Heart of Africa*. Carlsbad, CA, USA: Hay House Inc., p.xi.

¹³⁰ Ibid p. xvii

¹³¹ Ibid p. xvii

The author of the work became open to the idea of the apparition from the stories of Mary at Fatima which say biblical miracles moved into the here and now and this breaking into the modern world re-birthed the author's faith.¹³² The formula for her was simple, if Mary is real, then Jesus is real, and if both are real, then Dad had to be real (God).¹³³ Once one opens themselves to the presence of the Holy, it becomes quite easy to experience the world differently.

This experience was with Mary, who in Rwanda is known as "Mother of the Word".¹³⁴ But for the full story on Rwanda's Mary, it is not found in the time just before or during the Genocide, but rather the first apparition was on November 28, 1981.¹³⁵ Mary would connect with children again, as is usually her call, and with Alphonsie she reveals that she simply wants to be Mum, not a principal or boss, one of many revelations to come.¹³⁶

It is in these early apparitions that Our Lady of the Word opens individual's souls up to the Seven Sorrows¹³⁷:

1. Simeon stating Jesus would change the world but his suffering would be like a sword through her heart.
2. The Flight into Egypt.
3. 12 year old Jesus lost in Jerusalem.
4. Mary witnessing Jesus' agony on way to Calvary.

¹³² Ibid p. 10

¹³³ Ibid p. 11

¹³⁴ Ibid p. 14

¹³⁵ Ibid p. 31

¹³⁶ Ibid p. 44

¹³⁷ Ibid p. 96

5. Jesus on the Cross.
6. Receiving Jesus' body.
7. Placing her beloved boy in the tomb.

But within the sorrows revealed is the story of a refugee survivor of genocide. A Mum that watched as the world around her took her child away or possibly away at many different milestones. The question is would the nation listen to these sorrows and see the underlying warning and justice within them?

Not to be out done by his Mother, Jesus appears to a Pagan boy¹³⁸ and the second, to a Muslim girl¹³⁹. Mary had laid the ground work for the people to trust the Cosmic Christ again, not those that had corrupted the Gospel of Her Son who she wept for, but her true Son, and then her Son comes and dances with Mary. The circle is drawn wide as the message is not just to the “devout” but rather to all the children of God.

Mary would then move to one up her child, and appear to a visionary, Agnes, and the vision was rather direct. The warning was against promiscuity just as AIDS¹⁴⁰ was incubating to be the worst medical disaster in African history. For how can a society be healthy, without a healthy understanding of the dynamics of a healthy sexuality? The healthy sexuality not even being tied to where genitals go, or what not, but rather that healthy sexuality and sexual intercourse is found in loving relationships between equals where each party honours the others enough to ensure health and safety.

¹³⁸ Ibid p. 104

¹³⁹ Ibid p. 107

¹⁴⁰ Ibid p. 118

Mary, and her son, was creating quite a stir in transforming the nation from the corrupt dictatorship colonialism had left behind. So much so that the Government ran radio stations began to censure (limit) coverage of these apparitions, especially when the visionaries began fulfilling their role as prophet against the unjust system they lived in (the oppressive system & practices of Hutu majority upon Tutsi minority, a left over from colonialism that created a false racial divide).¹⁴¹

All of this, and the other apparitions, and many not even listed here tie into a long history of Mary appearing too many of God's children throughout history. The first reported apparition of Mary was in 40 CE while she still lived, she spiritually travelled to St. James the Greater in Spain.¹⁴²

The story of contemporary Mary is one of a prophet that continually forces the world back to looking at the heart of God—L-O-V-E. One may not have had an apparition, but there is still away to reflect back into the heart of God, by joining Mary in the birthing process of the Cosmic Christ into your life.

The Rosary (a compendium of the Gospel) was originally hidden on a person as a reminder to pray constantly.¹⁴³ John Paul II added five more mysteries of light (luminous) that were Marian in theory, focused on Jesus between birth and passion.¹⁴⁴

The Rosary is a method of self transformation, in which one can pray it as an ongoing meditation for God to bring peace by shaping one within the Gospel. These

¹⁴¹ Ibid p. 153

¹⁴² Ibid p. 160.

¹⁴³ McKenna, Megan (2004). *Praying the Rosary: A Complete Guide to the World's Most Popular form of Prayer*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday, p. 1-3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid p. 5

beads and prayers that include Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creeds, with the Liturgy of the Hours are two of the most used forms of Christian contemplation.¹⁴⁵ For one who prays the Rosary the thread that bonds the body of Christ are not the prayers or the beads, but the Word of God.¹⁴⁶ It is right for us to remember that the word of God is not the scriptures, but rather the incarnation of God, birthed by Mary into the world with all her story brought with it.

The power of her story still told through the apparitions today. It is not about the pain, the sorrow, but rather the freedom in the simple word she said at the annunciation: Y-E-S.

This is what we are to sit with in the next section as we explore the Canonical stories, what this yes means to us.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid p. 9-12

¹⁴⁶ Ibid p. 35

Chapter Four

The Story of the Peasant Girl who Answered God

Mary's story began as she was truly the first convert to the Incarnation when she said yes to God's plan at the Annunciation regardless of the consequences to her own life. This section will not do a disservice to our Jewish brothers and sisters by bastardizing their texts within the Hebrew Bible to prove Mary systematically; rather it will touch upon the scriptures that made it into the Canon of the Christian Testament.

Some of the earliest writings in the Christian Testament come from St. Paul of Tarsus, and there are scant verses that mention the Mother of Jesus of Nazareth (reproduced here, from the Contemporary English Version of the Christian Testament):

1. Galatians:

- *⁴ But when the time was right, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law, ⁵ so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children. (4:4-5).*
- *²⁸ My friends, you were born because of this promise, just as Isaac was. ²⁹ But the child who was born in the natural way made trouble for the child who was born because of the Spirit. The same thing is happening today. (4:28-29).*

This is the clearest connecting point of making known that Jesus was born of a woman, not just God appearing to be incarnated in human form, as had happened with many of the pantheon in Greco-Roman beliefs. It is through the spirit realm that Christ is made Christ, but Jesus the human was through the route and bloodline of Mary of Nazareth.

What follows are the Gospel stories and Acts of the Apostles. To make the next section easier, the Biblical texts have been reproduced for your own reading pleasure.

Yet it is not just reading the texts like one would a novel that needs to happen. It is living into the texts to truly experience life as a peasant girl of the First Century CE Israel. The foundations have been laid into your mind. It is time to center yourself to leave the academic and enter into being Mary.

As you experience these texts you may want to read, or you may want to use and audio bible, YouTube, having someone read it in a group setting. What is about to happen is a modified *Lectio Divina*¹⁴⁷ where you experience the scripture, it becomes a holistic approach, not just an academic pursuit.

Lectio Divina is quite simple, you will hear the reading three times. Each time there will be a question to focus your contemplation. At the end you may wish to take time to pursue your own style of journaling whether it is through art, dance, yoga, writing, singing, or other forms of artistic expression before settling into discussion with a spiritual director or a group on what was experienced.

The centering meditation to clear your mind is a simple mantra. First though you will need to find a comfortable spot whether it is sitting, lying down or walking. An environment that brings you peace and calm, that allows you to fully open up to the Holy Mystery speaking within you.

For centering once in this environment follow these simple steps:

- Close your eyes

¹⁴⁷ Divine Reading, out of Ignatian spirituality it is a method of bible experience that goes deeper than merely the mental pursuit of studying.

- Deeply breathe inwards and outwards, each time you exhale striving to push a little more of your lungs to completely empty.
- On the inward breaths the Mantra is the simple word “Me”
- Outward breaths the Mantra is “Not me, but Love” (Love if it is easier for centering can be replaced by words of Holy, Sacred, Christ, as this word takes you into the message of Marian thought).
- When ready if you are alone turn to the text once you feel at peace (note this may require certain aromas and/or lighting as well), or the leader of the group will begin.

The Divina is the reading used as follows:

- The reading shall be read three times.
- At the conclusion of each reading there shall be time left open for reflection/contemplation.
- Before each reading one of the focus questions shall be asked:
 - ❖ First Reading: What word leaps to you, cling to that word as you hear the story.
 - ❖ Second Reading: What image is created? Let that image rest within your heart.
 - ❖ Third (Final) Reading: What memory of your own journey does this reading and experience invoke? Live into that memory knowing that God’s annunciation has empowered you.

As well if one wishes, each story can be used as a guided meditation after the centering by replacing Mary with your own name, and the third person perspective with your own first person point of view.

The Stories of our Mother:

Mark`s stories from the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible:

3:31-35:

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

6:1-6a:

⁶ He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

Matthew`s stories from God`s Word Translation of the Holy Bible:

1:1-17:

This is the list of ancestors of Jesus Christ, descendant of David and Abraham.

*² Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.*

³ Judah and Tamar were the father and mother of Perez and Zerah.

*Perez was the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,*

*⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon.*

*⁵ Salmon and Rahab were the father and mother of Boaz.
Boaz and Ruth were the father and mother of Obed.*

Obed was the father of Jesse,

⁶ Jesse the father of King David.

David and Uriah's wife Bathsheba were the father and mother of Solomon.

*⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,*

Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Joram,

Joram the father of Uzziah,

⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah.

¹¹ Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers.

They lived at the time when the people were exiled to Babylon.

¹² After the exile to Babylon,

Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,

Abiud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Achim,

Achim the father of Eliud,

¹⁵ Eliud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob.

¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, who was the husband of Mary.

Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So there were

14 generations from Abraham to David,

14 generations from David until the exile to Babylon,
14 generations from the exile until the Messiah.

1:18-25:

¹⁸ The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. His mother Mary had been promised to Joseph in marriage. But before they were married, Mary realized that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph was an honorable man and did not want to disgrace her publicly. So he decided to break the marriage agreement with her secretly.

²⁰ Joseph had this in mind when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said to him, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus [He Saves], because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this happened so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet came true: ²³ "The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel," which means "God is with us."

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him to do. He took Mary to be his wife. ²⁵ He did not have marital relations with her before she gave birth to a son. Joseph named the child Jesus.

2:1-12:

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea when Herod was king. After Jesus' birth wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. ² They asked, "Where is the one who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star rising and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod and all Jerusalem heard about this, they became disturbed. ⁴ He called together all the chief priests and the experts in the Scriptures and tried to find out from them where the Messiah was supposed to be born.

⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this:

⁶ Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah.
A leader will come from you.
He will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod secretly called the wise men and found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. ⁸ As he sent them to Bethlehem, he said, "Go and search carefully for

the child. When you have found him, report to me so that I may go and worship him too.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they started out. The star they had seen rising led them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ They were overwhelmed with joy to see the star. ¹¹ When they entered the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. So they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.^[b]

¹² God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they left for their country by another road

Matthew 2:13-18:

¹³ After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel said to him, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and kill him.”

¹⁴ Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left for Egypt that night. ¹⁵ He stayed there until Herod died. What the Lord had spoken through the prophet came true: “I have called my son out of Egypt.”

¹⁶ When Herod saw that the wise men had tricked him, he became furious. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys two years old and younger in or near Bethlehem. This matched the exact time he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah came true:

*¹⁸ “A sound was heard in Ramah,
the sound of crying in bitter grief.
Rachel was crying for her children.
She refused to be comforted
because they were dead.”*

2:19-23:

¹⁹ After Herod was dead, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰ The angel said to him, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to Israel. Those who tried to kill the child are dead.”

²¹ Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea, Joseph was afraid to go there. Warned in a dream, he left for Galilee ²³ and made his home in a city called Nazareth. So what the prophets had said came true: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

12:46-50:

⁴⁶ While Jesus was still talking to the crowds, his mother and brothers were standing outside. They wanted to talk to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside. They want to talk to you."

⁴⁸ He replied to the man speaking to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ Pointing with his hand at his disciples, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother and sister and mother."

13:54-58:

⁵⁴ Jesus went to his hometown and taught the people in the synagogue in a way that amazed them. People were asking, "Where did this man get this wisdom and the power to do these miracles?" ⁵⁵ Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary? Aren't his brothers' names James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? ⁵⁶ And aren't all his sisters here with us? Where, then, did this man get all this?" ⁵⁷ So they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, "The only place a prophet isn't honored is in his hometown and in his own house."

⁵⁸ He didn't work many miracles there because of their lack of faith

Luke's stories in the New Century Version of the Holy Bible:

Gospel 1:26-38:

²⁶ During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel came to her and said, "Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you."

²⁹ But Mary was very startled by what the angel said and wondered what this greeting might mean.

³⁰ The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has shown you his grace. ³¹ Listen! You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. ³³ He will rule over the people of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. For this reason the baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Now Elizabeth, your relative, is also pregnant with a son though she is very old. Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant for six months. ³⁷ God can do anything!”

³⁸ Mary said, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!” Then the angel went away.

Gospel, 1:39-45:

³⁹ Mary got up and went quickly to a town in the hills of Judea. ⁴⁰ She came to Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the unborn baby inside her jumped, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² She cried out in a loud voice, “God has blessed you more than any other woman, and he has blessed the baby to which you will give birth. ⁴³ Why has this good thing happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ When I heard your voice, the baby inside me jumped with joy. ⁴⁵ You are blessed because you believed that what the Lord said to you would really happen.”

Gospel, 1:46-56:

⁴⁶ Then Mary said,

“My soul praises the Lord;

⁴⁷ my heart rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ because he has shown his concern for his humble servant girl.

From now on, all people will say that I am blessed,

⁴⁹ because the Powerful One has done great things for me.

His name is holy.

⁵⁰ God will show his mercy forever and ever
to those who worship and serve him.

⁵¹ He has done mighty deeds by his power.

He has scattered the people who are proud
and think great things about themselves.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
and raised up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with nothing.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant, the people of Israel,
remembering to show them mercy

⁵⁵ as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his children forever.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Gospel, 2:1-7:

At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order that all people in the countries under Roman rule must list their names in a register. ² This was the first registration;^[a] it was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to their own towns to be registered.

⁴ So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. ⁵ Joseph registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged^[b] and who was now pregnant. ⁶ While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have the baby, ⁷ and she gave birth to her first son. Because there were no rooms left in the inn, she wrapped the baby with pieces of cloth and laid him in a feeding trough.

Gospel 2:8-20:

That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news that will be a great joy to all the people. ¹¹ Today your Savior was born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord.¹² This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box."

¹³ Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴ "Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace among the people who please God."^[c]

¹⁵ When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in a feeding trough. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they told what the angels had said about this child. ¹⁸ Everyone was amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured these things and continued to think about them. ²⁰ Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen and heard. It had been just as the angel had told them.

Gospel, 2:21-40:

When the baby was eight days old, he was circumcised and was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before the baby began to grow inside Mary.

²² When the time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the law of Moses taught about being made pure, they took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³ (It is written in the law of the Lord: "Every firstborn male shall be given to the Lord.") ²⁴ Mary and Joseph also went to offer a sacrifice, as the law of the Lord says: "You must sacrifice two doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ In Jerusalem lived a man named Simeon who was a good man and godly. He was waiting for the time when God would take away Israel's sorrow, and the Holy Spirit was in him. ²⁶ Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the Christ promised by the Lord. ²⁷ The Spirit led Simeon to the Temple. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple to do what the law said they must do, ²⁸ Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God:

²⁹ "Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace as you said.

³⁰ With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you prepared before all people.

³² It is a light for the non-Jewish people to see and an honor for your people, the Israelites."

³³ Jesus' father and mother were amazed at what Simeon had said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, "God has chosen this child to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God that many people will not accept ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many will be made known. And the things that will happen will make your heart sad, too."

³⁶ There was a prophetess, Anna, from the family of Phanuel in the tribe of Asher. Anna was very old. She had once been married for seven years. ³⁷ Then her husband died, and she was a widow for eighty-four years. Anna never left the Temple but worshiped God, going without food and praying day and night. ³⁸ Standing there at that time, she thanked God and spoke about Jesus to all who were waiting for God to free Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything the law of the Lord commanded, they went home to Nazareth, their own town in Galilee. ⁴⁰ The little child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's goodness was upon him.

Gospel, 2:41-52:

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went to the feast as they always did. ⁴³ After the feast days were over, they started home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Thinking that Jesus was with them in the group, they traveled for a whole day. Then they began to look for him among their family and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him there. ⁴⁶ After three days they found Jesus sitting in the Temple with the teachers, listening to them and asking them

questions. ⁴⁷ All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers. ⁴⁸ When Jesus' parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I were very worried about you and have been looking for you."

⁴⁹ Jesus said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the meaning of what he said.

⁵¹ Jesus went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them. But his mother kept in her mind all that had happened. ⁵² Jesus became wiser and grew physically. People liked him, and he pleased God.

Gospel, 8:19-21:

¹⁹ Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but there was such a crowd they could not get to him. ²⁰ Someone said to Jesus, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

²¹ Jesus answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who listen to God's teaching and obey it!"

Gospel, 11:27-28:

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave birth to you and nursed you."

²⁸ But Jesus said, "No, blessed are those who hear the teaching of God and obey it."

Acts of the Apostles, 1:12-14:

Then they went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. (This mountain is about half a mile from Jerusalem.) ¹³ When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon (known as the Zealot), and Judas son of James were there. ¹⁴ They all continued praying together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brothers.

John's stories in the King James Version of the Holy Bible:

1:13:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

2:1-12:

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

² And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

³ And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

⁴ Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

⁵ His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

⁶ And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

⁷ Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

⁸ And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

⁹ When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

¹⁰ And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

¹¹ This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

7:3-5:

³ His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.

⁴ For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

⁵ For neither did his brethren believe in him.

19:25-28:

²⁵ Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

²⁷ Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

The Vision of the Apocalypse Story as found in Holman Christian Standard Bible

11:15-12:18:

The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying:

*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom
of our Lord and of His Messiah,
and He will reign forever and ever!*

¹⁶ The 24 elders, who were seated before God on their thrones, fell facedown and worshiped God,¹⁷ saying:

*We thank You, Lord God, the Almighty,
who is and who was,
because You have taken Your great power
and have begun to reign.*

¹⁸ The nations were angry,
but Your wrath has come.
The time has come
for the dead to be judged
and to give the reward
to Your servants the prophets,
to the saints, and to those who fear Your name,
both small and great,
and the time has come to destroy
those who destroy the earth.

¹⁹ God's sanctuary in heaven was opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His sanctuary. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings of thunder, an earthquake, and severe hail.

12 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head. ² She was pregnant and cried out in labor and agony as she was about to give birth. ³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and 10 horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth he might devour her child. ⁵ But she gave birth to a Son—a male who is going to shepherd all nations with an iron scepter—and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. ⁶ The woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, to be fed there for 1,260 days.

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, ⁸ but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil^[1] and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

The salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of His Messiah
have now come,
because the accuser of our brothers
has been thrown out:
the one who accuses them
before our God day and night.

¹¹ They conquered him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
for they did not love their lives
in the face of death.

¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens,
and you who dwell in them!
Woe to the earth and the sea,
for the Devil has come down to you
with great fury,
because he knows he has a short time.

¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been thrown to earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. ¹⁴ The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent's presence to her place in the wilderness, where she was fed for a time, times, and half a time. ¹⁵ From his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river flowing after the woman, to sweep her away in a torrent. ¹⁶ But the earth

helped the woman. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river that the dragon had spewed from his mouth.¹⁷ So the dragon was furious with the woman and left to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and have the testimony about Jesus.¹⁸ He stood on the sand of the sea.

Quite the spiritual journey to expand one`s horizons on what it means to become one with the Cosmic Christ. The challenge is to remember why Mary is important, it is through her that Christ enters us, it is through her that the world is reminded to live out the Greatest Commandments of Love, that have been lost within the politicizing of the name of God and Christ Jesus.

Return to this experience as often as you need to within your faith journey to renew your spirit.

Chapter Five

We Say YES to Freedom

More wars have been fuelled by the action of hate in the name of God than any other deity humanity has worshipped. The One God has become a divisive icon to distract from the world's true motivation for their atrocities whether they are rebel, cleric, business person or politician that is the amassing of money, power and control.

Whether it is the ancient stories of Mary that speak to your soul, the modern apparition or meditating upon the Rosary, this peasant woman who should have been a cast out asserted her humanity when everyone around her said she could not.

This is a story in which the first apostle among many continues to break into history to continually break the new ground of Christ's call to inclusion and equality for all. She is not concerned with a ladder to climb to grow wealth, achieve power, or control. Mary is firmly rooted in the tradition of the Grandmothers and setting the communion table for all of God's children.

All children that were created by God as the ancient myths of creation tell us across cultures, societies and religion. Children who had the sacred breathe life into everything, and Children who are called very good, blessed and beloved.

It is Mary whose name has not been side lined that still has the power to speak from the margins and to remind the margins that all labels that are divisive are there to keep us apart, not to aid us in celebrating unity within the Holy Mystery within our

diversity. The unity of all God`s children, and even creation that is like the rainbow in the sky where the beauty of all are unified in the promise of love that is the Holy Mystery.

She was a simple peasant girl when God broke into her life. She had never been allowed her own voice in a society that saw her as nothing more than property for breeding. Yet God saw the beauty of his beloved daughter, and came with a simple request that she would bear a child that would shatter the conditioned understanding and living in oppression. Mary could have said no, but she did not. Within the simple three letter word, she threw off the oppression of her time, chose the harder path, yet in this one word...she finally knew the true freedom of being a beloved child within the Holy Mystery.

Mary said, Yes. Will you?

Conclusion

Why put together a quasi-comprehensive exploration of the Virgin Mary?

Why remove systematic theology or doctrine from the equation and share across religions?

Why even bother with Mary at all?

Why Not is my smart ass retort, but honestly, like the teachings of a peasant labourer cum Messiah has inspired billions to attempt to transform our world, so too is Mary's life the same vessel of a different nature. She is the feminine within the story, the one that shows humanity is able of more, and that through faith in Holy Love the condition we have chosen to be bullied into living in is not where we need to live.

The institutional Christianities have long indoctrinated and bullied the membership into believing we are depraved and evil souls in a depraved and evil world. Mary bursts through this to remind us that these institutions do not speak for God or her Son, but rather for their own thirst for power, money and control. She reminds us that the ultimate source is Love. It is within love that all God's children are included in changing this world. It is through love that the Communion table is set for everyone regardless of label. It is through love that our world can be transformed by stripping away the power from the oppressor.

It is through love that God can be known and lived through unconditionally.

Why is there something about Mary for so many people in this world regardless of their religious affiliation, simple, she is the epitome of what humanity can and will be when we realize that it is simply, about divine Love.

DRAFT

Epilogue

I began this journey with Mary back in my days as a lay minister within the Roman Catholic tradition, okay I'll be completely honest it started when I returned to church as an adult within the United Church of Canada because as a writer all characters in a story matter to me. None more so than the characters in the greatest story that has shaped my life.

This journey led me into becoming a pastor, and the compassion work I did, this journey of inquiry led me into my Franciscan vocation to becoming a voice for the voiceless and aiding those without voice in discovering their voice. It led me to equip myself theologically at more conservative institutions, and liberal ones as well. To learn and challenge the world and its status quo that would shape my simple life mission of making my own corner of the world a little bit better. Or the scriptural equivalent, The Great Commandments from Matthew 22:34-40, the centering on Love.

I am an eclectic believer, not trapped within doctrine or systematic theology or historic creeds. I believe the Spirit of the Holy Mystery is continually active within history shaping our journey as one family, humanity. It is why the circle of inclusion of the beloved keeps being stretched more and more.

I love the Body of Christ, as much as I love the Holy Scriptures, yet I truly despise how both have been used and are used to holistically and systematically destroy the children in the Holy Mystery.

The journey on this project of Mary began when I stepped out of my ministry to those exiting homeless, following a call of God to enter into formal training to attain the

“government” credential for the work I had already been doing for years, that of chaplain. Hindsight though as the year long CPE was cancelled, and now the spring is in limbo, how the governmental funding did not come through for me to return to my Alma Mater seminary, so I went to a cheaper and more fundamentalist one. The call was truly the Holy’s way of protecting me and calling me out of the work for the organization, as a transformation was taking place that my heart would not allow me to be a part of, and if I forced myself to be a part of it would probably decimate me completely leaving my family with one burnt out soul of a husband and father.

But faithfully I followed the call. The seminary courses were not as taxing as I wanted, but they were good in reminding me how the evangelical world shaped their outlook. Especially since we as a family had settled into a local church that we hoped would be a safe spiritual home for all of us to grow (what it turned into was a nightmare) that led us to being yet again battered and bruised as our eclecticism does make it difficult to find a safe haven with God’s followers.

But still faithful to the call, I completed the course work and submitted my proposal for this project to hear back nothing... then to hear the crushing words as I thought to add to the plethora of letters before and after my name: Dale Carnegie Diploma, Electronic Assembler Installer Technologist Certificate, Bachelor of Arts in Leadership and Ministry; Master of Arts in Leadership and Ministry; Shaman (Wisdom Keeper); Doctor of Psychology (Holistic); Doctor of Divinity; Doctor of Metaphysics;

Spiritual Director; Reverend; Druid Priest; and Franciscan to the four letters that would aid the journey to chaplaincy the most: M.Div (Master of Divinity)¹⁴⁸.

But with mainstream Christianities more and more were being stripped away from me. No word on my proposal, our home parish dwindling in attendance for our meals and faith nights, I was left hurting and in limbo. Yet had all the research and experience of Mary of Nazareth to share and inspire.

I began to write. First as an academic thesis which is what I needed, but then it became less about that and the freedom that is found in centering folks back on God through the life and continued life of Mary as the *Theoktos* through her calls to Love she redirects us back to the Cosmic Christ.

I had personally drifted in my understanding and belief as each new attack, pain and grief was heaped upon my family and me. Yet as I began to write, a healing catharsis has taken hold. Mary's freedom was in saying Yes to her journey with the Holy Mystery. Through writing on Mary, my yes became renewing the journey I had forgotten with the Holy Mystery and how this journey has shaped me into the monastic pastor I am today. The husband I am becoming, and the father I continue to be.

So Mary's yes, as with her many appearing, became my yes to self transformation. So this work has become my work that I open up and share with you for your own soul work to see where Mary will take you into the Cosmic Christ and a refreshed reality. I thank you for allowing me to share this journey with you.

¹⁴⁸ The seminary was not for me as they say my understanding of the Holy Mystery as heresy.

References

- Anderson, C. and Msgr. E. Chavez. (2009). *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday
- Borg, M.J. (1994). *Meeting Jesus again for the First Time: Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith*, Waterville, Maine: Thorndike Press.
- Buby, B. (1997). *Mary of Galilee Volume III: the Marian Heritage of the Early Church*. New York, NY, USA: Alba House.
- Cawthorne, N. (2010). *A Brief History of Robin Hood: The True Story Behind the Legend*. London, UK: Constable & Robinson Ltd
- Connell, J.T. (2009). *The Secrets of Mary: Gifts from the Blessed Mother*. New York, NY, USA: St. Martin's Press.
- Connell, J.T. (2007). *The Visions of the Children: The apparitions of the Blessed Mother at Medjugorje*. New York, NY, USA: St. Martin's Press
- Crossan, J.D. (1998). *The Birth of Christianity: discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus*, San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Dormann, Johannes. (1998). *Pope John Paul II's Theological Journey to the Prayer Meeting of the Religions in Assisi, Part II Volume 2*. Kansas City: Angelus Press.
- Dormann, Johannes. (1996). *Pope John Paul II's Theological Journey to the Prayer Meeting of the Religions in Assisi, Part II Volume 1*. Kansas City: Angelus Press.
- Ehrman, B.D. (2003). *Lost Christianities: The Battles for the scriptures and the faiths we never knew*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fox, Matthew. (1988). *Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. San Francisco, CA, USA: Harper San Francisco.
- Harpur, T. (2004). *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light*, Toronto, ON: Thomas Allen.
- Harpur, T. (2007). *Water into Wine: the Empowering Vision of the Gospels*, Toronto, ON: Thomas Allen.
- Ilibagiza, Immaculee and Erwin, Steve (2008). *Our Lady of Kibeho: Mary speaks to the World from the Heart of Africa*. Carlsbad, CA, USA: Hay House Inc.,
- James, C.C. (2010). *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women*. Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan.

- Knight, S. (2003). *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*. New York, NY, USA: Cornell University Press.
- Kraemer, Ross Shepherd (1992). *Her Share of Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press
- Manning, J. (1999). *Is the Pope Catholic? A Woman Confronts her Church*. Toronto, ON, CAN: Malcolm Lester Books.
- McBrien, R.P. (1992). *Report on the church: Catholicism after Vatican II*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- O'Malley, J.W. (2008). *What happen at Vatican II*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- O'Malley, S. and Eimer, R. (1994). *Mary's Fiat: A Marian Novena*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.
- Phillips, G. (2005). *The Virgin Mary Conspiracy: The True Father of Christ and the Tomb of the Virgin*. Rochester, NY, USA: Bear & Company
- Pollard, A.J. (2004). *Imagining Robin Hood*. London, UK: Rutelidge.
- Pope John Paul II. (2004). *Rise Let us be on Our Way*. New York, NY, USA: Warner Books.
- Pope John Paul II. (1994). *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Toronto, ON, CAN: Alfred Knopf.
- Pope John Paul II (1996). *Gift and Mystery*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday.
- Ripley, F.J. (1969). *Mary, Mother of the Church*. Rockford, IL, USA: Tan Books and Publishers Inc.
- Schoemperlane, D. (2003). *Our Lady of the Lost and Found*. Toronto, ON: Harper Collins Canada.
- Spong, J. S. (1992). *Born of a Woman: A Bishop rethinks the Virgin Birth and treatment of women in a male dominated church*
- Spong, J.S. (2001). *A New Christianity for a new World: why traditional faith is dying and how a new faith is being born*, San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- Spong, J.S. (2011). *Reclaiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World*, San Francisco, CA: Harper One.

Staff of Leaflet Missal. (1976). *Queen of Heaven*. St. Paul, MN, USA: Leaflet Missal.

Sweeney, J.M. (2006). *Strange Heaven: the Virgin Mary as woman, mother, disciple, advocate*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete.

Thompson, A. (2012). *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography*. Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press.

Vatican (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church 2nd Edition Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. New York, NY, USA: Doubleday.

Virtue, Doreen (2012). *Mary, Queen of Angels*. Carlsbad, CA, USA: Hay House Inc.

Zipes, J. (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*. Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press.

DRAFT