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Collective Memory, Women's Identity and the Church

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COLLECTIVE MEMORY, WOMEN’S IDENTITY AND THE CHURCH

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

COLLECTIVE MEMORY, WOMEN’S IDENTITY AND THE CHURCH

by

Jo Ana Elise Brown

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Christianity, Judaism and Islam share a deliberative subjugation of women through ideologies, hierarchical structures and performative practices that effectively relegate women to an inferior position. The Christian tradition has one of the longest-standing and most consistent iconographies with regard to the characterization and status of women in society. The Christian church is prototypical of a religious institution iterating an ideology of women’s inferiority through various mechanisms that lodge and preserve it in societal collective memory. This study examines three mechanisms used by the Church to preserve collective memory about women’s inferior status in society: doctrine, liturgical practices and visual images related to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Through structured interviews with 40 women raised in the Roman Catholic tradition and educated in Roman Catholic schools, this study examines how collective memory about women’s identity transferred through these mechanisms become lodged in individual memory through socialization and education, and influence their attitudes, behaviors and self-identity. The study expands the examination from the realm of the individual and family to how doctrine, liturgical practices and visual images of Mary exert influence far beyond the confines of the church itself and its participants. The institutional church, and Roman Catholicism in particular, exerts global influence through reputational entrepreneurs who are power holders in society. The study considers
whether collective memory about women’s place in society, set forth and maintained by the Church, can be reconstructed and, if so, how it might be accomplished.
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Introduction – Collective Memory and Women’s Identity

Throughout history, the major world religions have tried to keep women “in their place” through social control. Christianity, Judaism and Islam share a deliberative subjugation of women through ideologies, hierarchical structures and performative practices that effectively relegate women to an inferior position. The Christian tradition has one of the longest-standing and most consistent iconographies with regard to the characterization and status of women in society. The Christian church is prototypical of a religious institution iterating an ideology of women’s inferiority through various mechanisms that lodge and preserve it in societal collective memory.

But with the Church purportedly declining in numbers and influence worldwide, why should we be concerned with its ideologies and practices? In this study I argue that the institutional Church continues to exert influence on societal attitudes about women via a concretized ideology that relegates them to an inferior position, continuing a centuries-old pattern of subordination that confines women to prescribed roles and denies their full membership in society as equal in intellect and ability to men.¹ For women and men raised in the Catholic tradition, these attitudes are part of a socialization process and the formation of identities connected to and shaped by religious upbringing. But I believe the influence extends far beyond the family, or even the confines of the church. My argument acknowledges the influence of socialization through an upbringing in a particular religious tradition, but contends that collective memory construction regarding women and their roles in society extends into society at large, influencing societal

¹ See Epstein (2006) who rightly asserts, “All societies and large institutions are rooted in the differentiation and subordination of females.” This statement is particularly true of institutional churches of every kind, and goes far beyond “fundamentalist” religious institutions. Subordination of females is implicitly part of mainline religious institutions, as well.
attitudes and women’s opportunities regardless of one’s religious background. Epstein’s contention that, “Everywhere, women’s subordination is basic to maintaining the social cohesion and stratification systems of ruling and governing groups-male groups-on national and local levels, in the family, and in all other major institutions” informs my argument and can certainly be extended to include the role of the institutional church in every society.²

The Development of Doctrine in the Early Church

The formalization of women’s roles and identity within the Christian tradition had a turning point around the fourth century when the early Church fathers were establishing a set of “normative” practices for Church life and creating the canon, which became the sanctioned Scriptures. They sifted through and selected from scores of writings from the first and second centuries C.E., deciding which to adopt into doctrine and practice. Among the writings that could have been accepted were numerous texts depicting women as revered prophets, teachers, traveling evangelists, healers, priests and even bishops. For example, in a passage from the recently discovered Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Mary tries to encourage the disciples after the crucifixion and tell them what Jesus had told her privately. Peter, furious at the suggestion, asks:

Did he (Jesus) then talk secretly with a woman, instead of to us? Are we to go and learn from her now? Did he love her more than us?” Distressed at his rage, Mary then asks Peter: “What do you think? Do you think I made this up in my heart? Do you think I am lying about the Lord?” Levi breaks in at this point to mediate the dispute: “Peter, you are always irascible. You object to the woman as our enemies do. Surely the Lord knew her very well, and indeed, he loved her more than us…” Then he

² Ibid. p. 4.
and the others invite Mary to teach them what she knows.\(^3\)

Such texts indicate that women might have been considered leaders alongside men in the early Church. Yet these writings were excluded from the canon, deemed “gnostic” or even heretical by the Church fathers. At the same time, we see the emergence of a set of narratives about female identity—purely theological constructions, not based on any previous writings—that prescribed certain roles and behaviors as normative for women in the Church. Primary among them: Marian doctrine, or the doctrine of Mary, the Mother of God, as some scholars refer to it, which lauds Mary’s role as obedient, chaste, virgin and perfect mother. I consider it no accident that Marian doctrine was constructed at the same time writings like the one cited above were deemed gnostic. The early Church narrative regarding women and their roles praised obedience and submission over speaking out and leading.

This study examines how the Church effectively lodged this subordinating narrative into societal collective memory by the use of three primary mechanisms: religious doctrine transmission through family upbringing (socialization) and religious education, performative (liturgical) practices and artistic images, particularly representations of Mary, the mother of Jesus, which most profoundly influence societal collective memory because of their global prevalence. To this end, I focus on these key questions:

1. How do women socialized into the Catholic tradition think about Mary and her meanings in their lives? Through interviews and discussion with women brought up in

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the church and its teachings, I explore the ways Catholic orthodoxy’s collective memory of Mary (and her moral opposite Mary Magdalene) has lasting influence on individual identity and behavior.

2. As an institution, how has the Church created and succeeded in maintaining a collective memory of Mary, the mother of Jesus? I explore the Church’s use of doctrine transmission, performative (liturgical) practices and visual images to shape and form collective memory and, consequently, women’s collective identity.

3. As women increasingly challenge the received collective memories of Mary, what are the possibilities of a reconstruction of her qualities? Do we find evidence of such reconstructions in an exploration of the iconography, historic and contemporary?

Figure 1: Statue of Our Lady Queen of Peace found at the entrance to Medjugorje, one of the most famous and visited Marian apparition sites in the world, located in Bosnia and Herzegovina.4

Collective Memory

My discussion draws from collective memory, a 20th century sociological concept I apply backward to a historical period one and a half millennia before its development. I argue that this modern concept was employed by the institutional Church to construct a collective identity for women that positioned them as inferior to men and prescribed certain roles for them. Certainly the socialization of individuals within a particular religious tradition is a direct form of belief and behavior transmission; but the Church, like other major institutions in society, has influence beyond only those raised within its tradition. By overlaying the modern sociological concept of collective memory onto a

5 Image found at:
previous era, we can analyze and understand certain sociological realities of our time about women and societal attitudes toward them; how these attitudes have been shaped and formed by the Church, why they have lasting power and abiding influence and how they have impact upon current society.

Previous sociologists and historians doing work on collective memory have explored the connection between collective memory and religious identity, specifically Gary Alan Fine (2001), Paul Connerton (1989), Elizabeth Castelli (2004), Jeffrey Alexander, Neil Smelser and Ron Eyerman (2004) and Daniele Hervieu-Leger (2000), but none has referred to it as a means of social control. For the purposes of this study, I define social control as passive or active group action intended to shape behavior and create an internalized boundedness for both behavior and identity. And while I focus here on the social control of women through mechanisms employed by the Church, it is important to note that they have influenced men as well.

Socialization and Identity Formation

Religious identity is transmitted by family upbringing from one generation to the next. The socialization process that accompanies a child’s constructed identification with a religious tradition serves as a conduit for the continuance of collective memory about any number of issues. This study is concerned with the socialization of women in the Catholic tradition. Sociologist William Kornblum, in a primer on sociological theory, writes,

Childhood socialization is the primary influence on the individual. Whatever happens to a person later in life, the early childhood experiences that shaped the social self will continue to influence the person’s attitudes and behaviors. But people are also affected by their life course: the set of
roles they play over a lifetime and the ways in which those roles change as a consequence of social change...Changes in the culture of a society can also significantly alter the roles people play during their lives.⁶

The religious education and doctrine transmission studied in this work contain *socialized* attitudes and behaviors, including rites, practices, attitudes and belief systems of the tradition. But I focus on collective memory in this study because of the influence of attitudes and beliefs of the Church on society at large. While First Communion and Confirmation practices are central to the upbringing of a child raised in a practicing Catholic family, the belief systems contained in the liturgy and theology of these practices exert influence beyond those socialized within the tradition.

Forty women raised in a Roman Catholic elementary school were interviewed for this study; each had received First Communion and Confirmation in a Roman Catholic school setting. None of them mentioned they had a choice about receiving these sacraments or the training associated with them. Clearly these women were socialized in this religious tradition, but they would have been exposed to the belief system of this tradition even if they had not been raised in it. The socialization of individuals within family groups is part of a larger sociological reality that extends beyond particular religious upbringing. The influence of the Church reaches beyond its own institutional parameters; as an “evangelical” institution, a significant part of its mission is to influence and shape the world in keeping with doctrinal imperatives and belief systems.⁷ For this reason, I move now to a deeper study of collective memory, a concept more far-reaching than individual socialization.

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⁷ See quotes in Chapter 3 regarding Catholic religious education.
Religion and Collective Memory

Collective memory is the shared understandings of a society or culture that have been defined, assigned value and passed from one generation to the next. Whereas individual memory is shaped and held by individuals and is personal in nature (through socialization in a certain family or religious upbringing), the memories shared by a society or culture are constructed by social institutions and power holders, and transferred into social memory via education, rituals, traditions, laws, art, doctrine and media. Such memories can be constructed around significant religious and historical themes, political and economic events, crises and leaders. They can be employed to perpetuate social hierarchy and roles, or to explain collective experiences that threaten to erode the fabric of society.  

The institutional Church is such a social institution, its power holders keen to preserve certain ideologies, hierarchies and roles—among them, women’s place as subordinate and outside the official structures of the Church. To this end, the early Church fathers created certain dogma, doctrines and liturgical practices, which became cemented in the collective memory of the Church—and, consequently, I argue, society at large. The doctrines, then, became embedded in iconography that carried the message of

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8 A contemporary American example of a constructed collective memory by a political institution is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The Vietnam War was a protracted conflict that continues to be a source of debate and diverse opinion in the United States. In sharp contrast to collective memory around World War II, Vietnam is not regarded as a success story. Almost 10 years after the ending of that conflict, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was erected in 1982, a decisive attempt to construct a collective memory that would honor the 58,000 American soldiers who died in that war, despite the war being a blemish on U.S. history. Controversy swirled around the memorial itself from veterans and anti-war groups alike, not to mention questions about the sculptor being the child of Chinese immigrant parents. What a nation chooses to memorialize in a public monument, how it is done and, perhaps more significantly, what a nation chooses not to memorialize, has significance for its place within collective memory.

9 Epstein (2006): “Controlling women’s labor and behavior is a mechanism for male governance and territoriality. Men’s authority is held jealously. Men legitimate their behavior through ideological and theological constructs that justify their domination. Further, social institutions reinforce this.” p. 15.
One of the fathers of sociology, Emile Durkheim, dedicated significant work to religious life and its impact on society. In “Elementary Forms of Religious Life,” he writes, “Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups.”

While Durkheim recognized the significance of religion as an element of social identity and a mechanism for organic solidarity, his work does not focus on collective memory, collective representation or social control.

But Durkheim’s work, particularly his understanding that social life is the locus for socially constructed meanings, clearly influenced Maurice Halbwachs, the French sociologist who originated the concept of collective memory in a landmark study published in 1925, titled “The Social Frameworks of Memory.” This study became the first chapter of Halbwachs’ groundbreaking work “On Collective Memory,” published posthumously in 1968. Drawing on Durkheim, Halbwachs viewed collective memory as embedded in group consciousness: Individuals remember only as members of groups. Groups create frameworks and practice “mapping” from within these social locations. “Collective frameworks are precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to

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11 Maurice Halbwachs was a brilliant sociologist and philosopher credited with developing the concept of collective memory. Halbwachs was a student of Emile Durkheim in the early 1900s and Durkheim’s influence on his understanding of the power of religious life and identity is evident throughout his work. Halbwachs himself was not Jewish, but his wife and in-laws were. During World War II, when his in-laws were detained by the Gestapo, Halbwachs intervened and assisted their leaving both France and Germany for safer lands. Eventually, Halbwachs’ activity on behalf of his in-laws was discovered and he was detained. He was sent to Buchenwald camp, where he died in 1945. He had only three published works at the time of his death, but they are considered the foundational work on collective memory.
reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of society,” Halbwachs wrote. Frameworks such as those created by the institutional Church serve as mechanisms through which boundaries are created; recollections are encouraged, discouraged or disregarded; and meaning-making activity is done.

Contemporary French sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Leger agrees that memory lies at the heart of religious existence, enabling groups in society to pass belief systems from one generation to the next. In her 2000 work, “Religion as a Chain of Memory,” she writes,

“The crucial points to grasp in this analysis are (a) the chain which makes the individual believers a member of a community, a community which gathers past, present and future members, and (b) the tradition (or collective memory) which becomes the basis of that community’s existence.”

Hervieu-Leger posits that modern societies are becoming less religious, or “amnesic,” not because they are increasingly rational but because they are less and less capable of maintaining memory. The social framework that used to assure transmission of collective memories from one generation to the next, she contends, has been destroyed by secularization and modernity. Loss of parish life, loss of feeling part of something larger than oneself, loss of traditional families, rise in out-of-wedlock births, lower marriage rates, increased contraceptive use and access to abortions have resulted in lower levels of religious identification and religiosity, by Hervieu-Leger’s analysis.

But if this is so, what would explain the rise in fundamentalism in all religious groups around the world, in the most technologically advanced era in history? Or the

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millions of “seekers” who throng to ashrams every year in India to “find themselves,” or the rise in Buddhism and its practices throughout the Western world? While my focus is not on evaluating the state of religion in modern society, I do contend that the continued use of the mechanisms discussed in this work--doctrine transmission, performative practices and visual images--strengthens the chain of religious memory in society regardless of modernization or technological advancement.

Halbwachs recognized the highly conflictual character of religious memory, combining, as it always does, a plurality of collective memories in a state of tension with one another. In his opinion, the main cause of conflict lies in the opposition between a rational, dogmatic type of memory (which he calls theological memory) and memory of a mystical nature. This study considers both types of memory—theological memory, including learned knowledge of doctrine and dogma, as well as rote practices of the liturgy; and mystical memories, such as those described by the women I interviewed for this study. Some spoke of mystical experiences during times of prayer to Mary, believing she came to them in a dream or a personal encounter at a Marian statue or icon, or visiting a Marian apparition site such as Lourdes or Medjugorje.14 Interestingly, very few spoke of mystical memories related to liturgical practices such as reciting the rosary or other prescribed prayers of the Church. The mystical experiences of these women did not seem to be directly connected to doctrine; rather, through the mystical experiences, the doctrines came to life for them.

In distinction from Durkheim, both Halbwachs and Hervieu-Leger take a decidedly “presentist” approach to collective memory—that is, looking at how the past is preserved in the present. Halbwachs argued the Church’s primary goal is to present itself

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14 See Appendix A on Marian apparition sites for information on women’s experience at such sites.
as both timeless/eternal and completely relevant to a contemporary world. This is what makes critique of the institutional Church challenging. If the early Church believed it necessary to exert social control over women and place them in a social structure where they would be eternally regarded as inferior to men, how could the Church effectively accomplish this?

**Development of Marian Doctrine**

The question above was addressed at the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E., one of the first official meetings where the early Church fathers debated and voted on various doctrines and practices with the intention of defining them as normative for Church life. Among these were doctrines defining acceptable behaviors and roles for women—wholly *theological constructions*, not based on scriptural passages. Marian doctrine held up Mary, the central female figure in Catholicism, as the ultimate role model for women. She is the perfect woman of virtue and perfect mother, obedient to the will of God. Historians believe Cyril of Alexandria was the primary author of early doctrine regarding Mary, with contributions from a number of earlier Church fathers, including Irenaeus of Lyons (140-202 C.E.), Ambrose of Milan (339-397 C.E.), and Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.). Though Mary holds a singular role in the Christian story, one unattainable for any other woman—indeed, Catholic theology asserts no woman can match her status of perfect mother and woman—all women are encouraged to strive for it by emulating Mary’s behavior.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) See Epstein (2006) where she writes, “The idea that girls must remain virgins until they marry or their entire family will suffer dishonor is used as a mechanism for women's segregation and subordination all over the world.” ASA Presidential Address. p. 13.
In Chapter 3, I present five key Marian doctrines—the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mary as the mother of all Humanity, Mary as the New Eve, and The Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven—which I believe have influenced Western Christianity and the societies claiming it as their primary religious system, shaping both collective memory and collective identity for women. Each of these doctrines can be found dramatically presented in religious art throughout the world. Despite nearly two thousand years of theological and social development regarding women’s place in society, these images of Mary remain eternally fixed and continue to exert social control.

Interestingly, the fourth century is also the era in which Mary Magdalene, identified in scriptures as a follower of Jesus and in the Gospel of John as present with Jesus at the crucifixion and at his tomb on Easter morning, began to be represented in her most demonized role: unrepentant prostitute. While earlier, gnostic writings about Mary Magdalene describe her as a disciple of Jesus and a leader (see earlier quote on page 2), around this time she begins to be portrayed in contradistinction to Mary, as fallen woman and prostitute, a true woman of vice. The first such instance was in a homily by Pope Gregory the Great dated September 14, 591 C.E. “She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark,” he stated. “And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts.”*(Homily XXXIII)*16 While nowhere in the Christian scriptures, in canonical or gnostic writings is Mary Magdalene referred to as a prostitute, Pope Gregory’s conflation of the story from the gospel of Luke and the person of Mary

Magdalene effectively relegated her to the status of fallen woman, a position with no historical referent other than Gregory’s misidentification.

The characterization stuck, promoted by a stream of writers and artists over many centuries depicting Mary Magdalene as a prostitute in their works (see image above). It wasn’t until 1969 that the Vatican explicitly rejected Gregory’s construction of Mary Magdalene, but by that time, her reputation was firmly lodged in collective memory. The depictions continue to this day, with recent memorable examples in Martin Scorsese's film adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis's novel “The Last Temptation of Christ,” José Saramago’s “The Gospel According to Jesus Christ,” Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera “Jesus Christ Superstar,” Mel Gibson’s film “The Passion of the Christ,” Jean-Claude La Marre's “Color of the Cross” and Hal Hartley’s “The Book of Life,” to name a few. The consistent characterization of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute has made her the patron of “wayward” women and the namesake for “Magdalene houses” established to help save women from prostitution. The Church discourages women from emulating her “wayward” (code for sexual) ways, even though “non-virgin” is more realistic and attainable than “perpetual virgin.”

A third Church-created female archetype explored less extensively in this study but meriting inclusion is that of martyr, specifically virgin martyr. Her role is undesirable but redeemable by virtue of her religious significance. As with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene, the defining element for the virgin martyr is her sexuality, either as chaste virgin or fallen woman. The vestal virgins of the Roman empire received their status because of their virginity, a state of purity that made them worthy to serve as the keeper of the eternal fires of the empire; the virgin martyrs of the early Christian
Church often received their notoriety through a refusal to marry, a refusal to *give up* their virginity, and therefore their unwillingness to be *given away* in marriage. Such a refusal had manifold significance: The refusal to be given away, the refusal to be taken into another man’s household and thus become his property, and the refusal to give up what is often regarded as the seat of a woman’s power, her sexuality.

Through narratives about the two Marys and, to a lesser extent, the virgin martyrs, the early Church concretized the dichotomous roles of woman of virtue and woman of vice. While I do not suggest this was the beginning of the Madonna/whore trope (as mentioned earlier, there were other major religious systems equally subordinating of women that existed alongside Judaism for centuries before the solidification of Christianity), I do contend that the Church used this distinction as a mechanism of social control over women and that it became one of the Church’s most significant deposits in societal collective memory.

**Reputation Construction**

Gary Alan Fine’s work on reputational legacy shaping informs this part of my argument. In his 2001 work “*Difficult Reputations: Collective Memories of the Evil, Inept and Controversial,*” an overview of eight compelling historical figures with negative, contested or sub-cultural reputations, Fine opens with two questions: Who shapes reputations? And why do some reputations stick and others don’t? He posits that reputations are collective in nature – that is, a reputation is not an individual phenomenon but a shared, transmuted image constructed somewhere by someone(s) and passed on through a variety of social sources. Like Halbwachs, Fine regards memory as a social
phenomenon, and he describes social memories as “institutionally sanctioned knowledge.”

For the purposes of this study, I regard such knowledge to be central to the work of the Christian Church (but note there are other institutions that have the power and influence to sanction—or de-sanction—knowledge). In reputation shaping, collective memory is constructed on the basis of “facts” that, even if questioned, take on a life of their own. Reputations make claims about the past that slowly permeate the collective memory of society. As quoted by Fine, the American sociologist Charles Cooley stated, “Fame may or may not represent what men were, but it always represents what humanity needs for them to have been.” The Church needed Mary, the mother of Jesus, to be regarded as the perfect ever-virgin woman, someone women are encouraged to emulate, if it was to be successful in asserting social control over women and women’s identity. The Church needed the role of perfect woman to include a model of submission, obedience and perfect motherhood. In turn, the religious adherent attempting to be a faithful follower mimics, to the best of her ability, the one she is encouraged to emulate and avoids the ways of the “fallen” one who squandered her virginity in “loose” living.

Fine presents three reputation models to help explain how historical people and events are evaluated: objective, functional and constructed. Objective reputation consists of the “facts” of a person’s life, such as her marital status, the number and gender of her children, her official residences, how many years she served in a particular office or occupation, her age at time of death. Functional reputation includes how a person’s

18 Epstein. p. 16.
19 Ibid. p. 6.
reputation is used to serve a particular purpose, and it can change depending on what purpose the reputation is serving. The functional model pertains somewhat to this study, but I draw primarily on Fine’s third model, the constructed reputation. The constructed reputation is both created and shaped by people in society, whether the “facts” of the reputation are true or not. Critical factors in reputation construction include who has access to the information, their position in society or in the media (which enables them to distribute the information), and the power they wield to make the audience listen and believe. These “reputational entrepreneurs” give reputations larger significance by transmitting them to a wider audience.

How, then, was the early Church able to construct and concretize singular reputations for the two Marys: the mother of Jesus, a person of complete perfection, elevated to a status alongside Jesus; and Mary Magdalene, a person of complete moral corruption?

Interestingly, Fine speaks of reputations as if they take on a life of their own. Though his work focuses primarily on difficult reputations, he allows that the constructed

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20 A few examples of contemporary functional reputations that have undergone quick and significant changes are Elliott Spitzer, former governor of New York who went from powerful, political, no-nonsense, bulldog, to “Client 9” in a high-end prostitution scandal in 2008 and Tiger Woods who went from multi-millionaire, golf pro and doting dad to cowardly philanderer. His image has been removed from the multiple luxury sponsors that helped fill his financial coffers over the past 15 years. Certainly Spitzer and Woods are only two in a long list of politicians and athletes who have participated in morally offensive and, in the case of Spitzer, illegal behavior. In both cases, reputational entrepreneurs, borrowing Gary Alan Fine’s term, strategically situated in positions of power in society, gained access to information that enabled reputations to be quickly tarnished or, perhaps, destroyed by their own philandering behavior and the work of effective reputational entrepreneurs.

21 In the example of Spitzer and Woods, the facts swirling around both cases were debated and contested until finally the “truth” was believed to come out. But it is possible that either of these famous individuals could undergo a reputation reconstruction. Sometimes such efforts are successful, other times not. Consider Michael Jackson, music and dance superstar whose reputation went from King of Pop in the 1980s to suspected child molester and predator within 10 years. His reputation was never successfully rehabilitated, although numerous attempts were made by his professional agents and his family. Consider O.J. Simpson, the former NFL star who was tried, acquitted and later found responsible for the death of his wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman. Simpson’s reputation has not been successfully rehabilitated, and it would be quite surprising if it ever is.
nature of reputations is the same whether they are positive or negative. Fine places both within a social-constructionist model that regards the past not as a set of facts but as a set of interpretations. Indeed, public response to negative events or deviant behavior fulfills society’s need for integration and boundaries. Fine writes,

Reputation is not an inert social object, the accidental, inconsequential bonus or penalty resulting from an individual’s actions. Reputation is a social entity that is created, and transformed, both shaping and being shaped by the society in which it is developed. It not only represents the thoughts and ideals of the cultural world in which it is established, but it also helps to explain how society is shaped by the actions of prominent social figures.\(^{22}\)

Reputational entrepreneurs are essential for reputations to be created and successfully communicated to a wider audience. They have narrative clarity, or the ability to communicate the story in a way that is accessible and understandable to a larger audience. Further, reputational entrepreneurs have an element of self-interest that makes pursuing the reputation worthwhile, and they have the social position necessary to make it stick.

For purposes of this study, I consider the institutional Church a primary reputational entrepreneur in the social construction of “acceptable” identities for women. The Church is a hierarchical structure consisting of individuals who hold appointed positions of power and influence. In the Roman Catholic structure, these individuals include the Pope, cardinals, bishops and a host of theologians who strive to maintain doctrinal and liturgical integrity and purity. But the Church’s roster of reputational entrepreneurs extends well beyond the uppermost ranks of the hierarchy to include priests, pastors (of all traditions), nuns and other Church leaders who translate and pass information and structures to the laity; media and political structures connected to the

\(^{22}\) Ibid. p. 167.
Church; and laity who live out unquestioned traditions passed on to them through other entrepreneurs. There are reputational entrepreneurs in every religious hierarchy; the Catholic tradition is just one example alongside many others. Further, and more significant to my argument, such translation extends beyond the parameters of the Church to permeate society at large.  

While Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene constitute the primary acceptable and unacceptable roles for women, a third role—that of woman as martyr (and specifically, virgin martyr)—appears often enough in Church doctrines and imagery to merit inclusion here. In Elizabeth Castelli’s 2004 work, “Martydom and Memory,” focusing on the early Christian martyrs Thecla and Euphemia, she raises questions similar to Fine’s about reputation construction, but she also makes the connection between collective memory and power. A few of her critical questions include: Who is remembered? How are identities constituted and reconstituted in suffering and its remembrance? How are the contours of memory, both its content and cultural forms, shaped by notions of difference and practices of power? Building on Halbwachs, she locates competing ideas about the character and legitimacy of different systems of power.

As a scholar in the fields of sociology of culture and sociology of religion, Castelli is concerned with the culture-making aspects of the representations of suffering and martyrdom. She looks at how particular ways of construing the past enable later

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23 Consider the recent health care debate and passage of a new health care bill. In the final hours of negotiation, the issue of abortion was a major sticking point, with “sanctity of life” language employed by politicians who had clearly been influenced by Roman Catholic anti-abortion Church law and, most likely, dollars connected to these institutions.

communities to constitute and sustain themselves, how realities become embedded in cultural memory and gain influence that becomes larger than the initial story. “My thesis,” she writes, “is that the memory work done by early Christians on the historical experience of persecution and martyrdom was a form of culture-making, whereby Christian identity was indelibly marked by the collective memory of the religious suffering of others.”

Mechanisms of Transmission

If we accept the premise that the Church constructed the reputations of the Marys and the martyrs, then we can explore how they have been transferred into collective memory. I identify the key transmission mechanisms as follows, and I will discuss them in detail in subsequent chapters:

--Religious education in the Catholic tradition. Although Catholic schools across the United States have experienced financial challenges similar to other private school systems and decreased enrollment in some places, Roman Catholic education is still a dominant mechanism through which tradition, doctrine, liturgical practices and religious identity are passed to the next generation. Throughout the world, the Roman Catholic Church supports primary, secondary and higher-education institutions with vast financial and personnel resources, and encourages Catholic (and non-Catholic) families to choose their schools over other options.

--Dogma and doctrine: Theological treatises, written creeds, liturgy (performative practices), prayers and songs from the Western Christian tradition focusing on Western Church doctrines related to Mary. Halbwachs’ theory of religious collective memory

25 Ibid. p. 4.
considers the creation of dogma and doctrine (terms he uses interchangeably) its most essential element. Five Church doctrines pertaining to collective memory and women’s identity are outlined in chapter 3. Further detail about the historical development of each doctrine is found in Appendix B.

--Imagery/art: Visual imagery and art, particularly of Mary, the mother of Jesus. With artistic representations of her (and other remembered people and events in the Church) so abundantly available throughout the world, they play a major role in collective-memory construction, collective memory maintenance and social control. I present and discuss extensive examples in Chapter 4.

--Performative practices: The regular re-enactment of parts of the religious tradition through rites and rituals, liturgies, use of a Book of Saints, commemorative practices and symbolisms (such as the Eucharist, Holy Baptism, First Communion and other sacramental practices). The work of Paul Connerton on performative memory factors heavily here. Because of their significance to collective-memory creation for girls and prevalent use in the Catholic Church (shaping collective memory for boys about girls), performative practices are explored in depth in the second and third chapters of this work.

**Performative Memory**

Paul Connerton, a sociologist and pioneer in social memory studies, uses the term “social memory” in much the same way Halbwachs and Castelli speak of “collective memory.” While this study uses the terms interchangeably, it will draw on Connerton’s concept of social memory, particularly his discussion of performative memory, as
essential to constructing and preserving collective memory. Performative practices are liturgical practices and rituals passed along within Church tradition.

Connerton believes societies remember by transferring knowledge from one generation to the next through rituals, performances and commemorations, each practice bringing recollections and bodies together. Connerton agrees with Halbwachs that social memory cannot be separated from individual memory. But, like Castelli, he sees a significant gap in Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory. Halbwachs does not mention the role of ritual performances in the transmittal of collective memory from generation to generation. Connerton writes,

> With exemplary lucidity, he (Halbwachs) demonstrates that the idea of an individual memory, absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction almost devoid of meaning. He shows how different social segments, each with a different past, will have different memories attached to the different mental landmarks characteristic of the group in question. And he singles out, as illustrative of his general thesis, the particular cases of memory as it works within kinship groups, within religious groups and within classes. Yet Halbwachs, even though he makes the idea of collective memory central to his inquiry, does not see that images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less) ritual performances (emphasis mine).26

Halbwachs provides a solid foundation for his theory on collective memory, but Castelli and Connerton add significant elements, namely the visual, bodily and performative, used by a society to construct collective memory. However, while Castelli and Connerton cite examples of the use of collective memory and power, neither specifically draws on collective memory, in any form, as a means of social control. Connerton’s theory implies that social control can be asserted through social habit memory claims, but his argument focuses almost entirely on memory as performative.

Connerton writes,

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Concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory...We may say that our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order. And yet these points, though true, are as they stand insufficient when thus put. For images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past, I want to argue, are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances.27

By presenting extensive examples of the performative and other key mechanisms of transmission in subsequent chapters, I demonstrate how the Church has embedded certain images of, and notions about, women in collective memory as a form of social control. But I am also interested in whether and how these thousands of years of collective-memory construction might be undergoing reconstruction by modern women. If collective memory is constructed, is it possible for it to be reconstructed?

An example of collective memory reconstruction is that of post-World War II Nazism. After the defeat of Adolf Hitler in 1945, Germany quickly abandoned Nazism and attempted to wipe the scourge of the Holocaust from its history. Sociologists Jeffrey Alexander, Neil Smelser and Ron Eyerman examine this phenomenon in their work on cultural trauma and collective identity,28 noting how former SS adherents fled Germany, took on different names and moved to other countries in an attempt to disassociate themselves from Nazism; swastikas were quickly removed from public spaces; concentration camps were shuttered from view; and records of mass exterminations, destroyed. The deconstruction of Nazi ideology worked, and its place now in collective memory is as anathema. Not that Nazism has been completely excised from Western

27 Ibid.
societies, but the ideology has experienced widespread rejection despite once holding the world captive to its power.29

Such attempts at collective memory reconstruction seem to have worked somewhat—or have they? Are there elements of collective memory too powerful to reconstruct? Given the long history of the Church, can elements concretized within its adherents’ collective memory be rehabilitated or relegated to a different sort of memory? In the final chapter, I apply these questions to age-old Church doctrines prescribing women’s roles. Through my interviews with women who grew up in the Catholic tradition and attended Roman Catholic school from kindergarten through at least eighth grade,30 we learn of attempts to reconstruct elements of their religious upbringing and education—specifically, how they have come to grips with the influence the Marys have on their self-identity, which elements they want to preserve and which they are choosing to discard and reconstruct.

29 Former Nazi leaders are still being hunted throughout the world, and are being brought to justice. 9,000 Nazi leaders fled to South America during and after World War II, and many were sheltered by complicit governments. As recently as August, 2012, former Nazi leaders are being found and arrested in places like Buenos Aires, Argentina. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/mar/12/warcrimes.chile. The trauma in collective memory about Nazism has not been excised from societal consciousness.

30 While attending a Roman Catholic school for kindergarten through eighth grade was one of the two requirements for participation in the study, I found that if a woman attended Roman Catholic school for those years, she most likely attended one through high school.
Christian doctrine shapes women’s collective identity and is imbedded in structures and institutions that extend beyond the confines of the institutional Church. But let’s begin with the question of individual socialization. Do women actually internalize the subordinate status argued in this study? Does their socialization into this particular religious system have an influence on their lives and self-identity? Does doctrine transmission through liturgical practices and visual images of a submissive Mary make any difference in women’s lives? And if so, does the social construction of women’s inferior identity extend beyond the confines of the Church, or is this just a “church” problem?

To answer the individual question, I conducted a series of structured interviews aimed at understanding the depths of indoctrination on women raised within the faith tradition (socialization), how it shaped their identities and behaviors, and whether it still
exerts social control on them decades later. Each interviewee must have been educated in a Roman Catholic school from kindergarten through the 8th grade, and must have received both First Communion and Confirmation in a Roman Catholic school setting.

Among the broader questions I hoped to answer: Does a woman’s early education in a Roman Catholic school, specifically doctrinal tenets reinforced via visual images of Mary, and subsequently her participation in First Communion and Confirmation training and liturgical rites (performative practices), have abiding influence on her identity as a woman? How, if at all, has her religious education about Mary, the mother of Jesus, influenced her identity as a woman? What are the most significant visual images of Mary she remembers? What does she remember of the Marian doctrines she learned? What does she remember learning about Mary Magdalene? Do the Marys make a difference in her life today?

The findings of my structured interviews clearly demonstrate these questions are complex. Although the Roman Catholic Church is believed to be in decline around the world, it continues to exert global influence, particularly over women’s roles in society and business, leadership roles (particularly in the church) deemed acceptable for them, and women’s bodies. Information shared by the women in these interviews confirms this assertion.

Structure and Methodology

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31 The image shared at the beginning of this chapter is, by far, the most common one remembered by the women interviewed for this study. 35 of the women indicated that the visual image of Mary alone, eyes downcast, hands outstretched “in welcome,” wearing a white gown and blue cape is their earliest and most significant visual image of her. 34 of the women said they received this image in a statue or painting as a gift at a young age.
Forty structured interviews were conducted with women who had been educated in a Roman Catholic school system from kindergarten through 8th grade. I chose those educational years because they include two of the main liturgical rites of passage examined in this study – First Communion (generally at age 6-7) and Confirmation (generally at age 12-13). These rites of passage are accompanied by rigorous study and preparation, so rigorous that a number of women interviewed used the word “trauma” to describe their experiences (more about this is included in the section on performative practices). But many of the interviewees described how meaningful and important these rites were in their lives, and were proud of their accomplishments. For many of them, successful completion of these two significant rites of passage are some of their happiest memories and significant because they were times when entire families gathered to celebrate the girl’s achievement. Any potential participant who did not have the two elements of education and First Communion/Confirmation training in a Roman Catholic setting was not eligible for the study.

I employed a snowball method of participant collection, asking five Roman Catholic women (formerly and currently) with whom I am acquainted to assist in identifying participants for the study. I also sent invitation emails to lists of women provided to me by the five women assisting me. I hoped for 20 participants; I received 50 responses from women across the country interested in participating in the study. In the end, I conducted 40 interviews. Two participants did not provide the necessary Institutional Review Board Human Subject Consent Form; after two follow-up reminder emails to them, their interviews were removed from the study data, bringing the number

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32 The remaining 10 of the initial 50 were women with whom it was difficult to schedule an interview. My rule was that after three failed attempts at scheduling, I removed the woman from the list of potential participants.
to 38. Each interview lasted from one to one and a half hours. Some women were very talkative; others were more reticent. Some were eager to share stories and memories; others seemed either uninterested or were doing the interview because someone had asked them to. A few were hostile to the topic in general (they had completely rejected the Catholic Church of their youth, one calling herself an “agnostic humanist” and the other “nothing.”)

All interviews were conducted by phone because 29 of the 40 (original) participants live outside of New York State. To keep the data collection consistent and uninfluenced by in-person interviewing, I conducted only phone interviews.  

Overview of participants

Age

The age of the women interviewed ranged from 19 to 84. The breakdown of ages:


Ethnic background

Irish=9, Irish/German=3, Irish/Italian=1, Italian=6, Latina (including Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican and Cuban) =9, German=7, Other=3.

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33 Of the women interviewed, I knew three. One I know fairly well, although we had never spoken at length about her Roman Catholic education or attitudes about Mary. Two of the women I had met at a social function hosted by a mutual friend. The remaining 35 women were unknown to me.

34 I did not ask women participants about their level of education post-high school or their annual income. I did not ask questions about their attitudes toward social issues such as abortion, contraceptive use, etc. Comments about these issues came out in some of the interviews, but no specific questions about them were asked. Because this study is not focused on socio-economic differences between women interviewed, or attitudes believed to be related to socio-economic grouping, I did not believe that information was pertinent to the study.
The women readily supplied their ethnic background; the overwhelming majority (84%) attended Roman Catholic schools reflective of their ethnic background. Comments were regularly made about living in an “all-Irish neighborhood in the Bronx” or a “100% Italian Catholic neighborhood.” Later in the chapter I mention the occasional “slur” made about Catholics of a different ethnic background (such as use of the word “Madonna” for Mary, and how some participants responded negatively to the word, saying it had a “dark” connotation for them or was a word used by “other” Catholics, specifically Italians and Africans about whom some of the Irish and German Catholics in the study spoke disparagingly.)

Years attending Roman Catholic School

As mentioned earlier, one requirement for participation in the study was attending a Roman Catholic school from kindergarten through eighth grade. Not a year could be missed, and First Communion and Confirmation education were required to have happened in a Roman Catholic school setting. Interestingly, the study found that if a girl attended a Roman Catholic school for her elementary years, she most likely attended a Catholic high school. 90% of the participants in the study continued on to a Roman Catholic high school (and 90% of these went to all-girls high schools). A significant percentage went on to attend a Catholic college (60%). 20% of participants did not pursue college and 20% went to either public or other private colleges not associated with the Roman Catholic Church.

Where raised in the U.S. (and explanation of those born outside the U.S.)
36 of the women interviewed were born and raised in the U.S. One was born in Cuba; one was born in Bermuda, but her family moved back to the U.S. shortly after her birth (her parents were both American, but her father was in the military and stationed in Bermuda for a time). The states from which participants come are: New York=11, Ohio=3, Pennsylvania=3, New Jersey=5, California=4, Florida=3, Connecticut=2, Kentucky=1, North Carolina=2, South Carolina=1, Indiana=1, Bermuda=1, Cuba=1.

Religiosity of family of origin

The religious practices of family of origin varied widely in the women interviewed. 13 indicated her family of origin was very religious, and cited experiences like attending mass every week as a family, and saying prayers or the Rosary every night before bed. 10 women said their families had been more religious at certain times than others; alcoholic parents, an abortion, divorce and other family struggles were reasons often given for why the family fell out of consistent religious practice. The remaining 12 women gave varying answers to questions about the religious practice of their family of origin. One, in particular, said children were “seen and not heard” when she was growing up; her focus was on “surviving.” “I did everything I could just to survive,” she said.

Their experiences at school, and their strained relationships with nuns who were their teachers in particular, might have factored in how this question was answered.

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35 I interviewed one woman who had five siblings, three “Irish couplets” as she called them because each set of two children was born within 13 months of the other, and two women had mothers who married brothers so they had only “double cousins.” All three of these women indicated the entire family would gather together, aunts, uncles and cousins, and recite the Rosary on special occasions, holidays or when someone died.

36 Three women spoke in particular about the shame felt in her family when her parents divorced, one after 40 years of marriage and 6 children. They never felt welcome at their local parish church after the divorce.
Many of the women 50 years old and older made comments like, “The nuns were always right and the students always wrong.” A number of women shared harrowing stories of mistreatment (abuse, really) suffered at the hands of cruel and angry nuns who were their teachers. Few of the women remembered having priests as teachers before they reached high school and, even then, there were far fewer stories about priests than nuns.37

Religiosity of participant today

I was interested to know if the women continue to attend Mass today, and if so, at what level? How many have left the Church? Do they still consider themselves Roman Catholic even if they do not participate? Do they consider themselves religious? The answers here were the most varied of all questions asked. The vast majority of the participants (84%) consider themselves “religious” or “very religious” today. 60% attend Mass on a regular basis. Four have left the Roman Catholic Church for Protestant denominations, two becoming ordained ministers in the United Church of Christ38 after serving as nuns for 13+ years (in different orders). However, it is important to note that of the 24% who consider themselves religious or very religious but do not attend Mass today, many still participate in prayer groups at various churches (Protestant and Catholic) and in people’s homes, or Sodality to Mary and Novena Adoration groups at

37 Because so many of the women interviewed mentioned nuns, a short section about the role of nuns in the women’s lives, based on interview data, is included at the end of this chapter.
38 The United Church of Christ (UCC) is one of the most progressive denominations in the Protestant tradition. It began ordaining women much earlier than its reformed counterparts and was the first Protestant denomination to support gay marriage and ordination for gay ministers. It is also significantly less liturgical than, say, the Episcopal, Anglican or Lutheran traditions. I did not explore the reasons for selecting the UCC as the denomination chosen by these women when they left the Roman Catholic Church, however comments made by both of these women suggest the social position of the UCC on various social issues strongly influenced their decision.
local parishes.⁴⁹ One woman said she belongs to 9 different prayer groups but never attends Mass at a church. Many of these groups focus specifically on Marian devotion.

There is something about Mary that continues to draw women in, even if they left formal religious practice long ago. This is consistent with the women’s descriptions of Mary as always being there for them, welcoming them, ready to help them in times of need. She is perceived by the majority of women interviewed as accessible to anyone, regardless of past wrongdoings or straying from the Church.⁴⁰

The specific interview questions used in the study are:

1. Where did you learn about Mary, the mother of Jesus? How did you learn about her?
2. What visual image of Mary comes to mind first when you think of her? Where did you first see that image? How old were you when you first saw it? What words come to mind as you think of this image? What images come to your mind when you hear "Virgin Mary" or "Madonna?"
3. Do you remember any specific doctrine related to Mary? (If not, give a prompt by reading the five doctrines explored in this dissertation.) What are your reflections on these doctrines today?
4. Do you remember any liturgies or rites within the church that were specific to girls? Do you remember any liturgies or rites within the church that were specific to Mary? Describe the impact/affect these liturgies had on you, your self-identity or religious understanding.
5. What did you learn about Mary Magdalene? Do you have any visual images of her you remember seeing as a child?

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⁴⁹ One woman who hasn’t attended a formal Mass in 10+ years participates in a group where each person volunteers to pray one hour every week near the tabernacle where the consecrated elements for Eucharist are kept during the week. The parish priest decided a Perpetual Adoration of the elements should be instituted after September 11, 2001; he created a schedule of 24 hours a day, 7 days a week consisting of hourly slots for which people sign-up. Every slot is taken, sometimes with 11-12 people present in the same hour, but there is always at least one person present; this woman has been doing the 11 pm-12 midnight slot Thursday nights for nine years and says she never misses a night.

⁴⁰ One woman shared that after going through a particularly challenging year in her family and praying consistently to Mary for help, she promised Mary she would purchase a beautiful statue of her to place on the front lawn if she helped them get through the challenges. Her family survived the challenges and she followed through on her promise, purchasing the same lawn statue seen in chapter 3 (see page 35). This woman truly believes it was Mary who came to her aid, and her religious devotion deepened after the experience.
6. What role does Mary, the mother of Jesus, play in your spiritual life today? What significance does Mary have for your life today? Do you believe Mary has relevance to your life today?

Overall, the subjects of religious life, family background, memories and recollections of school experiences were areas for rich and deep exploration by the women interviewed. With few exceptions, they were subjects about which the women felt comfortable speaking, even sharing about painful memories of experiences they thought had long since been forgotten. I was able to identify fairly quickly whether the woman being interviewed would be more or less talkative, and I found most of the women were very open to the questions being asked and forthcoming with their responses. Most had not thought of their connection to Mary in the specific terms set forth in the questions until asked, and, occasionally, gently probed. For many of the women, their spiritual lives and relationships with Mary is an internal reality, one they had crafted and carefully managed for most of their lives, finding ways to “make it work” for them. Some shared ongoing conversations they have with Mary, like the woman who said, “I talk to her all of the time. She’s my number one conversation partner. I imagine what she would be saying to me, how she would counsel me, what advice she would give to me. I try very hard to listen for her voice, because I think she always steers me in the right direction.”

The mention of apparition sites by a number of women came as a surprise to me. I did not have a question about apparition sites in the structured interview, but for many of the women interviewed, visiting Marian apparition sites is a deep part of their spiritual lives. They invest significant amounts of money to travel to faraway places to visit the most famous sites (like Lourdes and Medjugorje) and shared no experiences of being disappointed with their visits. The women began speaking about Marian sites when
asked about their spiritual lives today (see question 6 above). The section about Marian apparition sites is found in Appendix A.

Mary Magdalene findings

One interview question was about the women’s memory of learning about Mary Magdalene. The original proposal for this study included a larger section about Mary Magdalene, almost equal to that of Mary, mother of Jesus. What I discovered in the interviews revealed a single, clear finding about Mary Magdalene with much less additional information about her than originally anticipated. Each interviewee remembers learning she was a prostitute, even the 19-30-year-olds, who had been exposed to Elaine Pagels’ work on the gnostic gospels, and feminist Catholic writers like Elizabeth Johnson, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza or Rosemary Radford Ruether (whose work has been around for 30+ years) who have challenged the notion of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. Each woman interviewed had a clear understanding of what a “bad” girl was, and Mary Magdalene was the ultimate representation of that. Magdalene’s (theologically constructed) sexual “fallenness” was what defined her in the minds of many women interviewed. And they knew they should not become like her.

Pope Gregory’s historic 6th century sermon, discussed in chapter one, is still having an impact on women’s lives 1500 years later despite the Vatican’s reversal of this notion in 1969. However, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the looming presence in the lives of these women; they want to move toward Mary and away from anything “Magdalenish.”
Findings

I group the findings of the interviews into five sections, with two smaller sections at the end of the chapter. These areas, chosen for their prevalence and extent of interesting details mentioned about them, are: Dichotomization: Purity and Fallenness; Mary as Everywhere-Visual Images in Home, Church, School, Neighborhood and Body; Mary as Alone-Mary as Silent; An Iconic Image that Morphs; Performative Practices: First Communion and May Crowning; Nostalgia and Belonging, and The Influence of Nuns. The section on Marian apparition sites found in Appendix A was a later addition not originally intended to be included in the study. As mentioned above, so many of the interviewees talked about visiting such sites or going to one on a family trip or pilgrimage that I thought it should be included. The section gives some historical background, and I share my own experience of visiting two such sites – one of the most famous in Lourdes, France, and a second “unofficial” but quite large, site in LuJuan, Argentina.

Dichotomization: Purity and Fallenness

Women aspire to be like Mary, but her perfect, dichotomous reality (virgin and mother) is always unattainable for them. The messages “be a virgin” and “be a perfect mother,” abstain from sex to remain pure and unstained but also ask Mary to bless your home with fertility, are a source of constant conflict. Struggles with this irreconcilable dichotomy were expressed throughout the interviews. One woman said,

41 See Epstein, Deceptive Distinctions, pp. 12-13, where she writes, “It is important to note that the preference for dichotomous categorization exists. It may be that such thinking is more economical,
Could you (I) be like Mary? On the one hand she was the example of humility and purity, but on the other hand she had a completely magical upbringing that none of us had access to and she had this protection from sin. So she was always a two-edged figure--perfect and it was impossible to be like her. She was put out there to be a model but not taken too seriously because she was too different, too special, too set apart. Mary Gordon said Mary was a stick used to beat smart girls with because you could never quite live up to Mary, but there she always was.  

Other women found Mary’s early and unexpected pregnancy, and the shame she and Joseph felt about it, helpful as they dealt with similar struggles. One woman said,

My husband is RC, too. He is also practicing. We are very similar in our beliefs. We went to a Cursillo weekend and it was a turning point in my life. I didn’t want to go, but I had to because my husband was going (wives were required to accompany their husbands). Because I was eight months pregnant when I went, it was really a Mary moment for me. I was pregnant when I got married, and I had a lot of guilt about it. Other people had a hard time dealing with that issue. It was not an easy time in our lives. Being around people who told me it was OK and really bringing Mary into the issue was very healing for me. I felt like I had something in common with her, that she knew what I was going through and would help me.

The women in the study had dealt with every kind of struggle – abortion, getting married because they were pregnant, stillborn children, wayward children, divorce, excommunication from the Church, and Mary was both distant from them because of her singular perfection and completely close because of her suffering and accessibility. She is perceived as judging the bad behavior but available to help women out of the very situations for which she has judged them.

rewarding, seductive, or just easier in that mutually exclusive categories are parsimonious and even aesthetic.”

42 Mary Gordon is Professor of English at Barnard College in New York. I believe the reference here is from her book, “Good Boys and Dead Girls,” published in 1991. In that book, she examines and critiques the role of the church in shaping societal conversation about abortion, domination and women’s leadership.

43 Cursillo is an organization begun in 1944 as a movement within Roman Catholicism consisting of three-day retreats aimed at spiritual growth for the individual. www.cursillo.org provides historical information about the organization and its current mission statement. Since its beginnings, Protestant versions of Cursillo have formed, called by names such as Via de Cristo.
But while Mary is held up as pure, virginal and free of sin, she was also spoken of as desexualized by the women in the study. Her perpetual virginity, a doctrine most of the women had learned and could explain, removed her from a sexual realm. At the same time, she is significantly connected to women’s sexuality. One woman told the story of getting in trouble at school because she and her friends were making fun of another girl. A particularly strict nun brought her to stand in front of the statue of Mary in the school chapel. The nun placed the girl’s hand over her breast and told her to stand there, asking forgiveness for what she had done. The nun then brought the entire class into the chapel to see what the girl was doing, and the class laughed at her. It was an odd story, clearly filled with all sorts of serious issues, but the humiliation and sexualization of the breast-holding girl being placed in front of pure Mary were particularly significant. The woman described it as if her sexuality was being brought to Mary to be judged and then laughed at by the rest of the class.

I highlight this story because it makes the connection between Mary, sexuality and humiliation, three elements that seemed intertwined for the women interviewed. Mary holds power in women’s sexual realm, and many women shared stories of going to Mary for help to have children (or for other family members or friends trying to become pregnant). Fertility was mentioned numerous times as a blessing for a married woman, but this collapses in on itself if there is a divorce, pregnancy outside of marriage or even a wayward child considered to be the fault of her parents’ sinfulness (see section on Magdalene Houses in Chapter 1).\footnote{The 2013 film, Philomena, addresses the issue of babies born to unwed mothers in Magdalene Houses in Ireland being adopted by wealthy American, Catholic families.} Many of the women interviewed who visit Marian apparition sites mention prayers for fertility for themselves, friends or family members as
a primary reason for the visits. Yet all of these elements contribute to a collective internal reality of “fallenness” and trying not to become “one of them.” If untold numbers of women around the world, like so many interviewed for this study, consider themselves “fallen,” what becomes of them?

Mary as Everywhere--Visual Images at Home, Church, School, Neighborhood and Body

Of the 38 interviewees for this study, 30 made the statement, “Mary was everywhere” when asked the second set of questions in the interview. It was easy for them to describe the various visual images of Mary found in their homes, front yards, neighborhoods and churches. 13 of the women said a picture of Mary hung above their parents’ bed. When asked about the significance of this placement, most said their parents hoped Mary would bless them with many children, and one said, “good children, not bad ones!”; four women said watchful Mary would keep their parents faithful to each other, or at least they hoped she would. One said, “She was always watching everything; there was no place we could go to get away from her.”

One woman said that for the majority of her growing-up years, she was never in a place where there wasn’t some image of Mary. When she woke in the morning, a statue of Mary given to her at First Communion was the first thing she saw on her nightstand. When she walked down the circular staircase of the house, she passed a large ivory statue of Mary in the “coffin corner” (see footnote 114, Chapter 4, p. 108) with fresh flowers at her feet (her mother placed new flowers there each week). Mary hung on the wall in the dining room and in the living room, looking on as she ate breakfast, did homework and watched TV at the end of the day. As she walked to school, Mary was situated on the
corner of almost every lawn of every home on her street (she was raised in a solidly Italian Catholic neighborhood with single-family homes)\textsuperscript{45}, she greeted her as she walked into her Catholic school, and was in every room of the school (including the girls’ bathroom, where she was situated next to the soap dispenser!). And around her neck, the miraculous medallion given to her at Confirmation, which she wore every day (until it became so this faded she couldn’t see Mary’s image anymore and exchanged it for a crucifix). There was virtually no place where Mary was not present, including on this girl’s body from puberty (Confirmation age) on. Imagine the implications for a young girl growing up with Mary all around her, watching her, sometimes judging, sometimes protecting, but always representing the perfect woman she should aspire to become (but never could).

Interestingly, only 6 women mentioned a Madonna and Child image as primary for her. Although 24 mentioned the significance of Mary as a mother, the visual images they remember most are of Mary alone. Some women commented that even though Mary was considered a perfect mother, they don’t think of her as doing “motherly” things for Jesus. She exists above motherly duties, they said, even though the women believed she was a perfect mother. One woman said she wishes there had been more “cuddly” images of Mary with Jesus while she was growing up, but they weren’t to be found. And although there are thousands upon thousands of renditions of a serene Mary sitting with a calm Jesus on her lap, this was not the image that came to mind first for the women in this study.

Another interesting, and disturbing, finding of the interviews was a racial undertone that went along with the primary image the women overwhelmingly discussed.

\textsuperscript{45} See lawn statue image in Chapter 4 for a common example.
For them, Mary was white, and a very light, ivory-skinned white. Eye color was never mentioned, and that might be because 36 of the women see her eyes as downward cast, not looking directly at them. Only one woman mentioned the importance of seeing Mary as darker-skinned, and she described this as an awakening she had about Mary well into adulthood. Even the Latina women who spoke of La Virgin described the same ivory-skinned Mary as the Irish, Italian and German women interviewed. Eight women had a negative reaction to the word “Madonna” when asked if it was ever used for Mary in their home or school. One woman said, “I have a dark association with that word (Madonna). It was sometimes used by Italians, but we didn’t associate with them at all. We stayed away from their part of town, and they did the same with ours.” Another woman described how upset she was the first time she saw a rendering of a black Madonna while walking along 125th Street in Harlem. She said, “Seeing it elicited an almost visceral reaction in me. I thought, no, no, that’s not what Mary looks like. And I felt like Mary had been taken over and was being portrayed in an abusive way. I don’t believe in a black Madonna.”

So, not a black Madonna. Not a Madonna with child. Not an image of Mary looking directly at them. What about two of the images discussed in chapter 3: Mary standing on a globe crushing a snake underfoot, and Mary as Queen of Heaven? Did these two images have significance for the women in the study? 14 of the women mentioned Mary on the globe, and 10 of them knew the snake represented Eve and that Eve “brought sin into the world.” They had learned in school that Mary was the new Eve, accomplishing what Eve was not able to do – crush sin underfoot. Only 3 women described the sinfulness of Eve as sexual, but 12 women mentioned the temptation of
Adam by Eve, essentially prompting the Fall in the garden of Eden, and putting the responsibility for this on Eve’s shoulders. If prompted, most of the women could remember a Mary, Queen of Heaven, image they had seen, but only two mentioned it as the second-most-significant image in her memory; and no one claimed it as primary for them.

One woman, now an artist, has an extensive collection of Marian art, including paintings, statues andicons. She told me her Facebook page is filled with Marian images. While she is extremely hostile to the Roman Catholic Church today, she said, “Mary somehow got into my subconscious unscathed. My feelings about Catholicism are so negative. It was almost like she was her own little religion to me.” She, like four other women in the study, mentioned the use of religious art and crucifixes by (formerly) Roman Catholic stars like Madonna (who dropped the rest of her name, Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone) and Sinead O’Connor (who has a large tattoo of a rather scary crucifix on her upper chest). Each surmised it was a way for them to “work out” her issues with the Church. When they heard the word “Madonna,” they thought of the superstar, not Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary as Alone; Mary as Silent.

During the interviews, a number of women said they see Mary as a solitary figure. This is consistent with the iconic images discussed in this work – Mary is alone, looking down with hands open. Her aloneness is compelling. Does it reinforce her singular status? Does it make her more accessible because there are no threatening people (like God or Jesus, perhaps) standing alongside her, making her difficult to approach? She is
either standing or sitting alone. Upon further reflection, I was also struck by the reality that Mary rarely looks directly at a viewer because her eyes are often downcast.

What does the solitary, eyes-downcast Mary convey to her viewers? There are many images where Mary is looking out, but that is not the predominant image remembered by the women in this study. One woman said the downcast stare reflects “Mary’s sadness, both over the suffering of Jesus and that of the world.” Another said, “It reflects Mary’s humility, that even though Mary has power, she doesn’t need to project it outward through her eyes because her strength comes from within her soul.” But do downcast eyes project strength or power? Do they project humility, or is it meekness she conveys? One woman said the downcast eyes indicate “Mary protecting her inner self because there is so much suffering in the world she takes into herself.”

And what of the silent Mary? Not one woman interviewed for the study thought of Mary as speaking or having a voice. The significance they spoke of comes from Mary’s actions, her willingness to do what God asked of her, and her humility in taking on such an enormous task. But can a voiceless Mary help anyone else find a voice -- man, woman or child? Perhaps this is part of the subtext of Mary’s revered place within the Roman Catholic system. If women are encouraged to emulate her, that might include being silent or not searching for a voice that can speak out. The strength found in Mary for the women interviewed was related to being forgiven or redeemed from their unworthiness. It was a strength found in her presence with them, not in speaking out.\(^46\)

\(^{46}\) Obedience is a major theme found within speeches and writings about people who join religious orders. It is also a significant theme spoken of by the women about their behavior in school, how they were regarded there, and whether they were considered a “good girl” or “bad girl.” The system seems oriented toward silent obedience, which includes trusting designated leaders. More about this is included in the section on May processionals in Chapter 3.
The majority of communication with Mary comes through well-known prayers to her, prayers learned by the women when they were girls in Catholic school. In addition to the Rosary, the following are common prayers mentioned most often by women in this study:

Memorare Prayer: Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.  (Mentioned by 14 women)

Hail Mary: Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.  (Mentioned by 38 women)

May Processional Prayer and Song:

Bring flowers of the rarest, bring blossoms the fairest, from garden and woodland and hillside and dale; our full hearts are swelling, our glad voices telling the praise of the loveliest flower of the vale!

Refrain: O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today! Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May. O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May.

Their lady they name thee, Their mistress proclaim thee, Ah, grant that thy children on earth be as true, as long as the bowers are radiant with flowers, as long as the azure shall keep its bright hue. Refrain.

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47 A few women spoke of a Guardian Angel Prayer, but I wasn’t able to find a consistent example of the one most recited. There are endless numbers of prayers to Mary. The ones included here are the most common, and the ones most often mentioned by the women in the interviews.
Sing gaily in chorus; the bright angels o'er us re-echo the strains we begin upon earth; their harps are repeating the notes of our greeting, for Mary herself is the cause of our mirth. **Refrain.**

(Mentioned by 38 women)

Hail, Holy Queen Prayer: Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.

(Mentioned by 14 women.)

The Angelus – Said at Easter:

The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit. (Hail Mary) Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to Thy word. (Hail Mary). And the Word was made flesh. And dwelt among us. (Hail Mary)

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection. Through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Mentioned by 18 women)

Stabat Mater (Standing Mother) Hymn/Prayer – first five verses (of 19 verses):

At the cross her station keeping,  
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
Close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
All His bitter anguish bearing,  
Now at length the sword had pass’d.
Oh, how sad and sore distress’d
Was that Mother highly blest
Of the sole-begotten One!

Christ above in torment hangs;
She beneath beholds the pangs
Of her dying glorious Son.

Is there one who would not weep,
Whelm'd in miseries so deep
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

(Mentioned by 10 women)

Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe: God of power and mercy, you blessed the Americas at Tepeyac with the presence of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe. May her prayers help all men and women to accept each other as brothers and sisters. Through your justice present in our hearts, may your peace reign in the world. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Mentioned by 14 women)

Yet in all of these prayers, one never hears Mary’s voice. Mary does not speak through any of the most familiar and often-recited prayers. They are not Mary’s words. The Magnificat, or Mary’s Song, from scripture is the lengthiest set of words attributed to Mary. It doesn’t appear in the prayers quoted above. The Magnificat has a wholly different theme and tone than the prayers and could be considered the only voice of Mary attested to in scripture:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for God has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is God’s Name.
God has mercy on those who fear God in every generation.
God has shown the strength of God’s arm,
God has scattered the proud in their conceit.
God has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
God has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich God has sent away empty.
God has come to the help of God’s servant Israel
for God has remembered God’s promise of mercy,
the promise made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever.
Luke 1:46-55
(Mentioned by 1 woman)

One woman interviewed who became a nun, and later left for a Protestant denomination that ordains women, said she was shocked to learn while attending seminary as an adult that Mary’s single most important communication recorded in Scripture is about justice for the oppressed, “the poor being lifted up and the mighty being brought low.” It “never had a hearing” in her Roman Catholic education while growing up but has been a significant part of her life and religious identity today.

Although she left the Roman Catholic Church after 16 years in a religious order, she says Mary is still a major presence in her spiritual life. She said, “Somehow I thought that if I was going to give up the sisterhood and Catholic Church, I would have to give up Mary, too. I learned I didn’t have to do that and she (Mary) has remained happily part of my life as an ordained minister for 10 years. I feel I bring her with me as a gift to my Protestant brothers and sisters who haven’t given her the prominence she deserves.”

Why isn’t The Magnificat a common prayer learned by girls in Catholic school? Only one woman in this study mentioned it, and not as a memory from her early school years. Imagine if there was a prominent image of Mary surrounded by people, listening to her speak the Magnificat, and looking directly at them. What a contrast to the silent,
alone, downcast-eyed images seen most frequently around the world and cited most by the women interviewed for this study.

**An Iconic Image that Morphs**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is perhaps the most iconic female image in all of history, and the interview results attest to this. But her iconic image goes far beyond the most prominent one shared by the vast majority of women in this study, that of the ivory-skinned, humble woman, looking downcast with hands open in welcome, wearing a white gown and blue cape. She actually morphs, becoming what women want or need her to be. This is most evident at a place like the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth discussed in chapter 4 where Mary is artistically created as being from countries around the world. Mary is seen as Mexican, Vietnamese, Liberian and even Chinese (an interesting inclusion since China does not recognize the Vatican or Pope but has created its own Catholic Church and ecclesiastical hierarchy controlled by the Chinese government, not by Rome). Everyone wants to see Mary as “theirs” or “like us.” Such examples can be found around the world, but the most iconic image is the one described above (shown at the beginning of the chapter).

Yet it goes far beyond cultural collective identity, that Mary is “like us” or “belongs to us;” who Mary interacts with is an important indicator of whom she approves (although there are virtually no iconic images of Mary talking with anyone. Her perceived silence is discussed at length in the section in this chapter on Mary as Alone, Mary as Silent). Consider Trinity Lutheran Church on West 100th Street in Manhattan, a congregation located across the street from the huge Frederick Douglass housing project.

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48 The image at the opening of this chapter is a common rendition of this popular image of Mary.
and in an area with many Mexican immigrants. Even though “La Virgin” is not a historically Protestant figure, Trinity Lutheran commissioned a colorful mural of La Virgin de Guadalupe who, in the mural, is reaching out to Martin Luther and Frederick Douglas. This was done for two primary reasons – the congregation wanted Mexican people in the neighborhood, who are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, to feel welcome at this Lutheran Church. But they also wanted La Virgin to be depicted as embracing Martin Luther, the former Catholic priest turned church reformer who spurred on the Protestant reformation, and Frederick Douglass, the African American reformer and abolitionist leader after whom the nearby housing project is named.

The mural “Under the Rainbow: The Virgin of Guadalupe Embraces Martin Luther and Frederick Douglass,” was painted by artist Flavio Pellegrino.

Figure 4: The Virgin of Guadalupe Embraces Martin Luther and Frederick Douglass found at Trinity Lutheran Church, Manhattan, New York

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49 My thanks go to one of the interviewees who brought this mural to my attention. I include it in this chapter because it emerged during an interview; it could be included in chapter 3 on visual images of Mary. But because it is an image lodged in the memory of an interviewee, and mentioned by her to describe Mary’s ability to become what is needed in a particular circumstance, I chose to include it in this section.
As illustrated here, Mary morphs and changes to accommodate the needs of her admirers. Here, she is portrayed as uniting white German Lutherans and Black and Latino housing project residents. But she can also become a source of strength for someone in need, humility when one battles arrogance, forgiveness when one has strayed and is trying to find her way back (Mary is much easier to approach with a serious wrongdoing than Jesus, as attested to by many women in the study) and, in the case of the mural above, approval of two great reformers central to this local congregation’s identity. Further, she is believed capable of giving important qualities to her followers in their times of need. She becomes what a follower needs her to become and provides what the follower needs her to provide. This is a significant element of her widespread appeal.

One woman said, “I think of Mary as being just like us, and I want to focus on the human Mary. That’s why she’s so accessible. She relates to us; she suffers like us. She suffered when Jesus was crucified. Her heart was pierced so many times (see prayer card image in Chapter Four-Woman of Sorrows). There is no pain she hasn’t endured. That’s why I go to her first for help.” Yet, another woman said, “I wish I identified with Mary more. I don’t identify with her because I feel she is very special, chosen, and I feel I am neither. I had an abortion at 17, so that knocked me out of the ‘chosen’ category.” Yet, later in the interview this same woman said, “We were taught to be pure, honest, open to whatever God’s path is for you. I feel all of that is attainable, just not for someone like me.”

There was a consistent theme throughout the interviews that Mary was special and chosen, and women are called to emulate her. Yet no one can really be like her, so this thinking translates to, “I’m no good; my sins have knocked me out of the chosen
category.” Six of the women interviewed said they’d had an abortion. Each feels close to Mary but also believes the abortion permanently removes her from any “special” category. One of these women kept reciting a common Catholic prayer she says every day, “O Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come to me, but speak the words of comfort, and my spirit shall be healed.” Other women interviewed recited that prayer as well, and one shared two additional verses: “And humbly I receive Thee, the bridegroom of my soul, No more my sin to grieve Thee, nor fly Thy sweet control. O Eternal Holy Spirit, unworthy tho' I be, prepare me to receive Him, and trust the Word to me.”

Although this prayer is associated with Jesus, it points to the chronic reality of feeling unworthy about which many interviewees spoke.

One of the young women interviewed said, “You can pray to Mary whenever for whatever you need, and she is there for you. Mother of God means mother to us all, not just Jesus. You can go to her for anything and she won’t judge you.” A tension exists between being considered unworthy by Jesus (and Mary,) yet being accepted by her and not judged by her. If Mary doesn’t judge, then why would a woman believe she is unworthy? Or, is Mary situated between the woman and Jesus, not serving as judge but as mediator to the real judge, Jesus? Is Mary considered safe because part of the protection she offers is from her son’s judging eye? Does her acceptance take the place of that which her son cannot (or will not) give? Yet, if Jesus is the one who can “speak the words of comfort, and my spirit shall be healed,” then why the continued guilt and shame expressed by these women? Is there ever true freedom for them, even if they

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50 Attempts to find the origin of this prayer proved difficult. There are many different versions of it; it has been used as a poem, sung as a hymn, edited and added to by all sorts of artists over the centuries. The first verse, and the one often cited by women in the study, seems to be the version most solidified in their collective memory.
regularly recite prayers for redemption and healing? This is a further dichotomization not explored in the first chapter. Even if women are healed, the shame and guilt remain as constant reminders of their being fallen yet forgiven, “damaged goods” yet healed.

The women interviewed who had experienced an abortion, divorce, or being pregnant before marriage all expressed regret about the situation they found themselves in, and while it hadn’t completely prevented each of them from participating in religious life, the experiences clearly left a mark, or “stain,” on their self-esteem and identity. Being fallen and forgiven, damaged and healed are co-existing conditions for these women. Constant reconciliation of these divergent realities takes place within the mind and heart of each woman who experiences this dichotomization (which is all of them).

But the sense that fallenness has occurred means purity and innocence have been lost; this is an irretrievable loss not to be regained even through participation in many Marian prayer groups. But they keep trying. Many of the women interviewed who participate in such groups or attend Mass on a regular basis said they hope Mary intercedes for them with Jesus so they will be saved. One woman said, “I just keep going even though I’m a total screw-up. I keep hoping that in the end it will be enough.”

**Liturical/Performative Practices and Memory**

Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, very few of the women interviewed had any substantive memory of the names of doctrines they learned about Mary-- the doctrines of Perpetual Virginity of Mary, Immaculate Conception of Mary, The Assumption of Mary, Mary as Queen of Heaven and Mary as the New Eve. They knew the contents of the doctrines, more or less, but were not able to recite catechism learned
The liturgical practices in which they participated had a far stronger place in their memory than the doctrines learned. A few could give basic elements of some of the doctrines, but many mentioned they hold no significance for them today. The Baltimore Catechism was mentioned by most of the women in their 50’s and older as the standard catechetical text from which they learned Confirmation lessons and church doctrines.

One woman said, “I guess I remember learning the doctrines, but I couldn’t recite parts of the catechism today. We memorized the words, and I knew they were very important and that I wouldn’t get my First Communion or Confirmation if I didn’t know them.” Another said her parents asked one of her aunts, who later became a nun, to come to their house and help her memorize the doctrines she needed to know for an exam at school. Years later, the aunt purchased a home that had been a convent. The original altar was still in the structure, and her family used it as such; they would gather around it, say the Rosary together, listen to her recite doctrines from the Baltimore Catechism, and say evening prayers.

The most significant memories the women had, consistent with my argument in chapter 3, were the May processionals, Mary crowning ceremonies and First Communion services. First Communion was a much deeper memory for the majority of the women than Confirmation, even though many years separate these rituals and Confirmation happens at an older age. Almost all the women interviewed (36 in total) spoke about what they wore for First Communion, how serious an event it was and how nervous they

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51 The Immaculate Conception was the most confusing doctrine asked about in the interviews. It refers to the immaculate conception of Mary by her parents Anna and Joachim, not Jesus’ conception. Four of the women interviewed identified the confusion commonly believed about this doctrine, but 10 did not understand the doctrine at all.
were to receive Communion. They all said they wore a white bridal-type dress, veil, gloves and shoes for this special event. There were no exceptions. A blue veil, the color of virtue, was reserved for Mary alone, but the purity of the white dresses reflected Mary’s purity and virginity, and by extension, the purity of the girls. One woman said,

My parents didn’t have enough money for the mini-wedding dress that everyone had to wear, but I got a dress somehow and I thought it was divine. I wore the veil and the white shoes. There had been lots and lots of practice, walking up the aisle, receiving the host and going back to the pew. I still remember telling my father that I felt my heart opened that day, and that Jesus had gone inside of me for the first time.

To this day, she doesn’t know where the dress came from, but her First Communion experience was very special to her, and she has many positive memories about it.

One woman said she was the first girl to be born in her family in three generations, so a picture was taken of her at age 2 wearing a white dress and veil with a statue of Mary standing above her on the mantle. She was named after Mary and Mary’s mother (Anna) because her parents believed she was a gift from the Virgin Mary to them, and their whole family. But her experience of First Communion was “horrible.” There had been much practice to make sure the girls filed into the chapel in the right order; they had to march in step with each other and she could not sleep the night before, afraid she would “mess it up.” By the time she got to the actual service, she was so nervous she “threw up” the host after she received it. She said, “My father wouldn’t speak to me for days after that, he was so embarrassed at what I had done. To this day, my grandmother doesn’t think I actually received my First Communion.”

The combination of rehearsals and the seriousness of the ritual itself, together with the fancy dress and attention given to the girls, lodged this experience in the memory of the women interviewed. Many shared positive memories of the day, how
meaningful it was to have their entire family together for the event (many coming from long distances to be present) and how special they felt receiving the attention of friends and family members, and the nuns and priests of the parish. The women knew their parents and family members were proud of them that day, and that was a happy memory for many of them. Many described the experience as feeling “like a princess;” one woman said,

I had never really thought of myself as beautiful before that day. I always felt like the plain, homely girl at school, and that all of the other girls were much prettier than I was. But that day, when I looked in the mirror, I realized I was beautiful, too. My mother even let me put on makeup (which was unheard-of for girls in our family before they turned 13) and one of my aunts came and did my hair in a fancy style. Then, with the veil, well, I can’t even describe how beautiful it all was. I have pictures from that day that were taken by my father, but they don’t capture how beautiful I felt on the inside.

The second-most-prominent memory of liturgical practices involved “Mary’s month,” the month of May, entirely devoted to Mary. Various liturgies were celebrated throughout the month, but of particular importance were the liturgies dedicated to the time after the Ascension of Jesus and the Visitation of Gabriel to Mary announcing she would give birth to Jesus. May processionals were mentioned by all 38 women interviewed. Many of them shared happy memories of singing the “beautiful song to Mary” included in the prayers section of this chapter. Fourteen of the women interviewed began to sing the song as they recalled the memory. Each described the particular practice in her Roman Catholic school and it varied slightly by parish. But four elements were consistent for May processionals: walking into the sanctuary together to visit the statue of Mary, bringing flowers to place at Mary’s feet, singing the song “Bring
Flowers for the Fairest,” and someone placing a crown of flowers (dried or real) on Mary’s head.

Twenty-seven of the women interviewed spoke about the selection process for the girl (or girls) who would crown Mary. They had strong memories of being chosen – or, overwhelmingly, of not being chosen -- to crown Mary (36 of the women in this study were not chosen and some have clear, even devastating, memories of the selection process). Among the most telling comments about the selection process: “The most beautiful girl was chosen to crown Mary, and that was never me.” “The smartest girl in the class, the one with the best grades, was always chosen.” “The girl who followed the rules most closely would be chosen.” Only one woman interviewed for the study remembers being chosen to place the crown on Mary’s head during the May processional. And one woman remembers being chosen, along with her best friend, to crown Mary one year. She said it is one of her happiest memories from elementary school.52

But for many of the women in the study, never being chosen to crown Mary is a difficult memory. One woman said, “I never understood why I was never chosen. All of those years and I was never chosen. To this day I wonder what it was the nuns didn’t like about me. I guess I’ll never know.” Another said, “I never thought I would be chosen. I wasn’t that smart and certainly wasn’t beautiful. I didn’t follow the rules. I wasn’t the sort of girl they were looking for to crown Mary.” Still another said, “My husband and I always joke about that experience because he wants to create some ritual where I am

52 This woman also told the story that each December a nun who was her teacher would put each of the names of the girls in her class on an alabaster sheep figure and put all of the figures on the bottom of a steep staircase leading up to the nativity scene with Jesus, Mary and Joseph. If they did something good, the sheep with their name on it would move up one step toward the nativity. If they did something wrong, they would be brought back a stair (or more, depending on the seriousness of their wrongdoing). She said the same girl who was chosen to crown Mary usually got to the nativity scene first, which she interpreted as the nun playing favorites in the class.
chosen to place a crown on something. It bothers him that I’m still hurt by not being chosen after all these years.”

The women understood that placing flowers at Mary’s feet was a prayer for fertility, asking her for a good husband and many children, and that their children not go astray. 9 women who were married in a Catholic Church remembered placing a bouquet of flowers at Mary’s feet as part of their wedding service, and the liturgical action had the same intent as that of the May processionals they had done years earlier at school. But the crowning had a different function, or so it seemed to most of the women. The crowning was a reflection on them personally, of being good enough (or not) to be chosen to participate in an honored tradition. Further, the May liturgies for Mary were some of the few times boys and girls were together in chapel. The majority of women interviewed remember the boys carrying the large statue of Mary into the church – it was considered too heavy to be carried by the girls – and they remember the girls dancing around the statue as she entered the sanctuary. What identity construction was being created with this scenario of boys carrying the heavy statue of Mary and girls dancing around her (and, by association, around the boys)?

The only other performative practice that received notable mention in the interviews was reciting the Rosary. Twenty-four of the women interviewed mentioned the Rosary and the various places she recited it, including school, home, Sodality of Mary groups, prayer groups and individually. The Rosary dates to the 13th century, and is believed to have been given to St. Dominic through a Marian apparition. It has changed over the years, or at least been added to, the most recent being former Pope John Paul’s addition of five mysteries in 2002. Most of the women over 40 were unclear about those

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53 See section in chapter 2 on the origins and history of the Rosary.
additional mysteries, indicating they had not kept up with current practice of the Rosary. However, all 24 women who mentioned the Rosary could recite it without prompting, and many began to do so during the interview.

Ritual is powerful, and a very strong shaper of collective memory. My study is about three mechanisms: doctrine transmission, performative practices (rituals and liturgies) and visual images. Of the three, liturgical practices are nearly as effective as visual images in lodging beliefs in people’s minds. The Church has effectively used liturgical practices to lodge beliefs and attitudes into collective memory, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a primary participant in such rituals. Even if one later “rejects” the beliefs learned at one time, the collective memory remains, as indicated by many of the women interviewed.

Relics as Connectors to Family and Identity Formation

Every woman I interviewed told at least one story of a physical representation of Mary given to her by a family member, usually at First Communion or Confirmation but some at baptism or marriage. These are markers of socialization, and an upbringing in a particular religious tradition. Most of the women have a few special items like a small statue, a medallion or Mary charm worn on a necklace. They cherish them, even if they left the Church long ago. Many could share exactly who gave them the piece, for what occasion and where it is currently kept (from being worn all the time, “I would never take this off” to “There’s a picture of her I always hang in the bedroom-- even after 17 moves!” to “She is always on my dresser” to “I keep her in the safest place in the house, the liquor cabinet – it’s always locked for safe-keeping!”). They consider these items
heirlooms (some are, but many were purchased new for a special occasion). Those that were actually passed on from a previous generation are particularly cherished, more because of their familial significance than theological meaning.

But the theological themes or “messages” continue in collective memory through these cherished items, especially the ones that are brought out for special occasions like baptisms, weddings or funerals. The pieces serve as an amalgamation of varying elements of the woman’s life – family, socialization, identity, history, place of birth, home, belonging, nostalgia, joy, grief, love, God, memory. Part of the collective memory construction of these items and what they represent is tied to family and belonging, how a family shapes and regards itself and what defines it as a unit (socialization). Being from a strong Catholic family was a core element of the women’s identities and was mentioned by 24 of the women interviewed. Even though a number of them have left the Church, they have not left their families, and these physical items are ties to family belonging and identity construction.

One woman said,

When I see the miraculous medallion given to me by my grandmother at my First Communion, it immediately warms my heart because I loved her so much, and I know how much she loved me. But when I look at it a second and third time, it reminds me of what I haven’t done, who I haven’t become, all the hopes I had at one time. And what my grandmother wouldn’t approve of that I have done in my life. Then I feel bad about it. So, it’s both – happy and sad, warm and filled with disappointments.

Such dichotomization is consistent with one of the overall themes of this study: the irreconcilable quandary women find themselves in trying to be what they’re “supposed to be” and live with who they actually are.
Nuns

Although the study did not focus on the role of nuns in the women’s religious education, they were mentioned by 17 of the women interviewed. The women had overwhelmingly negative memories of their experiences with nuns, with a few exceptions. The women who were 40 or older had attended Catholic school at a time when corporal punishment was still permitted and accepted, and 13 of the 17 who spoke about experiences with nuns told stories of being hit with rulers and sticks. One told of being pulled by her hair off a playground by a nun and another saw a fellow student pushed down a staircase. The nuns did not represent Mary for the women interviewed; rather, nuns were considered mean-spirited and angry by 60 percent of the women interviewed.

In addition, 11 of the women interviewed remember the period after Vatican II when women religious discarded the full habit and began to wear street clothes. One woman shared a fascinating story of going to school one day and seeing her teacher, a nun who had previously worn a habit, now sporting a bright red dress with her long, flowing red hair visible for the first time to the students. The woman said, “I did not know what to do. It was so unexpected and we had never thought of the nuns as being regular people like the rest of us. To see my teacher’s body, face and hair outside of the habit was almost too much for me to bear. I think that teacher left the nunnery not long after that.” But despite their otherworldly status, only two of the women interviewed said the nuns they encountered at their Roman Catholic schools represented Mary for them. Those two women went on to become nuns themselves.
A few of the interviewees mentioned they are grateful for a prominent female figure in their faith tradition, and believe this is a unique element of Catholicism. For some, Mary has kept them in the Church, and loyal to her. Mary has continued to provide the dichotomous elements of total acceptance and impossible role model for these women, and out of the ordinary images do not seem to provide the comfort of the classic image. Yet, out of the ordinary images indicate she can be radicalized, or at least pulled out of her classic image. Could alternative images of her challenge the social control that undergirds women’s “place” in the Church?

Figure 5: Edvard Munch's The Madonna
Chapter Three

Religious Education, Doctrine Transmission and Performative Practices (liturgical rites)

For centuries, the Catholic tradition has relied on religious education as a major vehicle of faith formation and doctrine transmission. In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement reiterating its commitment to the religious education of children and young people:

Young people are a valued treasure and the future leaders of our Church. …Catholic schools provide young people with sound Church teaching through a broad-based curriculum, where faith and culture are intertwined in all areas of a school’s life. By equipping our young people with a sound education, rooted in the Gospel message, the Person of Jesus Christ, and rich in the cherished traditions and liturgical practices of our faith, we ensure that they have the foundation to live morally and uprightly in our complex modern world.54

Through the Church’s extensive system of schools and catechetical (doctrinal) instruction at key points in adherents’ lives, the process begins at an early age and continues into young adulthood.

In 2011 there were 7,000 Roman Catholic schools in the United States, carrying on the educational tradition that started in 1606 when the Franciscans opened a school in what is now St. Augustine, Florida. The most recent statistical report on the number of students enrolled in Roman Catholic schools in the United States (2010) cites 1,467,694 elementary and middle school students and 598,178 in secondary schools. Some 30

54 Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium
Copyright © 2005, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc.
percent are minority students and 14.9 percent are non-Catholics.\textsuperscript{55} This excerpt from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) explains the goal:

\begin{quote}
The Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church, especially for education in the faith. Remembering that “the simultaneous development of man’s psychological and moral consciousness is demanded by Christ almost as a pre-condition for the reception of the befitting divine gifts of truth and grace,” the Church fulfills her obligation to foster in her children a full awareness of their rebirth to a new life. It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of the faithful, that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

While this study critiques the mechanism of doctrine transmission through religious education and its role in the social control of women, it also recognizes that Catholic schools contribute in many positive ways to the educational landscape in the United States. In urban communities where public schools perform poorly in state and national standardized tests, Catholic schools offer an alternative for middle- and lower-income families. Further, Catholic education seeks to instill positive values, good morals, and commitment to serving the community and the wider world. The Church’s view of the school as a place of moral formation is evidenced in this additional excerpt from “The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education”:

\begin{quote}
The fundamental aim of teaching is the assimilation of objective values, and, when this is undertaken for an apostolic purpose, it does not stop at an integration of faith and culture but leads the pupil on to a personal integration of faith and life.

The Catholic school has as its specific duty the complete Christian formation of its pupils, and this task is of special significance today because of the inadequacy of the family and society. It knows that this integration of faith and life is part of a lifelong process of conversion until
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{55} http://www.ncea.org/news/annualdatareport.asp
the pupil becomes what God wishes him to be. Young people have to be taught to share their personal lives with God. They are to overcome their individualism and discover, in the light of faith, their specific vocation to live responsibly in a community with others. The very pattern of the Christian life draws them to commit themselves to serve God in their brethren and to make the world a better place for man to live in.\(^{57}\)

Note the phrases “inadequacy of family and society” and “come to terms with cultural conditions.” They clearly indicate the Church continues to see itself (and its schools) as responsible for social control because other societal institutions are failing at it. Religious education, then, serves as a key mechanism of social control, transmitting into young participants’ individual and collective memories certain doctrinal notions that influence their religious and social identities—and filter out to society at large because of the Church’s worldwide prominence.

For the purpose of this study, we are particularly interested in elements of doctrine transmission in religious education that shape and influence societal collective memory about women’s roles and identity. Our focus is on five key “Marian” doctrines pertaining to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the most iconic woman in the Christian tradition: the Doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Mary as the mother of God (and, secondarily, of all humanity), Mary as the New Eve, and the Doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. Each of these doctrines is taught both actively and passively in Catholic schools and in other catechetical instruction required for various events in Catholics’ lives.\(^{58}\)

\(^{57}\) Ibid. p. 5.

\(^{58}\) Roman Catholicism is a sacramental tradition that places significant emphasis on receiving the Sacraments in their “proper” order and at appropriate ages. Other religious traditions have similar rites of passage which mark a child’s journey from infancy to young adulthood. Most Catholic families baptize their children as very young infants. The Rite of First Communion is generally celebrated at age 7-8 and Confirmation at age 12-14. The Sacraments are rites of passage observed by most Roman Catholic families.
They set forth dichotomous categories of good/bad, righteous/unrighteous, pure/defiled, Madonna/whore which become embedded in the collective memory of all who learn them—both female and male—and particularly influence the collective social identity of women who grow up in the tradition. But the effects are much farther-reaching: because of the Church’s global influence, its doctrinal characterizations of women infiltrate societal collective memory and factor into debates on issues such as abortion, women’s rights, and contraceptive use.59

Naturally, students attending Catholic schools receive regular, daily doctrinal exposure, but doctrine transmission also happens via the mandatory instruction Catholics must get before they can receive the Sacraments (symbolic rites of the Church) to be considered faithful practitioners in good standing.60 (Even non-Catholic children who attend Roman Catholic schools receive catechetical instruction there.) The first of the Sacraments requiring such instruction is First Communion (to be discussed in detail later in this chapter), at age 7 or 8, followed by Confirmation, a significant rite of passage for pre-teen youth that commonly requires two years of preparatory instruction. Further, couples to be married in the Church must take Pre-Cana instruction, a series of four to six lessons taken in weekly sessions or at a weekend retreat, covering topics such as communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and Catholic views on marriage regardless of their level of active participation in the Church. It is a source of guilt and shame for parents who do not ensure their children have received the Sacraments in good order.

59 Consider the 2011 debate over whether Catholic hospitals should be required to provide insurance coverage for contraceptives to its employees. The Obama administration played hard-ball on this issue saying such coverage was mandated by law; later the administration softened its stance and created an exemption for Catholic hospitals. Why? Because the Roman Catholic Church remains a powerful social force in the United States, with political clout and the ability to harness significant support for or opposition to political issues and politicians in society.

60 See footnote 5 on the importance of receiving the Sacraments for Roman Catholics. Historically, it was feared that a child who died before being baptized would be condemned to hell. The creation of limbo, discussed in the previous chapter, was linked to this fear. Unbaptized children were believed to go to limbo at death and the family could make financial contributions to the Church and hold special masses to get their child out of limbo and into heaven.
and family planning. These occasions of required instruction include Marian-doctrinal messages about women, as well as other sexualized elements, which get embedded in participants’ collective memory and influence their attitudes.

Marian doctrines highlighting purity, obedience, sexual abstinence and virginity factor significantly into current Roman Catholic attitudes. In a 2011 survey conducted by a team of sociologists led by William D’Antonio of the Catholic University of America\textsuperscript{61}, Marian doctrine and the role of Mary\textsuperscript{62} in the spiritual lives of the faithful ranked as the third-most-important aspect of Catholicism for American Catholics. Jesus’ resurrection was the most important, with a 73 percent ranking; helping the poor came in second at 67 percent; and Mary followed closely at 64 percent. The “Church’s teachings about Mary” ranked higher than the sacraments, prayer, devotions, and a number of social issues about which the Catholic Church continues to express dismay (abortion, same-sex marriage, Vatican authority, the death penalty, and celibate all-male clergy ranks).

My interviews with Catholic-educated women (detailed in Chapter 2) reveal very specific ways that Mary and doctrines about her exert power over women’s self-understanding. Every woman I spoke to remembered wearing a white dress for her First Communion and talked about the significance of being “Christ’s bride” (a term they got from nuns, teachers and parents), approaching the altar pure, innocent and undefiled. Many worried intensely about being able to maintain the condition of purity, knowing in their hearts that it would be impossible.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. This question was stated as “The Church’s teaching about Mary.” p. 6a.
I will discuss how the doctrines pertaining to Mary become deposited in collective memory and impact women’s identity, but first a brief overview of the theology and history of the five doctrines explored in this study:

**The Doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary**

![Vladimir Elesa icon of the Ever Virgin Mary](image)

*Figure 6: The Vladimir Elesa icon of the Ever Virgin Mary.*

The Doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, considered “de fide” or an essential part of faith in the Catholic tradition, maintains that Mary was ever-virgin, i.e., before, during and after giving birth to Jesus. Roman Catholic catechism teaches:

The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it." And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the "Ever-virgin."  

The doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary began to take shape in the second century, and by the fourth century it was widely acknowledged as official Church teaching. It has remained essentially unchanged since that time. One of the first recorded sources

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63 Official Catechism of the Catholic Church - 1994
mentioning Mary’s perpetual virginity is a gnostic gospel, the Gospel of James, later known as the Protoevangelium of James, dated 145 AD. Deemed “dubious” by early Church father Origen of Alexandria and excluded from the scriptural canon, the text describes the birth and upbringing of Mary and maintains she was a virgin prior to, during and after the birth of Jesus.

Today Mary’s perpetual virginity is clearly espoused in the Official Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, as referenced in the most recent catechism curriculum:

”From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit without human seed". The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own. Thus St. Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century says: You are firmly convinced about our Lord, who is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin. . . he was truly nailed to a tree for us in his flesh under Pontius Pilate. . . he truly suffered, as he is also truly risen.”

The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiance. The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." There is scant information about Mary in Scriptures; she is mentioned in the first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in the narratives about the birth of Jesus, once in the Gospel of John about the wedding of Cana, and once in Mark 3 when the disciples inquire about Jesus’ family. She disappears from all four gospels after the initial chapters. No scriptural passages describe Mary as a woman of perfect virtue.

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
Rather, early Church fathers “constructed” her as such, with her virtue deriving from a lack of “defilement” by sexual relations (alongside her being chosen by God for a unique role as mother of God.) Writings within the Gospel of James claim that Mary delivered Jesus without labor pains because she was not under the same “curse” given to Eve after the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Mary, the new Eve, remained pure, the perfect woman, a role model whom women are encouraged to emulate (but of course can never match). Mary’s perpetual virginity is a significant aspect of her singular, unparalleled status among women.

For the women I interviewed for this study, the intense focus on virginity in their religious education had far-reaching impact. One woman recalled her experience of having an abortion at age 20. Already carrying tremendous guilt for losing her virginity at a young age and being unmarried, she became pregnant. When she told her family, they became irate and did not speak to her for a month. They refused to celebrate her birthday, saying her birth did not deserve to be celebrated. A priest whom her family consulted before the abortion told her she would never be forgiven for her “grave” sins (both her loss of virginity and the abortion). She had the abortion, believing there were no other options for her.

Seven years later, when she was contemplating marriage, she went to see a different priest to share her story and discuss her worthiness to participate in the Sacrament of Marriage. Though this priest delivered absolution to her, enabling her to be married in the Church, she carries profound guilt to this day and continues to believe she is a fallen soul. Far from emulating Mary, the mother of Jesus, she considers herself
more in the category of Mary Magdalene, the redeemed prostitute. Her intensive early training on virginity and abortion solidified this thinking about her self-identity.

**The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception**

The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception refers to the conception of Mary, not Jesus, a widespread misunderstanding even among many Roman Catholics. It maintains that Mary’s mother, known as Saint Anne, and her husband, Saint Joachim, conceived Mary through sexual intercourse, but that she was born without the stain of original sin through the work of God on her behalf, a foreshadowing of her role as the mother of God. Mary is God’s chosen daughter, regarded as holy, blameless, living a human life not affected by the burden of original sin. Official Catholic teaching states,

492 The "splendor of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is "enriched from the first instant of her conception" comes wholly from Christ: She is "redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son".\(^{136}\) The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly
places” and chose her "in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love".\textsuperscript{\textit{137}}\textsuperscript{66}

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception professes, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and therefore should firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful.

Moreover, our predecessors considered it their special solemn duty with all diligence, zeal, and effort to preserve intact the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. For, not only have they in no way ever allowed this doctrine to be censured or changed, but they have gone much further and by clear statements repeatedly asserted that the doctrine by which we profess the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin is on its own merits entirely in harmony with the ecclesiastical veneration; that it is ancient and widespread, and of the same nature as that which the Roman Church has undertaken to promote and to protect, and that it is entirely worthy to be used in the Sacred Liturgy and solemn prayers. Not content with this, they \textit{most strictly prohibited any opinion contrary to this doctrine to be defended in public or private in order that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin might remain inviolate. By repeated blows they wished to put an end to such an opinion}. And lest these oft-repeated and clearest statements seem useless, they added a sanction to them.\footnote{67} (emphasis added)

The aggressive, fear-provoking language here—“most strictly prohibited any opinion contrary to this doctrine” and “by repeated blows they wished to put an end to such an opinion”—reflects the early Church fathers’ fierce commitment to upholding Mary’s purity, preserving the notion of immaculate conception, and embedding it in church doctrine. Their zeal succeeded: Roman Catholic religious education upholds and teaches this doctrine to this day, continuing the focus on purity and the catastrophic effects of original sin, effects from which both Jesus and his mother escaped.

\textsuperscript{66} Official Catechism of the Catholic Church. 1994.
\textsuperscript{67} Pope Pius IX, \textit{Ineffabilis Deus}, December 8, 1854
My interviews with Roman Catholic women revealed First Communion (age 7 or 8) and Confirmation (age 12) as occasions to “practice” being pure, innocent and unstained. The white dresses and veils required for girls to wear when receiving First Communion, and worn by many for the May Processions (to be discussed later in this chapter), mimicked what “pure, undefiled” women are supposed to wear on their wedding days to tangibly express the virtues of purity and virginity, “immaculateness” before God.

Only one woman interviewed for this study remembered boys wearing white suits for their First Communion. Every other interviewee indicated the boys wore regular suits, typically black, with no physical marker connoting purity. Further, most of the women remembered receiving a white bible as a gift from parents, godparents or grandparents; other gifts for girls included cross necklaces, bracelets and fancy white rosary beads. Not so, the boys. Most of the women who remembered the gifts received by boys at First Communion said they were non-religious in nature (for example, cash, which they were encouraged to put in savings accounts, or savings bonds), oddly secular compared to the girls’ gifts.

The associations from First Communion continue through adulthood. Every time a woman takes Communion, she is repeating a performative practice (Connerton) that connects to her First Communion in both memory and rite, focused on purity before God. Furthermore, since Catholics are expected to go to Confession (to receive absolution from sins) before receiving Communion, and only priests (all male) can confer or withhold absolution from those making Confession, this becomes another occasion that reinforces the notion of men as power-holders in the lives of Catholics.
Doctri ne of Mary, Mother of God

Figure 8: Recently uncovered and restored fresco in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey, Apse mosaic of the Theotokos

Mary, the Mother of God, was the first doctrine to formally define Mary. It received doctrinal status at the Third Ecumenical Council, held at Ephesus in 431 C.E. Early Church fathers debated many aspects of this doctrine, some fully accepting the claim that Mary possessed a divine nature and transmitted it to Jesus, others arguing that only Jesus could possess a divine nature and his divinity was conferred on him by God. Nestorius of Constantinople led the charge against naming Mary as “Mother of God” (Theotokos), advocating instead for Christokos, or “Birth-giver of Christ.”68 Cyril of Alexandria was Nestorius’ chief opponent in the debate, arguing that dividing Christ into two natures --one human conferred through Mary, the other divine given by God --

68 http://thehandmaid.wordpress.com/2012/06/09/saint-cyril-archbishop-of-alexandria/
destroyed the perfect union of the human and divine natures held together in Christ.

Cyril of Alexandria, in a letter to Nestorius, writes,

…the holy fathers... have ventured to call the holy Virgin ‘Theotokos,’ not as though the nature of the Word or his divinity received the beginning of their existence from the holy Virgin, but because from her was born his holy body, rationally endowed with a soul, with which body the Word was united according to the hypostasis, and is said to have been begotten according to the flesh (Cyril's second letter to Nestorius).  

Eventually, the debates receded and Mary as Theotokos, Mother of God, became official Catholic teaching.

The catechism of the Roman Catholic Church states,

The Virgin Mary . . . is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer.... She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ' . . . since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head. Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church.  

This doctrine influences those who learn it and who, as seen in teachings on Mary as the Mother of all humanity, regard Mary as their own mother. As indicated in the previous chapter, the notion that Mary is everyone’s mother provides comfort if one’s own mother is absent or if that relationship is strained. For others, it creates fear if they believe Mary expects the same perfection from them as that exemplified by her heavenly son, Jesus.

**Doctrine of Mary, the New Eve (Our Lady as Nova Eva)**

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69 http://www.monachos.net/content/patristics/patristictexts/134-cyril-of-alexandria-second-epistle-to-nestorius
70 Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 1, Section 963.
Nova Eva (or New Eve) is the oldest title given to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Its origin can be traced to the first century C.E., when doctrinal statements surfaced placing Mary alongside Jesus as a restorer of humanity. Foundational to the Doctrine of Mary as the New Eve is an acknowledgment that the Eve of the Old Testament is tempted by the serpent and disobeys God. Through her disobedience, the human race is lost and death comes into the world. Since death had come through Eve, still a virgin, it was appropriate that life should come again through a virgin; because the serpent had deceived the first Eve, it was appropriate that Gabriel bear the good tidings to the second Eve. Mary’s obedience to God makes up for the disobedience of Eve.

The Doctrine of Mary as the New Eve states,
Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, is the new Adam. The first man, Adam, was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man, Jesus, is from Heaven. For as by one man’s disobedience (the Original Sin) many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience (Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross) many will be made righteous. (Catechism 504, 615)

Similarly, Mary is the new Eve. The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. (Catechism 494) By the grace of God, Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long. (Catechism 493)

The first Adam and Eve committed the Original Sin. The New Adam (Jesus) and New Eve (Mary) are both without sin, and so Jesus and Mary usher in a new birth of children adopted in the Holy Spirit. (Catechism 505) They opened the door for mankind to have a deeper relationship with God. We can now call God our Father (Lord’s Prayer), Mary our mother and Jesus our brother. 71

Consequently, the Eve-Mary parallel contrasts disobedience and obedience, sorrow and joy, woman cursed and woman blessed, darkness and light, sin and salvation, fall and restoration, condemnation and redemption, death and life, paradise lost and paradise regained. These are classic dichotomization categories, as discussed in chapter 1. 72 Church doctrine, sacred tradition, and the modern life of the Church reflect ongoing belief in, and devotion to, Mary as the New Eve. Throughout the history of the Church, people have turned to the Virgin Mary as a spiritual mother, the one who is both source and cause of life because she gave birth to Jesus, whom followers believe opens the path to eternal life.

References to Mary as the New Eve can be found throughout liturgy, poetry and literature beginning in the first century of the Church. An example is the work of poet Caelius Sedulius (d. ca. 440-450), who wrote,

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71 A Preparation for Confirmation – Based on the 1994 Catechism. www.loveourcatholicfaith.com. This website is widely used by Roman Catholic educators today as a source of Confirmation curriculum materials. It relies heavily on the 1994 Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church but is interlaced with commentary on the Catechism espousing the theological understanding of its authors.

72 See Epstein’s work on Deceptive Distinctions, referenced in Chapter 1.
Because of one man, all his descendents perished; and all are saved because of one man. Because of one woman, the deadly door opened; and life returned, because of one woman. (Elegia)

We are the blind offspring of the children of pitiful Eve, bringing with us the shadows born of an age-old error. But when God deigned to assume the mortal form of a human nature, then came forth from the Virgin a world of salvation…

One woman interviewed for the study said her most powerful visual memory of Mary from her childhood is a statue of Mary stepping on a serpent. The statue was 4 or 5 feet tall—enormous to a small child—and it was the first thing she saw upon entering her home. This classic image of Mary shown above, found throughout the world in museums and homes, will be studied in the next chapter. The serpent represents Satan, whose power Eve fell under in the Creation story of the Garden of Eden. Mary, as the new Eve, accomplishes what Eve was not able to do: crush Satan underfoot (Romans 16:30). Mary is a conquerer, not just of Satan but of the sin Eve personified. The woman explained that the statue had always scared her. After her mother died, she donated it to a religious charity.

**The Doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven**

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73 Caelius Sedelius
The Doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven is shared by the Western, Eastern and Orthodox traditions. Also known as the Dormition of the Theotokos in the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Assumption is a major feast day (August 15) and, in many countries, a Catholic holy day of obligation. The doctrine proffers that at the time of Mary’s death, her body was taken immediately into heaven, escaping human death in the same way the prophet Elijah is carried into heaven at the end of his earthly life. Elijah is the only figure within the Hebrew or Greek scriptures

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74 Found at [http://abookofeverything.blogspot.com/2012_08_01_archive.html](http://abookofeverything.blogspot.com/2012_08_01_archive.html)

75 Throughout Europe, Central and South America, August 15 is a national holiday. Government agencies and places of business are closed; the countries pause to remember Mary’s assumption, regardless of the strength of Catholicism in the country.

76 2 Kings 2:11
reported to escape earthly death; through this doctrine, although not as scripturally
specific as Elijah’s assumption, Mary becomes the second, and only female, scriptural
figure within Christendom to have this privilege conferred upon her. Roman Catholic
Catechism states,

When the course of Mary’s earthly life was finished, she was taken up
body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over
all things. (Catechism 966)  

While there is not space here to go into the deep history of this doctrine within
Eastern and Western traditions, its significance is especially evident in religious art
throughout the world, with renderings of Mary’s assumption almost as common as those
of the Annunciation. While the Annunciation (Gabriel’s visit to Mary when she is told
she will bear a son, born from God) is attributable to scripture, the Assumption is not.
Yet the early Church fathers championed her assumption to such an extent that it became
an official doctrine of the church. The notion that Mary escaped human death places her
outside the realm of human limitation, exemplifying her specialness and singularity of
role.

The doctrine is taught as part of contemporary Confirmation catechism, the
educational rite of passage for young teenagers to become full members and participants
in the Church. A current Confirmation curriculum uses the following reasoning when
teaching the Doctrine of the Assumption to students:

St. Peter the Apostle, our first Pope, is buried in St. Peter’s Cathedral at
the Vatican. St. John the Apostle’s tomb is still intact in a church in
Ephesus. Even though her contemporaries’ resting places are well known,
nowhere will you find mention of a tomb for Mary.  

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77 Catechism 966
78 A Preparation for Confirmation
Throughout the world, children learn these doctrines at church and in school. How do they influence social identity, particularly the young girls and young women? How do such doctrines affect the thinking and attitudes of young boys about girls, their mothers and women in general? This study argues that the Catholic Church’s heavy reliance on religious education, particularly doctrine related to Mary, the mother of Jesus, makes it a significant mechanism of transmission to collective memory. Thinking about perfection, perfect motherhood, perfect womanhood, and connecting these understandings with one’s standing before God and the impossibility of attaining similar perfection is the source of guilt and shame for women, in particular. The inability to achieve the perfection exemplified by Mary, the mother of Jesus, and/or “falling from grace” into the realm of Mary Magdalene creates both guilt and shame for women, with shame the more debilitating of the two. While guilt reminds the woman she has done something wrong, shame declares she herself is the wrong. Both conditions are stultifying, effectively used by the Church to exert social control.

**Doctrine/Dogma Creation**

These five Marian doctrines are examples of non-negotiable tenets of the Church, regarded as both historical and eternal, part of the broader set of dogma/doctrine the Church relies on to solidify and perpetuate past belief systems and practices in the present. As argued by Halbwachs, dogma creation enabled the Church to present its belief system as wholly consistent with the “original” Church, its events and people.\(^79\) In

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\(^{79}\) One reviewer of this section found it difficult to believe dogma and doctrine are as eternal as Halbwachs (and this writer) sets them forth to be. In the conclusion, I will argue that it is not the doctrines themselves that are so damaging, but what is done with them and the social control of women the doctrines explicitly and implicitly iterate. When the doctrines become imbedded in iconography and liturgical rituals, they
order to establish and maintain its legitimacy, the Church needed to portray itself as both historical and eternal. Creating dogma or doctrine helped accomplish that, as well as serving to form a common, symbolic canon and establish boundaries for the system. The development of theology, creeds, councils and doctrine believed to be non-negotiable within the system creates an understanding that such dogma is timeless.

If a religion is believed to be outside of time, and therefore eternal, how can its dogmas and canon be challenged, let alone debunked? Maurice Halbwachs argues this is precisely the intention of the Church in creating dogmas. He writes, “How can we explain that the Christian religion, entirely oriented toward the past as is the case with all religion, can still present itself as a permanent institution, that it claims to be positioned outside of time, and that the Christian truths can be both historical and eternal?” Halbwachs answers his own question by conceptualizing collective memory theory, noting the abiding influence that constructed collective memory has on society.

The memories are formed by the retelling of central stories recalling central figures (such as those who were prophetic or martyred), while hearkening back to the “true” Church to present the dogma as legitimate. Mariology is a strong example of the abiding influence of dogma creation; even though the Marian doctrines were theological constructions (not based on Christian scriptures), they have endured and deeply permeated collective memory. Halbwachs writes, “What is peculiar to the memory of religious groups is that, while the memories of other groups permeate each other mutually

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move from being words on a paper memorized in Confirmation class to pervasive visual images seen daily and the source of spiritual practices done regularly. The doctrines are concretized theological constructions, not to be altered or challenged but learned and accepted without question. Ultimately, it is the role the doctrines play in the everyday lives of people that is the focus of this study.

and tend to correspond, the memory of religious groups claims to be fixed once and for all. It either obliges others to adapt themselves to its dominant representations, or it systemically ignores them; contrasting its own permanence with the instability of others, it relegates them to inferior rank.” Halbwachs makes no mention of social control, and other scholars who built on his thesis (Castelli, 2004; Connerton, 1989; Fine 2001) have not focused on doctrine creation and transmission as forms of social control. I argue that the Church’s creation of doctrines and a canon, and closing them to further development or addition of new ideas, constitutes a form of social control.

How else could one interpret the Church’s profound intolerance of dissidence, such as expressed in the earlier quote from 1854 about the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary: “Not content with this, the Church fathers most strictly prohibited any opinion contrary to this doctrine to be defended in public or private in order that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin might remain inviolate…” “By repeated blows” they vowed to put an end to such an opinion, and woe to anyone who dared voice one.

**The Price of “Dissent”**

Within the Catholic system, there is a long tradition of people deemed “not in line” with official Catholic theology being excommunicated or silenced. One such example is Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University in the Bronx, N.Y., and a Roman Catholic sister regarded by colleagues as a somewhat conservative voice within the Church. Her book “Quest for the Living God,” published in 2007, was rejected by the U.S. Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops, and

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81 Ibid. p. 91.
Dr. Johnson was consequently censured as a theological voice of the Church. The bishops’ Committee on Doctrine, chaired by Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of the diocese of Washington, claimed her work “does not recognize divine revelation as the standard for Catholic theology” and “differs from authentic Catholic teaching on essential points.”

Of particular interest in the footnoted statement by Cardinal Wuerl is its focus on the intellectual and spiritual formation of “young adults today, who have little solid intellectual formation in their faith. It is in this context that books used in religious studies/theology courses at Catholic colleges and universities must be seen as de facto catechetical and formational texts.” The Catholic educational system continues its practices of indoctrination into adherents' adulthood, as evidenced by this recent quote from the official doctrine watchdog of the American Catholic Bishops.

Dr. Johnson’s “censure” might not seem a harsh punishment, but for an accomplished scholar and sought-after speaker, regarded as a strong theological voice in the Church throughout her academic career, it's professionally devastating to be unilaterally shut down and silenced in this manner, especially since she is a faculty

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82 Bishops’ Doctrine Committee Faults Book by Fordham Professor, March 30, 2011.
83 The Resource document citing the book’s deficiencies contains the following statement: “The book in question is an already published work not primarily directed to professional theologians for theological speculation, but rather one used as a teaching instrument for undergraduate students, many of whom are looking for grounding in their Catholic faith. The background against which the bishops must exercise their teaching responsibility today is the generally recognized catechetical deficiencies of past decades beginning with the 1970s. The result is a generation or more of Catholics, including young adults today, who have little solid intellectual formation in their faith. It is in this context that books used in religious studies/theology courses at Catholic colleges and universities must be seen as de facto catechetical and formational texts. While the content of a book may be highly speculative and of interest for trained theologians, when it is used in a classroom with students often ill-prepared to deal with speculative theology, the results can be spiritually harmful. The bishops are rightly concerned about the spiritual welfare of those students using this book who may be led to assume that its content is authentic Catholic teaching. The Committee on Doctrine expresses serious concern about the pastoral implications of the teaching in this book.” http://blog.cardinalnewmansociety.org/2011/04/19/cardinal-wuerl-reasserts-bishops-authority-over-theologians-undergraduate-catechetical-texts/
member of an esteemed Catholic university, with most of her grants coming from Catholic sources. The embarrassment and damage to her reputation at the height of her academic career are tangible and far-reaching.

Other religious systems employ similar—or more extreme—tactics for those who do not want to participate in the group’s memory construction and preservation. The Amish community shuns, a practice they call “social avoidance”\(^84\); the Scientologists disbar\(^85\); the Mormons excommunicate\(^86\); extremist Muslims behead\(^87\); and fundamentalist Christians murder\(^88\) and engage in other acts of violence—for example, targeting abortion clinics or other people and places deemed “evil” or “heretical.”\(^89\) In the early Church, removing a disobeying person from the system was a means of social control. In the context of faith communities, killed dissidents were sometimes regarded as martyrs and took on a different, redemptive meaning within the collective memory of the community. Martyrdom is a strong example of the power of collective memory to influence behavior and shape identity.

\(^88\) http://europenews.dk/en/node/43892
The female martyrs hold a unique place in the collective memory of the Church. Certainly there are more male martyrs than female, but the female virgin martyrs are the most revered, as evidenced by their frequent appearances in art and literature. Their virginity sets them apart as more valued and desired; it is a quality not focused on for male martyrs. In Karen Winstead’s book “Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends,” she outlines how certain legends about virgin martyrs thrived for hundreds of years, illuminating women who escaped the confines of the female stereotypes of demure maiden or disruptive shrew, another way of expressing the Madonna/whore trope. A few images from popular virgin martyr legends are shown in chapter 4.

**Doctrine and Memory**

How do doctrines become lodged in individuals’, and then collective, memory? Since doctrinal learning starts very young through socialization and family identity, I wondered to what extent children actually remember the doctrines taught to them, or, as with many childhood experiences and lessons, whether the doctrines float through their young minds but do not necessarily settle within memory? I found relevant theoretical concepts with regard to religious memory in the work of Philippe Bourgeaud, history of religions scholar at the University of Geneva. In his introduction to “The Memory of Religions,” Bourgeaud defines religious tradition as “not only a store of practices, of know-how, and of beliefs, but also a flexible and adaptable instrument of transmission whose preservation is closely linked to maintaining an identity.”

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of acquiring religious tradition: mechanical memorization and deliberate memorization. Mechanical memorization is “practice and imitation, the mechanical repetition of gestures and words.”  This kind of memorization makes possible the acquisition of a number of models for action, behavior, thinking and sensitivity, which define a social and cultural identity. Connerton’s theory of performative practices would be in agreement with Bourgeaud here. Through mechanical memorization, children acquire knowledge without being aware of it; gestures and words simply settle in their memory. By contrast, deliberate memorization, which Bourgeaud calls a “specialization of the most natural process of knowledge acquisition and of its techniques,” involves a more conscious learning process wherein knowledge is transmitted at defined moments.

Bourgeaud’s concepts inform this study as we consider the transmission of religious knowledge through doctrinal training and liturgical practice. Doctrinal training, in the form of memorizing prayers or aspects of a particular doctrine in catechism classes or religion courses, certainly involves a deliberate memorization process as well as elements of mechanical memorization. Consider a young child learning to recite the rosary, or the required prayer before confession, or the liturgical prayers that are repeated at each mass. Certain liturgical or performative practices, because of their rote-ness, settle into memory over time even without deliberate memorization (Connerton). Religious practices continue to have contemporary relevance because they are re-enacted each year following a ritual liturgical calendar. Religious traditions and commemorations influence the secular calendar of societies around the world, particularly in countries where there is a dominant religious system.  

92 Ibid. p. 10.
93 See reference about the Feast Day of the Assumption (August 15) in chapter 2.
Every woman interviewed for this study remembers the month of May being devoted to Mary in her Catholic parish and school. It is the most enduring and consistent memory related to Mary shared by the interviewees. May had two Marian liturgical celebrations: the Ascension of Mary and the Visitation of Mary. When the Feast Day of the Ascension occurs in May, the Saturday immediately following it is traditionally celebrated as the Feast of Our Lady, Queen of the Apostles. This liturgy commemorates the period of time after the Ascension when the apostles were gathered with Mary and other women in the “Upper Room,” the place where it is believed Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples. On May 31 in the United States, the Commemoration of the Visitation is celebrated. The Visitation recalls that when Mary heard that her elderly relative, Elizabeth, was expecting a child, she went to visit her. The day is commemorated because Mary's visit is believed to have brought Christ to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, even though still in Mary’s womb.

These days of “holy obligation” were recalled as significant by the women I interviewed for this study; all of May was deemed “Mary’s Month.” But each interviewee particularly remembered participating in May Processionals where the girls processed into the church carrying flowers to place at the feet of a Mary statue and adorn her head with a crown. Some recall boys being involved in the processionals; others said it was reserved for girls. While there is not an official source disallowing a male from crowning Mary or placing flowers at her feet, the de facto practice was only for girls. One interviewee remembered a nun telling the girls they should ask Mary to grant them many children, find them good husbands and make them fertile women and good wives in the future. In many Catholic schools today, May Processionals have broadened to
include boys, but this is not the practice everywhere. May Processionals and the Rite of First Communion are two examples of liturgical rituals involving sexualized elements that shape women’s identities and social attitudes.

**Performative Practices**

Sociologist Paul Connerton has done extensive work on the collective meaning-making power of performative practices or rituals in societies. Consider school kids reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of each day; the singing of “The Star Spangled Banner” before baseball and football games, often broadcast on national (and subsequently, international) television; the collective experience of burying a slain president, like John F. Kennedy in 1963, or the feared Korean leader Kim Jong-II in late 2011. Such services are carefully crafted and laden with overt and covert messages intended as meaning-making to a world audience. In the case of the Church, its messages and performative practices are being conveyed to people who want to be regarded as faithful followers and are therefore willing—even eager—to adhere to norms and rituals.

Connerton writes,

Ritual is rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thoughts and feeling which they hold to be of special significance…The liturgy of the Mass has persisted for nearly two millennia, during which time it has changed only very slowly; the creeds recited in the Mass are in their present form very ancient…Liturgical language makes special use of ‘us’ and ‘those;’ the plural form in ‘we’ and ‘us’ indicates that there are a number of speakers but that they are acting collectively, as if they were only one speaker, a kind of corporate personality.94

The “corporate personality” Connerton refers to is a form of social control: within a religious sphere, where adherents believe God will forever disregard or punish them if

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94 Connerton.
they go against the “we” or act in opposition to the “us,” they will tend toward submission and obedience to norms. Many of the women interviewed for this study regard Mary as an obedient woman, submissive and accepting of God’s call to bear the son of God, Jesus. If they are to emulate Mary, they must be obedient.

The Roman Catholic Church insists on maintaining an all-male clergy despite criticism of this practice. Catholic doctrine states:

Only a baptized man (Latin cognate: *vir*) validly receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men (Latin cognate plural: *viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ's return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible.\(^95\)

Children raised in the Roman Catholic Church see only men serving on the altar every Sunday. The message is clear: Only men can stand in the place of Christ/God (hence the term “vicar of Christ”). Historically, women were not allowed to participate in leadership at mass in any public capacity: Women were not allowed to read scripture lessons, serve Holy Communion, serve as eucharistic ministers (taking Holy Communion to home-bound and hospitalized members after Mass) or serve on the parish council. The same was true for altar servers; this role was reserved for boys alone.\(^96\) After Vatican II

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\(^95\) Catholic Catechism, para. 1577.

\(^96\) Progressive Catholic churches have shown their support for women’s leadership by allowing women to serve as lectors and Eucharistic ministers in their parishes. Nuns have served in both of these roles, as well. Recently, however, Pope Benedict instituted more rigid rules regarding who can serve on the altar or in leadership positions during Mass and in parishes at large. Along with a recent warning issued by the Vatican to nuns who had become too “liberal,” there has been a crackdown on the Leadership Conference on Women Religious, headed by Sister Pat Farrell. The Vatican is taking over leadership of this organization consisting of 57,000 women religious in the United States. The newly appointed leader is a male priest. See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/03/vatican-crackdown-catholic-sister-pat-farrell_n_1735672.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/03/vatican-crackdown-catholic-sister-pat-farrell_n_1735672.html)
in 1962, restrictions on women’s leadership in these capacities eased a bit, but they have re-emerged in the retrenchment of the Roman Catholic Church regarding women’s leadership and bodies.

Consider the significance in collective-memory formation for children who see only men and boys on the altar at Mass each week, every feast day and holy day of obligation. Girls not only learn to regard themselves as second-class citizens in the Church but also intrinsically know their “inferior” standing is because of their sex, and nothing else. No matter how faithful they are in attending Mass, how much they emulate the purity and perfection of Mary, or how well they perform in school or catechism class, they cannot attain a leadership position in the Church.\(^7\) The Vatican remains firmly opposed to any change on the issue of male-only clergy, despite eroded support from all ranks of the laity.\(^8\) Indeed, even while continuing to deny women in this regard, the Church keeps accommodating men. For example, the Vatican created the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter in order to accept (heterosexual) married Anglican priests into the Roman Catholic priesthood.\(^9\) Approximately 60 Anglican priests from around the United States are preparing for reception into the Personal Ordinariate, and

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See also the section in the concluding chapter on Pope Francis’ March, 2013 address to the international Leadership Conference on Women Religious.

\(^7\) It would be possible for a person to undergo a sex change in an effort to become a Catholic priest, but the practice of sex change is forbidden within Catholic moral law and would likely be uncovered in the highly scrutinized background checks now necessary for entry into the priesthood. See Jori Lewis, “Transgender and Christian: Finding identity,” Religion Dispatches magazine, 2009-SEP-03, at: http://www.religiondispatches.org/

\(^8\) An interview with Pope Francis in July, 2013 is instructive here. In that interview, after making a comment about not-judging gay people who “are searching for the Lord with a sincere heart,” he indicated the “door is forever closed” to the possibility of women’s ordination.

\(^9\) http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/22/world/22church.html?_r=1 and National Catholic Register, 2/12/2012 at http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/anglican-clergymen-become-catholic-priests-taking-the-final-steps-to-ordinations. It is believed this offer is connected to the 2008 decision in the Episcopal Church, USA, to formally allow and recognize the ordination of gay, partnered priests. It is speculated that African Anglican priests who are participating in the transition to Catholicism are also reacting to the ECUSA decision and fear the worldwide Anglican communion, strongly influenced by the American church, will follow suit in the near future. They are jumping ship before this possibility becomes reality.
there are hundreds more preparing in other parts of the world, particularly Africa and South America. Training has begun in several places in the United States, taking place via teleconferencing; while some men are watching in Texas, others are logged on in Baltimore.

How is it that the Vatican is able to look beyond the issue of marital status but cannot see beyond the sex issue? How is it that women are categorically kept out of ordained ranks, while an exception has been made worldwide for married Anglican clergy? Further, the Anglican/Episcopal church has ordained women for 40 years, at least in the United States and Europe. While they share the same ordination vows as their male counterparts and have served alongside them for decades, Anglican clergywomen are not welcome in the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, a strong confluence of social control and sexism.

The Rite of First Communion

Besides seeing only men in leadership positions at performative events in the Church, women are also subjugated by way of sexualized elements in various rites of the Church at key points in their lives. One of the first is the Rite of First Communion. In the early church (before the First Communion practice was developed) Baptism, Communion and Confirmation were done on the same occasion, in one rite. Primarily conducted with infants, the rite included sprinkling or immersing the child in water (baptism) in the name of the Triune God, Father-Son-Holy Spirit, immediately followed by anointing with oil, believed to be the formal receiving of the Holy Spirit or “chrismation” (Confirmation). The child was then brought into the worship service to receive Holy Communion for the
first time (First Communion). In Eastern Orthodoxy this procedure remains mostly unchanged today; in Western Christianity, however, the common practice of communing infants slowly declined and disappeared by the eighth and ninth centuries when the regular practice of Private Confession became a prerequisite for receiving Communion. So infants, who could not confess their sins verbally, were no longer communed. It was generally thought they were capable of confessing and communing by age 7 or 8, and the practice of First Communion emerged.

Remember: Marian doctrine took hold in the fourth to fifth centuries. At some point the practice of girls wearing white dresses and veils was instituted, a sexualization of the First Communion rite. One interviewee told how the families of girls in her Roman Catholic school in the Bronx, N.Y. (in a heavily Irish Catholic neighborhood), were required to purchase a special packet of materials for First Communion containing a white veil, white stockings, white gloves and a white missal—all to be worn or carried on First Communion day. The boys received no such packet. Preparations for First Communion day were intense and serious, according to the woman: Her parents went over every detail to make sure they got everything right; her class had numerous rehearsals specifically for the girls, to review how they would process into the church, stop at the statue of Mary for an “act of adoration,” and then continue to their seats.

How did this sexualized practice develop? Earliest Church records show no indication that the rite was overlaid with sexualized messages. In fact, infants were baptized naked, as they still are in the Eastern Church, to represent their coming to God with nothing—no possessions, no power, no social standing. In the early Church,
baptism was the great leveler, practiced in the same manner for children of poor peasants and wealthy kings. As the First Communion practice evolved, however, even the poorest families would spend scarce resources on the dress and veil, as well as host lavish parties for the occasion. This practice continues today.

**La Quinceanera Celebrations**

Another sexualized performative practice emerged within Latin American Catholicism: the “quinceañera,” or coming-of-age party, held when a girl turns 15. The origin of Mexico’s quinceañera celebrations remains obscure; its roots may be Aztec.

According to Bernardino de Sahagun in his chronicle “Historia de Nueva España,” it was traditional for the parents of a young Aztec maiden to formally acknowledge her passage into womanhood. This included an exhortation for her to observe certain “acceptable” modes of behavior. As Roman Catholicism became the dominant religion throughout Latin America, many practices native to local culture were appropriated for religious purposes. The quinceañera tradition is a strong example of appropriation by the Church, as is the tradition of devotion to La Virgen de Guadalupe.

In the traditional quinceañera ceremony, reserved for girls, the most important component is a Misa de acción de gracias (thanksgiving Mass). The birthday girl arrives decked out in a fancy, full-length dress—frills, pastel tones and matching hats or headdresses prevail. Flanked by her parents and padrinos (godparents), she is seated at the foot of the altar during the service. She may be accompanied by up to seven damas.

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100 For a full English translation of the passage “Advice of an Aztec Mother to her Daughter,” see William H. Prescott’s “The Conquest of Mexico.” 1842, republished in 1934 by Simon Publications.
101 La Virgen de Guadalupe is the name given to a woman believed to have appeared to an Aztec peasant, Juan Diego, in the desert near Mexico City in 1531. Rather than have the appearance create a cult of devotion to a saint not connected to the Roman Church, Rome quickly claimed her appearance as one from Mary, the mother of Jesus, and she was brought into the Catholic fold.
(maids of honor) and as many *chambelanes* (chamberlains), selected from among close family and friends. At the end of the mass, younger sisters, cousins and friends pass out *bolos* (commemorative favors) to attendees while the quinceañera deposits her bouquet on the altar or in a niche honoring the Virgin Mary, most often that of the ubiquitous Virgen de Guadalupe. The deposit of flowers on Mary’s altar denotes fertility, believed to be conferred upon the young woman by Mary or La Virgen. Quinceañera includes elements of fertility, purity and the declaration of marriageability of the young woman. There is no parallel rite for boys turning 15.

**The Rosary**

The rosary is the most familiar and widely practiced private Marian devotion in the Roman Catholic Church. The practice involves ritual speech and repetition of prayers, interspersed with scriptural stories, while holding a string of beads to count the prayers. With its origin in and focus on Mary, it is a significant example of a performative practice within Catholicism that influences women’s identity.

According to a study conducted in 2008 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, 52 percent of American adult Catholics say they pray the rosary. Among weekly Mass attendees, 45 percent carry rosary beads and 42 percent say they wear or carry a religious medal or pin of a saint or angel. Women are more likely than men to say they pray the rosary at least once a year (62 percent, compared to 42 percent). Pre-Vatican II Catholics are most likely to pray the rosary at least once a year (73 percent). Seventy-two percent of weekly Mass attendees say they
pray the rosary at least once a year.\textsuperscript{102} Clearly reciting the rosary repeatedly over time creates an internalization of the belief system contained within the Rosary, part of the preservation and continuance of the collective memory.

Regarding ritual speech (as used in praying the rosary), Connerton writes, “Compared with everyday speech, ritual speech is characterized not only by canonic parallelism but also by a restricted vocabulary, the exclusion of some syntactic forms, a fixity in the sequence of speech acts, fixed patterns in the volume of utterances, and a limited flexibility of intonation.”\textsuperscript{103} This describes the rosary well.

Saying (or praying) the rosary involves meditation on 15 biblical scenes called “the mysteries,” using key prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Doxology) that are repeated while holding the string of beads. Its history is somewhat ambiguous, but tradition claims the rosary was given to Saint Dominic in an appearance of Mary to him in 1214. This Marian apparition received the title of Our Lady of the Rosary. From the apparition, the rosary developed gradually over time, but in 1569, Dominican Pope Pius V officially established devotion to the rosary in the Roman Catholic Church as official practice of the faithful through the issuance of a papal bull, a directive communicated through an official Church letter, titled “Consueverunt Romani Pontifices.”

From the sixteenth century to the early twentieth, the structure of the rosary remained essentially unchanged: There were 15 mysteries, one for each of the 15 centuries of the Church up to that point. But in 2002, Pope John Paul II instituted five


\textsuperscript{103} Connerton. P. 60
new optional Luminous Mysteries, including one of particular significance to this study, the Hail Mary prayer, which is repeated 23 times during the praying of the rosary:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Another version is:

Mother of God and Virgin, rejoice, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast given birth to the Saviour of our souls.

The text is based on two scriptural references, from the Gospel of Luke: 1:28 and 1:42. Mary’s virginity and the “fruit of her womb” are the focus of the prayer, and although the rosary is considered a prayer for all the faithful, it has become a prayer said predominantly by women. In fact, as mentioned by a number of interviewees, there are groups in parishes centered on women’s (and their daughters’) regular recitation of the rosary for the purpose of Marian devotion. These Societies of the Blessed Mother, or Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were more common pre-Vatican II (1965) but can still be found in parishes throughout the world. Many women interviewed for this study remember being taken by their mother or grandmother to participate in the Sodality to the Blessed Virgin Mary prior to attending Mass. They would gather in the narthex or rear part of the sanctuary and say the Rosary together as an act of both private and corporate devotion. The repetitive reciting of the Hail Mary, with its focus on Mary’s virginity and fertility, is a powerful example of a performative practice lodged in collective memory that influences attitudes by and about women.

Interestingly, every woman interviewed for this study remembered the Hail Mary prayer, including those who have left the church and haven’t attended a mass in several
years. They were able to call it to mind on a moment’s notice, sometimes surprising
themselves at their ability to recite it quickly and flawlessly. It is taught at a very young
age and seems to find a permanent place in the memories of those who learn it. What
better example of the power and abiding nature of collective memory, and the Church’s
brilliant use of memory to cement doctrinal messages?

Summary

Religious education and performative practices are two of the key mechanisms by
which the Church conveys and perpetuates certain characterizations of women, prescribes
behaviors and roles for them, and resists—if not actively threatens—any challenge to its
“timeless” teachings. I argue that the sum of these parts amounts to social control, not
only exerted on adherents but also extending well beyond the boundaries of that
community because of the Church’s worldwide prominence. In the next chapter, we will
examine the most pervasive and powerful mechanism by which the Church exerts social
control: visual imagery.
Chapter Four - Images of Mary

“All art, at some basic level, must engage the procedures of human memory…”\textsuperscript{104}

“Great is the power of memory; a fearful thing, O my God”\textsuperscript{105}

![Image of Chris Ofili's The Holy Virgin Mary, 1996, collage](image)

\textit{Figure 11: The Holy Virgin Mary, 1996, collage by British artist Chris Ofili}

In September 1999, the Brooklyn Art Museum in New York was scheduled to host an exhibition titled "Sensation," featuring the work of young British artists. It was to include animals in formaldehyde and sculptures of people with genitalia replacing their faces. But one piece particularly offended Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, so much so that he threatened to cut New York City’s $7 million annual funding to the museum. It was \textit{The Holy Virgin Mary}, by artist Chris Ofili, pictured above, portraying a black Madonna.


spotted with elephant dung, some in the shape of testicles. She is wearing her trademark blue gown. Mayor Giuliani, a practicing Roman Catholic, said, “The idea of having so-called works of art in which people are throwing elephant dung at a picture of the Virgin Mary is sick.” The Holy Virgin Mary was ultimately excluded from the exhibition, and Giuliani’s action sparked outrage in the arts community around the world about violation of First Amendment rights of free expression.

Why the outrage? As Mount Holyoke professor of art Michael Davis said at the time of the controversy, “The mayor’s reactions appear to be based on the narrow definition that art should only be beautiful and an equally narrow picture of a Virgin Mary who looks like Ingrid Bergman.” I argue that Ofili’s Holy Virgin Mary assaulted the pure, virginal, static and white image of Mary that is cemented in societal collective memory, and with it the subtext regarding women’s identity, to such an extent that removing it from the exhibit appeared to be the only option. It’s possible that Mary’s portrayal as black instead of her standard ivory factored into the outrage, but that question is for another study.

Supporting my argument about Mary’s widespread reputation and influence, it wasn’t only Catholics who were outraged by the image. An article published in the Jewish World Review later that September agreed with Giuliani’s reaction. It said,

Some 135 years ago Abraham Lincoln said, "The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are in much need of one." When it comes to religious bigotry, the First Amendment, and the arts community, Lincoln couldn't have been more

106 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/455902.stm
107 https://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/csj/991008/madonna.html

108 There is a rich tradition of Black Madonna artistry, drawing from the imagery of Song of Songs 1:5, “I am black but comely.” In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Hebrew scholar, Marvin Pope, convincingly argues on linguistic grounds the Hebrew verse is more accurately translated, “Black am I and beautiful.” A similar argument can be made for the translation of the verse from the Greek Septuagint.
prescient. Does an artist have the liberty to depict religious symbols and characters in a denigrating light? Yes. Does a city or state, with taxpayer money, have the obligation to stand athwart such bigotry and say "No!"? Absolutely. Mayor Rudy Giuliani should be thanked for taking this courageous stand for religious tolerance and civic standards.\textsuperscript{109}

The writers go on to say, “Few religious symbols are held as sacrosanct by the Christian community as the Virgin Mary…Denigrating this figure, in the most obscene form, is nothing short of bigotry. …The Virgin Mary today, the Torah tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{110} Their comparison of Mary to the Torah, the holiest and most revered element in the Jewish tradition, illustrates her hold on societal collective memory at large (not just for Catholics), along with her conveyance that women are to be submissive, obedient and silent.

In this chapter I explore the use and prevalence of visual imagery, particularly of the Virgin Mary, as an extremely powerful mechanism by which the institutional Church influences and shapes societal collective memory about women’s identity. The classic and most recognized image of Mary is a submissive, quiet, obedient woman. She is often portrayed alone, but equally often she is holding Jesus or he is sitting on her lap. This image is so cemented in societal collective memory that the very thought of it being stained with elephant dung – Mayor Giuliani never actually saw it – made him call for its removal.

The image below would be far more acceptable to Giuliani, and society at large:

\textsuperscript{109} Matthew Brooks and Seth Leibsohn in \textit{Jewish World Review} / Sept. 30, 1999 /20 Tishrei, 5760.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
Unlike doctrine transmission through religious education and performative practices at services and events attended by adherents, images of Mary pervade the globe in countless public places, subtly and overtly influencing everyone who sees them. Mary statues are commonly found on front lawns in heavily Irish and Italian Roman Catholic neighborhoods. She stands inside and outside of every Catholic Church the world over, often with arms outstretched. She is seen on "miraculous" medallions worn as jewelry mainly by women, on figurines hanging from rear-view mirrors, and on the dashboards of cabs the world over, as a sign of the drivers’ faithfulness and hoped-for protection. And Mary is depicted in millions of artistic representations found in museums all around the world and seen by millions of visitors every year. Generations of artists have tried to capture Mary’s perfect image, and each of the doctrines explained in the previous chapter can be found in artistic renditions.
A notable site for Marian images that draws millions of visitors each year is the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, one of the holiest Marian sites in the world. (Historical and modern-day Marian-apparition sites are explored in Appendix A since they factored heavily in the stories told by women interviewed for this study). The cathedral is believed to be situated on the site where the angel Gabriel visited Mary in her home, announcing she would bear a son and name him Jesus. Today, it is a modern Catholic Church, built over the remains of Byzantine and Crusader churches marking the site and consecrated in 1969. The cave church found underneath the Basilica, believed to date to the fourth century, is an important pilgrimage stop on Holy Land tours today.

The cathedral is filled with hundreds of renditions of Mary, representing every culture in the world. At the time the Basilica was being planned in the late 1950s, an invitation went out to every country in the world to commission its most prominent mosaic artist to submit a rendition of Mary exemplifying the physical and traditional aspects of their culture. Hundreds of countries responded; to walk through the Cathedral is to see Mary as Aztec, Mary as Korean, Mary as stoic Northern European, Mary as peasant farmer, Mary as jeweled Indian, and many, many more. A few examples are shown below:
Figure 13: Japanese Mary wearing a kimono

Figure 14: Mexican Mary

Note La Virgin de Guadalupe overtones in this depiction with poor peasants sitting at her feet, hands outstretched, hoping for a gift of food from her, their blessed mother. It also contains the classic Virgin symbol of a peasant campesino holding Mary up on his shoulders, signifying the strength they receive from her (see additional image below taken from the Basilica of La Virgin de Guadalupe, Texayaca, Mexico).
What is remarkable about this cathedral, besides its massive scale and beauty, is how clearly it reflects the closeness various cultures feel to Mary, how they want to believe she relates to them, even looks like them, and how eager countries were to participate in the project. This chapter argues that society’s collective memory about Mary involves a complex identification with her, a belief in many parts of the world that she holds every person (and country and culture) in special regard. The elements presented in this chapter are consistent with findings in chapter 2. These elements of Marian devotion and exposure to her point to the central thesis of this work: Collective memory about Mary is profound, global and abiding, and it can be deeply affected depending on how she is portrayed.
Visual images speak in ways that words cannot, and the Church has actively and passively used images masterfully over the centuries to cement in collective memory the acceptable portrayals of Mary, and consequently, the acceptable roles for women. In the classic images of her, she is with her child or alone, her eyes cast downward and her head bowed. Her expression and pose convey humility, submissiveness, obedience, readiness to do God’s will. (Note that most of the renditions of Mary in the Basilica of the Annunciation portray her as mother, but a significant number show her alone.) She is perfect mother and/or submissive virgin, and her perfection or status is always tied to her virginity, chasteness and ability to withstand temptation (that is, sexual temptation). These qualities and characteristics are powerfully communicated through images.

Mary Magdalene, socially constructed through various reputational entrepreneurs to be wholly opposite of Mary, the mother of Jesus, has her own history in artistic representations. As the “woman of vice,” in contradistinction to Mary, the woman of virtue, she’s most often portrayed wearing red, vs. the Virgin Mary’s classic blue, the color of virtue. She is often portrayed naked, with her loose (red) hair flowing down her sides (see examples below). She was everything Mary, the mother of Jesus, was not. (See Mary Magdalene sculpture from the Louvre Museum, Paris, in this chapter).

In a few places, however, Mary Magdalene is depicted as a respected leader. She’s the central figure on the altar at the Church of the Madeleine in Paris, for one notable example. This mammoth structure is believed to have been the site of a Roman temple, a Jewish synagogue and later the locus of a large cult that followed Mary Magdalene, identifying her as their leader and prophet. On its main, high altar in the sanctuary Mary Magdalene floats above earth, surrounded by angels, in a scene that looks
like the Assumption of Mary into Heaven (see picture in chapter three). In fact, the huge statue of Mary Magdalene looks much more like Mary, the mother of Jesus. She also looks quite pregnant, an image inconsistent with the historical notion that Magdalene was a prostitute, not a mother. It is most unusual for the central artistic figure in a large Catholic cathedral to be someone other than Jesus; the Virgin Mary is always present but usually found along the sides of the cathedral or in a separate chapel area. But, Mary Magdalene, on the main altar…and pregnant?

Historical accounts claim the Roman Catholic Church was so threatened by the numerous cults to Mary Magdalene that had formed throughout France that it appropriated the site, consecrating it as an official Roman Catholic Church in 1842 but leaving the central statue of Mary Magdalene in place. But quite a while before this, various legends had spread throughout Europe about Mary Magdalene, holding that she and her sister Martha, brother Lazarus, Mary Salome and Mary Jacoby, the disciples Maximin and Sidonius (two of the 70 disciples referred to in the Gospels), along with Marcella their servant came to France by boat to escape persecution and certain death and began their own ministry there. Magdalene sites can be found throughout France. Some are grottos that supposedly have relics from Magdalene buried in them.\[111\]

\[111\] A fascinating story is told about the grotto of Saint-Baume, located in the south of France (near Aix-en-Provence) where it is believed Mary Magdalene lived the last 30 years of her life. There are many websites dedicated to Magdalene legends. At Saint-Baume, legend states her only sustenance was the Holy Eucharist, which she received on a daily basis from angels. During her waning years, the angels descended from heaven and transported her to an undisclosed location.

Another legend is told about the nearby town of St. Maximin where the Basilica of Magdalene is located. The following quote is taken from a Sacred Destinations website describing the town and Basilica where Magdalene’s remains are said to be buried:

\[http://travellady.com/Issues/December03/ASacredJourneyinProvence.htm\]

‘Maximin is a charming and ancient town that was originally a Gallo-Roman site. Its fame owes much to the mystique of Mary Magdalene, as her relics were discovered here in 1280 in an old Roman-era crypt. The 14th Century Basilica of Mary Magdalene was built with the blessing of Pope Boniface VIII to hold those relics. The Basilica’s sacred crypt contains the sarcophagus of Mary Magdalene, and a bronze reliquary of angels holds her skull, while a crystal tube preserves a fragment of her skin known as the “noli
The central figure of the Church of the Madeleine is pictured below:

![Image of Church of the Madeleine](image)

*Figure 16: Church of the Madeleine, Paris, France*

How did Mary Magdalene’s reputation turn from leader to fallen prostitute? I argue that the Church appropriated her and constructed a negative reputation of her, as it constructed Mary’s reputation, deliberately as a mechanism of social control of women. Artistic imagery of the Marys (and, to a lesser extent, the virgin martyrs) has very effectively served that purpose, shaping collective memory in a lasting, socially formative way.

**Art and Memory**

“Memory is the agent that verifies the existence of the past, but also required for memory’s crucial work are material evidence and material transmitters for that evidence.”

Visual images are powerful, and have been used throughout history as teaching tools and memorial hooks in memory-training and practice. Mary Carruthers, New York

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me tangere.” “Touch me not” were the words Christ used to Mary Magdalene on the morning of his resurrection, as he gently laid his finger on the brow of the saint.‘


112 Martha Banta, March 1999 issues of PMLA – Reenactments of Memory’s Power. If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem. PMLA 114.2. p. 175.
University professor and scholar of memory and memory training, asserts that visual images have been used in this way since the earliest known Western text, the Dialexeis. She writes, “In that pre-Socratic fragment, one is advised to fashion rebuses, or visual riddles based on homophonies, to recall the sound of particular words such as personal names, and heraldic images, such as Ares for anger, to remember themes” (emphasis mine). Art historian Emile Males has analyzed the function of Gothic images as “the literature of the laity” and effectively argues that the cathedral, with all its images, icons and statues, was a form of literature. The artistic representations were teaching tools. The three-paneled altar triptychs and frescoes found in most cathedrals around the world contain artistic depictions of the most significant biblical stories and events. Beautifully illustrated Psalters, utilized over a long period of time (their most prolific era was 1020-1300 C.E.), convey the power of visual images to tell a story, whether a scriptural narrative or another type of story. Frescoes can be found in the ancient cave churches of the early Christian movement in Cappadocia, Turkey, and each tells a story. Some share scriptural narratives, but others share stories of persecution, punishment and death. At the Basilica of San Marco in Venice, Italy, I saw the “propaganda” frescoes in the beautifully restored ceiling; often commissioned by the doges themselves, these frescoes show various doges being blessed by Jesus, Mary, St. John and others as a way to communicate to the laity divine approval of their leadership (despite their often cruel administrations).

Ancient scholar Cicero (106-43 BCE) argued, “Images ought to be ‘agentibus, acribus, insignitis (effective, sharply outlined and distinctive).’”

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“For fixing images in the mind, “the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight.” “Natural memory is not crushed beneath a weight of images,” he continues, citing eminent people “each of whom used to say that he wrote down things he wanted to remember in certain localities in his possession by means of images just as if he were inscribing letters on wax.”

Cicero stresses the importance of locality: “A material object without a locality is inconceivable.” Places or locations where collective memory has physical markers are important because of their permanence and regularity in everyday life, therefore reinforcing the memory on a continual basis.

The most common, and prominent, places we find Mary images and figures are on front lawns, inside and outside parish churches and cathedrals, hanging above beds in parents’ rooms, worn around people’s necks on miraculous medals (see examples below). These are often-seen places of significance for the individual because they represent home, safety, devotion and intimacy. One woman interviewed for this study was fixated on the marble statue of Mary that stood in her childhood home to the right of the banister, in the “coffin corner.” It was by far the most powerful visual image of Mary she recalled from her childhood. She passed this statue of Mary numerous times every day, as did other family members (another example of socialization). She was reminded of Mary every time she came downstairs to begin her day and every time she went upstairs to go to bed. The “locality” of the statue was significant; she could never get away from the watchful eye of Mary.

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116 In many Victorian houses architectural niches were built into the wall of the staircase landing. These niches were called “coffin corners.” Because most people died at home in their beds and most bedrooms were upstairs, it was difficult to get the casket down the stairs when the staircase turned a corner. So at the landing, Victorian architects cut a niche into the wall. The pallbearers would insert one corner of the coffin into the niche and make the turn at the landing. However, the majority of the time, the corner was for decorative purposes, to display a statue, like one of the Virgin Mary, or a vase, or flowers.
Historically, the Church has used visual images of Jesus, Mary and the saints to mark places of adoration. In the Stations of the Cross ritual, reenacted on Good Friday in the Catholic (liturgical) Church year, these statues seem to come to life as the faithful walk from station to station behind them in an act of remembrance and devotion. While the ritual’s performative aspects certainly factor into memorability, it is the visuality and corporality of the Stations, combined with the performative practices, that make them so effective. Thomas Lerud has done extensive work on the power of the Corpus Christi drama, which he argues functioned for decades as a “material transmitter” of the Christian story, a way to teach and memorialize it and assert its relevance and “continuing vitality in urban life.” He claims this drama held the stage in a number of Northern England towns, in particular York and Chester, for approximately 200 years (from 1311-1576). He speaks of the distinctiveness of the visual images used, in this case through dramatic portrayals that enhanced their “rememberability.” He writes,

...if we set up images that are not many or vague, but doing something; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for examples, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint so that its form is more striking or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily.\(^{117}\)

The “rememberability” of Ofili’s Holy Virgin Mary came not only from its assault on the static, acceptable image of Mary but also from the vulgarity of her disfigurement and ugliness, to use Lerud’s categories. Similarly, the memory system activated by the Corpus Christi drama relied on striking images: crowns, royal cloaks,

\(^{117}\) Ibid. footnote 26. Ad Herennium III. Xxii. 37, pp. 220-221.
disfiguring wounds, blood and brilliant colors (especially red), as well as comic effects that prompted laughter and mocking. The Stations of the Cross employ the same themes in their vivid portrayal of the events leading to Jesus’ crucifixion and death. Lerud wrote, “…sight is the sense that most easily impresses images upon the memory.”

Early Church theologian Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) made a similar claim in his *Summa Theologiae, Question 78*. In this monumental work, he describes five powers of the human soul: vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive and intellective. He classifies sight as a “sensitive” power. In the sensitive power are five external and five internal sense powers. Of the five external sense powers, sight, because it is “without natural immutation either in its organ or in its object, is the most spiritual, the most perfect, and the most universal (communior) of all the senses…” Aquinas’ internal sensitive powers are instructive for our study as well: common sense, fantasy, imagination, the estimative, and the *memorative* (La: 7:4). He writes, “It is this power of the soul that receives and retains images so that they may be acted upon by the intellectual powers; thus, no knowledge can be gained of anything that has not been imaged or retained by the sensitive powers of the soul.” This idea of sight as superior, as truly and completely spiritual, echoes the *Ad Herennium* and other classical rhetorical texts on the art of memory, and recurs throughout the defense of plays and images in the period of the Corpus Christi drama. In particular, the defenders of images, without making all of Aquinas’ distinctions, draw on the superiority of sight over hearing.

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118 Ibid. p. 13.
119 Ibid. p. 45.
120 Ibid. p. 44.
The idea that memory stores, sorts and retrieves material through the use of visual, mental images, and is the most effective collector of permanently retained data, is corroborated by Mary Carruthers:

According to the early writers, retention and retrieval are stimulated best by visual means, and the visual form of sense perception is what gives stability and permanence to memory storage. The sources of what is in memory are diverse, but what happens to an impression or an idea once it gets into the brain is a single process resulting in the production of a phantasm that can be “seen” and “scanned” by the “eye of the mind.” This sort of language is constant and pervasive in writings on the subject from the earliest times. Albertus Magnus, for instance, writes that “something is not secure enough by hearing, but it is made firm by seeing.” And he quotes Horace to the effect that “things intrusted (sic) to the ear/impress our minds less vividly than what is exposed/ to our trustworthy eyes.”

Contemporary neurological accounts confirm the centrality of visual images in the process of remembering. In a study by Daniel Schacter, memory researcher and professor of psychology at Harvard University, a group of students asked to recall specific events recalled most vividly those episodes of which they retained visual images. Relating such systems to modern theories of encoding, Schacter notes “the core cognitive act of visual imagery mnemonics--creating an image and linking it to a mental location--is a form of deep, elaborative encoding.”

Scholars such as Carruthers and Schacter are interested in memory because of its sheer power in what they regard as an “age newly obsessed with memory, both in acts of public memorialization of traumatic cultural events such as the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, and in the controversies surrounding long-buried recollections of child

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121 Carruthers. P. 17.
abuse or other traumatic individual episodes.” Of note here is the uncovering of widespread child sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests in the last two decades. The buried memories, the untold stories, the secrets kept and guilt hidden are what abuse survivors cite as most harmful to their identity and self-esteem, most stunting of their ability to become productive, healthy members of society. Similarly for many Catholic (and non-Catholic) women, memories of guilt, shame and regret are aroused when they see images of a serene, perfect Mary whom they are supposed to emulate but unable to match, memories that stunt self-esteem and self-actualization. Each time they see an image of Mary or engage in a performative practice involving her, they think how far they’ve strayed from Mary’s expectations of perfection.

Images of Mary

“In Mary, we see in the little that is told of her what a true woman ought to be.”
(quote of Adeney Walpole, a twentieth century theologian)

“For the first time in history, the mother kneels before her son; she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin—it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat.”

Yale University professor Jaroslav Pelikan retired after 50 years of teaching and chose the Virgin Mary as the topic for his final lecture series, the prestigious William Clyde DeVane series. His talks were partly based on his work, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*. In its introduction, Pelikan says,

The Virgin Mary has been more of an inspiration to more people than any other woman who has ever lived. And she remains so in the twentieth century, despite its being conventionally regarded as secularistic by contrast with previous so-

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123 Lerud, p. 1.
called ages of faith. Even in the absence of reliable statistical data, it is probably safe to estimate that for nearly two thousand years “Mary” has been the name most frequently given to girls at baptism...and through the Ave Maria, which has been repeated literally millions of times every day, (Mary) is the female name pronounced most often in the Western world. Almost certainly she has been portrayed in art and music more than any other woman in history.  

Representations of Mary express a wide range of religious and cultural meanings. She has a remarkable ability to transcend any single culture or population. The Virgin Mary initially appears as a humble, generic mother in the Roman catacombs as early as the mid-third century C.E.; she is transformed into an exalted queen of heaven following the 431 C.E. proclamation at the Council of Ephesus that she was the Mother of God. With the explosive growth of her cult in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Mary became the focus of popular veneration as the beautiful and loving mother to humanity, the merciful intercessor to God. Marian images proliferated, and then, as now, created controversy. With so little known about the historical woman Mary and her physical appearance, opponents of religious art in the early Christian Church argued that any image of Mary bore no relation to reality but instead resembled a pagan idol. This attitude prevailed for a few centuries; a writer at the court of Charlemagne attacked the adoration of imagery, pointing to the problem of accurately identifying a statue of a beautiful woman with a child on her lap. Was it the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus? Or Venus and Cupid? Or Alcmeme and Hercules? Should one venerate the statue as a sacred Christian image or destroy it as a hated idol?

Somehow, with remarkable tenacity, Mary survived the controversies that claimed devotion to physical images was idolatrous. Mary Carruthers tells the following

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story about seventh-century Bishop Serenus (the beginning of the first iconoclastic era) and his attempt to destroy religious images in his church:

In 600 C.E. Pope Gregory the Great wrote a letter to the hapless bishop, Serenus of Marseilles, who had become concerned that some of his flock might be engaged in superstitious worship of the holy images in his church. To prevent this, he destroyed all the pictures, thereby scandalizing his entire congregation, which deserted him on the spot. This story has been understood as an early indication that medieval images were a strict form of iconography, pictorial writing.\textsuperscript{127}

The vast creation of iconography in the early Church, its ability to withstand attacks, and the extensive use of visual imagery for ornamentation and objects of individual devotion, attest to the significance it holds for viewers and why it has been such an effective mechanism of social control in the Church. If a young girl sees multiple representations of the Virgin Mary every day, each time absorbing the message that Mary’s chaste, virginal status is to be emulated and, indeed, is expected of her by Mary and the Church, her attitudes and behaviors will be shaped accordingly. This is how collective memory is formed. Marian images abound—not only classic representations in museums but also those found in everyday life, as stated earlier; in homes, outside the neighborhood parish church, and other places where Mary holds the position of protector.

On a recent trip to Paris, I decided to make a record of the images of Mary I saw in the course of one day. I was not actively searching for them, nor was I in any museums. I noticed the Virgin Mary’s image in the following places: on laminated prayer cards taped to the top of four pieces of luggage of four different travelers, and on the outside of a portable stereo set up by a money-collecting karaoke singer passing from car to car on the Metro; on chains and necklaces of five different shop owners of various cultural backgrounds, from Indian to Northern African to Egyptian to French; in pictures

\textsuperscript{127} Carruthers, Book of Memory. p. 18.
hanging in the windows of seven restaurants; in statues standing outside eight churches; on miraculous medallions worn by eight people studying in the Pompidou Library (where much of this chapter was written). In other words, Mary was everywhere, in everyday places, in a country known for its supposed secularization and movement away from the Church. I do not suggest the medallions and prayer cards signify the religiosity of their owners; I am suggesting they point to the power Mary holds within collective memory as the transmitter of good luck, safety, and protection to those who possess and display her. These examples show how individual beliefs, even superstitions, about Mary are communicated to a wider world in public ways. Why were all of these examples of Mary in such visible places? Because of the collective memory elicited by merely glancing at her. Whether one believes she holds any power or not, Mary is there, triggering societal collective memory about women.

Her widespread visibility to any and all, regardless of the viewer’s religiosity, gives her a prominent place in societal collective memory, particularly for women. Her influence extends well beyond the Catholic or Orthodox churches – collective memory is not confined by such boundaries – with each representation of her acting as a “memory hook,” to borrow Mary Carruthers’ term, and a connection to acceptable social roles for women.

**Classic Representations in Christian Art**

Mary crushing a snake underfoot – Mary as the New Eve – Woman of Valor

Second Century C.E.
Early Church father Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (130 C.E.-200 C.E.), was the first to strikingly formulate the parallel between Eve, source of fallen humanity, and Mary, restorer of fallen humanity. In this representation, Mary is portrayed as accomplishing that which the “first” Eve was unable to do: be the obedient, perfect creature God created her to be. The passage below is found in both of Irenaeus’ surviving writings, Against Heresies (written in Greek but preserved largely in a Latin translation) and Proof of the Apostolic Preaching. It draws from both the Hebrew and Greek scriptures, playing off each other various elements in Genesis and the Gospels: Garden of Eden versus Garden of Gethsemane, tree of the knowledge of good and evil versus tree of the cross. This passage is believed to be the source of the representation of Mary crushing a snake underfoot, the image vividly recalled by a number of women interviewed for this study:

And just as it was through a virgin who disobeyed (namely, Eve) that mankind was stricken and fell and died, so too it was through the Virgin (Mary) who obeyed the word of God, that mankind, resuscitated by life, received life. For the Lord (Christ) came to seek back the lost sheep, and it was mankind that was lost; and therefore He did not become some other formation, but He likewise, of her that was descended from Adam (namely, Mary), preserved the likeness of formation; for Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality. And Eve (had necessarily to be restored) in Mary, that a virgin, by becoming the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience (emphasis mine).128

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128 Irenaeus. Proof of the Apostolic Preaching 33. Taken from translation of Joseph Smith.
Adam and Eve can be seen in the lower left corner, and Jesus and Mary in the upper right. Jesus and Mary accomplished that which Adam and Eve could not – true obedience and perfection. Jesus is the New Adam and Mary, the New Eve.

In Latin, the name Eva spelled backwards became Ave, the greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation, and echoed by millions of the faithful in a prayer second only to the Lord’s Prayer in popularity and memory, the Ave Maria. Composers have written scores of music based on the Ave Maria, still heard today at midnight Christmas Eve masses around the world, as well as in many other liturgical and non-liturgical venues. The connection between Eve and Mary stuck, but Mary became even more powerful through the designation. Humble, obedient Mary becomes a woman of strength and valor, one able to crush the tempter and its power underfoot. But the
temptation she conquers is related to her virginity, her ability to resist, so as not to become a fallen soul – like Eve or Mary Magdalene.

A Gregorian hymn from the sixteenth century captures the sentiment of Mary as the New Eve:

_Hail Star of the sea, o truly holy Mother of God,_
_You who are forever a Virgin, a joyous Gate of Heaven._

_Thou who didst take up the “Ave” from Gabriel’s lips,_
_Give foundation to our peace, by changing Eva’s name._

_Break the chains of the guilty, give light to the blind,_
_Protect us from all evil, obtain grace for us._

_Show yourself to be our mother, may he who was born for us,_
_By accepting to be your son, receive our prayer through you._
Rare Virgin, mild above all others, make us free from sins, mild and chaste. Give us pure lives, protect our path, that, seeing Jesus, We may rejoice in eternity.129

Theotokos-Mary as God-Bearer or Mother of God

Fourth and Fifth Centuries C.E.

In the Eastern tradition, the title Theotokos had a larger meaning than the one rendered in the Western Church. Theotokos meant “the one who gave birth to the one who is God,” rather than simply “Mother of God.” Early Church father Athanasius used the term often.130 The title signifies the exalted status Mary had achieved by the time of the Council of Ephesus of 431 C.E., the major theological conference where Marian theology was debated and formal doctrine about Mary was formulated. She had gone from humble Nazarethan peasant girl to woman of strength, the New Eve, to Mother of God.

130 Athanasius Orations Against the Arians III.29 (PG 26:385).
An undated hymn to Mary captures the image of Theotokos. This hymn was sung at masses for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary every August 15 in both Eastern and Western Catholic and Orthodox churches, and it is on the program every year at the Feast Day of the Assumption mass at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris:

_Hail, star of the sea, single receptacle of God’s Verb, Mother without a man, intact girl, you who was not dishonored, In which a new light, ray of the sun, descended like a rain._

_Receiving this Ave which is so soft for this world, you conceived God without man’s key. And when you gave birth, you did not undergo nuisance: The power of Christ descended in you like a rain._

The Iconoclastic Years – Eighth and Ninth Centuries

Beginning in the seventh century, and continuing well into the ninth, religious art was suppressed because Church leaders of these centuries deemed religious visual images as idolatrous. Possibly related to Islam’s prohibition of religious images, Byzantine iconoclasm was widespread in the East and exerted influence on the Western Church, as well. Over the course of these centuries, the production of Marian art rose and fell in accord with fluctuating sentiment about religious imagery. The iconoclastic sentiments began to wane, however, at the end of the ninth century and the ensuing centuries were times of prolific creation of Marian art and iconography throughout the world.

However, the Reformation and Counter Reformation years (1500-1650 CE) resurrected some of the earlier iconoclastic sentiment, with critics determined to undo “Mariolatry” in all its forms, both visual images and theology. “Mariolatry,” the term used by various reformers (not Martin Luther, however), was attacked as worship of any deity besides God and Christ. Reformer Ulrich Zwingli staunchly opposed any worship of Mary and any outward signs of devotion centered on physical objects. In a vivid description, Charles Garside, a critic of the Counter-Reformation, recounts the “war against the idols” that took place during Zwingli’s years,

The committee as a body went into every church in Zurich. Once inside, they locked the doors behind them, and then, free from all disturbances from the curious crowds without, began to dismantle the church...Every standing statue was removed from its niche or its base and, together with the base, taken out of the church. It was then either broken up by the masons, if made of stone or plaster, or burned, if made of wood. Every painting was taken down from the altars and burned outside. All murals were chipped away or scraped off the walls. The altars were stripped of
all images and vessels, all votive lamps were let down and melted outside, and all crucifixes were removed.\textsuperscript{132}

Zwingli would go on to say in his Sixty-Seven Articles of 1523 that because “Christ is the only Mediator between God and us, we do not need any mediator beyond this life but him.”\textsuperscript{133} Despite such controversy, Marian art would continue with even greater fervency as artistic representations flourished during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation – even renderings of two scenes that had not yet received official status: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary into Heaven.

\textbf{Mary, Queen of Heaven}

\textbf{Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries}

Because it was believed God had taken up habitation in Mary, a widely recognized title for her became Queen of Heaven. This was a title of veneration, as depicted below, signifying her crowning by the whole company of angels and indeed the Divine self. Mary is acclaimed as second in dignity only to God, rivaling Jesus in some renderings. In many depictions of her during the twelfth century, she is seated at Christ’s right hand, just as Christ is seated at God’s right hand. Of note in the image below is who accomplishes Mary’s crowning: God and Jesus, with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovering above. Pelikan writes, “Because she was the one who held first place among the entire celestial host, whether human or angelic, she, next to God himself,

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
should receive the praises of the whole world. There was, in short, “nothing equal to Mary and nothing but God greater than Mary.”

As the “Queen of Angels, the ruling Lady of the world, and the Mother of him who purifies the world,” she could acquire such titles as these: Mother of Truth, Mother and Daughter of Humility; Mother of Christians; Mother of Peace: My Most Merciful Lady. The paradox that a creature had become the mother of her Creator justified such names as “the fountain from which the living fountain flows, the origin of the beginning.” Therefore she was “the woman who uniquely deserves to be venerated, the one to be admired more than all women,” in fact, “the radiant glory of the world, the purest maid of earth.” Thus she excelled all others, “more beautiful than all of them, more lovable than all of them, super-splendid, super-gracious, super-glorious,” The glory of her name had filled the world.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 20: Diego Velazquez, 1641-44. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.*

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134 Pelikan. P. 134.
135 Pelikan. P. 130.
Mary, Mother of All Humanity

Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

During the period in which Mary became known as the Mother of All Humanity, the Church was undergoing substantial challenges and change. This was the time leading up to the Reformation when the Roman Church was being criticized (some would say assaulted) from every side. During this period, Mary’s role as the Mother of All Humanity attempted to both preserve her exalted status and portray the breadth of her reach, i.e., the diversity of persons for whom she cared. Pelikan writes, “She was the standard-bearer of piety, whose life of prayer the faithful imitated in their own. She was a model to them because she was courageous in her resolution, temperate in her silence, prudent in her questioning and righteous in her confession.”136 Note the diversity of people gathered at Mary’s feet: young and old, women and men, poor and sick. Mary as Madonna of the People is seen as caring for them all:

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Immaculate Conception

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

As stated in the previous chapter, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was not affirmed as official church doctrine until 1854. But, as with the Assumption of Mary (which did not achieve official status until 1950) artists had been portraying the Immaculate Conception for centuries before it received official status. Theologians of the church had been debating the doctrine for more than 200 years.

The Immaculate Conception is important to this study because the controversy around the doctrine lies in how Jesus could be sinless in his birth (i.e., not created as the result of “sinful” sex) if his mother was not conceived without sin (i.e., created as the result of “sinful” sex). It did not matter that Mary’s parents were married (i.e., she was
not a child born out of wedlock); what mattered was whether she had been born as a result of sex between two people under the scourge of original sin – a condition that would make her “unfit” to bear the sinless son of God. After years of controversy and debate about this question, the Church decided that Mary was, indeed, conceived without sin and maintained a status of sinlessness or perpetual virginity throughout her life. Legends developed about Mary’s childhood, and artistic portrayals emerged of her supposed early vow of chastity, lending visual credence to her status as unstained virgin. She is considered “the great exception”: She was free of the stain of sin because of her perpetual virginity.

Less than four years after the doctrine was made official by the Church, on March 25, 1858, in the French village of Lourdes in the Pyrenees, a “lovely lady” appeared to the peasant girl Bernadette Soubiroux and announced, in the vernacular dialect: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” This apparition was soon considered an affirmation of the work of the Church four years prior in affirming the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and Lourdes became one of the most significant Marian apparition sites in the world, now drawing an estimated 5 million to 6 million pilgrims each year.

138 See Appendix A on Marian apparition sites.
**Mater Dolorosa – Mother of Sorrows**

One of the most striking iconic images of Mary is the Mater Doloros, or Mother of Sorrows. Here, a woman looking no older than she was at the Annunciation, cradles her dead adult son in her lap. The boy she held on her lap as a baby in Madonna-and-child portrayals is again held in her lap, but in an anguished, heart-wrenching scene of death and grief. The *pieta* is a familiar scene, found in both St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.
and on the main altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Scholars have often considered the pieta the strongest example of Mary’s role as mediatrix for humanity, an intercessor between humanity and God. Mary is perceived as able to stand in this role because she has experienced the depths of human grief in losing her child.

As eleventh-century Catholic theologian Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, “She is our Mediatrix, she is the one through whom we have received thy mercy, O God, she is the one through whom we, too, have welcomed the Lord Jesus into our homes.” This portrayal is a striking example of how the viewer is drawn into Mary’s grief, making her seem more accessible to humanity and more fully able to relate to the lives of people. The early Church fostered this closeness, serving as the reputational entrepreneur (to revisit Gary Allan Fine’s term), to create a multifaceted Mary, one who is both exalted above humanity and yet grief-stricken with humanity, a woman of great valor and strength but also of humility. As the Mater Dolorosa, Mary is portrayed as accessible to all; there is no one outside of her grace and mercy. The depth of her suffering makes her more able to sympathize with the common layperson and his suffering.

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139 Notre Dame Cathedral receives 13 million visitors each year, and is the most highly visited tourist destination in France. St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome receives 7-11 million visitors each year and is the most highly visited sacred site in Italy.

140 Ibid. Bernard of Clairvaux same source.
Themes of Mater Dolorosa, also called the lamenting virgin, can be traced back to early Greek and Byzantine poetry and hymnody, such as the excerpt below from the Kontakion of Romanos Melodos:

Mary to Jesus:
I am vanquished by loving grief, child, vanquished
And cannot bear the thought of being in my chambers while you are on the cross;
I, at home while you are in the tomb. Let me come with you!
The sight of you soothes my pain.

Jesus to Mary:
Lay aside your grief, mother, lay it aside.
Lamentation does not befit you who have been called “Blessed.”
Do not obscure your calling with weeping, do not liken yourself to those who lack understanding, all-wise maiden.
You are in the midst of my bridal chamber.  

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La Virgin de Guadalupe

Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth Centuries

The Virgin of Guadalupe, introduced into the Western church soon after the conquest of Mexico (approximately 1519 C.E.), has become a symbol of political, social and religious liberation among the underclass. Mexican-American Catholic theologian Richard Rodriguez has suggested that “the Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes the entire coherence of Mexico, body and soul…The image of our Lady of Guadalupe (privately, affectionately, Mexicans call her “La Morenita,” which means Little Darling) has become the unofficial, private flag of Mexicans.”\textsuperscript{142} The portrayal of the Virgin Mary in this Mexican image, as another twentieth century writer has suggested, “contains the…basic themes of liberation.”\textsuperscript{143} A close look at the bottom of the image reveals a small peasant man lifting La Virgin up on his shoulders, giving the impression that his strength is coming from her.

I include La Virgin de Guadalupe in this study because her influence extends well beyond Mexico to most of the Spanish-speaking world. Like the cults of Mary Magdalene explored earlier in this chapter, cults to La Virgin de Guadalupe formed outside of official Church sanction and the Vatican worked to merge the local tradition of adoration of La Virgin de Guadalupe with that of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Here again, the theme of social control, of women in particular, by the Church is apparent. The legends involving La Virgin were retained even though there were no doctrines or art in the Western or Eastern churches portraying Mary as bringing food to poor peasants or

appearing to campesinos during times of drought or famine. But, as portrayed below, La Virgin was acknowledged by the Holy See more than 200 years after her initial appearance to Juan Diego in the Mexican countryside in 1531.

![Figure 24: Basilica de Our Lady of Guadalupe, Tepeyac Hill, Mexico City. Rendition of apparition seen by Saint Juan Diego, 12 December 1531, and approved by the Holy See, Pope Benedict XIV on 25 May 1754.](image)

**Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin – 1605-1606**

Among many controversial images of Mary through the ages, one notable example is Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin*, painted in 1605-1606. Rejected by the Church for its lack of decorum, the painting’s figure of Mary was rumored to have been based on a prostitute who may also have been the artist's lover.


Everyday Representations

Lawn Statue (also called Bathtub Madonna or Mary on the Half Shell – as pictured below):
Outside a Church

Holy Name Roman Catholic, 96th and Amsterdam, Manhattan

This picture was taken in the 1960s during a period when the church was closed to public use, but the statue of Mary that sits on its southeast corner served as a place of adoration for passersby. Even today, you occasionally see people, especially women, stopping in front of her for a prayer, perhaps leaving a picture of a loved one, a flower or some other marker of adoration at her feet.
Prayer Cards

Prayer cards with Marian images are plentiful, easy to obtain and observed often enough in public places to warrant inclusion in this discussion. They are carried in people’s wallets, pinned to cubicle walls, taped to checkout counters, fastened to travelers’ luggage, given as remembrances at funeral masses, and available at most gift shops and bookstores in Catholic churches and hospitals. While some people carry a prayer card in an almost superstitious fashion, as if it provides protection, the cards also serve as memory hooks for the Virgin Mary and the subtext about acceptable behavior and roles for women. The prayer card image below shows a sorrowful Mary, with seven
swords piercing her heart, recalling the verse from Luke 2:35 where Simeon, at the presentation of Jesus in the temple, says, “A sword shall pierce your heart, also.”

The card lists the seven sorrows of Mary and, on the back, a prayer meant to comfort the carrier during times of sorrow, and, by extension, guide him or her to emulate Mary’s steadfastness, even in the face of great grief—“for dejection has no claim on thee”—as stated in the prayer on the back of the prayer card (see below).

*Figure 28: Prayer Card for Mary, Lady of Sorrows*

**The Seven Sorrows of Mary**

The prophecy of Simeon  
The flight into Egypt
The three-day loss of Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem
The Meeting with Jesus on the way to Calvary
The Crucifixion - Mary standing at the foot of the Cross
The Pieta - Receiving His body
The placing of her Divine Son in a tomb

Prayer: O Desolate Mother, who can know the tender affection of thy broken heart that was laid in the sepulchre with the body of thy Divine Son? He was thy all, He still is thy all, for dejection has no claim upon thee. Teach me, Mother of Sorrow, to place my hope in Him, that the false security of the world may never seduce me. Amen.

Dashboard Figure

![Dashboard Figure](www.shutterstock.com · 832643)

*Figure 29: Dashboard figure found at shutterstock.com*

Miraculous Medallion
Modern-day representations of Mary, the cultural specifics continue...artists continue to portray Mary as like them, or as ordinary, everyday people.

Mary as a Nanny-Our Lady of Sutton Place
Figure 31: Mary of Sutton Place

The Madonna of the Internet – Mary holding Jesus and a computer mouse

Figure 32: Madonna of the Internet by Katherine Osenga

Rodeo Mary – holding Jesus, a cross and a gun
Images of Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene, in contrast to Mary, the mother of Jesus, is portrayed as the woman of vice. If she is clothed, she’s usually wearing red, the color of vice, in sharp contrast to Mary’s virtuous blue. Her hair, rather than smoothly brushed or worn in a crown, falls loosely and unkempt on her shoulders. And, as depicted in the two images below, she is often portrayed naked. Regarding collective memory, the Church used Mary Magdalene as a counterpoint to Mary. Thus, she is often portrayed as the Penitent Magdalene, the woman who has turned from her fallen ways back to God. Her name has been associated with reform organizations for prostitutes around the world, particularly in Spain and Italy, and the Magdalene Houses of Ireland and England -- homes for “wayward” girls, thankfully now closed because of the horrific abuses girls suffered in them -- were named after her. But to this day, on July 22, the Feast Day of Mary
Magdalene, parades are still held in some parts of the world, like Seville, Spain, where reformed prostitutes walk through the city streets pleading for other “fallen souls” to join them in prayer and penitence.

Figure 34: Mary Magdalene. 16th century. Gregor Erhart. Musee Louvre, Paris.
In the image above, the conflation of Mary Magdalene with the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet before the crucifixion is depicted through the inclusion of the oil vessel shown in the bottom left corner of the portrait. Mary Magdalene can often be identified in religious art through the inclusion of such a vessel, or oil pot, she is portrayed as holding.
Figure 36: Giotto di Bondone. Mary Magdalene’s Voyage to Marseilles. 1320. Fresco. Magdalene Chapel. Lower Church. San Francesco, Assisi.

Virgin Martyrs

Figure 37: Group of Virgin Martyrs (mosaic), Byzantine School, (6th century) / Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy The Bridgeman Art Library
Figure 38: St. Agnes, Virgin and Martyr. Unknown source.

Figure 39: Saint Lucy, by Domenico Beccafumi, 1521, a High Renaissance recasting of a Gothic iconic image (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena). Note the eyes on the platter Lucy is holding; legend says her eyes were gouged out at the time of her martyrdom. She is often depicted in later artistic renditions carrying her healed eyes on a platter.
Though my focus here is on imagery, it is worth noting that the equally abundant works of poetry, literature and music about Mary (worthy of their own separate study) also contribute to societal collective memory. To mention a few of the better-known examples:

1) Franz Shubert’s “Ave Maria,” one of the most recognizable and beloved pieces of classical music in the Western tradition, with its haunting “Ave Maria, Gratia Plena”

2) An influential hymn composed by an unknown poet in the ninth century, hailing Mary as the Star of the Sea, the nourishing Mother of God, the Ever-Virgin, the Gate of Heaven:

   Ave, maris stella,
   Dei, mater alma
   Atque semper virgo
   Felix caeli porta

3) This ecclesiastical sonnet to Mary written by William Wordsworth who was considered by some to be a “radical Protestant”:

   Mother! Whose virgin bosom was uncrost
   With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
   Woman! Above all women glorified,
   *Our tainted nature’s solitary boast;*
   Purer than foam on central ocean tost;
   Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak strewn
   With fancied roses, than the unblemished moon
   Before her wane begins on heaven’s blue coast;
   Thy Image falls to earth. Yes some, I ween,
   Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might bend,
   As to a visible Power, in which did blend
   All that was mixed and reconciled in Thee
   Of mother’s love with maiden purity,
   Of high with love, celestial with terrene!145

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4) And a Sacred Hymn to Mary:

Rose without thorns, woman without sin, through you the law of God is revealed, 
O Mary, star of the sea, salvation and queen of the world, purifying the world from evil, 
equal to the sun, red star of the morning, medicine of life and harbor of salvation, listen to 
us and save us from ruin.

Mother without equal, solace of the poor, you who alleviate burdens and heal old 
wounds, in your infinite kindness, intercede with the King of heaven on our behalf, that 
we may not succumb under the awful burden of our sins but benefit from more gifts and 
virtues.  

Summary

The images of Mary and, to a lesser degree, Mary Magdalene and the virgin 
martyrs, shown in this chapter are only a small sampling of the vast collection of images 
created over more than 2,000 years of artistic endeavors throughout the world. Indeed, as 
suggested by Pelikan, Mary’s long-standing iconography is unmatched by any other 
woman in history. Her image has been crafted, manipulated and co-opted at the discretion 
of artists and poets through the ages, becoming what they wanted and needed her to be -- 
like she did for the poet mentioned above: Even though there is no scriptural reference 
involving Mary and a sea or a body of water, the poet made her the guide for seafarers, an 
anchor in the storms of perilous life. To him (or her), Mary was therefore the Woman of 
Valor who was the Handmaid of the Lord.

Some might argue that the images taken together portray a multifaceted, complex 
woman, humble and submissive but also strong and valorous, crowned as Queen of 
Heaven and seated next to God. That is true, but also crucial to note is her honor and 
strength are always directly related to her chastity and virginity, her ability to remain pure

146 Motet: Almifonis Melos/Rosa Sina Cupla Spina. Ivrea, biblioteca capitolare 115. Manuscript 
polyphonique de l’Ars Nova, XVe siècle.
147 Ibid.
and perfect. And her valor derives from her obedience, her ability to be submissive to God and become a vessel of divine work. Nowhere in the scriptural witness, nor in the images presented here, does Mary speak a word. She is never portrayed in conversation; she leads not through instruction but by example. She is always silent, and most often her eyes are downcast, her hands folded or absent. The strength one might ascribe to Mary has to be created within the mind of the viewer, for she is not portrayed in such ways.

Even Pelikan, whose work intends to represent Mary in her most positive light, recognizes the historical pattern of Mary’s representations:

Throughout history Mary was seen as, on one hand, the “handmaid of the Lord,” as she called herself in Luke, the one who became the instrument of the divine plan. In every century she served as the model of patience, indeed of quietistic passivity and unquestioning obedience... It added to this definition of Mary the Handmaid that she was a woman and was therefore supposedly cast, by a deadly combination of nature and creation and fall, in the role of the passive and submissive one, the vessel that created. Therefore she could be held up to women as a model of how they ought to behave, in submissive obedience to God, to their husbands, and to the clergy and hierarchy of the church.¹⁴⁸

We recall the quote from Simone de Beauvoir in “Second Sex,” from the beginning of the images section of this chapter, “For the first time in history, the mother kneels before her son; she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin--it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat.”¹⁴⁹ Women’s inferiority becomes exalted through the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Submissiveness is rewarded, obedience praised, silence adored. And all these notions have been deposited in societal collective memory for 2,000 years.

¹⁴⁸ Pelikan. P. 83-84.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid. de Beauvoir. The Second Sex.
Through all manner of artistic works, Mary has claimed the affections not only of the Catholic faithful but also of millions outside the Church, who on doctrinal grounds did not share the traditional reverence for her. So it was that, as theologian Owen Chadwick has suggested, “The Annunciation by Fra Angelico, for a cell of the Dominican priory of San Marco in Florence, (was) one of the two or three pictures which most helped Protestants, as well as Catholics, to remember St. Mary with affection.”¹⁵⁰ Such pictures and other visuals have powerfully fueled the cult of Mary around the world for centuries, conveying to viewers the characteristics assigned to her by the early Church fathers. With their prevalence, accessibility and ability to communicate in ways words cannot, Marian images form the strongest link in the “chain of religious memory,” to borrow Hervieu-Leger’s term.

¹⁵⁰ Pelikan. P. 163.
Chapter Five – The Continuing Influence of the Institutional Church on Women

Today

Societal collective memory is constructed, shaped and promulgated by a variety of reputational entrepreneurs occupying influential positions within institutions that have abiding power over people’s lives and the ability to exert social control. This study has argued that one such institution is the institutional Church, a global, ecclesial hierarchy that has effectively used doctrine creation and transmission, liturgical (performative) practices and visual images, specifically of its most beloved female figure, Mary, the mother of Jesus, to construct and shape collective memory about women’s identity, utilizing this social construction as a mechanism of social control. While other societal institutions have contributed to the construction of women’s roles, identity and place in society, the Christian tradition has two thousand years of strong influence, and as of this writing, there was no sign of change in collective memory preservation about women’s roles and “place” on the horizon.

Some readers of this study might ask, “Does the institutional Church, its teachings, liturgies and ideas about women’s roles assert any influence in 2013?” Others may question whether the conservative theology of various church bodies about women has any influence in a contemporary world, where women have experienced enormous successes in education, business, medicine and politics. This study has argued that the Church, its doctrines, liturgies, art and teachings, continues to overtly and covertly influence societal collective memory, specifically women’s identity; arguments contrary to this understanding have (knowingly or unknowingly) fallen victim to the insidious
social control continually exerted upon women (and men) through its teaching and practices.

Consider the 2013 Catholic World Youth Gathering referenced in the previous chapter. This global event drew an historic number of young people from all over the world.\textsuperscript{151} It is used by the church to cultivate religiosity and loyalty to the church in young people, continue the transmission of doctrines that reinforce collective memory about women’s identity and roles, along with various social issues of critical importance to women, and thereby continue to transmit messages of social control to the next generation of women, and men. It is considered a tremendously successful endeavor by religious leaders around the world. And it is. What other religious system draws such a large number of young people to a single event, and engenders the commitment needed to raise the funds to make such an international trip? Is there any parallel to it?

The Catholic Church, and other Christian churches, is growing in parts of Central America, South America, Mexico, central and southern Europe and Africa. It is common to encounter African priests at American and European Catholic parishes today because those countries are producing the highest numbers of Catholic priests of any country in the world, and dwarfed the U.S. and Europe in the output of seminarians years ago.\textsuperscript{152} Roman Catholic dioceses in Africa consider the U.S. their mission field, and send priests here as missionaries. These priests bring with them both a conservative theological and cultural understanding about women’s place in society, providing a double-fold to collective memory preservation (in contrast, American and European-born priests have

\textsuperscript{151} See footnote 159 in this chapter for more information on this international gathering of Catholic young people.
\textsuperscript{152} \url{http://www.utexas.edu/conferences/africa/ads/735.html}; \url{http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/gissler/anthology/weblyman.html}
been trained in egalitarian societies with regard to voting rights for women and access to work outside the home, even if their theology doesn’t match this experience. And while it is true that Catholic dioceses in the U.S. have been closing churches and schools in certain parts of the country during the last 10 years, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to wield considerable influence on the American political scene.\textsuperscript{153} It is, by all accounts, a powerful political lobby, functioning like a PAC, and politicians understand that alienating Catholics in their districts is a bad idea. The ability of the U.S. Conference of Bishops to alter President Obama’s health care bill is one recent example of its influence. However, their influence goes far beyond abortion and contraceptive use.

The U.S. Conference of Bishops is championing the current immigration bill. This is a highly controversial topic in American society, but the bishops approach it as both a humanitarian and justice issue. An article on August 22, 2013, in the International Herald and Tribute stated:

Roman Catholic bishops and priests from major U.S. dioceses will preach a coordinated message supporting changes in immigration policy, with some using Sunday Mass on September 8, 2013 to urge congressional passage of a legislative overhaul that includes a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. The decision to embrace political action from the pulpit is part of a broader effort by the Roman Catholic Church and by other religious groups that support President Barack Obama’s call for new immigration laws. It includes advertising and phone calls directed at 60 Catholic Republican lawmakers and “prayerful marches” through congressional districts where the issue has become a divisive topic…Catholic leaders, who have regularly wielded their religious clout against Mr. Obama on issues like abortion, birth control and same-sex marriage, are betting that their congregations will be able to exert pressure on reluctant Republicans and wavering Democrats to support the president on immigration.

\textsuperscript{153} Mainline Protestant denominations throughout the United States and Europe have closed churches as well.
And, as referenced in the previous chapter, the article states:

Catholics are the largest single religious group in Congress, making up about 30 percent of the members, according to the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project. The current House has 136 Catholic members, including speaker John A. Boehner and 60 other Republicans, according to Pew.

Surely it’s not lost on the Bishops that the largest immigration populations coming to the U.S. continue to be from historically Roman Catholic countries like Mexico, Central America, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and South America; U.S. Catholic parishes need these parishioners to fill empty pews. In this instance, the bishops are reputational entrepreneurs wielding political influence and shaping societal thinking on issues they deem important. Shaping thinking shapes memory. In the example of immigration, the bishops proffer their stance in support of immigrants as a matter of justice and conscience. Yet the social control of women doesn’t appear to be a matter of justice and conscience for the Church.

Declarations about the supposed decline of the Church in the U.S. and Europe are naive at best and profoundly ethnocentric at worst. While much of the Western world was surprised when a South American pope was elected in March 2013, it was a welcome change for two-thirds of the world (in terms of population) where Catholic and Protestant churches continue to grow. And, as has been argued throughout this study, the influence of the Church goes far beyond issues related to women. Why was considerable attention given to the election of Pope Francis if the Church has lost its global power and influence? The eyes of the entire world were watching as the election took place, and much attention has been given to the differences between Francis and Benedict.
Attention is being paid by people of all religious traditions because of the Pope’s global prominent and influence.

One of Pope Francis’ foci appears to be addressing the huge gap between rich and poor around the world created by greed and consumerism; to make his point, he has chosen to live in a simple guest house at the Vatican rather than the papal quarters, the way he rejected the lavish quarters of the Argentinian Cardinals before him and chose to live in a simple apartment there. He took the bus to work each day then, consistent with his decision during a visit to Brazil in July 2013 to discard the bullet-proof “pope mobile” and drive through crowds of people in a regular vehicle.\(^{154}\)

In his previous post, he was outspokenly critical of priests who deny sacraments to people, particularly women, whom the priests deemed “unworthy” to receive them\(^{155}\) and has called priests around the world to focus their efforts on serving the poor rather than worrying about moving up in the hierarchy of the church. His message seems to be consistently oriented toward people on the margins of society, a modern-day Magnificat, if you will, calling the lowly to be lifted up and the wealthy and powerful to be brought

\(^{154}\) [http://www.politico.com/story/2013/03/pope-francis-biography-key-facts-life-in-latin-america-and-background-88818.html](http://www.politico.com/story/2013/03/pope-francis-biography-key-facts-life-in-latin-america-and-background-88818.html). In this article, Francis is quoted as making the following comments to a group of priests in Argentina where he formally served as Cardinal. “In our ecclesiastical region there are priests who don't baptize the children of single mothers because they weren't conceived in the sanctity of marriage,” Bergoglio (Francis’ given name before becoming pope) told his priests. “These are today’s hypocrites. Those who clericalize the Church. Those who separate the people of God from salvation. And this poor girl who, rather than returning the child to sender, had the courage to carry it into the world, must wander from parish to parish so that it's baptized!”

Bergoglio compared this concept of Catholicism, “this Church of 'come inside so we make decisions and announcements between ourselves and those who don't come in, don't belong,’” to the Pharisees of Christ’s time — people who congratulate themselves while condemning all others.

\(^{155}\) Ibid.
low. Women have historically been a marginalized group in society. Where do they fit in Francis’ Magnificat?

Despite the pontiff’s seemingly more progressive approach in an increasingly secularized world, Pope Francis shared the following words in May 2013 at an international gathering of 800 women religious (nuns) who lead religious orders around the world. His message focused on three elements of religious life: servanthood, obedience and chastity. On chastity, he said:

And then chastity, as a precious charism, that enlarges the freedom of your gift to God and others with Christ's tenderness, mercy and closeness. Chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven shows how affection has its place in mature freedom and becomes a sign of the future world, to make God's primacy shine forever. But, please, [make it] a 'fertile' chastity, which generates spiritual children in the Church. The consecrated are mothers: they must be mothers and not 'spinsters'! Forgive me if I talk like this but this maternity of consecrated life, this fruitfulness is important! May this joy of spiritual fruitfulness animate your existence. Be mothers, like the images of the Mother Mary and the Mother Church. You cannot understand Mary without her motherhood; you cannot understand the Church without her motherhood, and you are icons of Mary and of the Church.”

His words echoed orthodox Catholic theology about women in religious life living as (chaste) mothers, and serving as examples for all women.

156 The Magnificat is Mary’s lengthiest and most significant speech (a song, really) found in the New Testament. It will be examined more thoroughly in the section on Mary as Silent; the words of the Magnificat, or Mary’s Song, from the Gospel of Luke can be found on page 23 of Chapter 4.
158 Francis’ conservative address to the 800 women religious is in stark contrast to words shared with international press as he left the World Youth Day Gathering in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on July 28, 2013. Millions of youth from all over the world attended the international gathering, sleeping outdoors on the beach for several days in anticipation of Francis’ address to them. World Youth Day was instituted in 1984 by Pope John Paul II, occurring first every two years and, since 2002, every three years. In an era of increasing secularization, John Paul was concerned Roman Catholic youth were leaving the Church en masse. He instituted the huge international event as a way to focus on the needs and concerns of young people, and hopefully draw them back to the Church. World Youth Day has been held in such places as Manila, Philippines, Rome, Italy, Paris, France, Denver, Colorado, USA and other cities around the world.
words and images may seem archaic to the modern ear, even those of women religious (see footnote in chapter three on former Pope Benedict’s chastisement of “radicalized nuns” not adhering to traditional Catholic values regarding abortion and contraceptive use), but the world continues to listen. Francis made no mention of the possibility of women being ordained into the priesthood in the future, or expanding women’s leadership in the Church. As noted earlier, in July 2013 as he was leaving the World Youth Day gathering in Brazil, Francis said the door to women’s ordination is “forever closed” in the Roman Catholic Church, a comment that somehow received scant coverage in international press reports. Pope Francis seems to be as regressive toward women in the Church as Benedict, who is believed to have taken women back to pre-Vatican II status; this has been a significant sore point for women religious and women parishioners around the world.

On the issue of broadening women’s leadership in the Church, Francis, like the pontiffs before him, is silent; when speaking on issues of women’s leadership, he tows the conservative Catholic line. Here is an excerpt from the July 2013 interview:

A church without women would be like an apostolic college without Mary. The Madonna is more important than the apostles — the Church herself is feminine, the Spouse of Christ and a mother…The role of women doesn’t just end with being a mother and with housework. We don’t yet have a truly deep theology of women. We talk about whether they can be this or that, can they be altar boys, can they be lectors, about a woman as president of Caritas (Catholic charities). But we don’t have a deep theology of women in the church… On the ordination of women, the

As Pope Francis was leaving the 2013 World Youth Day gathering, a reporter asked him his thoughts on homosexuality. Francis reportedly said, “Who am I to judge a gay person of goodwill who seeks the Lord? You can't marginalize these people.” While scholars are debating whether this statement marks a shift in traditional Catholic teaching on homosexuality, it is the first time a pontiff has addressed the question with openness and candor. Yet, he has shown no such openness to the possibility of ordination for women priests and continues to maintain a conservative Catholic position when addressing women’s leadership, abortion, and contraceptive rights (His record on these issues from his home country of Argentina reflects this conservative stance; he stood in stark opposition to a proposal in 2006 to legalize abortion under certain circumstances and called upon the political leaders who proposed the bill to respect the strong Catholic presence in Argentina and “not waver in our defense in protecting the dignity of the person”).
Church has spoken and said “no.” Pope John Paul II, in a definitive formulation, said that door is closed.\textsuperscript{159}

Why does the possibility of women’s increased leadership remain so threatening to the Catholic Church? How, in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century when women are serving in the highest levels of government in countries around the world (including solidly Catholic countries like Francis’ own Argentina--now on its second female president, who recently was re-elected for a second term--Chile, the Philippines, Haiti, and even Ireland!), can the Catholic position on women as leaders in the church remain frozen in 4\textsuperscript{th} century theological constructions?

\textbf{When Memory Becomes Identity}

In the summer of 2013, an architectural exhibit was presented in Venice, Italy, called “When Attitudes Become Form.” It illustrated how certain attitudes about how people should (or shouldn’t) interact with each other in public spaces become imbedded in and then reflected in architectural forms. As we consider the social impact of the Christian tradition, its visual images of Mary, doctrines and liturgical practices especially for girls, we could title our exhibit, “When Memory Becomes Identity.” Such a name calls to mind Hervieu-Leger’s chain of memory, discussed in Chapter 1. The initial element of the chain of memory we are discussing in this study begins with social control imbedded in church doctrines (the transmitters of social control), exemplified in visual images, performed through liturgical rituals, and transferred into collective memory, which shapes identity. As discovered in the interview material in Chapter 2, doctrines

\footnote{\url{http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2013/07/29/pope-francis-door-open-to-gays-closed-to-women-as-priests/}}
alone don’t have much impact; the doctrines imbedded in images and liturgical rites lodge the (desired) impact of social control of women in the chain of memory.

It is an insidious process. The approachability of Mary and the comfort she provides, as expressed throughout the interviews, is manipulative because of the double-edged, dichotomous reality Mary embodies, particularly for women. Further, many significant figures in women’s lives support and transmit these messages. These reputational entrepreneurs include parents, other family members and respected adults, teachers, nuns, and priests, all figures of authority in children’s lives and over whom they have power and influence.

I have divided the final section of this study into what I believe are central findings from the interviews, maintaining that each of these findings is both the result of and a contributor to women’s continued inferioritization and collective memory maintenance about women’s identity. Each of these findings has deep roots in historic elements of Christian doctrine and theology, and each has permeated societal collective memory, affecting adherents and non-adherents alike.

Perfectionism

Perhaps most damaging of all the far-reaching Marion influences is the focus on perfection, an implicit, insidious and thoroughly devastating reality to which all women are exposed and by which all women are measured. Religious or not, all women are exposed to societal expectation of a perfection that is reinforced through every kind of media: print, magazines, billboard ads, television, big-screen movies and Internet-based technologies that consistently represent women in a societally defined (i.e., bodily)
perfection. While societal body perfection standards might be different for women than those espoused by Mary and the Church, the underlying reality is the same: Women are expected to be bodily perfect, either through virginity or having a perfect body. Mary both represents and underscores the perfection, serving in a role that divinely sanctions it.

The belief that a woman should be perfect but will always fall short creates a vicious cycle from which she can never escape. The doctrine of original sin in the Christian tradition sets women (and men) up for this never-ending cycle of defeat, as it posits that every human being enters the world with the stain of original sin. You enter the world from an inferior (bad) place that you can never overcome. Both men and women share this stark reality in the theology of the Catholic tradition, but women carry a double stain – original sin and the inability to live up to the perfection ideal (embodied in Mary) set before them.

The dichotomization of women creates an internal conflict/divide/split between what women have learned they should be, who they are, and what they can become. And, as noted throughout the interviews, there is an additional dichotomy or gap between beliefs and behavior. Although many women interviewed claimed to believe in the theology imbedded in the doctrines explored, their behavior doesn’t necessarily follow (e.g., the use of contraceptives historically forbidden by the Church and knowing the Church with which they identify is against it). Navigating the normal challenges of life with this added burden must prevent full self-actualization, particularly for women. Consider the loss in human and intellectual capital this psycho-social stress has created for women throughout history. Call to mind some of the many comments about unworthiness expressed in the interviews. It is a low-level stress carried through life and
another function of patriarchy’s continuing insidious impact. Even though women have made great strides in almost every profession, including business, law, politics and medicine, the Church’s levers of social control keep women from realizing their full potential as leaders. Unfortunately, this expression of patriarchy shows little sign of receding.

**Over-focus on Women’s Sexuality/Under-focus on Male Sexuality**

The Madonna/whore trope creates an over-focus on women’s sexuality based on virginity and chasteness in the Christian tradition, and an under-focus on the sexuality of men. There is no similar trope for men nor any parallel doctrine in Catholic theology focused on male sexuality, virginity, fertility or virility. Why is that? Even with Jesus, there is a profound under-focus, a non-focus, really, on any aspect of his sexuality. He is presented as non-sexual. Visual images of Jesus often focus on his suffering, such as hanging on a cross in a crucifix, or his humility or compassion, as displayed in Good Shepherd images.¹⁶⁰

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¹⁶⁰ For over one hundred images of Jesus as the Good Shepherd see http://www.goodsalt.com/search/jesus_shepherd.html.
Figure 40: Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Artist Unknown.

We never see Jesus wielding a scepter or weapon (a shepherd’s staff is regarded as an instrument to guide the flock, not punish it) in classic images of him, and rarely is he seated on a throne or other such exalted place (Mary is actually seated on thrones much more often than Jesus in visual images). There is an under-focus on Jesus’ power, and any power attributed to him is generally found in his humility, vs. physical strength or virility.

Collective memory is powerful. Consider the static nature of image recollection indicated in the interviews. Ninety percent of the women, who varied widely in age, recalled the same classic image of Mary as their earliest memory of her. There were very few non-traditional images of Mary mentioned by interviewees. But as shown in chapter
4, there are many such images out there; they simply do not receive the viewings of the classic image, and do not appear to have parallel significance.

And what about the classic image mentioned by so many of the women? The downcast eyes of Mary make her almost disappear – is that what the Church intended for women? The problem with such an approach is that women can’t just disappear – they were and are needed by the Church to produce children and continue to populate it. So what is the next best thing to disappearing? Being silent, obedient, submissive? The classic image of Mary recalled by the interviewees embodies these qualities, and women are expected to emulate them.

What would happen if the Catholic hierarchy opened the door to women as priests, and other leadership positions (like has happened with Caritas, or Catholic Charities, which historically was only served by ordained male leaders but has begun selecting women as CEOs).

**Reconstruction – Is it possible?**

In the introductory chapter of this study, the examples of World War II and the Vietnam War were used to demonstrate attempts by centrally positioned societal reputational entrepreneurs to reconstruct societal collective memory about global events. Clear and decisive steps were taken by reputational entrepreneurs in two governments, Germany and the United States, to change the memory about events that were controversial and disputed and left deep stains on the image of each government – Nazism and the loss of a controversial war by the United States. It can be argued that the scourge of Nazism was revealed, its ideology rejected, and the collective memory around
its brutal emergence at a particular point in history reconstructed to the status of anathema. This was a successful collective memory reconstruction. Yet with the Vietnam War, the process has been more challenging. Constructing breathtaking monuments hasn’t reconstructed the collective memory in the United States about this war. Perhaps it is too early to tell; perhaps memory reconstruction takes generations to complete.

But what about the collective memory regarding women’s place in society, which has been so carefully managed and maintained by institutions like the Church? Can such a deeply imbedded collective memory about women promulgated by the Church for millennia undergo reconstruction? As this study draws to a close, I would like to offer a hopeful word about that possibility. A future study might undertake a research project that identifies historical examples of successful collective memory reconstruction on matters of human identity, not just global events. Paul Connerton’s (1989) work on performative memory could be expanded beyond global events, commemorations and rote practices like reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to include collective memory on issues of human collective identity. One could then place the collective memory construction about women proffered by the Christian tradition alongside such examples and find parallel paths for this work.

Unfortunately, such an effort is outside the parameters of this study. But after years of doing this research, traveling around the world, and watching global events unfold in the institutional Church, I believe that collective memory about women’s identity can be reconstructed when the Christian tradition changes its theology about women. Until that happens, I believe such reconstruction will be impossible.
Pope Francis stated in the summer of 2013 that a “full theology of women” is needed in the Church to begin to answer recurring questions about women’s larger participation and leadership in the Church. Yet, that theology has not been forthcoming. Further, as recently as 1988 in a piece titled Mulieris Dignitatem, Pope John Paul II wrote what is considered the definitive manifesto on women and ordination. Benedict and Francis relayed that this is still the word they each follow, yet it is not the full manifesto on women’s theology Francis says is still needed. I consider this an example of infinite regression, a circular argument that says, “We cannot change the policy on X until we have undergone a thorough study of Y, and we cannot undergo a thorough study of Y until we have undertaken Z.”.

Nothing is studied; nothing is changed. And women pay the price. The deeper I have gone into studying collective memory about women’s identity, the more I have noticed the strength of its prevalence in society. I experience it everywhere. For example, I was invited to attend the reading of a play written by a senior undergraduate student at Barnard College in November, 2013. Barnard College is an all-women’s college often hailed for its progressive, feminist approach to education for young women. The play was titled, “The Nativity,” and was a modern-day nativity story, complete with the immaculate conception of a 16 year old high school student by a newfound friend named Gabriel. The play was written by a non-Catholic (but Christian) 21 year old in her senior year at Barnard. The 16 year old girl in the play has a possessive boyfriend who becomes irate when she shares with him she is pregnant, and not by him (not by anyone, actually, because the conception was “immaculate”). The boyfriend becomes enraged, aggressive and abusive, calling her all manner of names including “whore,” “slut,”

161 See earlier quote in this chapter.
“fallen,” “demonic,” etc. His vocabulary was filled with “fallenness” language based on her loss of virginity and perfection—“You were supposed to be mine; that was supposed to be mine. You’re ruined.” It was replete with the same sort of attitudes discussed throughout this study.

But this play was not written by a Catholic young woman. She had not been schooled in Catholic doctrine; she hadn’t worn a white bridal dress when receiving First Communion or sung “Bring Flowers to the Fairest” on Mary festivals in school. She had not learned the Marian doctrines discussed in Chapter three of this study. And yet, despite her not being schooled in Catholicism in any formalized manner, her play was filled with doctrine regarding women’s purity and virginity. It was yet another experience of the power of collective memory to pervade society at large, permeating attitudes and behavior of people far outside of the Catholic tradition.

Changing the theology regarding women in the Catholic tradition would be the most significant step taken for the reconstruction of collective memory regarding women’s identity. Such a move would have a far-reaching, global impact because of the prominence of the institutional Church traditions and their influence on societies around the world. Are there reputational entrepreneurs courageous enough to embark upon such a momentous path? This is the necessary shift to move beyond infinite regression.
Appendix A

Superstition or Super-Natural experiences of Mary – Apparition Sites

Special prayers have been created for every Marian apparition site in the world.

Examples of prayers for Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal are:

Prayers of Fatima – Given to those who visit this Marian Apparition site in Portugal

(The first is believed to be the message Mary brought in her apparition in Fatima, 1917. The second is the message brought by the angel who accompanied Mary, to the three children she appeared to.)

"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Your Mercy".

*(Our Lady at Fatima, 13th July 1917)*

"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love You. I beg pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love You."

*(The Angel to three children of Fatima, spring 1916)*

An unexpected finding from the interviews was the number of women who had an experience of Mary appearing to her in a dream or prayer, and the number who are visitors to and believers in Marian apparition sites. An apparition site is a physical place where Mary is believed to have appeared to people with a message from her intended to be widely shared. A site is considered an apparition site if Mary “appeared” there in some way, such as through the miraculous healing of an ill person or if there’s a visible outline of her on a tree or wall. Sometimes the apparition involves “weeping” where her figure appears to be wet, interpreted as Mary crying for some reason associated with the message she wants to convey.
I had not intended to include a section on Marian apparition sites in this study, but the number of women who mentioned them prompted me to do some research. Mary inspires all sorts of supernatural thinking, or at least such thinking has been placed upon her over the centuries, and the women interviewed for this study attest to this notion.

Mary is believed to have appeared in literally hundreds of places around the world and “Mary sightings” have become more frequent. She is perceived as capable of performing miracles not even attributed to Jesus (there are few Jesus apparition sites in the world, and where there are, Mary is believed to have appeared with him). And she is believed capable of performing modern-day miracles. My research for this dissertation took me to such places as Nazareth in Galilee, Paris and throughout France (where Mary and Mary Magdalene grottos and cathedrals are plentiful) to Rome and throughout Italy,

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165 Figure 41: Marian site in West New York, New Jersey, where Mary is believed to have appeared in a tree trunk in July 2012. The image of Mary is underneath the small prayer card in the trunk.

162 See image above. On July 13, 2012, Mary is believed to have appeared in a tree trunk in West New York, New Jersey. Thousands flocked to the site and the story was picked up by major news media across the country. See http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/07/13/12723230-virgin-mary-image-on-tree-in-new-jersey-crowds-say-yes?lite
to Barcelona, to South America, specifically Peru, Argentina and Brazil and, of course, the U.S. I added trips to Lourdes, France and LuJuan, Argentina, both Marian apparition sites, to experience this phenomenon myself. Each of the “approved” Marian sites around the world draws millions of tourists each year (8 million to LuJuan, Argentina each year -- and this is a small village about 65 kilometers from Buenos Aires), and the devotion people show to Mary in these places is fierce, whether they consider themselves practicing Roman Catholics or not.

Theologian and historian Jaroslav Pelikan has done significant research on Marian apparitions. He (like the author of this dissertation) sees in Marian apparitions a fascinating mixture of formal Church practice, local “folk” religion and an inexplicable capacity to foster intense devotion and fervent religious practice by those who visit the sites. Yet, in his book, “Mary through the Centuries,” he cautions, “The Church is very prudent with regard to apparitions, and accords them low status because they are signs which reach us through our senses and are subject to illusions of subjectivity.” Rene Laurentin, at one time the leading authority on the history of Marian apparitions, wrote an exhaustive report on the documents surrounding and following the appearances at Lourdes in 1858 (it is an impressive repository of historical source material for the entire history of Marian apparitions up to that time.) A catalog was published by Laurentin in 1962 of the Marian apparitions that had been ecclesiastically acknowledged to be worthy of recognition and pious belief at that time.

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163 Pelikan. P. 178.
Among the innumerable accounts reported by individuals and groups, the following list of 10, in chronological order of occurrence (which does not always correspond to the chronological order of their official acknowledgment), are those that have received official approval or sanction by the Church:

9-12 December 1531: at Guadalupe, Mexico, to Juan Diego
17 November 1830: at Paris, to Sister Catherine Laboure;
19 September 1846: at La Salette in the French Alps near Grenoble, to Maximim Giraud and Melanie Calvat
11 February-16 July 1858: at Lourdes, France, to Bernadette Soubiroux
12-13 January 1866: at Filippsdorf (Philippsdorf), now in the Czech Republic, to Magdalena Kade
17 January 1871: at Pontmain in Brittany
8 July 1876: at Pompeii, Italy
13 May-13 October 1917: at Fatima, Portugal, to three children, Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta.
29 November 1932-3 January 1933: at Beauraing, Belgium

David Blackbourn, in his book on Marian apparitions, writes, “All of the elements of the classic modern apparition as they had fused at Lourdes are present in this list: The simplicity of the humble visionary, the delivery of a message, the initial skepticism of the parish priest, the hostile reaction of the civil authorities, claims of miraculous cures, and finally the purposive creation of an official cult by the church.” Notably, the appearances are almost exclusively to women and girls, and the vast majority of those to whom Mary appeared during what could be called the great century of Marian apparitions--the hundred years from the 1830s to the 1930s--were not members of the elite but laypeople and peasants.

The story is told that on May 13, 1946, more than 700,000 pilgrims, almost one-tenth of the population of Portugal at that time, gathered at Fatima, Portugal (see prayers

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to Fatima at the beginning of this section) in honor of Mary as Queen of Peace to give thanks to her for the end of World War II. It was, as it had been for the 30 years preceding in the devotion to this particular Marian apparition, “scrubwomen, waiters, young and old, rich and poor, all sorts of people (but most of them humble, most of them barefoot, most of them workers and their families)” who paid tribute to the Virgin.\textsuperscript{166}

Undoubtedly some who visit these sites are sightseers or curiosity-seekers, and many others come only to pray. But millions have made the pilgrimage to apparition sites like Fatima, Guadalupe, Lourdes and even unofficial sites like Medugorje, to seek a miraculous cure for ills of body and spirit. The miraculous powers of the Virgin of Lourdes and the Virgin of Fatima have received certification at the highest level of the Church, namely the Vatican.

More recently, in 1981, the entire world, Roman Catholic or not, was shocked when Pope John Paul II was shot and gravely wounded in Saint Peter’s Square on May 13. The pope communicated no doubts regarding his view of how and why he was spared: “And again I have become indebted to the Blessed Virgin…Could I forget that the event in Saint Peter’s Square took place on the day and at the hour when the first appearance of the Mother of Christ to the poor little peasants has been remembered for over sixty years at Fatima in Portugal? That day…I felt that extraordinary motherly protection, which turned out to be stronger than the deadly bullet.”\textsuperscript{167}

Each year the sites attract millions of visitors, pilgrims as they are often called. Small towns have been built up around the sites, and the revenue generated in these communities comes almost solely from the tourism they draw. It has sometimes been

\textsuperscript{166} Pelikan.
\textsuperscript{167} L’Osservatore Romano, 12 October 1981.
estimated, whether accurately or not, that Lourdes has, in something less than a century and a half, attracted twice as many pilgrims as Mecca in more than 13 centuries.  

Figure 42: The procession at Lourdes

Figure 43: The Basilica at Lourdes

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In summer 2013, I visited LuJuan, Argentina, the site of a Marian apparition purported to have occurred in 1630 when an oxcart driven by a peasant unexpectedly stopped along a dusty road west of Buenos Aires. The story goes that the oxcart would not continue until a small figure of Mary was taken out of the cart and placed on the road. This was interpreted as Mary’s wish to remain there, and over the centuries a basilica was built on the site in her honor. The figure of Mary in the oxcart was small, similar to a Queen of Heaven rendering, with her wearing a blue brocade cape and small crown.

Figure 4: The Virgencita of LuJuan, Argentina, Patron saint of Argentina

This rendering became the patron saint of Argentina, called “La Virgencita” and, to this day, it’s found in every Roman Catholic church in the country. The Basilica to La Virgencita in LuJuan is an active Church; 5 masses are celebrated each day and families bring infants from all over Argentina to be baptized at the LuJuan basilica. In addition, healing services are held twice a month and people bring ill family members and friends, hoping La Virgencita will have compassion on them, and provide healing for their loved ones.
As I approached the cathedral, people were walking silently toward the cathedral, a few approaching on their knees (although nowhere near the number I saw crawling toward the cathedral at Lourdes, France).

![The Basilica of LuJuan, Argentina](image)

**Figure 45: The Basilica of LuJuan, Argentina**

The small town built up around the basilica mainly serves the millions of pilgrims who visit the site each year. There are particular festival days attracting more pilgrims; for example, each year a large band of youth walk from Buenos Aires to LuJuan to celebrate the feast day of the Virgin of LuJuan on May 8.

Lourdes is a much larger site and, unlike LuJuan, is Vatican approved. Mary is believed to have appeared 18 times to a 14 year old girl named Bernadette Soubirous in 1858 in a small community in southern France. Bernadette claimed Mary did not reveal who she was until she had made her 17th visit to the site. To visit Lourdes is almost like a trip to Mary’s wonderland; the site is Disney-like, and is one of the largest Marian sites in the world. Here I saw people crawling on bloodied knees across the large expanse leading up to the Basilica. The crowd was mainly women, but there were men and children present. A number of families had children with them who were clearly
suffering from various types of illnesses or malformations. In the Basilica, loud wailing could be heard from near the altar, as well as in some of the many chapels surrounding the central altar area. It was a place of serious devotional practice, and the Mass I attended was filled with emotional cries as prayers were shared, the Rosary was recited and people received Communion.

Figure 46: The Basilica of Our Lady of Lourdes, Frances

Some readers might feel skeptical about these apparition sites. This study is not arguing the veracity of them, but is attempting to draw attention to a continuing phenomenon that shows no sign of receding. Between 2011-2013 there were a dozen suspected Mary appearances in the U.S. alone, one as recently as October, 2012 in West New York, New Jersey (see photo on page 30). It seems safe to say that for millions of people no form of Marian devotion or doctrine has carried more momentous significance than her miraculous apparitions. One woman interviewed for this study told the story of visiting a presumed apparition site in 1992 in Cold Springs, Kentucky (it has not been
granted “official” status by the Church). She said, “The place was packed with people. The priest had moved the mass outside of the church to the site of Mary’s appearance and everyone in the town was there it seemed. I can’t describe what happened to me there, but I was changed by the experience. It was very, very powerful. I’ve never forgotten it.” She, like 9 other women interviewed for the study, travels with family members and friends to Marian sites around the world. While she said she’s not completely sure all of them are “true,” she finds them to be places of sincere devotion to Mary.

Another woman interviewed for the study said she began having dreams where Mary came to her at night speaking to her. This happened a number of times and she began to study Mary more. She visited the Guadalupe grotto at St. Anthony Parish in the Bronx and purchased some statues of Mary there. Her grandmother, one of the few people she told about the dreams, gave her a special Mary figure she holds dear. She said, “I felt Mary came to me. I used to question more, but as I have grown older, I’ve learned you just have to trust more and take things on faith and not expect to explain everything. I agree with all the doctrines we’ve talked about in this interview; I take them all on faith.” This woman was 19, one of the youngest interviewed in the study.

Another woman said that her family members are trying to visit every Marian site in the world. She said her brothers go along because “they are very apocalyptic in their thinking. They think the world is going to end soon, and they want to do everything they can to make sure they go up and not down.” One woman said her experience at Fatima in Portugal changed her life. A Mass was happening when she arrived, and as she entered the basilica she felt a physical sensation she could not describe, other than to say, “Mary was there; I could feel her.” She felt Mary came to her in a special way that day, drawing
her back to religious devotion and practices. Although she rarely attends a Mass today, she returns to Fatima every two years to “get filled up” for another few years. “That’s all I need,” she says. “Just an experience of Mary at that special place, and I’m good for a couple years.”
Appendix B

Historical Development of Marian Doctrines

Doctrine of Perpetual Virginity of Mary

The Greek term “aeiparthenos” (or “ever-virgin”) is found in Western and Eastern Orthodox liturgies when referring to Mary. Eastern Orthodox liturgical prayers typically end with "Remembering our most holy, pure, blessed and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary." The doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary began to take shape in the second century, and by the fourth century it was widely acknowledged as official Church teaching. It has remained essentially unchanged since that time.

One of the first recorded sources mentioning Mary’s perpetual virginity is a gnostic gospel, the Gospel of James, later known as the Protoevangelium of James, dated 145 AD. Deemed “dubious” by early Church father Origen of Alexandria and excluded from the scriptural canon, the text describes the birth and upbringing of Mary and maintains she was a virgin prior to, during and after the birth of Jesus.

Numerous early Church fathers supported the doctrine, including Hippolytus of Rome, who in the third century called Mary “the tabernacle exempt from defilement and corruption.” By the fourth century, works by Athanasius, Epiphanius, Hilary, Didymus, Ambrose, Jerome and Siricius continued the attestations of Mary’s

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169 Eastern Orthodoxy through Western eyes by Donald Fairbairn 2002 ISBN 0664224970 page 100
170 This Is the Faith by Francis J. Ripley 1973 ISBN 0852446780 page 264
171 Orations against the Arians 2.70.
172 Epiphanius of Salamis, The Man Well-Anchored 120, c.f. Medicine Chest Against All Heresies 78:6
173 Hilary of Poitiers, Commentary on Matthew Section 1:4.
175 Ambrose of Milan, Letters 63:111.
perpetual virginity. Clearly, the promulgation of this doctrine was quite important to the early Church fathers.

**Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception**

References to the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception can be traced back to the fifth century, the historical period during which much of the Marian doctrines were taking shape. But it took some time for this doctrine to find a firm place in Church teaching. Various early Church fathers issued encyclicals on both sides of the issue, some allowing for Mary’s immaculate conception along with Jesus’ and others insisting that immaculate conception must be reserved for Jesus alone. Debates ensued, with some theologians raising Mary to a position almost equal to Jesus’ and conferring upon her the title of Co-Redemptrix. Positioning her that way encouraged the faithful to pray through Mary in order to gain access to Jesus. She became a mediatrix and redemptrix alongside Jesus, having the same saving powers and ability to absolve sinners. Eventually, the Church fathers settled on the understanding that Mary was herself the offspring of an immaculate conception, conceived, like Jesus, by God alone. She *must have been*, they reasoned, in order to be free of original sin (implied: sex is the carrier of sin).

**Doctrine of Mary, the Mother of God**

Theology about Mary evolved to depict her as the mother of all humanity, although that is not an official Church doctrine. The catechism teaches that when Jesus, from the cross, uttered the words to Mary, his mother, and John, the beloved disciple,
“Mother, behold your son! Son, behold your mother!” (John 19:26-27), he was giving his mother to the whole church. John represents all humanity; through him, all humanity is given Mary as their mother.

**Doctrine of Mary, the New Eve (Our Lady as Nova Eva)**

Christ is regarded as the new Adam (I Corinthians 15:21-22), sent to earth to restore what the first Adam was not able to accomplish: complete obedience to the will of God. The first Eve, by taking fruit from the tree forbidden by God and giving it to Adam, was not able to accomplish what God intended for humanity: to live in a sinless world, surrounded by the beauty and perfection of the Garden of Eden, the garden God created for human beings to live together in perfect harmony with God and one another.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6

In the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary takes on the role of the New Eve:

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God…And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.’” And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:30-38)

The doctrine of Our Lady as Nova Eva states that Mary comes to fulfill what proved impossible for the sinful first Eve: perfect union with God and humanity. Here Mary is
depicted as not only the corrector of a previously failed Eve but also a necessary participant in the redemption of all humanity. She plays a role almost equal to that of Jesus, who must have a parallel if he is to be regarded as the New Adam. Because of Mary’s perfection, present since her conception and throughout her life, according to Catholic teaching, she becomes the unblemished co-redemptrix of humanity. Church Father Irenaeus wrote,

Even though Eve had Adam for a husband, she was still a virgin…By disobeying, she became the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race. In the same way, Mary, though she also had a husband, was still a virgin, and by obeying, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race…the knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith. 142 Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary "the Mother of the living" and frequently claim: "Death through Eve, life through Mary."143

**Doctrine of the Assumption**

There is little historical information to uphold this doctrine, but the Assumption of the Virgin has been reiterated throughout history by Church fathers, and there are plentiful artistic representations of it around the world. In an August 2004 sermon given at Lourdes, France, on the Feast Day of the Assumption, Pope John Paul II, then the beloved leader of the global Catholic Church, quoted John 14:3 as the scriptural basis for the doctrine, even though such a claim is a significant stretch of the scripture. In this verse, Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be also."

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According to Catholic theology, Mary is the pledge of the fulfillment of Christ's promise.¹⁷⁹

Fifty years earlier, Pope Pius XII dogmatically defined this doctrine as infallible. On November 1, 1950, in his Apostolic Constitution Munificentissimus Deus,¹⁸⁰ the Pope stated:

By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

Since Mary was free from all sin, and the corruption of the body is a consequence of sin, she did not suffer the decay of the grave. Furthermore, since it was Mary’s body that brought the Savior into the world, her body should share in His bodily glorification.¹⁸¹

No grave can be found for Mary, so her assumption into heaven is believed to be true. Through this and the Doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady as the Nova Eva, Mary achieves a role that parallels Christ’s.

¹⁸⁰ Encyclopedia of Catholicism by Frank K. Flinn, J. Gordon Melton 207 ISBN 081605455X page 267
¹⁸¹ Catholic Replies p. 146
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