

Mary, Blessed Virgin and World Mother

John F. Nash

Summary

This article examines the enigmatic figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in scripture, religious devotion and doctrine, and modern esoteric teachings. Medieval Christianity built the “Blessed Virgin,” pure in body and soul, into a model of dutiful self-sacrifice and declared her to be the “Mother of God.” Reaction to the “cult of Mary” called her status into question during and after the Reformation, but Mary’s exalted position continues to be affirmed in the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions.

Esotericists—those who do not ignore Mary altogether—also differ in their estimates. However, Mary’s strongest supporters view her as a manifestation of the World Mother, exalted not just through her association with Christ but in her own right. Mary emerges from the writings of certain esotericists as an individuality comparable with the more popular goddesses discussed by feminist theologians and New Age writers.

Introduction

Mary, the mother of Jesus, has played a key role in Christianity throughout its 2,000-year history. Some Christians—from the stereotypical peasant, to the most erudite theologians, to churchmen in high positions—have elevated her to near-divine status. Others covering a similar spectrum have reacted, as far as scripture and tradition would allow, with indifference or even hostility. Throughout the ages Mary’s Christian devotees, and to a significant degree Muslims, projected onto her the most cherished values of their time and culture. Inadvertently, they left a residue that can now evoke distaste. Feminist theologians, in particular, have tended to shun Mary because her attributes of passivity and subservience do

not support the self-concept to which modern women aspire.¹

Esotericists also seem reluctant to discuss Mary. Of the 83 articles published in the first four volumes of *The Esoteric Quarterly*, no more than two have been related, even indirectly, to this subject. Perhaps fearful of being relegated to the path of aspiration, esoteric students distance themselves from topics associated too closely with Christianity. Esoteric teachers eagerly discuss the Jewish Shekinah, the Gnostic Sophia, and the Tara of Mahayana Buddhism. But they rarely mention Mary, giving the impression that the subject lies below the level of useful discourse. Meanwhile Mary stubbornly refuses to go away. She continues to occupy a most conspicuous position in western spirituality.

Fortunately a few esotericists have recognized Mary as a high initiate of great importance, and their work inspires the present article. In addition to citing modern esoteric sources, this article draws upon the Mariological teachings of medieval Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Protestant traditions. It also cites scripture, including the Old and New Testaments, extra-canonical Christian texts and the *Qur’an*.

One objective of this article is to capture the most important knowledge, beliefs and specu-

About the Author

John F. Nash, Ph.D., is a long-time esoteric student, author and teacher. Two of his books, *Quest for the Soul* and *The Soul and Its Destiny*, were reviewed in the Winter 2005 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*, and his latest book, *Christianity: the One, the Many*, in the Fall 2008 issue. See the advertisements on page 4 of this issue and also the website: www.uriel.com.

lation about Mary with a view to stimulating greater interest among esoteric students. A second objective is to provide an understanding of Mary's role in redemption, or human transformation, appealing to a larger population than might be drawn to Marian devotion. Finally, if Mary can validly be depicted as a powerful, active figure, modern women—and men—might be encouraged to view her as an appropriate role model for our time.

Mary in Scripture

According to the *Infancy Gospel of James*, which dates from the mid-second century CE, Mary was the daughter of Hannah and her second husband Joachim, described as a very rich man. At three years of age Mary was presented to the temple, where she was “fed like a dove and received food from the hand of an angel.”²

Betrothal

Nine years later the priests decided that Mary should be married lest she “defile” the temple, presumably because of impending menstruation. Prospective men were lined up, and the priests asked for a sign from God to indicate who should be Mary's husband. A dove alighted on Joseph's head, whereupon he was duly nominated. Joseph, a widower, protested that he was old and already had grown children;³ but the priests pressed him to take Mary as his betrothed, and at last he agreed to do so.

The *Infancy Gospel* explains that Joseph left Mary at his home and set out to ply his trade: “I am going out to build houses, but I will come back to you. The Lord will protect you.”⁴ Returning six months later he found her pregnant. *Matthew*, probably written 60 or 70 years earlier, recorded that Mary was “with child of the Holy Ghost.”⁵ Both sources stated that an angel came to Joseph in a dream to explain her condition and reassure him that Mary should not be “put away.”

According to *Luke*, the angel Gabriel had already appeared to Mary to secure her consent. The words of the Annunciation became immortalized in the liturgy of Christmas:

Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.⁶

Mary questioned the likelihood of pregnancy but eventually agreed: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”⁷

The *Qur'an*, where Mary features more prominently than in the New Testament,⁸ records the words of Annunciation as “O Mary, God has chosen you, made you pure and chosen you above all the women of the world.”⁹ The angels—the *Qur'an* speaks of more than one—prophesied that Mary should bear a son whose “name is the Christ Jesus son of Mary, greatly honored in this world and the next, and among those drawn nearest to God.”¹⁰

Luke's Gabriel also announced that her older cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, whereupon Mary set off to visit her in Judea. Elizabeth, who would soon give birth to John the Baptist, greeted Mary with “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Mary then launched into the canticle of praise which Christian liturgy calls the *Magnificat*:

My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name...¹¹

In Christian tradition Mary felt no pain during childbirth because, sinless, she was exempt from God's curse on Eve.¹² Islamic tradition, by contrast, did not spare her the pain. According to the *Qur'an* Mary clutched the trunk of a palm tree, whereupon soft, ripe dates fell to refresh her.¹³ But it acknowledged the miraculous birth. When people questioned the circumstances of his birth, the baby Jesus

spoke from the cradle: “I am a servant of God... He charged me... to be dutiful to my mother... Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am resurrected...”¹⁴

Virgin Birth

Christian apologists have consistently claimed that Jesus had no earthly father but was conceived through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Gnostics challenged that claim on the grounds that the Spirit was female; for example, the *Gospel of Philip* raised the question: “When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?”¹⁵ Theophilus, second-century bishop of Antioch and a representative of the emerging institutional church, also identified the third person of the Trinity as female.¹⁶ However, when trinitarian doctrine took definite shape in the third and fourth centuries, the problem was eliminated by identifying the Holy Spirit as *Pneuma*—grammatically neuter, but with implied masculine qualities.

Apologists also took great pains to show that Mary was a virgin at the time of Jesus’ birth and remained a virgin thereafter. Most dramatic was the passage in the *Gospel of James*, where a midwife verified Mary’s post-partum condition:

Then said Salome: As the Lord my God liveth, unless I thrust in my finger, and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth. And the midwife went in, and said to Mary: Show thyself; for no small controversy has arisen about thee. And Salome put in her finger, and cried out, and said: Woe is me for mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God; and, behold, my hand is dropping off as if burned with fire.¹⁷

The *Qur’an* also referred to Mary’s virginity. Responding to Gabriel’s announcement of her conception, she declared, “no man has ever touched me, nor am I an adulteress.”¹⁸ The text added: “Mary, daughter of Imran, she who guarded her chastity, and We breathed into her of Our spirit, and she reposed her trust in the words of her Lord... and was devout in worship.”¹⁹

Matthew quoted *Isaiah* 7:14 to argue that Jesus’ virgin birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”²⁰ Another passage, from *Ezekiel*, sometimes quoted in support of Mary’s virginity, is “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it.”²¹

Apart from the passages in *Matthew* and *Luke* relating to Jesus’ conception, birth and boyhood, the New Testament contains few references to Mary. The synoptic gospels record minor incidents where she was present during Jesus’ ministry,²² while *John* records her presence at the marriage feast of Cana and the crucifixion.²³ The *Acts of the Apostles* relates that Mary was with the disciples in the upper room at the time of Pentecost.²⁴ And *Revelation* contains the passage customarily linked to Mary: “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”²⁵ That last passage seems oddly out of character with the matter-of-fact accounts found elsewhere in the New Testament; but it would play an important role in the glorification of Mary in later centuries.

Mary’s death was not recorded in scripture; but according to tradition she spent her last years in Ephesus, cared for by John the Beloved to whom the crucified Jesus had entrusted her.²⁶

Reflections

Should we take the scriptural accounts as factual? Probably not, but scripture can be understood on more than just the literal level. Hagiographies are written after their heroes and heroines have been anointed by reverent followers, or occasionally when an associate—like Jesus, in Mary’s case—is anointed. Details of the person’s unusual birth, privileged upbringing, and extraordinary accomplishments typically are filled in many years later, based on whatever fragmentary information may be available. Where reliable information is lacking, or where it lacks sufficient drama, hagiographers draw upon legends, archetypes, or stories of other famous people. Fact and

fiction become inseparable. Nevertheless the stories express the deeply felt beliefs and sincere veneration of the person's followers. A hagiography may not tell us much about a hero's or heroine's actual life, but it tells us much about his or her status in the particular culture.

Efforts to prove Mary's gynecological virginity have to be understood in terms of the misogynistic culture of the times. As skeptics have pointed out, scriptural support for the virginity of Mary is weak. For example, "virgin" in the key quote from *Isaiah*: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child..." translates the Greek word *parthenos* that appeared in the Septuagint.²⁷ Many scholars contend that *parthenos* was a mistranslation of the original Hebrew *almah*, which simply meant "a young woman." Biblical scholars also question whether the passage in *Isaiah* had any relevance to a coming messiah. The relevance of the quote from *Ezekiel*: "This gate shall be shut..." came under strong attack in by humanists in the 16th century.²⁸

Virgin births were not unfamiliar in the mythology of antiquity; Perseus, Romulus, Mithras, Horus and Krishna were just a few of the individuals said to have been so favored. Allegedly the Druids erected an altar to *Virgo paritura* ("Virgin who will give birth") on the site later occupied by the cathedral of Chartres.²⁹ However we need to examine the very term "virgin" in more detail. The Latin word *virgo* could mean "an independent woman." Thus Artemis and Athena were "virgin goddesses" but not necessarily celibate. When Romans of the classical period wanted to speak of a woman without sexual experience they used *virgo intacta*. Portrayal of the "Virgin Mary" as sexless may have been a deliberate confusion of the terms by the church fathers to produce a suitable feminine ideal for institutionalized Christianity. Salome diagnosed Mary as *virgo intacta*; how we interpret that diagnosis would depend on personal faith.

Nonetheless, even if the scripture writers and their later interpreters portrayed Mary in an unnatural light, they still accorded her the highest honors they could. "Blessed art thou among women," "all generations shall call me

blessed," and "Allah has chosen you... above the women of the world" speak for themselves.

Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Irenaeus, second-century bishop of Lyon, France, contrasted the disobedience of Eve with Mary's willingness to become the mother of Christ: "Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'"³⁰ From then on Mary became known as the "second Eve." Thus began the long development of Mariology—though that term for the Marian branch of theology would not be coined until the 19th century.

A major advance in Mariology was definition of two Marian dogmas by the Councils of Ephesus and Constantinople. The Council of Ephesus in 431 declared that Mary was the *Theotokos* (Greek: "God-bearer" or "Birth-giver to God"), and the Second Council of Constantinople (553–554) declared that she was "ever virgin."

The Ephesus declaration might be dismissed as devotional hyperbole, but the Council's formal decree added that Mary was *Theotokos* "in the true sense of the word." The decree also affirmed: "We magnify you O Mother of the True Light and we glorify you O saint and [Theotokos] for you have borne unto us the Savior of the world."³¹ The Council's purpose was to insist that Jesus Christ was both God and man, but in order to do so it had to concede that in some sense Mary gave birth to God. Cyril (c.378–444), Patriarch of Alexandria, interpreted *Theotokos* to mean *Mater Theou* ("Mother of God"), and the modified title passed into popular Christian devotion.

Not surprisingly, the *Qur'an* warned that neither Jesus nor his mother should be regarded as divine:

Remember when God said to Jesus son of Mary: "Did you really say to people 'Take me and my mother as two gods, instead of God'?" [Jesus] said "Glory be to You! What right have I to assert what does not in truth belong to me?... Worship God, my Lord and your Lord."³²

The Ephesus' pronouncement stimulated new doctrinal speculation. It also provoked the first stirrings of medieval Marian devotion. The assertion that Mary was taken up body and soul into heaven led to celebration of the feast of the Assumption in the fifth-century Syrian Church. And the feast of the Immaculate Conception grew from the suggestion that she was conceived without the stain of original sin. The latter feast was celebrated in the East, as early as the seventh century, and in the West by the 13th century. The new Marian doctrines were not endorsed by ecumenical councils and so remained matters of personal judgment or devotional metaphor. Eventually, they would be defined as dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church: the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and the Assumption in 1950.

The doctrine of Mary's eternal virginity gained strength at the same time that Christian attitudes toward the human body deteriorated; Mary became the model of purity and the inspiration to confront the concupiscence of the flesh.

Marian Devotion in the Middle Ages

Medieval Christians also viewed Mary as a model of compassion, mercy and self-sacrifice; someone worthy of reverence, even adoration. Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109) wrote three poems dedicated to Mary, the third of which began,

Mary, great Mary,
most blessed of all Marys,
greatest among all women,
great Lady, great beyond measure,
I long to love you with all my heart...³³

No medieval apologist gave Mary greater reverence than Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), but he approached the topic with trepidation:

It is true, there is nothing gives me greater delight than to preach on the glories of the Virgin Mother, yet neither is there anything that causes me greater fear. For without speaking of the unutterable treasures of her merits... whatever can be said on that ineffable subject... does not fully satisfy, does not fully please, is not quite acceptable.³⁴

Bernard overcame his fear and wrote 17 sermons on Mary, most of them linked to her principal feast days. For her role in Christ's incarnation Bernard accorded Mary the very highest place in creation, above the level of the angels. Certainly, Christ was higher still, but that created a gulf that Mary could help bridge: "So great a Mediator is Christ that we need another to mediate between Him and us."³⁵ Because of her sweetness and "softness," nobody need hesitate to approach her.

Bernard associated Mary with the "woman clothed with the sun" and made much of the image's symbolism. The moon under her feet symbolized the folly of man, but also the church militant "that shines with borrowed splendor."³⁶ The serpent crushed beneath her heel was the embodiment of error: "It is through Mary alone that every impious heresy has been vanquished."³⁷ The twelve stars in her diadem could be divided into three constellations of four, each constellation corresponding to a "prerogative" of grace: that of the heavens, the flesh and the heart.³⁸

Bernard's devotion to Mary was not without context. Not far away from where he wrote, the Troubadours were bringing the feminine to the forefront of poetic attention and extolling the sweetness and softness of their *domnae*; comparisons with Mary often lay near the surface of their work. During the same period the Kabbalists of southern France and Spain were writing of the Shekinah's betrothal to the Holy One. The *Sepher ha-Zohar*, or "Book of Splendor," asserted: "we should make a beautiful canopy with beautiful decorations to invite the Supernal Bride, who is the Shekinah."³⁹ In a reference to the *Song of Solomon*, Bernard wrote: "Mary's womb is the Bridegroom's marriage-bed."⁴⁰ Mary, in the emerging devotional imagination, was both the mother and the bride of Christ.

Bernard's contemporary, Hildegard of Bingen, (1098–1179) affirmed: "Mary, you are the bright matter through which the Word breathed all the virtues forth, as once he led forth, in the primal matter of the world, the whole of creation."⁴¹ In identifying Mary with "bright matter," Hildegard drew upon the similarity between the Latin words for "mother" and "mat-

ter.” One of her hymns dedicated to Mary combined age-old Celtic imagery of the Rhineland with hints of the modern active woman:

Hail to you, O greenest fertile branch! You budded forth amidst breezes and winds in search of the knowledge of all that is holy. When the time was ripe your own branch brought forth blossoms... The heat of the sun exudes sweat from you like the balsam’s perfume... [I]n you O gentle Virgin, is every fullness of joy, everything that Eve rejected. Now let endless praise resound to the Most High!⁴²

Most of the written works of the time came from the religious orders, but Marian devotion played a major role in the lives of ordinary Christians. People believed that Mary was especially responsive to human need. As Bernard suggested, Mary could be relied upon to intercede with Christ, so petitionary prayers were addressed to her rather than to her son. Not surprisingly she was viewed as the special protectress of women and children.

The cult of Mary grew rapidly after the 12th century. Numerous churches dedicated to Mary were erected, both on the continent of Europe and in England. The latter became known as “Mary’s Dowry” because of its reputation for Marian devotion, and Lady Chapels became the norm in large churches and cathedrals. Marian shrines attracted large numbers of people. On their way to the shrines, pilgrims chanted litanies offering praise and invoking Mary’s bounty or mercy. In the *Litany of Loreto*, for example, the liturgist called on: “... Mother of Christ... Mother of the Church... Mother of divine grace... Mother most pure... Mother most chaste...” and later: “... Mystical rose... Tower of David... House of gold... Ark of the covenant... Gate of heaven... Morning star...”⁴³ Each invocation was followed by the response: “Pray for us.” Long litanies whiled away the long days of traveling.

According to tradition, Dominic de Guzmán, founder of the Dominican Order, had a vision of Mary in 1214 in which he received a set of prayer beads.⁴⁴ The popular devotional practice that developed from his vision became

known as the *Rosary* (Latin: *rosarium*, “garland of roses”). Medieval Christians accorded Mary special reverence as the mother who watched her son die and held his body when it was taken down from the cross. Meditation on her “seven sorrows” led, in 1413, to creation of the feast of the Our Lady of Sorrows by the synod of Cologne.⁴⁵

Devotion to Mary inspired artistic works of timeless grandeur. From the medieval icons, to depictions of the Madonna and Child, to the *Mater Dolorosa* (“Mother of Sorrows”), the works of painters and sculptors grace the world’s art museums. The 13th- or 14th-century Byzantine icon *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*, Jan van Eyck’s *Lucca Madonna*, Fra Angelico’s *Madonna della Stella*, Michelangelo’s *La Pietà*, and Caravaggio’s *Madonna di Loreto* are just a few of the great expressions of Marian visual art. Similarly, sacred musical compositions dedicated to Mary are counted among the greatest works of classical music. Medieval chants for the Marian feast days are renowned for their serene beauty, and the Marian compositions of Claudio Monteverdi, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Giovanni Pergolesi are as popular today as they were in their own times.

Mary in Eastern Orthodoxy

Theologians in the Eastern tradition have long pondered Mary’s virginity and her role in the Incarnation.⁴⁶ The seventh-century Maximos the Confessor wrote:

For just as [Christ] Himself became man without changing His nature or altering His power, so He makes her who bore Him a Mother while keeping her a Virgin. In this way He reveals one miracle through another miracle, at the same time concealing the one with the other. This is because in Himself, according to His essence. God always remains a mystery... [T]he bonds of her virginity became even more indissoluble.⁴⁷

Doctrine and devotion have always been closely intertwined in Eastern Orthodoxy. Peter of Damascus, who is believed to have lived in about the 11th century, offered a hymn of praise reminiscent of the *Magnificat*:

Thus I, too, unworthy believer that I am, entreat you, holy Queen, that I may be allowed to perceive the gifts of grace bestowed on you and on the other saints, and to understand how you display so many virtues... Rightly do we, who have been saved through you, pure Virgin, confess that you are the Mother of God, extolling you with the angelic choirs. For God, whom men cannot see, on whom the ranks of angels do not dare to look, has through you become visible to men as the Logos made flesh... For with the true faith we confess that you are the Mother of God and we bless you, the ever-blessed. All generations proclaim you blessed as the only Mother of God, more honored than the cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim.⁴⁸

In Eastern Orthodox Christianity Mary Theotokos is regarded as the supreme example of cooperation between God and humanity. At times she has received more attention than Christ. Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) was able to say, without great exaggeration: “The Mother of God takes precedence of the Trinity and is almost identified with the Trinity. The people have felt the nearness of the interceding Mother of God more vividly than that of Christ.”⁴⁹ Mary Theotokos is considered to be the holy protectress of Russia and is described as “Mother of the World”⁵⁰—a term that would take on great significance in 20th-century western esotericism.

Numerous Orthodox churches are dedicated to Mary, and she is the subject of countless icons. Best known, perhaps, is the “Theotokos of Vladimir,” which shows Mary holding the infant Jesus.⁵¹ Another of Mary’s titles in the Orthodox churches is *Panagia*, meaning “The Most Holy One.” Panagia icons typically show the standing figure of Mary facing the viewer, with her hands extended in blessing and with the image of the child Jesus over her heart. A famous example is the 13th-century “Great Panagia” in the Savior Minster at Yaroslavl, Russia.

Eastern Orthodox authorities rejected the Roman Church’s right to define the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the

Assumption. Orthodox theologians do not view original sin as a personal inheritance, so there was no reason for any miraculous action to spare Mary from it. Nevertheless, in common with some Protestant reformers, Orthodox tradition does hold that Mary remained free of “actual” sin, committed during earthly life.

In place of the Roman doctrine of the Assumption, the Eastern Orthodox Churches teach the *Dormition* of Mary. According to the latter doctrine Mary died a natural death, and her soul was received by Christ. Then on the third day her body was raised, and she was taken up bodily into heaven, whereupon disciples found her tomb empty. According to an apocryphal text:

[T]he apostles... laid down her precious and holy body in Gethsemane in a new tomb. And, behold, a perfume of sweet savor came forth out of the holy sepulcher of our Lady the mother of God; and for three days the voices of invisible angels were heard glorifying Christ our God, who had been born of her. And when the third day was ended, the voices were no longer heard; and from that time forth all knew that her spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise.⁵²

Mary in European Protestantism

Mary played a smaller role in Protestantism than in either the medieval Church or Eastern Orthodoxy. The Protestant reformers were unanimous in rejecting any suggestion that Mary or the saints could intercede with God on behalf of a person, alive or dead; thus it was pointless, or even blasphemous, to pray to them.⁵³ Most of the feast days of Mary and the saints were abolished, and statuary and shrines were destroyed. The reformers also abolished the practice of pilgrimages, so many of which had Marian themes.

Nevertheless, the early reformers acknowledged Mary’s role in the Incarnation and were generally supportive of the Theotokos doctrine of the Council of Ephesus. For example, Martin Luther (1483–1546) stated: “Not only was Mary the mother of him who is born [in Bethlehem], but of him who, before the world, was

eternally born of the Father, from a Mother in time and at the same time man and God.”⁵⁴ Luther even affirmed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: “It is a sweet and pious belief that the infusion of Mary’s soul was effected without original sin; so that in the very infusion of her soul she was also purified from original sin and adorned with God’s gifts, receiving a pure soul infused by God; thus from the first moment she began to live she was free from all sin.”⁵⁵

Similarly, the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) wrote: “I esteem immensely the Mother of God, the ever chaste, immaculate Virgin Mary.”⁵⁶ Lutheran theologian Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) affirmed: “[T]he Virgin Mary fits in perfectly with the relations of the Trinity, since she conceives without man the Son whom the Father begets without woman; so that thus the Holy Virgin is a necessary, inherently requisite antithesis to the Father in the bosom of the Trinity.”⁵⁷ He digressed, echoing the sentiments of Julian of Norwich, to attribute feminine qualities to God the Son, returning to his theme with “the Son implicitly urges upon us the need of a real feminine being.”⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Marian devotion was opposed both by humanist scholars and by Calvinist writers. Prominent humanist Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466–1536) was scathing in his criticism of the Marian cult. In his view it was offensive to project onto Mary titles from biblical Judaism and pagan religion. Moreover, he urged that Mary should be described as “gracious” rather than “full of grace.”⁵⁹ His attack on the Marian cult influenced generations of Protestants. Marian devotion also became “a casualty of both the new form of evangelical spirituality introduced by the reformers and the continuing polemic with the Roman Catholic Church, which continued to honor Mary with ever-increasing fervor.”⁶⁰ Some Protestant writers rejected the Theotokos doctrine.

Mary in Anglicanism

Like their continental counterparts, the English reformers examined Marian doctrine in detail to determine what would be acceptable. While

they focused on Mary’s role in the Incarnation, they accepted her as the Mother of God, noting that the title was scriptural and consistent with traditions of the early Church. Reformers Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and John Jewel declined to take a position on whether Mary was preserved from original sin, but they acknowledged the perpetual virginity of Mary. Latimer was instrumental in destroying Marian shrines in England. Still, some expressions of Marian devotion were retained in the liturgy.

Religious reform was less radical in England than it was on the continent, or in Scotland where Calvinism held sway. The Church of England liturgical calendar, published in 1561 during the reign of Elizabeth I, contained five Marian feasts: the Conception, Nativity of Mary, Annunciation (“Lady Day”), Visitation and Purification.⁶¹ Collects for the five feasts were written and scriptural readings selected for the *Book of Common Prayer*. The *Magnificat* was preserved in the liturgy of Evening Prayer. Notwithstanding, devotion to Mary declined in the Anglican Church for more than a century after the Reformation.

Marian devotion was revived on a limited scale in the 17th century by the Caroline Divines, a group of clergy named after Charles I and Charles II whose reigns bracketed the English Civil War and Cromwellian regime. The Divines are regarded as early exponents of “high-church” Anglicanism. For inspiration they turned to Eastern Orthodox tradition rather than to Rome, believing that the former’s Marian teachings were closer to those of early Christianity. Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), who oversaw much of the work on the King James Bible, selected *Psalms* 2:7 as the theme for his Christmas sermon in 1609. But he modified “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” to create an affirmation for Mary: “Thou art my Son, this day I brought Thee into the world.”⁶²

Of all the Caroline Divines, Mark Frank (1612–1665) emerged as the leading exponent of Marian devotion. In a sermon preached on the feast of the Annunciation he said:

Give we her in God’s name the honor due to her. God hath styled her “blessed” by

the Angel, by Elizabeth; commanded all generations to call her so, and they hitherto have done it, and let us do it too... [T]he first Christians... speak of her as the most blessed among women, one “highly favored,” most “highly” too. But all the while give *Dominus tecum* all the glory, the whole glory of all to him; give her the honor and blessedness of the chief of the saints.⁶³

Scottish and Canadian revisions of the Prayer Book added the feast of the Dormition, or “Falling Asleep,” of Mary, to be celebrated on August 15, the traditional feast of the Assumption.

The work of the Caroline Divines influenced the Tractarian movement of the 19th century.⁶⁴ John Henry Newman, early leader of the movement, emerged as a noted Mariologist even before converting to Roman Catholicism.⁶⁵ Some high-church Anglicans have revived the pre-Reformation practice of pilgrimages, and a notable example was the restoration in 1921 of the Anglican shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk, England. Walsingham originally became a popular pilgrimage destination in 1061 when a devout Saxon noblewoman experienced a Marian apparition there. Destroyed during the Reformation, the site was rebuilt and now offers separate Anglican and Roman Catholic shrines.⁶⁶ “Mary’s Dowry” has been recovered at least on a small scale.

Marian devotion is now supported by Anglican religious orders and lay organizations, including the Society of Mary formed in 1931 as the combination of two earlier groups. The society, not to be confused with the Roman Catholic religious order of the same name, now operates in many countries. These organizations

seek to popularize devotions, like the Rosary, *Angelus* (“The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary...”), and *Regina Coeli* (“Queen of Heaven Rejoice...”), once popular only in Roman Catholic circles.

Mary in Roman Catholicism

Mary’s status in modern Roman Catholicism was enhanced by formal definition of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption—adding to the two dogmas defined by early church councils. In 1854 Pius IX declared that Mary “in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.” Papal infallibility was not yet an article of faith, but the First Vatican Council in 1870 confirmed as dogmas both the Immaculate Conception and infallibility. Pius XII defined the doctrine of the Assumption in 1950. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) confirmed the proclamation, asserting that

“the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things.”⁶⁷

Louis-Marie de Montfort (1673–1716), renowned French preacher and Mariologist canonized in 1947, offered a number of reasons for Marian devotion:

Jesus gave more glory to God his Father by submitting to his Mother for thirty years than he would have given him had he converted the whole world by working the greatest miracles. How highly then do we glorify God when to please him we submit

For 2,000 years Christians of multiple traditions, at every level of intellect and every level of spiritual attainment, have explored the spirituality of Mary, prayed to her, offered her praise, and visited her shrines. The fact that so many people continue to engage in these activities, in a sophisticated, “post-religious” age, warns against hasty dismissal as aberrant behavior.

ourselves to Mary, taking Jesus as our sole model.⁶⁸

The Carmelites, whose full name is the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, date from medieval times. But the major religious order dedicated to Mary is the Society of Mary (Marists), founded in 1816 and now offering opportunities for both men and women. Numerous sodalities and other lay groups promote the imitation of Mary in their spiritual lives and daily work.

Recent popes have expressed strong devotion to Mary. In 1954 Pius XII proclaimed that Christ crowned his mother Queen of Heaven and designated May 31 to be the feast of her "Queenship."⁶⁹ A generation later, John Paul II reflected on the angel's greeting at the Annunciation, assigning her multiple high honors derived from her association with Christ:

When we read that the messenger addresses Mary as "full of grace," the Gospel context, which mingles revelations and ancient promises, enables us to understand that among all the "spiritual blessings in Christ" this is a special "blessing." In the mystery of Christ she is present even "before the creation of the world," as the one whom the Father "has chosen" as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ...⁷⁰

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1990, John Paul came close to embracing the "World Mother" concept of the Russian Orthodox Church. Praying before an icon in Rome he declared:

O You, who are the first Handmaid of the unity of the body of Christ, help us, help all the faithful, who feel so painfully the drama of the divisions of Christianity, to seek with constancy the way to the perfect unity of the Body of Christ by means of unconditional faithfulness to the Spirit of Truth and Love, which was given to them by your Son at the cost of the Cross and of death... You who serve as Mother of the whole family of the children of God, obtain for the

Church that, enriched by the Holy Spirit with the fullness of hierarchical and charismatic gifts, she may continue with constancy towards the future...⁷¹

During John Paul's pontificate, popular pressure developed to designate Mary "Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate of humanity." None of those concepts was new; however formal definition would have far-reaching theological implications. John Paul was believed to favor a fifth Marian dogma, but advice from inside and outside the Church urged caution, and no action was taken before his death in 2005.

One measure of contemporary devotion to Mary is interest in Marian apparitions. The most famous incidents in the 19th century were the 18 visions reported by Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, France, in 1858. Since then, the number of reported apparitions has increased substantially. During the 20th century 386 significant Marian apparitions were reported.⁷² The official investigating body, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, rejected 79 incidents but judged that eight were of a character that could not be attributed to natural phenomena, delusion or fraud. They were: Fátima, Portugal, 1917; Beauraing, Belgium, 1932; Banneux, Belgium, 1933; Akita, Japan, 1969; Syracuse, Italy, 1953; Zeitoun, Egypt, 1968–1971; Betania, Venezuela, 1976–1984; and Manila, Philippines, 1986. A further 11 incidents were deemed "worthy of faith" by local bishops.⁷³ No authoritative judgment was issued concerning the remaining ones, but in every case the apparition sites become popular pilgrimage sites. Roughly five million pilgrims travel each year to Lourdes, many seeking healings.

Reflections

The Theotokos doctrine raised the difficult conceptual problem of how the Mother of God could be other than divine herself. Aristotelian physiology offered an answer that satisfied for a while: the woman's reproductive role was to provide fertile soil for gestation of the male "seed" but otherwise contributed nothing to the developing embryo. The eighth-century Byzantine emperor Constantine V explained:

“When she bore Christ within her womb, she was like a purse filled with gold. But after giving birth, she was no more than the empty purse.”⁷⁴ Several variations of that theme appeared in Protestant writings, some using less complimentary metaphors. Collapse of Aristotle’s theory of reproduction once again leaves the conceptual problem unsolved.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches, Roman Catholicism, and high-church Anglicanism have all assigned Mary special status in the divine order, through the merits of her son. Whether her imputed status competes with Christ’s, as the Protestant reformers claimed, remains a matter of contention. Apologists of the Church of Rome distinguish reverence for Mary, termed *hyperdulia* (literally, “above the level shown by slaves to their masters”), from *latria* (“service” or “worship”), which is reserved for God and Christ. Whether that subtle distinction helps is open to question.

In any event, reverence for Mary clearly meets a deeply felt human need. As Christianity spread throughout the pagan world, Mary and other female saints took the place of traditional feminine divinities. Ephesus, where the Theotokos doctrine was defined was not only the city where Mary reportedly spent her last years; it was also a center of devotion to the goddess Artemis-Diana. According to legend a crowd gathered outside the building during the council meeting and chanted, “give us back our goddess.” Rapid growth of the Marian cult in Ireland has been attributed to the tradition of Celtic goddesses.⁷⁵ Why did people need a goddess figure? Bernard of Clairvoix claimed that Christ was so exalted that we need a mediator to reach him. A modern commentary suggests that the burden of guilt may also play a role:

For the people of the Middle Ages, devotion to the Blessed Virgin offered an experience of a female figure intrinsically related to God, along with an experience of the power of love to blot away sin and the power of mercy to ameliorate deserved justice, experiences that were not otherwise readily available in the situation of the times.⁷⁶

The reformers sought to rid Christianity of anything resembling a goddess, and Protestantism has been impoverished in consequence. But the resurgence of Marian devotion in high-church Anglicanism shows that the need for a “female figure intrinsically related to God” is not easily suppressed. For 2,000 years Christians of multiple traditions, at every level of intellect and every level of spiritual attainment, have explored the spirituality of Mary, prayed to her, offered her praise, and visited her shrines. The fact that so many people continue to engage in these activities, in a sophisticated, “post-religious” age, warns against hasty dismissal as aberrant behavior. Whatever personal assessment one might make of the validity of the Marian apparitions, one cannot doubt the powerful transformative experiences reported by those personally favored and by the many pilgrims who flock to the apparition sites.

Mary in Esoteric Teachings

The name Mary, and its variants—Maria, Maryam and Miriam—are usually assumed to come from the same root as the Latin *mare* (“sea”),⁷⁷ giving meaning to Mary’s title of “Star of the Sea.” Mary is also associated with *Maia*, the name of Hermes’ mother. Scholars discount any etymological connection between Mary and the Sanskrit *maya* (“matter”). However the Latin *mater* (“mother”) and *materia* (“matter”) are closely related, implying a connection between “mother,” “matter,” and “matrix” (that is, “form”). Renaissance alchemists referred to undifferentiated “virgin” matter as the *prima materia*, whereupon “Virgin Mary” took on alchemical as well as religious significance. These associations are all replete with symbolism.

Mary in Western Esotericism

Writers in the western esoteric tradition typically have viewed Mary as divine, linking her with various terrestrial and celestial goddesses. Mary’s role as the Blessed Virgin recalls *Athena Parthenos* (“Athena Virgin”), Greek goddess of wisdom, as well as the constellation Virgo. John Paul II’s reference to Mary’s presence with Christ “Before the creation of

the world” would seem to link her with Chokmah/Sophia of *Proverbs* 8:22-30.

The Christian Kabbalah emerged in the late 15th century and blossomed over the next 200 years. Central to Kabbalistic teachings is the notion of polarities. The first manifestation of duality from the presexual, monadic *Kether* consists of *Abba/Chokmah*, the primeval masculine force, and *Ima/Binah*, the receptive feminine form.⁷⁸ Another important polarity involves *Tifareth*, which Christian Kabbalists associate with Christ, and *Shekinah/Malkuth*, the divine feminine form representing the world of human affairs. Binah is associated both with the Holy Spirit and with Mary, reminding us that the Neoplatonist Plotinus (c.204–270) asserted that the third aspect of the Trinity was dual in function: looking up to the divine Monad and down to the created universe.⁷⁹

Alternatively, Mary can be associated with Malkuth. In either case, geometric patterns within the Tree of Life offer profound insights into the relationships among Christ, Mary and the Holy Spirit. Christ and Mary take the place of the divine son and daughter/bride discussed in the Judaic theoretical Kabbalah.⁸⁰ Mary and the Holy Spirit correspond to the lower and higher aspects of the Shekinah, the indwelling glory of God. Occultist and physician Paracelsus (1493–1541), who was influenced by the Kabbalah, viewed Mary as the embodiment of a divine feminine principle that, together with God the Father, gave birth to the divine Son.⁸¹ Presumably the traditional role of the Holy Spirit was absorbed into that feminine principle.

Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) was also influenced by the Kabbalah. He wrote at length about the divine “Virgin-Sophia,” declaring that man lost his primeval “Sophia” through the Fall. Mary, in his view, was not immaculately conceived. However, through the merits of Christ, Sophia returned to her, and her virginity was restored:

Mary receives Her immaculate virginity not from Her racial inheritance, not from Her birth from the proto-mother Eve, but from the Heavenly Virgin. Descending upon Her

and becoming flesh of Her is Sophia. Moreover we say about Mary: She hath taken on the holy, heavenly, eternal Virgin of God, and is wrought the pure and holy element with that of Paradise, and is yet truly still a Virgin in this world, begotten of Joachim and [Hannah]. But now She is... an heavenly and pure Virgin in accord... with the heavenly Virgin in Her holiness and purity.⁸²

Rosicrucianism conventionally is dated from the early 17th century, but its true origins are obscure, and certainly it absorbed concepts and symbols from earlier traditions. Some of its symbolism is claimed to have come from the Noble Order of the Garter, founded by King Edward III in about 1348, and dedicated “to the honor of Almighty God, the glorious Virgin Saint Mary and Saint George the Martyr.”⁸³ Furthermore, the rose itself, central to Rosicrucian iconography, was traditionally associated with Mary—and not least with the Rosary. Not surprisingly, Mary has played a significant role in Rosicrucian teachings.

Max Heindel (1865–1919), founder of the modern Rosicrucian Fellowship, declared that Jesus was “a singularly pure type of mind [and through] many lives... trod the Path of Holiness and thus fitted himself for the greatest honor ever bestowed on a human being. His mother, the Virgin Mary, was also a type of the highest human purity.”⁸⁴ Heindel’s student Corinne Heline (1882–1975) regarded Mary as a high initiate. In her account, Mary described to John the Beloved an initiation experience at the foot of the cross:

I will tell you an astounding and hidden Mystery, which cannot be known by the heart or mind and cannot be comprehended by the understanding... A shining cloud came and bore me along and took me up into the Third Heaven and set me down at the boundary of the earth. *I looked and saw the whole earth was like a thing of nothing.*⁸⁵

Heline interpreted the passage from *Revelation* describing the “woman clothed with the sun” as a vision of Mary as a “Master Initiate.”⁸⁶ Interestingly, Heline referred to the temple

training Mary received as a child, suggesting that she was tutored by angels under the supervision of the Archangel Gabriel.⁸⁷ During her earthly life Mary attained four major initiations corresponding to the four elements: the Annunciation, Water; the Immaculate Conception, Fire; Pentecost, Air; and the Assumption, Earth.⁸⁸

Mary in the Theosophical Society and Its Offshoots

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott. Blavatsky (1831–1891), who has often been accused of anti-Christian bias, explored similarities between Mary and earlier divine personages in East and West. She noted disparagingly that titles like “Queen of Heaven,” “Queen of the Universe,” “Mother of God,” “Spouse of God,” “Celestial Virgin,” and “Heavenly Peace-Maker” were previously given to “a host of... Pagan goddesses.”⁸⁹ She also identified “the actual Queen of Heaven” as the moon. In a more positive light, Blavatsky offered the interesting insight that Hannah, the name of Mary’s mother, was “derived from the Chaldean Ana, heaven, or Astral Light, Anima Mundi.”⁹⁰ She also observed

The lotus, the sacred flower of the Egyptians, as well as the Hindus, is the symbol of Horus as it is that of Brahma... The sprig of lilies placed in the hand of the archangel, who offers them to the Virgin Mary, in the pictures of the “Annunciation,” have in their esoteric symbolism precisely the same meaning.⁹¹

Blavatsky judged that Mary bore the closest similarity with the Egyptian goddess Isis. “‘Immaculate is our Lady Isis,’ is the legend around an engraving of Serapis and Isis... the very terms applied afterwards to that personage (the Virgin Mary) who succeeded to her form, titles, symbols, rites, and ceremonies.”⁹² She commented, as have other writers, that depictions of the Madonna and Child were inspired by earlier portrayals of Isis and Horus.⁹³ Blavatsky attributed the transference of titles and images of Mary to Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, who “openly embraced the cause of Isis, the Egyptian goddess, and... anthropo-

morphized her into Mary.”⁹⁴ We recall that it was Cyril who first interpreted *Theotokos* as “Mother of God.”

Blavatsky’s move to India in 1879, and transfer of the Theosophical Society’s headquarters from New York City to Adyar three years later, were more than just symbolic of a change in the Society’s focus from West to East. Leading members came into contact with distinguished Hindu and Buddhist teachers, and from then until well into the 20th century, the Society focused almost exclusively on bringing eastern esoteric concepts to a western audience. Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) was a notable exception, insofar as her interests were distinctly western. A close contemporary of Blavatsky, she became president of the British Theosophical Society in 1883, until disagreements with the Adyar leadership led to her resignation the following year.⁹⁵ While Kingsford’s work had minimal impact on the Theosophical Society, it is of great importance to our present theme.

Kingsford rejected the “idolatry” of Christian images but otherwise took a positive attitude to both Christianity and Mary. A compilation of her channeled work appeared under the title *Clothed with the Sun*. Kingsford offered a new understanding of a traditional Marian doctrine:

[T]he Immaculate Conception is none other than the prophecy of the means whereby the universe shall at last be redeemed. Maria—the sea of limitless space—Maria the Virgin, born herself immaculate and without spot, of the womb of the ages, shall in the fullness of time bring forth the perfect man, who shall redeem the race. He is not one man, but ten thousand times ten thousand, the Son of man, who shall overcome the limitations of matter, and the evil which is the result of the materialization of spirit... [b]y force of love.⁹⁶

Later, Kingsford described the dual aspect of God, masculine in “Life” and feminine in “Substance.” The feminine aspect “appears as the Daughter, Mother, and Spouse of God.” Moreover:

[S]he is mystically styled the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in token of her Divine Moth-

erhood and heavenly derivation and attributes, is represented as clad in celestial azure, and bearing in Her arms the infant Man, in whom, regenerate and reborn of her own immaculate substance, the universe is redeemed.⁹⁷

Kingsford also saw the feminine aspect at work in Venus, Aphrodite, Pallas/Minerva, and Isis/Artemis. Unfazed by complaints that Mary's titles were previously given to "a host of Pagan goddesses," she found among those individualities support for titles like "Our Lady of Victories," "Mother of Sorrows," and "Mother of Joys."⁹⁸

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) headed the German section of the Theosophical Society, but left in 1912 after his studies led him away from the Society's Asian orientation toward a closer relationship with western esotericism. He also developed a favorable attitude toward Christianity. Much of his work focused on the "Mystery of Golgotha," in which Christ initiated a planetary transformation through the crucifixion. Steiner spoke of the search for "a new Isis."⁹⁹ Christ's earthly life featured prominently in that search, but Steiner seemed reluctant to identify the new Isis with Mary. Complicating the issue was his theory that the infancy stories in *Matthew* and *Luke* referred to two different children, jointly involved in Christ's incarnation.¹⁰⁰

Alice Bailey (1880–1949), who served as a regional official in the Theosophical Society in Los Angeles, left during a period of political turmoil in the early 1920s. By then she had already begun her long association with the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul. In her own book *From Bethlehem to Calvary*, she discussed Mary and the other characters in the life of Jesus at some length. But in the 16 books she wrote for the Tibetan, Mary is rarely mentioned, and then only as a symbol for the lower orders of reality or for humanity's base instincts. To illustrate: Mary symbolizes the lesser builders, contrasted with "the greater Builders... the Holy Spirit, or force overshadowing and fecundating matter."¹⁰¹ The "Glorification of the Virgin Mary" is associated with overcoming the instinctual desires, "the descending thoughtforms which the developing

human being is always creating and drawing downwards into manifestation, clothing them with the substance of desire."¹⁰² Mary's Assumption into heaven symbolizes the way we "gather up our bodies" on the Path of Return.¹⁰³ "Mary, that woman of sorrow" symbolizes materialism.¹⁰⁴

Somewhat more complimentary, Bailey affirmed that the "three goddesses" Eve, Isis and Mary "embody in themselves the symbology of the entire form nature, which, when integrated and functioning as a whole person, we call the personality."¹⁰⁵ Most complimentary was the assertion: "The feminine aspect in manifestation, symbolized for us in many of the world religions as a virgin mother and in the Christian religion as the Virgin Mary. It is that substance which enables Deity to manifest."¹⁰⁶ Kabbalists would agree with her.

In the 1910s and '20s, when Steiner and Bailey were moving away from the Theosophical Society, other prominent members were working from within the Society to bring about a more Christian focus. Not all Theosophists shared that goal, and some charged the "christianizers" with disloyalty to the Society's mission. One of the christianizing projects was establishment of the Liberal Catholic Church in 1916. James Wedgwood (1883–1951), Theosophist and Freemason who had been consecrated a bishop in the Old Catholic Church, became its first presiding bishop.¹⁰⁷ Shortly thereafter he consecrated prominent Theosophist Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934), who succeeded him in the leadership role in 1923.¹⁰⁸ The Liberal Catholic Church operated as a kind of subsidiary of the Theosophical Society.

The new climate in the Theosophical Society facilitated serious study of Christian subjects within a framework of Theosophical teachings. In particular it made Theosophists receptive to the concept of Mary as World Mother.

Mother of the World

Notions of a Divine Mother have deep roots in Hinduism and Buddhism. Most famous of her devotees over the last 200 years was the south Indian mystic Ramakrishna (1836–1886), another close contemporary of Blavatsky. How-

ever it was not his teachings—and certainly not Anna Kingsford’s, which had long been ignored—that caught the attention of leading Theosophists, but the work of a little-known Hindu writer, Nibaran Chandra Basu. In 1927 Basu published an article on the “World Mother” in *The Theosophist*.¹⁰⁹ As noted, that title was already applied to Mary in Russian Orthodox Christianity.

Soon after Basu’s article appeared, Annie Besant (1847–1933), then-president of the Theosophical Society, declared March 24, the traditional feast of the Annunciation, to be “World Mother Day.”¹¹⁰

Besant also announced the formation of a movement to herald the arrival of a “great spiritual Being who represents the feminine side of Divinity, the Ideal Womanhood, the ‘World Mother.’”¹¹¹ The Mother, according to Besant and her supporters, had previously incarnated as Isis and Mary and was now embodied in Srimati Rukmini Devi (1904–1986), the young Brahman wife of Theosophist George Arundale.¹¹² Devi began a long career as a sacred dancer and activist for feminist issues; but she never claimed to be a divine incarnation, and in 1979 she made an emphatic denial of any such status.¹¹³

Meanwhile Theosophical writers focused on the World Mother’s attributes and her incarnations as Isis and Mary. In 1928, soon after Besant’s declaration of World Mother Day, Leadbeater published *World Mother as Symbol and Fact* in which he asserted:

The World-Mother... is a mighty Being... She is in truth a mighty Angel, having under Her a vast host of subordinate Angels whom She keeps perpetually employed in the work which is especially committed to Her.¹¹⁴

[T]he Immaculate Conception is none other than the prophecy of the means whereby the universe shall at last be redeemed. Maria—the sea of limitless space—Maria the Virgin, born herself immaculate and without spot, of the womb of the ages, shall in the fullness of time bring forth the perfect man, who shall redeem the race.

Her work included watching over the women of the world, particularly those in childbirth. Leadbeater added that another function was “to try to mitigate the suffering of the world, to act as the Consoler, the Comforter, the Helper of all who are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness or any other adversity.”¹¹⁵ Through his reference to “the Comforter,” Leadbeater wittingly or unwittingly emerged as a champion of the early Christian assertion that the Holy Spirit is female.

Leadbeater considered the World Mother to be both a cosmic principle and an entity capable of physical manifestation. The cosmic principle, in his account, is *mūlaprakriti* (Sanskrit: literally “root of nature”), “that from which matter emerges when spirit ensouls it.”¹¹⁶ Leadbeater declared that “The Spirit of God

moved upon the face of the waters of space; but the waters of space are divine in their making just as much as the Spirit that moves upon them, because there is nothing but God anywhere.”¹¹⁷

Helena Roerich (1879–1955) never joined the Theosophical Society but made major contributions to the Trans-Himalayan teachings. She asserted that the World Mother was the spiritual mother of both the Buddha and the Christ: “[I]t is time to point out that the one Mother of both Lords is not a symbol but a great manifestation of the Feminine Origin.”¹¹⁸ Roerich declared that the World Mother shared with all human women in personifying self-sacrifice.¹¹⁹ However she also noted that joy could come from high spiritual aspiration: “How beautiful is the Image of the Mother of the World! So much beauty, self-renunciation and tragedy is in this majestic Image!”¹²⁰ Significantly, Roerich’s husband Nicholas Roerich, artist, philosopher and scientist, created several paint-

ings of Mary that are considered among his best works.

Geoffrey Hodson (1886–1983) belonged to the generation of Theosophists after Besant and Leadbeater, and he was also ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church. Initially Hodson perceived the World Mother as an archetype or abstract principle, reminiscent of Besant’s “Ideal Womanhood”:

Behind all womanhood exists the Eternal Woman, the one divine manifestation of femininity. At its origin, it is cosmic, being the half of all creation. The other half is the Eternal Man, and mysteriously these are not two but one... What are the essential qualities of the archetypal woman? They are sacrifice, tenderness, graciousness, divine radiance, heavenly fragrance, beauty, and grace... They are joyous radiant girlhood, graceful womanhood, creative, preserving, and transforming motherhood. Within the Heavenly Woman is an ascetic refinement of utter purity.¹²¹

Later, he began to see the World Mother less as an entity than as an *office* held by a succession of entities: “That Official is the World Mother for a planet and a period... There is such a Being, there is such an Official, and Mary the mother of Jesus now holds that Office, as Isis held it in earlier days.”¹²² Hodson also expanded his vision of “Eternal Woman” to see a more definite link between the World Mother and women everywhere:

In the holder of the divine Office of World Mother, a conscious union occurs between the archetypal woman fully manifest in the woman Adept and the cosmic principle of womanhood... The potentiality of this hypostatic union exists in every woman... This is in part the mystery of womanhood, this is the secret life of every woman, that on occasion she knows and is one with the Eternal Woman and has her mysterious life in that realm wherein She abides.¹²³

Hodson embraced traditional affirmations of Mary’s compassionate, nurturing role, even as he assigned Mary a more exalted status than did mainstream Christianity:

The Blessed Lady Mary, incarnation of the Maternal Spirit of the Godhead, moved by purest compassion and love, holds the whole of humanity in Her arms and at Her breast, nourishing it with spiritualizing life for the purpose of quickening the evolution of all sentient beings.¹²⁴

Like Leadbeater, Hodson saw Mary overseeing the gestation and birthing processes but added that this was true of the animal as well as the human kingdom. He also returned to another of Leadbeater’s themes, describing the World Mother as an archangel and a senior member of the Planetary Hierarchy:

The planetary World Mother is conceived... as a highly-evolved Archangel Representative and Embodiment on earth of the Feminine Aspect of the Deity. She is also thought of as an Adept Official in the Inner Government of the World, in whom all the highest qualities of womanhood and motherhood shine forth in their fullest perfection.¹²⁵

Moreover, the “Queen of the Angels, World Mother, Our Lady, [is in relationship and collaboration] with the Lord of the World—in what might be called, if one may so presume, His femininity-functions, extremely delicate and refined as they are in every kingdom.”¹²⁶ To associate Mary with the Lord of the World, Sanat Kumara, appeared to raise her to the level of the Planetary Council.

Andrew Harvey, who never belonged to the Theosophical Society, came to revere the Divine Mother through a long association with “Mother Meera,” an Indian woman whom devotees believed was an incarnation of the Hindu goddess *Shakti*. Later, Harvey had a series of experiences persuading him that Mary was a true manifestation of the Divine Mother:

In Mary the Divine Mother comes to earth and lives on earth and lives the passionate, strong, serious, simple and transforming life that shows us all how to live. Mary is the bridge between heaven and earth, between the human and the divine worlds, between human and divine justice... [S]eeing Mary as the Divine Mother would help us to see Christ too as every much the son of

the Divine Mother as the Divine Father. Seeing that would release Christianity from its patriarchal stranglehold and restore the mystical purity of its passion for fraternity and sorority, for equality and social justice and service.¹²⁷

Elsewhere, Harvey and a coauthor approved of the notion of Mary as mediatrix, noting that it is “the feminine principle of relationship that connects things to each other, for the supreme values of the heart.”¹²⁸ They also endorsed a point made earlier in this article: “The extraordinary story of the elevation of Mary to the stature of Divine Mother shows the immense need of people to have the feminine principle at the heart of their religions.”¹²⁹

Final Reflections

Once we penetrate the protective shells of their respective terminologies, we find surprising continuity between religious and esoteric teachings on Mary. And in this particular case scripture supports both.

Esotericists, like religious authorities, are far from unanimous in their regard for Mary. Some esotericists exhibit a strongly “Protestant” disdain for Mary—at least for the “Mary” of medieval astralism. However her esoteric supporters hold her in *very* high regard—higher than Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and high-Anglican religious traditions have deemed permissible. Their exalted estimation is based not just on the reflected glory of Christ but on Mary’s own role in the redemptive process. Mary’s most enthusiastic esoteric supporters view her as an *avatara* from the highest levels of the Planetary Hierarchy. Interest in Mary’s role as an *avatara* is particularly appropriate at this time because the Aquarian Age and manifestation of the Seventh Ray express the descent of spirit into matter. More generally, the combination of religious, mythological, and esoteric teachings propels Mary toward what the person in the street would call a goddess.

Esotericists endorse the notion of a close connection between Mary and the Holy Spirit, with the possible proviso that the latter is a feminine entity rather than the neuter/masculine personage of Christian trinitarian doctrine.

Viewed as the lower aspect of a twofold feminine structure, Mary dwells in our world, much as the Shekinah does in esoteric Judaism. Esotericists also embrace notions of the “Virgin Mary,” so long as “Virgin” has a larger meaning than it has in gynecology. We affirm that doctrinal propositions should be examined from a viewpoint above the dense physical or literal.¹³⁰ From that viewpoint, Mary’s virginity and her immaculate conception become almost interchangeable concepts.

“Mother of God” has always been problematic. However, “World Mother,” or “Divine Mother,” is a concept that has resonated with prominent esoteric writers—and even found an echo in the Mariology of John Paul II. Esotericists view the World Mother as an exalted being, or one of a series of exalted beings who have held that office over the millennia. In either case, the consensus is that she incarnated a number of times before her appearance as the mother of Jesus. Thus the transfer of titles from Isis to Mary was not plagiarism but the natural recognition of the continuity they both embodied. If Mary is a manifestation of the World Mother and the Holy Spirit, the interesting possibility arises that the two latter may be alternative faces of the same reality. Reference to the Holy Spirit as “God the Mother” already has religious precedents, and a synthesis of the Mother of God and God the Mother would be a significant theological development.

The connection between Mary and the angels is another important theme. Traditional Christian appellations, like Queen of the Angels, are viewed by some esotericists as factual. Seemingly, we should look for Mary in the Devic Hierarchy rather than the Hierarchy of Masters. Recognition that the deva evolution has a feminine polarity¹³¹—contrasting with the masculine polarity of the human kingdom and the Hierarchy of Masters—would make that an attractive possibility. According to one esoteric tradition, Mary departed from the human kingdom at the end of her earthly life to take up new responsibilities in the deva evolution.

Certainly the *avatara* portrayed in modern esotericism, even the Mary who emerges from recent papal Mariology—“Mother of the whole

family of the children of God” and “Co-Redemptrix”—is a more powerful, active figure than the submissive stereotype the modern world disdains. The “new Mary” comes across as a powerful role model, with appeal to both men and women.

Is this new Mary a psychological construct, a thoughtform created out of human need—cynics might say “neurosis”—or does she have independent, objective existence on the level of reality to which her devotees assign her? One response to the question would be to approve of any human construct that can stimulate transformative growth in large numbers of people. A better response would be to seek new insights to see if enough evidence can be found to convince skeptics, Protestant and esoteric, that Mary is the high initiate her disciples believe her to be.

Would “esoteric Mariology” be a worthwhile field when the focus of esoteric work is shifting to service? To be sure, humanity’s needs are such that great effort must be devoted to improving the human condition. But the expansion of human consciousness is a vital part of that work. If the World Mother indeed has objective, independent existence, and if her concern for humanity is as profound as it is said to be, the benefits promised by greater understanding would seem to justify some expenditure of effort. Even Marian devotion can acquire a service dimension and should not automatically be dismissed as antithetical to the path of discipleship.

¹ For example, Mary is not even listed in the index of influential works by Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman* (New York: Dorset Press), 1976; and *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1979.

² *Infancy Gospel of James*, 8:2, (transl: A. Bernhard), Early Christian Writings.

³ By one account Joseph was 36 years old. See Edgar Cayce, reading no. 5749-8, 1937, Association for Research & Enlightenment.

⁴ *Infancy Gospel of James* 9:11.

⁵ *Matthew* 1:18-20. All biblical references in this article are from the King James Bible.

⁶ *Luke* 1:30-33.

⁷ *Luke* 1:38.

⁸ Mary is mentioned 34 times in the *Qur’an*, far exceeding the number of New Testament references. An entire *surah*, or chapter, is named for her, and significant references appear elsewhere.

⁹ *Qur’an* 3:42 (transl: T. Khalidi), Viking Press, 2008. Most other translations retain the Arabic transliterations of “Allah” for God and “Maryam” for Mary.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:45.

¹¹ *Luke* 1:46-55.

¹² *Genesis* 3:16.

¹³ *Qur’an* 19:23-26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19:30-33.

¹⁵ *Gospel of Philip*, II 51, 55 (transl: G. MacRae & R. Wilson), Nag Hammadi Library, rev. ed., 1988, 143. In Jewish religious culture at the time of Mary’s conception, the Holy Spirit was identified with *Ruach*, a word that was grammatically feminine

¹⁶ Theophilus of Antioch, *Epistle to Autolychum*, II, 15. Theophilus of Antioch is not to be confused with the fourth-century Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria.

¹⁷ *Infancy Gospel of James* 19-20, (transl: A. Roberts & J. Donaldson), Early Christian Writings. A reference to Mary’s continued virginity also appears in *The Testimony of Truth*, Nag Hammadi Library.

¹⁸ *Qur’an* 19:20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66: 12. *Al ‘Imran* was the Arabic name of Mary’s family.

²⁰ *Matthew* 1:23.

²¹ *Ezekiel* 44:2.

²² *Matthew* 12:46-50, 13:55; *Mark* 3:31-35, 6:1-6; *Luke* 8:19-21, 11:27-28.

²³ *John* 2:1-12, 19:25-28. It is unclear from the synoptic gospels whether Mary was present at the crucifixion.

²⁴ *Acts* 1:12-14.

²⁵ *Revelation* 12:1.

²⁶ A building in Ephesus is revered as the house where Mary died. See for example <http://www.kusadasi.biz/virgin-mary/>, (accessed September 4, 2009).

²⁷ The gospel writers drew most of their quotes from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, which dates from the third century BCE.

²⁸ John F. Nash, *Christianity: the One, the Many*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2007), 202.

²⁹ Vincent Sablon, *Histoire de l’Auguste et Vénéérable Église*, 1671; extract in Robert Branner

- (ed), *Chartres Cathedral* (New York: Norton & Co., 1969), 107-114.
- ³⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book III, ch. 22, §4, (transl: W. Rambaut), Christian Classics Library.
- ³¹ See for example Interfaith Studies, <http://interfaithstudies.blogspot.com/>, (accessed Sept. 3, 2009).
- ³² *Qur'an* 5-116.
- ³³ Anselm of Canterbury, *Third Great Prayer to Mary*, (transl: J. Roten), Marian Library, <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/anselm.html/>, (accessed Oct. 28, 2009).
- ³⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, "Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Assumption," *Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1987), 200.
- ³⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption," *Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 207.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 214-215.
- ³⁹ Zohar, 21, *Trumah*: 80, verse 789. See also John F. Nash. "The Shekinah in Esoteric Judaism." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2005, 33-40.
- ⁴⁰ Bernard, "Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption," 203.
- ⁴¹ Hildegard of Bingen, Antiphon "O Splendidissima Gemma," *Symphonia*, (transl: M. Atherton), *Hildegard Selected Readings* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 117.
- ⁴² Hildegard of Bingen, Hymn "De Sancta Maria," *Book of Divine Works* (Rochester: Bear & Co., 1987), 379.
- ⁴³ See for example: <http://prayers.viarosa.com/LitanyOfLoreto.html>. (accessed September 5, 2009).
- ⁴⁴ Prayer beads are also used in Buddhism and Sufism.
- ⁴⁵ The seven sorrows were Simeon's prophecy, the flight to Egypt, loss of the child Jesus, the encounter with Jesus on the way to Calvary, the crucifixion, the descent from the cross, and Jesus' burial.
- ⁴⁶ All seven of the ecumenical councils took place in the East, and the leading protagonists all came from the Greek Church.
- ⁴⁷ Maximos the Confessor, "Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice," *Philokalia*, Vol. 2 (transl: G. Palmer *et al.*), (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), 166.
- ⁴⁸ Peter of Damascus, "A Treasury of Divine Knowledge," *ibid.*, Vol. 3, 130. The editors of this edition of the *Philokalia* dismiss a claim by St. Nikodimos that Peter of Damascus was Peter the Hieromartyr who died in the mid-eighth century.
- ⁴⁹ N.A. Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 24.
- ⁵⁰ Maria Skobtsova, *Veneration of the Mother of God* (transl: S. Janos), (Paris: YMCA Press, 1992/2001), 109-126.
- ⁵¹ The icon is now displayed in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
- ⁵² John the Theologian, *The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary* (transl: unknown), Wesley Center for Applied Theology.
- ⁵³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 576.
- ⁵⁴ Martin Luther, *The Works of Luther, Vol. 7*, Weimar Edition (transl: J. Pelikan), (St. Louis: Concordia, 572).
- ⁵⁵ Martin Luther, Sermon: "On the Day of the Conception of the Mother of God," December 1527. Hartmann Grisar, *Luther. Vol. IV* (transl: E. Lamond), (London: Kegan Paul *et al.*, 1915), 238.
- ⁵⁶ Quoted in E. Stakemeier, *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo*, Rome, 1962, 456.
- ⁵⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, (transl: G. Eliot), 1843, part 1, ch. 4.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 100.
- ⁶⁰ Jill Raitt, Bernard McGinn, & John Meyendorff, *Christian spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Vol. 2* (London: Routledge, 1987), 411.
- ⁶¹ The feast of the Assumption, previously celebrated on August 15, was abolished on the grounds that it was ascriptural and possibly exalted Mary above Christ.
- ⁶² Quoted in Marianne Dorman, "Andrewes and the Caroline Divines: Teachings on the Blessed Virgin Mary," Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 2000.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ The Tractarian movement took its name from the issuance of 90 tracts written to stimulate new perspectives on Anglican teachings.
- ⁶⁵ See for example Philip Boyce, *Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Writings of John Henry Newman* (Chester: Gracewing, 2001), 90.
- ⁶⁶ The Anglican shrine was created by Alfred Hope Patten (1885-1958), a Church of England clergyman. The Roman Catholic shrine was restored in 1897.
- ⁶⁷ Source: *Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Robert Appleton, 1917/2005).

- ⁶⁸ Louis de Montfort, *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (transl: F. Faber), Kessinger (reprint), 2007, ch. 1, §18
- ⁶⁹ Pius XII, Encyclical *Ad Caeli Reginam*, 1954.
- ⁷⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, part I, 1:8, 1987.
- ⁷¹ John Paul II, prayer before the Roman Icon of Our Lady, “Salus Populi Romani,” December 8, 1990.
- ⁷² Hundreds more incidents reported each year are considered too trivial to warrant serious investigation.
- ⁷³ Source: International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio:
<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/aprtable.html> (accessed September 2, 2009).
- ⁷⁴ See the discussion in MacCullough, *The Reformation*, 186-187.
- ⁷⁵ Peter B. Ellis, *Celtic Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).
- ⁷⁶ Raitt, McGinn & Meyendorff, *Christian Spirituality*, Vol. 2, 412.
- ⁷⁷ Alternatively, it is claimed that *Miriam* could mean either “beloved” or “rebellious.”
- ⁷⁸ Chokmah (“Wisdom”) and Binah (“Understanding”) are the Hebrew names of the sefiroth. Abba (“Father”) and Ima (“Mother”) are the Aramaic names of the corresponding partzufim. See John F. Nash, “From the Zohar to Safed: Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah,” *Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2009, 21-46.
- ⁷⁹ Plotinus, *Second Ennead*, 3rd tractate, (transl: S. MacKenna & B. Page). Plotinus referred to the third aspect as the feminine *Psyche* (“Soul”).
- ⁸⁰ John F. Nash, “From the Zohar to Safed: Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah.”
- ⁸¹ Paracelsus, *Liber Sancta Trinitate*; see Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus* (New York: State University of New York, 1997)80-83.
- ⁸² N. A. Berdyaev, “The Teaching about Sophia and the Androgyne. J. Boehme and the Russian Sophiological Current.” §II, *Journal Put*, April 1930, no. 21, pp. 34-62; (transl. unknown).
- ⁸³ Hargrave Jennings, *The Rosicrucians: Their Rites and Mysteries* (London: Hesperides Press (reprint), 1870), 317.
- ⁸⁴ Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception, or Mystic Christianity* (Oceanside, CA: XXX: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1909), 378.
- ⁸⁵ Corinne Heline, *The Blessed Virgin Mary* (London: New Age Press, 1971), 69. Emphasis in original.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 85-106.
- ⁸⁹ Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1877), 96.
- ⁹⁰ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1888), 91.
- ⁹¹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. 1, 91-92. See also *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, 379fn.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 94-95. Parenthesis in original.
- ⁹³ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, 403.
- ⁹⁴ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. 2, 41.
- ⁹⁵ After leaving the Theosophical Society Kingsford co-founded the Hermetic Society, a forerunner of the Society of the Golden Dawn.
- ⁹⁶ Anna B. Kingsford, *Clothed with the Sun* (London: J. M. Watkins, 1889), 32-33, republished by Forgotten Books, 2008.
- ⁹⁷ Anna B. Kingsford and Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way*, 1923, 55, republished by Cosimo Books, 2007.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-57.
- ⁹⁹ See for example Christopher Bamford (ed.), *Isis, Mary Sophia: Selected Lectures and Writings by Rudolf Steiner* (Pittsfield, MA: Steiner Books, 2003), 191-226.
- ¹⁰⁰ Rudolf Steiner, *From Jesus to Christ* (Forest Row, E. Sussex, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2005), 133ff.
- ¹⁰¹ Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis, 1925), 617.
- ¹⁰² Alice A. Bailey, *Glamour, a World Problem* (New York: Lucis, 1950), 220-221.
- ¹⁰³ Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, II (New York: Lucis, 1955), 622.
- ¹⁰⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis, 1957), 471.
- ¹⁰⁵ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (New York: Lucis, 1953), 253.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 362.
- ¹⁰⁷ The Old Catholic Church seceded from Rome in 1870 over the issue of papal infallibility. But like the Church of Rome it claimed to have preserved the apostolic succession.
- ¹⁰⁸ Leadbeater had served as a high-church Anglican clergyman, but more recently had become a Buddhist.
- ¹⁰⁹ Nibaran Chandra Basu, “Dhurga: The World-Mother Aspect of God.” *Theosophist*, January 1927, 433-440; February 1927, 537-545.
- ¹¹⁰ Robert Ellwood, “The Church, the World Mother and the New Age,” *The Liberal Catholic*, Easter 1998.
- ¹¹¹ Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 206.

-
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 206.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The World-Mother as Symbol and Fact* (Pasadena: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928), 4.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-54.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁸ Helena I. Roerich, *Leaves of Morya's Garden II, 8,11* (New York: Agni Yoga Society, 1925), 68-69.
- ¹¹⁹ Helena I. Roerich, "Mother of the World," *Letters of Helena I. Roerich* (New York: Agni Yoga Society, 1935-1939), 456.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 372.
- ¹²¹ Sandra Hodson (ed), *Light of the Sanctuary* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishers, 1988), 81-82.
- ¹²² Geoffrey Hodson, *Illuminations of the Mystery Tradition* (Pasadena: Theosophical Publishing House, 1992), 70. See also S. Hodson, *Light of the Sanctuary*, 355.
- ¹²³ S. Hodson, *Light of the Sanctuary*, 82.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 414.
- ¹²⁵ Geoffrey Hodson, *The Kingdom of the Gods* (Pasadena: Theosophical Publishing House, 1952), 244.
- ¹²⁶ S. Hodson, *Light of the Sanctuary*, 355.
- ¹²⁷ Andrew Harvey, *Return of the Mother* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2001), 343.
- ¹²⁸ Andrew Harvey & Anne Baring, *The Divine Feminine* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 1996), 104.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.
- ¹³⁰ Other doctrines that need to be examined from above the physical level are the Resurrection and the real presence in the Eucharist.
- ¹³¹ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 91.