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# FEMINIST AND NEW FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON MARY: RENEWAL OR RETRIEVAL?

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*Gloria Falcão Dodd, STD*

## Introduction

Combining the idea of a priest's spiritual marriage to the Church and Pope Paul VI's title for Mary as Mother of the Church, Pope Francis joked with a group of seminarians: "If you don't go to Our Lady as Mother, you certainly will have her as a mother-in-law! And this isn't good."<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the many changes after Vatican Council II, Paul VI had observed the need to prevent misunderstandings, such as viewing Our Lady as a mother-in-law rather than a mother, or diminishing Marian devotion. Therefore, Paul VI wrote his 1974 encyclical, *Marialis Cultus*, describing three

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<sup>1</sup> "Full Text of Pope Francis' Q&A with Seminarians in Rome: 'For leadership there is only one way: service. There is no other.'" May 12, 2014. Zenit. [http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/full-text-of-pope-francis-q-amp-a-with-seminarians-in-rome?utm\\_campaign=dailyhtml&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=dispatch](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/full-text-of-pope-francis-q-amp-a-with-seminarians-in-rome?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch).

aspects of a sound Marian devotion and providing four guidelines for a fruitful renewal of Marian devotion.<sup>2</sup> The fourth guideline in particular addressed an anthropological perspective on Mary in response to the movement for women's equality. While keeping the three aspects in mind, this paper will focus on the four guidelines to analyze the writings of six American women from a Catholic context to see if their writings fulfilled Paul VI's criteria. Because three of these women are feminists and the other three fit into the category of New Feminists, this paper will first define what is meant by "feminist" and "New Feminist." Then, it will present the criteria used for the evaluation and introduce the authors. Next, this study will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their recent Marian writings according to Paul VI's criteria, to understand how these two types of feminism impact Mariology and Marian devotion. The paper will conclude by answering the question: Are these Feminist and New Feminist perspectives on Mary a renewal or retrieval of pre-Vatican II Marian devotion?

For clarity, a definition of Feminism and New Feminism is necessary. "Feminism" in this paper refers to "a 'direction within the women's movement that strives for a new self-understanding by women and the abolition of the traditional separation of roles,'" with a rejection of three systems: 1)

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<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, February 2, 1974. The Vatican. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19740202\\_marialis-cultus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html). Henceforth, *Marialis Cultus* will be abbreviated as *MC* and cited in the text.

patriarchalism, that refers to the “social primacy of males”; 2) sexism, that is the ‘differentiation in the roles of sexes,’ leaving women “disadvantaged because of one’s sex,” particularly in the “division of labor on sex-specific lines”; and 3) androcentrism, that makes “males (or the masculine) ... the measure of everything human.”<sup>3</sup> Subjective female experience is the criterion for evaluating all things.<sup>4</sup> Rooted in Marxism, existentialism and the sexual revolution of the 1960s, this “mainstream” or “radical” feminism seeks freedom and power for women as well as equality of the sexes in such a way that abortion and lesbianism are at least tolerated.<sup>5</sup> Although Pope St. John Paul II agreed with their rejection of the sin of machismo, he also seemed to criticize this feminism as he called on women:

to promote a “new feminism” which rejects the temptation of imitating models of “male domination,” in order to acknowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Manfred Hauke, *God or Goddess? Feminist Theology: What Is It? Where Does It Lead?* Trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 21–22, quoting the German *Duden* dictionary’s definition. This excellent work critiqued feminist theology up to 1993, when the German original was written, and while noting some positive developments, he did not seem to know of any authors who could be considered New Feminist. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 18–22, provided a similar description.

<sup>4</sup> Hauke, *God or Goddess?* Chap. 6, 118–134.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–33.

and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.<sup>6</sup>

Instead, New Feminism expresses solidarity with the unborn as well as with men, who are understood to be complementary to women. While relying on women's experience, New Feminism accepts "objective and universal truth" about freedom, God, and the vocation of men and women to serve others in love.<sup>7</sup> Thus, although both mainstream feminism and New Feminism aim at the full flourishing of women, they have very different concepts of what constitutes a woman's fulfillment, and therefore, they have divergent concepts of Mary as well as what devotion is appropriate for her.

#### **Four Guidelines for Marian Devotion in *Marialis Cultus***

While Paul VI's description of a sound Marian devotion included three aspects—Trinitarian, Christological, and Ecclesial (MC 25-28)—and noted the importance of the

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<sup>6</sup> Quote from John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 99, March 25, 1995, The Vatican,  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html). For the rejection of machismo, John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, #25, November 22, 1981, The Vatican,  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html).

<sup>7</sup> Helen Alvare, "A New Feminism," *Liguorian Magazine* (May 1997), republished on The Mary Page,  
<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/newfeminism.html>, quoted John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 6.

Rosary and the Angelus (*MC* 40-55), this paper will focus primarily on his four guidelines for the renewal of Marian devotion in the Catholic Church, as the standard for evaluating the six authors in this study. Therefore, a brief review of the four guidelines provides the context for the evaluation.

1. Biblical “imprint”: This is “not ... merely a diligent use of texts and symbols skillfully selected from the Sacred Scriptures. ... [T]exts of prayers and chants should draw their inspiration and their wording from the Bible, and above all that devotion to the Virgin should be imbued with the great themes of the Christian message” (*MC* 30).
2. Liturgical “harmony”: Devotions “should somehow derive their inspiration from [the liturgy] and ... they should orient the Christian people towards it” (*MC* 31). This “harmony” with liturgy neither eliminates devotion nor mingles the two (*MC* 31).
3. “Ecumenical aspect”: In the strict sense of relating only to Christian communities, this ecumenical dimension “unites” Catholics with the Orthodox in devotion and “solid doctrine,” with Anglican classical tradition, and with the Reform tradition’s emphasis on the Scriptures, especially in praying the Magnificat. It is necessary to avoid misleading exaggerations, as well as any incorrect practices (*MC* 32).
4. Anthropological model: With the rise of the women’s movement for equality in the 1960s, many women who worked outside the home, engaging in

public life and academic life, found the meek and domestic concept of Mary too limiting to be a good example for them. Paul VI called for “*theologians*, those responsible for the local Christian communities and the faithful themselves *to examine these difficulties with due care*” (emphasis added, MC 34).

Although all four guidelines are necessary and will contribute to this evaluation of the authors’ views, the fourth guideline pertains the most to this topic.

Under the heading of anthropological model, Paul VI even proposed seven ways that Mary “can be considered a mirror of the expectations of the men and women of our time” (MC 37).

1. Her vocation as “*First and most perfect*” *Christian disciple*: Mary is “an example to be imitated, not precisely in the type of life she led,” but “rather for the way in which ... she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God (cf. Lk. 1:38), because she heard the word of God and acted on it, and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions” (MC 35). As such, she models the Christian “who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city; the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people’s hearts” (MC 37).
2. Her “*active and responsible consent ... to that ‘event of world importance’*”: “Thus, the modern woman, anxious to participate with decision-making power in

the affairs of the community, will contemplate with intimate joy, Mary who, taken into dialogue with God, gives her active and responsible consent, ... to that ‘event of world importance,’ ... the Incarnation.” (MC 37).

3. Her “*courageous choice ... of the state of virginity*”: “The modern woman will appreciate that Mary’s choice of the state of virginity” did not repudiate the goodness of marriage but rather was her brave decision to live a totally consecrated love for God (MC 37).
4. Her role as *proclaimer of God’s vindication of the poor and humble*: Mary “did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions” (MC 37). She was neither “timidly submissive” nor obnoxiously pious (MC 37).
5. Her *solidarity and strength in difficulty*: “Mary ... ‘stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord,’” the *anawim*, as “a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile” (MC 37). Paul VI noted in particular that this quality should appeal to “those who wish to support, with the Gospel spirit, the liberating energies of man and of society” (MC 37).
6. Her *action “to strengthen ... [others’] faith in Christ*”: Mary “helped to strengthen the apostolic community’s faith in Christ” (MC 37).



7. Her role as *Universal mother*: [Her] “maternal role was extended and became universal at Calvary” (MC 37).

Thus, Paul VI described what he thought would be an attractive or at least palatable image of Mary for modern tastes.

After offering his suggestions about the anthropological guideline, Paul VI concluded the guidelines with some warnings as well. *Marialis Cultus*, 38, repeated the admonitions of Vatican Council II in regard to Marian doctrine. These warnings included more specific corollaries of the guidelines to avoid the following errors:

1. “Exaggeration of content and form which even falsifies doctrine.”
2. “*Small-mindedness which obscures the figure and mission of Mary.*” Such obscurity contradicts the truth about Mary.
3. “*Vain credulity*, which substitutes reliance on merely external practices for serious commitment.”
4. “*Sterile and ephemeral sentimentality*, so alien to the spirit of the Gospel that demands persevering and practical action.”
5. “*Exaggerated search for novelties or extraordinary phenomena*,” the avoidance of which “will make this devotion solidly based, with the consequence that study of the sources of Revelation and attention to the documents of the magisterium will prevail.”

6. “*Everything that is obviously legendary or false must be eliminated.*” Rather, this devotion should be “objective in its historical setting.”
7. “*A one-sided presentation of the figure of Mary, which by overstressing one element compromises the overall picture given by the Gospel.*”
8. “*Unworthy self-interest,*” an attitude contrary to a devotion that is “clear in its motivation.”

These eight additional points affirmed and elaborated the Council’s teaching, as well as clarified what Paul VI meant by the anthropological guideline for Marian devotion. This paper will now compare these instructions with the representative authors, starting with the feminists.

### **Feminist Representatives**

Three women were chosen to represent the feminist point of view because each wrote a Marian book and came from a Catholic context that might induce them to respond to *Marialis Cultus*; in fact, two of them did. These three authors also represent a range of feminist perspectives. This paper will first introduce these authors in the chronological order of their most famous Marian publication. Then this paper will evaluate their works according to the criteria of *Marialis Cultus*.

Prof. Marina Warner’s landmark book, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, is an historical survey of how Marian doctrine influenced culture, especially as expressed by literature and art. First published in 1976, her scholarly tome of more than four hundred pages has remained so popular that it was republished in 2013 with

a new preface and some updated illustrations.<sup>8</sup> Raised a Catholic, Warner mentioned *Marialis Cultus* several times in her book—twice in agreement, and then other times to illustrate how the Church teaching is a myth and presents Mary as an impossible ideal to keep women subordinate to men.<sup>9</sup> Although she did not rewrite the book, she became a mother after writing it, and in the interview, she admitted that she would have preferred to add more to the second edition about Mary as a mother.<sup>10</sup> Even so, as a groundbreaking work, Warner’s book was cited by both of the other two feminist representatives.<sup>11</sup>

The second feminist in our study is Elizabeth A. Johnson, a Fordham professor, author of many books, and a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood. Sr. Johnson’s book, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the*

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<sup>8</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). The pages cited henceforth will be from this first edition unless specified as being from the second edition published by Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, xxii for a mention, 15 and 334 in agreement, 335 as myth, and 337–338 for an impossible ideal and tool of domination.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Stanford, “Marina Warner and the Cult of Mary,” *The Telegraph*, February 25, 2013.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/9885622/Marina-Warner-and-the-cult-of-Mary.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 8, 42, names Warner in the text. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, c2005), 338, cited Warner in note 91 for Chap. 5, and notes 1, 4, and 10 for Chap. 6.

*Communion of Saints*, is her only book focused on Mary. With a title taken from *Marialis Cultus* and a three-page discussion of the encyclical, the book creates a hope that this work will apply the four guidelines in a fruitful way.<sup>12</sup> Published in 2003, this 397-page scholarly work did not attract as much attention as *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* from 1992, and the 2007 book, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*.<sup>13</sup> The latter prompted the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to issue a rare “Statement” of incompatibility with Catholic doctrine.<sup>14</sup> Although she publicly contested its judgment, the Bishops’ Committee reaffirmed its conclusion

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 131–134, cites MC 56 for the quote, and mentions it on 286, 322.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Statement on *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, By Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson. March 24, 2011,” <http://www.usccb.org/about/doctrine/publications/upload/statement-quest-for-the-living-god-2011-03-24.pdf>.

in a published response to her.<sup>15</sup> Its critique was reviewed to see what might apply to this evaluation of Johnson's Marian work.

The third representative of feminists is Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether. As a Visiting Professor Emerita of Feminist Theology, Ruether is described in her faculty profile as an "activist in the Roman Catholic Church, and is well known as a groundbreaking figure in Christian feminist theology."<sup>16</sup> However, the very first note of her book, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*, states that she does not believe the biblical god to be the only one;<sup>17</sup> instead, her approach is "pagan, prophetic, and mystical-contemplative."<sup>18</sup> Her goal is "to seek a more adequate alternative religion that will fully affirm us as

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<sup>15</sup> "Johnson Letter to U.S. Bishops' Doctrine Committee," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 6, 2011, <http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/johnson-letter-us-bishops-doctrine-committee>. Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Response to Observations by Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Regarding the Committee on Doctrine's Statement about the Book *Quest for the Living God*. October 11, 2011," <http://www.usccb.org/about/doctrine/publications/upload/statement-quest-for-the-living-god-response-2011-10-11.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Prof. Ruether's Faculty Profile at Claremont School of Theology. Accessed May 2014. <http://cst.edu/academics/faculty/rosemary-radford-ruether/>.

<sup>17</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 309, Chap. 1, note 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 309, Chap. 1, note 4.

women.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, her 381-page study does not mention *Marialis Cultus*. However, since Ruether’s public *persona*, exemplified by her faculty webpage and by Wikipedia, is as a “Catholic theologian,” she is included in this study.<sup>20</sup> Thus, while these three feminists are united in a general perspective, they have their own approaches that differ in specifics from each other and exemplify the variety of types that exist within the broader category of feminism.

The following analysis comparing their works to the criteria of *Marialis Cultus* will list their various positions in the order of the original publication date of their major Marian work (i.e. Warner first, Johnson second, and Ruether third). To be fair in evaluating their complex ideas, this analysis includes both strengths and weaknesses of the adherence to each of the four guidelines in turn. Hopefully, the analysis will provide a clear understanding of each person’s position as well as an overall picture of feminist perspectives.

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<sup>19</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> “Rosemary Radford Ruether,” Wikipedia. Accessed May 2014, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary\\_Radford\\_Ruether](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary_Radford_Ruether). Angela Bonavoglia, *Good Catholic Girls: How Women Are Leading the Fight to Change the Church* (New York: ReganBooks, 2005), 26. Mary E. Hunt, “The Life of ‘Scholar Activist,’ Rosemary Radford Ruether,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 15, 2014 (October 10–23, 2014, for the print edition), <http://ncronline.org/news/people/life-scholar-activist-rosemary-radford-ruether>.

## ***1. Biblical Imprint of These Feminists***

Appropriately, the “biblical imprint” is the first criterion. As the Word of God, the Bible is a fundamental and primary source about Mary.

### **Biblical strength**

*“Use of texts ... from the Sacred Scriptures”*: Warner and Johnson each devoted an entire chapter to the Gospel portrait of Mary, and made biblical references throughout the rest of their texts.<sup>21</sup>

### **Biblical weaknesses**

Unfortunately, some of the errors that Paul VI had identified can be seen in the works of these feminists. As numbered earlier in this paper, these errors included:

*“2. Small-mindedness which obscures the figure and mission of Mary”* in two ways:

- *First, by reinterpreting the virginal conception from literal to figurative*: On the literal level, Warner thought that only Matthew presented the

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<sup>21</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, “Mary in the Gospels,” 3–24. In Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, “The Dangerous Memory of Mary: A Mosaic,” 209–304, and “Index of Ancient Sources,” 377–379, are primarily biblical. In contrast, Ruether, *Goddesses*, 146–150, provided only five pages on Mary in the New Testament, and just mentions in “Feminine Symbols in Medieval Religious Literature,” 159–189, and “Mary and Wisdom in Protestant Mystical Millennialism,” 220–248.

virgin birth.<sup>22</sup> While upholding the figurative meaning of her virginity as an independence of men, Johnson argued that the two infancy narratives were not sufficient to validate the literal meaning of this doctrine from the early Church, especially when there are so many other reasons against the doctrine.<sup>23</sup> Thus, all three feminists held that Mary's perpetual virginity was not biblical. Warner thought that the belief predated the Gospels and prevailed over the contradicting Gospels.<sup>24</sup> Warner, Ruether and Johnson argued that belief in Mary's perpetual virginity was a Patristic invention to emphasize the superiority of virginity over "the lower state of marriage and sexual reproduction."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 19–24.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 31–32 for the figurative meaning, and 231–237, 235, for the denial of the literal meaning. If Johnson's method of contrary reasons overriding rarely mentioned conceptions were applied consistently, it would undermine her argument of the importance of women in the early Church, known from solitary mentions in the Bible.

<sup>24</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 22–24.

<sup>25</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 50–56. Quote from Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 23–24, understood Tertullian to vilify sex, and, 28–29, Helvidius and Jovinian as providing a motive for the Church to teach Mary's perpetual virginity, before, 30–32, reinterpreting Mary's virginity to mean she could have had sexual experience as well. Ruether, *Goddesses*, 152.



- *Second, by holding that Mary became a disciple only after the Resurrection:* Ruether thought Mary did not believe in Christ's mission during His earthly life, and was, therefore, repudiated by Christ who entrusted her to a believer, and who chose not to appear to Mary after His resurrection.<sup>26</sup>

*"6. Legendary or false" in a construction of a feminist image of Mary:* Johnson and Ruether then reconstructed the stories of the women hidden behind the patriarchal texts and re-imagined the liberating truth underneath the oppressive texts.<sup>27</sup> Ruether called for women "to be 'reformers' and reinterpreters of those [patriarchal] traditions."<sup>28</sup> Johnson held that the original egalitarian Jewish community and Christian church structure was later changed by men.<sup>29</sup> In this process, Johnson argued that it was legitimate to interpret a text contrary to an author's intention.<sup>30</sup> This methodological weakness of denying the inerrancy of divine revelation is so serious that the U.S. Bishops' Committee on

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<sup>26</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 146–148.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xvi, and "(Chap. 10) 'The Dangerous Memory of Mary,'" 209–304. Ruether, *Goddesses*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 188–189, 309.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 215, 263. Ruether, *Goddesses*, 127 ff.

Doctrine judged it a fatal flaw to any Christian theology.<sup>31</sup> Their concern is understandable when one considers the application of this method to undermine the Marian dogma of perpetual virginity.

*“7. One-sided presentation of the figure of Mary” with a deconstruction of a patriarchal, impossible Marian model:* Warner and Ruether’s approaches agreed with Johnson who read the “Scripture ...through women’s eyes with feminist hermeneutical methods” and used women’s equal rights to correct Scripture and its impossible Marian model of a virgin-mother.<sup>32</sup> In 1976, Warner left Mary behind as an irrelevant legend or myth of the past;<sup>33</sup> however, in her 2013 edition, Warner admitted that Mary’s ideal has retained its power, but has shifted from being a moral example of sexuality and less of a feminist issue, and, instead, Mary has a moral significance in politics and “larger ethical

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<sup>31</sup> Committee on Doctrine, USCCB, “Statement on *Quest for the Living God*, 1–3.

<sup>32</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 17, 338, are two examples of how she saw Scripture being used to inhibit women’s sexual freedom. Ruether, *Goddesses*, 5, rejected any “Christian exclusivism” since “Christianity is one religion among others,” and, 1, considered Christianity as “a reinterpreted synthesis of the religious worldviews of the ancient Mediterranean world”; her statements deny divine revelation in the Bible. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xvi, for the quote, and also 7, “Sociological subordination,” 34–36, traditional Mariology oppressing women “Critical Judgments,” 8–12 and 22–23, and “Dangerous Memory of Mary,” 209–210, 212–213, and 302.

<sup>33</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 339.

questions.”<sup>34</sup> Ruether’s rejection of the patriarchal view of Mary was included in a broader context of “all religions [that] have their negative sides, including marginalizing women to one degree or another.”<sup>35</sup>

## ***2. Liturgical Harmony of These Feminists***

### **Liturgical strengths**

“*Orient the Christian people towards the liturgy*” with a context of the communion of saints: As an active religious sister with a daily schedule of prayer, Johnson provided all of the positive liturgical points for this category. To avoid obliterating the contributions other women have made to the Church, Johnson emphasized that Mary needs to be kept in the context of the communion of saints—both in her lifetime on earth and then in heaven where she remains in union with the saints still on earth. From this perspective, Mary is a companion rather than a patronness in prayer, along with the other saints on earth and in heaven.<sup>36</sup> Johnson noted Mary’s presence in the Eucharistic liturgy;<sup>37</sup> Johnson affirmed Paul VI’s encouragement to pray the rosary that he had described

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<sup>34</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 2nd ed., xxvii.

<sup>35</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 305–325, esp. 315–322.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 116.

as a “preparation for” and “continuing echo” of the liturgy (MC 48).<sup>38</sup>

### **Liturgical weaknesses**

*“1. Exaggeration of content and form which even falsifies doctrine” in both ways.*

- *In terms of content with Mary as a functional goddess:* Ruether found liberating elements in the Catholic understanding of Mary as sinless, assumed into heaven, crowned queen, and celebrated; “she is functionally the Christian Goddess, although officially she is simply the representative of our original nature, our best human potential.”<sup>39</sup> Warner interpreted her experience and the devotion of Catholics around the world as a “worship” of Mary as a goddess.<sup>40</sup>
- *In terms of form that rejects the patronage of saints:* Johnson unfortunately set the companionship of saints against their patronage because the latter is hierarchical like a patriarchy, while the former is egalitarian as in a democracy.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 322–323.

<sup>39</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 303, for the quote; see also 9, 191, 207, 302–303.

<sup>40</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, xxi, 338.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 315–317.

“8. *Unworthy self-interest*” for women’s ordination: Warner and Johnson supported the interpretation that women’s exclusion from the priesthood was a form of oppression.<sup>42</sup> Ruether held that the description of Mary as a coredemptrix at the foot of the cross logically supported the ordination of women.<sup>43</sup> Such positions seem self-serving and disregard the Church’s definitive teaching on the matter for priestly ordination.<sup>44</sup>

### ***3. Ecumenical Aspects of These Feminists***

#### **Ecumenical strength**

*Union with Reform emphasis on the Scripture:* Johnson noted that various Protestant women have found Mary and her Magnificat to be inspiring.<sup>45</sup> Ruether reviewed various points of agreement and disagreement about Mary among Catholics, Luther, and Calvin.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 191. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 16, 290.

<sup>43</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 166.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone), May 22, 1994, The Vatican. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html).

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 14, 15, 57, 63–64, 258–259, 263–274.

<sup>46</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 10, 220–223.

## **Ecumenical weakness**

*Incompatibility with Orthodoxy and other Reform traditions:* The feminist approach of reform and reinterpretation clearly rejects the patriarchal aspects that are strongly held by many Orthodox and some Reform traditions. These religious groups in turn reject feminist hermeneutics and conclusions about Mary as incompatible with Scripture and Tradition.<sup>47</sup>

### **4. Anthropological Model of the Ideal Disciple**

In the following review of the seven points expressed in the “Mirror of expectations” of *Marialis Cultus*, it is clear that Johnson followed some of Paul VI’s suggestions for anthropological development. Partly because neither Warner nor Ruether were trying to follow *Marialis Cultus*, they made fewer contributions in this category.

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<sup>47</sup> For examples of Orthodoxy, Nonna Harrison, “Orthodoxy and Feminism,” *St. Nina Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1998). <http://www.stnina.org/print-journal/volume-2/volume-2-no-2-spring-1998/orthodoxy-and-feminism>. Vasile Tudor, “Apostles to the Apostles—Feminism as It Should Be Understood,” in *The Sounding*, June 30, 2014, Orthodox Christian Network, <http://myocn.net/apostles-apostles-feminism-understood/>: “His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church affirmed, speaking to a meeting of the Union of Orthodox Ukrainian Women in Moscow: “I consider this phenomenon called feminism very dangerous.” For an example of the Reformed tradition’s conflict with feminism, Douglas Schuurman, “God, Humanity, and the World in Reformed and Feminist Perspectives,” in *After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation*, ed. Mary Stewart van Leeuwen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 160.

### Anthropological strengths

“1. *Christian disciple*” in the community: Johnson corresponded to Paul VI’s first point by recognizing that Luke portrayed Mary as the “ideal disciple” because “she heard the word of God and acted upon it.”<sup>48</sup> Johnson emphasized Mary’s discipleship “amid the community as one unique member among other unique members” to avoid taking attention away from “the distinctive witness and ministry of the other women.”<sup>49</sup> To highlight our common humanity with Mary, the main theme of her book, Johnson took the title “*truly our sister*” from paragraph 56 of *Marialis Cultus*.<sup>50</sup> From this perspective, Johnson interpreted the Immaculate Conception to mean that Mary as a Spirit-filled woman was “free, fully human.”<sup>51</sup>

“2. *Active and responsible consent ... to that ‘event of world importance’*”: Ruether noted that others held—and Johnson appreciated—that Mary’s consent to the Incarnation was a free and independent action.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 247 as disciple, 111 as “woman of faith,” 255 about Luke.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 303.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xvii–xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xiii, 101, quote on 110.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 256. Ruether, *Goddesses*, 148–150, seemed to agree with Luke and the Church Fathers on the importance and independence of Mary’s consent.

“3. *[Her] courageous choice of virginity*”: None of these three feminist authors supported this idea.

“4. *Proclaimer of God’s vindication of the poor and humble*”: For this concept, Warner merely mentioned that the Magnificat made Mary to be a prophet of justice for the oppressed, but Johnson stressed this interpretation of the Cantic. Johnson even ended her book with an appreciation of how the Magnificat unites us with Mary; she provided an inclusive version of the prayer that added Sarah’s name along with Abraham’s and used the term “children” rather than “sons.”<sup>53</sup>

“5. *Solidarity and strength in difficulty*”: When addressing this point, Johnson stressed the trials of the “historical reality of Miriam of Nazareth, a Jewish woman in a relatively poor, politically oppressed, first-century peasant society,” one among “the poorest of the poor, colonized women in violent situations, most of all,” a widow, and a mother of an executed son.<sup>54</sup>

“6. *Action ‘to strengthen [others]’ faith in Christ*”: Congruent with Paul VI’s sixth point, Johnson acknowledged Mary’s role at Cana of fostering the faith of others, and reflected on other New Testament women who also did this.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 12. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 323–325.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, quotes from xvi, 13–14, and concept elaborated in “Galilee: The Political-Economic World,” 137–150.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 291–292, and as a prophet, xvii, 258.



Two of these feminists followed Paul VI's warnings in a couple of other respects. Avoiding at least some of what was "6. ... *legendary or false ... [by remaining] objective in its historical setting*" (MC 38), "Part Four: Picturing a World" of Johnson's book has three chapters devoted to the study of the "historical reality of Miriam of Nazareth" in terms of politics/economics, religion, and the socio-culture of first-century Judaism.<sup>56</sup> Warner and Johnson agreed that Mary was a real Jewish woman, legally married to Joseph before the Annunciation.<sup>57</sup> Johnson also rejected a "*sterile and ephemeral sentimentality*" by stressing the imperative to put one's Marian devotion into practice by working for justice and aiding those who need help, especially needy women.<sup>58</sup> These strengths contrast with the anthropological weaknesses of these feminists' writings.

### **Anthropological weaknesses**

"2. *Small-mindedness which obscures the figure and mission of Mary*" was demonstrated in two ways.

- *First, in the form of an Androgynous ideal that downgrades Mary's motherhood:* Jung had proposed the concept that a "whole person"

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<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, quote from xvi; Part Four included "Galilee: The Political-Economic World," "Second Temple Judaism: The Religious World," "Women: The Social-Cultural World," 137–208.

<sup>57</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 21. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 100–101, 190–191.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xvii.

needs “to integrate into his psyche those aspects pertaining to the opposite sex,” so that “‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are not qualities identical with concrete male or female existence as such.”<sup>59</sup> As a corollary of this concept, these feminists rejected the concept of complementarity of the sexes because they believed that it had been and always would be used to justify the violation of women’s equal rights.<sup>60</sup> Warner explicitly rejected Jung’s approval of Mary as the feminine ideal because Warner disagreed with Jung’s ideal of an integrated psyche; her ideal woman had “masculine” qualities.<sup>61</sup> In a more nuanced position, Ruether hoped for a “gender mutuality no longer built on domination and

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<sup>59</sup> Hauke, *God or Goddess*, 100.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 338. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 47–70, Chap. 3, “Cul-de-Sac: The Ideal Face of Woman,” rejected any type of “Dualistic Anthropology,” exemplified by Leonardo Boff, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Pope John Paul II, in favor of an “Egalitarian Anthropology.” Ruether, *Goddesses*, 2, presented “the whole of religious history,” that would include the idea of complementarity, as a “long history of domination,” while she searched for “the affirmation of women as full and equal persons.”

<sup>61</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 132–133, and 335–338.

subordination.”<sup>62</sup> These feminists objected to even a legitimate subordination because they equated it with a sinful domination.

From this perspective, Mary’s motherhood was understood as either a problem in itself or as an oppressive model imposed on women. Exemplary of some types of feminism, Warner’s 1974 description of motherhood in general as a subjugation, and a danger to be avoided, is something that she wished that she had revised in the second edition, but did not.<sup>63</sup> By 2003, Johnson accepted the testimonies of feminists who had spoken in favor of their experiences of motherhood as empowering, but she still feared that Mary’s motherhood was a harmful model. As a religious sister, Johnson worried that Mary’s motherhood would be used to pressure women to marry and have children, preventing the development of each woman “as an independent individual.” Johnson also thought that viewing Mary as one’s mother would keep her spiritual clients in an unhealthy childish psychological state, and make heaven into “a patriarchal household” which it could not be if it is

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<sup>62</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, 306. This seems to be a more nuanced position than her earlier works that had argued that the difference between men and women is simply physical for the purpose of reproduction, as evaluated by Hauke, *God or Goddess*, 100–101.

<sup>63</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 284, 289, 338; Peter Stanford, “Marina Warner and the Cult of Mary,” *The Telegraph*, February 25, 2013. [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

“a state of bliss.”<sup>64</sup> This ignorance or rejection of the complementarity of the sexes is understandable given the sinful reality of this world, but it does not take into account the Gospel.

While not referring to “domination”—as John Paul II did later, Paul VI affirmed a woman’s equal place in the home and her role in public life (*MC* 34).<sup>65</sup> Paul VI also had emphasized the Trinitarian aspect of Marian devotion by reflecting on Mary’s relationship with each of the Persons of the Trinity (*MC* 25–27). This dogma of the Trinity is precisely what provides a perspective of an equality of persons together with a respectful subordination. The relationships of the three Divine Persons within the Trinity reveal persons who are all equal in nature and dignity, but still exist in a hierarchy of relationships in which the Son is subordinate to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father and to the Son. The equality of Persons can exist harmoniously with a distinction and even precisely

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<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 33–34.

<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, August 15, 1988, section 10. The Vatican, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_15081988\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem.html).

with a subordination of roles.<sup>66</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (372) even officially teaches the anthropological impact of the Trinitarian image in humanity, that is, that “Man and woman ... are equal as persons ... and complementary as masculine and feminine.”<sup>67</sup>

- *Second, a “small-mindedness” in the rejection of Mary’s special place:* Johnson avoided the description of Mary as the “most perfect” and even the “first” disciple because Johnson thought such exaltation of Mary denigrated the equality of all disciples.<sup>68</sup>

“6. *Legendary or false,” in terms of an unproven premise of an egalitarian early Church with female clergy:* Johnson relies upon a feminist history reconstructed from the Bible and the Apocryphal Gospels to hold that the early Church had women in the same ministry and leadership positions as men, and that it took centuries to develop an ordained priesthood.<sup>69</sup> However, the evidence presented

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<sup>66</sup> Hauke, *God or Goddess*, 110. Sara Butler, “Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church,” *Voices*, Online Edition, vol. 29, no. 1 (Pentecost 2014), <http://archive.wf-f.org/14-1-TOC.html>, makes a useful distinction between the rejection of sinful domination of men over women since Original Sin, which should be rejected, and the collaboration of the sexes in God’s original plan for persons whose bodies express who they are and our common call to a nuptial relationship with God.

<sup>67</sup> Hauke, *God or Goddess*, 113, pointed out this passage.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 301–302, 309.

does not support this premise, particularly in the face of biblical passages about the ordination of priests by the laying on of hands and the historical continuity of interpreting this type of laying on of hands as the ordination to diaconate, priesthood, or episcopacy.<sup>70</sup>

“7. *One-sided presentation of the figure of Mary*” in the form of “subversive” interpretations: Johnson herself described her interpretation of the Magnificat, and of Mary in general, as “subversive” and “dangerous,” because she thought it overthrew earthly oppression such as patriarchal structures in the world and in the Church.<sup>71</sup> Depending on how one defines “oppression” and “patriarchal structures,” there could be truth to her aspiration; however, given her understanding that this re-ordering would include the ordination of women, the distinction between domination on one hand, and a legitimate subordination that includes a complementarity of the sexes does not require a female priesthood. Moreover, insofar as there are abuses of even

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<sup>70</sup> Just as Ruether, *Goddesses*, Chap. 1, 13–40, critiqued the theories of female-dominant early cultures to argue that they were more likely egalitarian, but noted that the subjective interpretations of artwork that is the basis for these theories are not conclusive, this paper would argue that the evidence for women’s leadership in the early Church is at best ambiguous; this ambiguity is clarified by Tradition with a negative answer, as seen in the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, 1976, The Vatican, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html), and John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, May 22, 1994.

<sup>71</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 14, 15, 57, 63–64, 258–259, 263–274.

legitimate power in this world, Christ noted that His “Kingdom was not of this world” (Jn. 18:36), thus grounding us in the reality that it is only in heaven where complete justice is rendered. Even though Johnson’s addition of Sarah to the Magnificat may be a legitimate recognition of Sarah’s role in the generation of children, this addition also ignores the difference between Abraham’s faith in God’s promises (Rom. 4:3, Gen. 15:6) that unfortunately Sarah did not have (Gen. 18:10-15). Ruether also held a “subversive” interpretation of Mary as represented in Our Lady of Guadalupe’s image. She thought this “American Indian painting” of a goddess is “endlessly reappropriated and interpreted from revolutionary, liberative and feminist perspectives” leaving open the possibility of interpretations that contradict historical reality as much as those presented by those whom Ruether called “reactionaries” and “defenders of traditional femininity.”<sup>72</sup>

This completes the evaluation of the three representative feminist authors according to the criteria of *Marialis Cultus*. In summary, Warner’s groundbreaking work took the Bible seriously and began an anthropological study of Mary but ended by leaving Mary behind as an oppressive model. On the other hand, Ruether’s cultural studies promoted Mary as a coredemptrix, reclaiming Mary as a functional goddess that does not conform to Paul VI’s proposals. From a Catholic standpoint, Johnson’s work is clearly the best

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<sup>72</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses*, first quote from 9, second quote on 219, and misunderstanding of the image as a painting, 207.

example of a feminist perspective on Mary with an emphasis on Mary's historical humanity, solidarity in the communion of saints, and an advocacy for the rosary. These ideas correspond to Paul VI's criteria, but unfortunately also with a feminist critique of public revelation and advocacy for women's ordination that undermine its doctrinal value. After this survey of the feminists, it is now the New Feminists' turn.

### **New Feminists**

Of the three New Feminists studied, Dr. Ronda Chervin was the first to write as a feminist trying to follow Church teaching. She is a consecrated widow and a full-time faculty member at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Connecticut.<sup>73</sup> She is a convert to Catholicism from an atheistic background after being raised by a bisexual, Communist mother;<sup>74</sup> Chervin's conversion was fostered by her admiration for the beauty of Marian music, statues, and Notre Dame Cathedral, as well as by a dream of Mary inviting her in Hebrew to join her and Jesus at a banquet

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<sup>73</sup> Ronda Chervin, "Rondavein: Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist," April 25, 2011, <http://www.ccwatershed.org/blog/2011/apr/25/dedicated-widows-holy-eucharist/>. Updated information: Ronda Chervin, "Options for Widows," accessed January 7, 2016, <http://www.rondachervin.com/ocw.htm>. "Chervin, Dr. Ronda." Holy Apostles College and Seminary, accessed May 2014, <http://www.holyapostles.edu/the-community/faculty/ronda-chervin/>.

<sup>74</sup> Ronda Chervin, *En Route to Eternity: The Story of My Life* (New York: Miriam Press, 1994), 9, 14–16, 21–23.



table.<sup>75</sup> Her own motherhood, involvement in the charismatic renewal, as well as her doctorate in philosophy and a master's in religious studies, prepared Chervin to be a consultant for the U.S. Bishops' pastoral on women, a role that required her to listen to many women's painful experiences of domination by men even within the Church. Her book *Feminine, Free and Faithful*, published in 1988, expressed her moderate Christian feminism.<sup>76</sup> Her primary Marian work was a co-authored series of Rosary meditations from 1980, *Bringing the Mother with Us*<sup>77</sup>; she revised and republished her meditations online as a forty-nine-page Rosary booklet, *Mary, Teach Us How to Live! Attuning Our Lives to the Mysteries of the Rosary*.<sup>78</sup> Mary appears in various other popular works by Chervin, such as her autobiography and a leaflet about women's roles in the

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<sup>75</sup> Chervin, *En Route to Eternity*, 50–51, 56–57.

<sup>76</sup> Ronda Chervin, *Feminine, Free and Faithful* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

<sup>77</sup> Ronda Chervin and Mary Neill. *Bringing the Mother with You: Sources of Healing in Marian Meditation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

<sup>78</sup> Ronda Chervin, "Mary, Teach Us How to Live! Attuning Our Lives to the Mysteries of the Rosary," Ronda Chervin. Accessed May 2014.  
<http://www.rondachervin.com/pages/pdf/MaryTeach.pdf>.

Church.<sup>79</sup> Chervin remains a pioneer in this new style of feminism faithful to the Magisterium.

Ronda Chervin knows the second of the three authors in this study, Mrs. Juli Loesch Wiley, from Marian Women in Ministry, a group that grew out of Chervin's consulting work for the U.S. Bishops. A lapsed Catholic, Wiley was a "syncretist feminist-pagan-Christian" in her twenties, before becoming an agnostic, until the pro-life movement and St. Louis Marie de Montfort drew her back into the Church.<sup>80</sup> She then began to "use [her] feminist sensibilities to find reasons why [Church teaching] is defensible, even necessary, from a feminist point of view"—a good description of a New Feminist method!<sup>81</sup> Her Marian ideas appear as secondary themes in her short apologetical and pro-life works: 1) "In Defense of God the Father", a twelve-page chapter; 2) "The Well-Connected Mother: The Centrality of Motherhood Is Not Just an Idea," an article of a few pages; and 3) "Jesus' Genealogy: The Woman

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<sup>79</sup> Chervin, *En Route to Eternity*, 50–51, 56–57, 112–114, 117–118. Ronda Chervin, "Tell Me Why I Should Be a Catholic When ... Women Are Second-Class Citizens in the Church?" Accessed May 2014. <http://www.rondachervin.com/pages/pdf/Leaflet5.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, "My Bumpy Road Home," in *Prodigal Daughters: Catholic Women Come Home to the Church*, ed. Donna Steichen (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 29, for the quote, 51–53 for de Montfort, and 29–74 for the rest of her spiritual autobiography.

<sup>81</sup> Wiley, "My Bumpy Road Home," 47 (henceforth "Road").

Problem,” another short article.<sup>82</sup> Formerly an activist and journalist, Wiley is a homeschooling mother of two sons, and a self-described, “recovering feminist.”<sup>83</sup> Her New Feminist perspective is expressed by her rejection of typical feminism, along with the admission that “it’s ok to be a feminist in the Church if you’re a feminist transformed by the Gospel.”<sup>84</sup>

Chronologically the last to publish on this topic, the next New Feminist author studied is Dr. Michele Marie Herbst Schumacher. Her 203-page doctoral dissertation in 1993 was “Christological and Marian Mediation: The Dramatic Integration of Human Freedom into Divine Communion according to Hans Urs von Balthasar.”<sup>85</sup> Schumacher is a

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<sup>82</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, “In Defense of God the Father,” in *The Politics of Prayer*, ed. Helen Hull Hitchcock (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 307–319. Juli Loesch Wiley, “The Well-Connected Mother: The Centrality of Motherhood Is Not Just an Idea,” Touchstone 2006, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=19-01-034-f>. Julianne Wiley, “Jesus’ Genealogy: The Woman Problem,” *Voices*, online edition, 27 #2 (Lent-Eastertide 2012): 2. <http://www.wf-f.org/12-1-Wiley.html>, also published in four parts as “The Woman Problem in the Bible,” *Spero News*, Nov. 19, 2011, <http://www.speroforum.com/a/NOGGPJXZHR50/64079-The-Woman-Problem-in-the-Bible-Part-One-of-Fourpart-series#.VnrVPFLamf4>.

<sup>83</sup> Wiley, “Jesus’ Genealogy.”

<sup>84</sup> Wiley, “Jesus’ Genealogy.”

<sup>85</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, “Christological and Marian Mediation: The Dramatic Integration of Human Freedom into Divine Communion according to Hans Urs von Balthasar,” STD Dissertation, The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family (Washington, D.C., 1993).

theologian and mother who explicitly responded to Pope St. John Paul II's call for a New Feminism with her scholarly writings: "The Prophetic Vocation of Women and the Order of Love (1999)," as well as four articles in her edited collection of essays, *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism* (2003).<sup>86</sup> As a theologian, Schumacher identified "a philosophical and theological anthropology (where God is the 'measure' of man)" as the context for women's "equal dignity, of her shared responsibility for the earth and its inhabitants, of her likeness to him, and ultimately of her originality: her specific, metaphysical differences from man, as distinguished from the differences among women themselves."<sup>87</sup> Her Marian works include "A Speyrian Theology of the Body" in 2005, and a 2008 pastoral presentation on the "Magnificat and the Prayer Life of the

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<sup>86</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, "The Prophetic Vocation of Women and the Order of Love," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 147–192. Michele M. Schumacher, ed., *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003). "Toward a New Feminism: Interview with Author Michele Schumacher," *Zenit*, March 8, 2007. <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/toward-a-new-feminism>.

<sup>87</sup> Schumacher, "An Introduction to a New Feminism," in *Women in Christ*, xi.

Christian Couple.”<sup>88</sup> The very titles of her works reveal many of her ideas.

Following the same method for evaluating the work of the three feminists, the assessment below of these three New Feminists will now evaluate their works by using the four criteria of *Marialis Cultus*, presenting the authors under each criterion in the chronological order of the publication of their New Feminist Marian works. Therefore, Chervin will be first, Wiley, second, and Schumacher, third.

### ***1. Biblical Imprint of These New Feminists***

#### **Biblical strengths**

Within Paul VI’s first criterion of Scripture being the foundational “imprint,” there are two notable strengths for the New Feminist perspective.

1. “*Diligent use of texts ... from the Sacred Scriptures*” in terms of holding Scripture as the standard: All three New Feminists accepted the Bible as the Word of God to judge their subjective experience, and used all parts of the Bible, but with different emphases. As Wiley expressed it, a New Feminist is “transformed by the Gospel.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, “A Speyrian Theology of the Body,” in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, ed. Michael Daphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 315–352. Michele M. Schumacher, “Magnificat and the Prayer Life of the Christian Couple: Keynote Address—October 11, 2008,” in *Pilgrimage of Hope Companion* (Yonkers, NY: Magnificat, 2008), 2–21.

<sup>89</sup> Wiley, “Jesus’ Genealogy.”

2. *“Diligent use of ... symbols skillfully selected from the Sacred Scriptures” with an Old Testament typology:* Wiley focused especially on the Old Testament, calling Mary a “Daughter of Eve” as well as the fulfillment of each of the women named in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. As the “new Rahab,” Mary “rescues her family ... the human race by faith in God’s almighty power”; the “New Tamar ... chooses God’s promise even when the Chosen People do not.” Mary is the “new Ruth” by quoting her exultant hymn of praise in the Magnificat. As the “new Bathsheba,” Mary is the mother of a “new Solomon ... the Judge of all the world.”<sup>90</sup> Schumacher applied “Daughter of Sion” to Mary as God’s beloved.<sup>91</sup>

### **Biblical weaknesses**

*“Exaggeration of content and form that falsifies doctrine” in terms of an experiential method and inaccuracies:* Chervin’s method included private revelation that was appropriate in her work of personal devotion, but would not be an appropriate basis for theology. Even in devotion, using unapproved private revelations—her own and others—requires careful discernment.<sup>92</sup> Chervin’s own birth-giving experiences provided her reflection on the birth

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<sup>90</sup> Wiley, “Jesus’ Genealogy.”

<sup>91</sup> Schumacher, “Christological and Marian Mediation,” 106–137.

<sup>92</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 3, referred to the approved “apparitions at Guadalupe, Fatima, Lourdes,” and 38, mentioned “so-called private visions that we have received from the Holy Spirit.”

of Christ as being painful; she seemed ignorant of the doctrine of Mary's miraculous and painless delivery expressed in Isaiah 66:7 and teachings by Saints Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, John Damascene, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure.<sup>93</sup> Chervin's presentation of Mary's pregnancy as a publicly shameful situation also seemed to contradict the biblical description of Joseph's secrecy over his surprise about his wife's pregnancy (Mt. 1:19).<sup>94</sup>

## ***2. Liturgical Harmony of These New Feminists***

The New Feminists' correspondence with Paul's VI's second criterion of the liturgy is summarized in three points.

### **Liturgical strengths**

1. "*Orient the Christian people towards [the liturgy]*" in terms of liturgical roles and language: Chervin explicitly follows the Church teaching on women's liturgical roles and the use of approved but precise translations that distinguish between men as the male sex and humanity in general. In a popular leaflet, she does an excellent job of expressing women's legitimate frustrations about inaccurate translations, summarizing the theology and also making

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<sup>93</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 10. Taylor Marshall, "Mary's Painless Delivery of Christ (Scripture, Church Fathers, Popes, and Doctors of the Church)." Stay Salty, My Friends, December 21, 2010. <http://taylormarshall.com/2010/12/marys-painless-delivery-of-christ.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 7.

some pastoral suggestions for both men and women.<sup>95</sup> Wiley proposed a psychological apologetic, specifically in favor of the masculine references to God, and applied it to Mary representing all humanity as the bride of God, the Bridegroom.<sup>96</sup>

2. Avoiding a “*sterile ... sentimentality*”: Chervin wrote the lyrics for two lullabies that Mary sings to us, her children; one specifically avoided the negative sense of childishness by calling the listener to action, to becoming a spiritual mother, too.<sup>97</sup> Wiley’s experience of her consecration, made according to the form of St. Louis de Montfort, testified to the difference that Marian commitment exerted as one of the final steps in her return to the Faith.<sup>98</sup>

3. *Promotion of the Rosary (MC 42)*: Chervin and Wiley testified to the effectiveness of praying the Rosary daily for conversions. Chervin had prayed it for her non-Catholic husband, and Wiley noted its role in her own return to the faith.<sup>99</sup> Chervin promoted the Rosary with her meditations

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<sup>95</sup> Ronda Chervin, “Tell Me Why I Should Become a Catholic When ... Women Are Second-Class Citizens in the Church,” <http://rondachervin.com/pages/pdf/Leaflet5.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Wiley, “In Defense of God the Father,” 318–319.

<sup>97</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 4–5, and 46, spurring the child to become a mother as well.

<sup>98</sup> Wiley, “Road,” 51–53.

<sup>99</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 1; Wiley, “Road,” 47.



that included ten narratives from Mary's point of view, and three more that address Mary.<sup>100</sup>

### **Liturgical weaknesses**

*Incomplete:* Since Chervin's Rosary meditations were written before 2002, they lack the Luminous Mysteries that would be a helpful update.

### **3. Ecumenical Aspects of the New Feminists**

#### **Ecumenical strengths**

1. *Avoid misleading exaggeration:* Chervin's care to describe the Assumption as the Dormition and to leave open the issue of Mary's death showed a sensitivity to the Orthodox.<sup>101</sup> Schumacher's explicitly Christological approach, as indicated by the title of her dissertation, might allay ecumenical fears about detracting from Christ.<sup>102</sup>

2. *Praying the Magnificat:* Wiley noted how Mary's song expressed Mary's role of uniting generations, expressing a continuity appreciated by the Orthodox.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 2–7, 9–10, 12–13, 15–16, for all five Joyful Mysteries; 28–29, for the Crucifixion; and 32, 34–35, 37–38, 40, for the first four Glorious Mysteries, given from Mary's point of view, while in 18, 22, 25, the Agony in the Garden, Crowning with Thorns, and Carrying of the Cross include Mary.

<sup>101</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 40–41.

<sup>102</sup> Schumacher, "Christological and Marian Mediation," 106–137.

<sup>103</sup> Wiley, "Well-Connected Mother," 45.

Focus on Mary's biblical canticle could appeal to the Orthodox and Reform traditions. Schumacher interpreted the Magnificat as expressing Mary's state of self-surrender.<sup>104</sup>

3. *Points of unity with other Christians*: Chervin and Wiley's presentation of Mary as the "Bride of the Spirit" could appeal to those in charismatic Reform traditions.<sup>105</sup> Wiley's description of Mary as the "bride unwed" and her typological development also evoke an Eastern perspective.<sup>106</sup> Chervin's charismatic involvement prompted her description of Mary at Pentecost as groaning, weeping and speaking in tongues when filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>107</sup>

### **Ecumenical weaknesses**

The ecumenical weaknesses of this aspect were not apparent.

## ***4. Anthropological Model of the Ideal Disciple***

### **Anthropological strengths**

The New Feminists followed six of the seven suggestions made in *Marialis Cultus* for the anthropological aspects, but skipped the third point.

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<sup>104</sup> Schumacher, "Magnificat," 4–5.

<sup>105</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 3, 42. Wiley, "Defense," 318–319.

<sup>106</sup> Wiley, "Jesus Genealogy," 7.

<sup>107</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 3, 37–38.

“1. ‘first and most perfect’” *Christian disciple, expressed as the archetype of a “whole” person in a careful use of Jung*: From a biblical perspective, all three New Feminists agreed on Mary’s role as a model disciple in hearing and keeping the Word of God.<sup>108</sup> Chervin emphasized Mary’s common humanity as a disciple who had to learn from Christ in solidarity with and as a model for all Christian disciples.<sup>109</sup>

From a philosophical or anthropological perspective, these New Feminists valued complementarity and receptivity as part of being a whole person, and therefore Mary is archetype of a “whole” person.<sup>110</sup> They also maintained that there was a particularly feminine way of

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<sup>108</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 35; Wiley, “Defense,” 318–319; Schumacher, “Speyrian Anthropology,” 343–347.

<sup>109</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 9 “vulnerable” and 46 “Daughter of Eve” for common humanity, and 15–16, 29, 32, 35 for discipleship.

<sup>110</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 3 and 9, about Mary’s receptivity and complementarity, and *Weeping with Jesus: The Journey from Grief to Hope*, [http://www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=5](http://www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=5), 58, about Mary’s wholeness in heaven. Wiley, “In Defense of God the Father,” 310–312, 318–219. Schumacher, “The Nature of Nature in Feminism, Old and New: From Dualism to Complementary Unity,” in *Women in Christ*, 49.

being a person as well.<sup>111</sup> Schumacher's emphasis on Mary as the archetype prompted her presentation of Mary as more a "first Eve" than a New Eve because Mary, not Eve, is the prime analogate in the analogy that is a reflection of the Trinity.<sup>112</sup>

"2. *Active and responsible consent ... to 'event of world importance'*": Chervin described Mary's consent at the foot of the cross as her loving union with Christ offering "a gift of love to the Father."<sup>113</sup> Wiley reflected upon Mary's consent as a way that God Himself depended on her.<sup>114</sup> Schumacher focused on Mary's role at the Annunciation as a Mediatrix between Christ/Father and Christ/man, and therefore, Our Lady could also be called a coredemptrix.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Chervin, *Feminine, Free and Faithful*, 128. Ronda Chervin, *The Woman's Tale: A Journal of Inner Exploration* (NY: Seabury Press, 1980), 139, states "all feminine archetypes [are] fulfilled in the image of the Virgin Mother Mary." On a pastoral level, Chervin's later meditations, e.g. on the Assumption, in *Teach Us*, 41, dropped the psychological categories that she had used in *Bringing the Mother*, 119. Wiley, "In Defense of the Father," 311 and then 318, "God as the Bridegroom chose to need the Bride. God as the Son chose to need the Mother." Schumacher, "An Introduction to a New Feminism," xi–xv.

<sup>112</sup> Schumacher, "Christological and Marian Mediation," 107.

<sup>113</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 28.

<sup>114</sup> Wiley, "In Defense of the Father," 318.

<sup>115</sup> Schumacher, "Christological and Marian Mediation," 136, 157–158, as well as "Speyrian Anthropology," 347–350. Wiley noted the cosmic significance of the Incarnation but did not focus on Mary's consent in "Well-Connected Mother," under "Bodily Connectors."

“3. [Her] ‘courageous choice ... of the state of virginity’” in terms of a Beloved who responds in total self-gift: These New Feminists noted that God/Trinity/Christ/Holy Spirit loved Mary in a pre-eminent way. Chervin and Schumacher presented Mary’s Immaculate Conception, or state of being pre-redeemed and then assumed, as proof of God’s love for Mary.<sup>116</sup> Mary then lovingly responds to God as a virginal bride who becomes both a physical and spiritual mother. Chervin and Schumacher would describe Mary as the Bride of God, although Chervin also specified “Bride of the Spirit,” while Schumacher emphasized Mary’s spousal relationship, not with the Father or the Spirit, but with Christ, in a “real but suprasexual way,” because they were both embodied.<sup>117</sup> Schumacher perceived Mary’s perpetual virginity as part of her total self-gift to God.<sup>118</sup> While both Chervin and Schumacher described Mary’s virginal marriage to Joseph, Chervin then extended the concept to reflect on Mary’s widowhood after Joseph’s death.<sup>119</sup> Chervin was the only one who noted Mary’s bravery in terms of her virginity combined with her maternity, perhaps prompting shame in her loved ones.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Schumacher, “Christological and Marian Mediation,” 88.

<sup>117</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 3, 6. Schumacher, “Christological and Marian Mediation,” 99, and “Speyrian theology,” 279.

<sup>118</sup> Schumacher, “Christological and Marian Mediation,” 85, 121, 125, 147.

<sup>119</sup> Chervin, *Weeping with Jesus*, 71, 83.

<sup>120</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 7.

“4. *Proclaimer of God’s vindication of the poor and humble*”: Chervin saw Mary’s Magnificat as a declaration of hope to the hopeless.<sup>121</sup>

“5. *Solidarity and strength in difficulty*”: All three New Feminists described various types of strength that Mary manifested in the trials of her life. Wiley and Chervin focused on the physical and emotional/psychological difficulties of Mary’s pregnancy and the emotional and psychological stress at the loss of Jesus at age twelve.<sup>122</sup> Chervin also reflected on Mary’s anguish at the death of her [Mary’s] husband, as well as at the passion and death of her Son.<sup>123</sup> Schumacher described Mary’s sorrowful anticipation of the Cross as early as during her pregnancy, and then Mary’s “abandonment” by Christ on Calvary, her participation in Christ’s kenosis on the cross, of feeling rejected by His Father.<sup>124</sup>

“6. *Action ‘to strengthen ... [others’] faith in Christ*”: Wiley personally experienced Mary leading her back to the Faith. She also noted how Mary empowers both women and men, who are feminine in relation to God, to become brides

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<sup>121</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 7–8.

<sup>122</sup> Chervin, *Feminine, Free, and Faithful*, 129; *Teach Us*, 7, 10, 16. Wiley, “The Subject Lord,” in “Well-Connected Mother,” and “Scandal, Ancestors and Us: What Was Christ Getting Into?” in “Jesus’ Genealogy.”

<sup>123</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 25, 28–29, and *Weeping with Jesus*, 3, 6, 71.

<sup>124</sup> Schumacher, “Christological and Marian Mediation,” 138, 157–158.

and mothers of Christ as well.<sup>125</sup> Schumacher described the faith of all Christians as a participation in Mary's paradigmatic faith.<sup>126</sup>

"7. *Universal mother*": All three New Feminists agreed on Mary's universal spiritual motherhood. Chervin emphasized Mary's universal motherhood with titles such as "Mother of the Church," "New Eve," "Mother of the Kingdom,"<sup>127</sup> and "Mother of Mercy," extending even to the souls in purgatory.<sup>128</sup> Chervin interpreted Mary's maternal role as a type of leadership as teacher in the early Church.<sup>129</sup> Wiley's emphasis on the female body, in order to stress Mary's embodied and living connection between God and man, past and future generations, was a novel approach.<sup>130</sup> Schumacher also described this universal motherhood as "Mother of the Church," "New Eve," "Mother of All" and "Mother of the Faithful," but emphasized Mary's archetypal maternity as "Mother of the Faith."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Wiley, "My Bumpy Road," 51–53, 71, and "In Defense of the Father," 318–319.

<sup>126</sup> Schumacher, "Christological and Marian Mediation," 153, 162.

<sup>127</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 29, 38.

<sup>128</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 38, 57.

<sup>129</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 37–38.

<sup>130</sup> Wiley, "Scandal, Ancestors and Us: What Was Christ Getting Into?" in "Jesus' Genealogy." Wiley, "Well-Connected Mother."

<sup>131</sup> Schumacher, "Christological and Marian Mediation," 85, 100, 140, 171, and 149 for "Mother of the faith."

Schumacher stressed Mary's faith as the form that all of the Church participates in to have faith.<sup>132</sup>

The New Feminists also avoided some of the errors identified by Paul VI, notably in their efforts to follow his admonition that the "6. *Legendary or false* [teaching] *must be eliminated ... [with] an objective ... historical setting.*" The New Feminists stressed Mary's common humanity in various ways. Chervin and Wiley emphasized the objective historical setting in their extended descriptions of Mary's Jewish identity.<sup>133</sup> These two New Feminists understood Mary's breastfeeding of Christ as part of her total self-giving as a mother.<sup>134</sup> Chervin saw Mary's ignorance in needing clarification of how God was working in her life, and of the meaning of Christ's three days of disappearance at age twelve.<sup>135</sup> Chervin's experience prompted her to reflect on Mary's grief at the death of Joseph and the loneliness she felt as a widow, albeit an "Exalted Widow."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Schumacher, "Christological and Marian Mediation," 153–161.

<sup>133</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 12–13, 15–16. Wiley, "Mother's Grace," in "The Well-Connected Mother."

<sup>134</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 10. Wiley, "The Centrality of Motherhood Is Not Just an Idea," in "Well-Connected Mother."

<sup>135</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 7, 16.

<sup>136</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 28, 42, also her *Weeping with Jesus*, 71, 83–84.



### Anthropological weaknesses

Private revelation is not an appropriate basis for theology and unapproved private revelation could be problematic for devotion as well. It is not clear if Chervin, and even more so Schumacher, distinguishes between private revelation and the use of public revelation that is the valid basis for theology. Chervin's use of her own private revelation, as well as the unapproved private revelations of others, requires discernment even for devotion. Schumacher's use of Speyr's private revelation leaves her open to this critique as well.

"6. *'false'*"—*in terms of historical inaccuracies*: Although Chervin's presentation of Mary's pregnancy as a publicly shameful situation does not correspond to the reality of the Jewish two-stage marriage and the biblical description of Joseph's discretion, Chervin's point is still valid in the sense that Mary was courageous in risking this since she would not have known exactly how Joseph was going to handle the situation.<sup>137</sup> Also, Chervin confused the timing of Jesus' circumcision that, in fact, did not occur at the Presentation of the Temple when he was forty days old, but rather when he was only eight days old, but Mary's sorrow at the shedding of Christ's blood would have been the same regardless of the timing.<sup>138</sup> Fortunately these errors do not undermine the points Chervin makes about Mary.

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<sup>137</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 7.

<sup>138</sup> Chervin, *Teach Us*, 13.

## Retrieval or Renewal of Marian Devotion?

At the risk of over-simplification, this paper attempts to answer this question. In terms of the representative works of these “mainstream” or “radical” feminists—Marina Warner, Elizabeth Johnson, and Rosemary Radford Ruether—their approach did not retrieve nor did it entirely renew a Marian devotion that met all four criteria set forth in *Marialis Cultus*. Instead, while some aspects of renewal were provided, this feminist approach tended toward two of the errors Paul VI had identified:

- 1) “7. *One-sided presentation of the figure of Mary*, which by overstressing one element compromises the overall picture given by the Gospel” (MC 38).
- 2) “8. *Unworthy self-interest*” (MC 38), manifested in their search for “female power.”<sup>139</sup>

Their feminist approach deconstructed patriarchal Marian doctrine and devotion to construct an egalitarian view, critiquing revelation and overstressing some truths in a way that renewed some Marian doctrines while it denied other doctrines to work toward androgyny as their idea of justice. However, a more complete evaluation would require a review of all of their writings rather than just the representative works used for this evaluation.

At the same time, Chervin, Schumacher, and Wiley’s New Feminist approach used Tradition to interpret their feminine experience, providing new insights into complementarity to retrieve and to revitalize Marian

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<sup>139</sup> Stanford, “Marina Warner and the Cult of Mary,” quote from Warner.

devotion and theology according to six of the seven criteria presented in *Marialis Cultus*. While private revelation prompts the need for some discretion in certain areas, Chervin has continued to write various pastoral works with Marian mentions, but not a work focused on Mary. Wiley has developed the pro-life aspect of St. John Paul II's "feminine genius" of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, but Wiley has not included an explicitly Marian dimension.<sup>140</sup> Schumacher has been focusing on the philosophy and wider anthropology of New Feminism to lay a solid foundation.<sup>141</sup> Their efforts provide a basis for further development that could fruitfully include reflection on the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 2004 document on *The Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, "The Myth of Sexual Autonomy," and "Toward a Holistic Ethic of Life," in *ProLife Feminism: Yesterday and Today*, ed. Mary Krane Derr, Rachel MacNair, and Linda Naranjo-Huebl, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kansas City: Feminism and Nonviolence Studies Association, 2005), 270–275.

<sup>141</sup> Schumacher, *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, has three parts: Part I: Philosophical Anthropology, Part II: Theological Anthropology, and Part III: Ethical and Practical Consequences.

<sup>142</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, May 31, 2004, The Vatican, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040731\\_collaboration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html).

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