"Just when you thought that the voices of Catholic women were being muffled (or even silenced), *Women, Wisdom, and Witness* appears. Hope lives. The authors are new voices, on the cutting edge of theology, while cognizant of those who have come before. This is an extraordinary book, coming at a moment in the life of the church, when many are despairing of the possibility of dialogue. *Women, Wisdom, and Witness* models the way we can dialogue about important questions, not only in the substantive essays on topics that affect contemporary women and men, but in the way the authors actually dialogue with one another. Pope Paul VI wrote that dialogue will make us wise. Here's a living example."

—Dolores Leckey
Senior Fellow Emerita
Woodstock Theological Center,
Georgetown University

"These essays are scholarly yet also experientially grounded in each writer's own context, thus strengthening the conversation. They speak truth to power and are in themselves a challenging and, at the same time, hope-filled read."

—Diana L. Hayes
Professor Emerita, Georgetown University
Author of *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality*

Women, Wisdom, and Witness

Engaging Contexts in Conversation

Edited by

Rosemary P. Carbine and
Kathleen J. Dolphin

A Michael Glazier Book

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Foreword

The Birth of New Voices

Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College,
and Kathleen J. Dolphin, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame

Helping women find their voices figures prominently in the history of US feminisms[1] and of US feminist and womanist theologies, both Catholic and Protestant.[2] This goal also has featured prominently in the mission of Saint Mary's College since its founding as a women's college by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross (CSC Sisters) in 1844. A college in the Catholic liberal arts tradition, it serves as the sister school of the University of Notre Dame.

The college's Center for Spirituality[3] is an important and promising locus where the mission of the college can be advanced with particular

[1] Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); and Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

[2] Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, and God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski, *Women and Theology*, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society, vol. 40 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Diana L. Hayes, *And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Liberation Theology* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), and *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011); Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); and Mary Ann Hinsdale, *Women Shaping Theology* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006).

[3] For more information, visit the Center for Spirituality at www.saintmarys.edu/spirituality.

attention to spirituality considered as both an academic discipline and a way of life. The center offers programs that address contemporary religious issues, creating a network of scholars and practitioners for continuing education in spirituality, especially for women. This introduction reviews the history and current praxis of one particularly effective programmatic component of the Center for Spirituality, namely, the New Voices Seminar, an annual intellectual retreat that is informed by dialogical methods used by the Catholic Common Ground Initiative.[4] The seminar provides a forum to articulate and advance women's voices within Catholicism via dialogue across different social locations and academic disciplines that eschews "hardness of hearing" and exercises collaboration.[5]

The seminar coincides with the annual endowed Madeleva Lecture at Saint Mary's College. Creation of the Center for Spirituality in 1984 carried forward the spirit of the Graduate School of Sacred Theology, which flourished at Saint Mary's College from 1943 to 1970 under the guidance of its legendary president, Sister Madeleva Wolff, CSC. The program granted doctoral and master's degrees in theology. At that time, it was the only graduate theological program that admitted women anywhere. Then, as doors began to open for women at other American colleges and universities, the graduate school at Saint Mary's College closed, its pioneering work completed.

In 1985 Monika K. Hellwig officially launched the Center for Spirituality with an inaugural lecture[6] in what became known as the Madeleva Lecture Series.[7] This anthology of essays from twelve participants in the New Voices Seminar is dedicated to the memory of this remarkable woman. Monika K. Hellwig, former professor of theology at Georgetown University and past president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, died in 2005. She was an important contributor at the

[4] The Catholic Common Ground Initiative (CCGI) is housed in the Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. More information can be found at www.catholiccommonground.org.

[5] Hinsdale and Kaminski, *Women and Theology*, x.

[6] Monica K. Hellwig, *Christian Women in a Troubled World*, 1985 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985). See also Dolores Leckey and Kathleen Dolphin, eds., *Monika K. Hellwig: The People's Theologian* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

[7] The lectures can be read online at www.madelevalectures.org/catalog.php.

reunion of Madeleva lecturers in 2000, where she also helped in formulating "The Madeleva Manifesto: A Message of Hope and Courage,"[8] a document composed and signed by all the Madeleva lecturers between 1985 and 2000 who had gathered at Saint Mary's to celebrate the new millennium. Speaking a message of hope and courage to women in the church, these senior scholars addressed women in ministry and theological studies, women looking for models of prophetic leadership, women tempted by the demons of despair and indifference, women suffering the cost of discipleship, and young women in the church. "We will be with you along the way," the manifesto said, "sharing what we have learned about the freedom, joy and power of contemplative intimacy with God. We ask you to join us in a commitment to far-reaching transformation of church and society in non-violent ways." That document birthed, in part, the New Voices Seminar and continues to inspire it.

History of the New Voices Seminar

The Center for Spirituality celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary during the 2009–10 academic year, focusing on the topic "Women, Wisdom, and Witness." Drawing its title from that anniversary, this book celebrates women, wisdom, and witness as exemplified in the New Voices Seminar. The seminar is a lively intergenerational and in many ways diverse group of roughly forty to fifty women scholars who take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Christianity, utilizing ethics, history, law, liturgy, ministry, pastoral care, political science, psychology, Scripture studies, social work, sociology, spirituality, and theology.

The New Voices Seminar was inaugurated in 2004 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Madeleva Lecture Series. Approaching its tenth year, the fully funded seminar has flourished as an annual intellectual retreat for young women scholars to create a community of conversation that "is at once dialogical in process, courageous in its openness, and yet very uncommon in fact."[9] Its purpose is to provide an opportunity for women scholars, particularly those who are at a relatively early stage of their career, to share energetic conversations with each other, to learn

[8] "The Madeleva Manifesto: A Message of Hope and Courage" is available online, along with a photo of the signatories, at www.madelevalectures.org/manifesto.php.

[9] Hinsdale and Kaminski, *Women and Theology*, ix.

from the wisdom of more experienced women scholars, and to create a supportive community of women academics. "New Voices" denotes promising women scholars whose work contributes to the vision so articulately expressed in the "Madeleva Manifesto."

> In the tradition of Sister Madeleva Wolff, CSC, we sixteen Madeleva lecturers have been invited to speak a message of hope and courage to women in the church. Reflecting the diversity of gifts bestowed on us by the Spirit, we speak from our particular experiences and vocations, yet share in a universal vision that is faithful to our Catholic tradition. To women in ministry and theological studies we say: re-imagine what it means to be the whole body of Christ. The way things are now is not the design of God.

To date, over fifty women have participated in at least one New Voices Seminar. All participants are invited to return each year, and several new invitees are contacted to join as well. The average annual number of participants is twenty—a new constellation of scholars each year. A small ad hoc committee, including past Madeleva lecturers, selects the invitees, who must fulfill several criteria. The invitee must have a doctoral degree and must be working in an academic setting or in a field with strong connections to academia. Her area of expertise must be in theology and/or related fields in the study of Christianity. She must have a demonstrated interest in spirituality, either specifically and formally as a scholar who engages the discipline in her professional work, or informally as a scholar who desires to integrate the life of the mind with the life of the spirit in her own personal life.

At the time of this writing, the voices of the seminar members are beginning to be heard in the academy; all contribute new and exciting perspectives (feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and others) in their professional work. The New Voices Seminar supports its members in these endeavors, encouraging them to reflect on the challenge and promise of furthering the Catholic tradition at its best. Intergenerational and intercultural components add depth and richness to this reflection. Several past Madeleva lecturers participated in the first New Voices Seminar as honored guests, and past Madeleva lecturers have joined the group in subsequent seminars as well. Seminar members express appreciation for the opportunity to get acquainted (or reacquainted) with senior scholars in this informal setting. Since the Catholic tradition at its best fosters ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, New Voices Seminar participants

have recently included members of diverse faith traditions. However, given the urgent need for women's voices within Catholicism at this time in history, the New Voices Seminar continues to have a decidedly strong Catholic flavor to it.

New Voices Seminar Format

Each year the New Voices Seminar theme coincides with some themes inherent in that year's Madeleva Lecture. The lecturer stays for the New Voices Seminar as a guest of honor, engaging the members in discussion about those themes. Generally, the seminar format consists of three sessions: (1) confidential sharing of personal concerns, current academic projects, successes, and difficulties; (2) discussion of the Madeleva Lecture; and (3) further discussion of themes and issues that emerged in the previous sessions. For example, at a recent seminar in response to the concern about getting work published, the Madeleva lecturer spontaneously presented a brief but substantive workshop on the topic of publishing.

Prior to each session, one participant is invited to serve as a conversation starter. Her task is first to listen with "head and heart" to that session's discussion, then to formulate a response during the coffee break, and then to present her observations to the group when it reconvenes. Unlike an academic response that involves critique and perhaps constructive advice, the response that the conversation starter offers goes deeper. She identifies themes, issues, and questions that emerged. She notes the feelings that were expressed as well. Perhaps she comments on what was *not* said in the discussion.

This conversational format relates directly to a unique feature of this book: each of the three sections concludes with a conversation, an interactive dialogue among a conversation starter and the authors of the chapters in that section. These conversations took place in phone conferences, which were recorded and then transcribed. By introducing the writings and conversations of selected women in the New Voices Seminar, the book models and stimulates much-needed dialogue between theology and ethics about some of the most salient intersections among women, Christianity, and contemporary US society that revolve around poverty, sexual norms, trauma and slavery, and the roles of women in education, the church, and public life.

Rather than conclude each section of the book with questions for further discussion and lists of books for further reading as in most books

designed for classroom use, the phone conferences serve as a methodological and pedagogical tool for doing and teaching theology and ethics more adequately across different disciplines. The phone conferences prompt and model how to engage in conversation in the classroom about issues raised by the essays, and thus they differ from traditional formal academic responses. Although the phone conferences strive for the same intellectual and practical rigor of scholarly discourse, the conversations transcribed at the end of each section of the book prompt the contributors—and readers—to think more deeply about a theme or two or three collectively, which exceeds what any single essay accomplishes, and which demonstrates the benefit of a collaborative dialogical method for doing theology and ethics from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The phone conferences, then, model civic discourse at its best by showcasing passionate scholars who are engaged in dialogue about complex social issues from diverse and divergent viewpoints and who talk across differences of all sorts in order to reach for tentative, open-to-revision conclusions about those issues. By modeling such conversational exchanges, the contributors and the conversation starters intend to open up spaces within classrooms, churches, and elsewhere for informed civic discourse that harnesses the potential of genuine dialogue to replace a prevalent theo-political view of power as unilateral "power over" or "power to" with a "democratized ideal of co-creativity . . . a sustainable catholicity of creaturely solidarity kin to 'democratic cosmopolitanism.'"[10]

Lastly, concluding each section with a transcript of this interactive dialogue demonstrates the communal and collaborative praxis of doing theology and ethics that takes place at the annual New Voices Seminar. It also invites the book's readers to join in such a dialogue. In this way, the book takes its inspiration from the dialogical method employed by the Catholic Common Ground Initiative (CCGI) and shows its benefit for doing more adequate theology and ethics around some of the most important issues of our time.

Since its establishment in 1996 by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, CCGI has been committed to addressing the pastoral concerns of the church in the United States. The initiative does so by modeling and fostering intrachurch dialogue on issues that are timely and relevant for the

[10] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 51, 52.

life and mission of the church. Saint Mary's College has been affiliated with CCGI since 2001. The Center for Spirituality administers CCGI programs, typically sponsoring a Catholic Common Ground Conversation approximately once a semester, utilizing conversation starters to open the discussion. These events take place in a space large enough to accommodate several circles of chairs. At each conversation, four individuals are invited to serve as conversation starters by presenting a five-minute commentary on the selected topic. Every effort is made to gather a balanced roster of four conversation starters. Before introducing the conversation starters, the moderator presents a brief summary of the official Catholic teaching on the topic (without further comment). Then, each of the starters presents a brief commentary. For example, for the conversation on homosexuality, a young woman shared her experience of being a lesbian; another student shared her experience of having a brother who is gay; a psychology professor commented on recent research on sexual orientation; and another participant shared her confusion about homosexuality being defined as a profound "disorder." At the end of this half hour of short presentations, each conversation starter "blends into" one of the conversation circles. In these small group conversations, the conversation starters do not act as discussion guides or facilitators in any formal sense. The moderator reminds the participants that in real life we don't have "facilitators" to guide every conversation. Adults learn by experience how to engage in conversations that are respectful and substantive. To develop the art of conversation, "Common Ground Conversation Guidelines"[11] are distributed to the groups. Refreshments are served and the groups engage in conversation for roughly forty minutes. At the end of the discussion, the moderator thanks the participants for engaging in this conversation and bids them farewell. No reporting to the large group takes place, and no written summaries are submitted to review. Rather, the emphasis is on cultivating a free-floating, respectful, and informal conversation that could mark the beginning of many future conversations, enlightened (hopefully) by the Catholic Common Ground Conversation that the participants experienced.

[11] "Common Ground Conversation Guidelines" can be found on the Center for Spirituality website: www.saintmarys.edu/spirituality. These light-hearted "ground rules" effectively put participants at ease and guide them in discussion of even the most contentious topics.

This New Voices anthology breaks new ground by enacting a modified version of the CCGI's method of dialogue across differences as a basis for a collaborative, dialogical method to do theology and ethics around some of the most tragic contexts of women's experiences, especially suffering and resistance; some of the most contested contexts in which women scholars put their wisdom to work, namely, in higher education; and some of the most challenging contexts in which women witness to more just ways of life together in the church and the world, namely, at the intersections of religion and public life. "The presence and voices of women, therefore, still evoke some of the most hope-filled yet also the most contested possibilities for inquiry."[12] Thus, this book emphasizes the rich sociopolitical, dialogical, and interdisciplinary implications of Catholic women's intellectual and social praxis in contemporary theology and ethics.

A Chorus of New Voices

This collection brings together a diverse group of women scholars—Euro-American, Latina, African American, Asian American—who represent diverse approaches to theology and ethics (virtue ethics, social ethics, sexual ethics, constructive theology, practical theology, public theology) and who practice in their essays and in their conversations an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on Scripture studies, aesthetics, globalization, history, pedagogy, politics, psychology, postmodern studies, sociology, spirituality, and race and gender studies. Each chapter combines theology or ethics on the one hand with insights from one or more disciplinary perspectives on the other hand. Each essay's twofold task is (1) to utilize those sources to critically reflect on and confront particular contexts of contemporary women's experiences with regard to suffering and resistance, academia and higher education, and religion and public life, and (2) to explore as well as appraise women's creative approaches, both religious and practical, and to enhance women's and wider human well-being, understood as "reciprocal, collaborative energy that engages us personally and communally with God, with one another, and with all of creation in such a way that power becomes synonymous with the vitality of living fully and freely."[13]

[12] Hinsdale and Kaminski, *Women and Theology*, x.

[13] Denise M. Ackerman, "Power," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 219–20.

The book is divided into three thematic sections, which address particularly significant contexts of contemporary women's experience: suffering and resistance, academia and higher education, and religion and public life. Each section provides interdisciplinary perspectives in theology and ethics on a particular theme and concludes, as noted above, with an interactive dialogue. Excerpts from Monika Hellwig's inaugural lecture grace the opening page of each section in order to provide the reader with an orienting point and organizing frame of reference for the essays in that section.

Section I, titled "Women's Experience in Context: Suffering and Resistance," features Anne O'Leary, Saint Mary's University, San Antonio, TX; Susie Paulik Babka, University of San Diego; Mary Doak, University of San Diego; and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Boston College. The conversation starter is Maureen O'Connell, Fordham University. O'Leary offers the leading essay, "Mary of Nazareth and the Mysticism of Resistance," in which she engages in a quest for the historical Mary by reclaiming the phrase "bondwoman," often mistranslated as "handmaid" in the Lukan narrative, for a deepened understanding of the reality of bondwomen in Israel and for prophetic resistance to such suffering today. Babka's essay, "Art as Witness to Sorrow: Käthe Kollwitz, Emmanuel Levinas, and Dorothee Sölle," offers a theological aesthetics rooted in postmodern ethics regarding the role of art and prayer as modes of witness to suffering, with particular attention to poverty and to maternal grief. Doak's contribution, "Trafficked: Sex Slavery and the Reign of God," identifies and reflects on the ecclesiological, eschatological, and christological responses to globalized sex trafficking, slavery, and trade in women and children. Pineda-Madrid's "Feminicide and the Reinvention of Religious Practices" explores the Ciudad Juárez feminicide of girls and young women, which demands a more adequate account of historical salvation. Pineda-Madrid's essay argues that practices of resistance in response to the feminicide forge a new, emancipatory space that bears theological and political significance for understanding salvation as a social, collective reality.

Conversation starter Maureen O'Connell opens the dialogue by noting a common theme in these four essays: the power of women's resistance to suffering, both individually and communally. What follows is an energetic, insightful, and respectful conversation among the four essayists and O'Connell. The conversation reflects mainly upon theology and ethics, but the focus varies and includes systematic theology, practical

theological methodology, biblical theology, and the interface of theology and the visual arts. Readers will note how effectively they build on each other's ideas and commentaries. For example, Doak appreciates Babka's understanding of theological aesthetics as an affirmation of human dignity. Doak, who explores the theological implications of the tragedy of global sex trafficking, finds Babka's analysis particularly helpful. Indeed, Doak expresses her determination to incorporate the notion of human dignity to an even greater extent in her own work as a result of this conversation. The level of mutual support in this conversation is high; yet it does not prevent the participants from posing challenging questions to each other during the good-natured conversation.

Section II, titled "Women's Wisdom in Context: Academia and Higher Education," flows easily from the first, moving from an identification and analysis of key issues into a consideration of the academic vocation that will address these issues. Featured in this section are Mary M. Doyle Roche, College of the Holy Cross; LaReine-Marie Mosely, Loyola University Chicago; Emily Reimer-Barry, University of San Diego; and Bridget Burke Ravizza, Saint Norbert College. In "Virtues and Voices: Building Solidarity among Women Scholars," Roche offers a feminist virtue theory of "listening for voice," in conversation with sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, that enables expansive circles of solidarity among scholars and among students. Roche considers the importance of women's voices, women sharing their experiences, and the moral wisdom discerned through those experiences for feminist theology and ethics. Feminist theorists in other disciplines have also highlighted the importance of voice and narrative for understanding the complexity and nuance of many social issues. The technological age has presented new opportunities and obstacles for communicating experience, and feminist theologians can play a pivotal role in articulating the virtues required to build and sustain relationships of solidarity in this context. Mosely's "The Conundrums of Newer Catholic Women Theologians" analyzes aspects of the postmodern times in which newer theologians are situated—the contested meanings of the Second Vatican Council, the impact of the worldwide clergy sexual abuse scandal on the church's moral and social credibility, and the investigations of perceived-to-be-problematic persons. At this crossroads, there are also positive signs—for example, Elizabeth Johnson's instructive response to the US bishops' doctrinal committee and that committee's invitation to dialogue with pretenure theologians. Turning to the life praxis of Maude Petre, an intellectual friend

of George Tyrell, Mosely's essay draws some instructive lessons from English Catholic modernism to shed light on ways newer theologians can navigate the troubled waters of the twenty-first-century church in postmodern times. Reimer-Barry reflects on the context of faith formation not only in liturgical but also in other familial, educational, and social settings. Her essay, "Suffering or Flourishing? Marriage and the Imitation of Christ," provides a feminist response to the US bishops' pastoral letter on marriage, drawing out the letter's implications of Jesus' death on the cross as a model for marital love, particularly the implications of an uncritical acceptance of suffering for women. Ravizza's essay, "Feminism a Must: Catholic Sexual Ethics for Today's College Classroom," outlines components of and concrete examples from a course in Catholic sexual ethics that is informed by feminism and sociology and that speaks meaningfully to both scholars and students alike, without reinforcing theories that either equate girls' moral purity with their virginity or disconnect sexual behaviors from our morality.

The participants in this section are theologians and ethicists with diverse areas of expertise, such as Catholic ethics and social teaching, Catholic feminism, women's/gender studies, and African American studies. They are invited into conversation by conversation starter Michele Saracino, Manhattan College. They begin with a discussion of the distinction between listening "to" voices (listening to those already involved in the conversation in some way) and listening "for" voices (seeking out those who have yet to be engaged in the conversation). Participants reflect on the impact listening has on themselves personally, on their teaching practices, and on their theology or ethics. The conversation is enriched by the racial diversity in the group as they grapple with racial issues. These Catholic women scholars seek ways to remain in dialogue with the magisterium while continuing to explore ways of transforming the tradition with creative fidelity.

Section III, titled "Women's Witness in Context: Religion and Public Life," focuses on the work of Nancy Dallavalle, Fairfield University; Rachel Bundang, Marymount School; Kristin Heyer, Santa Clara University; and Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College. Dallavalle leads the section with her essay, "Icons and Integrity: Catholic Women in the Church and in the Public Square." Dallavalle builds on Karl Rahner's insight that the story of women falls to women to tell, in order to recount an institutional history of Catholic women in the church through three key icons: "mother" for the institution of the family, "cantor" for

the institution of the laity, and "sister" for the institution of the church. Bundang's essay, "Bridget Jones, Cancer Patient: On Navigating the Health Care System as a Singleton," identifies and explores heretofore overlooked gender and spirituality issues for single women in the US health care system, which too often privileges the worth of attached (i.e., married and familied) women. Heyer's essay, "Reservoirs of Hope: Catholic Women's Witness," reflects on the role of women religious, especially those involved in NETWORK and in current US health care reform debates, with a particular focus on their external advocacy and internal operational witness for conscientious discernment and for prophetic obedience. Carbine concludes the third section with "The Beloved Community: Transforming Spaces for Social Change and for Cosmopolitan Citizenship." In this essay, Carbine examines the emergence of the notion of the beloved community in the Civil Rights Movement and the reemergence of this notion in the New Sanctuary Movement, with particular attention to how these movements for equality across racial and national lines transform political and ecclesial spaces for the purpose of social, gender, and global justice.

To launch a conversation among the ethicists and theologians in this section, historian Mary Henold of Roanoke College identifies three common themes in their essays: individuals and institutions (primarily Catholic) who advocate for the poor, the victims of injustice, or the marginalized; the willingness to enter public spaces that are fraught with risk; and the formulation of particular religious and political constructs that promote human flourishing. As a historian, Henold shares with the group her concern regarding the current attempts by the institutional church to perpetuate misguided understandings about Catholic women's identity—a concern expressed by Dallavalle and others as well. This lively conversation is enriched by the mix of reflections on Catholic sisters and laywomen, both single and in committed relationships. The discussion of ecclesiological issues is particularly enlightening as participants grapple with the highly complex nature of the institutional church's identity and sociopolitical impact.

Concluding the volume is an essay by Colleen Griffith, Boston College. In her "Dialogue, the Pearl of Great Price," Griffith notes that each essay in the book elaborates a way of doing theology and ethics in dialogue with specific disciplines and localities to address women's real-life issues pertaining to suffering and resistance, education, and public life. She explores resources in the fields of practical theology, interreligious under-

standing, and pastoral care to advance the notion of evocative listening, in part modeled on and by the book's dialogues that conclude each section.

Hope in Dialogue across Disciplines and Differences

This collection of essays about women, wisdom, and witness is the product of a group of women scholars who recognize the potential of genuine dialogue to further the greater good of all. A dialogical process has informed the shape of this book from its beginning. In this respect, members of the New Voices Seminar carry forward the wisdom and witness of the sixteen Madeleva lecturers who gathered at Saint Mary's College in 2000 for their convergence conference. At the dawn of the new millennium, the group formulated the "Madeleva Manifesto." The powerful message emerged from the dialogue engaged in by these senior women scholars over a period of several days.

Both the manifesto and this collection were birthed at historically critical turning points. The manifesto was published a year before the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and the advent of the US war on terrorism, as well as the early unfolding of the worldwide sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. Ten years later, *Women, Wisdom, and Witness* debuts in a seriously polarized church and in a world wracked with political turmoil abroad and political gridlock at home. Arguably, there has never been a time of greater need for genuine dialogue among Catholics themselves, among nations of the world, or between the Catholic Church and other societal institutions, both religious and secular.

In the 1990s, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago was keenly aware of a growing crisis within the church. Shortly before his death in 1996, he established the Catholic Common Ground Initiative primarily "to help Catholics address, creatively and faithfully, questions that are vital if the church in the United States is to flourish as we enter the next millennium."[14] Fifteen years later, the initiative is reenergizing itself. It holds great promise as it affirms and promotes the full range and demands of authentic unity, acceptable diversity, and respectful dialogue, not only as a way to dampen conflicts but also as a way to make conflicts constructive. For those doing theology and ethics and those who are interested, for example, in exploring effective ways for the church to bring its rich

[14] See the CCGI founding documents at www.catholiccommonground.org.

tradition to bear on the public square and also to be appropriately influenced by social change itself, the CCGI has much to offer.

The significance of genuine dialogue about contested contexts functions as the central theme of this book. In the process of writing it, the contributors themselves became more aware of dialogue as a promising locus for collaboration, with a view toward effectively addressing and helping to solve some of the most pertinent crises in the church and civil society. The emerging new voices speak with clarity, conviction, and courage while listening to (and for) other voices. Such dialogical collaboration bodes well for the future of theology and ethics, for the church, and for society.

Acknowledgments

A book of this kind demands a collective and collaborative effort to reach fruition. The coeditors thank the donors to Saint Mary's College who made possible the annual New Voices Seminar since its inception in 2004 through 2010. Michelle Egan, associate director of the Center for Spirituality, and Kathy Guthrie, assistant at the Center for Spirituality, coordinated all logistics for this annual seminar. Michelle Egan copy-edited the entire manuscript, and Kathy Guthrie cooperated with IT at Saint Mary's College to facilitate recording and transcribing conversations among contributors that appear in the book. Kathleen appreciates Rosemary's expertise and learned a great deal about the inner workings of the editing process. Rosemary, together with the contributors, is indebted to Kathleen's insight into gathering resources and creating the cohort for the annual seminar, which originally inspired and sustained this project. To all New Voices who accompanied us in past seminars and who will benefit from future seminars, we say—in the words of the "Madeleva Manifesto"—"You are not alone. We remember those who have gone before us, who first held up for us the pearl of great price, the richness of Catholic thought and spirituality. We give thanks to those who continue to mentor us. To the young women of the church we say: carry forward the cause of gospel feminism. We will be with you along the way, sharing what we have learned about the freedom, joy and power of contemplative intimacy with God. We ask you to join us in a commitment to far-reaching transformation of church and society in non-violent ways."

Section I

Women's Experience in Context

Suffering and Resistance

When we try to make such a communal discernment of vocation for Christian women within the North American situation in our own days, then we must certainly take into account the wealth that is at our disposal, the extent to which we have been liberated from back-breaking, soul-destroying, exhausting physical work, the civic rights and participation which we enjoy, the educational advantages which we have had, and the world of desperate needs which surround us in our times. . . . We therefore have unprecedented opportunities to participate actively in the affairs of the larger society through volunteer work, through professional or business careers and through political activity. There is also no doubt that the educational advantages we have enjoyed equip us for acquiring a good understanding of issues concerning peace and the continuing armaments buildup, and issues concerning the plight of the poor, the oppressed, refugees, political prisoners, and populations undergoing famine.

It is, then, above all a time for individual and communal discernment on the part of Christian women of our times who have enjoyed a privileged education and are placed within the economically privileged, relatively leisured class in a democratically organized society that offers women great social freedom and, on the whole, great respect. Because it is a time of rapid changes in

society and rapid communication across the whole world, the call for continuing discernment moves swiftly from crisis to crisis, opportunity to opportunity, and human need to human need. . . .

The suffering of such systemic exclusion of those who have gone before us with whom we can readily identify, by those in other contemporary cultures with whom we must try to identify, and by those among us whose gifts and calling are not acknowledged or honored, is an experiential basis for working toward a clearer understanding of what it is that is awry in our world. It is an experiential basis for an understanding of compassion as a redemptive answer to all that is awry. To enter deeply into the experience of the other, of any other, without exclusion or discrimination is indeed to unravel the apparently unredeemable hatreds, oppressions, and miseries of our world.

—Monika Hellwig, *Christian Women in a Troubled World*, 32–34, 42–43

Mary of Nazareth and the Mysticism of Resistance

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In this essay, I invite you to join me in looking through one small "opening" that the Gospel of Luke provides through which we may glimpse something of the person and life context (*Sitz im Leben*) of Mary of Nazareth (b. ca. 10 BCE) and the mysticism of resistance that she proclaims.[1] This opening is first found in Luke's account of the annunciation (cf. Luke 1:26-38), specifically in the metaphor that Mary uses to describe her relationship with God at the time the angel visits her with news of God's extraordinary mission for her. Mary responds to Gabriel's announcement by saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid [lit. "bondwoman"] of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).[2]

The author of Luke tells us that after Mary's visit to her kinswoman Elizabeth, she sings a prophetic song, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), in

[1] The first version of this essay was given as a public lecture at the Church of Saint Peter Chanel, Dunedin, New Zealand (June 11, 2009), in response to the invitation by Sister Noreen McGrath, PBVM, and the Presentation Sisters, New Zealand/Aotearoa, to mark the 225th anniversary celebrations in honor of the death of Nano Nagle (1718–84), the founder for the Presentation Sisters. The second and only other version was written as a lecture delivered during the International Presentation Sisters' Charism and Spirituality Retreat, Aberdeen, South Dakota, August 8, 2010.

[2] All biblical quotations are from the *New American Bible* unless otherwise indicated. Saint Mary's Press, *College Study Bible*: *New American Bible, Including the Revised Psalms and the Revised New Testament, Translated from the Original Languages with Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2006).

which she uses the same metaphor to describe her relationship with the Lord. Mary sings:

> My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
> my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
> For he has looked upon his handmaid's [bondwoman's] lowliness;
> behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. (Luke 1:46-48)

Thus, Mary is the Lord's "lowly bondwoman."

The Greek term for "bondwoman" (*hē doulē*) has usually been translated as "handmaid," corresponding to the Vulgate's rendition of Mary's response: *Ecce ancilla Domini*. This translation and much subsequent interpretation, combined with the portrayal of Mary by the artists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as a handmaid of a lady of means or status, have done much to tame the harsh historical reality of the bondage of Mary's day[3] and to cloak the theological richness generated by the term "bondwoman" that Luke places on the lips of Mary.

This essay is in part about recovering something that has been lost in translation, and it will show that a study of the Lukan portrayal of Mary of Nazareth through the hermeneutic of bondage brings into relief the prophetic dimension of her spirituality and, in particular, the mysticism of resistance. I draw on Dorothee Sölle's description of the terms "mysticism" and "resistance." Sölle describes mysticism thus: "As the experience of oneness with God, mysticism is the radical substantiation of the dignity of a human being."[4] She describes resistance as the positive, proactive opposition to anything that reduces a human being "into that of a consuming and producing machine that neither needs nor is capable of God."[5]

We begin the quest of recovery and demonstration of the thesis by engaging in three hermeneutical methods: first, the hermeneutic of social location[6]—in this case, the world of Nazareth, Galilee. Would bondmen

[3] S. Scott Bartchy, "Slavery: New Testament," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al., vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 66.

[4] Dorothee Sölle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 43.

[5] Ibid., 44. See also Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 255.

[6] The hermeneutical methods employed in this essay are based on the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). See also Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 213.

and bondwomen have come from Nazareth in Mary's day? What did it mean to be a bondwoman then? Was Mary ever a bondwoman, literally speaking? To respond to this question, we will examine the geographical, socioeconomic, and political environment in which this first-century Jewish woman lived. This will provide a context for the second aspect of our quest, which is to engage in the hermeneutic of critical evaluation—that is, we will examine how the way in which Luke tells the story of the annunciation impacts its theological import or message in relation to Mary. This will lead us to respond to the questions: How does the term "bondwoman" that Mary uses function theologically? What does it tell us about her person and her spirituality? We conclude our quest of recovery and demonstration by engaging the hermeneutic of transformative action for change. We will reflect on how the study of Mary's song, or *Magnificat*, can inspire a mysticism of resistance appropriate to our time and place. This will lead us to respond to the question: How can a study of Mary of Nazareth and the mysticism of resistance speak to us today—personally and corporately?

Significance of the Study

The problem of "the missing Bible." Why quest for glimpses into the historical Mary and the historical reality in which she lived? My response to this question is threefold. First, while we have a rich tradition of honoring the person of Mary and presenting her to the world, that tradition is often solely or primarily focused on Marian doctrines, dogmas, and devotions. Understandably, from the Reformation (sixteenth century) up to the Second Vatican Council (twentieth century) within Catholicism, the Bible was regarded as a peculiarly "Protestant book." Instead, Catholic theology stressed the sacraments and what was handed down in tradition. However, all doctrines, dogmas, and devotions to Mary must be grounded in and complemented by an understanding of the historical person Mary of Nazareth as portrayed in the New Testament. In the words of the Pontifical International Marian Academy, "Marian devotion . . . must have a deep biblical imprint."[7] We need to take hold anew of the Scriptures and in doing so find again the biblical Mary. Indeed, one

[7] The Pontifical International Marian Academy, *The Mother of the Lord: Memory, Presence, Hope* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 2007), 76.

of the hallmarks of Catholicism, especially since the modern period, is attentiveness to approaching theological questions with a historical consciousness. We take as a basic principle that God has in the past worked through human history and the history of the cosmos, continues to do so in the present, and promises to do so in the future. Therefore, the quest for the historical Mary is, in fact, a theological quest, a quest for the God of history who raises up prophets of resistance in history.

The problem of excesses in relation to Mary. Second, non-Catholics who observe the cult of Mary in various parts of the world perceive that Catholics have made Mary the fourth person of the Trinity—forming "a quaternity in God."[8] And while we might smugly dismiss their misunderstanding, we must also hear its challenge. The theologians of Vatican II recognized this issue and furnished us with a wise caution: the church "exhorts theologians and preachers of the divine word to abstain zealously both from all gross exaggerations as well as from petty narrow-mindedness in considering the singular dignity of the Mother of God."[9] Moreover, all believers are asked to "assiduously keep away from whatever, either by word or deed, could lead separated brethren or any other into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church."[10] To those who say that Mary appears to be more important than Christ in Catholic tradition, we take another basic principle of Vatican II, namely, that "the Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary's to Christ."[11] The ongoing study of Mary in the Scriptures is one of the ways in which the church redresses any excesses—theological and devotional—that may have emerged in relation to her. In the New Testament, the portrayal of Mary is always directly linked to the identity of her son, Jesus, as the Christ. Therefore, the quest for the historical Mary is ultimately a christological quest, a quest for the prophetic dimension of the Christ.

The problem of the conflation of the role of Mary and that of the Holy Spirit. Third and finally, the Holy Spirit has sometimes been regarded by

[8] John Van Den Hengel, "Miriam of Nazareth: Between Symbol and History," in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 139.

[9] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), 8:67. All quotations from the Vatican II Documents are from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council.

[10] Ibid. See the Pontifical International Marian Academy, *The Mother of the Lord*, 68.

[11] *Lumen Gentium*, 8:62.

scholars outside the Roman Catholic tradition as the "poor relation" in the Catholic theology of the Trinity. The weaker promotion of the role of the Spirit in the West, relative to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, coupled with the great Roman Catholic regard for Mary, has led to the problem that sometimes the Spirit's functions become attributed to Mary.[12] John Van Den Hengel observes this conflation and writes, "One needs to look only at the Litany of Loreto to recognize in 'ark of the covenant, seat of wisdom, tower of David, advocate of sinners, consoler of the oppressed' titles that originally pertained to the Spirit (or the Church) rather than to Mary."[13] What Mary achieves for us is through the power of the selfsame Sophia-Spirit that hovered over her in Nazareth. Therefore, the quest for the historical Mary is a pneumatological or Spirit-oriented one, a quest for signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in and through the agency of prophets in history.

The Phenomenon of Bondage in Galilee

Would bondmen and women have come from Nazareth in Mary's day? Nazareth was an isolated village nestled in the hills of southern Galilee with a population of approximately three hundred to four hundred people at the turn of the century CE. In the Gospel of John, Philip tells Nathanael, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth" (John 1:45). Recall Nathanael's pejorative response: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Why was it that Nazareth was disregarded by Jews from elsewhere?

The Hebrew Scriptures never mention this village, nor does the famous first-century historian Josephus (ca. 37–100 CE), nor does the Talmud. Absence of mention suggests absence of importance. Because archaeologists have found nothing in their digs at Nazareth that "suggests wealth,"[14] we plausibly conclude that Mary and most of her fellow townsmen and women belonged to the lower of the two main classes,

[12] With regard to the West, Elizabeth Johnson notes the tendency of "forgetting the Spirit" and comments that, "for whatever reason, theology of the Spirit remained in an embryonic state." See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 128.

[13] Van Den Hengel, "Miriam of Nazareth," 139. See also ibid., 129.

[14] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 141.

the peasant class. The lower class constituted 90 percent of the population nationally, and they struggled to survive. The remaining 10 percent constituted the upper class, who lived mostly in the country's urban areas.

Bondage was a widespread phenomenon in Galilee and all of Israel before, during, and after Mary's lifetime and that of her son, Jesus (ca. 4 BCE–26 CE). At Traichae in Galilee, in 53 BCE, just decades before Mary was born, Peitholaus (n.d.), an aristocrat from Jerusalem (and second in command to the high priest Hyrcanus II [79–40 BCE]), rose up against Roman occupation but was defeated by Cassius Longinus (85–42 BCE). According to Josephus, Peitholaus was killed and "30,000 men were reputedly sold into slavery."[15] This degree of enslavement does not seem atypical in the Ancient Near East (ANE). Hebrew Bible scholar Muhammad A. Dandamayev notes that, for example,

> When the Babylonian captivity ended and the Jews returned to their homeland after the Persians had captured Mesopotamia, the adult composition of the repatriated people was as follows: out of 42,360 persons (30,000 of them men), the number of slaves and slave women came to 7,337, i.e., between one-fifth and one-sixth of the number of free people.[16]

In the first century BCE, Galilee was a predominantly rural province populated by communities of peasants (Hb., *am ha-'arets*). Historical-critical scholar Séan Freyne's research finds that "in all probability a good portion of Palestine, north and south, was in the hands of the king [Herod the Great, b. ca. 73 BCE] or his agents."[17] Moreover, as a result of triple taxation, "taxes and rents flowed relentlessly away from the rural producers to the storehouses of cities (especially Rome), private estates, and temples."[18] Taxes included 10 percent of the harvest to be given as tribute to the priests of the temple, to the Roman emperor, and to King

[15] Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities* 14:119f, and *Jewish War* 1:180, Loeb Classical Library, vols. 1 and 3, trans. H. St. J. Thakery, R. Marcus, and L. H. Fledman (London: Heinemann, 1925–65), cited in Séan Freyne, *Galilee: From Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 BCE to 135 CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 2000), 60; see also 93n13.

[16] Muhammad A. Dandamayev, "Slavery: Old Testament," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 64.

[17] Freyne, *Galilee*, 156.

[18] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 144; see also 144n21.

Herod, not counting what was demanded by the tax collectors.[19] Though free in theory, the peasants in this province were, in reality, caught up in a type of collective bondage: "These natives are 'bound to the soil' so that ownership of the land in question means ownership of its inhabitants and thus their position is best described as 'bondsmen.'"[20]

The impact of decades of collective bondage was the great impoverishment of families that was compounded for many by their subsequent defaulting on debts. It often resulted in one or more members being sold into bondage. Jewish law scholar Ronald L. Eisenberg notes that there were largely two ways in which a Hebrew male could be sold into slavery. A free man could choose to sell himself to escape from extreme poverty (cf. Lev 25:39), becoming a member of the household of another and earning his food and shelter through his labor. A thief might be sold by the court to raise funds to pay his victims (cf. Exod 21:2). In relation to females, until a girl reached puberty, "an impoverished father had the right to 'sell' her to a wealthy family as a bondwoman,"[21] where she would be "used primarily for household tasks requiring neither skill nor extensive supervision."[22] Removing a member from a household was intended not only to benefit the family of origin economically but to secure a future for the bonded female. Fathers sold their young daughters to the masters of upper-class homes in the designer-built cities of Herod the Great near Nazareth, such as Sepphoris.

Among first-century CE Jews, "an extremely frequent phenomenon was the selling of daughters as slaves by their fathers" (cf. Exod 21:7).[23] As a father may sell his daughter "only when he has no other means of subsistence left,"[24] it indicates the extent of impoverishment at this time. Moreover, by the time of the birth of Jesus (ca. 4 BCE), "the children of women in slavery had become the primary source of slaves."[25]

[19] Ibid., 148.

[20] Freyne, *Galilee*, 161; see also 161n29.

[21] Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The 613 Mitzvot: A Contemporary Guide to the Commandments of Judaism* (Rockville, MD: Schreiber, 2008), 135.

[22] Dandamayev, "Slavery: Old Testament," 65.

[23] E. Urbach, "The Laws Concerning Slavery as a Source for Social History of the Period of the Second Temple, the Mishna and the Talmud" (London: Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies, 1964), 15-18, cited in Bartchy, "Slavery: New Testament," 67.

[24] Haim Hermann Cohn, "Slavery," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, vol. 18 (Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), 669.

[25] Bartchy, "Slavery: New Testament," 67.

What did it mean to be a "bondwoman," then? Selling a young (i.e., premenses) daughter offered a way of guaranteeing her virginity.[26] Because "the owner of the slaves owned the bodies and not just the work of the persons in slavery [it] meant that slaves were regarded as sexually available without restriction."[27] Moreover, the initial sale of a young girl into bondage was to result in her marriage to the master or the master's son. Upon marriage, the bondwoman was "not to be treated any differently than a free woman" in the household (cf. Exod 21:10).[28] However, as the story of Sarah and Hagar indicates, likely this was observed more in the breach than in the occurrence (cf. Gen 16:4-6).

If a bondwoman enjoyed an improved domestic status upon marriage, she also carried great responsibilities, especially that of being biologically generative in bearing a son. Any sons born to her were to "inherit her *ketubah*, in addition to their share with their half-brothers in his [the master's] estate."[29] Any daughters born of a bondwoman should receive maintenance until the time came to be betrothed. If, however, a master refused to marry the bondwoman, or to have her marry his son, he must allow her father to redeem her in private for a minimal, token sum of money, which spared the loss of dignity for her and her family.[30] The master could not be permitted to ever forget that his own people were once slaves in Egypt (cf. Deut 24:18).

It is not surprising that the grief caused by the breakup and sometimes remaking of families as a result of bondage, coupled with the crippling burden of taxation, stretched to the limit the social fabric of the com-

[26] The attractiveness of girl slaves was centuries old: "As was characteristic of other ANE societies, captive men, boys and even women were often put to death and only girls were sent into slavery (Num 31:9-18). Thus, during one military campaign there were captured 67,500 head of sheep, 72,000 head of cattle, 61,000 asses, and 32,000 girls (Num 31:32-35)." See Dandamayev, "Slavery: Old Testament," 63.

[27] Bartchy, "Slavery: New Testament," 69. Susan Elliot writes: "Part of what it means to be a slave is to have no relational 'nexus,' to relate in one direction only: 'vertically' as an extension of the master." See Susan M. Elliot, "John 15:15—Not Slaves but Friends: Slavery and Friendship Imagery and the Clarification of the Disciples' Relationship to Jesus in the Johannine Farewell Discourse," *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 13 (1993): 39. See also Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 255.

[28] Eisenberg, *The 613 Mitzvot*, 287.

[29] Ibid., 288.

[30] See Cohn, "Slavery," 668.

munities of Galilee and beyond. It evoked resistance among the poor against the authors of their suffering. Freyne observes:

> Lack of access to sources of production can cause not just poverty, but an awareness that the condition "is not merely a matter of *poor* times but of *evil* times."[31] Such a breakthrough of consciousness in which the legitimacy of the existing authority is challenged and the right not to be oppressed asserted seems *a priori* at least, to be more likely among those who have absolutely nothing to lose.[32]

Such breakthroughs of consciousness did occur among the people and resulted in the raising up of dissenting voices, at times with some effect. One aspect that endeared King Herod to Rome, likely to the same degree that it generated hatred among the poor, was his ability to stop at nothing in order to raise extra tribute.[33] However, under pressure "from below,"[34] he granted a tax relief in 20 BCE and "remitted one third of the taxes of the people of his kingdom 'under the pretext of letting them recover from a period of lack of crops.'"[35] It marked a small but significant foreshadowing that the mighty elite would be "cast down from their thrones" (Luke 1:52), albeit sometimes in incremental steps. Such resistance to the oppression induced by the pain of bondage and poverty would explode again (37–34 BCE) upon the death of Herod, when Jesus was but an infant, and during the first Jewish revolt in 70 CE.[36]

So in our quest of recovery and demonstration, we can now ask, *was Mary ever a bondwoman, literally speaking*? The peasant class reflected a certain degree of stratification. While the majority of peasants worked the land, about 5 percent of them were artisans or craftspeople. Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, belonged to this class. Matthew records how people in Jesus' hometown dismissed him, asking rhetorically, "Is he not the carpenter's [*tekton*] son?" (Matt 13:55; cf. Mark 6:3).

[31] S. Mintz, "The Rural Proletariat and the Problem of Rural Proletarian Consciousness," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1974): 315, cited in Freyne, *Galilee*, 197.

[32] Freyne, *Galilee*, 197.

[33] Ibid., 64, 66, 191. See also Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 153.

[34] "Jewish resistance to Roman rule, then, was more than a people's generic resistance to a state oppression. In both religious-cultural and economic-political senses, the lordship of Caesar conflicted in a particularly poignant way with the traditional Jewish religious loyalties." See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 166.

[35] Freyne, *Galilee*, 178, citing Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15:365.

[36] Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:56, and *Jewish Antiquities* 17:27ff, cited in Freyne, *Galilee*, 123.

Artisans such as Joseph often had an even lower median income than the tenant peasants, as they could not guarantee continuous labor.[37] Thus, as is often still the case, "class marries class." Mary's betrothal to Joseph indicates that she was certainly on the lower side of the social divide, one step above the degraded class and two steps above the lowest class of all, the unclean.[38]

Was Mary ever sold into bondage, though? Could her father have sold her and later redeemed her from a disinterested owner before making a match with Joseph? Although a possible scenario, there is little evidence to support it. Therefore, when Mary speaks of being "a bondwoman of the Lord" (Luke 1:38) and being the Lord's "lowly bondwoman" (Luke 1:48), it is more plausible to conclude that she is speaking metaphorically. However, her metaphor derives from her social location, from the all too familiar and burdensome reality of the members of her degraded class, who were sold into bondage for their own families' survival or bought back in mock redemptions when their services were no longer required by their masters.

It was in an environment of hardship and suffering that Mary's spirituality and sensibilities were fashioned. In such a matrix, she would have learned compassion[39] and that the essence of the role of a bondwoman was the ability to listen, to listen often, and to listen deeply. A young girl listens to her lowly father arranging to sell her to a wealthy master; upon moving to the master's household, she must learn to listen to the master's instructions and those of his wife, children, sons, and chief bondwomen. In listening and observing, she must anticipate the needs, including those unspoken, of those around her and respond accordingly.

Mary, Bondwoman of the Lord

How does the term "bondwoman" that Mary uses function theologically? What does it tell us about her person and her spirituality? Luke's account of the annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) is fashioned according to the literary conventions used in narratives about the commissioning of a prophet and in birth announcements. From a study of the prophetic

[37] See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 192.

[38] See ibid., 146.

[39] Gk., *sumpaschō*, lit. "suffer with." See 1 Cor 12:26: "If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy" (cf. Rom 8:17).

call narratives of Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah, Gerard Meagher detects six constitutive elements that are common to these call narratives. They are as follows: (1) the sign, (2) the divine confrontation, (3) the introductory word, (4) the commission, (5) the objection, and (6) the reassurance. He sets them out in tabular form thus:[40]

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Moses	Ex 3:1-12	1-4a	4b-9	10	11	12a	12b
Jeremiah	Jr 1:4-10	4	5a	5b	6	7-8	9-10
Isaiah	Is 6:1-13	1-2	3-7	8-10	11a	11b-13	
Ezekiel	Ez 1:1–3:11	1:1-28	2:1-2	2:3-5	(2:6-8)	2:6-7	2:8–3:11
Dt-Isaiah	Is 40:1-11		1-2	3-6a	6b-7	8-11	
Luke[41]	Lk 1:26-36	26	27-30	31-33	34	35	36

By using the prophetic call form, Luke is indicating clearly that Mary "is engaged for a prophetic task, one in a long line of God-sent deliverers positioned at significant junctures in Israel's history."[42]

Elizabeth Johnson finds five elements common to the prophetic call narratives and the birth narratives of the Old Testament such as the birth of Samson (cf. Judg 13–16):

> First, an angel or some other form of messenger from heaven appears with a greeting. Next, the recipient reacts with fear or awe and is encouraged not to be afraid. Third, central to the story, the announcement itself declares God's intent and gives a glimpse of what the future outcome will be. Fourth, the recipient offers an objection: How so? Fifth, the story ends with a sign of divine power that reassures the recipient.[43]

[40] Gerard Meagher, "The Prophetic Call Narrative," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (1972): 169.

[41] This row is added by this author. See also Meagher, "The Prophetic Call Narrative," 175.

[42] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 250. See also Meagher, "The Prophetic Call Narrative," 177.

[43] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister,* 249; see also 248, 250.

Notably, Luke's account of the annunciation has an extra element:[44] Mary's *consent* to Gabriel's invitation and her self-declaration that she is "a bondwoman of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).[45] The added element provides a glimpse into Luke's theological agenda.

Luke's added element serves to portray Mary as a "mature woman, who had a mind and will of her own."[46] In the words of Cleo McNelly Kearns, Mary's freely offered and audible consent to the Lord "shows a decided aspect of negotiation."[47] She writes further:

> Although she is giving full consent, the text makes clear that she is not simply writing a blank check in response to this angel and his news of sudden, dangerous, and irregular conception. . . . The phrase "according to your word," with which Mary qualifies her fiat, invokes, then, a covenantal and socially authorized relationship. In countersigning that covenant, Mary indicates her understanding that the assurances she has been given here are not mere promises of the earthly and mortal propagation of the species, but of the propagation of eternal holiness, the child will not simply be a human infant but also the Son of God.[48]

Such audible negotiation contrasts with the silence and absence of any freedom to negotiate or dialogue that bondwomen ordinarily endured, when, from the outset, their lives were determined by the say-so of male authority figures—their fathers, masters, masters' sons, male offspring, and priests.[49] A bondwoman was not granted freedom during the yearlong

[44] "In none of the twenty-seven Hebrew commissionings [of a prophet] . . . and none of the nine other New Testament commissionings . . . are the commissioned ones depicted as assenting verbally and directly to their commission." See Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 131, cited in Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 254.

[45] *Kyriou* means literally "master" or "lord." Johnson and others have indicated that "the relationship signified by this phrase 'handmaid of the Lord' is thus enormously problematic in feminist and womanist theology." However, a study of the tradition of interpretation of this title for God by Mary is beyond the scope of this essay. See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 254.

[46] Ibid., 256.

[47] Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 149.

[48] Ibid., 149; see also 154.

[49] See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 256, contra Meagher, who states that the "modification is slight." See Meagher, "The Prophetic Call Narrative," 177. Susan Elliot writes: "Part of

Sabbath rest on the seventh year, nor on the year of the great Jubilee, as the law required that she must become betrothed to the master or his son. Upon marriage, she must become part of her betrothed's household and bear her betrothed's offspring. Moreover, Luke's added element serves to portray something of the nature of God. We learn that "divine freedom does not override created freedom but waits upon our free response which, in a theology of grace, God has already made possible,"[50] thereby substantiating the dignity given us as human beings.

We get a further insight into Luke's theological agenda from the angel's greeting to Mary. Luke has Gabriel (Hb., lit. "strength of God") address her by her Hebrew name, Miriam. Here one might ask, what is in a name? Deirdre Good's interesting study "What Does It Mean to Call Mary Mariam?" finds that "50% of all Jewish women in the Second Temple and early Rabbinic periods in Judea and Galilee were called Mariamme (Miriam) or Salome."[51] However, Luke only uses the Hebrew version of the name for the mother of Jesus and calls the other Marys mentioned in the gospel by the Greek name Maria (cf. Mary Magdalene, 8:2; Martha's sister, Mary, 10:39, 42; Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, 24:10).[52] This naming of Mary requires further attention.

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what it means to be a slave is to have no relational 'nexus,' to relate in one direction only: 'vertically' as an extension of the master" ("John 15:15—Not Slaves but Friends," 39).

[50] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 254. McNelly Kearns's comment is insightful: "Furthermore, as Robert Magliola has pointed out, to see Mary as having said a simple yes *tour de court* at this point, without any degree of inquiry or understanding or consciousness of the terms at stake, would open that *yes* to serious risk. Such acquiescence would be worse than a *no* because it would suggest implications of naïveté and seduction and present her as entering blithely and without question into a relationship that could result in illusion or idolatry. Mary's position as a servant and woman makes her sexually and socially vulnerable here, but it also makes her vulnerable at a deeper level to religious idolatry and to a failure to exercise what Catholic theology would call discernment of spirits, the testing of apparent revelation against tradition and compassionate humanity." See McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary*, 150.

[51] Deirdre Good, "What Does It Mean to Call Mary Mariam?" in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 101.

[52] Ibid. Good also notes that "the specifically Lucan nomenclature 'Mariam' is also found in one other text reporting Jesus' birth, namely, the *Protoevangelium of James*." See ibid., 104.

By the use of the Hebrew name in the opening greeting of the annunciation narrative and the term "bondwoman" in Mary's response, which forms the closing element of the pericope, Luke evokes a parallelism between Miriam of Nazareth and her "eponymous ancestor"[53] Miriam of Egypt, prophet[54] and sister of Moses and Aaron. As well as a shared name, both women are linked by the reality of bondage.[55] The first Miriam knew the pain and suffering caused by the Hebrews' bondage at the hands of the powerful in Egypt. The second Miriam knew the pain and suffering caused by bondage of her villagers in Nazareth at the hands of the powerful ruling class. By framing the account of the annunciation with references that evoke the ancestor Miriam, Luke gives us a further insight into how the term "bondwoman" that Mary uses functions theologically. Thus, as well as the use of the prophetic call form, Luke's use of the Hebrew name for Mary is further evidence that he wishes to speak to the emergence of a new female prophet from Nazareth.

Susan Ackerman, in "Why Is Miriam Also among the Prophets? (And Is Zipporah among the Priests?)," draws our attention to an aspect of the timing of the prophetic vocation of Miriam of Egypt. Ackerman applies the insights of the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, in his book *Rites de passage* (1909), to the narrative of the exodus in the Hebrew Bible. His research found that when ethnic groups encounter unprecedented challenges, they undergo three stages: (1) separation, (2) margin or *limen* (from the Latin meaning "threshold"), and (3) reincorporation or reaggregation.[56] Ackerman observes that all three stages can be traced in the account of the exodus journey. Moreover, she explains why Miriam fulfills a prophetic role in Exodus 15:20, a role that was in that epoch ordinarily the preserve of men:

> [It is] because the narrative locates her prophetic identity as belonging to a liminal period of anti-structure. In narrative depictions of

[53] Ibid., 102.

[54] Four other women bear the title "prophet" in the Hebrew Bible: Deborah (Judg 4:4), the unnamed wife of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 8:3), Hulda (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22), and Noadiah (Neh 6:14). See Susan Ackerman, "Why Is Miriam Also among the Prophets? (And Is Zipporah among the Priests?)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 1 (2002): 49.

[55] We also note that, in all the times Luke mentions servants, the only instances in which he uses the term for female slave or a bondwoman are the two times he uses it in relation to Mary of Nazareth, or Miriam as he calls her (cf. Luke 1:38, 48).

[56] Ackerman, "Why Is Miriam Also among the Prophets?" 64.

> liminality, the gender conventions that more usually restrict women from holding positions of religious leadership can be suspended. Therefore Miriam can be described as occupying a position as a prophetic functionary that, outside of liminal time and space, women are generally denied.[57]

By evoking the parallelism between Miriam of Egypt and Miriam of Nazareth, Luke is indicating that this female prophet of Nazareth also stands in a liminal space where old traditions and conventions are suspended to make way for the new. Moreover, she literally becomes a liminal space in which the uncontainable God is for a time contained. She becomes "the threshold" between what God has done in the past and the radically new deed that God promises to do in and through her for the community into the future (cf. Isa 43:19).

"Prophecy implies discernment,"[58] and discernment requires deep listening, dialogue, and critical evaluation. Johnson writes, "Mary's stance is of the utmost attentiveness and the creativity which flows from it, based on a listening life."[59] Mary's dialogue emerges from a desire to discern God's promise to her through the angel. Her ability to critically evaluate has her wonder how she might embark "on the task of partnering God in the work of redemption."[60] Clearly, from the way in which Luke tells the story of the annunciation we are oriented to understand that Mary's contribution to the work of redemption will be effected in huge part through her dual vocation as prophet and mother.

Luke records in the form of a canticle, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), a further aspect of Mary's response to the invitation to embark on the task of partnering God. Through the use of this genre, he evokes another

[57] Ibid., 71.

[58] Good, "What Does It Mean to Call Mary Miriam?" 104. Mary's son would grow up to fulfill the role of redeemer (Hb., *goel*). The *goel* is one who intervenes on the part of a family when a member of the family has been sold into slavery. He is the one who buys back that enslaved person. For the portrayal of God as the divine *goel*, see Deutero-Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:3; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8.

[59] McNelly Kearns writes: "Later tradition will often assert that the fecundating moment takes place through Mary's ear, rather than her womb. The former is an organ common to both genders and associated with the reception of speech and learning, while the latter is strictly maternal and associated with preverbal stages of development." See McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary*, 149. See also Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 257n119.

[60] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 256.

parallelism between her and her ancestral namesake, Miriam of Egypt (cf. Exod 15:1-5, 20-21), and indeed with other female singers of her tradition who "sang dangerous songs of salvation."[61]

That Luke has placed on Mary's lips the longest passage spoken by any female in the entire New Testament is worthy of attention.[62] It says something important about the message and the messenger. Second, Luke fashions the canticle or song in two parts; the first part is fashioned in the style of a psalm of praise, the genre of worship and temple liturgy (Luke 1:46-50), while the second part reflects the genre of a prophetic oracle (Luke 1:51-55), the genre of those whom God lifted up to poke at people's conscience about the injustices of their day.

The first part of the *Magnificat*, Mary's song of praise, interlocks with the account of the annunciation by means of Mary's repetition of her self-description as "a bondwoman of the Lord" (Luke 1:48). In this stanza, she accentuates the metaphor by calling herself "a *lowly* bondwoman" (cf. Gen 29:32). The term used for "lowliness" by Luke (Gk., *tapeinōsis*) was also used to describe the status of her female ancestral bondwoman Hagar when seeking refuge in the wilderness after having been cast out by her jealous mistress, Sarah, upon her pregnancy through her master, Abraham (see Gen 16:9, 11). A cognate term (Gk., *kākōsin*) is used in the book of Exodus "to describe the severe affliction from which God delivers the people (Exod 3:7)."[63] By interlocking narratives thus, Luke magnifies the reasons for praise. To the reasons the Hebrews already had for praising God, including God's care of Hagar and the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, Mary has added one more, one unlike any heretofore. The God who had in the past been intimately involved in the redemption of the Hebrew people has at the present time chosen her to be mother of the Son of God. This is reason for praise indeed!

Reflecting on the link between praise and mysticism, Sölle writes:

> Mysticism's basic idea about what language can do—and what it cannot do adequately but also cannot relinquish under any circumstances—is oriented towards pure praise. While praise may have its reasons—and mingles with thanksgiving in the language

[61] Ibid., 263. See also Deborah, Judg 5:1–31; Hannah, 1 Sam 2:1–10; and Judith, Jdt 16:1–17.

[62] See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 263.

[63] Ibid., 265.

> of liturgy—in reality it always has the character of *sunder warumbe* ["without a why"].[64]

Mary praises God because God has raised her up without any regard for her earthly status as a lowly bondwoman. In this way God has substantiated her dignity. From a study of her prophecy (below), it becomes clear that she in turn envisions that others of lowly status too will be lifted up through the power of God and, in this way, will come to know the true source of their dignity and worth.

Mary's song of praise is modeled on the canticle of Hannah found in the First Book of Samuel (1 Sam 2:1-10). In this way Luke also interlocks the stories of these two women—Mary and Hannah. In the opening stanza of Hannah's song of praise, she declares her delight in God because he has ended her barrenness. The faith evidenced in the prayer and tears of this bondwoman found favor in God's sight. She who had begged God for a child, who had listened often and listened deeply in the temple for God's response, was in time blessed with a son whom she named Samson (1 Sam 1:9-18). Samson, in turn, became bonded spiritually to God. He became a Nazarite,[65] as Hannah had promised God he would, and was a blessing to the whole of Israel.

Spontaneously extolling God by means of a song of praise like that of Hannah indicates how steeped Mary was in her religious tradition. Moreover, by portraying her delight in and prophecy about her blessedness for all generations, a blessedness first affirmed by her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:42), Luke is presenting her in line with other great female ancestors who have partnered with God to deliver the people from suffering: "When Jael dispatches the enemy of the people [of Israel], the prophet Deborah utters, 'Most blessed be Jael among women' (Jdg 5:24). After Judith's spectacular defeat over the enemy general, Uzziah praises her, 'O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all other women on the earth' (Jdt 13:18)."[66] While Leah justifiably cries out with joy at the news of her pregnancy, "What good fortune, because women will

[64] Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 61.

[65] Nazarites were celibate male Jews, easily recognizable because of their long hair, who dedicated their lives to praising God in the temple. They occupied a special section of the temple in Jerusalem.

[66] Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 252.

call me fortunate!" (Gen 30:13), Mary prophesies that "all generations" will call her blessed.

The commendations of these women are similar, and the reasons given are also similar. However, the reason for the self-commendation by Mary is due to something radically greater. Mary of Nazareth delights in the blessedness to be afforded to her because it will come from those who recognize that she is the bearer of Mystery, God's very own Son (cf. Luke 1:32).

Thus, the term "bondwoman" functions theologically to tell us something of the nature of God, that the God of Mary and her ancestors is a lover of freedom. In her person, Mary has been lifted up by God. It is not surprising, then, that praise and blessing are hallmarks of her mystical journey of faith (cf. Rom 1:5).

Mary of Nazareth and the Mysticism of Resistance

How can a study of Mary of Nazareth and the mysticism of resistance speak to us today—personally and corporately? Just as a study of the genre of the prophetic call narrative was insightful in decoding Luke's portrayal of Mary as prophet of Nazareth in the annunciation story, so a study of wisdom genres in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles alerts us to the fact that when blessings are ascribed, they are often coupled with curses (cf. Deut 28:1-6, 15-19; 27:14-26). We find such a coupling reflected in Luke's Beatitudes (Luke 6:20–26).

In the first stanza of the *Magnificat*, Mary prophesies about her blessedness through all ages, a blessedness earned because of the Life she carries in pregnancy; in the second stanza, she prophesies the cursedness of those who, because of greed, diminish the life of others, a cursedness that is echoed later by her prophet Son:

> No! he cries to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation!
> No! he cries to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry.
> No! he cries to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep.
> No! he cries to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets the same way.

This prophet-mother-to-be, like the prophets of old, hurls indictments at those who stand in the way of the reign of God, and, in this way, teaches us about the potent relationship between mysticism and resistance as a force for good (cf. Luke 1:51–53):

> No! she cries to the arrogant of mind and heart.
> No! she cries to the corrupt rulers who sit upon their thrones.
> No! she cries to the rich who forget their covenantal responsibilities to the poor.
> No! No! No! This is resistance.

So often, and for so long, scholars have proclaimed the power of Mary's yes, her *via positiva*. However, a study of Mary from the hermeneutic of bondage helps us to recover the wisdom of the *via negativa*, a wisdom given to us by Mary, who models that one of the fruits of discernment and critical evaluation is to know when a negative response, no, is in the service of the ultimate yes. Johnson writes: "Here her *fiat* finds its home in her defiant resistance to the powers of evil. She takes on as her own the divine no to what crushes the lowly, stands up fearlessly and sings out that it will be overturned. No passivity here, but solidarity with divine outrage over the degradation of life with the divine promise to repair the world."[67]

However, this kind of resistance is not an end in itself. The mysticism of resistance that Mary is caught up in holds in it a vision for transformation and change. She and many others would see and hear later how her son, Jesus, challenged Simon the Pharisee not to presume that "the woman in the city" could not be included in the circle of faith (Luke 7:36-50). In Jesus' parable about the hypocritical Pharisee who was cast down from his proverbial theological throne and the humble tax collector who was raised up, many more would celebrate God's power to reverse the status quo (Luke 1:52; 18:9-14). The five thousand hungry persons would experience how good it was to be filled with good things (Luke 9:10-17).

The kin(g)dom dynamic desired by this mother and Son is captured well in the words of Sölle when she states that "mysticism and transformation are indissolubly interconnected."[68] Moreover, what we learn from these related prophets is that the nature of the transformation is liberating and often concrete. They knew only too well from their own *Sitz im Leben* what such transformations could look like:

> Releasing slaves from legal bondage was a frequent and carefully regulated event under Jewish, Greek, and Roman laws, by which at one stroke the person in slavery ceased to be a property and

[67] Ibid., 271–72.
[68] Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 89.

> became a legal person. "In juristic terms, he was transformed from an object to a subject of rights, the most complete metamorphosis one can imagine" (Finley 1980:97). No matter how much authority the former owner, now patron (Gk *prostates*; Lat *patronus*), may have retained under Greek or Roman law, the freedman/woman was now unequivocally a human being.[69]

In sum, a study of Mary's oracle provides a window through which Luke allows us to view the positive power of how a negative response is articulated in the service of the fundamental yes, or Good News (Gk., *euangelion*). Such a response can effect a transformation for persons that is healing in body, mind, and spirit/soul and for communities that is healing socially, economically, and spiritually. Out of the joy of the *via positiva* and the often-felt pain of the *via negativa* arises the *via transformativa*—the way of "changing the world through compassion and justice."[70]

Conclusion

First, a study of the Lukan portrayal of Mary of Nazareth through the hermeneutic of bondage brings into relief the prophetic dimension of her spirituality and, in particular, the mysticism of resistance. A study of her *Sitz im Leben* using the hermeneutics of social location demonstrates that while we do not find evidence indicating that she was a bondwoman, literally speaking, we do find strong evidence indicating that her spirituality of deep listening and her compassion for the lowly would have been fashioned and honed from the pervasiveness of bondage in her locale. Mary would have absorbed the wisdom and skill of her female indentured kin, especially the practice of listening, that is, of listening often and listening deeply and of responding from that place of deep listening.

Second, a study of the account of the annunciation and the *Magnificat* using the hermeneutic of critical evaluation demonstrates that Luke portrays Mary as having a dual vocation, that of prophet and mother. The grace given to her by virtue of her prophetic vocation would account for her ability to dialogue and negotiate with the angel about God's proposal regarding her motherhood, an ability that bondwomen were ordinarily

[69] Bartchy, "Slavery: New Testament," 71.

[70] Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 89.

denied. Poet Denise Levertov writes: "She was free / to accept or refuse; choice / integral to humanness."[71] Moreover, the fruit of Mary's tussle with and subsequent consent to the angel's proposal generates two further hallmarks of her mystical spirituality, namely, praise and blessing—that is, praise and blessing proclaimed by her and of her for the radical and unique substantiation by God of her intrinsic worth and potential and, by implication, that of all lowly persons.

Third, a study of the account of the second stanza of the *Magnificat* using the hermeneutic of transformative action for change demonstrates her practice of the mysticism of resistance. The redemption she envisions is as practical as it is powerful. She is clear that arrogance, corruption, and undistributed riches are to be resisted, and, by implication, the principles and practices related to humility, integrity, and the distribution of resources are to be embraced. This kind of resistance is not an end. Rather, it is oriented to transformation, its hallmark, which is resistance as the positive, proactive opposition to anything that reduces a human being.[72] The ultimate ground of such mysticism is the experience of oneness with God, source of all life, and it is an experience that must be sought after and nurtured faithfully, whatever the challenges.

Mary of Nazareth experienced such mystical oneness. We know this from her ability not only to say yes but also to say no when it was in the service of her ultimate yes. Almost two millennia later, the essence of her spirituality continues to reverberate in the experience of others among her Son's disciples. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45), writing during his time in prison, expresses it thus:

> What I mean is that God, the Eternal, wants to be loved with our whole heart, not to the detriment of earthly love or to diminish it, but as a sort of cantus firmus[73] to which the other voices of life resound in counterpoint. Where the cantus firmus is clear and distinct, a

[71] Denise Levertov, "Annunciation," in *A Door in the Hive* (New York: New Directions, 1989), 86.

[72] See note 5 above.

[73] Jill Carattini writes: "The *cantus firmus*, which means 'fixed song,' is a pre-existing melody that forms the basis of a polyphonic composition. Though the song introduces twists in pitch and style, counterpoint and refrain, the *cantus firmus* is the enduring melody not always in the forefront, but always playing somewhere within the composition." "The Cantus Firmus," *The BioLogos Forum* (blog), December 1, 2011, http://biologos.org/blog/the-cantus-firmus.

> counterpoint can develop as mightily as it wants. The two are "undivided yet distinct," as the Definition of Chalcedon says, like the divine and human natures of Christ. Only this polyphony gives your life wholeness, and you know that no disaster can befall you as long as the cantus firmus continues. . . . Have confidence in the cantus firmus.[74]

[74] From a letter to his friend Eberhard Bethge dated May 20, 1944. See *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 394–95.