

petua and Felicity, the martyrs; Monica, the mother of St. Augustine; a few queens—Elizabeth of Portugal, Margaret of Scotland, Elizabeth of Hungary; and Martha of Bethany, the perfect Christian type of the domestic woman.)

And in her myth, Mary Magdalene sins because she is not chaste, and not for any other reason that might be considered more grave.<sup>12</sup> The Christian harlot has absorbed to some extent the role of the classical goddesses of love. Aphrodite was sometimes surnamed *Porne*, or Courtesan. The name Pelagia actually belonged to Aphrodite in her aspect of goddess of the sea, from the Greek word for sea, *pelagos*. This facet of human personality could not be represented by the Virgin Mary, however beautifully and youthfully and enticingly she is portrayed. Her unspotted goodness prevents the sinner from identifying with her, and keeps her in the position of the Platonic ideal; but Mary Magdalene holds up a comforting mirror to those who sin again and again, and promises joy to mankind, Mary Magdalene when she mourns and lays out Christ's body usurps that role, leaving the Virgin of Sorrows a more natural character.

Together, the Virgin and the Magdalene form a diptych of the patriarchy's idea of woman. There is no place in the conformation of Christian society for a single woman who is neither virgin nor whore. Indeed, in Catholic countries the unmarried woman who has taken the veil is a pathetic figure of fun—the *zitella*, the *zita*, included in popular Italian songs. The Church venerates two types of femininity—consecrated chastity in the Virgin Mary and impenetrable sexuality in the Magdalene. Populous as the Catholic pantheon is, it is nevertheless so impoverished that it cannot conceive of a single woman, independently of her relations (or lack of relations) with men.

The rise of the cult of Mary Magdalene through the high middle ages and Counter-Reformation keeps pace with the growth of belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. For the more Mary was held to be free of all taint of sin, actual and original, the less the ordinary sinner could turn to her for consolation in his weakness, and the more he needed the individual saints whose own lapses held out hope for him. From the capricious goddess capable of angry quarrels with her faithless votaries, or the barefoot mother nursing her child, the Virgin Mary became, from the fifteenth century onwards more and more remote, as she ascended to ever higher pinnacles of perfection.

reply is framed, the Immaculate Conception remains the Virgin Mary is set apart from the human race, not stained by the Fall. And if on one plane the perfection is achieved as the conquest of the natural laws of childbearing, the prevailing idea of perfection denies the goodness of the world, and of the human body, and postulates another perfection where such conditions do not obtain. This is dualistic, and the Virgin is a symbol and an instrument of that dualism.

As the icon of the ideal, the Virgin affirms the inferiority of the human lot. Soaring above the men and women who pray to her, the Virgin conceived without sin underscores rather than alleviates pain and anxiety and accentuates the feeling of sinfulness. The state her votaries believe to be hers must always elude them, for all creatures except her are, they are told, born in sin. Mary is indeed Eve's other face: the two female symbols excite that very emotion that the story of the Fall sought to explain and the story of the Incarnate God sought to heal: the feeling that in its very nature humanity is fatally estranged from goodness, which, for a believer, is God. Any symbol that exacerbates that pain runs counter to the central Christian doctrine that mankind was made and redeemed by God, and, more important, it is a continuing enemy of hope and happiness.

words of the *transubstantiation*—"Hoc est corpus"). The Reformation had challenged the virtue of Rome; the Age of Reason questioned something that had never before been doubted—its intelligence. The fountainhead of European culture and knowledge, the curators of world history, were ridiculed as ignorant and credulous. The Counter-Reformation had been a revolt: the Church would prove the Reformers wrong by exceeding them in moral courage; but the assaults that stemmed from rationalism and its legacy and continued from the eighteenth century until the present day did not produce such a muscular response, but a form of acquiescence to their critics, as the Church relaxed its claim to intellectual leadership and Catholic piety throughout Europe became more saccharin, more prettified, more emotional.

This sentimentality and quest for simplicity were themselves products of the affective streak in eighteenth-century thought, and they permeated Catholicism, especially in France, until very recently. As Vita Sackville-West pointed out in her biographical studies *The Eagle and the Dove*, the capable and fiery St. Teresa of Ávila was the saint of the Counter-Reformation; the sweet, indeed glutinous, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (d. 1897), who entitled her autobiography *L'Histoire d'une Ame—Histoire primitive d'une petite fleur blanche* (The story of a soul—the springtime story of a little white flower), inflamed the hearts and minds of the entire Catholic world at the beginning of this century with her naïve and simple mixture of excessive egoism and emotional self-sacrifice. The Little Flower of Jesus, as she came to be known, also saw the Virgin in a vision when she was a child in bed with a fever; she marked it, along with her first communion and her entry into Carmel at the age of fifteen, as one of the important days in her brief and unexceptional life.<sup>33</sup> Other children saw the Virgin, as we have noted, throughout the nineteenth century and the beginning of this; it is a belief in the freshness, the native goodness of the simple and uncorrupted nature of the child (ironically a direct inheritance from Rousseau) that makes their testimony acceptable to a Church that now chiefly exercises its sphere of influence over parts of southern Europe, Latin America, and Africa, where progress towards industrialization has been comparatively slow. The Curé d'Ars (d. 1859), a parish priest of simple mind and intense feeling, represents like St. Thérèse of Lisieux the way the Church in the nineteenth century and today identifies itself with humble men and their message. And when the Virgin appears to Catholics in obscure places, clinging to an old way of life that has come under strain, proof is thereby given that God has not altogether hidden his face.

Each vision represents a rearguard action against the forces of "prog-