

A Moving Prayer:  
The Poetic and Theological Ductus of the Rosary

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No prayer is so tightly entangled in the public and private identity of Catholicism as the rosary. Tradition claims that the Blessed Virgin herself appeared to St. Dominic, founder of the Dominican Order, in 1214 and presented the rosary to him as “an antidote to heresy and sin.”<sup>1</sup> Pious legend or not, the rosary nevertheless became the “most popular extraliturgical prayer” in the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> The devotion’s name derives from the Latin *rosarium*, meaning “crown of roses,” reflecting the medieval understanding of its purpose as a prayerful bouquet of praise and petitions for Mary, the Mother of God. And like many medieval texts, it developed collectively over time to meet the spiritual – and practical – needs of the devout.<sup>3</sup> Its catechetical potential and broad appeal for the “unlettered population” of medieval and early modern Catholics, as well as the expansive cultural backdrop of intense Marian piety, certainly drove the devotion’s sustained popularity over the centuries.<sup>4</sup> However, external factors should not completely eclipse the role that the rosary’s own “formal arrangements” – to use Mary Carruthers’ term – play in the prayer’s effectiveness and power.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Thurston and Andrew Shipman, “The Rosary,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912). Iconography and artwork depicting this legend add a further dimension of movement to consider: St. Dominic is universally depicted lower than Mary, typically at her feet, with the rosary beads bridging the gap between Our Lady’s hands and his own. This movement from on high to below is a reversal of the movement of the prayers of the devotion, which proceed from the devotee up towards Mary (as discussed below.)

<sup>2</sup> Anne Winston, “Tracing the Origins of the Rosary: German Vernacular Texts,” *Speculum* 68, no. 3 (1993), 619.

<sup>3</sup> Winston, “Tracing the Origins,” 619.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Winston, “Tracing the Origins of the Rosary: German Vernacular Texts,” *Speculum* 68, no. 3 (1993), 634, 636; Anne Dillon, “Praying by Number: The Confraternity of the Rosary and the English Catholic Community, c. 1580-1700,” in *History* 88, no. 3 (2003), 459. Winston, “Tracing the Origins,” 619 refers to the rosary as the “most popular extraliturgical prayer” in the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Carruthers, “The Concept of *Ductus*, Or Journeying Through a Work of Art,” in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 201.

Carruthers' work on *ductus* brings into sharp focus the means by which a piece of art "leads someone through itself."<sup>6</sup> In her essay describing the term, she traces the history of the use of *ductus* from the ancient Greeks to the medieval period, arriving at the conclusion that the concept earned a "particular importance" and "even ubiquity" in medieval interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Her focus there is on the *ductus* at work within the composing, performing, and reading of rhetoric, but she has also engaged with the *ductus* of architectural spaces like monasteries in her previous books on medieval memory.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Fowler takes this idea further in her essay "Art and Orientation," using *ductus* to explore the ways in which poems utilize the "orientation" of the built environment they reference to move their readers mentally and, often, physically.<sup>9</sup> The "exercise of art," she explains, requires its viewers, readers, or "users" to "recognize its patterns," to travel along the path it has designed, to orient themselves within the "larger network of social meanings, positions, and persons."<sup>10</sup> Poetry, like any other art form, can invite – and often demands – "ritual performance."<sup>11</sup> Fowler's argument lends itself to an understanding of prayer in a similarly productive way; that is, in a way that habituates its devotees who read and enact them. Although neither Carruthers nor Fowler refers directly to the medieval (and modern) devotional practice of the rosary, their work can shed light on the *ductus* of the physical object itself and two of its primary Marian prayers. Indeed, attention to these "formal arrangements"

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<sup>6</sup> Carruthers, "Ductus," 190.

<sup>7</sup> Carruthers, "Ductus," 190.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) or *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Fowler, "Art and Orientation," *New Literary History* 44, no. 4 (2013): 595.

<sup>10</sup> Fowler, "Art and Orientation," 596.

<sup>11</sup> Fowler, "Art and Orientation," 605.

reveals the ways in which the rosary compels its devotees to pray, habituates their loving dependence on divine assistance, and inculcates within them an individual presence in the collective body of Christian believers that stands in relationship with God.

The rosary has tangible and intangible elements, and although both serve to direct devotees through the prayer experience, it is important to distinguish between the two parts: The prayers of the rosary and the physical devotional item used to pray them. When a devotee prays the “rosary,” after all, she recites the standard set of prayers that the devotion includes, and she may or may not be using some kind of physical apparatus (most usually a string of beads or something similar) to keep track of those prayers as she goes along. In this way, it would appear that the prayers are the essential component of the rosary, rather than the beads. But the physical object called the rosary, especially when in the common lasso shape most common today, nevertheless maintains its identity as “rosary beads” even when the prayers recited in conjunction with its use are not the rosary prayers; for instance, chaplet prayers, such as the Divine Mercy Chaplet, are frequently prayed using rosary beads.<sup>12</sup> In order to understand how the rosary “moves” devotees, then, both the prayers and the apparatus need to be addressed: Though inextricably linked to one another, conflating these two distinct parts to the point of mutual inclusion oversimplifies the role each plays independently. Since a discussion of the “movement” of a prayer would seem to flow from the physical dimension of its apparatus more obviously than from its internal poetics, I will address the rosary beads first.

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<sup>12</sup> Not all chaplets require the same number of beads as the rosary; the Chaplet of the Holy Face, for example, which honors the Five Wounds of Christ, involves a “chaplet” (i.e., the physical apparatus) containing a cross and thirty-nine beads – six large beads and thirty-three small ones. Father Johann Rotan, S.M., outlines a variety of chaplets in “Chaplets: Various Kinds,” University of Dayton Marian Library, <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/c/chaplets-various-kinds.php#anchor3>.

The word “bead” comes from the Middle English *bede*, itself seemingly derived from the Old English noun *bedu*, meaning “prayer,” and the verb *biddan*, meaning “to pray.”<sup>13</sup> By the fourteenth century, *bedes* referred to what we would now call beads threaded onto a string and used to keep track of the number of prayers recited. These strings of beads were not necessarily for praying the rosary, but by the mid-sixteenth century, this use of *bedes* almost always referred (directly or indirectly) to that particular prayer. Of course, the modern sense of bead as a small ornamental object incorporated into jewelry or clothing existed in this period, as well; however, it appears that the religious sense preceded the “secular” term, not the other way around. Expressions such as “to bid a bede” were in use from the fourteenth century onward in reference to saying one’s prayers, and the phenomena of “bead-folk” who were financially supported and often housed in “beads-houses” in exchange for their prayers for their benefactors continued well into the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the use of beads for counting prayers is not a uniquely Christian phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> And, despite the claims about Saint Dominic’s gift, the rosary did not appear in its modern form overnight: The *Ave Maria* or “Hail Mary,” the rosary’s main prayer, dates at least to the twelfth century and possibly even earlier to the mid-eleventh.<sup>16</sup> During the twelfth century, legends arose of the Blessed Mother rewarding devotees for pious recitation of the *Ave*; such legends often entailed a specific number of *Aves* being recited, and eventually, a

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<sup>13</sup> OED, s.v. *bead*. All citations from the OED were accessed no later than November 2022.

<sup>14</sup> OED, s.vv. *bead-folk*, *bead-house*. Consider, as just one example, Anthony Trollope’s novel, *The Warden*, in which a legal case ensues regarding the proper financial support owed to the twelve “bedesmen” that live in the almshouse attached to the fictional Barchester Cathedral. Such bedesmen wouldn’t necessarily pray the rosary, and in fact, outside of Roman Catholic contexts, they almost certainly would not have been doing so.

<sup>15</sup> Consider, for example, the *japamala*, a loop of prayer beads used in Hinduism and other religions.

<sup>16</sup> Thurston and Shipman, “Hail Mary,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7.

rosary came to entail fifty *Aves*.<sup>17</sup> Prayer beads then came into use in order to help keep track of these prayers. These beads thus became known as *Ave* beads or paternoster beads.<sup>18</sup>

A conventional rosary today includes fifty-nine beads in a lasso-shape: The large circle features five “decades,” or grouping of ten beads on which the *Aves* are prayed, separated by a single *Pater Noster/Gloria* bead; this circle is connected to a short strand with five additional beads – three *Ave* beads and a *Pater Noster/Gloria* bead on either side – that terminates in a crucifix. However, other iterations of rosary beads existed in the medieval and early modern periods. Knots on twine, for instance, could be used instead of beads. Strands that included a single decade plus the three-*Ave* intro beads were common, and even rings with ten knobs or grooves existed as tools for keeping track of rosary prayers.<sup>19</sup> The latter would have been especially useful after the Reformation and subsequent Counter-Reformation periods, when discretion was key for Catholics in England who continued to practice the devotion.

Regardless of the shape they take, rosary beads are not passive. They certainly assist devotees to keep track of the number of prayers being recited, but they also have “instrumentality and agency” through the way they “direct us” towards our goal.<sup>20</sup> As Carruthers notes, any meaningful sense of deviation requires a “plainly delineated route.”<sup>21</sup> Being in error, or even being lost, is a privative state, dependent on a structure – physical or otherwise – from which one

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<sup>17</sup> Winston, “Tracing the Origins,” 620. As will be noted below, a full rosary today actually includes fifty-three *Aves*; three *Aves* are recited – for “faith, hope, and charity” – before the first decade.

<sup>18</sup> Thurston and Shipman, “The Rosary.” The “paternoster” speaks to an older medieval devotion that entailed repeated recitation of the Latin “Our Father” prayer.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, *Beads from a Rosary* (early 1500s), The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.24602556>.

<sup>20</sup> Carruthers, “Ductus,” 191, uses these terms to describe the *ductus* of roads, but the description maps – if you’ll excuse the pun – onto rosary beads equally well.

<sup>21</sup> Carruthers, “Ductus,” 191.

has strayed. Carruthers spoke of the *ductus* of roads, but it is equally true in this case. While praying one or nine or three-thousand *Aves* would never be called an error, it could not be called a rosary. And in the absence of beads, devotees find themselves merely substituting them with either objects of a like-number (i.e., fingers) or mental tallies. The beads are “formal arrangements” of the rosary that direct by their own agency the devotion’s movements, which Carruthers notes can be “mental and sensory and ... physical.”<sup>22</sup> The physical is perhaps the most obvious: As one moves along a string of rosary beads, one is led from one prayer to the next, all the way until the end of the sequence. It is a physical movement – stop on a bead, pray, shift to the next, pray, repeat – that actually marks progress, especially on rosaries in the traditional shape.

The progress, however literal, is hardly mathematical. In *The Book of Memory*, Mary Carruthers groups the rosary with the abacus as “counting devices” that “involve manipulating physical objects in a rigid order as an aide-mémoire in calculation.”<sup>23</sup> This comparison, while accurate in the general sense, warrants a point of clarification. The purposes behind the two devices – that is, the beads of an abacus and the beads of a rosary – are divergent: The abacus is primarily descriptive, as the calculations one makes using its beads produce a numerical answer that is wholly dependent on the information that generated it. A rosary, on the other hand, is prescriptive; no computation is involved, and the “answer” is always the same. That there are ten *Aves* in a decade, five decades in a set of mysteries, and three sets of mysteries suggests far more

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<sup>22</sup> Carruthers, “Ductus,” 201.

<sup>23</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 99.

computational aid than is actually necessary.<sup>24</sup> That a set of rosary beads, whether in the traditional looped shape with fifty-nine beads or in an abbreviated string of eleven beads, prescribes the number of prayers to be said is not only useful but also entirely the point. It is a convenience that substantially defines the apparatus itself. As mentioned above, a physical “rosary” in the barest sense can be any set of ten tangible objects, such as a devotee’s own two hands; however, two hands are a rosary only insofar as they have ten fingers. I belabor the obviousness of this illustration in order to emphasize that a rosary is defined by the number it yields to those who use it to count. In those terms, an abacus it is not.

Nor is it truly a mnemonic device in the way one might immediately assume. Note that it is not the beads themselves being counted, but prayers: Ten of the *same* prayers, which is a phenomenon remarkably distinct from a series of ten *unique* prayers. A series of ten distinct prayers, whether short and simple or long and elaborate, would perhaps benefit from a string of beads in hand, but that is not the case here. Indeed, beads are useful for “remembering” just how many *Aves* one has recited, but that is not a mnemonic trick any more than an over-the-shoulder glance can help you “remember” how far along a path you have walked. All that is needed, truly, when reciting a rosary is a tactile cue of when to switch prayers. And the beads provide that cue: They tell a devotee when to start and when to stop, when to shift their attention from one litany of a *Pater Noster* and ten *Aves* to another litany of the same composition. In this way, the beads serve as an external counter that requires no conscious counting at all, for the sake of removing that particular distraction from the devotee’s mind. It is no great feat to count to ten; however, even this simple mental task provides a distraction from the meditative focus that the devotee is

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<sup>24</sup> That is, three *traditional* sets of mysteries: the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Glorious Mysteries. The fourth set of mysteries – the Luminous Mysteries – was not officially added until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by Pope Saint John Paul II.



attempting to maintain throughout the rosary prayer. The beads, then, do not merely signal a shift from one decade to the next but a shift from one *mystery* to the next. In other words, the transition is not from a particular set of prayers to another but instead from one overlaid meditation to the next. The beads signal – unobtrusively – a turn, a pivot, a reorientation that marks progress without drawing attention to that movement itself in relation to the destination. That is to say, the beads guide the devotee gently along their journey while providing clarity and momentum worthy of complete trust: Just stay on the path and arrive exactly where expected.

In this way the rosary resembles another winding devotional tool used in Christian prayer – the labyrinth. Of course, like prayer beads, labyrinths have origins external to Christianity. The image conjured in the public imagination is likely that of the mythic maze built by Daedalus, with its high walls, dead-ends, and raging minotaur. But even as the term *labyrinth* has become synonymous with *maze* in general parlance, the technical understanding of a labyrinth – despite its Cretan origins – entails a unicursal path while mazes include false paths. In other words, unlike a maze, a labyrinth has a natural *ductus*, guiding those who enter from its beginning to its end intuitively by means of its design alone. This *ductus* arises not from any restraints on the user, such as high walls or hedges but rather from the path itself: Labyrinths, especially in indoor settings, were *only* defined by lines or paths on the floor. Those who “entered” the labyrinth were of course free to wander away at any time, to step off the path and rejoin it elsewhere. However, the natural *ductus* of the labyrinth compels them to behave, to posture themselves, in this particular way. The meditative potential of this act of motion is revealed in the evidence that exists of its use: Craig Wright’s work on mazes outlines the shifting use of physical labyrinths and maze-like motifs over time, and he notes that unlike the indoor labyrinths of the Hellenic and Roman culture, which have only been found within “secular buildings,” the indoor labyrinths

dating from late antiquity and the Middle Ages resided exclusively in Christian churches.<sup>25</sup> Chartres Cathedral in France, for example, still features an early thirteenth century prayer labyrinth on the floor in the center of the nave, near the High Altar.<sup>26</sup> Both then and now, devotees enter the labyrinth from a western point, twisting and turning in all directions, but ultimately heading east, where the path lets out.<sup>27</sup> As they traverse this single, meandering path, they would pray silently to themselves or as a part of a group; the rosary was frequently the prayer of choice.<sup>28</sup> In the Middle Ages, traversing a labyrinth in this way served as a substitute for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> (The west-to-east orientation was intended to parallel the journey from Western Europe to the Middle East.) As Corelyn Senn notes, while pilgrimages were extensive and dangerous, visiting a cathedral with a labyrinth was far more attainable for most people.<sup>30</sup> Of course, shorter pilgrimages – such as to holy wells, local saint shrines, and even specific cathedrals (and their labyrinths)<sup>31</sup> – were taken on by even the poorest Christians. Labyrinths were thus imagined as micro-pilgrimages, and indeed, many of the same benefits of these devotions drove the popularity of the rosary prayer.

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<sup>25</sup> Craig Wright, *The Maze and the Warrior: Symbols in Architecture, Theology, and Music*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001): 16.

<sup>26</sup> The design of Chartres Cathedral, which has been copied in other churches and cathedrals, can be seen here: <https://jstor.org/stable/community.11661327>.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, *Maze and Warrior*, 19. Wright notes a page earlier, “Almost all church mazes found in later medieval sanctuaries would... be placed just inside the west door.”

<sup>28</sup> Corelyn F. Senn, “Journeying as Religious Education: The Shaman, The Hero, The Pilgrim, and the Labyrinth Walker,” *Religious Education* 97, vol 2 (2002): 135.

<sup>29</sup> Senn, “Journeying as Religious Education,” 135.

<sup>30</sup> Senn, “Journeying,” 135 notes that Chartres and its labyrinth was a popular pilgrimage site.

<sup>31</sup> Fowler, “Art and Orientation,” 608 briefly discusses the role of holy wells and holy trees as “stations” of pilgrimage for devotees.

Neither labyrinths nor rosaries are utilized for their own sakes: Both instead are primarily physical means to a contemplative end. They lead devotees along by the natural *ductus* of their construction, but light exercise is hardly the goal of labyrinth walking any more than digital dexterity is the goal of the rosary. Rather, they serve as opportunities to focus the mind by removing distractions, thereby directing the mind through simple, repetitive motion. *Move, turn, change*, the winding path and the string of beads inform their users. Although the two main prayers of the rosary – the *Ave Maria* and the *Salve Regina* – have their own *ductus*, as will be explored below, and are directly counted by means of the beads, another important element of the rosary devotion ought to be at least briefly mentioned: The meditations on the life of Mary and Christ.

These mediations find their roots in the “Books of Hours” and personal psalters that rose in popularity during the Middle Ages among the laity, who sought more accessible alternatives for the traditional “canonical hours” of the Church’s daily prayer cycle.<sup>32</sup> While these books first and foremost featured the psalms, they also frequently emphasized Marian devotion, as well. The “extremely popular” Little Office of the Blessed Virgin found in many Books of Hours frequently invoked components of the *Ave Maria* prayer – specifically, the words of the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation and the words of St. Elizabeth at the Visitation – as a complement to the psalms.<sup>33</sup> Other events in the lives of Mary and Jesus similarly became the foci of meditation. Although the specific events included in these devotions varied from place to place and time to time, standard sets of meditations – known as mysteries – rose in stature and in use.<sup>34</sup> Even after

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<sup>32</sup> Winston, “Tracing the Origins,” 621.

<sup>33</sup> Winston, “Tracing the Origins,” 620.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, Matthew J. Mills, “Stephen of Sawley’s Meditations on Our Lady’s Joys and the Medieval History of the Rosary,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2015) finds an analogue between the eventual standard

these mysteries separated from the Books of Hours, their original connection to the psalms carried over into the emergent rosary devotion: The fifteen mysteries (that is, three sets of five mysteries) were eventually accompanied by repetitions of ten *Aves each*, for a total of 150 – one for each of the 150 psalms.<sup>35</sup> Rather than praying through the psalms with a Book of Hours, devotees could meditate on the life of Mary and Christ while reciting a rosary. And, of course, rosary beads made that structured recitation possible.

As mentioned above, however, the physical apparatus of the rosary is not the sole source of *ductus* for the devotion. The prayers themselves that concern the rest of this paper – the *Ave Maria*/Hail Mary and the *Salve Regina*/Hail, Holy Queen – utilize poetic *ductus* which moves the reader not only into specific mental postures but also into a particular Christian identity. The *Ave Maria*, the most prominent rosary prayer, will be discussed first. For ease of reference, I shall juxtapose the Latin and the English below:

Ave Maria, gratia plena,  
 Dominus tecum.  
 Benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
 et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus.  
 Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,  
 ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc,  
 et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
 The Lord is with thee.  
 Blessed art thou among women,  
 and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
 Holy Mary, Mother of God,

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Joyful Mysteries of the rosary and a devotion created by Stephen of Sawley called *Meditationes de gaudiis*, or “meditations on the joys” of Mary.

<sup>35</sup> Both this transition to a standard set of mysteries and the transition from the Marian Little Office to the rosary prayers are far more complicated than could be covered in this essay. For more in-depth analysis, see John Desmond Miller, *Beads and Prayers: The Rosary in History and Devotion* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2002).

Pray for us sinners, now  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The *Ave* begins, whether in Latin or English, with a greeting. *Ave Maria!* the devotee prays. *Hail, Mary!* Already the semantic field is muddled: A neat translation of the Latin command *ave* is difficult to pin down, functioning in most cases as an interjection for a formal expression of greeting, as to a commander or to one who is departing for a long time. However, it stems from the verb *aveō*, meaning “to desire, wish or long for”; the imperative form is often translated as “be well.” The difficulty isn’t resolved in English, either, as the term “hail” has taken on an unavoidable dimension of meaning in light of Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation. *Hailing*, for Althusser, is the means by which ideology “transforms” us into subjects.<sup>36</sup> To hail someone, Althusser argues, is to force them into a recognition that they are the subject of said hailing.<sup>37</sup> Responding to that hail is an implicit acknowledgement that one had been hailed in the first place; thus, whether or not someone reacts to the hailing – not only in the literal sense of calling out but also in the Althusser’s metaphorical sense in which ideological worldviews condition us to act<sup>38</sup> – demonstrates the way in which that person sees themselves in relation to the person (or ideology) that has hailed them. At face value, then, *hailing* Mary positions her as the subject of the prayer while also suggesting a profound expectation of how she will respond.

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<sup>36</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essay*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 86. Althusser, of course, wrote in French; Brewster’s term *to hail* serves as both the translation and a definition of Althusser’s original *interpeller*.

<sup>37</sup> Althusser, “Ideology,” 86.

<sup>38</sup> Althusser, “Ideology,” 82.

At the risk of over-explaining the obvious, let it be emphasized that hailing Mary implies an assumption that someone exists who is being hailed, just as knocking on a door implies that there is someone to answer. Indeed, when a devotee prays the *Ave Maria*, she is not shouting into a void but rather speaking to particular person – the Virgin Mary. And there is no ambiguity to who is being greeted and hailed, as the appellation and apposition of the prayer make clear. Lest the devotee forget, the second half of the prayer begins with a restatement of its subject: “Holy Mary, Mother of God.” Mary is called out to again, this time with another adjective – *sancta* or “holy” – and a direct reference to another aspect of her particular identity as the mother of Christ, the God-Man. This goes beyond Althusser’s classic image of a vague “Hey, you there!” where the subject is defined by who responds<sup>39</sup>: The only one who could respond to such an address as “Mother of God!” is Mary. In this way, hailing Mary here not only demonstrates the devotees’ understanding of who they are crying out to but also reflects the confidence the devotees would have in Mary’s recognition of herself as the subject of these cries.

Such confidence can exist because of the Scriptural origins of the *Ave*. The first two lines of the prayer echo the angel Gabriel’s greeting during the Annunciation in Luke 1:28, while the third and fourth lines recall part of Elizabeth’s greeting during the Visitation in Luke 1:42.<sup>40</sup> In both Gospel scenes, Mary is the subject of the saints’ “hailings,” and both times, she responds favorably. Her humble consent to the Incarnation pitched by Gabriel serves as an archetype for Christian submission to the divine will, and the canticle she ecstatically proclaims in response to

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<sup>39</sup> Althusser, “Ideology,” 86.

<sup>40</sup> Luke 1:28 (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition): “And the angel being came in, said unto her: ‘Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed are thou among women.’”

Luke 1:41-42 (DRA): “And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: ‘Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.’”

Elizabeth – the Magnificat – has held a prominent place in the Catholic hymnody since the beginning of the Church.<sup>41</sup> Thus, when a devotee prays the first four lines of the *Ave*, she is co-opting the language of previous hailings of Mary that she knows to have been successful. This new utterance, though unique to the devotee, is participating in a centuries-long tradition of call-and-response, in which both components are familiar and expected: A greeting is called out to Mary, and Mary responds favorably.

Recitation of those first four lines, however, is more than mere appropriation of a successful petition. To quote the lines from Elizabeth – “Blessed art thou among women, / And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus” – is to participate in a broader theological and poetic tradition of connecting Mary to Jesus. The parallel “blessed” statements highlight the bond between Christ and His Mother; here and elsewhere, the two are commonly named in relation to each other. Mary’s nomination is exclusively tied to her role as the “Mother of God,” either directly by appellation or indirectly through the allusions to the Annunciation and Visitation events which occurred during her pregnancy. Likewise, Christ’s only direct reference in the prayer is appositive to the metaphor “fruit of thy [Mary’s] womb.”<sup>42</sup> This Mother-Son connection is ubiquitous: One medieval verse written by Friar William Herebert in the early fourteenth century features a series of appellations for Mary – “gat of heven blisse” (3) and “sterre of see” (5) – but its opening two lines focus on the title that ties Mary to her son: “Holy

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<sup>41</sup> The Magnificat, found in Luke 1:46-55, is considered to be one of the most ancient Christian hymns, and it has been a part of the Roman Breviary, and the Liturgy of the Hours, since at least 500 AD. See Herbert Thurston and Andrew Shipman, “Magnificat,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, New York: Robert Appleton Company (1910).

<sup>42</sup> The appellation “fruit of your womb” for Christ is a rich one, providing a parallel between Jesus, the fruit of Mary, and the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Christ is thus the fruit that was “put back” onto the tree – i.e., the cross – to replace what had been taken off of it in the Garden.

moder, that bere Crist, / Buyere of monkunde.”<sup>43</sup> An even earlier anonymous verse similarly dwells on Mary’s divine maternity, thanking her for “that gohid that thu havest idon me / Wid thine swete child” (3-4).<sup>44</sup> Beyond poetics, the syntactic closeness of Mary to Christ in the *Ave* and elsewhere illuminates the theological concept at the heart of medieval Marian devotion:

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<sup>43</sup> Maxwell Sidney Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, eds., *Middle English Lyrics* (New York: Norton, 1974), no. 186:

Holy moder, that bere Crist,  
 Buyere of monkunde,  
 Thou art gat of hevene blisse  
 That prest wey givst and bunde.  
 Thou sterre of see, rer op the folk  
 That rising haveth in munde.  
 In thee thou bere thin holy fader,  
 That maiden were, after and rather,  
 Wharof so wondreth kunde.  
 Of Gabriele’s mouthe  
 Thou fonge thilke Ave;  
 Lesne us of sunne nouthe,  
 So we bisecheth thee.

Herebert’s syntactic ambiguity captures some of the doctrinal messiness of the Middle Ages, as well. Grammatically, the referent of “Buyere of monkunde” could be either Mary or Jesus, but the title “Co-Redemptrix” for Mary was controversial then (and continues to be so today.) Franciscans like Herebert generally encouraged the title, while Dominicans, among others, resisted its use.

<sup>44</sup> Luria and Hoffman, *Middle English Lyrics*, no. 183:

Levedye, ic thonke thee –  
 Wid herte swithe milde –  
 That gohid that thu havest idon me  
 Wid thine swete childe.

Thu art good and swete and bright,  
 Of all otheir icorinne;  
 Of thee was that swete wight  
 That was Jesus iboren.

Maide milde, bid I thee  
 Wid thine swete childe  
 That thu herdie me  
 To habben Godes milce.

Moder, loke one me  
 Wid thine swete eyen;  
 Reste and blisse gef thu me,  
 Me lehedy, then ic deyen.

This lyric ends with a plea for consolation in the devotee’s final hour similar to the one that ends the Hail Mary.



Mary's relationship with Christ, namely, her divine maternity and his associated true humanity, warrants faith in her intercessory power.<sup>45</sup>

That faith defines the prayer, and in doing so, it demands a reevaluation of *hailing* here, as Althusser's argument falls short of capturing the phenomenon. After all, despite his examples of the policemen and doorknockers, Althusser was not particularly interested in the one-on-one connection between two individuals but rather on the interplay between ideology and individuals. When a devotee hails Mary, perhaps there is something to be said for the way in which Mary is interpellated, identifying herself as the one who is being hailed as the Mother of God. But that in and of itself is not particularly useful beyond what has been discussed above. A different paradigm is needed. By way of illustration, consider the scene of a small child screaming "Mom!" in a crowded store: Multiple women will turn around. That is Althusser's understanding of interpellation in action; women who are mothers, who live in the ideology of being mothers, respond appropriately, "according to the correct principles" of motherhood.<sup>46</sup> Ostensibly, however, one woman will have turned around not simply because she recognizes herself as a mother but also – and more profoundly so – she recognizes the voice of the child who cried out. This scenario is not a case for the study of ideology but phenomenology; so, too, with the rosary. Though repeated again and again, by millions of Catholics throughout history, the *Ave Maria* remains a unique utterance of a child calling out to her mother. And although a thorough examination of the phenomenology of the rosary falls outside the scope of this paper, a

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew J. Mills, "Stephen of Sawley's Meditations on Our Lady's Joys and the Medieval History of the Rosary," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2015), 435, considers Mary's intercessory power to be "traditionally regarded as [divine maternity's] consequence."

<sup>46</sup> Althusser, "Ideology," 82.

small taste of the discipline does allow us to understand the ways in which devotees relate to the divine, to Mary, and to other Catholics through participation in this act of prayer.<sup>47</sup>

One of the defining characteristics of the phenomenon of prayer is an inescapable sense of desperate dependence on God. Philosopher Jean-Luc Chrétien for this reason called prayer “wounded speech.”<sup>48</sup> It is wounded, he argues, for two reasons: First, because the speech is directed towards God but instead acts upon the speaker herself.<sup>49</sup> Prayer is in this way auto-affective, to use Derrida’s term, and unintentionally so. Second, because in hearing one’s own speech, and recognizing the reality of prayer as an admission of a complete lack of self-reliance, the speaker realizes that she is wholly inadequate and unworthy of praying to an omnipotent and benevolent God in the first place.<sup>50</sup> Despite the Derridean resonances, this is not a new understanding of the phenomenon of prayer.<sup>51</sup> The Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas emphasized in the *Summa Theologiae* that praying does not remind God of our needs but rather reminds *us* that we are wholly reliant on divine assistance.<sup>52</sup> And as early as the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo established that the faith which prompted a person to call out to God is only

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<sup>47</sup> Marie-Aimée Manchon, *Alentour du Verset: Petite Phénoménologie des Mystères* (Paris: Ad Solem, 2019) explores the phenomenology of the rosary and promises to be an enriching take on the subject, but as the book is currently only available in French, I was unable to make adequate use of it at this point in my research.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Luc Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” in *The Ark of Speech*, translated by Andrew Brown (New York: Routledge 2004): 37. Another prerequisite for discussing the phenomenology of prayer is the understanding that the existence of God is ultimately irrelevant. As Chrétien, notes, regardless of God’s existence (or nonexistence), “the fact remains that the way we address him, name him, speak to him, the nature of what we ask from him and feel able to ask from him, the fear or the trust with which the person praying turns to him, all depend on the being of this addressee as he appears to the believer” (18). This paper, of course, takes the same approach with regards to the rosary prayer in particular: the *ductus* of the rosary exists for devotees with or without any supporting theological assumptions.

<sup>49</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 21.

<sup>50</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 24.

<sup>51</sup> Chrétien was, notably, a student of Derrida.

<sup>52</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, Part II-II, Question 83, Article 2: <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3083.htm>.

possible through an initial freely-given and unmerited gift of divine grace; such a call – prayer – is thus only ever a response to God.<sup>53</sup> Chrétien insists on this definition, arguing that prayer “does not begin, it responds.”<sup>54</sup> This response is also essentially a communal one in the Christian worldview. Even when a devotee prays independently, she is nevertheless praying as a part of the “Mystic Body of Christ,” the collective voice of the Church that is in relationship with the divine.<sup>55</sup> Individual prayer is in this way only ever “a provisional detachment from collective prayer, since it is always based in the church.”<sup>56</sup> This reality manifests in the language of these individual/communal prayers. As Chrétien notes, the Christian Creed, or Profession of Faith, is recited by an individual – “*I* believe in God the Father...,” etc. – but it states that the Incarnation, Passion, Death, and Resurrection occurred “for *us men* and for *our* salvation.”<sup>57</sup> The devotee’s speech, that is to say, becomes part of a collective voice as the Creed goes on. The rosary likewise speaks with a collective voice, and this voice, wounded like the individual voices which comprise it, cries out to God for the divine aid it knows it needs.

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<sup>53</sup> This doctrine of grace is central to Augustine’s theology, and thus it appears in several of his works. It is perhaps most explicit in his anti-Pelagian tract, “On Grace and Free Will.” In chapter 17, he writes: “[St. Paul] does not say. ‘I obtained mercy because I was faithful,’ but ‘in order that I might be faithful,’ thus showing that even faith itself cannot be had without God’s mercy, and that is the gift of God.” See “On Grace and Free Will,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 5, edited by Philip Schaff, translated by Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, and revised by Benjamin B. Warfield (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

<sup>54</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 25.

<sup>55</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 34.

<sup>56</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 34.

<sup>57</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 34. He is referring to the Nicene Creed here, the official Latin translation of which begins with *Credo*, “I believe.” The original Greek version from the First Council of Nicaea in 325 begins with *Πιστεύομεν*, “We believe.”

The second half of the *Ave Maria*, then, predictably shifts from a mode of greeting and nomination to a mode of petition.<sup>58</sup> Though not a direct parallel, this section of the prayer begins much like the first, with coupled appositives that echo what the other has said: “Holy Mary/*Sancta Maria*” strikes a similar note as “Hail Mary/*Ave Maria*” does, with the direct naming of Mary anchoring the address of this prayer. Also, the phrase “full of grace” serves as a metaphor for the Mary’s condition shortly after the Annunciation – that is, pregnant with the Son of God by the power of God’s divine grace. The devotee’s plea takes up the last two lines of the prayer: “Pray for us sinners, now, / And at the hour of our death.”<sup>59</sup> Note the switch to plural pronouns; the prayer has now taken on an explicit communal voice. The mode of the prayer has also changed from a greeting to a pleading; to stick with Althusser’s analogy, it’s not a knocking at the door but a pounding. *Mary*, the devotee calls out, *intercede for us!* And not just at this moment but always!

The *ductus* of the *Ave Maria*, as a part of the larger Rosary prayer, hinges on these final two lines. The *now* in which the devotee is concerned is not so much a finite moment as it is a discrete point in a continuous stream of *now*. As the *Ave* is repeated ten times per decade, with five decades per set of mysteries, with three sets per complete Rosary, the *now* extends from the length of the word itself, to the length of the complete Rosary prayer, to the next day when the

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<sup>58</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church §2675-6 describes this “two-fold movement” from praise to supplication as a hallmark of Marian devotion.

<sup>59</sup> As a point of interest, extant breviaries from before and after the fourteenth century suggest that this *memento mori* ending was added to the rest of the prayer in response to the Black Plague, as a turn towards hope. Phillip Kosloski, “How the Black Plague Changed the ‘Hail Mary’ Prayer,” *Aleteia*, 17 March 2020, <https://aleteia.org/2020/03/17/how-the-black-plague-changed-the-hail-mary-prayer/>. The reason for this change had been suggested (among others) by Fulton J. Sheen in his 1952 book *The World’s First Love*, though Donald Calloway supported the argument with the manuscript evidence in his 2016 book *Champions of the Rosary*. The text of the Hail Mary was finalized by the Catechism for the Council of Trent and included in the Roman Breviary of 1568.

Rosary is recited, to the next, and the next, and so on. The *now* finally comes to an end – or, rather, to its fulfillment – not at the end of one’s recitation of the *Ave* but rather at the end of one’s life. The Rosary is in this way like the pilgrimage journey. Both mentally, as the devotee moves from *Ave* to *Ave*, meditating on each successive mystery of the Rosary, and physically, as she simultaneously moves from bead to bead of a rosary apparatus, the devotee finds herself traveling forward through a successive sequence of *nows*, of daily troubles that prompt pleas for aid, towards an eventual arrival at a final moment and a final bead. Emboldened by Scripture’s reassurance that Mary will answer her call, the devotee hails until the end of her life. Hailing in this way is an unending path for the Christian, though, since the journey does not end upon her arrival at death any more than a pilgrim’s journey ends upon her arrival at the holy well, the shrine, or the Cathedral. Faith in the message of the *Ave Maria* instead promises that Mary will be there, waiting to answer the hail.

The Rosary prayer, after a litany-like repetition of fifty *Ave Marias*, ends with a single utterance of the *Salve Regina*. Once again, I shall provide the prayer in both Latin and English below:

Salve, Regina, mater misericordiae;  
vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.  
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevae.  
Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes  
in hac lacrimarum valle.  
Eia ergo, advocata nostra,  
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.  
Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.  
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy,  
our life, our sweetness and our hope.  
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.

To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping  
 in this valley of tears.  
 Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
 thine eyes of mercy toward us,  
 and after this, our exile, show unto us  
 the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
 O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Thematically resonant with the *Ave*, the *Salve Regina* similarly begins with a “hailing” of the Virgin Mary, and it clearly reflects the same intense medieval Marian devotion. However, the *Salve Regina* is not simply a reiteration of the *Ave*; it serves as a destination for the *ductus* of the entire Rosary. Whereas the repetitious *now, now, now* of the *Aves* drove the devotee forward, the *Salve Regina* stops all forward movement and directs the devotee’s pleas and gaze upward towards Mary while summoning Mary’s own gaze and consolation. The *Salve Regina* in this way becomes a capstone and a consummation of the rosary’s *ductus* as a prayer of spiritual pilgrimage.

The *Salve Regina*, like the *Ave*, is not exclusive to the rosary. It is speculated to have been composed sometime in the first half of the eleventh century as a monastic prayer, though its first documented appearance is in 1140 in a Cistercian monastery’s antiphonary; by 1145, it was officially used by the same monastery in the procession for the feast of the Assumption.<sup>60</sup> It became integrated into the daily chanting and recitations by monks, and after the Dominicans began using it during Compline, the final liturgical hour of the day, in 1221, its use in the Roman Breviary expanded rapidly, being officially added in the fourteenth century.<sup>61</sup> Religious confraternities and guilds of the thirteenth century and beyond included the anthem in their

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<sup>60</sup> Mills, “Medieval History of the Rosary,” 435.

<sup>61</sup> Hugh Henry, “Salve Regina,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, New York: Robert Appleton Company (1912).

evening devotions.<sup>62</sup> Exactly when the *Salve Regina* was first added to the end of the rosary is hard to say, but the leap to that place of honor is not difficult to follow, considering the prayer's demonstrated reputation as a near-perfect note of finality or closure.

Let us begin with the speaker – or rather, the speakers – of the *Salve Regina*: Who is this “us?” Here again we see the first-person plural, the same group of “sinners” as in the *Ave Maria*. A collective voice speaks up. We, the “poor banished children of Eve,” have no need for individuality, really, as we are all stuck in “our exile.” Our sighs, our mourning, and our weeping – all our sufferings are passed collectively up to Mary, who is “our life, our sweetness, and our hope.” The identification of the speakers as “children of Eve” draws on a common iconography of Mary as the New Eve and Christ as the new Adam.<sup>63</sup> Like in the *Ave Maria*, Jesus is referred to by the appellation “blessed fruit of thy womb.” However, despite the plethora of appellations for Mary in the *Salve Regina*, she does not have her complementary “Mother of God” title. Instead, she is *Mater Misericordiae* – “Mother of Mercy.” The emphasis of this prayer, in contrast to the *Ave*, is not on Mary's role as Mother of Christ but on her role as Mother of all Christians *through Christ*. Christ's role in our salvation is not minimized nor excluded by the *Salve Regina* but rather implicitly emphasized by the *ductus* of the prayer, which positions Mary as a conduit to her Son.

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<sup>62</sup> Henry, “Salve Regina.”

<sup>63</sup> Consider, for instance, another poem by Friar Herebert, from Luria and Hoffman, no. 185, which includes the appeal in the first two lines of its second stanza:

In grith us sette and shild from shome,  
That turnst abakward Eves nome.

Interestingly, the famous “Adam lay ibounden” poem (Luria and Hoffman, no. 164) seems to draw a parallel between Adam and Mary by listing her heavenly coronation as the consequence of the *felix culpa* of Adam; neither Eve nor Christ are directly mentioned in the poem.

Whereas the *ductus* of *Ave Maria* drives the devotee forward, from one bead to the next, the *Salve Regina* represents a halt, or at least a deceleration. A relentless stream of appellations – five right in a row – hails Mary without waiting for a response. (In the Latin version, the five are even bookended by the hail of *salve*.) In both English and Latin, the direct address demonstrates the confidence of the hailing: There is no ambiguity as to who is being addressed; we, the poor banished children of Eve, are crying *to you*, sighing *to you*. The Latin’s *Ad te*, however, especially connects the deictic markers throughout the poem with alliteration (*ad te, ad te, Advocata, ad nos*), emphasizing that the prayer does not move in just one direction. While the collective speaker comes to a rest before Mary, calling her name, Mary also begins moving towards the speakers. The next two lines ask Mary: *ad nos converte* – turn towards us! Or, more accurately, turn your eyes of mercy – *illos tuos misericordes oculos* – towards us. In this way, Mary’s movement is in her gaze. This movement is profound, though, considering what she would be turning *away from* – Christ on the Cross.<sup>64</sup> The purpose of this movement is made clear by the two following lines already discussed above: “Show unto us... Jesus.” The speaker is praying to Mary, but ultimately for the purpose of one day seeing Christ. The devotee cries out to Mary, specifically “sends up [their] sighs” from below “in this vale of tears” to Mary, who turns in response towards the one who called her, for the sake of directing their gaze towards her Son, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>64</sup> This request for Mary to turn from her son towards her spiritual children can be found elsewhere, such as in this short verse from Luria and Hoffman, no. 190:

Now goth sonne under wod:  
 Me reweth, Marye, thy faire rode.  
 Now goth sonne under tree:  
 Me reweth, Marye, thy sone and thee.

The temporality of this poem is resonant with the *Salve Regina*’s place at the end of Compline or other evening prayers, which are prayed with “goth sonne under wod” and “under tree,” i.e., at or after sunset.



At the heart of the *Salve Regina*, and indeed the entire rosary prayer, is the understanding of Mary as a mediator between humanity and Christ. Though the Church has ceaselessly insisted on the role of Christ as the perfect mediator between God and man,<sup>65</sup> the title of Mediatrix has been used since at least the fourth century.<sup>66</sup> In this role, Mary serves as the greatest intercessor among the saints, bringing the needs of the faithful before the throne of God. All Marian devotion is predicated upon this understanding of Mary's efficacy as Mediatrix; the rosary prayers are but a single reflection of it. For instance, the tableau of devotees seeking Mary as a waypoint to seeking Christ played out at every Mass in the later Middle Ages, during which the lay congregants would be separated from the High Altar – and thus from the consecration of the Eucharist – by a Rood Screen.<sup>67</sup> This wooden screen featured a crucified Christ, with Saint John and the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross. Thus, in order to see the Christ in the transfigured Eucharistic bread and wine, the devotee would need to look *through* Mary on the Rood Screen.<sup>68</sup> This physical movement of the eyes from one's own prayers – frequently the rosary, as Eamon Duffy reports<sup>69</sup> – upwards towards Mary and Christ for the consecration and elevation would not have been a disruption but a continuation of the same mental movement encouraged by the rosary prayers themselves. With faith in Christ as the source and means of human salvation,

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Aquinas, for instance, codified this doctrine in his *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Question 26, Articles 1 and 2: <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4026.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Miravalle, *Introduction to Mary: The Heart of Marian Doctrine and Devotion* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1993): 104.

<sup>67</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale UP): 110.

<sup>68</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 97 is emphatic that the Rood Screen was not intended as a mere obstruction of vision, and in fact frequently featured “elevation squints” in order to allow devotees line of sight to the Sacrament.

<sup>69</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 118.

Christians turned to Mary to not only guide their eyes and mind towards that ultimate goal but also to accompany them along the way and serve as their Advocate upon arrival.

But where exactly are the “poor banished children of Eve” going in the *Salve Regina*? What is “our exile,” and what comes after it? This line makes more sense in conversation with the final two lines of the *Ave Maria*: “Pray for us sinners, now, / And at the hour of death.” The devotees are in exile now, living as sinners, but after their death, they will be shown Jesus in Heaven. They are crying out to Mary now, in the present, but also gesturing towards the future, where they will be greeted by the “Gate of Heaven” at the moment of their judgment.<sup>70</sup> The three anaphoric invocations in this final line of the prayer – “O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary” – ring out as an appeal for defense against harsh judgement, a plea for clemency from the beloved Mediatrix and “Advocate” in the face of divine justice and retribution by the Christ, the Divine Judge.<sup>71</sup> The *Salve Regina*, in this way, serves as both the destination towards which the physical progression of the rosary prayer is heading and as a single waypoint in the spiritual life of devotees on their way to Heaven. They have already arrived at the end of the prayer, at the end of the rosary, at the “Gate of Heaven,” as it were, but their journey, their pilgrimage, has not ended – not yet.

Unlike a physical pilgrimage, moreover, the rosary is intended to be a continually repeated devotion. It is, in this way, like any other work of art, which Fowler argues “is designed

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<sup>70</sup> “Gate of Heaven” is one of the oldest titles for Mary, coming from an interpretation of Ezekiel 44:1-3 in which Mary is figured as the closed gate through which the Lord entered. Recall the Herebert lyric discussed above, which referred to Mary as “gat of hevne blisse” (Luria and Hoffman, no. 186).

<sup>71</sup> Some early accounts report that Bernard of Clairvaux exclaimed this line while in religious ecstasy on Christmas Eve 1146 in the Cathedral of Speyer, Germany, and it was subsequently added to the *Salve Regina* prayer, which had originally ended with the preceding line. See Victor Thiébaud, *Fleurs Mystiques ou Les Litanies de la Sainte Vierge: Expliquées et Commentées*, 3rd edition (Paris: Jacques Lecoffre, 1864): 436-7.

to be reused again and again, even to become a habit.”<sup>72</sup> Praying the rosary shapes one’s *habitus*, one’s disposition towards this posture, this habit, of reflecting on the life of Christ and Mary and turning one’s gaze towards them in prayerful meditation. The repetition of ten, fifty, one hundred and fifty *Aves* is not for naught. Devotees are not subjecting themselves to a simple ascetic discipline for the sake of mortification of the flesh; the rosary is not merely a dedication of one’s time that could be more productively spent elsewhere. Nor is it a demonstrative spectacle: The public mortifications of early Christian stylites and of medieval and early modern flagellants stand in contrast to the quiet self-denial of the movements of the rosary. If art is indeed the “habituation of our bodily experience,” as Fowler claims, then the repeated recitation of the rosary, the continual reenactment of its embedded “mobilization of faculties,” cultivates a *habitus* within its devotees that helps them “attain their social beings” within their Christian worldview.<sup>73</sup> The rosary, in other words, has the power to mold a person into the “typology,” so to speak, of a faithful Christian. The beads pull Christians along this path of development, as the prayers turn them towards their salvation and directs them to call out to Mary in faith that she will answer.

Such is the collective identity of the Christian faith to which an individual devotee contributes her voice and through which she begins to understand her own independent identity. In repeating that plea – “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.” – fifty-three times in a row, the devotee is not saying anything original to Mary or to God, but she is speaking. And that speech act, Chrétien insists, surely reaches the ears of its addressee but it also echoes back to the addresser, and she will inevitably hear herself and recognize that although

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<sup>72</sup> Fowler, “Art and Orientation,” 597.

<sup>73</sup> Fowler, “Art and Orientation,” 597.

these words do not belong to her alone, they are nevertheless working on her, in her, through her towards a transformative end.<sup>74</sup> The rosary becomes the means by which the Christian recognizes herself as a part of that “we/us” who is dependent upon God and needs Mary’s loving guidance. Moved by the *ductus* of the devotion, it is as though, in hailing Mary, the Christian is hailing and interpellating herself, and responding to her own desperate, wounded call.

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<sup>74</sup> Chrétien, “Wounded Speech,” 35. “The highest intimacy with God,” he writes, “is expressed in words that we do not invent but that, rather, invent us, in that they find us and discover us where we were without knowing it.”

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