Telling the beads

The practice and symbolism of the rosary

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Foundations

I GREW UP IN THE ERA IN WHICH THE BEATLES were trailing off to India in search of enlightenment, and thousands of British people who couldn't get to India were going to evening classes in Transcendental Meditation. Indeed, TM was so popular that even to many people who did not practise it (including myself) it was known only by its initials. So I thought meditation techniques belonged to the mystic East, and that westerners were doing something exotic in following spiritual paths of this kind. But it seemed that there was much to be gained from such spiritual disciplines, and I was therefore thrilled when I read Marina Warner's book *Alone of all her sex: the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary*, and discovered that there was a western tradition of meditation based on repetitive incantation.[1] That tradition was, of course, the rosary; and although I subsequently learnt of other Catholic meditation practices, it has been the rosary which has continued to capture my imagination most strongly.[2]

Some weeks after my discovery of the rosary, which I was learning to say on my own, I was given a tour of my local Catholic church by one of my teachers, a Catholic who knew that I was developing an interest in Catholicism. As soon as we had entered the church, I was struck by the sound of voices intoning Hail Marys. It was a sound that seemed to be ancient and sacred – something that touched me to the core: the kind of sound that one should surely hear in any religion in which people desire immediate contact with the divine, but which I had never heard with my own ears in any Christian worship that I had previously attended. It was not until some time afterwards that I discovered that the chanting group was in fact reciting the rosary.

It is not surprising that the recitation of the rosary should have struck me as ancient and sacred. There are some activities which are so widespread among human cultures that one might almost describe them as 'natural' to the human condition. Praying or meditating with beads may be one such activity. The very word 'bead' is cognate with the German *gebet*, meaning 'prayer', and the English word 'bid', which still has religious connotations in the phrase 'bidding prayers'. Thus we

can see that beads and prayers are connected to one another from antiquity. Buddhists, Muslims and Catholics across the world meditate with strings of beads, and Orthodox Christians use knotted ropes. The 'worry beads' that Greeks put around their wrists probably have their origin in a similar practice;[3] and the New Age 'power beads', now being sold in the form of bracelets because of the special properties that are supposed to be inherent in the stones from which they are made, will surely serve a similar meditative function.

In the British Museum there is a string of beads from the Aigina Treasure – Cretan work from about 1,700 to 1,500 years before Christ – in which each bead is carved or moulded in the form of a woman's breast with a hand around it.[4] The identification label displayed next to the beads includes the observation that fertility goddesses in the ancient Near East were often shown holding one breast,[5] and that the beads probably had a religious function. In other words, it looks as though they formed a rosary. The beads are made of carnelian, lapis lazuli and gold, which is to say that their colours are red, blue and gold – the same colours that in the Middle Ages came to be associated with Our Lady, in whose honour the Catholic rosary is dedicated. And the motif of the nursing breast is likewise one with strong marian and rosarian associations. A popular Catholic legend recounts the origin of the rosary as follows:

In the twelfth century in southern France there was a group of Christians known as Cathars (or Albigenses, after the town of Albi), who did not subscribe to the teachings of the Catholic Church, but who believed that the material creation was evil and who taught a world-denying doctrine of the necessity for retreat into a purely spiritual realm. St Dominic tried by his preaching to convert them to Catholicism, but failed. In the year 1214, after much fasting and prayer, and when he was on the point of losing hope, Dominic received a vision of the Blessed Virgin escorted by three queens and fifty maidens. The Virgin gave him the rosary, explaining to him the prayers that were to be said and the mysteries which the devotee should meditate upon when passing the beads through the fingers. The rosary would convert the heretics to the love of Christ in human flesh. The Virgin also pressed milk from her breast, which Dominic drank.[6]

We shall return later to the origins of this legend; for the present, let us attend to the symbolism of the milk pressed from the breast.

The Virgin's milk signifies the real humanity of Christ. His humanity was given by his mother, and her milk fed his dependent human body. In medieval iconography, Mary's bare breast often has connotations of

mercy, and these connotations are directly related to the doctrine of the incarnation. It is because the eternal Word of God took human flesh and understands our weaknesses that we can trust that he will show mercy to sinful humanity: indeed, he was so much one of us that he even depended upon a mother's milk for his survival. So Mary's breast is the reminder of Christ's humanity and vulnerability, and hence of Christ's mercy. Her breast is sometimes compared in art and literature to the wound in the side of Christ, since both show his human weakness and both point to his pity for the world. Or again, it was because Mary gave Christ his humanity (symbolized by the breast) that he was able to die for the world's salvation (symbolized by the wound). The mysteries of the rosary are centrally concerned with the incarnation, and it is therefore fitting that the motif of Mary's milk should appear in the legend of the rosary's supernatural origin.

Yet St Dominic is not the only saint of whom such a legend is recounted. Most famously, it is St Bernard – noted for his marian homilies and great devotion to Our Lady – who received from the Virgin's breast drops of milk upon his lips. Roland Bermann, a contemporary French writer on esoteric subjects, suggests that the symbol of the Virgin's milk falling upon St Bernard's lips stands for the Mercy of God (made of the Virgin's own substance) falling upon that part of his body with which he speaks, indicating that he is called to transmit (by preaching) the grace that he has received.[7] This interpretation would perhaps be even more appropriate to St Dominic, since he founded the Order of Preachers and in the legend of the rosary is being called to preach this particular form of devotion. Moreover, since the rosary is a devotion conducted not only with the fingers but also with the mouth, or at least the lips, there is the implication that the prayers of the rosary are themselves like drops of the Virgin's milk in their spiritual purity and their capacity to nourish the life of Christ within the devotee.

Yet the image of a nursing breast gains its symbolic power because it evokes a profound emotional reaction. It has often reminded men and women of their dependence upon their own mothers and upon the whole material world that nourishes us, as we transform it into our very selves and participate in it through labour and pleasure – the same world, of course, which can fail to provide us with that nourishment and pleasure.[8] Perhaps the pagan goddess whose breast is represented in the Aigina treasure personified that world and its divine power. The Blessed Virgin and the mysteries of the rosary point us to the Creator

God who makes and sanctifies both us and all that sustains or destroys us.

The colours of red, blue and gold – the colours of the Cretan beads – are found on a number of ancient Mediterranean images that seem to be representations of goddesses.[9] When applied to the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages, the colours were ascribed symbolic meanings. In thirteenth-century Spain, King Alphonsus X ('the Learned') of Castile, or one of his court musicians, wrote a song retelling the story of a monk who illuminated the name of Mary in three colours.[10] Gold – traditionally associated with royalty – was appropriate to the Virgin because it was 'rich, harmonious, noble and very precious'; blue – traditionally symbolic of heaven and of purity – 'resembles the heavens which show her splendours'; and the third colour, vermilion, is also called 'rose', a flower which, as we shall see below, has often been associated with Mary. But since gold may be represented – in heraldry, for example – by yellow, it is surely the case that what we have here are the primary colours: the three colours which underlie all the colours of creation, as well as white and black. The nursing breast, the primary colours and the beads themselves: all are things which are primitive and fundamental to the human condition as something both physical and social. And it is precisely in operating at that most primitive and universal level that the rosary leads us into intimacy with the divine.

Early Catholic beads

The rosary in its current form is a relatively modern invention, having evolved over many centuries. It is likely that Christians from early times counted their prayers by moving pebbles from one pile to another, and subsequently by pulling beads or knots along a string or by turning a prayer wheel a spoke at a time. The devout Lady Godiva, Queen of Mercia, founded the women's monastery of Our Lady at Coventry (the name 'Coventry' is derived from 'convent', after the monastery), and when she died in 1041, in her will she left a string of beads, on which she used to keep a tally of her prayers, to be hung upon the neck of the image of Our Lady.[11] However, the evidence does not indicate that praying with beads was associated especially strongly with marian devotion; rather, beads were used for prayers of several kinds.

In monasteries, monks and nuns chanted the 150 psalms, and lay brothers and sisters, who were not bound by the obligation to do this, would say 150 *Pater nosters* instead. By having 150 beads to pass through their fingers, they were easily able to keep count of the number of prayers they had said. Here again, it does not seem that the pattern of

reciting 150 prayers on 150 beads was anything like a universal practice for several hundred years. Beads were strung together in lines as well as circles, and the number could vary quite widely. In London, the streets around St Paul's Cathedral bearing the names Ave Maria Lane, Creed Lane and Paternoster Row are the streets where the bead-makers lived and worked. The names indicate that the prayers used for bead meditation in the Middle Ages were largely those that are still in use today, although they would not always have been used in the same sequence. For example, the Our Father, or *Pater Noster*, has given rise to the English word 'patter', after the sound of the practice of constantly repeating the prayer.

At this point, one may want to ask, 'What is the point of repeating the same prayer over and over again?' Is it to gain the merit that accrues to each recitation? Well, partly. Is it to help keep one's mind on holy subjects and to stop it from wandering? Indeed: that is quite an important function. But most of all, perhaps, the repetition of a prayer over and over again is a technique for lulling the mind into a meditative state in which it may become attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. A religious sister who lives in London told me that she had once been on an underground train that had stopped very suddenly and caused a certain amount of panic amongst passengers who feared that there had been an accident. She said that her first reaction was to take hold of and recite her rosary. Her reaction shows a recognition of the need in times of distress to turn to that which is deep and enduring – that which can sustain us when our emotions seem to tell us that everything is dissolving. When using the rosary becomes habitual, it makes the reassurance of God's presence close at hand: the trust that one is grounded in the divine may be summoned by the movement of a hand or the silent recitation of simple words.

The repetition of the rosary, especially when recited by a group of people, may be compared to the repetition of a sea shanty. The recurrent pattern of verse and response induces a sense of being caught up in the flow of something greater, and thus liberates the meditator to throw him- or herself completely into the task. It is probably the case that the two most ancient forms of song are those used for ritual and those used for work.[12] If the sea shanty retains an ancient manner of working, then the rosary retains a correspondingly ancient manner of praying.

Repetitive incantation is common to the use of prayer beads in all the traditions that employ them. What is more unusual about the Catholic rosary is the practice, which grew up in the Middle Ages and endures to the present, of using the beads to meditate upon a variety of different

topics or 'mysteries' in sequence. The grouping together of a number of related topics under a single heading has been a popular religious practice retained until recent times in, for example, English folk song. It acts as a mnemonic device, that is, helping one call to mind sacred mysteries or other points for meditation or devotion. Thus, there are the well-known Seven Sorrows of Our Lady – a devotion particularly promoted by the Servite order. The so-called 'dolour rosary' consists of seven groups of seven beads to assist in meditation upon the seven sorrows. Our Lady's joys have been variously enumerated; one English song recounts ten, and another tells of seven. A common number is five, although these are by no means always the five which are familiar in the modern rosary. One song lists them as the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Harrowing of Hell and the Ascension.[13] It is most interesting that the Crucifixion is included in a list of Our Lady's joys: it always occurs, of course, in lists of her sorrows, but its inclusion in the list of joys reflects the fuller understanding that the mystery of the cross is a paradox. For the instrument of death is simultaneously the instrument of life and salvation, and to see the crucifixion as one of Our Lady's joys invites us to meditate upon this central Christian mystery at a much deeper level than that of the human drama.

Symbolism

Numbers, of course, tend to acquire a certain significance of their own. The modern rosary has three sets of mysteries – three being the number of the Blessed Trinity – and five mysteries in each set – five being noted supremely as the number of Our Lord's precious wounds, although it is also a 'natural' number in the sense that it is the number of fingers on a human hand. In the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Sir Gawain is solemnly equipped to set out on his mission to meet the Green Knight in the Green Chapel at New Year.[14] On his shield is painted a gold pentacle on a red ground. The pentacle is the five-pointed star made of a single continuous line. The author explains the symbolism of the pentacle at some length. It was devised by King Solomon and is called 'the endless knot'. This should certainly be read not just as a description of its physical appearance, but as indicating that it is a symbol of eternity – that which has no point of beginning or end; and one might understand the ring of rosary beads in a similar manner. Among the several points signified by the five points of the pentacle, the author of the medieval poem mentions Gawain's trust in the five wounds of Christ and the five joys of Our Lady, both of which occur in different ways in rosary meditation. The image of Our

Lady is painted on the inside of Gawain's shield, so that he might look upon it to give him heart. This constant reminder or evocation of Mary's presence again has a certain correspondence with the repetition of the 'Hail Mary' in rosary recitation.

The symbol of the rose is another aspect of bead meditation that has been handed down from the Middle Ages. The Tibetan rosary is called a 'mala', which means 'garland', and likewise, the word 'rosary' means 'rose garland' or 'rose garden'. The nursery-rhyme 'Ring-a-ring-a-roses' may have its ancestry in a song about the rosary.[15] The rose is a very rich symbol, and I do not doubt that its full significance can be grasped only through meditation rather than explanation. So I offer here only some pointers for further reflection.

When you look at a rose window, such as that in Durham Cathedral or in the Gothic cathedrals of France, you see layers and layers of stained glass petals radiating around a central image. If you start at the outermost lights, you will usually find saints represented in these petals, and the closer you come to the centre, the holier – the closer to the Lord – are the saints or angels represented in the successive layers. When you come to the centre, there is usually an image of Christ or of the Virgin and Child. In the East rose of Laon cathedral, the central image is of the Virgin and Child enthroned, with the Virgin holding up a rose in her right hand. When the Virgin in Majesty holds a flower in her right hand, this is usually taken to be a rod of Jesse (Isai 11:1), understood typologically: she herself is the shoot, and Christ is the flower. Yet when we look through the layers of rose petals and come, at the heart of the flower, to the Virgin and Child raising a rose to our gaze, we might sense that something even more mysterious is at work here. It is as though the rose that she holds up to us is an initiatory or revelatory symbol which we will comprehend only when we have attained a sufficient degree of spiritual maturity and understanding.

Mary herself is the Mystic Rose par excellence. She is the noblest flower at whose centre is obtained the most precious jewel in the universe, Christ himself. As it says in the English carol:

> There is no rose of such virtue
> As is the rose that bare Jesu.
> *Alleluia.*
> For in that rose containèd was
> Heaven and earth in little space:
> *Res miranda.*

Because the Blessed Virgin received the Word of God in her womb, because she was the rose who bore God at the very centre of her being, it is possible for each human person to receive that Word and be transformed by it, and so to come to recognize God at the heart of all created things. This is the work which rosary meditation is designed to help us accomplish.

The modern rosary

Although precedents survive from the beginning of the fourteenth century, it was during the fifteenth century that the rosary became established in the form in which it is most widely used today.[16] Even the prayer the Hail Mary was not used in its modern form until that time, having previously consisted only of the scriptural greetings: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.' The name most strongly associated with the establishment and promotion of the modern rosary – that is, the sequence of 150 'Hail Mary' beads, with fifteen intervening 'Our Fathers', and the corresponding pattern of five joyful, five sorrowful and five glorious mysteries for meditation – is that of the Dominican Alan de la Roche (Alanus de Rupe). It is from him that we first learn the story of Our Lady giving the rosary to St Dominic, and it may be that Alan wrote the story of the Virgin's milk in imitation of the similar story concerning St Bernard. Unfortunately, another point of dubious historical accuracy concerns the conversion of the Albigensians, since this came about not so much through the preaching of the friars as through military force. Yet Alan had struck a winner: through the promotion of the Dominicans, and later of the Jesuits, the modern rosary became hugely popular and quickly supplanted other techniques of bead meditation in the Catholic world.

An image that is sometimes found in church wall-painting of the late Middle Ages is that which art historians term the *Marian psychostasis*. This shows St Michael holding the balances in which souls are weighed for their good and evil deeds on the Day of Judgement. In one pan of the scales is a soul being weighed, and around the other pan there are devils trying to pull it down. If the soul weighs more heavily, then that indicates that it is righteous, and therefore will be saved. But if the soul is sinful, then the devils will pull down their scale-pan and the soul will be damned. The Virgin Mary, however, is throwing weights, or, more often, a string of rosary beads into the pan on the soul's side, thereby ensuring the soul's salvation.[17] Thus, the Virgin's intercession is associated directly with the rosary, and images of this kind may well

have been promoted by rosary confraternities – associations of lay people who met to pray the rosary, and in particular, to pray for the faithful departed.[18]

Perhaps the popularity of the modern rosary derives in part from the particular sequence of the mysteries. The first five concern a woman who gives birth for the salvation of the world; the second five concern a man – the son whom she has borne – who dies for the salvation of the world; and the third group concerns the reunion of the man and the woman in the accomplishment of that salvation. The balancing of man and woman and of birth and death, together with the reuniting of the man and the woman in their transcendence of birth and death, is a satisfying pattern.

Yet even since the general establishment of the modern rosary, people have explored other ways of using the beads – a sign that the tradition has remained vibrant. Francis Borgia, for example, the third General of the Society of Jesus, wrote a set of meditations that begins with recollection of one's sins, and then moves on to meditation on the Immaculate Conception before continuing with other mysteries of the lives of Our Lady and Our Lord.[19]

Another variation in rosary meditation is that promoted by devotees of Our Lady of Fatima. This variation consists in the addition of the prayer, 'O my Jesus', after the 'Glory be' at the end of each decade.[20] Indeed, promotion of the rosary has come to be a mainstay of the devotions associated with modern marian apparitions, and Medjugorje prayer groups, for example, make it an important feature of their meetings, again adding a distinctive touch of their own, in this case by reciting the prayers very slowly in order to allow more time for meditation.

Dolour rosaries, rosary rings (to wear on the finger) and bracelets, and strings of ten *Pater noster* beads are again becoming more widely available in Britain, which suggests that bead meditation is currently alive and well here.

Techniques

The great variety of methods of bead meditation brings us on to the mechanics of rosary use: the question of whether there are any dos and don'ts, and if so, what they are.

The number of different prayers used in the standard Catholic rosary, together with the number of different subjects for meditation, mean that it is an exceptionally complicated technique. There are some people who will prefer to repeat one prayer only and to focus on one subject for

meditation. This subject may be one of the standard mysteries, or some other scriptural or sacred scene, or it may be more akin to that striving towards God which is described most famously in the *Cloud of unknowing*. One has to try different forms of meditation to discover what is most helpful. Having said that, however, it must be emphasized that a meditator is not normally in a position to be able to judge what is the best method for them to adopt until they have become reasonably competent in at least one technique. For this reason, it is best to start out on the tried and tested path of the standard rosary and to become familiar with that first of all.

Now, there are many people who say, 'I've just never been able to get on with the rosary'. Sometimes, this is because they have been badly taught. It is also the case that not every form of meditation suits everybody all the time, and there will always be those for whom bead meditation has little to offer. But to become at all expert in the technique of rosary meditation demands a good deal of practice. It is like learning a new language or cultivating a new friendship: you really have to devote time and effort to it.

This raises the question as to what one actually *does* when one is said to be meditating upon the mysteries, and there are various techniques which are preferred by different people. Some of the early books of rosary meditations consist of a series of pictures of the mysteries, with the intention that the reader look at the image whilst passing the beads through the fingers and reciting the prayers. For many people, this is probably a very helpful means of meditation, and in the 1940s Maisie Ward produced a book containing a sequence of prints of paintings by Fra Angelico for this purpose.[21] But rosarians will probably like to compile their own collections of favourite images for meditation.

Another method of rosary meditation is to imagine the scene and the drama of each mystery in detail. This is helpful for those who have the kind of visual imagination that can conjure up such a 'stage set', and many Ignatian meditators will fall into this category. But if your mind just twists into knots when it attempts these kinds of acrobatics, then it will be more helpful to focus on a single image, word or sensation to draw you into the particular mystery. To a certain extent, you just have to say the words and finger the beads, and trust to the grace of God to lead you on from there.

The beads

And what about the beads themselves? Many modern rosaries have 'Our Father' beads which are no different in size or shape from the

'Hail Mary' beads, and this is not very satisfactory, because it makes it harder to tell when you have reached the end of a decade. So it is good to look out for beads that are practical. Some people feel drawn to beads that are very simple – perhaps made of wood. Others like beads that sparkle or look precious (or, if you can afford it, really are precious!). It is not difficult to find beads carved or moulded in the shape of stylized roses, or indeed made from crushed rose petals which retain their scent. Traditionally, you should not buy your own rosary but should be given it or find it, as though it stands for God's grace which cannot be acquired by any exchange on our part. And a rosary is not only a lovely thing to receive, but also to give.

When the Cretan craftsmen of 3000 BCE made their beads of precious stones and gold, those who used the beads must have understood that the beauty of the material world gave them an inkling of heaven. And so it remains with the modern rosary and its mysteries.

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NOTES

1 Marina Warner, *Alone of all her sex: the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary*, new edn (London: Vintage Books, 2000), pp 305–310.

2 The most widely used modern Catholic rosary consists of meditation upon a circle, or chaplet, of fifty beads, divided into five groups of ten, or decades, with a separating bead between each decade and its neighbour. The meditator passes the beads through the fingers, saying the prayer 'Hail Mary' on each bead of each decade, beginning each decade by reciting the 'Our Father' on the previous separating bead, and finishing the decade by reciting the 'Glory be' on the bead following. For each decade there is a different subject of meditation, or mystery. These are divided into three groups of five, so it takes one round of the rosary to complete one set of mysteries.

The mysteries are as follows. The Joyful Mysteries: the Annunciation, the Visitation, Christ's Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple and the Finding in the Temple; the Sorrowful Mysteries: the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion; the Glorious Mysteries: the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Assumption of the Virgin and the Coronation of the Virgin in Heaven. 'Complete' rosary chaplets include fifteen decades with their separating beads, but the shorter form is more commonly used, and is often used for reciting only one set of mysteries at a time.

Most rosaries have a number of additional beads and a cross or crucifix attached, and there are various traditions as to what prayers are recited on these and why, although the Apostles' Creed is almost always included.

3 Eithne Wilkins, *The rose-garden game: the symbolic background to the European prayer-beads* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), p 57.

4 BM Catalogue: Jewellery 756A. The beads are usually on display.

5 Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, in *A history of pagan Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p 7, give a line drawing of a Cretan seal (*c.* 1500 BCE) which shows, among other figures, a woman holding her breast. The interpretation of the image is disputed.
6 Wilkins, *The rose-garden game*, pp 37–38.
7 Roland Bermann, *La Vierge Noire: vierge initiatique* (Paris: Dervy, 1993), pp 80–81.
8 See Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and handmaid: on nature and culture in the cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Cassell, 2000), pp 33–79 and references.
9 These too can be seen in the British Museum, e.g., an enthroned figure from Athens (*c.* 500 BCE), catalogue number BM.1966.3-28.19.
10 Many of the *Cantigas* of Alfonso el Sabio are now available on recordings. This *cantiga* is number 384, and has been recorded by Esther Lamandier, on the album *Alfonso el Sabio: Cantigas de Santa Maria*, on the Astrée label.
11 Recorded in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* of 1123. Quoted at length in Edmund Waterton, *Pietas mariana Britannica: a history of English devotion to the Blessed Virgin Marye . . . with a catalogue of shrines . . .* (London: St Joseph's Catholic Library, 1879), under the catalogue entry for Coventry. Brief quotation in Wilkins, *The rose-garden game*, p 25.
12 A consideration of shanties, and a briefer consideration of ritual songs, is given in A. L. Lloyd, *Folk song in England* (London: Paladin, 1975).
13 Manuscript and published references to these and others are given in Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (eds), *The Oxford book of carols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p 157. The full words and melody are given of a seven-joy version (pp 156–157).
14 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (trans Brian Stone), ll. 619–669 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp 44–46.
15 Wilkins, *The rose-garden game*, p 81.
16 Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the rose* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp 15–17.
17 A discussion of the evolution of this iconography, together with a list of extant examples, can be found in Catherine Oakes, 'The scales: an iconographic motif of justice, redemption and intercession', *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies* 1 (August 2000), pp 11–36.
18 The evolution of these confraternities is discussed in detail in Winston-Allen, *Stories of the rose*.
19 Francis Borgia, 'Pious meditations on the beades: for detestation of synne; obtayning of Christian perfection; and dayly memory of the life, and passion of Christ our Sauiour', included in *The practise of Christian workes* (written in Spanish and Englished by a Father of the Society of Jesus), published 1620.
20 The prayer is usually recited in the form: 'O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of Hell and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those most in need of thy mercy.' An account of the apparitions and development of the cult of Our Lady of Fatima, including the giving of this prayer, can be found in Francis Johnston, *Fatima: the great sign* (Chulmleigh, Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1980).
21 Maisie Ward, *The splendour of the rosary* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1946).