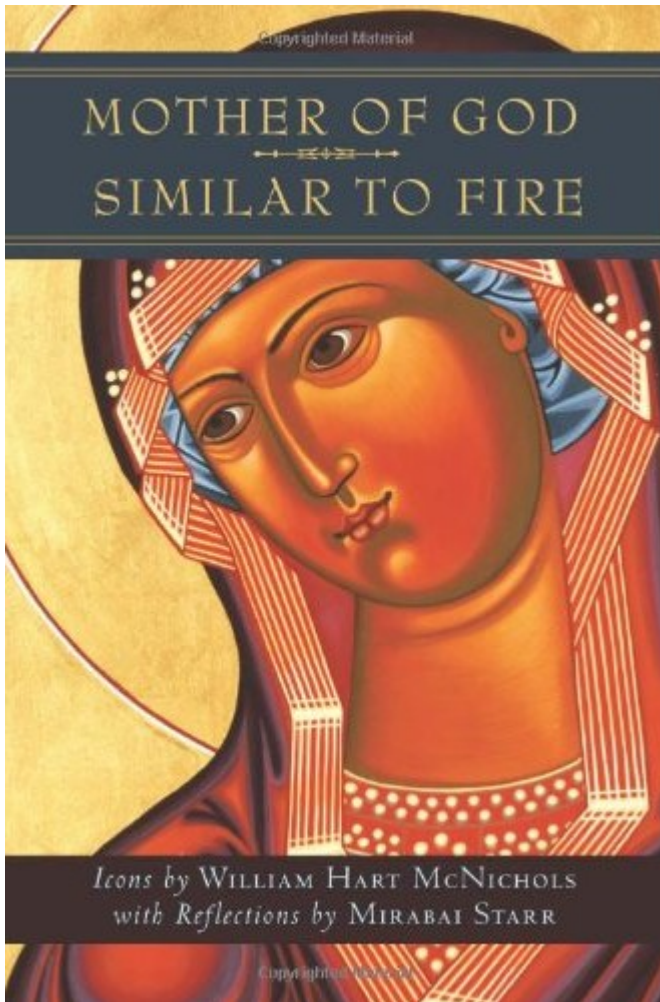


# A thousand forms of Mary

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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## In Review



## Mother of God Similar to Fire

Icons by William Hart McNichols, reflections by Mirabai Starr  
Orbis

A few years ago, when I was researching a [story](#) in Veracruz, Mexico, the proprietor of a small cantina and I struck up a conversation. When talk turned to religion, Señor Gonzalez shyly asked if I would like to see one of his most highly prized treasures. He led me to the upstairs banquet room, where an errant barbeque had left a smoke stain on the wall.

"Do you see her?" he asked me anxiously. A lifelong Protestant, I wasn't immediately clear to whom he was referring. (I hadn't been in Mexico long.) I stared at the smoke for a while, and with Señor Gonzalez's help, I was eventually able to see her: the face of the Virgin Mary appearing to him in smoke.

During the rest of my visit, these appearances of Mary were shown to me frequently: on rocks, on moss, in food, on walls. I learned quickly that Mary's appearance was a mysterious commonplace, a way to see God in everything.

This is still difficult for me to grasp, but a new book is a dramatic help. This book is a series of icons painted by Catholic priest [William Hart McNichols](#), with prayers written by acclaimed translator and self-described "Jewish Sufi Buddhist who loves Christ" Mirabai Starr. Their collaboration deserves lingering attention.

Every other page contains one of the "1000 forms" of Mary from cultures all over the world, accompanied by a variety of seasons, color palettes and moments of human life. Many of the icons show Mary "similar to fire," just as she was in the smoke in Veracruz. Mary speaks from mountains, plains and deserts—in suffering and in hope.

In one icon Mary stands in the presence of the angel with a Hebrew text in her hand. Starr writes:

May I learn to exalt in the  
ordinary moments of my life  
and embrace God everywhere  
in everything  
always.

Amen.