

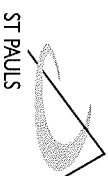


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THE MARIAN MYSTERY

THE OUTLINE OF A MARIOLOGY

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tion, I returned to the doctrinal topics in a more systematic and synthetic way, yet completing in some sense what their first exposition entailed. My hope is that in this way both the sequence of the doctrinal development and the interconnectedness of the various doctrinal statements could be shown with a result of understanding a potential synthesis of Marian thought which may be further developed from the material presented.

Likewise, this book's approach may seem to underestimate the riches of the speculative theology of the Middle Ages, and to be overly zealous when treating historical, critical, and often mere textual issues. But in today's state of Mariology such considerations, even if often apologetic, are greatly needed. The damage done, as assessed by a most qualified authority on the issue, Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, largely came in the form or disguise of doubts and suspicions raised by historians and critics, who were at times indeed at a loss how to distinguish facts and fiction in Mariology.¹³ May the reader continue to work on the issues presented here for further re-building Mariology, ultimately *ad aedificationem Ecclesiae*.

¹³ He formulates the conclusion that the invasion of biblical, liturgical and patristic studies by historicism, led first to "the victory of ecclesiocentric Mariology" and then to "the collapse of Mariology altogether." Cf. the article quoted above in note n. 2, p. 2.

THE BIBLICAL SOURCES ON MARY

NEW TESTAMENT¹⁴

Methodological Remarks

In the New Testament Mary is neither frequently mentioned nor negligibly peripheral. Regardless of the statistical evidences that one could marshal in support to this statement, the question of her importance in the biblical books – or that of any person or doctrinal issue – is not to be decided by mere statistics. Such a question does not depend on the number of occurrences we find for a particular name and person, or a specific term, in the Bible, but on the merit of the issues involved, which is usually defined by the Christological perspective and possibly also by a method the theologian has applied. In biblical studies, in fact, the *theological* importance of a subject is greatly determined by the way in which the exegete conceives the relationship between exegesis and theology.

¹⁴ Biblical Mariology, especially Mary in the New Testament is treated by a variety of literature. However, the exegetical presuppositions are often not clarified. It is left unclear by many of the authors how they regard the relationship of history and theology or that of biblical and systematic theology. A disconnected presentation of biblical, theological and historical chapters makes this literature often valuable on details but problematic with regard to general conclusions. Such is, for example, the work of Juan Luis Bastiero, *Mary the Mother of the Redeemer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), which in fact remains a series of ultimately independent lectures. An excellent biblical Mariology is by Ignace de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992). Much better known in America is Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph Fitzmyer, and John Reumann (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, New York: Paulist, 1978), but its pursuit of denominational pluralism turns it into a problematic tool for Catholic theology. On this see more on pp. 256-258.

By limiting the exegetical investigation to the historically identifiable and explicit intention of the human author(s), a biblical scholar may end up harvesting precious little from his inquiry about "Mary in the Bible." Such investigations often speak only of "suggestions" found in certain texts about Mary's role in the plan of salvation. In such a perspective, for example, Galatians 4:4 ("born of a woman, born under the law") would appear mariologically irrelevant. Also Romans 1:2 ("from the seed of David according to the flesh") may appear unimportant for what the Bible says about Mary, or even worse: contradictory to the idea of her virginal motherhood.

An inquiry into the "historical Mary," locked into critical exegesis, notes only that she is mentioned by name only in three of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In the Fourth Gospel, Mary is mentioned twice, in the short narrative of the Wedding Feast of Cana (2:1-11) and at the crucifixion (19:25-27), but without being named. Yet from these data it would be exegetically false to conclude that "the mother of Jesus" was for John a merely symbolic figure. Symbolic significance and historical reality are not mutually exclusive. In the case of the Fourth Gospel, we see quite the contrary: the historicity of the events causes their symbolic significance to be rooted firmly in reality. And this reality is not some lifeless factuality now all gone and pertaining to the realm of the past, but rather a physical fact pointing beyond itself and into a spiritual realm that lasts. Following this line of thought, we discover that also in the Book of Revelation (chapter 12) the Mother of the Messiah is mentioned, but in this book the primary aspect is symbolic, speaking about the end of history in a language of images. But, of course it is of great importance that the Church is being symbolized by the cosmic image of the Messiah's Mother, indicating that just like Mary so also the Church is called to go through both suffering and glory.

The biblical sources of Mariology, therefore, are not a catalogue of data to be programmed into a system, nor statements organized by their logical connections so that "all biblical data" could be worked into thesis-formulas. Instead we must treat biblical passages about Mary as verbal expressions of truth, "revealed for our

salvation,"¹⁵ in the form of narratives and statements, about natural and supernatural realities, which – in the case of Mariology – are connected in the closest possible way to the mystery of the Incarnation and of the Trinity, the central truths of Revelation. The biblical text clearly manifests the special status of Mariology: it presents her as the person from whose individual human nature the Incarnation of God's Son took place. In Matthew and Luke, the two canonical Gospels that explicitly treat Jesus' human origins, Mary appears as the one human being from whom the humanity of Jesus was created, in body and soul, and inserted into the human race by God's direct and unprecedented intervention.

The Genesis of the Lord

A majority of biblical historians, when they set about reconstructing Christian origins, consider the development of an interest in Jesus' childhood as a rather late phenomenon, absent from the mind of the first Christian generation and, for that reason, from the oldest written Gospel, that of Mark. Since Mark's priority as the oldest Gospel is widely accepted as the principal hypothesis in Synoptic studies, many Biblicists accept this premise without question or objection. Of course, Markan priority remains a hypothesis, not yet accepted by all, and recognized by most contemporary authors as not fully proven. If Matthew were the first Gospel, then the origins of the Messiah would more convincingly appear to have been a matter of original interest for the evangelists. But a third approach is also possible, and it does not depend on any source theory of the Gospels. Let us closely consider Romans 1:1-4. As practically all Pauline scholars admit, St. Paul here cites a pre-Pauline formula he inherited from the apostolic community. The text also shows vivid interest in Jesus' origins:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, which he promised be-

¹⁵ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council, n. 12.

forehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, the Gospel concerning his Son, *who was descended from David according to the flesh* and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...

In this tripartite description of the "Gospel," (in the Pauline sense of the word, meaning message and not book or text) the middle part is about the Son's fleshly origins, described in terms of Davidic ancestry. According to Paul, Jesus' origin fulfills the Scriptures and proves that he is a human being. As such, he is able to suffer and die in order, thereafter, to be exalted in glory. It is important to note the two references this passage makes to Jesus as "Son of God," one before mentioning his descentance from David, and one before his exaltation is stated. That is, Jesus is proclaimed Son of God even before his human birth, and not only after his exaltation. Thus it is God's Son who is here said to have become a descendant of David and thereafter to have died and risen from the dead. Since the Epistle to the Romans is dated with unanimity to about A.D. 56-58, and therefore antedates all the canonical Gospels, we are entitled to conclude that there is nothing unusual or "late" in Matthew's or Luke's interest in Jesus' origin. Incidentally, it is rather Mark's lack of such interest that should be regarded as anomalous.¹⁶ One is, therefore, entitled to ask why Mark omits at his Gospel's beginning any treatment of Jesus' origins and starts his "story" with the ministry of

¹⁶ Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (VI, 14-5-7) quotes from an otherwise lost work by Clement of Alexandria (*Hypotyposes*) a saying by one of the "ancient presbyters" (meaning the immediate disciples of the Apostles) according to which the gospels with "genealogies" (i.e., passages about the origins of Jesus) are more ancient than those without such texts. This probably does not mean that Matthew and Luke are prior to Mark and John, but rather that the heretical editions of the gospels, like Marcion's edition of Luke and the gospel of the Ebionites based on Matthew, have illegitimately left out the infancy stories. Clement's saying is the oldest statement asserting that the narratives about Jesus' origins belong to the original integrity of the Gospel tradition. See Denis Farkasfalvy, "The Presbyters' Witness on the Order of the Gospel as Reported by Clement of Alexandria," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, LIV, 2 (April, 1992) 260-270.

John the Baptist.¹⁷ Whichever way we answer this question, we must say that the way Matthew opens his book is well in accordance with Paul's summary of his Gospel's message in Romans.¹⁸

Let us then consider the opening of Matthew:

The book of "genesis" of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham... (Mt 1:1)

We must leave the word "genesis" untranslated for the moment. For Greek-speaking Jews and Christians alike, "Book of Genesis" meant in the 1st century what it means today: the title of the first volume of the Pentateuch. But it was also the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew expression *sefer ha-toledot*, which refers to texts that explain the origins of something or somebody. In fact, Genesis uses this expression when referring to the creation or origin of heaven and earth (2:4), then the creation or origin of Adam (5:1), and the genealogical tables connecting Adam to Noah and further down all the way to Abraham (6:9, 9:12, 10:1). Thus, Matthew begins his book quite skillfully and appropriately as a new "Genesis" in which he will describe the beginnings of a new creation – the story of Jesus – by combining this opening with the genealogical list from Abraham to David and from David all the way down to Jesus. For Matthew it is very important to show the initial paradox of his message: on the one hand, Jesus is the son of David (cf. Mt 1:20 and 2:5-6, in fulfillment of Mi 5:2) but, on the other hand, Jesus was born by no act of human "generation" (that would be γεννησις not γένεσις) from a Virgin by an action of the Holy Spirit, which again fulfilled Scripture (cf. Is 7:14 in Mt 1:22-23). Therefore, we can say that Matthew 1-2 expands on the theme that Paul so briefly enunciated using a pre-Pauline Christian

¹⁷ This is not our subject to treat, but the answer lies in a comprehensive study of all the omissions which Mark makes of the traditional material of which he was certainly cognizant. Such are, for example the "Our Father" or a closer description of Jesus' temptations in the desert, which he mentions in a few words (1:13) but does not describe.

¹⁸ More specifically, Matthew's opening lines correspond to the way Paul's sources (the Jerusalem community in the late 30's) presented its narrative about Jesus the Christ.

confessional formula when speaking of Jesus' human generation in Romans 1:2.

The narrative pericopes of Matthew 1-2 provide answers more specifically to three questions: Was Jesus a descendant of David? Was he born in Bethlehem of Judah? How is it that nonetheless he was known as Jesus of Nazareth? Each answer is rooted in some scriptural passage of the Old Testament which we will treat here one by one.

The first is Isaiah 7:14, in which Ahaz, a Davidide king of Judah, is told about a "sign" that God will give him: his (messianic) descendant named Immanuel (God is with us) will be conceived by a virgin. If we read this in Matthew's perspective, we understand the role of Joseph. He is an important part of the sign precisely because he is not Jesus' physical father. It is through him that Jesus is legally a "Davidide," "the son of David," although not "of a Davidic descendant's seed," unless indirectly, if one assumes that Mary was also a descendant of David.¹⁹ Matthew wants to demonstrate not only that, under the same breath, the virginal birth and the Davidic origin of the Messiah (the two poles of the paradox) were prophetically predicted, but also that Jesus is identical with the Immanuel of Isaiah's book. The latter means that he is the person through whom God's presence and reign in the world are fulfilled. How this ultimately happens will become clear only at the end of the story: Jesus' own ongoing and everlasting presence among his faithful is predicted (Mt 28:20).

A second quotation is signaled in Matthew 2:15; it comes from Hosea 11:1. Through this text the evangelist first identifies Jesus' return from Egypt with Israel's Exodus under Moses. In both cases God calls his "Son" – Jesus corresponding to the Chosen People – and calls him out of Egypt back into the land of the forefathers. This quotation points beyond Jesus' fleshly origin, for Jesus incorporates in himself the whole people of Israel: he is in fact God's Son, fulfilling in himself what Israel and the Messianic King were expected to

do in the world, that is, to bring God's reign to the Chosen People and through them to the whole world. By being all at once God's Son and David's Son, Jesus brings about, not only a new Genesis, but also a new Exodus.

In Matthew 2:23 we encounter again an explicit reference to some prophetic text, but its identification is a bit more difficult. For in 2:23 Matthew concludes again about Jesus' origins but now with a puzzling connection between the name "Jesus of Nazareth" and the fact that he grew up in this Galilean town, by referring to something that, allegedly "the prophets" said about it. In the tradition, this allusion is most frequently interpreted as a reference Isaiah 11:1, although contemporary exegesis seems to lean toward Isaiah 4:3.²⁰ Matthew's text lacks clarity. Among other things, it is not quite clear how the adjective "Nazarene" is grammatically derived from either the Semitic or Greek name of the town of "Nazareth." The Greek text offers little help. The plural in "prophets" is also obscure, but it does not necessarily indicate that more than one prophetic text is involved; it only means that the text in question is representative of "the prophets" in a collective sense, i.e., the Old Testament as a whole.²¹ In any case, we have here a triangular connection linking a geographic name (Nazareth) with a scriptural quotation and a descriptive or personal name applied to Jesus (*Nazaraïos* or *Nazarenos*). Modern Matthean scholarship is inclined to speak here of an unsolvable dilemma. For the name of the town Nazareth is certainly not named in any text of Isaiah, nor by any other ancient prophet. But there is evidence sufficient to resolve the issue with strong probability. Jesus' name "Jesus of Nazareth" is widely attested in all branches of the Gospel tradition. Most clearly, John 1:45 tells Jesus' full name under which he was unambiguously identified: "Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth." As was usual in 1st century Palestine, his name consisted of three parts: "personal name / patronymic / prov-

²⁰ W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) I, 275-281.

²¹ Matthew and most New Testament books use the expression "Law and Prophets" as standing for all the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Cf. Mt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40.

¹⁹ Matthew provides no basis or hint for making this assumption. But Ignatius of Antioch seems to suppose it (cf. *Letter to the Ephesians* 18:2).

enance." John 1:45 reproduces, therefore, Jesus' "full legal name." On the other hand, the verb "he will be called," in Matthew 2:23, makes the reader understand that Matthew presents here not some attribute of Jesus but a name by which he was called by his contemporaries. Since Matthew already stated that the personal name "Jesus" was predetermined by a divine decision (Mt 1:21), and carried out by Joseph (Mt 1:26), it is logical to expect that the last component of the name – his provenance – would also be divinely arranged and then put into effect by Joseph.

We can go now to Isaiah 11:1. Here again the prophet refers to the Davidic offspring, the one who was called Immanuel-El in Isaiah 7:14, but here is called "nezer," i.e., a shoot. This word was probably pronounced in the 1st century like "nazār" and, therefore sounded quite similar to "Nazara," the Aramaic form of Nazareth.²² The Greek word in the text, "Nazariois," meaning "from Nazara," refers to the same word but provided with a Greek ending, just like the Latinized form "Nazarenos" which is also found in variant texts. Both mean "from Nazara." Thus Matthew seems to be telling us that the decision Joseph makes when moving to Nazareth – the decision that eventually determines Jesus' "last name" (the place of provenance) – did not happen by accident, but was likewise divinely willed and carries a theological significance. That for modern linguistics this is a "false etymology," since the name "Nazareth" does not in its view come from "flower," is beside the point. When calling him Jesus of "Nazara," his contemporaries were in fact fulfilling him Jesus of "Nazara," his contemporaries were in fact fulfilling the Scriptures: they called him the "shoot," and Matthew sees here a third reference to a new beginning – after "new Genesis" and "new Exodus," now "the shoot" – by which God jump starts his *salvation plan*.²³ Thus when, due to political circumstances, Jesus and his family end up choosing to dwell in Galilee, the evangelist sees in

²² In ancient Gospel manuscripts there are three main forms for Nazareth: Ναζαρέθ (Mk 4:13; 4:16), Ναζαρεθ (Mt 21:11), or Ναζαρετ.

²³ The word "Nazarene" could also be linked to the word and concept of the "Nazaries" or "nazirs" as privileged holy men chosen to be religious leaders in Israel. This connection seems to be the least warranted by "prophetic texts."

this event the fulfillment of the Scriptures as it was foretold by some prophet: "He will be called a Nazorean."

God both hides and reveals Jesus' identity – hides for the contemporaries and reveals to the reader of the Gospel. Not only is he God's Son by nature and origin, but exactly when, seeking refuge in Egypt, he loses the transparency of his origins, he begins appearing as the one who incorporates into his personal destiny that of the whole people. Moreover, by being re-routed back to Galilee, a region unfit for David's sons, he indicates a radically re-shaped salvation plan as a new shoot in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Mt 4:15).

It is at this point that we must make a theological connection to Paul's text, regardless of how much or little Paul may have known about the name or the person of Mary:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. (Gal 4:4-5)

Once we admit the canonical unity of the two Testaments, this theological connection is inevitable. The "fullness" of time necessarily refers to its counterpoint, the beginning. But further, when Paul refers to "the Law," he speaks of the Torah (the Pentateuch), which had its beginning, the Book of Genesis, and comes to its fullness when it is transcended, that is, at Jesus' birth. In Jesus' case "birth from a woman" means a birth like any other that followed the creation of Adam and Eve, and yet it is unlike any other birth because it meant a new Genesis beyond the Torah. Paul says that, born of a woman, Jesus is born into the order of the First Genesis, under the Torah. Matthew agrees: he is son of Abraham and David. Yet he is not a physical son to the Davidide man Joseph. Rather, his birth was the miraculous fruit of a unique, non-sexual reproduction from "the woman," chosen to be the one on whom the Holy Spirit descended for a new creation, to signify a new Genesis. This new beginning continues with a new Exodus that is re-routed to Galilee of the Gentiles, where Jesus is rooted and planted anew as the "shoot,"

prophesied by Isaiah. As Son of God, he redeems from the Law and establishes a new Israel, a new filial relationship: a sonship that is spiritual and universal. Paul indicates that the birth of Jesus results in the birth of all the redeemed so that we may become "children of God" with the Spirit dwelling in our hearts crying out "Abba, Father." Regardless of how explicitly Paul registered the implications of his text, Galatians 4:4-5 stands in parallel to Matthew 1:20. Both speak about a physical birth causing, at the same time, a new beginning in a spiritual sense as it leads, ultimately, to our non-physical birth or "regeneration" from God. But while in Matthew the birth from the Spirit primarily refers to Jesus' divinity, in Galatians the spiritual birth is explicitly that of the Christians in whom the divine life comes about through faith and baptism so that Jesus' own voice and word call out from within us to the Father.

The mariological content of Matthew 1-2 consists of the virginal conception of Jesus, linked in two antithetical ways to the "Book of Genesis." On one level, the word "Genesis" in Matthew 1:1 assumes the role of a title and links the New Testament's beginning to the beginning of the Old. It links Jesus' origins to the origins of all creation. On another level, this same word points out that Jesus' conception marks the appearance of a new creation. Insofar as it is virginal, the new genesis comes about without an antecedent, yet, insofar as it stands in succession to human generations, it brings to fulfillment the drama that God has kept on weaving through a particular salvation history, a path starting with Abraham and leading from generation to generation to Jesus.

We must keep in mind that in the various episodes of Matthew 1-2 Mary is never the central figure. She does not act or speak, but is only the "locus" where the Holy Spirit's power of causing Jesus' conception operates. Nothing in the narrative suggests a sexual or "quasi-sexual" link of Mary to the Holy Spirit or to any male human being. Neither Joseph nor the Spirit "begets" Jesus in Mary. It is the divine action of the Spirit that makes this new generation happen, an action that has no sexual or physical characteristics and is fully supernatural. Therefore, Jesus' conception, expressed by the passive

voice of *γεννάω* (*γεννήθῃ* in v. 16 and *γεννηθεὶς* in v. 20), cannot be validly transformed into sentences with the same verb in active voice because the divine agent is asexual. This makes the role of Joseph peculiar in these narratives. It is not enough to speak of Joseph's role in the story as a feature of the author's "narrative technique" introducing the reader gradually to the mystery of Jesus' conception. It would be more correct to say that Joseph, the only conceivable witness other than Mary, is entitled to learn the truth about Mary's uncompromised virginity, as he does from an angel, and is, therefore, the chosen recipient of this revealed truth. That the reader too is thus told about this mystery through the message of an angel confirms this statement: Joseph transmits what he learns; the one evangelized becomes an evangelizer. Of course, only Mary is drawn into the heart of the mystery of divine motherhood, which Matthew's narrative indicates only indirectly. Mary's witness is not based on her association with a single point in Jesus' life; rather it is based on the sum total of her life-time's experience that ultimately remains behind an impenetrable veil beyond the limits of human speech.

It is simply unacceptable to argue that the evangelist fabricated the stories about Joseph with no more historical information than Jesus' patronymic (cf. Jn 1:45) and an anonymously evolving theology of the Incarnation. Of course, the name of Joseph makes one think of the stories of Joseph, the patriarch whose proclivity to revelatory dreams and whose virtue of chastity are known from the Bible (Gn 39:1-23). It is quite possible, even plausible, that the cross-references to this patriarch are intentional, so that the Joseph cycle of Genesis might have shaped the figure of Joseph in the Gospel. But his role in Matthew 1-2 focuses on his reception (embraced with faith) of a divine revelation about the mystery of Jesus' bodily origins, something entirely absent from the stories of Joseph.

We must remain aware that the overture to the story of Jesus' origins is the summary statement in Matthew 1:1, which makes a triple reference to the Old Testament: "book of Genesis," "son of Abraham," and "son of David." Of these, the third is fulfilled specifically through Joseph. Although Jesus was conceived in a way that

by-passed human paternity "according to the flesh," Joseph was, in an important sense, the "father of the Messiah." He was the person linking Jesus to the Davidic covenant and thus bringing about one of the basic "fulfillments" of the Scriptures. We face here one of the Christological paradoxes of the New Testament: Jesus is the Davidic Messiah and yet his origins surpass, yes, even contradict, the most important element in the concept of Davidic messianism: he was not conceived by the Davidic spouse of his mother. We will see how consistently Luke's text affirms the two sides of the same paradox.

The Portrait of the Mother of the Lord in Luke 1-2

1. *About Luke's Sources*

For the rest of the Church's teaching about Mary as well as for Christian Marian piety, the most important texts are found in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel; two passages, the Annunciation at 1:29-38 and the Visitation at 1:45-57, are the only Gospel episodes with Mary in the center. Although the story lines of Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 share important elements and exhibit some convergent aspects, they cannot be harmonized. In fact, any harmonization would risk missing the point of each narrative. But one may say that Luke's text represents a further and deeper delving into the mystery of the virginal conception already seen in Matthew, and especially into its implications for Mary's personal life, her call and role. Luke, we might say, was the first to transmit the special outlook and perspective that characterize Mariology.

The Lucan narratives about Jesus' origins and childhood do not isolate Mariology, but keep it embedded in the Gospel structure. This is clear if we realize that the Lucan account of Jesus' origins consists of stories parallel to stories about John the Baptist, as if expanding the analogy found in all four Gospels between Jesus' ministry and that of John the Baptist. When comparing the episodes of Jesus' and John's infancy in Luke, René Laurentin speaks of a "diplych" exhibiting a certain "limping" or "asymmetric" parallelism.

The Biblical Sources on Mary

The episodes about John become shorter and lose importance while those about Jesus expand in size and significance.²⁴

As is the case for Joseph presented by Matthew, so for Mary presented by Luke, some recent exegetes tend to reduce Luke's accounts to a composite of fictitious narratives based on reflections on Old Testament texts and thus eliminate the question of historicity in their regard. This tendency is based on a handful of findings, convincing neither individually nor cumulatively, providing little more than random possibilities.

An important issue debated in this context concerns Luke's sources. Does his text reveal a Hebrew or Aramaic "Vorlage"?²⁵ For literary critics, the most important aspect of the question has always been the peculiar literary language and style exhibited by the Infancy Narratives in Luke 1-2.²⁶ These two chapters (following the Prologue in 1:1-4) contain so many Hebrewisms – more than the rest of the Gospel or most of Acts – that, in general, they are legitimately considered to be indicators of Semitic sources used by the evangelist. However a few important studies claim to have produced evidence to the contrary. These propose that the stylistic peculiarities like the Semitisms may come from conscious efforts of imitation of "the sacred language" of Scripture (in this case, its Greek translation) by Luke, who developed a technique of writing in the style of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced a couple of centuries before the birth of Jesus.

²⁴ *Luc 1-11, Études bibliques* (Paris: Gabalda, 1958), 22-42. Raymond Brown also speaks of a (more elaborate) diplych well laid out in his *An Introduction to the New Testament, The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York/London/Toronto/Sidney/Auckland: Doubleday, 1996), 230-231.

²⁵ "Vorlage" is a technical term for a previous oral or written composition, which the author finds ready-made and uses as a basic framework for his text.

²⁶ Raymond Brown notes that the question about the origin of the Semitisms in Lk 1-2 can be traced back to the early 1800's. See *The Birth of the Messiah, New Updated Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 246, n. 39. Brown, however, disassociates himself from those who regard "these stories as historical" and "trace them back to family traditions" (ibid., 244-245). But his last word is that the "reconstruction of the pre-Lukan sources" is "enormously difficult" and thus he cannot say anything definite about them (ibid., 250.)

This thesis is not satisfactory.²⁷ Luke's Prologue, which the Infancy Narratives immediately follow, insists rather adamantly that his Gospel is based on eyewitness accounts. The supposition that, after such a Prologue, he would present fully fabricated stories by using a deceptive stylistic maneuver does not square with his stated purpose. Nor can one explain clearly why he bothered to state this purpose at all in the wholly different style of a well educated Greco-Roman historian, only to switch over immediately to a narrative loaded with Semitisms. We do not know of any similar work contemporary or prior to Luke's Gospel written in a similar manner. The extraordinary number of authentic Hebraisms in Luke 1-2, well exceeding what we find in the rest of Luke, would need a better explanation than the author's effort of mimicking scriptural style. In a similar manner, a more "Hebraistic" account of Jesus' ministry could have also come about under Luke's pen for the sake of a similar effect, i.e., for an artificially obtained impression of authenticity.²⁸ Why does Luke limit this concentration of "Septuagintal

²⁷ To quote a French specialist of the Gospel of Luke, François Bovon, "The question of the occurrence of Semitism is a difficult one." Bovon observes that Luke very often avoids the Semitism he finds in Mark's Gospel (which most authors believe is a source used by Luke). But he also notes that, in the Birth Narratives, "he employs Semitisms whenever he finds them tolerable." And he adds that in numerous sayings of Jesus Luke is not prone to modify material he takes from his sources (*Luke 1, Hermeneia*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000, 4). In his *Anchor Bible Commentary* Joseph Fitzmyer just attempts a list of the "Septuagintisms" in Luke's style; he assures us that the list is incomplete and finally notes Luke's "fondness for Septuagintisms." *The Gospel According to Luke 1-IX, Anchor Bible* 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 114-116.

However, I. Howard Marshall, the evangelical author of a commentary on Luke, puts together these findings in a positive way and concludes in a manner that I find most convincing: "In some places [of the Gospel] a number of scholars suspect that the material proper to Luke is his own creation, since it displays his peculiar theological interests. This theory has been advanced particularly in respect of the birth stories.... But the general fidelity of Luke to his sources Mk and Q, where these can be certainly identified, makes one skeptical of the suggestions that he created material in the Gospel on any large scale." *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 31.

²⁸ Different authors would present differently the proportion of underlying traditional material and Luke's own effort of expanding them into full-fledged stories. Typically a "middle-of-the-road" position is followed by Luke Timothy Johnson, a Catholic author, who points out in general Luke's "fondness for archaizing." He surmises that Luke builds "entire scenes" from "biblical prototypes." But all the

style" to the episodes about Jesus' childhood? It is in the context of this unanswered question that Luke's references to *Mary keeping the memory of the events in her heart* take special significance. For after the episode of the nativity we read: "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (2:19). Then at the end of the childhood narratives, as Jesus is found in the Temple, the text concludes: "And his mother kept all these things in her heart" (2:51).

Of course, nowhere does Luke claim that he personally learned about any event from Mary, the mother of Jesus. Yet the two comments quoted above seem to express his conviction that what is known about Jesus' origins and infancy has been remembered from eyewitness sources, among them the most qualified witness of all, Mary herself. This makes us understand why Luke, and Luke alone, mentions her by name in the early post-apostolic Church: among the Apostles gathered at Pentecost, at the "infancy of the Church," when they receive the Holy Spirit. For, in fact, Acts 1:13-14 lists by name the eleven Apostles and Mary, and only then, without names, indicates the presence of other women as well as the brothers of Jesus (of whom we will need to speak later), all of them witnesses at the overture of the "apostolic preaching." On the other hand, besides the events of the infancy, nowhere does Luke's Gospel offer any episode of Jesus' life with a reference to Mary. From Luke's own perspective, Mary's presence at Pentecost would be irrelevant unless she were a witness to something important that was narrated in the "first volume" of the Lucan work. Just as the eleven names in Acts 1:13-14 constitute a reference to Luke 6:14-15, Mary's name is best explained in connection with Luke 2:19 and 2:51.²⁹

examples he gives for these statements are from Acts: Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke, Sacra Pagina*, Vol. 3 (Collegeville: Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1991), 12-13. Much more restrained, maybe even too shy, is I. Howard Marshall's sober approach in assessing Luke's historicity. He states that work on traditional historical issues has only recently begun in earnest. "It may, therefore, seem rash to attempt any kind of historical appraisal of the origins of the traditions recorded in Luke." *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 32.

²⁹ The literature opting for non-historicity of the Infancy Narratives explains these references to Mary as a "model" of behavior rather than a reference to an oral source. Brown states this in the first edition of his *The Birth of the Messiah* and

2. *The Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38)*

The passage constitutes a literary unit: it starts with the Angel Gabriel being sent and ends with the Angel departing. The main character in the narrative is Mary. Its literary structure follows that of other biblical birth announcements – of Samuel, Samson, and most obviously John the Baptist – but it resembles just as closely, if not more, the narratives of divine calls like the call of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. It contains a number of characteristics typical of the latter group of narratives: an opening that makes the person addressed wonder, a reference to awe and fear (“Do not be afraid”), the announcement of conception and birth (or a call), an objection by the person addressed, a word of assurance in response to the objection and, finally, the expression of consent by the addressee.

But equally important are the differences that make this narrative unique. In the parallel texts the conception and birth of the child is ardently desired by the woman in question and her husband expected to become the father. Here, the issue is exactly the opposite, as the question is stated: how can this happen, since Mary is a virgin and has no relations with any man? The divine assurance resolves this question by reference to the intervention of the Holy Spirit and not by reference to a man, although a spouse was explicitly named in the introductory words.

The description of the Child, contained in verses 32-33 and 35, is rich in Christological details. At this point the title “Son of God” is closely connected with attributes of a Davidic Messiah. However,

repeats it in an appendix in response to the “conservative” critics of his book (see pp. 429-430 and 680-681 in the updated edition quoted above in note 26). However, he erroneously claims that in light of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II Catholic scholars are now not expected to adhere to the historicity of the inspired books. He seems to forget about no. 19 of *Dei Verbum*: “Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held and continues to hold that the four Gospels just named, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day he was taken up to heaven (see Ac 1:1-2).” The expressions “did and taught” is technical: it summarizes in Ac 1:1-2 what Luke himself thought to be the content of his first volume.

The Biblical Sources on Mary

the “royal attributes” of the messianic figure are clearly transcendental: “he will reign forever” and “of his reign there will be no end.” Of course, these terms can be applied in some sense to David’s merely human successors as we have them in some royal messianic texts, especially if isolated from the rest of the narrative (e.g. Ps 45:6 or 89:28-29). But when the Angel specifically describes Mary’s conception as happening through the “overshadowing” of the Holy Spirit, there can be no doubt that this Child is the result of a supernatural, divine act. He is called “Son of God” not in the sense of any Davidic Messiah – in fact, it is just being explained how he would be born without being inserted into David’s lineage – but because the Spirit will cause this conception as a novel beginning in a virginal womb without and beyond any human generative force.

It is Mary’s question that elicits the exposition of the second set of the child’s attributes, as she inquires: How can this be? The meaning of Mary’s objection is handled in modern times as a *crux interpretum*. No matter how we answer the long-debated issue about Mary’s intentions or vows or plans or prospects or expectation or readiness or non-readiness to remain a virgin, all exegetes agree that the narrator (Luke) makes it crystal clear that the Child is not being conceived by Joseph, but in a miraculous way without the Virgin “knowing a man.”

At this point – which contains, in fact, the heart of its message – the story of the Annunciation to Mary diverges from all parallels. The “task” divinely assigned to the addressee by the angelic messenger is not an action or a chain of actions but an act of inner consent. Of course, just like in the case of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, or Jeremiah (vocation stories and not birth announcements), Mary’s consent implies a commitment that defines her life and identity – in this case her role as the mother of the Messiah. Verses 32-33 portraying a Davidic Messiah are essential parts of the story. Yet the focus of the narrative is Mary’s reply in which, predictably yet freely, she accepts the task and commits herself as “the handmaid of the Lord” (1:35).

This reply of hers is another feature that makes the story utterly

different from its biblical parallels. Although the narrative explicitly states that "with God nothing is impossible" – it is impossible with God (it is "inconceivable") that God's Holy Spirit would make Mary conceive the Son of God without her previous consent. Thus, while there is no doubt that God can make a virgin turn pregnant, God cannot do what is intrinsically wrong. Thus it is impossible for God to cause Mary's pregnancy without first asking for her free consent.³⁰

When Mary objects to the Angel that she does not "know man," her words must be logically taken as an objection to the Angel's words about her offspring (vv. 32-33); for she rightly concludes that this Child would be a son of David and thus, in view of her engagement to Joseph, Joseph's son. This is indeed what the reader is also reasonably expected to conclude at the beginning of the passage, since in the first sentence we are told that she was espoused to a man of Davidic descent. Therefore, for her to become pregnant with a Child who is to sit on David's throne would imply not only to "know man" (cf. Gn 4:1 and 4:25) in a general sense, but to "know" this specific man, Joseph, to whom she is espoused. Conversely, when Mary states that she "does not know man," the phrase means not only that she has no sexual relations with any man, but, on account of the context, specifically not with Joseph.

Here the story comes to a point where ancient interpretation and modern exegesis part. While the logic of the text seems to imply that Mary does not intend to be in sexual relations with Joseph, modern exegetes cannot see how, in a Jewish context, a "virgin espoused to a man" could be thought of as someone intending to remain a virgin.³¹ But the problem of interpreting the text remains the

³⁰ Since the 2nd century (the Talmud and the Roman pagan writer Celsus) there have been authors interpreting the virginal conception as a cover-up for illegitimacy. Recent studies time and again refuted this on a historical and critical basis. See M. Eugene Boring, *Mark, A Commentary: The New Testament Library* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 165-166.

³¹ A survey of modern proposals of interpretation is found in John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 188-192. McHugh pays much attention to the interpretation of some German exegetes (specifically Haug and Gächter, but also Audet, a French exegete, who joined their view with some variation). These authors claimed that if translated into Hebrew the Angel's message can be read as "behold you have conceived"

same. If Mary is espoused with the intention of entering into sexual relations with Joseph, her objection makes no sense: she would naturally have thought the Angel was speaking of a Child to be born of her relation with Joseph. The text must be allowed to suggest beyond what it directly states. In other words it is unavoidable to perceive the suggestion by Mary's reply to the Angel that she has no intention to consummate her marriage and live with Joseph as his wife. We may think we know enough about 1st century Judaism to conclude that this interpretation is historically improbable; but such an understanding of the text is the oldest we know. The so-called *Proto-evangelium of James*, an apocryphal text coming from the middle of the 2nd century, although with no assured credentials of historical tradition or credibility for historicity, uses both Matthew's and Luke's Infancy Narratives and supposes this interpretation.³² It assumes that Mary has made a vow of virginity and, therefore, raises her objection to the Angel because she intends to live a life of consecrated virginity.³³ Luke's text certainly does not say anything clear or explicit about such a vow. One must admit, however, that only if her words are taken as expressions of an intention of ongoing virginity, do they constitute both a *specific and substantial* objection to the angelic message. *Specifically* the Angel spoke of her future Child as

(*hinnach harach*) with Mary's responding that she had no sexual relations with anybody, although her espousal to Joseph would allow sexual intercourse. There are two astonishing details in this, in case this was indeed the "state of art" reached by the middle of the 20th century in interpreting Lk 1:34. First, it assumes that the Son of God has already taken flesh in Mary, i.e., the Holy Spirit made her pregnant without previous notification, not to speak of her previous consent. Second, when in need of a particularly "flattering" (Mariologically deconstructing) interpretation, these exegetes are ready to assume that the text came from a Hebrew *Vorlage* and nobody seemed to remind them (and McHugh) that Luke had no Hebrew or Aramaic sources; he only uses "Septuagintisms" as a literary device in order to camouflage the lack of Hebrew sources.

³² The *Proto-evangelium* gives evidence that its author lacked knowledge about the conditions of 1st century Palestine. It reflects, however, beyond doubt, what has been thought about the Lucan narrative in the 2nd century. In fact it is by far the earliest record of how Christians understood Mary's question to the Angel: she was committed to remain a virgin.

³³ To be fair about the difficulty of historicity, we must mention right here (we will repeat it further down) that the *Proto-evangelium* had, most probably, no Hebrew sources either.

a son of David, while the narrative started by saying that her spouse, Joseph, was from the house of David. And, of course, "knowing man" in the Bible is, ever since the first pregnancy of Eve (Gn 4:1), a necessary premise to becoming a mother. The *Proto-evangelium's* explanation is easily understood on account of the early 2nd century's institution of consecrated virginity in the form of *virgines subintroductae*, meaning virgins living under tutelage and supervision of ascetic men. However, quite possibly, as many commentators admit, such an arrangement was known much earlier, perhaps to Paul and to the Church in Corinth (1 Cor 7:25-40), and even earlier, as some Jewish antecedents to such or similar arrangements suggest.

In any case, a genuine understanding of the Annunciation must be based on what is unique in it and differs from the conception of John the Baptist by Elizabeth and from other Old Testament parallels. Mary is not a barren wife like Elizabeth or Anna, Samuel's mother; she is not hoping and praying for a child, but quite to the contrary, she is a virgin who, although espoused, when told about her future pregnancy, reminds the heavenly messenger of her virginity and asks: how will that be? Even if these words do not refer to any "institutional status" of virginity, they cannot indicate anything short of a desire to remain in the condition of virginity.³⁴

All Mariological reflections that grew out of the account of the Annunciation are based on the insight that "the virgin named Mary," when facing God's will to receive the gift of a Child without marital relations and thus by retaining her virginity, perceived this message as a call or invitation to which she responded positively but in complete freedom.³⁵ In Catholic theology, the understanding that the grace of the Incarnation – God becoming man – is the root of all graces also implies that Mary's call and her response constitute the prototype of all human encounters with divine grace. A literary analyst may claim that the outcome of the story is clear from its beginning; a theologian may state that God's actual grace was granted

³⁴ Ignace de la Potterie proposes that, even if the culture in which Mary lived did not appreciate lifelong virginity, she desired to remain a virgin, an interpretation he finds in St. Thomas and Thomas' commentator Cajetan. See *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992), 25-29.

with the foreknowledge and certainty of its acceptance; but theologically it remains just as correct and important to say that, when giving her response, Mary represented (and acted on behalf of) all mankind as she welcomed God's Son into her womb. This is the basis of the comparison and contrast between Mary and Eve, calling Mary's response an act of obedience and opposing it to the disobedience of Eve that marked man's first sin. In the Church Fathers' perspective, not only the Angel Gabriel, but the whole world was eagerly expecting Mary's response. We quote this tradition in the classical and most eloquent formulation St. Bernard gave it, when addressing the Virgin Mary in his fourth homily "In Praise of the Virgin Mother":

You heard, O Virgin, the fact and the way; both are miraculous, both are happy. Rejoice, O daughter of Zion, exult O daughter of Jerusalem. And because what you heard was a sound of happiness and joy, let us hear your reply of joy which we so desire in order that our humiliated bones may exultantly rejoice. You have heard the fact and believed, believe also in the mode in which this is going to happen. You heard that you will conceive and bear a son; you heard that it will not happen through a man but through the Holy Spirit. The Angel is waiting for a reply; it is time for him to return to the one who sent him. We too await a reply of mercy, O Lady, all we who are oppressed by a sentence of condemnation. And behold, the prize of our salvation is being offered to you: we will be redeemed as soon as you agree. We have all been created through the Eternal Word of God and yet we are dying. In your brief response we should be restored and

³⁵ At this point we cannot remain boxed in uncertainties about the practice of virginity around the first years of the Christian era. There is an immense list of important issues of pre-70's A.D. Judaism, about which we know very little or nothing. But we know – and with certainty – that God could not have turned Mary into the virgin mother of his Son without her consent. Thus Mary's choice of accepting her virginal motherhood was a real one. This is why at this point, I expand the interpretation of the Annunciation in the sense Christian tradition slowly but surely penetrated its meaning.

will be called back to life. This is what Adam asks of you in despair, with all his offspring born outside of paradise. This is what Adam and David ask and all the holy fathers ask, your own fathers, who are dwelling in the shadow of death. This is what the whole world is asking, kneeling before you and rightly doing so.³⁶

Mary's reply expresses both a free consent and a profound sense of obedience. The expression "let it be to me" clearly indicates that her motherhood happens to her as an event which she cannot cause or *make* happen. Yet her role is not totally passive: as a handmaid she commits herself to a life of service. The event of the Annunciation is the paradigm for any act of grace: the initiative and the act which bring about supernatural results belong totally to God, yet the human response is equally essential. All other acts of divine grace have their source in this grace given to Mary. Tradition rightly applies to this event the verse of John's Gospel, coined for indicating the universal import of the Incarnation: "out of this fullness we have all received" (Jn 1:16).

3. Visitation to Elizabeth and the Magnificat (Lk 1:39-54)

This is the second pericope in Luke's Gospel with Mary as its central figure. The episode begins with her trip to Judaea. Elizabeth greets her with inspired prophetic pronouncements. They address, first, Mary, and only in second place her messianic Child. At the end, a fairly long canticle follows, which Mary recites to celebrate all the great things God has done to her. Only in *obliquo* does the *Magnificat* refer to Jesus.

Although the Visitation seems to be a separate unit, it is essentially linked to the Annunciation. The reason for the trip comes from the Angel's statement to Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy, which is supposed to prove that "with God nothing is impossible" (Lk 1:36). Luke's delicate presentation avoids giving specific reasons

³⁶ *In laudem Virginis Matris* IV, 8, Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia (Leclercq IV, 53).

for Mary's trip. We may only guess that Mary is prompted by a desire to share her joy rather than to check on the truthfulness of the Angel's word. It is only in the middle of the Visitation story that we learn from Elizabeth that Mary believed Gabriel's words (Lk 1:45), and so her trip was not motivated by doubt but by faith.

The central passage of the narrative contains three *makarismoi* or proclamations of "blessedness":

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord. (Lk 1:42-45)

These expressions exalt her as the "mother of my Lord." Addressing Mary in this way evokes the court language of the Books of Samuel,³⁷ and thus expresses homage to the Davidic prince and to his mother as the Queen Mother, carrying him in her womb. Immediately thereafter Elizabeth explains that she received revelation from the prophetic child whom she bears in her own womb: "the child in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1:44).

The opening verses of the Visitation describing Mary's walk from Galilee to "a town in Judah" in the vicinity of Jerusalem reminds the reader of a scene of the Old Testament about the Ark of

³⁷ There appear here two literary features that justify this suggestion. When Elizabeth addresses Mary as "the mother of my Lord," she switches from second to third person; moreover "the mother of my Lord" resembles the expression "my Lord, the King" the latter being used in a consistent and highly stylized manner in 1 S 22:24 and 2 S 3:24 more than thirty times. René Laurentin, in *Luc I-II* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957), 78-80, and David Stanley in "The Mother of my Lord," *Worship* 34 (1959-1960), 330-332, argue that this formula, used in the Books of Samuel with regard to Saul and David is intentionally inserted here and expresses Elizabeth's homage to the messianic King, or really an homage by John the Baptist. Since even a contemporary reader of the Bible in English can recognize the stylistic similarity, I see no reason why J. Fitzmyer should call the reference all too "subtle" to be valid. See *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor Bible* 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 365.

the Divine Presence being carried on a similar route. John and then, of course, his mother whom he inspires to greet Mary, realize the meaning of this humble event that brings to fulfillment the old story of the Ark's arrival to Jerusalem from Kiriat Yearim³⁸ in which David subserviently humbles himself in a ritual dance (2 S 16:14-16).

The Visitation ends with a poetic text (Lk 1:45-55), the *Magnificat*, named after the first word of its Latin translation. Although carefully researched in every commentary on Luke, the origin and full theological significance of this text has remained elusive. In the canonical Gospels only in Luke 1-2 are some of the narratives interrupted by inserted hymns. However, we find a similar technique with similar compositions in several narrative episodes of the Old Testament.³⁹ The *Magnificat* is a pre-eminently Marian text: it is Mary's song of thanksgiving for being chosen as the Mother of the Savior. This poetic text, together with the canticles of Zechariah (Lk 1:68-79) and Simeon (Lk 2:29-32), is one of the strongest indicators that Luke has used for his Birth Narratives a special source, for he would have found ample reason to make up similar compositions in the rest of his Gospel or in various parts of Acts.⁴⁰

The most important message of the *Magnificat* is that it combines Mary's exceptional dignity and blessedness with a most profound sense of humility. In her prayer, Mary sees herself in full unity with all who are lowly, while prophetically predicting that she will receive praise from all generations. While this statement is extended to all future mankind, Mary points out that these blessings are rooted in the promise made to Abraham. She refers back to the first of all divine promises as we find it in Genesis 12:2-3:

³⁸ Traditionally Holy Land pilgrimage routes for immemorial times located the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth in ancient Kiriat Yearim, today on the outskirts of the extended city of Jerusalem.

³⁹ See for example Gn 15:1-17; Dt 32:1-43; Jg 5:1-32; 1 S 2:1-10 and the insertion of the entire Ps 18 into 2 S 22:1-51.

⁴⁰ Commentators often point out that the *Magnificat* cannot be a Lucan composition but must have come from some outside source because it does not exactly fit its context. This is a valid insight, but only up to a point. That it sheds additional light on the narrative beyond what the story says is obviously the very reason for which the lyrical passage has been inserted.

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

4. Circumcision and Presentation in the Temple (Lk 2:21-40)

The coincidence is not planned, nor is the harmony intentional, but Luke narrates what Paul stated in Galatians 4:4: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law." For this reason after the birth of Jesus in "the city of David" (Lk 2:11) the Child is circumcised on the eighth day (Lk 2:21), then, forty days after the birth, he undergoes with his mother a ritual of purification (Lk 2:22-24, cf. Ex 13:2, 12-15).

Protestant exegesis made it fashionable not to notice these texts' Mariological relevance. Yet, in the episodes of the Lucan Birth Narratives, the mother of the Lord plays an important role: she acts on behalf of the infant Messiah in fulfilling the Scriptures or prompting some bystanders to utter prophetic words and take prophetic actions, which in turn anticipate what the Child came to accomplish. In the scene of the Presentation, the roles of two elderly persons, Simeon and Anna, who receive Jesus in the Temple, are charged with symbolic significance. Simeon recognizes in the Child the messianic "Light for the Nations" of whom Isaiah spoke (Is 42:46), and performs, after the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, the third song of the Infancy Narratives, the *Nunc Dimittis* (Lk 2:29-32). Then he prophetically addresses Mary with words predicting suffering in the future: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:34-35). Historical-critical exegesis had immense difficulties with this text. What do "the sign," the "sword," and the "piercing" of Mary's soul signify? Catholic popular piety went in the opposite direction and found in the passage more symbolism than

it was able to handle. Baroque art usually represented Mary's heart (meaning her "soul") as pierced by seven swords. There is, however, less agreement about how to enumerate one by one Mary's seven sorrowful experiences. Ultimately, there can be little doubt that, at this point, Luke's account of Jesus' infancy alludes to the Cross of Jesus (redemptive death by crucifixion), rather than to other particular painful episodes – real or projected – that one might perceive in Mary's life with Jesus. That the Messiah encounters oppositions and contradictions to be interpreted as signs of his authenticity is an Old Testament theme, best known through the songs of the Suffering Servant. These reached their climax at the Cross. The "daughter of Zion" – the people of Israel, whom Mary certainly represents in Luke 1-2 – was brought to a crisis and was broken-hearted on account of Jesus. Mary's soul, representing both that of Israel and her individual internal sufferings, was torn as she participated thus in Jesus' suffering.

Up to this point, the perspective of Luke's text is reasonably clear. We might therefore conclude that, as the community of the disciples was tried and "sifted" by the crisis of Jesus' demise (cf. Lk 22:21), Mary also underwent deep suffering. But beyond this the parallelism is less clear. The disciples participate in the night of Gethsemane, but in the Synoptic Gospels Mary is not mentioned in the Passion Narrative. However, we see her under the Cross in John's Gospel, providing evidence of her persevering on Jesus' side until his last hour. This detail is all the more important because the Beloved Disciple also remains at Jesus' side in his final hours, a detail that appears to be contrary to what Matthew and Mark suggest.⁴¹ Moreover, all the four canonical Gospels note that a group of women watched Jesus' execution.⁴² Mary's presence at the Cross and her suffering cannot be described as a time of crisis for her faith. Rather, it is a form of "com-passion," a participative sharing in Jesus' Passion by a mother who, in a preeminent way, has no other purpose in her life than that her miraculously conceived only Son may accomplish his mission.⁴³

5. *Finding Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:41-52)*

As if following up on Simeon's prediction, the last episode of Luke's stories about Jesus' young years includes a detail in which Mary and Joseph jointly undergo sorrow and anxiety. Luke expresses this pain in Mary's own words: "Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (2:48).⁴⁴ The same Greek word (ὀδυνημένον) is used by Luke in Acts when he describes the experience of the Christians of Ephesus saying good-bye to Paul in the harbor of Miletos and anticipating the Apostle's martyrdom: "And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed, sorrowing (ὀδυνημένοι) most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they should see his face no more" (20:37-38). As several commentators point out, Luke's story about Jesus found on the third day in the Temple has a paradoxical and pre-figurative meaning.⁴⁵ These events, therefore, point to Jesus' death and burial followed by his "being found" on the third day. We have every reason to extend this symbolic trajectory to the conclusion of Luke's Infancy Narratives:

And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, *your father* and I have been looking for you anxiously." And he said to them, "How is it that you

⁴³ Patristic and medieval tradition developed this theme as an explanation for the biblical text. See especially what we find about this in St. Bernard's *Marilogi*: pp. 188-189.

⁴⁴ I do not suggest that Simeon's prediction is completely fulfilled in the episode, but that its fulfillment begins right away in the subsequent passages.

⁴⁵ René Laurentin, *Jésus au Temple. Mystère de Pâques et foi de Marie en Luc 2, 48-50* (Paris: Gabalda, 1966). But according to J. Fitzmyer, "this is scarcely the foreshadowing of the resurrection." *The Gospel According to Luke 1-IX, Anchor Bible 28* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 441.

⁴¹ In Matthew and Mark (Mt 26:56; Mk 14:50) "all" the disciples are said to have fled. Luke does not make such a statement. Rather, he emphasizes that Peter followed him from a distance (Lk 22:54); this is mentioned also in Mt 26:58 and Mk 14:45.

⁴² There is here an evident apologetic aspect which the Gospels could not have neglected: the women accompanying Jesus saw him die and thereafter visited the empty tomb so that his true death is ascertained by the same eyewitnesses who first discovered the empty tomb.

sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. (Lk 2:48-51)

Some authors think that this "lack of understanding" on the parents' part points to a pre-Lucan tradition which knew nothing of the Virgin Birth.⁴⁶ Such commentators assume that Luke (or, in any case, the final redactor) has inadvertently kept this remark in the text, or was not bothered by the inconsistency. For if the parents knew that Jesus was virginally conceived they would have well understood why he calls God his *real* father in opposition to what Mary's words suggest.⁴⁷ Other commentators dwell on Mary's "keeping all these things in her heart." This verse certainly echoes Mary's "pondering" the events that surrounded the birth in Bethlehem like the shepherds' visit and their report about the appearance of angels. Here, however, the word "kept" (ῥητέει) refers even more explicitly to a function of memory: remembered, retained, and kept in store. Moreover, at this point both an episode (Jesus' self-revelation in the

Temple) and a whole subsection of the book (the Infancy Narratives) come to a close. Therefore, a reference to a person who keeps the "words" (both the events and the sayings) obtains a rather special significance. Since Luke assures us in his Prologue (1:1-4) that his material comes from informed sources and, at the beginning of Acts, he presents Mary by name along with the list of the eleven witnesses to Jesus' ministry, it is in no way an exaggeration to assume that the Lucan author is presenting Mary as the one through whom these stories were "stored" or remembered.⁴⁸

Mary in the Johannine Writings

As we have seen above, the paucity of episodes mentioning Mary cannot be taken to imply the unimportance of her person or role. The scarcity of explicit statements about the three divine persons in one divine nature, does not allow us to conclude that Trinitarian theology is an unimportant issue for the Christian faith. Positively, explicit statements about the divinity of Christ or about the Incarnation are rare and far between, but these teachings are central to the doctrinal content of the Scriptures. But even these issues are cited only for the sake of *some* analogy. Ultimately, the concept of "importance" for a doctrine remains vague and must be researched in some particular sense.

It is, therefore, rather surprising that, without repeating any of the stories which Matthew and Luke provided about Mary, and without even mentioning her name, John's Gospel adds new material, and does so at a location as important as the beginning (Jn 2:1-12) and the end (Jn 19:34-35) of Jesus' public life. But there is also a third reference to Mary, likewise silent about her name, at a place even more important, the Prologue (Jn 1:13), which most probably contains a reference to the Virgin Birth.

⁴⁶ Raymond Brown thinks that "this story or a form of it may have well spread in circles ignorant of the annunciation and of the virginal conception." *The Birth of the Messiah*, 483. One must strongly disagree. That Mary refers to Joseph as "your father" makes sense for two reasons. First, because it is an important reminder of Jesus' Davidic descent, an issue on which each of the four canonical Gospels, including Luke (3:23) insist outside of the Birth Narratives. Second, it re-enforces an awareness of the irony which a double usage of the word "father" provides, by pointing out a double paternity: a divine and real one on the one hand and a perceived but only legal one on the other.

⁴⁷ Brown also thinks that "they did not understand the event," assuming that the Greek word *rhēma* is a Hebraism, signifying the whole "issue" and not only Jesus' words in reply (*ibid.*, 477). Such suggestions are avoided by more faithful devotees of "redaction criticism," (cf. I.H. Marshall and E.E. Ellis) who realize that according to the rules of this method one must assume that Luke pays attention to his text's implications and avoids inconsistencies. In fact, the Finding in the Temple makes its point by the fact that Jesus surprises both Mary and Joseph by a reference to his own miraculous origins of which only Mary obtained knowledge before Jesus was even conceived. If the Virgin Birth was miraculous at the beginning, is it not equally miraculous that, first, the Child declares that he is aware of his identity and, second, that he goes "home" to Nazareth and lives with his "parents" in perfect obedience?

⁴⁸ "As in 2:19 there may be an allusion to the source of the narrative." I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 130.

1. *The Prologue on the Virgin Birth: John 1:13*

John 1:13 carries an oblique reference to the virginal conception, or so it seems. A good number of scholars question this assertion. Yet one thing is agreed upon: a very old textual variant of the Fourth Gospel, which was known at large among Christians in the 2nd century, as testified to by Irenaeus, Tertullian, the *Vetus Latina* and several other patristic sources, carries a clear reference to the virginal conception of Jesus. The issue is mishandled, if the discussion shifts too quickly from the textual to the doctrinal side of the argument. Nor must we deal with it from a narrowly apologetic point of view. To Christians of the early 2nd century the doctrine of the virginal conception was widely known. At the same time, in the Fourth Gospel *allusions* or doctrinal hints are often used to make the reader discover in the text what he already knows from oral tradition or other sources.⁴⁹ There is also little doubt that a number of Church Fathers read the text of John 1:13 in the singular, i.e., as referring to the incarnate Son who *was* born "not from blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God." The question, legitimately raised as an issue of textual criticism, is only this: How did this variant reading come about and spread around so early that it was known in both East and West in the 2nd century, and yet subsequently disappeared from circulation so rapidly that no extant Greek manuscript of the Fourth Gospel contains it? The variant is in the singular and clearly designates the mode in which the Word was made flesh:

He [the Logos], who was born, not from blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God...

It is quite unlikely that the anti-Gnostic milieu to which Irenaeus belonged could have fabricated it in place of what critical editions (and also all forms of the *textus receptus*) have in the plural:

⁴⁹ Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 165-169. Irony is particularly frequent when the author is dealing with Jesus' origins (ibid., 171-172).

those [the believers], who were born, not from blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.

The strongest argument comes from Tertullian, who accuses the Valentinian Gnostics of having falsified John 1:13 by transposing what was originally in the singular into plural.⁵⁰ A rather powerful proof is found also in 1 John 5:18, a verse in a Johannine writing in which the idea that we are born of God is inseparably linked to Jesus' birth of God: "We know that *any one born of God* does not sin, but *He who was born of God* keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him."

This quotation from 1 John, which is virtually a comparison of the two textual variants, sheds light on the meaning of that triple negation in John 1:13, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." Properly these negations can refer only to Jesus, the One born from God, the Logos. But in a metaphoric sense it may be extended to refer also to all Christians as *mirroring in their spiritual rebirth the virginal conception* of the Logos by Mary. In any case – directly or indirectly – John 1:13 echoes the early Church's faith in the conception of Jesus by the Virgin. This is, ultimately, not surprising. Even by a most pessimistic estimate John's Gospel was written around A.D. 100, i.e., at least a couple of decades after Matthew and Luke and almost as late as the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, who is quite explicit about the virginal conception.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *De carne Christi* 19:1-2 (CCL 2.997). Tertullian provides us with the Valentinian interpretation: in their understanding that the text refers to a mystical race of spiritual elite (*semen arcanum electorum et spiritualium*) to which they also belong. Today, most Johannine scholars think that Tertullian was wrong; they argue that the change of the text took place in the opposite direction, i.e., the plural reading was replaced by the one in the singular in support of a Christology with a docetic tinge, by suggesting that, on account of his virginal conception, Jesus' humanity was of a more spiritual nature. But this method of reconstructing what happened is hard to accept. It would be strange that Tertullian and Irenaeus would have fallen into the Gnostic trap by not noticing the alleged docetic "tinge" of the text in the singular.

⁵¹ One must note that Ignatius' *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* opens with a phrase resembling Jn 1:13 and often noted as an indicator that Ignatius knew the Fourth Gospel: *υἱὸν θεοῦ κατὰ θεῶν καὶ διὐναὺν θεοῦ γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ πατρὸς υἱον*. "Son of God according to God's will and power, actually born of a virgin." The

The singular reading of John 1:13 has its own importance and implications. It inserts the virginal conception fully into the context of Johannine theology. It is quite interesting to see how, for Karl Rahner, the variant of John 1:13 in the singular, together with 1 John 5:18, presents three filiations – the Son's eternal birth from the Father, the Son's birth from the Virgin in time, and that of the Believer at his re-birth by the Spirit – and combines them as extensions of the eternal birth of the Logos. For Rahner this perspective greatly enhances not only the intelligibility of the Johannine Gospel, but also that of the Virgin Birth. He writes:

The world and its conditions and claim of intrinsic potentialities offer from below no compelling reason why the eternal God himself should descend into history. Since, therefore, in this sense, the Son of God *did not come of the will of man or the will of the flesh*, from the world's forces and energies, he correspondingly willed to become man in such a way that it would be clear from the very manner of his coming that his origin is not of the earth, from the inner forces of human love, but wholly from on high.⁵²

Karl Rahner might be right in seeing in John 1:13, understood in the singular and combined with 1 John 5:18, a quasi-technical language about the transcendental character of Jesus' conception, and in linking it to the core of the Fourth Gospel's Logos theology.

2. *Mary at Cana and at the Cross: John 2:1-10 and 19:26-27*

The story about the Wedding Feast in Cana is one of the few episodes in John which offers in length and structure something quite similar to the pericopes of the Synoptics. Like in the Synoptics,

expression "according to God's will and power" is applied here to Jesus' mode of conception as if stating positively the opposite of what Jn 1:13 denies: "not from the will of man."

⁵² *Mary Mother of the Lord* (New York: Herder, 1963), 68. I have added the emphasis. It is quite interesting that Rahner quotes Jn 1:13 according to its patristic variant without even noting the main-stream scriptural or patristic references.

the episode begins with a reference to the narrative flow of the Gospel by some casual every-day event (a wedding) linked to a geographic location (Cana in Galilee). But in a surprising way, it is Mary who is mentioned first: she comes to the wedding and that is how the reader is to understand that Jesus has also shown up with his disciples (Jn 2:1-2). Then, in a typical way, the story continues with a crisis in which Jesus' help is sought. The crisis is resolved by Jesus' prophetic and miraculous intervention, which leads him to a pronouncement that sheds light on the nature of his mission and person.

That Mary appears to be present at the wedding independently of Jesus is unparalleled and quite peculiar.⁵³ The episode opens in a way no Gospel story ever does: at the beginning Jesus is not in the center. Consistent with this feature is the fact that the "crisis" – the lack of wine – is noticed by Mary and it is by her initiative that it is brought to Jesus' attention. But this in itself is not unique. It is similar to what happens at the miraculous feeding of the multitudes: not Jesus, but the disciples notice the crisis (cf. Jn 6:5; Mt 14:15; Lk 10:12). At other occasions, however, it is Jesus who begins speaking about the need for feeding the crowd (Mt 15:32; Mk 3:30; 8:2).

As is typical for John, the rest of the story turns into a dialogue, a feature that has no Synoptic parallel. The assessment of Mary's role and the interpretation of Jesus' words to her have been a matter of intense debate for a long time. A final judgment on the various interpretations depends on the presuppositions with which we approach the text. Most commentators agree, however, that in the Fourth Gospel no episode can be satisfactorily explained in isolation from the work as a whole. Mary's remark, "They have no wine," is not merely a subtle request to help a household in trouble, but an assessment of the status of that *messianic* wedding banquet which Jesus came into the world to celebrate. This is the real "wedding banquet" about which the Evangelist is concerned, as made quite clear in the next

⁵³ Popular preaching regularly tells that Jesus was invited to a wedding and he took along his mother. But the scriptural text says: "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited" (Jn 2:1-2).

chapter by John the Baptist's speaking of Jesus as the bridegroom.⁵⁴ Therefore, Jesus' reply to Mary must be taken according to the rules of "Johannine irony." Irony shifts a statement about an apparently mundane issue into a symbol of some deeper truth.⁵⁵ It turns around the meaning of Mary's report about lack of wine by calling attention to "Jesus' hour" which has not yet come, but is obviously the goal of his ministry. As the theme of his "hour" unfolds in the Gospel, we learn that it means the hour of his self-immolation on the Cross where from his crucified body flow forth "water and blood" and also his Spirit, containing all the gifts of the messianic age, first diffused with his last breath on the Cross and then with his breathing on the disciples at their first encounter after the Resurrection. The arrival of the Spirit should be understood as God's full arrival on earth through Jesus. In this full picture, Mary's role is both historical and symbolic. As a witness, a believer, and a participant, she beholds the torture and death of the Son she bore, but in her association with the Son she symbolizes the Church as the new Eve, the mother of "all the living" in a new order of creation, a new out-pouring of the Spirit of life in the water and blood of the pouring from his body, sacrificed on the Cross.

Most exegetes see some value in the fact that, in his last hour, Jesus entrusts Mary to the Beloved Disciple as an act of filial care, making provisions for her sustenance and support. Yet because of the special characteristics of the Fourth Gospel and the way it reports this story, we must open our ears to hear the connotations which these provisions signify.

Although in the Fourth Gospel Jesus' mother is not called by her proper name, she is obviously a real person, not only a symbol

⁵⁴ "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete" (Jn 3:29).

⁵⁵ According to Culpepper, irony and symbolism are closely linked. Misunderstanding, double-entendre, several "levels of meaning" invite the reader to explore hints, implications and suggestions in the text and thus to discover depths beyond the immediate meaning of the words. Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 180-198 with application to Jn 3:29 on p. 193.

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for believers. So is also the "Beloved Disciple," although he too goes unnamed. There is, therefore, little doubt that a real person was assigned the task to take Mary under his care and lead her into his home. The identity of the one who became the caretaker of Jesus' mother after the crucifixion would have been public knowledge in the early Church, and a fact important enough to be remembered. With no competing tradition whatsoever about the identity of this person, there can be no reasonable doubt that the Beloved Disciple doing this task was John, the younger son of Zebedee and one of the Twelve.

As early as the 2nd century, the Church Fathers began to comment about Mary's role in this context and the way it is surrounded with symbolism. The Beloved Disciple was also seen as "becoming a son," assimilated to Jesus under the Cross. This means that when John's symbolic sonship is declared by Jesus, a "messianic birth" takes place, fulfilling what Jesus had stated in advance: "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a man⁵⁶ has been born into the world" (Jn 16:21).

No doubt the focus is Christological; the central issue is Jesus' death and not his birth. But also a birth is mentioned here, but another birth, a new birth coming about through death, and this would be of no purpose unless, through Jesus' death, all those symbolized by the Beloved Disciple have also been "born" anew. After all, from the third chapter of the Gospel we have been waiting for the fulfillment of Jesus' words about the new birth of the disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above'" (Jn 3:5-7). Under the Cross, then, the disciples' new status is declared. For them, becoming Mary's son

⁵⁶ The translations have "child" but the Greek text has the word *ἄνθρωπος* meaning simply "human being." We must be aware of this exact meaning of the word for seeing its link to "Adam," the first man God created. Translating "child" obscures the reference to the Book of Genesis.

means stepping into Jesus' place in the world with not only a new set of chores and responsibilities, but also with a renewed existence. Indeed, there is symmetry between the two sentences of the Gospel: "*He said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!'* Then *he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!'*" (Jn 19:26-27). This is best understood by seeing Mary's new motherhood as correlative to John's new sonship.

The link that connects Cana with Golgotha is essential for understanding Mary's role in the Fourth Gospel. One of the most important indications of this link is the usage of the word "woman." An exegesis unfriendly or suspicious to symbolism would eagerly point out that Jesus calls "woman" not only his mother, but also the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21) and Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:13 and 15), and then, on that basis, question any symbolic meaning attached to the word. But the symbolism at hand is not merely philological. "Woman" in John 2:4 and the same word in 16:21 are linked by a "woman and her hour," an hour of anguish at giving birth. Similarly, the word "woman" under the Cross refers to an incipient filial relationship: a birth. This is why we can only approve and admire the early Church Fathers (starting with Justin Martyr),⁵⁷ who expanded on this link by pointing out the connection between Mary and Eve, a theme which we will discuss in further detail when we explore patristic Mariology.⁵⁸

Mary in the Book of Revelation: Revelation 12:1-7

The Johannine use of the word "woman" for the mother of the Messiah finds new expression in the Book of Revelation. The birth that this text speaks of is not the birth of Bethlehem, but again the

⁵⁷ See below, on pp. 66-69.

⁵⁸ If we see the symbolism behind the use of the word "woman" by Jesus as he addresses his mother in Jn 2:4 and 19:26, we will not find such language scandalous in the mouth of a son when speaking to his mother. Strange as it may culturally be for people of our age, the word "woman" is used by all evangelists in reference to the female personalities of their stories. In Mt 15:26 ("O woman, great is your faith!") the use of this word goes together with the highest recognition.

"messianic birth": a symbol of pain and anguish turning into joy, as described in John 16:21 (with reference to Isaiah 66:7-8) and ultimately referring back to Genesis 3:16. In Revelation 12 this image becomes much more ample: the childbearing of the Woman means in temporal terms the whole history of the Church. As the Child is separated from his mother and reaches God's glory, the Woman remains in Exile (the Desert) for a time period established by God. The physical and individual mother of Jesus is not directly signified here as a historical person, yet Jesus' mother as a historical person is clearly presupposed. The text focuses on a figurative and collective meaning of the "mother" struggling and suffering while undergoing persecution on earth when her Child is already in heaven's glory, at God's right hand, ruling with an iron rod (cf. Rv 12:5; cf. Ps 2:9). The meaning of this collage of imagery cannot be deciphered unless we retain the symbolism suggested in the Fourth Gospel: Mary bore the Son who has suffered and obtained his glory, and the disciples personified by John are also her sons: their sonship comes about amidst pain and travail. The messianic birth with all its pain is bound to continue in the world. Just like in Cana, where a spiritual wedding feast is signified (by anticipation), so also here Mary's figure overlaps (by extension) with that of the Church. While her first Son reigns from heaven, she remains on earth personified by "the rest of the offspring" who continue to fight the battle against the Dragon. They are those "who keep the commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (Rv 12:17).

In these scriptural verses, Mary is only obliquely implied. What is rather interesting is the way the Messiah is spoken of as the Son of a "cosmic personality," whose individual characteristics are completely veiled by the imagery of the sun, the moon, and the stars. The appearance of precisely twelve stars is noteworthy, since the number elsewhere in this book symbolizes "the twelve Apostles of the Lamb" (21:17). While one finds no direct reference to Mary, the mother who gave birth to Jesus on earth, the symbolic ties with the Church are quite explicit. In this sense, the Book of Revelation draws a clear image of the Church as a cosmic reality encompass-

ing all human existence, but principally by referring to the Church's life-giving and child-bearing function. The Marian meaning of this passage is only indirect. Directly it seems to link the Church more to Eve (the story of the beginnings of the cosmos) as the mother of all human beings, whose battle began in the Garden of Eden and came to a close only with the victory of Mary's Child.

OLD TESTAMENT

Introductory Remarks

Studies about Mary in the Bible deal with this topic in a variety of ways. Those who consider the historical-critical method the one and only ultimately valid method, defining and verifying (or rejecting) all other methods, may find in the Old Testament very few or no texts applicable to Mary, except possibly by analogy, extrapolation, or symbolism, all constituting some sort of *eisegesis*.⁵⁹ Accordingly a Marian meaning would not be considered as properly contained in any Old Testament text, but imported from some other scriptural sources, either from the New Testament or from outside of the

⁵⁹ The "task force" which sponsored *Mary in the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John Reumann, eds., list four ways of dealing with Mary in the Old Testament. The first three are these: looking for texts which "foreshadow the details of the career of Jesus," or texts of which a "fuller sense" is revealed in the New Testament, or, finally, reproducing the New Testament writer's interpretation of Old Testament texts without worrying if they were valid in the first place. All of these methods are rejected as either "difficult to decide" to be legitimate or just imaginative to the point of becoming *eisegesis* (p. 30). Finally a fourth method, the "canonical reading" of the Scriptures is mentioned, but is also rejected because it is quite difficult to decide whether or not, for example, the Mary/Eve parallel was "in the mind of the Fourth Evangelist" or of the author of the Apocalypse (p. 31). We finally catch here the ultimate problem that separates the historical-critical exegete from other users of the Bible. The historical-critical exegete attempts to reconstruct what the original author "had in mind." Those, however, who assume the unity of the two Testaments assume that in the two sets of books belong to one salvation plan and that its unity is not rooted in the mind of any particular human author. If we follow the mind of the Church, we search for what God had in mind to reveal to us for the sake of our salvation through the Scriptures and not assume that the human author's conscious inspection and approval was a necessary condition for any revealed truth to make its way into the Scriptures.

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Bible altogether. In fact, the historical-critical approach usually assumes that the meaning of a text must reflect knowledge available for its author at the time he or she is writing. Thus, unless receiving supernatural knowledge of prophecy in the narrow sense of the word (prediction of future events), the hagiographer can report only events and persons belonging to his past or his present but not to the future. Therefore, the Scriptures written before Mary cannot tell us anything about her unless by anticipating future events through divinely obtained knowledge. The historical-critical exegete would be surprised to learn that he stands in agreement with all the Church Fathers and the medieval tradition! For, according to a traditional teaching of dogmatic theology, the Incarnation remained a mystery (*mysterium stricte dictum*) until it was revealed by Jesus. This implies that the fact and the significance of Mary's divine motherhood also had to remain a secret until Jesus' divine sonship was revealed. Thus only New Testament authors, such as Luke and John, could be regarded as true "biblical sources" for Marian doctrine.

Yet is it still true that all divine revelation, including that of the *mysteria stricte dicta*, takes place in a temporal process and is only gradually inserted into history? In view of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* and the tradition it represents, the answer must be an emphatic yes. Thus it is not only a justifiable but also necessary task for the Christian study of the Old Testament to see how it prepared and even anticipated the Marian mystery, something that Christian tradition could not have realized in any other way than by its retrospective view of the Old Testament. So, as it is with many other biblical topics, the Old Testament – its history, faith and institutions, including the Scriptures – must be examined also in terms of presuppositions and preparatory ways (the "foreshadowings"⁶⁰) to-

⁶⁰ In this matter a full misunderstanding of the Church's tradition is expressed by the quoted task force as they state in their report: "A theory of foreshadowing of the NT in the OT reflects, at times, a naïve or precritical understanding of prophecy, as if the Israelite prophets foresaw in detail the career of Jesus. Most modern scholars would maintain that the OT prophets dealt with their own time and the immediate future, not with far distant Christian history" (op. cit., 30). Whether or not we like the term "foreshadowing," it cannot mean "foreseeing in detail" and the "career" of Jesus is also an inappropriate term. "Foreshadowing" must

ward the Marian mysteries. Such inquiry not only provides us with an enriched understanding of the explicit texts of the New Testament texts but introduces us to the early Church's tradition about Mary.

The Word Incarnate, and therefore all that concerns his coming in the flesh, was anticipated not only through figures and images functioning as mute antecedents, waiting passively for the moment of the Incarnation, but prophetic events and persons, constituting, for both contemporary witnesses and later generations who reflected upon their testimony, expressions of the experiences of faith which effectively formed God's people in an extended process from Abraham through Moses, the prophets, the scribes and leaders of the exiled people, and the whole People of God awaiting messianic salvation. They were expressed in words through narratives and poetry and as such were verbal forerunners of the Word, preparing the People of God (first Israel and later the Church) for the *fullness of their meaning* in and after the event of the Incarnation.

The most important of these forerunners are the very themes from which the evangelists (Matthew, Luke and John) drew to describe Mary's historical person and her role in the history of our salvation. These appear in both the biblical texts and the earliest tradition of the Church Fathers in a triangular pattern. The three vertices that such scriptural themes, images, and allusions incessantly connect, compare, and combine are the following:

Mary's virginal motherhood,
the Church as mother and virgin, and
the individual believers who participate in this mystery
reflected and mirrored between Mary and the Church.

Inscribing the Marian mystery within these three themes, both the Gospels and the Church Fathers form concepts and a language

mean "for-telling" in some form of communication, not something "in detail" but in some basic and essential way and *without lifting the veil of mystery*. We are dealing here with an epistemological concept that a rationalist understanding of "knowledge in advance" is not capable of conceiving.

for speaking about the female protagonists of salvation history as maternal figures in the chain of the transmission of life (both physical and spiritual: Eve, Sarah, Ruth, etc.), and female personifications of God's self-expression (like Wisdom) or of the redeemed collectivity (like Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, the Church). In the context of salvation history each of these figures – on the historical, literary, or symbolic level – refers also to Mary as recipient and transmitter, protagonist and exemplar, believer and leader, as both Mother of the Messiah and Daughter (of) Zion.

The New Eve

Mary appears in the figure of the "new Eve" explicitly only in the 2nd century. We lack documentation about how exactly the comparison of Mary to Eve emerged in the theological world of Justin Martyr (d. 160), but it is hardly thinkable that it was a complete novelty he invented. Reflections on the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, comparing and contrasting the new creation brought about by Christ with the first sin of "the Man" (Adam), recur three times in surely authentic Pauline texts⁶¹ and once in the Pastorals.⁶² There is also one passage in 2 Corinthians, where Eve is mentioned alone:

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:2-3)

Although St. Paul makes no reference to Mary, it is in this text that we find quite clearly the triangular interconnection mentioned above, from which ancient Christian literature formed its analogous triangular outline of "Mary/Church/the redeemed individual," a

⁶¹ Rm 2:4; 1 Cor 15:22, 45.

⁶² 1 Tm 2:13-14, in this place alone are both Adam and Eve mentioned.

theme which deeply inspired the Church Fathers. The Apostle depicts Eve as a virgin for whose seduction Satan disguises himself as "Lucifer," an angel of light. The "virgin" signifies both the first woman and the Church of the Corinthians; the cunning serpent is both Satan and the "pseudo-apostles" posing as heralds of the true Gospel (2 Cor 11:4). The first woman is still in her virginal state just as the Corinthians' faith has not yet been perverted. Paul may refer in this text to an interpretation of Genesis 3 viewing man's first sin with sexual connotations, but that is of secondary interest. In the center of the metaphor we see the virgin-church to be dissuaded from her virginal commitment to Christ, the Bridegroom, by a tempter who claims to excel in eloquence and knowledge over Paul, the authentic messenger. This scene is really some sort of a "counter-annunciation" text, narrating the arrival of a false angel (false apostle) as opposed to Paul, the true apostle who has tried to lead the virgin to her true nuptials with Christ.

In other texts Paul also mentions, if only cursorily, his awareness of the Church's (and even *his own*) maternal function (especially Gal 4:19, but also Gal 4:26; Eph 5:31), as well as the role of Satan as a supernatural seducer or an angel acting in the person of the pseudo-apostles (Gal 1:8). However, it was the Church Fathers' task to integrate it into an antithetic parallelism between the images of the Virginal Spouse and of the childbearing Mother on two levels: (1) that of the historical mother of Jesus and (2) of his super-temporal mother, the Church. They developed this theme with growing attention to the role of Mary as virginal Mother, a concrete symbol of the Church, and a perfect model of the redeemed human being.

We must realize that Christ, called the "new Adam," does not mean only an external and superficial similarity based on the idea of "re-starting" mankind's existence as if from scratch with a new start like it happened in the case of the Flood and Noah. In Noah's case man is rescued but history re-starts on an already vitiated basis. Noah's covenant does not signal redemption, only a mysterious tolerance to which God commits himself out of patience and for the sake of an alternative plan which he then keeps hidden for a long time:

I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. (Gen 8:21)

Through Christ, all humanity is regenerated and also recapitulated, i.e., in Christ all mankind is redeemed *with retroactive efficiency*. In this case one can truly speak of a new creation that includes radical novelty. At the same time, however, this new beginning was part of God's original plan designed for his first creation, which is being restored and redeemed: Jesus is born as a child of Adam (cf. Lk 3:38), not only of Abraham and David (Mt 1:1); as he becomes a man "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4) he is a son of Eve, not only the son of Mary. He is a human being who shared the nature of the first couple, Adam and Eve. Christ's birth, life, and passion redeemed and sanctified not only those who lived after him and eventually accepted the Gospel with faith, formally and consciously, but all human beings who, however they were saved, have encountered and accepted God's universal salvific will. In the Incarnation the walls of temporal separation collapse, for, through his divine nature, Christ brought his humanity within reach to all human beings. Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son, and his unique Incarnation is the universal source of salvation for all people of all times.

As Christ is the first individual of a re-born human race, in Mary, the Mother of Christ, Eve's role is fulfilled: the one who bore Jesus is the "mother of all living." Mary obtains this role through a double linkage. As the mother of Jesus, she receives the Incarnate Word into the family of the first Adam and thus into the whole human race. But since of all human beings she is Jesus' only parent, she also links him all by herself to the whole human race, to both those who temporally preceded his coming and those who were to be born after him. Not only was she the only immediate human ancestor of Jesus but she was also the first to believe in him as the "Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:32). Jesus is linked to the whole human race through her both physically and spiritually since she was also the

exemplar of all who were redeemed by her Son for she was the first to hear and accept the Good News announced to her by an Angel. On the one hand, Mary as a human being was born from Eve; on the other hand, in the order of salvation, the whole human race was reborn from Mary's womb.

In this perspective, the Mary/Eve parallelism is neither forced nor off-beat. It is nothing more than an extension of an apostolic exegesis of the Scriptures, reaching back to the first pages of Genesis. Its theological content vindicates the universality of Christ's redemptive work and thus, by the same logic, asserts the universality of Mary's motherhood. All this becomes clear if we realize that the early Church's parallelism between Mary and Eve stands in continuity not only to the Eve/Church parallelism of 2 Corinthians 11:3 but also to the threefold parallelism found in the Book of Revelation (12:1-6). There also, like in Paul, it is the Church and not Mary who suffers before becoming exalted. Yet she is not a purely abstract symbol, but concretely refers to the mother of Jesus who is called "Woman" in the Johannine Gospel (Jn 2:4, 19:26).

The magnificent medieval antiphon,⁶³ the *Salve Regina*, enshrined this component of Marian tradition, when depicting mankind as "the exiled children of Eve" crying out to Mary for a share in the fruit of her womb. Eve and "the fruit," are references to the first Eden, but the "blessed fruit" of Mary's womb makes reference to the Visitation and also, at least from the 2nd century, to the Annunciation. Countless medieval paintings and sculptures represent Mary, as she holds Jesus *together with a fruit*, emphasizing another aspect of the "antithetical parallelism" that connects Mary and Eve: the fruit forbidden by God but offered by Satan and the blessed fruit of life offered by God in replacement for the first fruit. "The fruit" of Mary's womb is not to be understood as a demonstration or advertisement, but as an act of persuasive enticing and inviting: a call

⁶³ It is again by no oversight that the ultimate perspective of the scriptural text is exposed in reference to its patristic/medieval expansion that helps it reverberate in our faith and spiritual life.

for Adam's posterity to participate in the fruit of the Tree of Life, the remedy of immortality.

Israel: the Lord's Spouse

Beginning with Hosea, the prophetic literature compares Israel's relationship with God to the spousal relationship. The serious weight of this metaphor cannot be grasped within the confines of a merely critical and historically minimalist interpretation. In the prophet's perspective, Israel's God is fully non-physical. Moreover "Israel" means in a canonical context the collectivity of God's people in its trans-historical existence, a chain of generations created from the bodies of Abraham and Sarah over a period of centuries. God's project was falling apart. Yet, as Israel's history passes from the divided monarchy to complete dissolution, there appears new hope, such that a reversal of Israel's fate appears on the horizon: from exile to return and from return to reconstruction. Throughout these two consecutive phases the imagery of Israel's spousal relations to God, rather than losing meaning, becomes ever richer, gaining new substance and importance.

Hosea's passionate presentation of a human drama – seemingly his own – with a hopelessly faithless wife, goes way beyond either a parable or an autobiography, carrying a theological message. Regardless of whether we stick to the historicity of the prophet's experience with Gomer, the whore he married, or we prefer to regard the story as fiction, the text's ultimate impact resides in its connection to the "love story" God narrates to Israel, "the real story" that has truly happened between himself and his faithless people.

This ultimate truth is not about the prophet's bitter-sweet personal tragedy or the tormenting experience of an all-too-human prophet in the throes of jealousy or the humiliations he undergoes in the service of God's word, but the shockingly anthropomorphic inner life of God. It tells about God's "man-like sentiments," which testify to the hopeless distance separating "God from his people" as

lovers with irreconcilable differences. While the wife (Israel) cannot give up on her amorous exploits, the prophet (the divine Spouse) reaffirms, on some unspeakable, unfathomable, and yes, irrationally mysterious basis, a love by which, he insists, they belong together and so he makes repeated attempts to restore the covenant between himself (God) and the unfaithful woman (Israel).

This "irrational" dimension stands out already in Hosea and is carried on by the prophetic tradition. The parallelism between idolatry and harlotry remains as a constant reference to the linkage of their opposites: purity of the monotheistic faith and faithfulness to the Covenant. In the prophet's message the passion with which he, a mere man, lures back to himself his ex-harlot wife, falling back time and again into harlotry, becomes a revelatory tool for teaching about God's undying and inexhaustible mercy for his people.

Regarding the topic Hosea/Gomer, a long and complicated historical and literary tradition developed, forming multiple streams of texts from Isaiah to Jeremiah and beyond the exile. For our purpose, it should be enough to quote here a few weighty texts demonstrating how, in prophetic preaching, the spousal imagery is displayed and developed for depicting God's renewed relationships to Israel:

And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Ho 2:19-20)

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jr 31:5)

For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your Builder marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Is 62:5)

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. (Zp 3:14-15)

It is important that we take time to notice here how the themes of the Old Testament we have named above are linked to the central Mariological texts of the New Testament. In the fullness of time, when the Son of God chose to be "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4), it was against such a background that the Mother of the Messiah was portrayed both in the Annunciation and in the Visitation. Since the publication of an article by Stanislas Lyonnet in 1939,⁶⁴ many exegetes have called attention to the Old Testament background of Gabriel's greeting (Lk 1:28). Interestingly, in the case of this Lucan verse, it seemed that it was the text of the Vulgate, translating the Greek *χαίρε* by the Latin *ave* that kept on prevailing and obscured the original meaning of Gabriel's greeting. In Hellenistic Greek the word *χαίρε* was used idiomatically as a casual "hello," but, of course, it also signified literally the second person singular imperative of the verb meaning "to rejoice." Accordingly, in the Latin text *ave* and the next two words *gratia plena* (translating *Χαίρε, κεχαρισμένη*) began to function as a mixture of a so-called minimalist translation ("*ave*" = "hello") and maximalist interpretation ("*gratia plena*" = "full of grace") of the angelic salutation, each part stretching the text's meaning in opposite directions.

Still today, exegetes of various backgrounds opt either for emphasizing or reducing the literal meaning "rejoice" and rejecting or accepting the Latin *ave* (or the English "hail"). Some point out the many biblical allusions that characterize the first two chapters of Luke, among them *χαίρε* as it is found in the LXX, signaling the joyful arrival of redemption to the Virgin Daughter, a figurative image of Zion or Israel (Zp 3:14; Zc 9:9). But other commentators, shying away from a "Mariological" meaning, prefer to follow the judgment of the Latin translators and to see in Gabriel's words a more casual

⁶⁴ *Χαίρε, κεχαρισμένη* in *Biblica* 20 (1939), 131-141. Since then many Catholic exegetes followed Lyonnet, most decidedly R. Laurentin in his *Luc 1-II* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957), 64; McHugh and de la Poterie. Interestingly, the minimalist translation of *χαίρε* by the Latin *ave*, as a Hellenistic salutation with no further depth, is followed by Luke Timothy Johnson ("Greeting" in English) in his commentary, *The Gospel of Luke, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 37-39, and F. Bovon, *Luke 1, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 43-44. Neither of these two authors would elsewhere ever vindicate the Vulgate's text.

(and shallow) greeting, steering clear from the assumption of some need for correspondence with an "original" text in Hebrew. These exegetes even more forcefully reject the translation of *κεχαριτωμένη* as *gratia plena*. But not so fast! On the one hand, the *ave* of the Vulgate is idiomatic, departing unnecessarily from the literal meaning. It also lacks awareness of the Old Testament background mentioned above, as well as of the fact that, in the Bible, the first word of a heavenly appearance is hardly ever a "casual greeting."⁶⁵ Since Luke 1-2 is full of "septuagintal" references to the Old Testament, there is little reason not to follow this lead and restore the Hellenistic literal meaning "rejoice" which also the occurrence of the word *χαίρε* signifies in other important messianic texts.

On the other hand, the *gratia plena* ("full of grace") must not be quickly rejected as a Mariological exaggeration. The history of the Latin text of the angelic salutation, which goes back to the 2nd century, is quite rich in theological considerations and must be handled with special care. The Vulgate's solution was the outcome of a linguistic problem. The Latin verb corresponding to *κεχαριτωμένη* would be *gratari*, but it is a deponent verb, passive in form but active in meaning, so that it offers no precisely corresponding principle for a literal translation: the form *gratitata* means "gracious" not "recipient of grace." The translator of the Vulgate had no choice but to use several words, of which one had to be *gratia*. The expression *gratia plena* signifies literally a feminine subject who is declared to be the recipient of (divine) grace. Since the grace in question is that of the Incarnation, the Latin expression *gratia plena* (equivalent to the English "full of grace") proved itself not only as "acceptable" but as the correct choice for translation and became quickly rooted in usage. Every interpretation of this choice of words is a matter of exegesis and theology and cannot be debated on purely grammatical grounds as a correct or an incorrect rendition. The Mariology

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connected to *gratia plena* or "full of grace" must be evaluated on theological grounds and not by exegetical criteria.⁶⁶ As "text" it allows many possible translations. No translation is ever perfect, because two idioms can hardly ever be mapped onto each other point by point and matched one-to-one.

We can, however, justify an exegesis of the Annunciation according to which the Angel's greeting is not an idle reproduction of a formula in koine Greek, but makes a retrospective hint to certain Old Testament texts and anticipates the message which the Angel is about to deliver. The various exegetes who discussed the meaning of Luke 1:28 should have taken more seriously the direction that Luke himself gives his reader in the verse that follows. For it seems that in Luke 1:29 ("But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be"), we, the readers, are also urged to join Mary in pondering the Angel's words and to assess correctly with what kind of expectation we ought to receive the rest of his message. Ultimately, this is the strongest point, a device built into the text itself that justifies the search and discovery of a deeper meaning. Mary is approached by the angelic messenger according to the prophetic promises as we have them in Zephaniah 3:14, Zechariah 9:9, and Lamentations 4:21, all addressing the Daughter of Zion.

"Behold the Virgin..."

The quotation of Isaiah 7:14 is explicit in Matthew 1:23, but is only implicit in Luke 1:31. Since the 2nd century, Jewish exegetes accused Christians of misinterpreting Isaiah 7:14 when applying it to Jesus. This question has been controversial ever since. It is clear that Matthew (and all Christian sources) quote the Septuagint's (LXX) text in which we find:

⁶⁵ The New American Bible's "highly favored daughter" was a failed attempt to replace "full of grace" by introducing the word "daughter" and eliminating the Christian concept of grace by replacing it by "favor" with its secular flavor. This choice does reflect earlier English translations, like the King James and Revised Standard Versions, but the fact that it utterly lacks any Mariological, even Christian, resonance is a major problem.

⁶⁶ The risen Christ appearing to the Apostles says εἰρήνη, "peace" or *shalom*, but the greeting is "loaded" with theology and cannot be translated as "Greeting!" (cf. Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19, 21, 26). See also Jg 6:12, where Gideon is greeted by the angel with words to which Lk 1:27 harks back: "The Lord is with you."

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.

Of course, the LXX represents an understanding of the text by the Jews of Alexandria in the 2nd century before Christ. Both the Jewish rabbis of antiquity and modern translators point out that the Hebrew text uses *almah*, meaning a "young girl," not necessarily a virgin. They also opine that this girl originally, that is in Isaiah's mind, meant King Ahaz' new wife and, therefore, predicted the birth of the crown prince, Hezekiah, and not the Messiah. So the problem is easily resolved. Most messianic texts refer first to an event in the course of Jewish history (the paschal Lamb, King Solomon, the return from the exile) but then to a *further* meaning or a whole chain of further meanings and an ultimate meaning that eventually come to sight. In fact, all texts quoted by Matthew are prophetic in such a sense. The Jews of the 1st century easily understood this since, as the LXX testifies, before the time of Jesus and the evangelists there was already a Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 translating the Hebrew *almah* as παρθένος, or "virgin." When Christianity began its spread, those of the Jewish diaspora who did not want to accept the Gospel undertook the task of sponsoring a new Greek translation which widened the gap between the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation by the Gospels. The best known among them were those produced by Theodotion and Aquila, which, however, are extant today only in fragments. In Christian tradition Isaiah 7:14 was justifiably read as a text witnessing to the expectation of the Messiah whose very birth will be a "sign" of God's favor returning to his people. The existence of the Septuagint's text in itself justifies this reading, the issue is not about the text in isolation from those who wrote, translated, and used it. The textual history of Isaiah 7:14 correctly witnesses that it was read in the last couple of centuries before Christ as a witness to a messianic hope and, in connection with that hope, was taken to be about a virgin. Those who, in retrospect, did not like the translation of the Septuagint were free to create a new Greek text, but they could not

alter the history of the text and all the hopes and sentiments that the text has occasioned.

I am fully aware that this short section is just a concise rendition of all Christian thought about Mary nurtured with Old Testament texts. I consider it, however, important for demonstrating that familiarity with historical and critical reading of the Old Testament should not discourage us from investigating the themes and topics of the Old Testament about Mary and, eventually, as we move on to discuss the Church Fathers' Mariology and its scriptural basis, we may grow in appreciation for the presence of further Old Testament themes in their Mariology.