

Mary, Woman and Mother in God's Saving New Testament Plan

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THESE REFLECTIONS on Mary in the New Testament (henceforth NT) will differ dramatically in both presuppositions and approaches from the 1978 ecumenical book by that title, whose viewpoints for the most part remained within the predominant historical critical mindset of that time.¹ Expressly theological considerations or applications regarding Mary's role in the NT were generally kept distinct from "strict" historical exegetical conclusions. Unfortunately, the theological outcomes of that book regarding Mary's religious role in God's saving NT plan were meager. Virtually its only salient and secure consensus about Mary was that the NT clearly affirmed that Mary gave birth as a virgin to Jesus. This presentation will attempt to be much more explicitly and unreservedly theological and Catholic, even in its exegetical underpinnings.²

This essay proceeds from both theological and reader-response presuppositions. Its theological presupposition is that Mary's special emphasis, especially in Catholic and Orthodox theology and spirituality (and even in the NT itself), is primarily due to her irreplaceable role in the Incarnation of God's Son—his becoming man to save all humans—as Theotokos, Mother of God, as the Church would later define her role in

¹ *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, ed. Raymond E. Brown and Karl P. Donfried (Philadelphia / New York: Fortress Press / Paulist Press, 1978). Its ecumenical structure favored historical criticism as a common approach for bridging denominational differences regarding Mary.

² See the appendix to this essay for some examples of contemporary approaches to Mary.

the first Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431). An auxiliary methodological presupposition from secular literary reader-response approaches is that actual readers interpret texts from their respective worldviews and perspectives. We readers are twenty-first-century Catholics. The historically retrospective insights and sensitivities about Mary that we bring to our reading of Scripture naturally guide our choice and interpretation of the NT texts concerning her.³

In addition, as a reader who is a Jesuit, I would like to introduce my reflections on Mary's part in God's saving plan with a contemplation on the Incarnation from *The Spiritual Exercises* of the Jesuit founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Here it will be how the Three Divine Persons look down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth, filled with human beings. Since They see that all are going down to hell, They decree in Their eternity that the Second Person should become man to save the human race. So when the fullness of time had come, They send the Angel Gabriel to our Lady.⁴

This contemplation by Ignatius of Loyola exemplifies a type of reading, also found in St. Irenaeus, in which theological exegesis and interpretation contextualize particular biblical passages within the overall biblical narrative of God's saving the fallen human race.⁵ Like Irenaeus, Ignatius meditated on the event of the Incarnation explicitly within the

³ Compare the role of experience in the Marian articles in *Catholic for a Reason*, II, ed. Leon J. Surprenant, Jr. (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Pub., 2000), such as Curtis Martin, "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary"; Curtis J. Mitch, "The 'Woman' in Salvation History: Reflections of Mary in the Old Testament"; Curtis Martin, "Called to be Children of Mary: God's Family Plan"; Jeffrey Cavins, "The Rosary: It Beats the Rhythm of Human Life." Cf. Pope John Paul II's reflections in *A Marian Treasury*, ed., intro., Marianne Lorraine Trouve (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2005).

⁴ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* [translated by] Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 49, §102. For a theological comparison of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the Fourth Gospel, see David M. Stanley, S.J., "I Encountered God!" *The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of St. John* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986). A profound theological reflection on the biblical salvation account, also influenced by the *Spiritual Exercises*, is Paul M. Quay, S.J., *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002, 1997, 1995).

⁵ William S. Kurz, *Reading the Bible as God's Own Story: A Catholic Approach for Bringing Scripture to Life* (Ijamsville, MD: Word Among Us Press, 2007), chaps. 2, "Developing a Theological Approach to Scripture," and 3, "Reading Scripture Theologically with St. Irenaeus," 45–87.

context of this saving scriptural narrative. God is contemplated as the eternal Trinity of persons coming to the “decision” that the Son should become man to save humans from their otherwise hopeless situation. At “the fullness of time” the Trinitarian persons sent the Angel Gabriel to Mary for her consent that the Holy Spirit make this Incarnation a reality. Although this is a sixteenth-century imaginative Catholic contemplation of the foundational reality of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity that took place when Mary assented to Gabriel’s message and request, it explains with amazing aptness (and without violence to the NT texts) the role of Mary according to the NT.

The NT texts that are primarily applicable to, and help portray Mary and her central role in, our salvation are Luke 1–2 (with Acts 1:14), John 2 on Cana, John 19 on Mary at Jesus’ cross, and Revelation 12 on the Woman and Messiah. Using particularly these NT passages that have the most theological relevance for Mary’s foundational role, this essay will briefly explicate how Mary is identified as Woman and Mother in God’s saving New Testament plan for reconciling the alienated human race to its Creator God.⁶

My method is a theologically focused exegesis and interpretation of these relevant NT texts. My approach incorporates but goes beyond conventional historical exegesis, as recommended by *Dei Verbum* §12. The 1966 and 1996 translations of *Dei Verbum* §12, as well as the translation on the Vatican website (2008), differ enough to quote all three in order to bring out more of *Dei Verbum*’s nuances.

According to *Dei Verbum* §12, besides using historical criticism, we are also to interpret biblical texts “with its divine authorship in mind” (1996), or “according to the same Spirit by whom it was written” (1966), or “in the sacred spirit in which it was written” (Vatican 2008). *Dei Verbum* §12, therefore, recommends attending to three realities: (1) “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture”; (2) “according to the tradition of the entire Church”; and (3) “the analogy of faith” (1996) or “along with the harmony that exists between elements of the faith” (1966, Vatican).⁷

⁶ Less theologically indispensable for Mary’s foundational NT identity and role as Mother of God are the NT treatment of Mary from Joseph’s perspective in Matthew 1–2 and comparatively incidental references to Mary in the Synoptic Gospel accounts and in Galatians 4:4.

⁷ *Dei Verbum* §12 in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language*, Austin Flannery, general editor (Northport, NY: Costello; Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1996), 106. The original translation was from *Dei Verbum* §12, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, Association Press, 1966), 120. Compare *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997 rev. ed.) §§109–14. The English Vatican translation was accessed June 2, 2008, at

The first presupposition of theological interpretation, “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture,” justifies for this study of Mary the use of passages from three NT books that are not in general historically inter-related: Luke 1–2, John 2 and 19, and Revelation 12.⁸ Unlike Matthew 1–2, which is written principally from the viewpoint of Joseph, Luke 1–2 narrates Jesus’ conception, birth, and destiny primarily from Mary’s perspective. The Cana wedding account in John 2 provides a Johannine version of the influence of the Mother of Jesus as “Woman” on the beginning of Jesus’ ministry leading toward his “hour.” John 19 recounts Jesus on the cross entrusting his Mother as “Woman” to be mother of his beloved disciple at the culmination of his “hour.” Revelation 12 mythically describes the cosmic sign of the prominent biblical symbol of the “Woman” giving birth to her messianic son, who is snatched to heaven from the waiting dragon’s jaws.

Mary in Luke 1–2.

This Lukan account emphasizes Mary’s “Yes” to God’s vocational invitation to be the mother of his Son who would save the human race. It features four perspectives about the identity and role of Mary in salvation history: (1) Mary reverses Eve’s “No” to God’s directive; (2) Mary is a faithful servant of the Lord; (3) Mary is Mother of God (Theotokos) and of the Davidic Messiah; (4) Mary is source and example of memories and reflections of the Church.

1. Mary Reverses Eve’s “No” to God’s Direction

Mary the virgin’s “Yes” to God reverses the “No” of Eve the virgin (at least regarded as virgin in much patristic interpretation). Mary’s reversal of Eve’s disobedience makes possible the Incarnation of the Son of God as human son of Mary. In Johannine terms, Mary’s “Yes” provides the occasion for God’s Word to become flesh and dwell among us (Jn 1:14).⁹ Mary’s humble obedience foreshadows the humble obedience of her Son

www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

⁸ José Granados similarly uses the witness of John’s Gospel to confirm the importance of the Lukan emphasis on Mary’s memory: José Granados, “Through Mary’s Memory to Jesus’ Mystery,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33 (Spring 2006): 11–42, at 26. Cf. also Scott Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

⁹ Another theological use of Scripture, David S. Yeago, “The Presence of Mary in the Mystery of the Church,” *Nova et Vetera* 2.1 (2004): 147–68, at 158, similarly explains the Lukan Annunciation with the help of the Gospel of John, in that case, its prologue.

and God's, Jesus, which reverses Adam's sin of grasping at being like God (as described in Phil 2:5–11).¹⁰

Mary's question about how the angel's message should come to pass provides the opportunity for the answer, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (v. 35). Thus is explained the process of the Incarnation of God's Son—*how* "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, quotations normally RSV). The Incarnation happened when Mary consented to God's plan, and was brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit producing the child Jesus, the Son of God, in Mary's womb (Luke 1:38, 35).¹¹

2. Mary Is Faithful Servant of the Lord

The wording of Mary's consent clarifies her biblical identity and role: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). The Greek for handmaid is δούλη, *servant/slave* of the Lord. The term servant has rich Old Testament (OT) resonances, from Moses as Servant of the Lord, through David and the prophets as the Lord's

¹⁰ Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.19–20 in A. A. Just, *Vol. 3: Luke*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19–20: "As the human race was subjected to death through the act of a virgin, so was it . . . precisely balanced by the obedience of another. Then indeed the sin of the first formed man was amended by the chastisement of the First Begotten, the wisdom of the serpent was conquered by the simplicity of the dove, and the chains were broken by which we were in bondage to death."

¹¹ Compare the biblical image of the Spirit hovering over the waters in Gn 1:2 and bringing life, as remarked in *The Navarre Bible: St. Luke's Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Four Courts, 1991), 40, regarding Luke 1:37. See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2nd ed., Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 314–15.

A bold corrective treatment of Luke 1:35 (Jesus' conception and the divinity of Jesus it implies), despite decades of hesitancy by even Catholic exegetes to admit this divinity, is John J. Kilgallen, S.J., "The Conception of Jesus (Luke 1,35)," *Biblica* 78 (1997): 225–46. Kilgallen argues that the Annunciation scene in Luke explains how Jesus is divine Son of God to provide *asphaleia* and foundation for the rest of Luke–Acts (see esp. 240–43). Cf. Juan Luis Bastero, "El Espíritu Santo y María en *Lumen Gentium* y en el Magisterio de Pablo VI," *Scripta Theologica* 38.2 (2006): 701–35, at 706–9, 722–24, including citations of *Lumen Gentium* 56; Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus* 26; and Sts. Ambrose, John Cassian, Bede, et al. Cf. also Jarislav Jasianek, "La Presencia del Espíritu Santo en la Maternidad de María," *Scripta Theologica* 38.2 (2006): 671–700, at 672–74, 683–85, esp. 684 on Mary as the holiest part of the Temple and sanctuary of the Spirit precisely because she is Mother of God.

servants, and culminating in the figure of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40–55. Like Moses and David and the Servant in Isaiah, Mary acted as God's servant, through whom he executed his plan to save his people. Further, through Mary's servant obedience to God came the Servant of the Lord par excellence, Jesus the Suffering Servant (cf. Acts 8:32–33, citing Is 53:7–8), who was exalted to the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33).¹²

Mary's song in the presence of Elizabeth further emphasizes her role as God's servant. Mary refers to "God my Savior," and how God "regarded the low estate (ταπεινώσις) of his handmaiden" (or servant; Lk 1:48). Like the OT servants of the Lord, the lowly servant Mary shall also be exalted (vv. 48–49), all because of God's mercy (v. 50). God humbles the proud and exalts the humble (vv. 51–53), according to his promises (vv. 54–55).¹³

Subsequent events in the Lukan infancy narrative further elucidate the meaning, identity, and mission of the Son of Mary and of God. The inspired prophet Simeon declares that Mary's son is not only to bring salvation for Israel, but also to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." This echo of the Servant Songs in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 implies that Jesus is the Isaian Servant of the Lord.¹⁴ But this servant vocation will cause opposition to Jesus and a sword for Mary. That is, both Jesus and Mary as servants of the Lord will have to suffer in their missions (vv. 34–35).

3. *Mary Is Mother of God (Theotokos) and of the Davidic Messiah*

Mary's foundational identity and role as Mother of God is confirmed by Elizabeth's greeting to her as "mother of my Lord" (Lk 2:43). Following Elizabeth's Spirit-filled reference to the blessed "fruit of your womb," her identification of Mary as "mother of my Lord" is a clear Lukan precursor to Mary's later, more explicit ecclesiological title of "Mother of God." Elizabeth's prophetic greeting also explains that it was through Mary's faith that she came to be "mother of my Lord": "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment (τελείωσις) of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). Vital both for Mary's functioning as

¹² Granados, "Mary's Memory," 35, refers to Mary's "inclusion in Christ as the obedient Servant of God."

¹³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 43, suggests that Luke 1:54–55 in Mary's song makes Mary a representation or personification of the people Israel, who are blessed in the mercy God showed to her. A later section will suggest similar overlapping symbolism relevant to Israel and Mary in the Woman in Revelation 12.

¹⁴ Cf. Johnson, *Luke*, 55 about Luke 1:32, and 57; Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, 456–60; John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, 35A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 124.

servant of the Lord and for her becoming Mother of God is her faith in God's word to her.¹⁵

The Lukan narrative of the loss and finding of the boy Jesus in the Temple is pregnant with theological meaning and implications regarding Mary as mother of the Son of God (Lk 2:41–52). The true identities of, and relationships between, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and God the Father are all unambiguously suggested by Jesus' answer to Mary and Joseph in Luke 2:49: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου, more literally, "in the business of my Father").¹⁶ In either translation, the text sharply distinguishes Jesus' true Father, God, from the designation of "father" for Joseph: "Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Lk 2:48). This interchange insists that Jesus is Son of God ("my Father") whose authority supersedes that of his natural mother and his putative and adoptive father Joseph. The theological implications of this episode are clear today, though Luke repeats that Mary continued to reflect on the meaning of all this (Lk 2:51).

Other important elements in God's plan were Mary's virginity and betrothal to "Joseph, of the house of David" (Lk 1:27). Her virginity provided the natural sign that her son was not by Joseph but from God, so that he could "be called the Son of the Most High" (v. 32). That Joseph belonged to the house of David was nevertheless the prerequisite needed for Mary's son to be recognized as Davidic Messiah who would receive "the throne of his father David" (v. 32) and have an everlasting rule over Israel (v. 33). In Luke, this ascribed paternity remains important, even though Luke again denies Joseph's actual physical paternity at the beginning of his description of Jesus' genealogy through Joseph [Lk 3:23, "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli . . ."].¹⁷

¹⁵ Mary's obedient faith also makes her a model of believing members of the Church and prototype for the redeemed in the Church (Yeago, "Presence of Mary," 160–61).

¹⁶ The Vulgate's "in his, quae Patris mei sunt" probably influenced earlier Catholic translations like "my Father's business," *Navarre Luke*, 62–63 ad 2:49. Pace Nolland's arguments preferring "in my Father's house," the Temple (*Luke 1–9:20*, 131–32).

¹⁷ See William S. Kurz, "Luke 3:23–38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Genealogies," in *Luke-Acts: Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad, 1984): 169–87. Cf. Ephrem the Syrian: "From what the angel said to Mary, namely, 'Elizabeth, your kinswoman,' it could be supposed that Mary was from the house of Levi. Nevertheless up to this, the prophecy was established within the framework of the husbands. The family of David continued as far as Joseph, who had espoused her, and the birth of her child was reckoned through the framework of the men, for the sake of the family of David. It is in Christ that the seed and family of David are brought to completion" (*Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* 1.25 in Just, *Vol. 3: Luke*. ACCS NT 3, 16–17).

The angels proclaim to the shepherds “in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). His roles include saving the whole human race as well as being the awaited Davidic Messiah of Israel. Of special note, “Christ the Lord” identifies Mary’s messianic son as “the Lord,” the principal Old Testament term for God. As newly born man who is also God, Mary’s son is a Savior who can reconcile the human race to God.

4. Mary Is Source and Example of the Church’s Memories and Reflections

Whether or not these theological interpretations would have been evident to original readers, they are legitimate theological ramifications of the meaning implicit in the biblical portrayal of Jesus and the names given to him. The Lukan commentary at the end of the shepherd episode implies sustained theological reflection by Mary on the meaning and identity of her new son: “But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). Luke’s repeated mention of Mary’s meditation on her memories of Jesus regarding his identity and mission (also at 2:51) seems a Lukan pointer to the importance of such reflection for understanding Jesus.¹⁸

Later in Acts, Luke will go out of his way to mention Mary’s presence in the community in Jerusalem praying before Pentecost (Acts 1:14).¹⁹ Scholars have not found it easy to explain the reasons for this seemingly intrusive mention. My suggestion is that Luke seems to have created a deliberate intratextual link between his statements in Luke 2:19 and 51, about Mary recalling and reflecting on the meaning of Jesus’ origins, and Mary’s presence in the Jerusalem community awaiting Pentecost.²⁰

Repeated mention of and emphasis on Mary’s attempts to understand the marvelous origins of her son Jesus can suggest that Mary’s memories and reflections were the ultimate source of the Lukan narratives about Jesus’ origins. Luke would not claim to have known Mary during Jesus’ earthly life. However, her early presence in the Jerusalem community,

¹⁸ Cf. “Mary: Every Believer’s Model for Receiving the Word,” Part I, Chap. 3, in *Working Paper of Word of God Synod*, ZE08061203—2008-06-12 (accessed June 12, 2008, permalink: www.zenit.org/article-22878?l=english); cf. Granados, “Mary’s Memory.”

¹⁹ Cf. Yeago, “Presence of Mary,” 161–62.

²⁰ Cf. Granados, “Mary’s Memory,” 23–26 on the role of Mary’s memory in Luke-Acts and especially in Acts 1:14 (25 and 31–32), though his emphases and explanations differ from mine. Bastero, “Espíritu Santo y María,” 712–14, 727–28, compares the coming of the Spirit on Mary at the Annunciation and on the Church at Pentecost.

which Luke most likely did visit and some of whose members he probably did know, suggests a link that could have made Mary's memories available to Luke. It could be a chain of witnesses from Mary through members of the Jerusalem church (among whom she temporarily stayed) to Luke later visiting Jerusalem to seek information about Jesus. Since Luke presents his narratives as truthful history (in the manner of God's Old Testament history) rather than as fiction (Lk 1:1–4), this link between Luke 2:19 and 51 and Acts 1:14 might be a way to suggest inconspicuously a possible source in the Jerusalem community for Luke's information about the conception and birth of Jesus and Jesus' relationship to Mary and to God his Father.²¹

Conclusion

The Lukan narrative presents Jesus as Son of God, both truly God and truly man. A theological conclusion about Mary that can (and later will) be drawn from all this is that Mary as Jesus' mother is indeed the mother of God's Son. Since the New Testament witness as a whole makes it clear that Jesus as God's Son is himself God, Mary can, therefore, logically and truly be called the Mother of God, as the Church will later confess.

Fourth Gospel and Revelation

Space permits only briefer consideration of John 2 and John 19 and Revelation 12.

John 2, Cana

The Cana account in John 2 provides a Johannine perspective on Mary's role as woman and mother in the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, which propelled him forward to his "hour," when God would act decisively to reconcile the hopelessly alienated human race to himself through Jesus' death and resurrection. In the heavily biblical setting of a wedding feast with many eschatological overtones, dated to "the third day" (John 2:1, foreshadowing the victory of his "hour"),²² "the mother of Jesus" calls his

²¹ Cf. Granados, "Mary's Memory," and the more homiletic reflection, Joe G. Burnet, "The Marvelous Memory of God: Pastoral and Personal Reflections on Preaching Luke," *Sewanee Theological Review* 44.2 (2001): 141–55.

²² Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *Belief in the Word. Reading the Fourth Gospel: John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 91, relates the manifestation of Jesus' *doxa* "on the third day" to the gift of *doxa* at Sinai "on the third day" (Exod 19:16, 19). Cf. Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press [Michael Glazier Books], 1998), 73 regarding John 2:11, and works cited. This implicit comparison of *doxa* from Jesus with that of the OT recalls the claim of greater grace from Jesus than from Moses in John 1:16–17.

attention to an embarrassing shortage of wine. Jesus' seemingly harsh but explicitly eschatological response emphasizes that his "hour" has not yet come:²³ "What is this to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come" (my literal translation of of *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου*, v. 4).²⁴

Without responding to Jesus' statement, Jesus' mother simply instructs the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). Jesus immediately commands the servants to fill six large water jars with water, then to "draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast" (v. 8). Their faith in and obedience to Jesus leads to the water becoming wine, superior even to that originally served. The narrator's summary emphasized that this was "the first of his signs." Thus, Jesus "manifested (*φανερώω*) his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (v. 11).

The context of this account is transposed beyond a historical wedding to the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of the purpose for which the Word, the Son, "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14)—namely, so that we could see his glory (Jn 1:14). Although Jesus initially replied that his hour had not yet come (v. 4), his response to his mother's observation and her subsequent arrangements with the servers

²³ On Jesus' "hour" and its christological revelation here, cf. M. Gourgues, O.P., "Marie, la 'femme' et la 'mère' en Jean," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 108 (1986): 174–91, at 175–76. Gourgues correlates the statement that this first sign of Jesus manifested his glory and led to belief (2:11) with "It is finished" on the cross (19:30) as the beginning and fulfillment of Jesus' hour.

²⁴ Cf. a balanced recent study (with helpful bibliography) of this difficult saying: Edward W. Klink III, "What Concern Is That to You and to Me? John 2:1–11 and the Elisha Narratives," *Neotestamentica* 39.2 (2005): 273–87. Arthur H. Maynard, "ΤΙ ΕΜΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΣΟΙ," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 582–86, argues that in the Greek OT and NT, this and related idioms create distinction or distance. In the Synoptics the idioms often are spoken by superhuman demons recognizing Jesus' divine nature. Maynard claims, with perhaps some exaggeration, that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is similarly distinguishing himself from the merely human level of his mother. Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 81, n. 19, cites Giblin's helpful observation of a repeated narrative pattern in John's Gospel of suggestion, negative response, but positive action (John 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 7:2–14; 11:1–44): C. H. Giblin, "Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in St. John's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979–80): 197–211. Tertullian had taken a more negative view: "At this time, He seems to have admonished His mother, that He could not recognize her authority any longer (St. John 2:4), having now entered upon His work as the Son of God." Tertullian, *The Five Books against Marcion*, trans. P. Holmes, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 427. Cf. Augustine, *Tractate on John* 8.9; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.16.7.

(vv. 3, 5) did in fact inaugurate the signs of his ministry, which began the process of leading the disciples to faith.²⁵

Both here and at the cross in John 19, Jesus addresses his mother as “Woman,” which brings to mind the first woman, Eve. As the woman Eve influenced Adam, who then sinned and fell from God’s friendship, so in John 2, the woman influenced the second Adam, Jesus, who then inaugurated his sign-filled ministry of salvation.²⁶ After the mother of Jesus mentioned the lack of wine to Jesus, she alerted the waiters at the wedding to “do whatever he tells you.” This recalls Pharaoh’s instructions to his people regarding Joseph in Exodus 41:55, “When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, ‘Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.’”

John 19:25–27

When this action of the mother of Jesus is integrated with the new relationship between beloved disciple and mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross, the Cana portrayal of the mother of Jesus instructing people to “do whatever he tells you” suggests a further theological application. Mary’s instruction to the servants at Cana to obey Jesus can be related to mother Church likewise instructing her children to obey Jesus, to “do whatever he tells you.” In John 19:25–27, the Johannine pattern of never naming Mary persists as the narrator continues to refer to her as the mother of Jesus, and as Jesus continues to address her as “Woman.” Although readers would be expected to know Mary’s name, restricting reference to her solely by the title “mother of Jesus” facilitates a second, symbolic meaning for the mother of Jesus as representing Mother Church.²⁷ Likewise, the beloved disciple continues not to be named, which facilitates a second symbolic meaning for him too, as representing all Christian disciples.²⁸

²⁵ Cf. Bernard J. Le Frois, S.V.D., “The Spiritual Motherhood of Mary in John 3,3–5,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 14.2 (1952): 116–23, at 116.

²⁶ See Le Frois, “Spiritual Motherhood,” 116.

²⁷ A. Feuillet, “Les adieux du Christ à sa mère (Jn 19,25–27) et la maternité spirituelle de Marie,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 86 (1964): 469–89, provides theological insight into Mary as New Eve, “mother of the living,” including (by adoption) the beloved disciple representing the “first born” of many other children who believe in Jesus (esp. 474–77). He enriches the symbol of Mary’s motherhood at the cross through the metaphor of the painful motherhood of Zion from Isaiah 26:17–18 and 66:7–8 and Jesus’ comparison of his passion to painful birth (John 16:21), which identify Jesus’ hour with the hour of the woman, Zion and Mary, for giving birth to a new people of God represented in Jesus’ disciples (esp. 477–80).

²⁸ Cf. Joy A. Schroeder, “Revelation 12: Female Figures and Figures of Evil,” *Word & World* 15.2 (1995): 175–81, at 179.

Although Protestant interpreters tend to eschew such symbolic interpretations suggested by patristic and medieval authors up to contemporary Catholics like Raymond Brown,²⁹ such a Catholic reading seems not to violate the sense of the wording of the text, and can be proposed without apology as a Catholic theological interpretation. Thus, as at Cana, Jesus' addressing his mother as "Woman" evokes the Woman Eve, the "mother of all the living" (Gn 3:20). As Eve rejoiced, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gn 4:1), the "woman" here is given a new adopted son by the Lord as his solemn disposition while dying on the cross (Jn 19:26).³⁰

In return, the "disciple whom he loved" is given "your mother" (vv. 26–27).³¹ Besides the surface meaning of the dying Jesus entrusting his mother to the care of his beloved disciple, additional symbolic meanings seem part of even the original intent of the passage. Every disciple of Jesus would like to consider herself or himself as "the disciple whom he loved" (v. 26), so that the beloved disciple can readily stand in for all disciples of Jesus or members of the Church. Correspondingly, "mother" of beloved disciples of Jesus can naturally symbolize not only Mary as mother of Christians but also the Church who, like the mother of Jesus

²⁹ E.g., George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Dallas: Word Book Publishers, 2002, 1999, 1987), regarding John 19:26–27, p. 349. Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 504, counters such concerns by arguing that, despite exaggerated claims, it is clear that Jesus at the cross was establishing a new family, with his mother playing the maternal role in this new family.

³⁰ Cf. Raymond Brown's observations about adoption formulas, generally in "you are" form, e.g., "You are my beloved son, today I have begotten you" (Psalm 2:7), and slightly different normal ways of entrusting one's mother to another's care upon one's own death, in Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (xiii–xxi)*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 906–7 about John 19:26–27. Mary Coloe, "Raising the Johannine Temple (John 19:19–37)," *Australian Biblical Review* 48 (2000): 47–58, at 54–58, esp. 55, theologically interprets John 19:25–26 in context as a formula of adoption for the beloved disciple (and all Christians for whom he stands) to be adopted sons (and daughters) of Mary and of the Father, and siblings of Jesus (20:17), in fulfillment of John 1:12 of becoming children of God born not of blood, flesh, or man but of God. She places this in the context of the Nazarene (from *netzer*, Davidic shoot) "temple builder" (John 19:19, fulfilling his prophecy at 2:19). This new temple includes the mother and beloved disciple as recipients of the Spirit at the cross (19:30). For a more poetic reader-response treatment of this as a "birthing scene" in which one son is born while the other Son dies, see Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, "Stabat Mater? Rebirth at the Foot of the Cross," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 11, 3–4 (2003): 468–87, at 478. Cf. Schroeder, "Revelation 12," 179; and Feuillet, "Jn 19,25–27," 483.

³¹ Cf. Le Frois, "Spiritual Motherhood."

at Cana, instructs disciples to “do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). According to the principle of the “unity of Scripture,” further confirmation of this identification might be the Woman in Revelation 12:17, on “the rest of” whose offspring the Satanic dragon made war, that is, “on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.”³²

Revelation 11:19–12:17

The vision of the Woman in Revelation 12 follows immediately from Revelation 11:19, the vision of God’s temple in heaven and of the ark of the covenant within that heavenly temple.³³ The ark of the covenant had become a symbol of God’s presence. Immediately following mention of the ark of the covenant in the temple in heaven (and linked by “and,” καὶ) is reference to the appearance of the portent of the Woman in heaven. The context implies a relationship between the ark of the covenant in heaven and the sign of the Woman in heaven. The ark is the site of God’s special presence. Insofar as the symbolism of the ark can be extended to the Woman, she too might be considered a special dwelling for God’s presence. Catholic tradition has long referred to Mary, or more particularly, her womb, as ark of the covenant, where God dwelt.³⁴

The heavenly Woman is portrayed with cosmic symbolism that gives her mythical attributes: clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, and wearing a crown of twelve stars.³⁵ According to the curse on the first

³² Cf. Schroeder, “Revelation 12,” 179.

³³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, 52b (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 677 about Rev 12:19b, calls the ark in heaven the *true* ark and supposedly the archetype for the construction of the earthly ark.

³⁴ On Mary’s womb as Ark of the Covenant, *Navarre Luke*, 41 ad Luke 1:38, refers to Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 6. “With regard to Mary, these liturgies celebrate it at the feast of the new Eve, the obedient and faithful virgin, who with her generous ‘fiat’ (cf. Lk 1:38) became through the working of the Spirit the Mother of God, but also the true Mother of the living, and by receiving into her womb the one Mediator (cf. 1 Tm 2:5), became the true Ark of the Covenant and the true Temple of God” (*Marialis Cultus* §6 is cited from *Mary in the Church: A Selection of Teaching Documents* [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003], 53–91, at 57–58). Cf. Bastero, “Espíritu Santo y María,” 705, 707, esp. 709 and 711–12, and his citations from Paul VI, 720, 723–26. Note esp. his citation of St. Ambrose: “María es templo de Dios y no es el Dios del templo” (“Mary is temple of God and is not God of the temple,” *De Spiritu Sancto*, III, c. 2, n. 80, PL 16, 829, my translation).

³⁵ For her mythical cosmic attributes and background, see esp. Stefan Schreiber, “Die Sternenfrau und ihre Kinder (Offb 12): Zur Wiederentdeckung eines Mythos,” *New Testament Studies* 53 (2007): 436–57; and Roland Bergmeier, “Altes und Neues zur ‘Sonnenfrau am Himmel (Apk 12)’: Religionsgeschichtliche und quellencritische Beobachtungen zu Apk 12:1–17,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche*

woman (Gn 3:16), in this cosmic Woman's pregnancy with the Messiah and approaching delivery, "she cried out in her pangs of birth" (Rv 12:2).³⁶ The opposing Satanic dragon waited to eat the Messiah at its birth, but immediately the Messiah was "caught up to God and to his throne" (Rv 12:4-5).³⁷

Despite reference to the Woman giving birth to the Messiah, this scene of delivery from the dragon's jaws refers more obviously to the painful death, followed by resurrection and ascension, of the Messiah to God's throne than to his birth that began his earthly life.³⁸ Therefore, most consider the initial and primary referent for this cosmic woman to be somehow God's (OT) people from whom the Messiah was born.³⁹ Grelot allows the reasonableness of this referent, but the Woman's appearance first in heaven gives her broader signification. The Woman clothed with the sun represents the new humanity, as the woman in Genesis

Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche, 73.1/2 (1982): 97-109. For a readable overview of mythical elements, see Adela Yarbro Collins, "Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation," *Biblical Interpretation* 1.1 (1993): 20-33, esp. 20-27. Acknowledging mythical elements but arguing for a stronger OT influence on this Woman are Bertrand Buby, S.M., "The Fascinating Woman of Revelation 12," *Marian Studies* 50 (1999): 107-26, at 110; and Aune, *Revelation* 6-16, 670-76.

³⁶ Cf. Schroeder, "Revelation 12," 177.

³⁷ Charles Hauret, "Ève transfigurée: De la Genèse à l'Apocalypse," *Revue D'histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 59 (1979): 327-39, treats Gn 3:15, Rv 12, and John 19:25-27 as a triptych of human salvation history from the promise to Eve in Gn 3:15 to the victory of the Woman's Son over Satan in Rv 12 to her motherhood of the other sons who believed in Jesus in John 19:25-27.

³⁸ Cf. Schroeder, "Revelation 12," 179; Sarah Butler, "The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: A Theological Note," *Chicago Studies* 43.3 (2004): 297-303; P. Grelot, "Marie Mère de Jésus dans les Écritures," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 121 (1999): 59-71, at 66. For the pains of birth, compare the reference in the Greek of Isaiah 66:7-9 to Zion being in travail, fleeing and bearing a male child (67, citing Prigent). Grelot acknowledges Catholic reluctance to refer to Mary as having birth pangs, but argues that if Jesus suffered Adam's curse of death (and in a horrible way), why should Mary not suffer Eve's curse of birth pangs?

³⁹ Joy Schroeder, "Revelation 12," 179, expresses it aptly: "In other words, the woman is the messianic community; she is the church in continuity with Israel." Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation," 20-33; Schreiber, "Sternenfrau." Buby, "Fascinating Woman," 111-17, provides a judicious listing of 28 interpretations of the Woman, plus a very useful bibliography (125-26, citing the applicable pages from each entry). For interpretations of the Woman in the fathers and tradition, including a comparison to the image of our Lady of Guadalupe (137), see Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, with Rebekah Callow, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 136-38.

2:22–24 represented the woman of the origins, “the mother of all the living” (Gn 3:20). Thus, this mother of the new humanity is the “new Eve.”⁴⁰ The new humanity more completely will begin from the birth of the Messiah who would be born from her. Later reference to the Woman’s “other children” who confess Jesus includes the Church within the Woman symbol. However, before the birth of Jesus, the new humanity exists only in the person of the mother of Jesus.⁴¹

In the cosmic and Eve imagery, others also find reference additionally to Mary, Jesus’ actual mother.⁴² The woman’s flight into the wilderness also has resonances with God’s OT people, for example, when God says he will woo his faithless spouse in the wilderness to bring her back to her first love (Hos 2:14–16).

In bi-level symbolism, the earthly scene of the dragon’s frustration at the Messiah’s escape to God’s throne is paralleled with a heavenly scene of warfare between Michael and the dragon and their angelic armies. Because of the “blood of the Lamb” and the martyrs’ testimony, Satan the accuser of God’s people is cast out of heaven to earth, where in his wrath he persecutes the Woman, who is rescued from him (Rv 12:7–16). He then “went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (Rv 12:17). These latter references to the Woman, especially to her children “who bear testimony to Jesus,” now clearly symbolize the Church. During the development of the vision, the same sign of the Woman has metamorphosed from God’s OT people to God’s NT Church.⁴³

Concluding Theological Reflections

Taking seriously the unity of Scripture, Catholic tradition, and the analogy of faith, a theological interpretation of the role of Mary, Woman and

⁴⁰ J. Edgar Bruns, “The Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26.4 (1964): 459–63, at 460, suggests that the inspiration for the heavenly woman came from Gn 3:15–16 (Eve, primarily an individual, secondarily a collective womankind), Micah 3–4 (daughter of Zion, primarily collective for Israel, secondarily the individual mother, giving birth to ruler). He notes that Revelation 12 primarily identifies the collective, secondarily Mary, whereas John 19:26–27 concerns primarily Mary, secondarily a collective (probably the Church).

⁴¹ Grelot, “Marie Mère de Jésus,” 61–62.

⁴² Cf. Vladimir Berzonsky, “‘Do Whatever He Tells You’: The Mother of God and Christian Faith,” *Eastern Churches Journal* 6.2 (1999): 23–36; Jean-Marie Hennaux, “Marie Mère de Jésus dans les Écritures,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 121.1 (1999): 59–71.

⁴³ See William S. Kurz, *What Does the Bible Say about the End Times? A Catholic View* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004), 159–60.

Mother in God's saving New Testament plan, can correlate these differing but complementary insights about Mary. We can relate the implicit Johannine symbolism of the woman and mother of Jesus as the Church, mother of Jesus' beloved disciples, to this image in Revelation 12 of the Woman with children who confess Jesus. The Lukan portrayals of Mary as believing servant of the Lord, whose Yes permits the Spirit's action, can be theologically related to the Johannine prologue's revelation of the Incarnation of the Word and Son of God as man "who dwelt among us."

Mary's role in the Incarnation is fundamental for the part she played in the saving plan of God by which the Son would become man to reconcile man to God. From her role as Mother of God flow her other roles as mother of the beloved disciples and representation of the Church, mother of Christians. She is also mother of the Davidic Messiah and Servant of the Lord who came as Savior not only for God's chosen people Israel but for all nations. Not only was Mary's Yes essential for the Son of God to become man in the Incarnation, but the Johannine Cana account also portrays Mary as occasioning the inauguration of Jesus' signs and ministry leading to the fulfillment of his "hour" through his death and resurrection. Revelation facilitates a theological portrayal of Mary in which, as Woman and Mother of the Messiah, she has many symbolic correspondences with the OT people as mother of the Messiah and the NT Church as mother of those who professed faith in Jesus, or more inclusively, with "the messianic community; she is the church in continuity with Israel."⁴⁴ A careful interpretive correlation of these complementary biblical depictions of Mary produces a much richer theological portrayal of Mary and her cardinal role in God's saving of the human race than the meager consensus statement about the virgin birth produced by the strictly historical critical 1978 *Mary in the New Testament*. Of course, one reason for this more comprehensive depiction of Mary's role in saving history is that it contextualizes particular biblical texts within the

⁴⁴ Joy Schroeder, "Revelation 12," 179.

Many observations about Mary similar to those in the present article are made by Pope Paul VI, "Carta al cardenal Suenens con ocasión del XIV Congreso Mariano Internacional," *AAS* 67 (1975): 358, who is quoted in Bastero, "Espíritu Santo y María," 730–31. Compare also Bastero's own conclusion, 732–35. See also the writings of Pope John Paul II and von Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary, God's Yes to Man: Pope John Paul II Encyclical Letter, Mother of the Redeemer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); Pope John Paul II, *Theotókos: Woman, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2000). For a remarkable fourth-century mariological complement to this study of Mary in the NT, see Lucas F. Mateo-Seco, "La Mariología en San Gregorio de Nisa," *Scripta Theologica* 10.2 (1978): 409–66.

unity of all Scripture as interpreted in Catholic tradition with the harmony between elements of the faith. It would be interesting to see how much of this richer Catholic biblical interpretation of Mary's role would be ecumenically persuasive to other Christian interpreters today.

Appendix

Contemporary writings vary enormously in their approaches to Mary. This specifically Catholic article cannot address this multiplicity. See the following examples. *The Many Faces of Mary*, ed. Diego Irarrazabal, Susan Ross, and Marie-Theres Wacker (London : SCM Press, 2008); George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

Muslim: Joseph Samaha, "The Virgin Mary, A Bridge with Islam?" *Eastern Churches Journal* 10 (2003): 67–70; Aliah Schleifer, *Mary, the Blessed Virgin of Islam* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1998).

Orthodox: Verna Harrison, "The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006): 149–60; Manfred Hauke, "The Immaculate Conception of Mary in the Greek Fathers and in an Ecumenical Context," *Chicago Studies* 45 (2006): 327–46 (author Catholic but ecumenical focus); Paul Ladouceur, "Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006): 5–57; Vladimir Berzonsky, "'Do Whatever He Tells You': The Mother of God and Christian Faith," *Eastern Churches Journal* 6.2 (1999): 23–36; John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), ch. 8, "Mary in the New Testament," 143–58; Appendix: "Mary: Mother of Believers, Mother of God," 229–38, a critical review article of Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), as in effect denying the incarnation and Theotokos.

Evangelical Protestant: "Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life: A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together," *First Things*, no. 197 (Nov., 2009): 49–59; David Parker, "Evangelicals and Mary: Recent Theological Evaluations," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30 (2006): 121–40; Tim S. Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals: Toward an Understanding of the Mother of our Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2002); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Dwight Longenecker

and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003).

Feminist: Karl J. McDaniel, "Transgression, Tradition, and Transformation: Six Women of the Matthean Genealogy," *ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University* 33 (2005): 248–56; J. Lyle Story, "The Discipleship of Women—From Jesus' Birth to the Empty Tomb," *Priscilla Papers* 21 (2007): 14–20; Frank Reilly, "Jane Schaber, Raymond E. Brown, and the Problem of the Illegitimacy of Jesus," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21 (2005): 57–80; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Jon M. Sweeney, *Strange Heaven: The Virgin Mary as Woman, Mother, Disciple, and Advocate* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006); Deirdre Joy Good, *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

Pacifist: Brittany Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 436–56.

Reductionist: Gerd Lüdemann, *Virgin Birth?: The Real Story of Mary and Her Son Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

Liberationist: Scot McKnight, "The Mary We Never Knew," *Christianity Today* 50 (2006): 26–30.

Mary in Culture: Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

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