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The Blessed Virgin Mary in the New Testament

What is my approach in this study? I would call it the classic approach of Catholic theology, the methodology of which can be laid out in three steps—an account of which will shortly follow. I draw here on the description of theological method I offered a quarter of a century ago in my study *The Shape of Catholic Theology*, a work which has been found both representative and even helpful by those mandated to teach such theology in a wide range of institutions, especially in the United States of America.[1] So I do not think that in this "methodological introduction" I am likely to lead the reader too far astray.

1. Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to its Sources, Principles, and History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

A Methodological Introduction

The *first* step in classical Catholic theology—of which Mariology is a sector or department—consists in exploring the sources of revelation: namely, Scripture and tradition (on which more anon).

The *second* step consists in interrelating the fruits gained in this process, not only with each other but also with the other doctrinal convictions held by the church. Insofar as it entails relating the fruits of exploration of the sources of revelation to other aspects of Christian believing, this second step is often called "applying the "analogy of faith.'" All aspects of revelation, so the principle of the analogy of faith asserts, are of their nature intrinsically interconnected. It is at this second stage that appeal to the contemporary magisterium (teaching authority) of the church is relevant, for the magisterium is concerned with the overall pattern of Christian truth, where to lose one element of doctrine is to imperil the balance of all.

Then in a *third and final* step of the classical method, the outcome of placing the fruits of exploration of the sources of revelation in a position of interrelation not only to each other but also to other key aspects of revelation is systematically reorganized by the selection of an ordering principle which the individual theologian finds especially helpful or illuminating. (Thus, for example, in the case of St. Thomas Aquinas's celebrated *Summa theologiae*, that "ordering principle" is God in the production of all creatures and the return of creation to God, which for human beings, comes about on the way of salvation.) This third step is what accounts for the plurality of theologies within the unity of a single faith.

In this systematic representation of the fruits of investigating the contents of Scripture and tradition, fruits duly contextualized by reference to the principle of the analogy of faith, the writer may

well appeal additionally to philosophical concepts as aids in putting forward his or her teaching. It is a feature of a classical Catholic theological culture to hold that there is in existence a patrimony of such philosophical concepts (often called the "perennial philosophy"), an inheritance that has proved invaluable in this task. The deployment of its content by Catholic theologians helps to keep the variety of ordering principles in particular theologies within the church from becoming intellectually anarchic or from leading to a breakdown of intelligibility in a common conversation.

Before getting into the meat of Mariology itself, and bearing in mind in particular the title of this opening chapter of *There Is No Rose*—"The Blessed Virgin Mary in the New Testament"—I need to say something more about that first step in the methodology of classical Catholic theology: namely, the exploration of the sources of revelation, Scripture and tradition. Clearly, what one says about the figure that Mary of Nazareth cuts in the New Testament will be affected by the kind of approach one has to reading Scripture—or what since the nineteenth century has come to be called the "hermeneutic," the interpretative starting-point or, more widely, interpretative scheme, of this or that theologian.

The Council of Trent, in the decree on Scripture and traditions it produced during its fourth session (in 1546), describes revealed truth as found both in Scripture and in the traditions to which church life gives access in ways that are other than scriptural. Subsequently, the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 1965) in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965) emphasized the intimate unity which joins Scripture and traditions in a single global whole. A way of expressing this as a hermeneutic which would gain the support of many—probably most—classically minded Catholic theologians runs as follows. In general terms, the whole of revelation is found in Scripture, but it can only be so found when Scripture is read through

the medium of the traditions—traditions which are found concretely in such "monuments" as the creeds, the historic liturgies, the teaching of the Fathers, the testimony of iconography, and the witness given to this or that truth by the devotion of the faithful.

In general, then, revelation is, as the formula has it, *totum in sacra scriptura*, "totally in sacred Scripture," which must be carefully distinguished from the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone," since on this distinctively Catholic view the *totum* is not available except by reference to the traditions which are the medium through which Scripture is read, the lens we bring to reading it.

We say "in general terms" the whole of revelation is found in Scripture because even theologians concerned to stress the *totum in sacra scriptura* principle have to admit that at least two truths about Scripture are not found in Scripture itself, and these are: the list of the canonical books and the claim that all of Scripture, New Testament as well as Old, is inspired, with the various corollaries that carries. Many would add, furthermore, that "the traditions" also supplement Scripture by calling our attention to *mores Ecclesiae*, the "customs of the Church," those practical aspects of belief and worship from which theological inferences can be drawn. The latter are chiefly what, for example, the fourth-century Greek Father St. Basil the Great (for example) has in mind when he discusses this topic of the relation of tradition to Scripture.[2]

The implication of this view of Scripture, or the Scripture-tradition relationship, is that, when developing the main Mariological themes, we should aim at returning time and again to the foundational scriptural texts, but approach those texts with the aid not only of such neutral yet legitimate tools as philology, the historically precise use of

2. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 27.

words, but also by making reference to the traditional sources. This will mean granting authority in biblical interpretation to the exegesis of the Fathers and to the use made of biblical allusions in the liturgies and other expressions of Christian devotion whether these be textual or practical in format.

It will also mean paying due attention to the implications of the two teachings about Scripture found only in the traditions—namely canonicity and inspiration. Canonicity and inspiration tell us that the biblical books, Old and New Testament together, form, despite their diversity, an overarching unity, and that this unity is at the intellectual level a coherent, though complex, and developing truth since texts inspired by God, among whose names is *Veritas*, "Truth," cannot be in contradiction one with another.

The Primacy of St. Luke (Gospel/Acts) and St. John (Gospel/Apocalypse)

With these methodological preliminaries in place, then, we can begin to investigate the texts of the New Testament that are most crucial for the eventual emergence of the theological sub-discipline we have come to call "Mariology." The chief among these texts will already be familiar to anyone who has a decent acquaintance with the New Testament at large and the Gospels in particular. Overwhelmingly they are Lukan and Johannine, and this seems no coincidence. Why do I say that?

In the explanatory letter which prefaces his Gospel, St. Luke tells us that his own method as an historian has entailed wherever possible interrogating those who were eyewitnesses of the Word (1:2). Such concern for establishing the oral testimony of eyewitnesses was the gold standard of ancient historiography at its best. As soon as one reaches Luke's own account of the public ministry of Jesus, one finds

that he names as the first four disciples of the Lord, Andrew and Simon, later called Peter, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. These names immediately suggest themselves, therefore, as prime examples of the eyewitnesses Luke might have sought out. But we know from the Gospel of John that the evangelist, standing with Mary the mother of the Jesus at the foot of the cross, was entrusted with the care of the mother of the Lord, in a common household which ecclesiastical tradition locates at Ephesus on the Asia Minor coast.

The fact of John's intimacy with Mary together with the demands of Luke's historical method, make it likely *a priori* that the Johannine and Lukan writings have preserved the fullest Marian material and especially the fullest material about Mary derived from Mary herself. This is so even if one wishes to ascribe the final composition of the Fourth Gospel to a disciple of the evangelist, thoroughly at home with his data and imbued with his spirit. So I shall concentrate on Luke and John here, reserving discussion of other New Testament references to comment on particular Marian themes in later chapters.

The Lukan Scenes

The opening two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel, after the prefatory letter, are known to modern students as his "infancy gospel," and considerations of language as well as subject matter justify, up to a point, the separation of these sections from the rest of Luke's Gospel which this title implies. Though Luke's Gospel as a whole is clearly the work of a man who knew the Jewish Scriptures well and considered the events he was retailing to be in various ways their fulfillment, the richness of Old Testament allusion in the infancy gospel is especially thick—to take a metaphor from clotted cream.[3]

i. The Annunciation

The first Lukan episode that must detain us is the Annunciation. Luke does not spend much time setting the geographical scene—a "city of Galilee," he writes, "whose name was Nazareth" (1:26), but if we contextualize the Annunciation event in the wider stretch of his Gospel, which runs from the Annunciation via Elizabeth's conception of John the Baptist to Luke's account of the Nativity, we find that he has gone to considerable trouble in setting the chronological scene. His various indicators of the passing of time add up to seventy weeks: seventy weeks from the first appearance of Gabriel in the temple to the birth of Jesus, and this is a significant sum because in the Book of Daniel, where Gabriel makes his début in the narrative of revelation, seventy weeks is the—no doubt, symbolic—time assigned until the final deliverance of Israel (Dan. 9:24). In this charged temporal setting, then, for readers of the infancy gospel as a whole,[4] Gabriel greets Mary, a "virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph" (Luke 1:27), with two words which lend themselves especially well to a study of Scripture read in the medium of tradition: *Chaire, kecharitômenê.* They are the "angelic salutation."

The usual English translation in Catholic Bibles influenced by the (Latin) Vulgate text of Scripture is "Hail, full of grace," but far from being an overly maximalist translation (as much Protestant exegesis once assumed), investigation of how the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine liturgical tradition understood those two keywords has stimulated philologists to look at them more carefully and to find their Latin (and thus English Catholic) rendering, if anything, insufficiently enthusiastic.

3. René Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc 1–2* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957).
4. Lucien Legrand, *L'Annonce à Marie (Lc 1, 26–38): Une apocalypse aux origines de l'Evangile* (Paris: Cerf, 1981).

Whereas in secular Greek, *chaire* is a commonplace enough greeting, in those books of the Septuagint, the Bible of the Greek-speaking Alexandrian Jews, that are translated from Hebrew, *chaire* (we are told) should be translated "rejoice" or "rejoice greatly" because this word typically "refers to the joy of the people. . . at some striking act done by God for their salvation."[5] The Greek patristic tradition assumes this at all points, and the translation "rejoice" is pressed into service in multiple ways in the Akathistos Hymn, a much used lengthy liturgical poem, likely written in the sixth century.

> An angel of the highest rank was sent from
> heaven to say to the Theotokos, 'Rejoice…' He
> stood before her and began crying out:
> 'Rejoice! You by whom joy will shine forth
> Rejoice, you by whom malediction will cease!
> Rejoice, you who raise up the fallen Adam!
> Rejoice, you who dry the tears of Eve…'[6]

Three of the key instances of the Septuagint use of this verb for salvationally relevant rejoicing have it in common that they name Israel in feminine terms. Characteristically, they address her corporate person as the Daughter of Zion, a daughter who is also a mother, and they do so in the context of the fulfillment of messianic expectation. The most ancient of the three texts (the others are in Joel and Zechariah) is Zephaniah, the third chapter of whose book calls on the Daughter of Zion to rejoice, cry aloud, be glad, and be delighted, because the king of Israel is now present as "the Lord in the midst of thee" (3:15). As the rest of the angelic message will make plain, Luke sees Mary as the one in whom precisely this sort of prophecy is fulfilled, the eschatological Daughter of Zion, corporate Israel

5. John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Doubleday, 1975), 39.
6. *The Akathistos Hymn*, I.

embodied in one woman, at the climax of saving history, the happy beginning of the end of the ages.

The other key term in the opening of the angelic salutation, *kecharitômenê*, is also theologically pregnant, even more so than the Vulgate's *gratia plena*, "full of grace," would suggest. As philologists have pointed out, the verb from which this adjective is formed belongs to a family of Greek verbs all of which have the ending omicron omega, *oô*, verbs that have in common the expressing of causal action. The best translation, accordingly, is, "You who have already been transformed by grace." That is a pointer to what the Catholic dogmatic tradition will come to call the "immaculate conception." It is a point perceived in *sura* 19 of the Koran: "The angel said, "O Mary, indeed God has favoured you and made you immaculate, and chosen you from all the women of the world.'"

"The Lord is with thee" may seem, in comparison, small beer, but as the Ushaw biblical scholar John McHugh points out, in the Old Testament these words are not a conventional reassurance. Rather, they are integral to an announcement that some formidable task is about to be allotted to the person addressed. This throws light on Mary's reaction—which Luke describes as one of deep disturbance.

Since the rest of the angel's speech consists in explaining that the call of the Daughter of Zion to be Mother of the long-awaited Messiah will actually be realized in the form of what the historic creeds, taking their cue from the Prologue to St. John's Gospel, term divine "Incarnation," Mary's disturbance turns out to be well-justified. The fulfillment of the hope of Israel will take the form of a new creation in Mary's womb by the "overshadowing"—that is, the sanctifying presence—of the Holy Spirit, such that what is born of her will be not only the true king of Israel, to whom the "Lord God will give to sit on the throne of his father David," but also, and more foundationally, the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32).

Whereas David's royal rank entitled his heirs to be called sons of God, according to the terms of Nathan's prophecy about the royal house in the second book of Samuel (2 Sam. 7:14), Luke reverses the order, which had run: son of David, therefore a son of God. Instead, Jesus's divine sonship will be the foundation of his entitlement to be king of Israel, and such divine sonship entails, then, for Mary, a corresponding divine motherhood. She will be, in the formula used in Byzantine iconography, *Mêtêr Theou*, "the Mother of God," or, in the language of the Greek dogmatic tradition, which achieved authoritative status at the Third Ecumenical Council, Ephesus (431), she will be the *Theotokos*, the "Bearer of God." How much did she understand of this at that point? The Flemish Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx ventures the following judgment, "In a confused but nonetheless very real way, she was conscious of the deeper implications of her motherhood—that God himself, who had once come into Israel's womb, was now to enter her womb."[7]

So far as this indeed formidable task is concerned, we can assume Luke takes it for granted that, as a woman already transformed by divine grace, Mary's mind and heart were peculiarly open to divine illumination. Nonetheless, she has very immediately one source of bewilderment, or, at least, confusion. "How can this be since I know not man?" (Luke 1:34). Another perfectly possible translation reads, "How can this be since I am not to know man." Beginning in the east with Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century and in the west with Augustine in the fifth century, these words have been taken to imply a vow, or, as it is sometimes termed, a "proposal," of lifelong virginity on Mary's part. The discovery of the Dead Sea (Qumran) Scrolls in 1947, by filling out what was already known from such contemporary Jewish reporters as Josephus and Philo of the radical

7. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption. The Religious Bases of the Mystery of Mary* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 27.

ascetic movement in first century Judaism styled "Essenism," has alerted modern scholars to the possibility that these patristic witnesses were on to something. The consecration of virginity to the God of Israel by a freely chosen celibate life, though a surprising development in a religion which celebrated both domesticity and fecundity so thoroughly, is a fact of the epoch of Mary of Nazareth—though there was, further back in Israel's tradition, the ancient example of the Nazarenes, people "separated to the Lord" in the Book of Numbers (6:2); Samson, in the Book of Judges, is the best known case.

It is, however, true that Mary's circumstances, as a betrothed bride, were familial and normal, not, as with the Qumran celibates, coenobitic and exceptional. Why would Mary have accepted a betrothal that of its nature would lead to marriage and hence offspring if she had in fact made a vow of this kind? For a single woman in Roman Palestine, having a husband as protector was no doubt a practical necessity if she had to leave the parental home, so a sociological argument can be brought forward here. It remains the case, though, that the content of a pre-Annunciation vow of virginity could itself only be pre-Christian, whereas the terms in which tradition has exalted Mary as *beata Virgo*, "*the* blessed Virgin," and in the words of the *Lauretana*, the Litany of Loreto, *Regina virginum,* "the Queen of Virgins," have assumed that Mary is the paradigm of a virginal renunciation of conjugal life made *out of love for the incarnate Lord.* One sees the difference. Anything less than the latter is not really Christian at all.

A solution might be advanced along the following lines. If Mary's proposal of virginity was, in her mind, a settled yet conditional one—conditional, that is to say, on what she understood of God's will for her, then with the Annunciation—when that conditional proposal became an absolute or unconditional one—it changed not

only its *formal character* (from conditional to unconditional) but also its *material content* (from pre-Christian to Christian), and became an option for perpetual virginity in the exclusive service of her Son, the divine-human Messiah-king.

This will be pertinent to any account of Mary's role as helpmate of the Redeemer, or what a more daring theological usage would call the "co-redemptrix"—a theme which, as we shall see, on a *minimal* reading finds its scriptural warrant in the Annunciation episode but when treated *maximally* takes its biblical departure-point from St. John's Passion narrative, and the depiction there of Mary's standing by the cross.

The virginal conception of Jesus by Mary is sometimes seen as exclusively a Lukan (and Matthaean) theologoumenon, but apart from passing references which tell in its favor in the Gospel of Mark and the Letters of Paul, the Gospel of John speaks strongly for it—which is what we should expect if, as I suggested, John had the advantage of direct disclosures from the Mother of the Lord, disclosures shared in due course with the historian Luke. Though the testimony of St. John to the virginal conception is, by way of the famous Johannine irony, implicit in the polemical scenes of chapter 8 of his Gospel where Jesus disputes with Jewish representatives about paternity, his and theirs, an explicit assertion of the virginal nature of Mary's motherhood is found in the Johannine Prologue (John 1:1–18).

Or rather, that is so if we accept not the reading of verses 12 and 13 of the Prologue concluded to by textual scholars who have examined the manuscript tradition from the age of the great codices—the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus—onwards, but, rather, the reading presumed by *the earliest of the Fathers of the Church*. The verses, as known to, for instance, Irenaeus in Asia Minor (and subsequently, Gaul) or to Tertullian in North Africa, read:

> As many as received him, to them he gave power
> to become children of God, to those who believe
> in his Name, who was born [note the singular "was,"
> not "were"] not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh,
> nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12–13).

The Jesuit exegete Ignace de la Potterie stresses that in the Johannine literature as a whole, the spiritual rebirth of Christians—which copyists came to consider the exclusive subject of these verses—is never mentioned without some reference to its model in Christ the natural Son of God. He writes of the words "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man":

> The negations are so strong, they have such an absolute characteristic about them, that it is difficult to explain them if it is purely a question of the spiritual rebirth of Christians. If, on the other hand, these negations are seen in relation to the *physical* birth of Jesus, who is born of a woman, then it is not meaningless to know how that birth took place. This negative argumentation, in our opinion, leads very expressly in favour of a singular reading of verse 13 [i. e. "who *was* born," rather than "who *were* born"]. John is arguing here with the people who have doubts about one or another aspect of the *physical* birth of Christ, notably the virginal conception (and birth) of Jesus.[8]

Where the extant Greek manuscripts *do* retain a plural—though this is concealed in English translations—is for the word put into English as "blood": "born not of blood." The word "bloods," *aimata*, is a reference to Levitical prescriptions concerning the ritual pollution involved in the shedding of blood in childbirth—primarily, through the breaking of the hymen by the firstborn. If St. John is saying here there was no such rupture of the hymen at Mary's giving birth, that is only the same as the ancient liturgies maintain when they put into poetic speech what the seventh century Lateran Synod,

8. Ignace de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant,* trans. Bertrand Buby (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1992), 106.

preparing the way for the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople III (681), went out of its way to define: Mary's virginity remained intact not only before the birth of her child but during it and after it. Mary's "virginity in giving birth"—the *virginitas in partu*—a neglected doctrine in modern theology—draws attention to the cosmic significance of this birth: how it is to change the conditions in which a fallen world exists.

I note in passing that there remains in all this the vexed question of the *adelphoi tou Jêsou*, the "brothers" (and indeed, sisters) of Jesus referred to in the Synoptic Gospels: John McHugh's well argued chapters on this topic in *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* conclude with a judgment which accepts while also modifying St. Jerome's influential view that "brethren" here means "cousins." After a careful investigation of the possible relations between Joseph, Mary the mother of James and Joses; and Mary "of Clopas" (that is, wife to Clopas), McHugh comes to the conclusion that the *adelphoi* were first cousins who are also foster-brothers (or, more widely, foster-siblings).

Before moving on to the great Johannine tableaux of the wedding at Cana and the passion, which have implications for, respectively, Mary as mediatrix of graces and Mary as co-redemptrix, I need to say something about the remaining Marian scenes in Luke's Gospel, the visitation and the presentation in the temple, along with the finding in the temple. I block together with these the reference to Mary's presence in the upper room, the Cenacle, in the opening chapter of Luke's other writing, the Acts of the Apostles.

ii. The Visitation

As is well-known, St. Luke's infancy gospel begins and ends in the Jerusalem temple, and, granted the identification in the Zion theology of the Hebrew Bible between the temple and the divine presence, this is already significant for construing the place of Mary, whom tradition has acclaimed in devotional texts like the Litany of Loreto as *Arca foederis,* the "Ark of the Covenant." The ark was, of course, the Holy of Holies of the desert tabernacle and the first temple, and still (one might venture to say) in the second temple, as rebuilt by Herod the Great, indicated by its absence the innermost sanctuary of the temple shrine.

There is a persuasive argument that in the visitation episode, Luke's choice of vocabulary draws biblically alert readers' attention to a comparison between, on the one hand, the pregnant Mary's journey to Elizabeth, herself still with the infant Baptist in her womb, and, on the other hand, the transfer in 2 Samuel of the ark from the fields of Kireath-jearim via the house of Obededom to its predestined home in David's capital, Jerusalem. The verb used for Elizabeth's greeting to Mary, a verb best translated "intoned," is only used in the Septuagint in connexion with liturgical ceremonies involving the ark. And just as David cried out in holy terror, "How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam. 6:9), Elizabeth in comparable awe says, "How should this befall me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). The ark stayed with Obededom three months, as Mary did with Elizabeth, and Mary only reaches Jerusalem with her now newborn Son at the presentation episode, which Luke surely understands as a fulfillment of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."

iii. The Presentation

At the presentation, Mary as Daughter of Zion (it is not likely Luke will have forgotten so soon the significance of the angel's greeting *chaire*) takes Jesus to the temple there to receive Simeon's scary prophecy. The prophecy foretells that, in the course of the division the divine Messiah will cause in Israel, prompting some to rise and others to fall, a "sword will pierce your soul" (Luke 2:35). The church fathers were aware of the obscurity of these last words which are often placed in brackets in modern printed Bibles as a way of signaling how they interrupt the flow and, especially, the direction of Simeon's speech.

One suggestion is that the "you" of "your own soul" is really Israel as a whole, of which the virgin Daughter of Zion is now the representative—in which case those irritating brackets can be taken away. Since this individual, Mary, embodies the destiny of Israel and thus, in biblical terms, the hope of the world, the prophecy is fittingly addressed to her, and indeed touches her in a unique way, as devotion to our Lady as the suffering Mother, our Lady of Dolours, indicates. The wider sword and her own are closely connected in that one of her sorrows will be knowing on Calvary that the "appointed leaders of God's chosen people had refused the message of salvation."[9]

iv. The Finding

Finally, in the Lukan infancy gospel, we hear of Mary's incomprehension when Jesus at twelve years old defends his absence without leave in the temple by saying he must be *en tois tou Patros mou*, "about my Father's business," or, in an alternative translation, "in my Father's house" (Luke 2:49). The Fathers of the church do not

9. McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus,* 111.

agree in their discussion of what it was Mary failed to understand about this reply.

Probably the best solution is that she did not at this point understand that his mission was to end in sight of the temple, in his passion and resurrection, to be accomplished in Jerusalem.[10] And that is where we have our last glimpse of our Lady in Luke-Acts, within sight and hearing of the temple, in the Cenacle which is to be, at Pentecost, the place of the manifestation of the new Israel, the church. As the medieval German theologian Gerloh of Reichersberg put it, Mary is the *consummatio synagogae*, the "consummation of the synagogue." She is the image of the fulfilled synagogue and thus the image of the church—she is, in Gerloh's words, *Ecclesiae Sanctae nova inchoatio*, "the new beginning of Holy Church."[11] This is a theme which will occupy us in the seventh chapter of this book.

The Johannine Scenes

What then, in conclusion, of the two Johannine set pieces—Cana and Calvary in the Gospel of John and their coda in the Johannine Apocalypse, in the "Woman clothed with the Sun" (Revelation 12)?

i. At Cana

At Cana, when Mary intervenes with Jesus over a domestic (but, in context, deeply embarrassing) episode involving newlyweds—the failure of the wine at the marriage feast— Jesus' initial reply runs, "What, woman, is that to you and to me?" (John 2:4). The word

10. René Laurentin, *Jésus et le Temple. Mystère de Pâques et foi de Marie en Luc 1–2* (Paris: Gabalda, 1966).
11. Gerhoh, *Liber de Gloria et honore Filii hominis* 10. 1, cited in de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, xxxviii, n. 22.

"woman" here directs attention away from a blood relationship, which would be better expressed by the address "mother," to a different kind of relation joining Jesus and Mary. At first, Jesus defers her request rather than refuses it outright, and that for the reason given in the following sentence, "My hour has not yet come." The implication is that when his hour does come, Mary and Jesus will be in every sense united, on Calvary and in its aftermath. After that, all her requests to him will merit hearing without hesitation.

This is the interpretation given by Augustine and Aquinas, and also, it so happens, in Newman's reply to Pusey's *Eirenicon*, which was reprinted in his *Lectures on the Difficulties of Anglicans*.[12] In fact of course, though at Cana Jesus defers her request, in the sense of postponing his affirmative response, he does in the end defer to it—in the sense of accepting it, even though the resultant "sign" that he works long precedes his "hour." And so in both respects this is a little drama that looks ahead to the doctrinal thesis of Mary's mediation of graces—not least because in John's narrative, which is symbolic as well as historical, the wine into which the water is changed is the wine of salvation, the wine of life everlasting.

ii. At Calvary

This, then, is the first of Jesus's signs. The Fourth Gospel is often described as a "Book of Signs." If with various modern scholars, we count, after Cana, five others during Jesus' ministry (the walking on the water, a possible but disputed candidate, is not called a sign and by the lack of a dialogue to throw light on its meaning seems out of series),[13] then the seventh and climactic sign will be the passion and resurrection of Christ. Cana plus five other signs becomes a total of

12. The relevant texts are brought together in François-Marie Braun, *La Mère des fidèles. Essai de théologie johannique* (Paris/Tournai: Casterman, 1954), 56–58.

seven if we add as the seventh the glorious cross. And precisely the passion and resurrection of the Lord are the content of the "hour" referred to in the dialogue at Cana. On Calvary Mary not only stands and stands by—the starting-point of maximalist speculation on her co-redemptive role, but also, in receiving the Beloved Disciple, the archetypal disciple, as her son, she also becomes the mother of the church or, as Justin and Irenaeus will call her, the New Eve, the mother of all the supernaturally living (cf. Gen. 3:20).[14] And this will be the starting point for the doctrine of her ecclesial motherhood. Admittedly, John does not know the expression "The New Eve," nor for that matter is he familiar with its christological counterpart, the title "The New Adam." Yet it may be that he finds in Mary at the cross the embodiment of a certain little parable, with a background in the life of the first Eve, told by Jesus in his farewell discourse. This woman, Mary at the cross, is herself

> in labour, she feels sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. (John 16:21)

In what sense, though, does Mary "give birth" during the paschal mystery?

The New Testament letters and the Apocalypse frequently speak of the risen Lord as the firstborn from the dead. The birth-pangs Mary did not know at his biological birth (according to tradition, and, probably, as we have seen, the Johannine Prologue), she knew to full effect in his paschal birth, when on Good Friday she stood by his cross.

13. The five are: The Ruler's Son (4:46–54); The Cripple at Bethzatha (5:1–18); The Feeding of the Five Thousand (6:1–15); The Man blind from Birth (9:1–41); The Raising of Lazarus (11:1–54).
14. Idem., "Les adieux du Christ à sa mère: La maternité spirituelle de Marie dans le Nouveau Testament," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 86 (1964): 469–489.

iii. The Woman Clothed with The Sun

This is also the clue, finally, to the great drama that engulfs the woman clothed in the sun in chapter 12 of the Apocalypse, which book we can regard as, like the Johannine letters, the work of a John who used different scribal secretaries of varying literary gifts. It is a reading of the Old Testament in the light of the paschal mystery. In its starting point, chapter 12 is, as the Fribourg theologian Cardinal Charles Journet put it, "the apostolic exegesis of the Protoevangelium," the prophecy of a death-struggle between the woman and the serpent, where the offspring of the woman will triumphantly crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15).[15] As with the figure of the Daughter of Zion, the woman clothed with the sun is an example of typically ancient Hebrew "corporate personality" thinking. This "great sign seen in heaven" (Rev. 12:1) is Israel as predestined to glory through Israel's Messiah. It is the church both as triumphant, assured of final victory, and also as still in combat on earth. Triumphant, for this is the archetypal church, fulfilling and super-fulfilling Israel, and now depicted in imagery taken from the Song of Songs "fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the marching stars' (Song of Sol. 6:9). But at the same time this is also the church "in combat," for despite the indestructibility of the church implied in her triumph, she is the object of mortal attack by the serpent, who spews out a river of lies before unleashing physical persecution.[16]

If we grant the unity of the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse, we can hardly mistake the Marian dimension of this "Woman." The Daughter of Zion par excellence stood by the Crucified on the great and terrible Day of the Lord. She went through torment

15. Charles Journet, *Esquisse du développement du dogme marial* (Paris: Alsatia, 1954), 91.
16. André Feuillet, "Le Messie et sa mère d'après le chapitre XII de l'Apocalypse," *Revue biblique* 66 (1959); 58–86, reprinted in idem., *Études johanniques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 272–310.

as she saw Jesus "born" (salvationally speaking) on Calvary (Rev. 12:2). She saw him taken up to God and his throne (12:5): literally "saw" according to the iconographic tradition which in, for instance, the ninth-century dome mosaic of Hagia Sophia at Thessaloniki, includes her with the apostles at the moment of the Ascension of the Lord.[17] (A theologian from the Orthodox East will say her presence on Olivet is no tardy invention but a given of tradition.[18]) And she was later to witness the sufferings of the "rest of her children" (12:17). But in that case the remainder of this archetypal symbol—sun-clothed, moon-girt, star-crowned—must *also* be applicable to Mary as well. It is from this text that tradition develops its scriptural understanding of Mary's assumption which, as it happens, is the only one of the six particular themes of *There Is No Rose* not mentioned in this present chapter until now. A great future lies in store for this text.

17. John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 195.
18. Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1982), 196.