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Bernard A. Lazor

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MARY IN THE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST FROM ADVENT TO THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD: BIBLICAL REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

In undertaking this paper I tried to focus on the ultimate reason for the title. There is a trilogy involved in these lectures, namely, Mary in the Mysteries of Christ as seen from a biblical, liturgical and theological perspective. Because of the nature of the title of this paper and the papers that follow, I concluded that we were proceeding from a liturgical context. I proceeded to formulate a list of the Mysteries of Christ which might be involved. While I do not pretend to have included every possible one, these are among the principal ones: His Pre-existence with the Father; His Trinitarian Relationship; His Incarnation; His Nativity; His Presentation; His Finding in the Temple; His Public Life and Mission—like Moses (the Lawgiver), like the Prophets (Teacher); His Messiahship; His Kingship; His Priesthood; His Passion and Death (His role as Savior and Redeemer); His Resurrection and Ascension (His glorification); His Church (Mystical Body); His Sacramental Role; and His Cosmic Role (His eschatological role—His ultimate fulfillment of the divine plan).

Since this paper is limited to the liturgical period from Advent to the Baptism of Christ and to the relationship of Mary to the Mysteries involved, we can expect that some Mysteries will be highlighted more than others.

Another important consideration before examining the specific biblical references is to understand the role of the Bible in relation to the Church, also its relationship to Tradition in handing on Revelation as well as the impact of biblical scholarship upon interpretation of the passages that will be involved.¹

¹Any good Catholic Introduction to the Bible or to the theology of Revelation will familiarize the reader with the teachings involved here on

We know that the Bible tells of God's involvement with the human race (as seen specifically in the history of the Chosen People in the OT) and the perfection of that relationship extended universally through Christ and His Church (as seen in the NT). The Bible is one of the principal sources of Revelation, indeed, for some, the ONLY SOURCE (*sola scriptura*).²

However, for the Catholic Church there is also the role of Oral Tradition, witnessed especially by the Magisterium. Oral tradition had an important part even in the OT, both in assembling the content of the books and in interpreting said contents. Recall the role of the Talmud, of mishnaic and midrashim writings. One simple practical look at the Bible and oral tradition can lead us to ask what would happen if the Bible would totally disappear—no more copies—but yet the human race survived. Oral tradition would continue. But the Bible is one of the great mysteries of Revelation. It, like Christ and the Church and the other mysteries—AND MARY, will survive to the end of time.

The Bible is, however, a book, a piece of literature, and as such it is subject to analysis, to close scrutiny of its contents and its whole background, to interpretation and misinterpretation. For almost 3,000 years it has been used and abused, understood and misunderstood. In the last two hundred years especially, with the invention and the development of printing and the host of philosophical, sociological and educational movements in the world, this Book has been the subject of controversy, debate, judgment and diverse interpretations on the part of its critics as well as of its believers. Consequently, during this period of time, biblical

Revelation, Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, e.g., Augustine Cardinal Bea, S.J., "The Bible in the Life of the Church, Part I," in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. by R. Fuller, L. Johnston, C. Kearns (London: Nelson, 1969), especially 3-13.

²The teaching of the Church on Revelation, Scripture, Oral Tradition and the Magisterium is summed up beautifully in the decree of Vatican Council II, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation." See also J. P. Mackey, *The Modern Theology of Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 16 ff. and 170-75, where he gives a brief summary of the principle of *sola scriptura*.

scholarship has witnessed new methodologies, new terminology (*Formgeschichte*, *Redaktionsgeschichte*, demythologizing, etc.) and concomitantly new and diversified hermeneutical procedures.³ While this has opened vast new horizons, it has at the same time been a source of enlightenment and enrichment of our knowledge of the Scriptures and simultaneously it has been a source of confusion and skepticism. It is for these reasons that, as we undertake an analysis of the passages that show Mary in relation to the Mysteries of Christ, we encounter a multitude of interpretations, oftentimes contradictory to each other.

Mary and the Advent Liturgy

When we examine the Advent readings, whether pertaining to the Mass or to the Office, one thing is immediately obvious. There is much abstracted from Isaiah. The theme of salvation, especially in the setting of Israel's history, stands out. However, the first solid Marian reflection occurs with the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The OT reading in this instance is taken from Genesis 3:9-15:20. It is the text known to the earliest Christian writers as the Protoevangelium (the first glad tidings). It is a text that highlights God's salvific plan, a plan that will dominate as a biblical theme both the OT and NT, so much so, that the Bible has come to be known principally as *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation History). The basic theme in Genesis 3:15 comes immediately upon the heels of the presentation of the first sin of Adam and Eve and the subsequent judgment passed by God on the parties involved—the serpent, the woman and the man. However, just as it seems to be a condemnation, there is introduced the element of hope and deliverance or salvation. The serpent, representative or agent of the force of evil, will strive to undo God's plan for the human race made in His image, but some seed (offspring of the woman) will crush his head. This simple statement is the mes-

³W. J. Harrington, O.P., "The Critical Study of the New Testament," in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. by R. Fuller et. al. (London: Nelson, 1969), 802-9.

sage of hope, salvation. But the further delineation of it, or its further explanation, throws the door open for diverse interpretations. For Jews, who do not relate to a NT, the answer must be in the word *seed* or *offspring*. This could be singular or plural as far as its realization, just as the seed of Abraham can be seen as an individual or the chosen people, or as Jacob can signify himself, the person, or Israel the nation. But Christians, who see links between the OT and NT, project other interpretations. The Septuagint translation helps them to understand the offspring as "he" (*autos*). Hence the emphasis is on an individual conqueror, who ultimately is Christ. The Latin Vulgate, however, came up with a translation—"ipsa conteret caput tuum"⁴—which gave rise to "she shall crush your head" and to subsequent Mariological references in text and in art. Modern scholars, non-Catholic and most Catholic as well, see this as an indefensible translation when they refer to the original Hebrew. This does not destroy the Mariological reference. For just as St. Paul (Rom. 5:12-20) draws from this text his comparison of the First Adam and the Second Adam (Christ), so also may we infer that the First Eve is supplanted by the Second Eve (Mary). Over and above the simple reference by association there is the more intimate relationship via the message and the role of the characters. The First Eve (as seen in Gen. 2:23) was of the same nature as the man (taken from his rib) and made in the image and likeness of God as he had been (Gen. 1:26). Both had a responsibility to that image. By their disobedience they failed to use their freedom of choice properly. Theirs was a "NO" to their Creator. Contrast St. Paul's "YES" of Christ (2 Cor. 1:19 ff.).

Mary, in the Gospel for the feast of the Immaculate Conception (Lk. 1:26-39), will, by her FIAT, give her free response in acceptance of the Divine Will to be the NEW

⁴St. Jerome, in his translation of the Bible called the Latin Vulgate, gave impetus to this expression, and the English Catholic Douay-Rheims version continued this Roman Catholic interpretation, "she shall crush your head," until recent times.

EVE, the new Mother of the Living. While this makes for some beautiful reflections apropos Mary's role in God's plan—as role model for all of us, as special insight into the role of women and motherhood vis-à-vis the Pro-Life Movement—nonetheless, it leaves us Catholics uneasy concerning the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. There is no mention of this dogmatic term in the Bible, no explicit explanation of its intent (that Mary from the first moment of her conception was delivered from any taint of sin, unlike the rest of the children of Adam). It is here that modern scholarship helps to obviate the difficulty, but not with complete satisfaction. The answer, however, may be seen in implicit references.⁵ In this case, it is the greeting of the angel, "Hail, Full of Grace" or "most favored one." As Catholic tradition and theologians will point out, the Immaculate Conception was a privilege bestowed on Mary in virtue of her role as Mother of Christ, and in that fullness of grace may be seen her prerogative of freedom of any taint of sin.

Liturgy for December 20th—OT, Is. 7:10-14; NT, Lk. 1:26 f.

The content of Isaiah 7:10-14 is well known. Back in the 700s BC, when Ahaz was king of Judah, the Assyrians were a major threat. It seemed like a good idea to Ahaz to enter into a proposed alliance with Aram and Israel. Isaiah tells Ahaz not to do so, but Ahaz will not heed the admonition of the prophet. Isaiah resorts to telling the king to ask for a divine sign. When Ahaz refuses, the prophet proffers one: "The Virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel . . . by the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good, the land of those two kings whom you dread shall be deserted."⁶ Historically it happened so. The sign was quite simple. Some young lady (Heb. *almah*) in the royal court would conceive and have a child. He

⁵Mackey, *Modern Theology*, 164-5.

⁶The biblical texts used in this paper are from *The New American Bible*.

would be named Immanuel (God with us). In other words when you see little Immanuel running around, recall how God has been with His chosen people down through the centuries, ever delivering and protecting them. By the time he is old enough, around early teens, these other nations will be passé. So much for the historical context.

Matthew will take this passage and use it as a prophecy of fulfillment in the context of Joseph's discovery of Mary's pregnancy. But just as there was a problem with Genesis 3:15 regarding the one who would crush the serpent's head, so, too, there is here a problem relating to the translation. The Septuagint calls the young maiden "*parthenos*" which means a strict virgin. St. Matthew uses this form in his narrative. The Hebrew '*almah*' is neutral; it says nothing of the virginal status of the young woman. On the contrary with *parthenos*. When the Greek writers and other early Fathers used this text they had no trouble with the Matthaean application and explanation. As far as the exegesis of the passage in its literal and applied usage, we can relate to both ancient and modern methods of interpretation. The typical sense was well-known and widely used by early Christian writers. Something in the OT relates to something in the NT by divine intention. We have, as a result, the parallels—the maiden and Mary, young Immanuel and Christ. Some modern scholars opt for the use of what is called the *sensus plenior*.⁷ Since there is dual authorship in the Scriptures, divine and human, the divine author may intend something over and above the human writer. Future revelation, in the Bible (in this case Mt. 1) or in the teaching of the Church, may unravel the hidden meaning. Many find this explanation very useful in offsetting a more fundamentalistic interpretation whereby Isaiah 7:14 is unequivocally related to Matthew's usage.

⁷R. E. Brown, S. S., "Hermeneutics," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 615-17.

Besides the reference of Mary-Virgin as conceiving Christ, there are further implications. Christ is the Messiah, the Anointed One. He is the fulfillment of the kingship in the line of David. In seeing the child Immanuel, we are introduced to the Incarnate Word via His name, Immanuel, "With us (is) God." And if God is with us, who can be against us or overcome us? Chapter 7 of Isaiah is the beginning of the Book of Immanuel. The Immanuel theme continues through chapter 11. In Isaiah 9:6 ff. we have the titles of this messianic ruler, "wonder-counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal-Father, Prince of Peace." All of this is seen in connection with the throne of David and a reign that would be fair in judgment and integrity. Chapter 11 tells of the ideal king and kingdom. A shoot (offspring) from Jesse is imbued with what we know as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that his reign will be one of justice and integrity and fairness. The whole history of kingship in Israel, and ultimately in Judah, was one basically of failure. When we read about the rise of the monarchy in I Samuel and about all the kings who reigned from Saul to Ahaz, the evaluation concerning most of them is one of displeasure in the eyes of God.⁸ That is why Prophecy as an institution arose side-by-side with the monarchy. God, in spite of the kings, would achieve His goals among the chosen people through the prophets who became His mouthpiece. The first ideal for the chosen people was to adore the Lord, Yahweh, and to live according to His commands: "I am your God and you are my people, provided you do the things I command you." This leads us

⁸Modern biblical scholars refer to this theme as Deuteronomistic History. The influence of the book of Deuteronomy derives from the principles "I am your God and you are my people, provided you do the things I command you." And if you do not, if you sin, there is inevitable punishment; and with punishment there will hopefully result repentance. And with repentance there will be reconciliation. Thus, once again there will be realized that "I am your God and you are my people." Modern scholars see these principles impregnating the books of Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. Most of the kings gave displeasure to the Lord.

to another aspect of the divine plan and involvement. In Matthew's Gospel, when Christ is seen as the new Immanuel, how far surpassing is He over the Immanuel in the time of Ahaz and Isaiah; for He is truly GOD WITH US, the Incarnate One, and Mary is God's instrument in bringing about this mystery. In Matthew (1:21), however, she is also involved with the mission of Immanuel, seen in another name, "Jesus," which means Savior. Kings were to save their people from hostile invaders and from all kinds of oppression and injustice. These ideals were not being realized for the most part by the kings of Israel. Hence, there arose in the minds of the prophets the concept of the ideal king, one like David, from the line of David but far surpassing even David. To throw light on this matter, let us examine two Gospel readings as they prepare for the realization of the fulfillment of what is known as the Davidic Covenant: 1) Reading for December 20—Lk. 1:26-38, and 2) Reading for the 4th Sunday of Advent (Cycle A)—Mt. 1:18 f.

We mentioned above the ideal king and the ideal reign; God had prepared for this in 2 Samuel 7:1-16 (a reading which occurs on the 4th Sunday in Advent in Cycle B along with the Gospel of Luke which we are now considering). David had realized success over his enemies and the nation was united. He had built himself a nice palace. However, one day he was musing about his abode and contrasted it with the Lord's dwelling in the Tent that housed the Ark. How unfitting! With that, he had in mind to build a temple to house the Ark and told Nathan of his plan. It is in this context that God initiates the Davidic Covenant. God was pleased with David's desire to build a house, but Nathan is inspired to relate the divine plan: "It is I who took you from the pasture . . . to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went . . . I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I will fix a place for my people." God will make of David a dynasty: "Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me." In these words we have the promise that the throne of David shall perdure. When the kingdom of Israel split after the

death of Solomon in 926, it was the line of David that was to continue, the line of the kings of Judah. However, as we already have said, the kings were not representative of this ideal. That is why Isaiah wrote the Immanuel chapters and was looking for true justice and integrity throughout his prophecy. That is also why we have Micah writing about a king from the line of David, coming from Bethlehem, David's town, who will shepherd the Lord's people.

A real shattering of the ideal came in 586, when the Babylonians overthrew the Kingdom of Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and even the Temple, and finally took King Zedekiah into captivity. When the Babylonian Captivity came to an end in 539, the Jews were able to return, rebuild the city, even the temple, but with no king. Then the expectancy of an Anointed One (Messiah) began to grow, as Jewish leaders and scholars looked for the restoration of the kingship. This went on till 37 BC. Under the Romans, Herod was made king of Judaea. Finally, fulfillment! However, that was not the case. Herod was not of the line of David; he was not even a true-blooded Jew. No wonder the consternation that he shows in the Magi narrative (Mt. 2). It is for this reason we have Matthew 1:18 ff. and the reading on Christmas Eve (daytime Mass), Matthew 1:1-25. The genealogy takes us through the generations from Abraham, highlighting key names along the way but especially the lineage of Judah and David, until we arrive at THE CHRIST. Luke will synopsise the whole picture, when he tells the message of the angel: "You shall conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus. Great will be his dignity, and he will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father. He will rule over the House of Jacob forever and His reign will be without end" (Lk. 1:31-34).

All of this stands out very significantly, not only for the realization of the Davidic Covenant, but also in the light of the life of Christ. On the various occasions when people wanted to make Him king, He withdrew. And Luke himself records at the time of Ascension how the Apostles were

looking then for the restoration of the Kingdom (Acts 1-6). Christ spoke in His parables of the kingdom of God, but it was a kingdom not of this world. We could add, however, that it was an eschatological kingdom (realized and at the same time not yet).⁹

But what about Mary in all these contexts? The references seem to be chiefly by association and implication. I think that the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 12), which is part of the Advent liturgy, tells us something. The readings are appropriately Marian oriented. The Old Testament Reading is from Zechariah 2:14-17. The prophet refers to Daughter Zion: "Sing and rejoice, daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you. . . . Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day." Mary, by her apparition to Juan Diego at Tepeyac, was God's agent for the seeding of the faith, making Christ present in Mexico and eventually all of Latin America. And so it would be with regard to so many apparitions of Mary. The apparition at Lourdes can be seen as a confirmation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It also occurred at a time when scientific knowledge was attempting to obscure the role of faith. Hence, the Gospel for this same feast highlights the humility and faith of Mary in accepting her role and teaching us to do the same. The Gospel (Lk. 11:27-28) focuses on the words of Christ in response to those who had said, "Blest is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." "Rather," He replied, "blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it."

In mentioning the Daughter of Zion theme in Zechariah, we are introduced to an oft-mentioned association with Mary. "Daughter of Zion," in the literature of the prophets,

⁹Many modern theologians and biblical scholars distinguish between realized and futuristic eschatology. Since the coming of Christ we are NOW in the end-time of God's plan of salvation. It has been realized. But insofar as the work of salvation is an on-going process, still being realized in the life, work and mission of the Church, it is still YET TO BE. Hence, it is futuristic.

referred to the city of Jerusalem.¹⁰ This city, which witnessed so much suffering in the country and in her own environs, is personified as reflecting upon these sorrows. She laments, she grieves, she reaches out to show compassion and heal the many wounds. And so it is with Mary, especially as seen in the prophetic words of the old man Simeon on the occasion of the Presentation in the Temple (Lk. 2:22-35). On the one hand, we have the roles of the newborn babe being foretold. He will be a light of revelation to the nations. He will be Savior. But he will also be destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel, and a sword will pierce her heart, too. By her close association with her son, Mary would experience the anguish and hurt that he endured during his public life and culminated in his crucifixion. A. Feuillet,¹¹ in referring to this usage of the Daughter of Zion theme personified in Mary, found a number of writers who had a difficult time accepting this reference. But P. Benoit¹² is singled out as one who justified it. He saw the words "a sword shall pierce your soul" to be in harmony with the text that precedes and follows, namely, the crisis that results with the appearance of the Messiah, the inevitable judgment that comes upon the acceptance or rejection of him and its climax in the Passion and Death. The destiny of the whole chosen people is, as it were, incarnated in Mary. So if it is true to say that as Daughter of Zion and representative of the Remnant of Israel she joyfully received Christ, it is also

¹⁰The expression "Daughter of Zion" was one of the beautiful images used to represent Jerusalem. Jerusalem's fame was not so much because it was the capital city, but rather because it was the city where Yahweh chose to dwell and specifically on Mount Zion where the Temple had been built. Mary is the dwelling place of the Lord. She is His City, His Temple, His Ark of the Covenant. That is why the liturgy so frequently refers to her as the Daughter of Zion.

¹¹A. Feuillet, *Jesus and His Mother: According to the Lucan Infancy Narratives and According to St. John*, trans. by L. Maluf (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1984), 47 ff.

¹²P. Benoit, O.P., " 'Et toi-même, un glaive te transperçera l'âme!' (Luc 2.35)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25, 3 (July 1963): 251-261.

true that she suffered from the disobedience of many of her countrymen. Thus, she truly bore in her heart the tragedy of Israel and even that of the whole human race.

In this last segment, I anticipated the liturgical reading from Luke 2:22-40, the scene of the Presentation, which is used for the Feast of the Holy Family, on account of the associations presented from the reading of Zechariah for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Now, however, I would like to return to Luke 1:39-45, the scene of the Visitation. This reading occurs in the C Cycle for the 4th Sunday of Advent. While there is the obvious understanding of the reaction of John in the womb of his mother on the occasion of his encounter with Jesus in Mary and the extolling of the faith of Mary by Elizabeth, there are several other important implications. The messianic joy experienced by John the Baptist is the same joy expressed in John's Gospel (3:29-30) verbally when he says, "It is the groom who has the bride. The groom's best man waits there listening for him and is overjoyed to hear his voice. This is my joy, and it is complete." One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22). Was not Simeon joyful and moved by the Spirit to react to the Messiah? John as precursor highlights the spirit that should be present in the presence of the Messiah. Where there is ultimate union it is only a short step to realize the espousal theme which is prevalent in the prophets and especially noted in the Song of Songs. Parallels are seen between Luke 1:39-45 and Song of Songs 2:8-14 or 5:2-5. Like the beloved in the canticle, Jesus present in Mary passes over the mountains; and the precursor leaps for joy, while the Beloved in the Song is stirred by the arrival of the Loved one.

Another theme that seems to dominate the Lucan narrative, both in the Annunciation scene as well as in the Visitation, is Mary as antitype¹³ of the Tabernacle or the Ark of

¹³The antitype takes the place of the type (figure). The type is in the OT; the antitype is in the NT. Early Christian writers already had established the TYPICAL SENSE of Scripture. Simply put, something in the OT (person, place, thing, event) points to something in the NT by divine in-

the Covenant. We know that the Tabernacle and the Ark symbolized Yahweh's presence among His people. As we have observed earlier in this lecture, there is a profound significance in Luke's reference to Christ fulfilling the Davidic Covenant. In the case of the Ark, he likewise seems to draw from analogous situations in 1 and 2 Samuel. Some of this will come to light when we treat of the Magnificat. Right now the statement by Elizabeth, "But who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:42), is an echo of David's cry when he received the Ark: "How can the Ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam. 6:9). There is then a journey through the mountains followed by joyful manifestations (2 Sam. 6:16) and then the Ark of God stayed three months in the house of Obededom, as Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months. This theme of "the Lord pitching His tent" is an echo of Sirach 24:8 ff., where wisdom is personified being sent to pitch her tent in Israel. John's Prologue also seems to reflect this in "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," as also does the angel in Luke's narrative (Lk. 1:35), "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The cloud (*shekinah*)¹⁴ was associated with the function of the Ark, manifesting the divine presence and influence. The role of the Holy Spirit is one of the trademarks of Luke's Gospel as well as of Acts. Small wonder that Mary features so strongly in witnessing and experiencing the Spirit's role in the Incarnation, in the Visitation, in the Presentation and (in Acts) in the expectation of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost.

The text of Luke 1:26-38 is one of the most used in regard to Marian devotion in the Church and it is also recur-

rention. This latter point (divine intention) indicates some revelation. Applying this to Mary, we see she is the Tabernacle or Tent, the abode for Christ.

¹⁴The Hebrew word "*shekinah*" was frequently used in the Bible and in rabbinical studies to emphasize the divine presence or glory. It derives from the Hebrew word (*shkn*) "to dwell."

rent in the liturgy of Advent and Christmas. One keynote of this text is the Virgin Birth of Christ. Some scholars see the special significance of this theme as the culmination of the role of several noteworthy women in the divine plan of salvation. A unique characteristic of these women was their state of barrenness or sterility. Since the Father of believers, Abraham, gave rise to the chosen people and also to the family of believers, it is no wonder that we can begin by referring to his wife Sarah. She was beyond the age of conceiving. It was a stigma not to have borne a child. Abraham was constrained to have an heir by way of his servant-girl wife. This heirship, via a servant, was not to be, however. The seemingly impossible was to occur. Sarah did have a child—the child of promise—about whom St. Paul would later make much ado in Galatians. Isaac, the son of Sarah, was married to Rebekkah. Although she did bear (she had twins), yet the divine plan (divine election) occurred there when the younger son, Jacob, supplanted the older, Esau. Eventually, Jacob, in turn, found that his first love among his four wives, Rachel, was barren, unable to conceive. However, when she finally did conceive, it was a favored son, Joseph who, after denial and rejection by his brothers, became the savior of the family and began the rise of Israel in Egypt. In later history, in the time of the Judges, Manoah's wife was barren. He was visited by an angel who assured him that his wife would have a child; this child was Samson, one of the principal deliverers of Israel from the hands of the Philistines (Jdgs. 13:2-7:24-25, a reading used in Advent for Dec. 19). Then, in the book that led Luke into so many of his themes, we find Hannah grieving and sobbing in prayer because she is barren (1 Sam. 10 ff.). When Eli the priest sees her he tells her not to worry, that she will have a child. That child (Samuel) was to be another key figure in God's plan, for he would be the last of the Judges and first of the historical prophets. It was he who would anoint, first Saul and then David, as king.

While all of these women who were childless eventually begot children by their husbands, Mary would experience a

sacred sterility, her virginity, which God would accept and convert into the blessed fruit of her womb by His own divine action, "for nothing is impossible to God" (Lk. 1:37). This sacred fruitfulness is highlighted in Vatican II's reference to Mary as model for virgins and celibates, as well as for all humans who, like Mary, beget Christ in their lives by faith and humility. This role open to all, men and women alike, married or single, is emphasized by Paul, when he writes to the Corinthians, "... it was I who begot you in Christ Jesus, through my preaching of the Gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). Christians form Christ in themselves and by their witness help mold him in others.¹⁵

The Magnificat

Now I shall bring this paper to conclusion with a consideration of the Cantic of Mary. As in so many of the other passages referring to Mary or to the Infancy literature, there is the perennial problem of authorship and of origin. Were these the words of Mary, as most manuscripts indicate and as Catholic Tradition maintains, or were they the words of Elizabeth? Are they *ipsissima verba*, or are they words created by the Christian community or the Evangelist?¹⁶ I only mention this, not to render all the arguments pro and con, but to indicate why scholars and their readers engage in endless discussion concerning this cantic. Ultimately, the beautiful message is ever there to be relished.

Earlier in this paper I mentioned that the Bible, Christ, the Church AND MARY will endure to the end of time. The Magnificat, as a prayer, is said every day in the Liturgy of the Hours (The Office), and this is so throughout the world. The words, whether coming immediately from Mary herself

¹⁵Cf. Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, ch. 8, no. 65.

¹⁶"*Ipsissima verba*" is a reference to the actual words really and truly spoken by Mary. By contrast, some scholars would say that they are words placed in the mouth of Mary (or Elizabeth) by Luke or by some early Christian Tradition.

or supplied for her, are most true: "From this day forward all generations shall call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me and Holy is His name." It does not take much research to realize how true this saying is. No woman or man (save her Son) can relate to such a statement. Besides the liturgical texts, there are shrines and churches and art (both in ecclesiastical as well as in secular settings) which tell of Mary. The Magnificat is Mary's praise of God for His work of salvation and His realization of the promise (covenant) made to Abraham.

The parallel between Mary's jubilant expression of the divine work in her is seen in Hannah's canticle of praise in 1 Samuel 2. However, there is in both of these songs an element that raises some questions. There is praise of God who exalts the lowly, the poor, the oppressed and down-trodden. This is readily understandable in the light of the humiliation of Hannah's barrenness and the stigma of embarrassment that went with it. To see God as the deliverer, from this trial as well as from any trials that afflict humans—famine, injustice, violence, etc.—is expected by one who trusts in Him. But then why words that are so forceful and powerful, even militant?: "He has confused the proud in their inmost thoughts. He has deposed the mighty from their thrones" (Lk. 1:51-52). The whole history of Christ and the Church will be one of conflict, until the end of time. Just as in the OT God was constantly delivering Israel from her enemies in order to keep alive His Chosen People to be a light unto the nations, so will it be for the Church. Throughout her history, as foretold by Christ, the Church will suffer persecution: "as they have persecuted me they will persecute you" (Jn. 15:20). The tension, the conflict, will be there, but the victory is ultimately that of Christ.

This latter reference, relating to Christ and the role of the Church, could easily lead us into a consideration of the woman in Apocalypse 12. The persecution of the woman and her child is reminiscent of the struggle of the early Christian Church, newly begotten but threatened and persecuted by the Roman Empire. However, since my paper is to

focus on references from Advent and Christmas, I will not pursue this beyond the simple mention of it.

Conclusion

The texts that we have considered are well-known to most, if not all, of you. Most of the mysteries of Christ, though not all which I enumerated at the beginning of this paper, have been alluded to in it. Since biblical texts in the liturgy are extracts, I have attempted to place them in their original context and in their usage in the tradition of the Church. When Church documents, as in the case of the liturgy or even in Papal Documents, cite Scripture, we must distinguish whether the document is giving an authoritative exegesis of the text or simply using Scripture to illustrate a point. The Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, on the Immaculate Conception, recalls Genesis 3:15, and the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus*, referring to the Assumption, recalls Apocalypse 12. Are the respective Popes dogmatically affirming that these texts in their literal sense refer to Marian doctrines? Or is the reference to a more than literal sense, like the *sensus plenior*? Or do the citations imply no more than that reflection on these scriptural verses has aided liturgists and theologians in understanding the Marian doctrines and thus guided the Church to take a dogmatic position? In the view of many scholars this latter seems to be the correct possibility. In particular, Pius XII seems to claim no more than that the dogma of the Assumption receives support from Scripture.¹⁷ However, the rich treasure of liturgical usage of scriptural passages continues a long history of awareness of Mary's relationship to the Mysteries of her Son. And the axiom that puts the crowning emphasis on this is the formula "*lex orandi, lex credendi*."¹⁸ And with this in mind let me conclude with the beautiful prayer of Jean Jacques Olier:

¹⁷Feuillet, *Jesus and His Mother*, 120, 266.

¹⁸This well-known formula can be popularly expressed as "the norm for our praying is the norm for our believing." In other words, our prayer reflects our faith.

O Jesus living in Mary,
Come and live in thy Servants
In the Spirit of thy Holiness,
In the fulness of thy Might,
In the truth of thy Virtues,
In the perfection of thy Ways,
In the communion of thy Mysteries.
Subdue every hostile power in thy Spirit
For the Glory of the Father. Amen¹⁹

BERNARD A. LAZOR, O.S.A.
Villanova University
Villanova, Pa.

¹⁹Prayer composed by Venerable Father Olier, and found in Father F. X. Lasance's *Prayer-Book for Religious* (New York: Benziger, 1941), 148.