

1-14-1960

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Recommended Citation

Mercurio, Roger (1960) "Some Difficult Marian Passages in the Gospels," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 11, Article 9, Pages 104-122.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol11/iss1/9

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SOME DIFFICULT MARIAN PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS

Several indications assure us that the first Christian preachers spoke of Our Lady. For these organizers of the primitive kerygma¹ were eye-witnesses of all that Jesus did and taught from the baptism of John until the day on which He was taken up into heaven (cf. *Acts* 1, 1-2, 21-22). They related what they themselves had seen and heard (cf. *Acts* 4, 20). We would expect them, therefore, to remember and hand down incidents in which Mary had taken part.

While the catechesis was forming in the Jerusalem Church,² Mary herself was a member of that community. St. Luke assures us of this explicitly in the narrative of Pentecost (cf. *Acts* 1, 14). The Fourth Gospel implies the same, for there we read that "the disciple took her into his home" (*Jn.* 19, 27). Now John was one of the leaders of the Jerusalem Church (cf. *Acts* 3, 1; 12, 1; *Gal.* 2, 9). If Mary resided with John, then she must have been known to the brethren there.

Finally, in presenting Jesus as one "born according to the flesh of the offspring of David" (*Rom.* 1, 3), the first preachers must necessarily have spoken of Mary His Mother. St. Paul, writing to the Galatians between the years 50-58, referred to Jesus as "born of a woman,"³ for he knew that his

¹ On the interesting and important question of the development of the Christian kerygma, cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York, 1949) 7-35; V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Traditions* (London, 1953) 22-43; J. Huby and X. Léon-Dufour, *L'évangile et les évangiles* (Paris, 1954) 1-98; L. Cerfaux, *La voix vivante de l'évangile au début de l'Église* (Tournai, 1956) 15-36.

² L. Cerfaux, *La communauté apostolique* (Paris, 1953) has given a vivid picture of the Jerusalem community; also D. Stanley, *Kingdom to Church: The Structural Development of Apostolic Christianity in the N.T.*, in *TS* 16 (1955) 1-29.

³ *Gal.* 4, 4; cf. L. Cerfaux, *Le Fils né de la Femme*, in *BVC* 4 (1953) 59-65.

Galatian converts were familiar with the data of the primitive kerygma.

When, therefore, in the fifth decade of the first century, the Apostle Matthew wrote down the primitive catechesis in a schematic form,⁴ he had Marian material to draw upon. He knew, for example, that Our Lady had visited her son during the public ministry (cf. *Mk.* 3, 31-35; *Mt.* 12, 46-50; *Lk.* 8, 19-21), that the townspeople of Nazareth called Jesus "the son of Mary" (*Mk.* 6, 3; cf. *Mt.* 13, 55).

A decade later in far-off Rome St. Peter related these incidents, but in the descriptive style of an eye-witness. John and Mark heard this vivid Petrine preaching. He used the picturesque recollections of St. Peter to enliven the staid narratives of Aramaic Matthew.⁵

St. Luke, the traveling companion of the Apostle Paul, found among the brethren of Palestine an account of the Lord's infancy in which Mary enjoyed an important role. At once the artist in Luke saw that this narrative would make a fitting introduction to his book on Jesus. Under his pen the infancy story became a message of good news prior to the official proclamation of good news during the public ministry.⁶

The later redactor of the primitive Aramaic gospel (known to us as the author of our canonical Greek Matthew⁷) discovered a different tradition about Jesus' infancy. He used it

⁴ L. Vaganay, *Le problème synoptique* (Tournai, 1952) 51-85; *Matthieu*, in *DBIS* 5, 940-946; P. Benoît, *L'évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Paris, 1950) 27-29.

⁵ L. Vaganay, *op. cit.*, 156-160. Writers usually attribute Mk's vividness to St. Peter. Cf. V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London, 1953) 88-89; M-J Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc* (4th ed., Paris, 1929) cviii-cxiii; J-B Colon, *Marc*, in *DBIS* 5, 841-848.

⁶ One today must consult the excellent study of René Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II* (Paris, 1957).

⁷ We will refer to our canonical Greek Gospel as *MT*. We reserve *M* and *Mg* for the Aramaic gospel and its literal Greek translation. Cf. Vaganay, *op. cit.*, 196-244.

as the preface to his revised version of the earlier gospel. He so arranged this new material⁸ as to strengthen his thesis that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised by the prophets of old.

The disciples of John learned from their master several incidents involving the Mother of Jesus that "escaped" both the official catechesis of the early community as well as the "research" of St. Luke.⁹ They later incorporated these stories into our Fourth Gospel.¹⁰

This is a brief summary of the formation of the early kerygma and the genesis of the gospels, relative to Our Lady.¹¹ Such a summary helps us to appreciate the reliability and accuracy of the gospel narratives on Mary.¹²

In this paper we will concentrate on two Marian passages that for a long time have proved enigmatic to scholars.¹³ Both Catholics and non-Catholics have experienced special difficulty in explaining these logia satisfactorily. We are referring to the sayings of Our Lord as found in *Mk.* 3, 31-35; *Mt.* 12, 46-50; *Lk.* 8, 19-21 and 11, 27-28. The first three passages treat of Jesus' saying on the occasion of Mary's visit during the public ministry. *Lk.* 11, 27-28, a passage proper to the Third Gospel, gives Our Lord's words when an unknown woman praised His Mother.

Our purpose is to attempt a solution of the exegetical

⁸ Cf. Vaganay, *op. cit.*, 234-237.

⁹ Cf. *Jn.* 2, 1-12; 19, 25-27.

¹⁰ On recent views on the Fourth Gospel one should consult: *L'Évangile de Jean: Recherches Bibliques* (Louvain, 1958) and C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1954).

¹¹ Cf. D. Unger, *The Use of Sacred Scripture in Mariology*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 67-116, esp. 74-76; C. Charlier, *La discrétion des évangiles sur la Vierge*, in *BVC* 7 (1954) 42-56.

¹² Cf. L. Venard, *Historique* (Genre), in *DBIS* 4, 23-29.

¹³ Besides the usual gospel commentators and the "lives" of Christ, one may consult M. Benassi, *Chi è mia madre, chi sono i miei fratelli?*, in *Mm* 18 (1956) 347-354; A. Cerutti, *L'interpretazione del testo di S. Matteo XII: 46-50 nei Padri*, in *Mm* 19 (1957) 185-221.

problems raised by these passages. By means of a study of the sources and through the principles of form-criticism we will analyze the literary genesis of the sayings in each of the gospels. Then we intend to detect the significance each evangelist gave the sayings. Finally, we will study their meaning as originally intended by Our Lord. This method may seem intricate and involved, but we believe that in this way alone one can reach a full understanding of these gospel pericopes.¹⁴

For the sake of simplification we refer to the saying common to all three Synoptics as the "Triple Passage," while we indicate the narrative proper to the Third Gospel as the "Lucan Saying."

I. LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGES

A. THE TRIPLE PASSAGE

A narrative of Our Lady's visit to Jesus during the public ministry is found, as I have said, in all three Synoptic Gospels. A comparison of the narratives in each gospel indicates slight differences and varying points of emphasis. This should not surprise us, for each evangelist was a real author. The sacred writers' task was not simply to record the past in a stereotyped manner as befits, for example, tape-recordings of today. Each was an author, I repeat, and as such felt perfectly free to re-tell an incident from Jesus' life in his own way.¹⁵ Like any other literary writer, an inspired evangelist

¹⁴ J. Dupont has developed this method with great success in his important study *Les béatitudes* (2 ed., Louvain, 1958). Cf. X. Léon-Dufour, "Formgeschichte" et "Redaktionsgeschichte" des Évangiles synoptiques, in *RSR* 46 (1958) 237-269, for latest methods in gospel interpretation. We have attempted to follow this method in a previous article: *A Baptismal Motif in the Gospel Narratives of the Burial*, in *CBQ* (1959) 39-54.

¹⁵ This appreciation of the evangelists as authors is being stressed today as against the earlier emphasis on the sacred writers as mere recorders. This is a happier development in recent gospel criticism. Cf. A. Hastings, *Prophet and Witness in Jerusalem* (Baltimore, 1958).

also would put a narrative into the distinctive framework of his own work. He would make it serve as a means of developing his proper theological themes.

We must, first of all, study the Triple Passage as regards its text and context.

1. Text¹⁶

First we turn to Mk. Verse 34 contains a word peculiar to the Second Gospel: *periblepsamenos*, "looking round on."¹⁷ Four times in our short passage the historical present tense is used: in verses 31, 32, 33, 34. This is another special feature of Mk. who preferred the present tense to the aorist or perfect.¹⁸ Ordinarily we associate such vividness with oral preaching. In this case we feel justified in concluding that the author got these vivid details from St. Peter and inserted them into an earlier, more solemn narrative.¹⁹

MT's account has several distinctive features. The passage begins "while he was still speaking to the crowds." Verse 49 describes Jesus as "stretching forth his hands toward his disciples." Note that MT is the only gospel that in this narrative calls the followers of Jesus *mathetas*, "disciples." In the final verse MT reads "the will of my Father in heaven," proper here to the First Gospel. Finally, textual critics advise us that verse 47 is quite dubious. We should hesitate to ascribe it to our evangelist.²⁰

¹⁶ J. Chapman and J. Barton, *Matthew, Mark and Luke* (New York, 1937) 118-119, gives a detailed discussion of our texts.

¹⁷ Cf. 3, 5; 5, 32; 9, 8; 10, 23; 11, 11. V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 222; J-M Lagrange, *op. cit.*, lxviii and 59.

¹⁸ Cf. V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 46-47; J-M Lagrange, *op. cit.*, lxix-lxx.

¹⁹ We have noted (*supra* note 5) that this is the opinion of Vaganay. V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 653-664, arrives at a very similar conclusion in regard to the formation of the Passion narrative in Mk.

²⁰ This verse is omitted by Lagrange, Allen, B  noit, etc.

These variations are significant. The opening clause "while he was still speaking to the crowds" is found frequently in the First Gospel (9, 18; 17, 5; 26, 47). It serves as a literary link between narratives.²¹ Its use here, moreover, indicates that the text has been re-edited by the redactor.

The phrase "will of my Father in heaven" is typical of MT. It is a semitic expression which befits the Jewish reverence for the holy Name. Mk. and Lk. invariably wrote "God" where in MT we find "Heaven" or "My Father." We should conclude that the expression "will of my Father" is more primitive, retained by the editor of MT.²² Since Mk.'s "looking around on" is most probably a Petrine reminiscence, we should infer that MT's "stretching forth his hand" is also a more primitive expression preserved by the editor.

This study of MT leads to the conclusion, therefore, that in the First Gospel the Triple Passage is close to the earlier text. However, there is evidence that the editor or redactor has done some re-editing of his own.

In the Third Gospel the Triple Passage is very brief.²³ Lk. did not mention Jesus' action of stretching forth his hand nor his gazing upon the crowd. He did not give the Lord's question: "Who is my brother or mother?" Besides, the final statement has a different form in Lk. These variations suggest that the author of the Third Gospel has, not only re-edited an earlier text, but also has abbreviated it for his own purposes.

From this study of the Triple Passage in each gospel we see how the individual evangelists differ from one another. Our analysis suggests that each writer made use of a primitive

²¹ Cf. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Paris, 1923) 252; W. C. Allen, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* (Edinburgh, 1951) 141.

²² Cf. Lagrange, *op. cit.*, 253; J. Dupont, *op. cit.*, 168, footnote.

²³ Cf. J.-M. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Luc* (Paris, 1921) 244. We omit for later discussion the question of Lk's context for the Triple Passage.

source which he added to or altered according to his own purposes. Can this suggestion be substantiated?

A recent writer, Leon Vaganay, would answer with a strong affirmative. It is his contention that the common source of the three Synoptics was the primitive gospel of St. Matthew. Vaganay maintains that the Synoptic writers utilized a literal Greek translation of the original Aramaic. He calls this translation *Mg*. It was the basic and common source of the first three gospels. Vaganay has presented this challenging thesis in his work: *Le problème synoptique*.²⁴ With many others we believe that this hypothesis is substantially valid.²⁵

If indeed a common source was used, then we should ask: what precisely was the form of the Triple Passage in the earlier gospel? It is important to conjecture this original text in order to determine more clearly where a writer differed not only from another, but also from his source.²⁶

On the basis of our detailed analysis we would ascribe the following conjectural narrative to *Mg*:

And his mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to him; and it was announced to him: "Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you." And answering he said to them: "Who is my mother and my brother?" And stretching his hand toward his disciples, he said to them: "Behold my mother and my brothers, for whoever does the will of my

²⁴ Cf. *supra*, note 4.

²⁵ Cf. J. McKenzie, in *TS* 15 (1954) 639-644; D. Stanley, in *CBQ* 17 (1955) 647-655; L. Cerfaux, *Le problème synoptique à propos d'un livre récent*, in *NRTh* 76 (1954) 494-505; J. Levie, *L'Évangile Araméen de S. Matthieu: est-il la source de l'évangile de S. Marc?*, in *NRTh* 76 (1954) 689-715; 812-843. Recently F. McCool restudied the entire problem and gave a good critique of V. Cf. *Revival of Synoptic Source-Criticism*, in *TS* 17 (1956) 549-493.

²⁶ Only in this way can we be certain that the differences between the evangelists are actually intended. We fear that A. Feuillet (*Les perspectives propres à chaque évangéliste dans les récits de la Transfiguration*, in *Bibl* 39 [1958] 281-301) has weakened his thesis by failing to conjecture the primitive source.

Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother." ²⁷

We are now in a position to differentiate the adaptations each evangelist imparted to this narrative.

Mk's text is basically *Mg's*, but the graphic present and the peculiarly Marcan word *periblepsamenos* ("looking round on") impart to this narrative a vividness that *Mg* lacks.²⁸

MT is for the most part verbally close to *Mg*, but the introductory phrase "while he was still speaking to the crowds" joins the narrative quite intimately to the preceding pericope.

Lk., on the other hand, has re-worked the passage the most. He omitted Jesus' question and altered the final saying.

These variations and alterations may at first glance seem insignificant, but in the added light of the context they take on important implications.

2. Context

It might appear impossible to discern the context of our narrative in *Mg*. Literary analysis can, however, cast a ray of light upon this problem.

In Mk. and MT the context is similar. In both gospels the Triple Passage is preceded by Jesus' discussion with the Scribes and Pharisees. It is followed by a collection of parables. Lk. did not give this context for the Triple Passage, but if, for a moment, we turn to the Lucan Saying in chapter 11, we find that there a Marian passage is preceded by a discussion with the Scribes. In other words, even in Lk. we have

²⁷ Our conjectural narrative was arrived at by eliminating variations that manifest a peculiarity of one or other of our evangelists. Hence, we did not follow: Mk in his graphic present tenses, *periblepsamenos* and "will of God"; MT in his opening connective link with preceding pericope and his omission of vs. 47; Lk in his abbreviating of the passage and alteration of the saying in the last verse.

²⁸ L. Vaganay, *op. cit.*, 158.

a Marian narrative in a context quite similar to Mk's and MT's setting.

The conclusion that presents itself is this: in *Mg* and even in the primitive oral catechesis a Marian story was preceded by a discussion with the Scribes or, in the terms of Form Critics, by a "conflict-story."²⁹

Mk. faithfully preserved this primitive context but without giving any special emphasis to it. In fact, in Mk. the Triple Passage appears quite independent. There are no obvious literary ties or bonds.³⁰

MT on the other hand emphasized the context by joining our passage to the preceding narrative with an introductory phrase "while he was still speaking to the crowds." He also strengthened the bond with the parable narrative by the opening words in that pericope: "on that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the seaside" (13, 1).

MT, moreover, has placed this narrative in his "Third Book." To appreciate this point, we must recall that today exegetes hold that the First Gospel is divided into five great sections or "books."³¹ Each "book" is composed of a discourse and narrative section. Discourse and narratives present a unified theme with the latter serving as a preface to the teachings of the discourse. In our present section MT has collected narratives that will emphasize the parables. This "Third Book" contrasts the various reactions aroused by the preaching of Jesus.³² The Scribes rejected him. His own disciples, however, accepted His message. The very composition of the First Gospel, therefore, binds the Triple Passage

²⁹ The Form-Critics do not agree in their nomenclature. The term "conflict-story" seems appropriate here.

³⁰ This is one reason why we would hesitate to connect the preceding vs. 20-21 with our present passage, although many scholars do. Cf. V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 245.

³¹ P. B  noit, *op. cit.*, 7-12; L. Vaganay, *op. cit.*, 74-78; 200-201.

³² P. B  noit, *op. cit.*, 8-10; L. Vaganay, *op. cit.*, 207.

to the preceding narrative as well as to the discourse in parables that follows.

In Lk. we find the Triple Passage in a different context. Lk. omitted the preceding conflict-narrative but emphasized the parable context. In fact, in the Third Gospel the Triple Passage has become the conclusion to the parabolic discourse. In this way Lk. has imparted to it a different significance, as we shall see.

Before detailing the meaning of our narrative in the light of this analysis of text and context, we must briefly turn to the other passage, the Lucan Saying:

B. THE LUCAN SAYING

In Lk. there is a second Marian saying, elicited by the praise from an unknown woman. As this passage is proper to Lk., we cannot analyze its original form with any assurance. But we should note several words or phrases commonly used by Lk. and Lk. alone: *eparasa phonon* ("lifted up her voice"), *logon tou theou* ("word of God"), *koilia* ("womb").³³ The presence of these Lucan elements leads to the conjecture that the evangelist has altered a primitive narrative, at least to some extent.

In regard to the context, the Lucan Saying is quite interesting. This second Marian passage in Lk. has a context similar to Mk's. and MT's for the Triple Passage. Lk. has preserved the Scribal-denunciation setting.

Moreover the Lucan Saying occurs in that part of the Third Gospel commonly known as the Journey Narrative.³⁴

³³ A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh, 1953) 305-306.

³⁴ J. Lebreton, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, 2 (London, 1935) 1-6; L. Cerfaux and J. Cambier, *Luc*, in *DBIS* 5, 560-562; 567-568; A. Hastings, *op. cit.*, 107ff.

This is the Great Interpolation in Lk.—a section which the evangelist “interpolated” or inserted into the Markan framework.³⁵

The Journey Narrative contains material proper to Lk. alone, for example, the parables of the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Unjust Steward, etc. On the other hand, it has many passages similar to MT. In MT these parallel passages are gathered together in one or other of his five great discourses. In Lk. they are separate, isolated sayings, and frequently quite brief. Vaganay has brilliantly conjectured that MT and Lk. are both using the same source.³⁶ This common source was originally intended as a Supplement to the Aramaic Gospel of St. Matthew. This Supplement (hence called *S.* or *Sg.*) was composed of sayings. MT inserted these supplementary sayings into the framework of his five great discourses. Lk. on the other hand kept them in their original fragmentary form in his Journey Narrative.

In regard to our present passage, Lk. found in this supplementary collection a narrative on the Scribes and a Marian saying. He had omitted the earlier conflict-story from *Mg.* and altered the place of the Marian passage from that same source. Now he used *Sg.*'s conflict story together with its Marian saying in his Journey Narrative, keeping both in the order in which he found them.

The significant point is this: Mary is praised in a setting similar to MT and Mk., that is, after a denunciation of the Scribes. Lk. indicates, therefore, his familiarity with the primitive context, even though for reasons of his own he had altered this context in his earlier section.

This brings our analysis of the texts and contexts to a close. Our study has been long, and perhaps tedious. But

³⁵ E. Osty, *L'évangile selon Saint Luc* (Paris, 1948) 18. Vaganay (*op. cit.*, 105-109) calls this Lucan section “livret hors série.”

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, 101-151.

such preliminary research is necessary if we are to garner the rich meaning of our passages. In the second part of this paper we will evaluate the significance of the sayings in the light of our literary analysis.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PASSAGES

A. *Significance in Early Catechesis and Mg.*

We have already seen that the early catechesis and *Mg.* contained a Marian passage in connection with a conflict-story. Why did the primitive tradition bring these two divergent themes together?

We do not deny that both incidents could have occurred in the same historical sequence. This would be a simple explanation why the early preachers and the primitive gospel placed them together.

On the other hand, we must weigh the possibility that their closeness may be the result of artificial grouping by the first Christians. Two narratives may be joined by logical bonds as well as by chronological demands.³⁷ Can we trace any reasons why the catechesis would have joined a Marian passage to a narrative denouncing the Scribes? To answer this question we must situate ourselves in the period that witnessed the formation of the oral catechesis.

In the early years of the Jerusalem Church the Christians were brought into conflict with their former co-religionists (cf. *Acts* 1-12). At first this conflict was mainly with the priestly class of the Sadducees, for controversy centered around the question of the Lord's resurrection (cf. *Acts* 4, 1-2; 5, 17-18). It was only after the bold attack of St. Stephen upon the Temple worship that the Pharisees also turned against the Christians (cf. *Acts* 7,1-8,3).

³⁷ V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 235, sees merely a logical ordering of these incidents.

Faced with this growing hostility, the Christians necessarily recalled the Lord's own controversies with the Scribes and Pharisees. They found strength in remembering the words of Jesus that the disciple is not above the Master. Had he not warned them about "this brood of vipers"? These sayings of the Lord were now repeated by the Christian preachers as a source of consolation for the persecuted Brethren. In this way conflict stories became part of the official kerygma.

Shortly afterward the Christian message reached out into Gentile lands through the phenomenal apostolate of St. Paul. Vast multitudes of non-Jews entered the Church. St. Paul did not insist that his pagan neophytes be circumcised. He did not oblige them to the observance of the Mosaic Law. Other Jewish Christians, however, argued that the new converts must become Jews. Thus arose the thorny problem of the Judaizers.³⁸

Once again a solution was sought by recalling the Lord's teaching. Men remembered how Jesus had claimed an independence of the Law and the Sabbath. He had taught that flesh and blood could not receive the Father's revelation. He had even denounced the Pharisees for their pretensions based upon carnal descent from Abraham. On two occasions, eye-witnesses recalled, the Lord had stressed the need of a spiritual bond even above the physical ties that united Him to His own family and even to His Mother. The Christians related these stories to prove their position against the Judaizers.³⁹

This is the theological background of our two passages. It indicates the significance these passages had in the early catechesis and in *Mg*. There the emphasis was placed upon the need of spiritual union with Christ by doing the will of God. This stress is due in great part to the Judaizing controversies of the first Christian generation.

³⁸ J-B Colon, *Judéo-Chrétiens*, in *DBIS* 4, 1298-1315.

³⁹ C. Charlier, *art. cit.*, 56.

B. Significance in the Synoptics

Mk. found the Triple Passage in his source *Mg*. With the aid of Peter's reminiscences he was able to retell it in a more vivid manner. Nevertheless, for Mk. the narrative retained its original significance, now highlighted by graphic language. The true brethren are not the Scribes who blaspheme the Spirit and so are guilty of an everlasting sin. Nor does blood relationship alone constitute one a brother of Christ. His true brethren are they upon whom Jesus looked with tender love—they who do the will of God.

The author of our First Gospel also kept this primitive meaning, faithful as he was to the message of the original Gospel of the Apostle Matthew. He even strengthened this significance by joining the Marian passage more closely to the preceding denunciation of the Scribes.

This original meaning was highlighted also by the close connection of our passage to the parables. We have seen that it constitutes for MT one of the preparatory narratives for that discourse. To such as the Scribes who have hardened their hearts Jesus must speak in parables, but to the others, His true brethren, He makes known the mysteries of the kingdom (cf. 13, 10-15).

Now Christ's true brethren are they who do the will of the Father who is in heaven. To them the meaning of the parables is made known (13,11). For only such as these—who do the will of the Father—shall enter the kingdom (cf 7,21). They constitute the "disciples" (a word used here only by MT). They are the "blessed" ones, for they enjoy the vision that many prophets and just men of old longed to see and hear (cf. 13, 16-17).

These disciples toward whom Jesus stretched out His hand make up a new spiritual family. They will be to Christ as brothers and sisters and even as a mother! For they are the true Israel of God, the Kingdom, the Church. MT thus

used our passage to continue his kingdom theme, the ecclesiastical motif ⁴⁰ that threads its way throughout the First Gospel. We find it foreshadowed in the visit of the Gentile Magi in chapter two. It reaches its grand climax in the closing logion: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (28,19).

Christ's kingdom will be composed not of Scribes and Pharisees, for they are children of an evil and adulterous generation. His spiritual family will number only those who do the will of His Father in heaven. These are His true disciples, His brethren in the new Christian meaning of the word.

Jesus was not ashamed to call such as these "brethren," as the author of Hebrews reminded the Jewish Christians of Palestine (2,11). Paul also called his fellow Christians "brethren." He even spoke of his own role as that of a mother to souls (cf. *Gal.* 4,19).

Our passage had a profound impact upon the early Christians. MT caught this significance and made it part of his theological teaching.

In Lk. the Triple Passage underwent great variations. Lk. abbreviated the text and altered the context. These changes help to bring out the special significance the passage has in the Third Gospel.

The omission of Jesus' question softened any apparent harshness suggested by His words to His Mother.⁴¹ The same happy effect was achieved by omitting Jesus' action of stretching out His hand toward His disciples or His intensive gaze upon His followers. Since Lk. made these variations out of respect for Mary, we can at the outset expect a more direct Marian significance in Lk.'s text.

⁴⁰ P. Bénéit, *op. cit.*, 35-37; D. Stanley, *Kingdom to Church*, in *TS* 16 (1955) 1-29.

⁴¹ Lagrange, *Saint Luc*, 244; J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London, 1953) 118; J. Dillersberger, *Gospel of Saint Luke* (Westminster, 1958) 233.

We noted earlier the changed context of the Triple Passage in Lk. This highlights another Lucan purpose: to show the importance of rightly hearing the word of God.⁴² Lk. was interested in bringing out the moral teaching of Jesus. He wanted to show how the Christian message should be embraced by men of the second generation. His retouching of the parable of the sower⁴³ accomplished this. His handling of the Triple Passage achieved the same end, for the very words Lk. used bring out this purpose: "My mother and my brethren are they who hear the word of God and act upon it."

As we read this saying in Lk. we remember all that we have already read about the Mother of Jesus.⁴⁴ She is the Virgin Mother, the fruitful Virgin, the Ark of the Covenant. In her, as in the Temple of the Most High, the Word of God was enshrined.⁴⁵ She stored up all the words of the Lord in her Immaculate Heart and pondered over them in prayerful meditation.⁴⁶ Now Lk. presents Mary as the perfect hearer of the word, that fruitful soil that brought forth the hundredfold completely. As such Mary is the model for all the disciples of the Lord. Each believer must, like a mother,⁴⁷ receive the word joyously and let it bear fruit in his life.

Lk. continued his praise of Mary in the second passage.

⁴² Writing for second generation Christians, Lk's purpose was to make Jesus' teaching applicable to his contemporaries. H. Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit; Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen, 1957), has highlighted this view of Lk but unfortunately in an excessive manner. Cf. review by X. Léon-Dufour, in *RSR* 46 (1958) 242-250; M.-E. B[oisnard], in *RB* 62 (1955) 138-139; H. E. Turlington, in *JBL* 76 (1957) 319-322.

⁴³ In Lk (8, 11-15) the seed is the word of God (vs. 11); "believe and be saved" (vs. 12), proper to Lk; "temptation" (vs. 13), proper to Lk, etc. These variations indicate Lk re-phrased the explanation here and there in accord with the language of the second generation Christians.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Lk* 1-2 esp.

⁴⁵ R. Laurentin, *op. cit.*, 148-164.

⁴⁶ *Lk* 2, 19; 33, 51.

⁴⁷ J. Dillersberger (*op. cit.*, 234-235) has beautifully developed the theme of becoming "mother" to the word.

This time he retained the primitive setting of the narrative. In this way Lk. holds up before us the example of Mary in contrast to the Scribes. The true disciple must hear the word and keep it. His response must be, not that of the Scribes, but that of Mary.

As we hear the joyous cry of a "certain woman," we detect Lk.'s voice mingled with hers: "Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the breasts that nursed thee!" Throughout the gospel Lk. has sung the praise of Mary. He knows that she is blessed among women for she believed (cf. 1,45). The evangelist now makes his own the Master's yet greater beatitude: "Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." For Lk. knows that in uttering this praise the Master was extolling His Mother.

C. Significance Intended by the Lord

What actually did Jesus mean by these sayings? This is the final problem that we must discuss.

If we wish to find Jesus' original meaning we must dismiss for the moment the literary context that the passages enjoy in the gospels. We must, rather, attempt to put them in the background of Jesus' ministry.

Our Lord proclaimed the gospel message to a people grown satisfied with their favored status with God. Jews of the first century felt secure in their rigid fidelity to Law and temple worship. The messianic promises were rightfully theirs, for they were children of Abraham. The Qumranites did indeed realize the need of moral preparation, but so much of their ethical teaching shared the literal-mindedness of their contemporaries.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ J. M. Oesterreicher, *The Community of Qumran*, in *The Bridge* 2 (New York, 1956) 91-134, gives a sympathetic but judicious judgment of the spiritual mentality of the Qumran Community.

Frequently Jesus endeavored to correct this too human, even materialistic viewpoint. From the very beginning He preached the need of spiritual renewal: *metanoete*, repent, change your mental attitudes! ⁴⁹ In the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parable of the Sower He insisted on right interior dispositions of the heart.

On two occasions when His own Mother was receiving special deference precisely because of her human, carnal relationship with Himself, Jesus felt obliged to rectify the outlook of His followers. Once the disciples sought to make way for His relatives to come to Jesus, saying: "Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you." As Jews, they expected Jesus to go at once to greet His own. Instead, to the surprise of all, He asked: "Who is my mother and my brothers?" Stretching His hand toward His disciples, looking upon them intently, He cried out: "Behold here are my mother and my brothers, these men and women who do the will of my Father!" More important than human relationships is the higher bond of faith and love and obedience to the will of God.⁵⁰

On another occasion a certain woman, imbued with this same Jewish mentality, raised her voice to praise His Mother. Once again Jesus corrected her attitude. He did not deny the truth of her words. He simply raised her thoughts to a higher, loftier plane. "My mother," Jesus answered, "should receive praise above all else for being the ideal hearer and doer of the life-giving word of God!"⁵¹

⁴⁹ Mk 1, 15. Cf. Behm, *Metanoete*, in TWNT 5, 994-998; J-Ph. Ramseyer, *Repentance*, in *A Companion to the Bible*, edit. by J. J. Von Allmen (New York, 1958) 357-359; E. Roche, *Pénitence et conversion dans l'évangile et la vie chrétienne*, in NRTb 79 (1957) 119-120.

⁵⁰ Writers usually have drawn this lesson from our passage; cf. Lagrange, *Luc*, 335-336; J. Guittou, *Le force de la Vierge*, in LV 16 (1954) 81; I. Alfaro, *Significatio Mariae in mysterio salutis*, in Gr 40 (1959) 9-37, esp. 22.

⁵¹ J. Dillersberger, *loc. cit.*

We can see that in this historical setting Our Lord's words were not intended as a disparagement of Mary. He was known to His contemporaries as "the son of Mary."⁵² He had lived thirty years subject to her at Nazareth. He knew very well that right-thinking men would not mistake His meaning.

CONCLUSION

The primitive tradition as well as our three evangelists did not misunderstand the Lord's meaning. In using the sayings to solve the Judaizing problems, the first Christians were simply bringing Our Lord's authentic teaching to bear upon their pressing needs. Gentiles did not have to become Jews, subject to the Law, in order to become members of the Christian brotherhood. Their faith made them heirs of the promise, for "the man of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham" (*Gal.* 3,8).

MT was faithful to the Lord's meaning when he used the saying to teach the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, for the true brethren are those who do the will of the Father.

Lk. also was true to Jesus' thought when he made the saying serve as a conclusion to the parable, for like Mary, every Christian must hear the word of God and keep it faithfully. And when on Luke's pen both sayings became a veritable hymn of praise to Mary, this evangelist better than *Mg.* or *Mk.* or *MT* caught the full tonality of the Lord's meaning.

Today in the Church's liturgy we read these passages to extol the dignity of Mary. As we do so, we can, like Paul and the first Christians and our evangelists, cry out: "We too have the mind of Christ!"

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⁵² *Mk* 6, 3.