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OUR LADY AND THE INCARNATION

A Study in the History of Salvation

In a recent article a Protestant historian and theologian criticizes what he calls 'womb theology,' which is "the tendency to assign the Virgin Mary a supernatural place transcending the level of the faith argued on physical-metaphysical grounds."¹ This is certainly a temptation when treating one of the greatest themes of salvation history, namely, *Our Lady and the Incarnation*. It would be tempting to argue *a priori* from Mary's physical causality in the Incarnation and from the fact that the metaphysical term of Mary's causality is the Word incarnate to a real sharing by her in the redemptive work of Christ and to a special place for her in the assembly of the faithful. The blood relationship becomes the cause of the faith relationship of Mary to Jesus.

This type of reasoning process has a place in theology, but it must be used with care and precision, not so much to deduce new conclusions as to explain a truth already found in divine revelation.² Care must be exercised especially in the area of Marian theology because "all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure."³ Thus, an appreciation of the place of Mary in the divine plan of salvation as a result of her role in the Incarnation should be sought, not first from her physical-metaphysical relation to Christ, but from a study of the Sacred Scripture wherein is found recorded the divine pleasure, the revelation of God's free choice. We will

¹ Heiko A. Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Ecumenical Perspective*, in *JES* 1 (1964) 279

² René Laurentin, *Le mouvement mariologique à travers le monde*, in *VS* 86 (1952) 183. "On peut tout rattacher au mystère de la maternité de la Vierge; on n'en peut quasi rien déduire"

³ Const. *De Ecclesia*, n. 60.

avoid a false 'womb theology' and develop a deeper understanding of *Our Lady and the Incarnation* if we begin with an analysis of the scriptural data.

This paper, therefore, will present first of all two basic presuppositions on which the analysis is founded. Then we will search out the way in which Sacred Scripture describes Mary in her immediate relations to Christ at the time of the Incarnation. Finally, we will try to discover in the biblical writings if Mary's relation to the Incarnation, according to God's good pleasure, formed a basis for her role in the redemptive work of Christ.

BASIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

The first presupposition is that along with rich diversity and continuous development there is an essential unity in the message found in Sacred Scripture. The biblical message is like a spiral which always climbs upward while circling around the same central point. As Professor Rowley says:

There is progress in revelation; part of the Old Testament was outgrown before the Old Testament was itself complete, and more was superseded in the New Testament. Yet amid the diversity runs a unity, and in all the progress there is a thread of true continuity which derives from the God who speaks through it all.⁴

God speaks to us by His activity and through His prophets, and He reveals certain features in His plan of salvation which are constant with a continuity that does not rule out progression and the unexpected. Salvation is a result of God's initiative and man's total dependence on God, of God's free choice and man's response in faith. This is true whether we are concerned with Israel or the Church. This spiral of progression and continuity

⁴ H. H. Rowley, *How to Read the Bible with Understanding*, in *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, (New York, 1962) 1516.

will help us to appreciate Mary's place in the history of salvation.

The second presupposition of this paper is not so easily enunciated. Perhaps it can be understood by examining one of the challenges that faced the authors of the New Testament. The good news of salvation was being proclaimed to Jews and pagans in a world dominated by a Hellenistic and Roman culture. This Christian message of redemption contained many elements analogous to those of the mystery religions and the Greek and Roman mythologies and cults, namely, a divine savior, a Son of God, a miraculous birth. How could Christ and the divine plan of salvation be preached in an unequivocal way, a way which would not make of Jesus just another pagan god and savior? How could the supernatural conception of Christ be taught without giving the proselytes the image so common among the pagans of sexual union between a human mother and a god?⁵

John L. McKenzie explains how the biblical authors met this challenge:

The Messiah of Israel can be proclaimed and understood only in Old Testament terms as the fulfilment of Israelite faith, Israelite history, and Israelite institutions. If the Church attempted to proclaim him in other than biblical terms she ran the risk of assimilating him to types of savior figures which were numerous and well known in the Hellenistic-Roman world. Such were the mythological gods of fertility, the healers, the divine savior-kings, various types of political or economic messiahs. The Messiah of Israel was none of these, he was a unique figure, and because he was unique he could demand a unique way of life. The Church had the task of exploring

⁵ Cf. J. Danielou, S.J., *Le culte marial et le paganisme*, in *Maria*, ed. by Hubert du Manoir, S.J., 1 (Paris, 1949) 161-167. The temptation to confuse the miraculous conception of Christ with paganism is still present. Witness the following statement: "The idea of a supernatural or virgin birth is pagan, and it must have found its way into the story of Jesus through Gentile-Christian channels." Walter E. Bundy, *Jesus and the First Three Gospels* (Cambridge, 1955) 11.

the Old Testament thoroughly enough to define the character of Jesus Messiah.⁶

The early church attempted to define both the Incarnation and the plan of salvation by means of the terminology and the ideas of the Old Testament. Speaking of the Annunciation, Laurentin says:

The pedagogy involved in this first revelation of the Incarnation is astonishing. It is set forth without any elaborated conceptual material, by an application of the old Scriptures to the new event. Thus that event, illumined by the Scriptures, opens up its divine dimension, and the Scriptures, actualized in the event, received a marvelous and unforeseeable fulfilment.⁷

Thus, our second presupposition is that the New Testament references to the Virgin Mary are deliberately couched in the terminology and ideas of the Old Testament.⁸ This terminology and these ideas are not always adequate because there is progression in the biblical revelation, but they are always illuminating because there is continuity in the biblical revelation. We do not look back into the old Testament principally in order to find prophecies of future events, but in order to under-

⁶ John L. McKenzie, S.J., *The Challenge of the Bible*, in *The Critic*, (Aug.-Sept. 1965) 21

⁷ René Laurentin, *Court traité de théologie mariale* (4th ed. Paris, 1959) 25 "On rest confondu devant la pédagogie de cette première révélation de l'Incarnation. Elle se fait sans matériel conceptuel élaboré, par une application de l'Écriture ancienne à l'événement nouveau. Ainsi l'événement, illumine par l'Écriture, livre-t-il sa dimension divine, et l'Écriture actualisée dans l'événement découvre-t-elle un merveilleux et imprévisible accomplissement."

⁸ One author says "that the birth stories of Matt and Luke are as Jewish as anything in the NT" Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958) 172. Cf. also Pedro Franquesa, C.M.F., *Posibles influencias paganas en el culto a María*, in *EM* 22 (1961) 218. "El origen mitológico del relato de la concepción virginal no se encuentra en la narración de Lucas. Todos están de acuerdo en afirmar que la narración tiene un marcado carácter semita. En realidad el anuncio y el nacimiento de Cristo se describen como cumplimiento de la esperanza mesiánica."

stand what the New Testament authors intended to teach about Mary when they made use of Old Testament figures and language.

VIRGIN MOTHER

The idea that the divinely chosen leader and savior of God's people should be conceived in some miraculous way is frequently found in the Old Testament. Sara became the mother of Isaac when she was beyond the age of childbearing (*Gen.* 18:9-15). As a result of Isaac's prayer, Jacob was born of the previously barren Rebecca (*Gen.* 25:21). God remembered the barren Rachel, and she gave birth to Joseph who later saved Israel from the famine (*Gen.* 30.1, 2, 22, 23). The great hero Samson (*Jud.* 13:2, 3) and the prophet Samuel (*1 Sam.* 1.1-21) were conceived as a result of God's special favor.

Why this repetition of miraculous conceptions in the Old Testament? Do they have any basic connection with the history of salvation and the Israelite conception of the relation between God and His chosen people? An examination of the various stories seems to indicate that they are intended to underline man's total dependence on God.

God gave to Abraham the promise of a land and of descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (*Gen.* 13:14-17). Yet Sara, his wife, was barren, and the fulfillment of the promise is credited to the intervention of Jahweh. Isaac became the heir to the promise (*Gen.* 21:12), but the wife chosen for him by the Lord was also barren (*Gen.* 25.21). The continuance of the promise depended on the free intervention of the Lord. Samson, the fabled hero and savior of his people, was born of a barren mother (*Jud.* 13.2, 3), another sign that salvation is due to God's initiative. Repeatedly these stories present the paradox—the divine promise and the salvation of the People of God apparently thwarted by a barren woman. What is the lesson of this paradox?

The texts of the Bible allow us to resolve this apparent contradiction by showing us that sterility is, for woman, a consciousness of her own nothingness, and, for God, a manifestation of his omnipotence.⁹

Perhaps this idea that God alone saves will help to explain the enigmatic text of Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel"¹⁰

It seems most likely that these words of Isaiah as originally spoken to King Achaz did not literally foretell a virginal conception. Rather the prophet was merely indicating that a sign of God's faithfulness at that time would be the birth of a son to Achaz, a birth which was perhaps unexpected but not necessarily miraculous. Despite the apostasy of Achaz which extended even to sacrificing his son and heir to the god Molach,¹¹ Jahweh would intervene and raise up another son who would be the heir to the Davidic promises, who would be the sign of God's presence with His people, who would be Emmanuel.

When the story of Achaz was included in the post-exilic redaction of the Book of Isaiah it must have had a special meaning to the Jewish people of that day. Perhaps by that time, the end of the exile, the person of Emmanuel and his mother had been idealized. The likelihood of this idealization is supported by the editorial unity of First and Second Isaiah. Deutero-Isaiah is obviously eschatological in character,¹² and the redactor who brought the various sections together to form

⁹ Michel Allard, S.J., *L'Annonce à Marie et les annonces des naissances miraculeuses de l'Ancien Testament*, in *NRT* 78 (1956) 732. "Les textes de la Bible nous permettent de résoudre cette contradiction apparente en nous montrant que la stérilité est, pour la femme, prise de conscience de son néant, et, pour Dieu, manifestation de sa Tout-Puissance"

¹⁰ For the context of this prophecy and some of the difficulties connected with it, cf Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *The Mother of Emmanuel*, in *MS* 12 (1916) 165-204

¹¹ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1955) 259-260

¹² James Muilenburg, *Isaiah Introduction, chs. 40-66*, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 5 (New York, 1956) 398-400

our present book of Isaias may well have intended to clothe the whole work with this eschatological perspective. Furthermore, the tendency of the Hebrews to give historical individuals a corporate or community meaning is commonly admitted, and this tendency is probably found exemplified in the Servant Songs of Second Isaias.¹³

Moreover, the depth of the humiliation of Israel during the exile gave the people a personal realization of the necessity of total dependence on God. In such an atmosphere Achaz could easily become the figure of the leader who depends on worldly power and brings the nations to destruction, and Emmanuel could become the figure of the leader who depends entirely on God and brings salvation to the people. This idea of dependence is symbolized by the fact that the son will have as his food curds and honey, the food which comes from God and not from the cultivation of man, the food which is reminiscent of the ancient promises (cf. *Ex.* 3:8; *Josua* 5:6; *Jer.* 11:5). The unusual circumstances of his birth would also recall the miraculous conceptions of the other great national heroes, and this recollection of tradition may have led the Septuagint translator to use the Greek word for *virgin* in translating the original Hebrew word for *young woman*, thus emphasizing the total dependence of the people on God, the theme that God alone saves.

In describing the Virgin Mary, Luke implicitly refers to these Old Testament stories. It is possible to compare, for example, the story of the visit of God's messengers to Abraham and Sara with the story of the visit of the angel to Mary.¹⁴

Genesis 18:1-15

Luke 1:26-37

And the Lord appeared to him	The angel Gabriel was sent from
by the oaks of Mamre (v. 1)	God to a city of Galilee

¹³ For a discussion of the theory of corporate personality and its use in Second Isaias, cf. Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiab* (London, 1956) 103-116, 204-207.

¹⁴ Cf. Allard, S.J., *art. cit.*, 730-733.

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|---|---|
| | named Nazareth (v. 26) |
| (Abraham said) My Lord, If I
have found favor in your sight
(v. 3) | And the angel said to her, "Do
not be afraid, Mary, for you
have found favor with God"
(v. 30) |
| (The Lord said) Sara your wife
shall have a son (v. 10) | You will conceive in your womb
and bear a son (v. 31) |
| So Sara laughed to herself, say-
ing, "After I have grown old,
and my husband is old, shall
I have pleasure" (v. 12) | And Mary said to the angel,
"How shall this be, since I
have no husband"? (v. 34) |
| Is anything too hard for the
Lord? (v. 15) | For with God nothing will be
impossible (v. 37) |

The same basic elements are found in both narratives—a message from God, the announcement of the birth of a son, a question concerning the human impossibility of bearing a son, and a statement of divine omnipotence. The conception and birth of Christ are literarily tied in with the conception and birth of the chosen ones of the Old Testament. This is confirmed by the *Magnificat* in which the joy of Mary overflows in a canticle based to a large extent on the song of the barren Anna who became the mother of the prophet Samuel¹⁵ In the eyes of the evangelist, Mary takes her place as one of the long line of women who found joy in the birth of "one who is to be ruler in Israel" (*Mic.* 5:2).

St. Matthew makes this identification explicit when he describes the virginal conception of Christ in the words of Isaiah

Now all this came to pass that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, *Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son; and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which is, interpreted, 'God with us' (Matt. 1 22-23).*

Galot summarizes the whole development in these words:

¹⁵ The literary background of the *Magnificat* is very complex. Cf. James T. Forestell, CSB., *Old Testament Background of the Magnificat*, in *MS* 12 (1961) 205-244

By human barrenness, God wishes to show that from divine power comes a chosen offspring. The idea that woman must look to God for her fruitfulness seems already to be in the background of the story of the fall in Genesis. This idea gradually grew clearer as it became more certain that salvation was to be brought about not by men but by God. Thus men whom God wishes to raise up to come to the aid of mankind would owe their birth to divine intervention, made more striking by a mother's barrenness. In this line of development is to be considered the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the virgin who has conceived and who brings forth Emmanuel, the prophecy in which the Messiah appears as rising not according to normal human generation or royal dynasty, but through a super-human and virginal conception, a sign given by God, this line of development has now reached a climax with Mary.¹⁶

As Virgin Mother, Our Lady played an intimate role in the Incarnation which inaugurated the most decisive series of events in the entire history of salvation. As *Mother* of the Savior she is the perfect and final fulfillment of the ideal woman of the Old Testament; she is the woman whose seed shall crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). As a *virginal* Mother she personifies one of the essential elements of salvation, total dependence on God's initiative. "Mary's virginity is therefore a real sign of man's poverty and his inability to work out his own salvation, to bring into being that perfect One who can save him."¹⁷

DAUGHTER OF SION

Luke's Gospel seems to portray Mary also as the Daughter of Sion which is an Old Testament literary personification of the Israelite nation.¹⁸ We will first examine the meaning of this phrase, Daughter of Sion, in Sacred Scripture, and then

¹⁶ Jean Galot, S.J., *Mary in the Gospel* (Westminster, 1965) 43-44.

¹⁷ Max Thurian, *Mary Mother of All Christians* (New York, 1964) 32.

¹⁸ Cf. A.-G. Hebert, S.S.M., *La Vierge Marie, Fille de Sion*, in *VS* 85 (1951) 127-139, A. R. C. Leaney, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (London, 1958) 22-24.

whether and in what sense the Evangelist applies it to Our Lady.

The title of Daughter of Sion is found principally in the prophetic and poetic literature of First Isaias and Micheas, Jeremias and Sophonias, Second Isaias and Zacharias, the Psalms and Lamentations. In this literature, the title ordinarily is a personification of the people of Israel,¹⁹ but it carries with it certain definite overtones which are important to an understanding of its use in the Bible.

Israel is frequently called the Daughter of Sion in the context of *impending or actual disaster*. The following two examples will suffice:

Thus says the Lord. "Behold, a people is coming from the north country, a great nation is stirring from the farthest part of the earth. They lay hold on bow and spear, they are cruel and have no mercy, the sound of them is like the roaring sea; they ride upon horses, set in array as a man for battle, against you, O Daughter of Sion" We have heard the report of it, our hands fall helpless, anguish has taken hold of us, pain as a woman in travail Go not forth into the field, nor walk on the road; for the enemy has a sword, terror is on every side O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, and roll in ashes, make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us (*Jer* 6:22-26)

From the Daughter of Sion has departed all her majesty. Her princes have become like harts that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and bitterness all the precious things that were hers from days of old When her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was none to help her, the foe gloated over her, mocking at her downfall (*Lam* 1.6, 7).

In the Book of Lamentations, the Daughter of Sion is described as a virgin. The author's purpose is not in any sense to extol virginity, but rather to indicate the depth of Israel's desolation To remain unmarried and without issue was social

¹⁹ A. G. Hebert, S.S.M., *art. cit.*, 128-130.

and even religious disgrace for a Jewish woman, and this idea was used to portray poetically the nation at the time of the exile.

What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin Daughter of Sion? For vast as the sea is your ruin, who can restore you? (*Lam* 2:13)

The title of Daughter of Sion also carries with it the notion of *restoration*. In Micheas, for example, the title is found in Chapter 4 and 5 which are concerned with the restoration of Israel in "the latter days." The Prophet Zacharias sings of the eschatological joy of the Daughter of Sion "Sing and rejoice, O Daughter of Sion; for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord" (*Zach.* 2:10; cf *Soph.* 3:14-20). Jeremias also sees the restoration of joy and beauty to virgin Israel

For thus says the Lord Your hurt is incurable, and your wound is grievous There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you, they care nothing for you; for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant (*Jer* 30:12-14)

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers (*Jer.* 31.3, 4)

The salvation of Israel is described in terms of the restoration of fruitfulness to the virgin Daughter of Sion. The sorrows of exile are those of a woman in childbirth, and the aftermath of this sorrow will be the birth of a new ruler and the rebirth of the nation and the people.

Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, the pangs have seized you like a woman in

travail? Writhe and groan, O Daughter of Sion, like a woman in travail; for now you shall go forth from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies (*Mtch.* 4.9-10).

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrata, who are little to be among the clans of Juda, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth, then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel (*Mtch.* 5.2, 3).

Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord (*Is.* 54: 1).²⁰

The combination of desolation and consolation, the helplessness and hopefulness, embodied in the Old Testament concept of the Daughter of Sion provided the Evangelist with an excellent pedagogical device to express the Christian belief in Our Lady's role in the Incarnation. In order to see precisely what was Luke's intention, it is necessary to examine the Annunciation scene more closely.

The first word addressed to Mary in Luke's Gospel is usually translated into English by the word *Hail*, and this translation is based on the word *Ave* contained in the Latin Vulgate. There are, however, serious doubts as to whether it brings out fully the original meaning of the Evangelist. The Greek word used here is *chaire* which carries with it the sense of great rejoicing. It is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint version of the texts concerning the Daughter of Sion in Sophonias and Zacharias.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130 "Ainsi, dans l'Ancien Testament, l'expression 'la Fille de Sion' désigne Israël souffrant et attendant la venue du salut de Dieu, elle est aussi représentée parfois comme la femme qui enfante. La personification aide le poète à pénétrer, par son imagination, la souffrance, la foi et l'espérance du peuple de Dieu."

Shout for joy (*charre sphodra*), O Daughter of Sion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem (*Soph.* 3:14).

Rejoice greatly (*charre sphodra*), O Daughter of Sion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem (*Zach* 9:9, cf. 2.10)

Thus the angel's greeting to Mary is seen as more than the simple Hebrew greeting, *shalom*; rather it is a call for joy, for the joy associated with the salvation and consolation of Israel, it is a call for the messianic joy of the last days²¹

Further examination of the message of the angel to Mary and the annunciation of the joy of deliverance of the Daughter of Sion brings out more similarities.

<i>Luke</i> 1.28, 31	<i>Soph.</i> 3.14, 17
Rejoice, (V. 28)	Shout for joy, (V. 14)
O Highly Favored, (V. 28)	O Daughter of Sion, (V. 14)
The Lord is with you, (V. 28)	The King of Israel, the Lord is in your midst, (V. 15)
Do not be afraid, Mary, (V. 30)	Do not fear, O Sion, (V. 16)
You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, (V. 31)	The Lord, your God, is in your midst, (V. 17)
And you shall call his name Jesus (Jahweh-Savior) (V. 31).	A mighty savior (V. 17)

This parallelism of both ideas and terminology makes it very probable that the Evangelist wished to tell his readers that at the moment of the Incarnation not only the messianic joy announced by the prophets finds its fulfillment, but also that Mary is the Daughter of Sion²² In the belief of the apostolic

²¹ For an evaluation of the arguments in favor of this conclusion see the article by S. Lyonnet, in *Bibl* 20 (1939) 131-141; also Manuel de Tuya, O P, *Valoración exegético-teológica del "Ave, gratia plena,"* in CT 83 (1956) 3-9.

²² René Laurentin, *Court traité de théologie mariale* (4th ed, Paris, 1959) 25: "Reprenons pas à pas les lignes parallèles des deux textes et, de leur rapprochement, nous voyons jaillir la lumière. La Joie annoncée par l'ange, c'est la joie messianique de Sophonie; 'Marie' qui reçoit l'annonce, c'est 'la Fille de Sion,' elle résume Israël à cette heure décisive"

Church Mary is the personification of Israel from whom would arise the Savior of the World. She is the Daughter of Sion, desolate in her barrenness, who now rejoices because she will give birth to "one who is to be ruler in Israel" (*Msc.* 5:2). This is the opinion, among others, of Max Thurian who writes:

The Virgin, the Mother of the Messiah, is the personal embodiment of Israel, the daughter of Zion, who was waiting throughout her sad history for the joyous birth of her hope, the promised deliverance of the Lord. Mary, the daughter of Zion, is the 'Incarnation' of Israel²³

As the representative of Israel, what is asked of Mary? What has always been required of Israel throughout her history? Abraham, the father of the people of God, "believed the Lord, who credited the act to him as justice" (*Gen.* 15 6). It was faith that God demanded from his people. By faith Moses overcame the Egyptians and led the people out of Israel; by faith Gideon defeated Madian; by faith David was able to slay Goliath; by faith Judith destroyed the might of the Assyrians. The initiative is always God's, but something is required on the part of the people, not power or might, not gold or silver, not worldly wisdom, but *faith*, the faith which involves the realization and loving acceptance of total dependence on God and His promises.

Mary, as the representative of Israel, expresses her complete faith and trust and obedience by freely embracing the divine promise contained in the message of the angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (*Luke* 1:38). In the history of salvation, therefore, Mary played a role which was more than merely a physical cooperation in the Incarnation, more than merely a passive acceptance of her maternity. Rather, in keeping with her dignity as a hu-

²³ Max Thurian, *op. cit.*, 16. Clement Dillenschneider, C.S.S.R., *Marie dans l'économie de la création renouvelée* (Paris, 1957) 226: "Marie, au moment de l'Annonciation, incarne en elle le peuple d'Israel appelé couramment la fille de Sion."

man person, her cooperation was an active, free, human response in faith to the mystery of our redemption. "Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience."²⁴

As Virgin Mother she is the living sign of the necessity of total dependence on God for salvation; as Daughter of Sion she is the living sign of the necessity of free cooperation by man. By her role in the Incarnation Our Lady embodies in herself the two basic principles of salvation—God's initiative and man's response in faith.

MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

The Catholic Church from the patristic period has always taught that Mary's place in the history of salvation goes beyond her immediate cooperation in the conception and birth of the Savior. For centuries Catholic teaching and piety have recognized her as the spiritual Mother of mankind who shares in some fashion in the redemption and salvation of all men. In 1964 Pope Paul VI solemnized this teaching by declaring that Mary is the Mother of the Church²⁵ Is this another example of 'womb theology' at work in the Church? Is it valid to pass from Mother of the Savior to Mother of the Church? Is this the mere exercise of theological deduction, or does this teaching have some basis in Sacred Scripture?

As shown above, Mary is described in Scripture in terms of the women in the Old Testament who conceived a son who became the leader of God's people. In these cases, it is often implied that the women gave birth not only to an individual but to a nation. Concerning Sara, the wife of Abraham, God said, "I will bless her, and will also give you a son by her; yes, I will bless her, and she shall be the mother of nations;

²⁴ Const. *De Ecclesia*, n. 56

²⁵ The text of this declaration can be found in *The Pope Speaks*, 10 (1965) 137-141.

kings of peoples shall descend from her" (*Gen.* 17:16). As she bore Esau and Jacob in her womb, Rebecca was told by the Lord, "Two nations are in your womb; two peoples shall stem from your body" (*Gen.* 25:23).

The Hebrew tended to identify the individual and the nation, and this tendency is frequently noted by exegetes and often described in terms of corporate personality. In these cases the individual offspring is identified with the nation of which he would be the father.

It is quite reasonable then to apply this biblical mode of reasoning to Mary. She conceived and bore in her womb Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church which is His body (cf. *Eph.* 1:22, 23). Christ is the source of life, the principle of regeneration for all those who are members of the new nation, the new people of God. In a more profound sense than is the case with the Hebrew patriarchs, it is possible to identify Christ and His Church. Thus it can be said of Mary that, while bearing Christ in her womb, she was also bearing a nation, a people, the Church, and this is one basis for claiming that Mary is Mother of the Church.

Furthermore, the fact that Mary was the Mother of the Messias who inherited the throne of David and who is king over the house of Jacob forever (*Luke* 1:32) gives to her the special title of Queen Mother. In the kingdom of Juda, the Mother of the reigning King received the title of *Gebirah*, and the title implied a certain dignity and special powers which extended beyond her personal influence over her son.²⁶ She had an official position which she received either at her son's accession to the throne or as soon as her son was designated heir to the throne.²⁷ "She who begot the nation's king was recognized by everyone as a woman of power in dealing with the

²⁶ Cf. Ronald De Vaux, O.P., *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions* (New York, 1961) 117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118

king."²⁸ Christ was king from the first moment of His conception, and at that moment Mary became the official Queen Mother over His kingdom which is the Church.

Evidence that Mary's privileged position as the *Gebirah* was recognized by the early Church is found in the words of Elizabeth in Luke's Gospel. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to Mary, "And how have I deserved that the Mother of my Lord should come to me" (*Luke 1:43*). This phrase, *Mother of my Lord*, refers to Mary in terms of the Queen Mother of the Old Testament. As Ahern explains:

The real value of the phrase consists in the evidence it offers that, prior to the composition of Luke's gospel (ca 80 AD), the Church was already giving to Mary a veneration which was next in importance to that of her divine Son.²⁹

Mary is Mother of the Messiah and for this reason she is the Queen Mother over her Son's kingdom, the Church, tenderly watching over the children of the kingdom and using her privileged position only for the benefit of all her children and the glory of her Son.

Finally, as shown above, Mary's response in faith at the Annunciation was given by her as the representative of Israel. The development of faith in Israel involved the gradual unfolding of man's necessary reliance on God, and of the meaning of the promises of salvation from the vague promise of a land and numerous offspring made to Abraham, to the promise of a permanent dynasty made to David, to the eschatological vision of salvation in Second Isaias. This faith of the Old Testament people of God reached its perfection and was embodied in the *fiat* of Mary because her faith demanded total reliance on God's word—a consciousness of her own nothingness and a realization of divine omnipotence—and because the

²⁸ Barnabas Ahern, C P, *The Mother of the Messiah*, in MS 12 (1961) 44.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 47.

object of her faith was the full realization of the promises made to Israel³⁰ "Mary enters into God's plan, accepts the formidable vocation of the Daughter of Zion, and the revolutionary task of being Mother of the Messiah."³¹

Mary's faith, therefore, has a certain universal implication³² Her act of faith recalls that Abraham. Both stand at the beginning of a covenant, both are asked to accept a miraculous conception, and as a result of their faith and obedience both received the fulfillment of the promises. By his faith Abraham inaugurated the Old Testament, and by her faith Mary inaugurated the New Testament which was later solemnized by the blood of her divine Son on the cross.³³ Thus Mary's faith not only completed the faith of Israel but it initiated the faith of the Church This important point is explained by Galot:

By summing up the faith of the past and perfecting it in herself, Mary pledges the faith of the future. Since, in the Annunciation, she represents God's people according to its broader meaning, her act of faith is made in the name of the Church rather than in the name of Israel Her faith is identical with that of the Church, because it possesses the essential characteristic of bearing directly on Christ. This is distinct from the faith of the Old Testament Therefore, we may say that the faith of the Church is born in the soul of Mary.³⁴

As a result of her sublime faith, Mary can truly be called the Mother of the Church. It is faith in Christ, a living and vital and total faith and commitment to the person of Christ, which constitutes the Church. The Church is the fellowship of

³⁰ Jean Galot, S J, *Mary in the Gospel* (Westminster, 1965) 50-51.

³¹ Max Thurian, *op. cit.*, 60

³² Clement Dillenschneider, C S S R, *Le mystère de Notre-Dame et notre dévotion mariale* (Paris, 1962) 89-90. "Le Fiat de Notre-Dame, lors de l'Annonciation, n'a pas seulement une haute valeur personnelle; il est un événement de l'histoire officielle de notre salut comme telle et, à cet égard, nous importe plus que le foi d'Abraham et la conclusion de l'alliance sinaitique"

³³ Edward D. O'Connor, C S C, *The Faith of Abraham and the Faith of the Virgin Mary*, in *AER* 132 (1955) 232-238.

³⁴ Galot, S J, *op. cit.*, 53

believers. Max Thurian rightly says, "She is the first believer of the New Testament, the mother and example of all believers in the Church."³⁵ Just as Abraham by his faith became the father of the Jewish nation, so Mary by her faith became the Mother of the new people of God, not by means of carnal generation as did Abraham but by means of spiritual regeneration. The Constitution on the Church, issued by the Second Vatican Council, explains the mystery in these words: "In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace."³⁶ It was this faith so clearly set forth in the Bible which led the early Christians to see Mary as the New Eve, the Mother of all the living, the Mother of the Church.

An examination of these few biblical concepts makes it evident that Our Lady, as a result of her role in the Incarnation, has an important place in the history of salvation. She is the physical Mother of Christ and, by her virginity, a sign of total dependence on God; she is the representative of Israel and, by her faith, a sign of the necessity of man's free response to God; she is the Mother of the Church both by reason of her physical motherhood and her sublime faith.

Commenting on the vision of the woman in chapter 12 of the Apocalypse Max Thurian has these words:

The same vision of the Woman, sad and yet victorious, therefore describes Mary, Israel and the Church. The Virgin Mary, who is outlined at the moment of the childbearing and rearing of the Messiah, serves, in this vision, as the link between Israel and the Church. In her, the Woman-Israel becomes the Woman-Church.³⁷

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³⁵ Max Thurian, *op. cit.*, 63.

³⁶ Const. *De Ecclesia*, n. 61.

³⁷ Max Thurian, *op. cit.*, 180.