An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

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AN EXEGETICAL APPROACH TO GEN. 3:15

The title of this paper, "An exegetical approach to Gen. 3:15," limits the subject to be treated. A complete exegesis of a text in Sacred Scripture demands that the teachings of the Church be used as a guide. The official interpreter of Sacred Scripture is the living Magisterium of the Church.1

We must limit our subject still further because of the scope of the following two papers which will also deal with Gen. 3:15. One will treat the Patristic Tradition concerning the Protoevangelium and the other will study the use of the text in the Magisterium of the Church. We are concerned with Positive Theology in this paper. Our study, therefore, will be confined to the deposit of revelation as found in Genesis. Because of recent Catholic views on Pentateuchal criticism,2 it will be necessary, and we believe useful, to consider the introductory questions on Genesis somewhat in detail.

Our text appears in that part of the book of Genesis known as prehistory. Genesis I-XI records the creation of the world, the origins of man and the account of mankind down to the time of the Hebrew Patriarchs. With the biblical account of


Abraham (Gen. 11:27b) and his call from God to be the father of the Chosen People, we enter the period of written history. The accuracy of the accounts in Genesis concerning the Hebrew Patriarchs has been questioned by critics, either by denying their existence or by seeing "in the patriarchal narratives retrojections of ideas and customs which prevailed in the period of the monarchy (1000-587 B.C.)." Father Frederick L. Moriarty indicates thus why such an attitude must be rejected:

"If the situation has changed drastically today—and no one who understands the facts can doubt it—the credit goes first and foremost to the archaeologist and linguist whose combined efforts have set the Patriarchal Age in an entirely new light. In the past twenty-five years a bewildering amount of new material has been turned up and it has revolutionized our knowledge of that part of the world which very deservedly is called 'The Cradle of Our Civilization.' Within one generation we have seen whole cultures saved from the oblivion of millennia, new and unsuspected scripts and languages brought to light, entire civilizations reconstructed. Who in 1920 had ever heard of Ugarit and its great epic literature? How much did we know of the Hurrians and the Hittites? . . ."

The Patriarch Abraham lived ca 1850, B.C. For the sake of comparison, we can add here that Moses lived during the thirteenth century, B.C. The discoveries of archaeology

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have shown the historical accuracy and the literary antiquity of the narratives of Genesis. Law codes which are prior to Moses by centuries have been discovered and deciphered. Thus Father Robert in *Guide to the Bible* could write: "The very life of antiquity, with its literatures, laws and law codes, institutions, and religions, is presented to us under a tangible form. All this information makes it possible for us to clarify many passages in Scripture, to complete fragmentary knowledge, and often to correct our mistakes in perspective. But, especially it demonstrates that Israel was a late comer in world history, that in every way she was part of her milieu, and that she was profoundly influenced by it."

**Directives of the Church**

We must now turn our attention to the first section of Genesis, chapters I-XI.

The historicity of Biblical narratives in general has been constantly upheld by the Church. In June 30, 1909, the Church defended the historical character of Gen. 1-3. The replies of the Pontifical Biblical Commission must be considered in the light of the letter of the Biblical Commission to Cardinal Suhard on Jan. 16, 1948, concerning the sources of the Pentateuch and the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The Commission encourages further study of the problems in the following words: "It will be agreed that

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8 Cf Albright, *op cit.* 225, Arbez, *op cit.* 176
10 A Robert, *The Law or the Pentateuch*, in *Guide to the Bible*, *op cit.*, 168
11 June 23, 1903, in *EB* No. 161
these replies are in no way a hindrance to further truly scientific examination of these problems in accordance with the results acquired in these last forty years. . . .”

Concerning the question of the literary form of the first eleven chapters of Genesis and their importance in determining their historicity, the Commission had the following to say:

“The question of the literary forms of the first eleven chapters of Genesis is far more obscure and complex. These literary forms do not correspond to any of our classical categories and cannot be judged in the light of the Greco-Latin or modern literary types. It is therefore impossible to deny or to affirm their historicity as a whole without unduly applying to them norms of a literary type under which they cannot be classed. If it is agreed not to see in these chapters history in the classical and modern sense, it must be admitted also that known scientific facts do not allow a positive solution of all the problems which they present. The first duty in this matter incumbent on scientific exegesis consists in the careful study of all the problems literary, scientific, historical, cultural, and religious connected with these chapters, in the next place is required a close examination of the literary methods of the ancient oriental peoples, their psychology, their manner of expressing themselves and even their notion of historical truth; (the requisite, in a word, is to assemble without preformed judgments all the material of the palaeontological and historical, epigraphical and literary sciences.) It is only in this way that there is hope of attaining a clearer view of the true nature of certain narratives in the first chapters of Genesis”

To attempt to clarify in some way the literary character of Gen. I-XI, and to determine the historical value of these chapters, we must heed the words of Pope Pius XII in his encyclical, Divino afflante Spiritu:

14 Such is, loc. cit.; EB No. 581.
15 Such is, op. cit., 75; EB No. 581.
"As in our age, indeed new questions and new difficulties are multiplied, so, by God's favor, new means and aids to exegesis are also provided. Among these it is worthy of special mention that Catholic theologians, following the teaching of the Holy Fathers and especially of the Angelic and Common Doctor, have examined and explained the nature and effects of biblical inspiration more exactly and more fully than was wont to be done in previous ages. For having begun by expounding minutely the principle that the inspired writer, in composing the sacred book, is the living and reasonable instrument of the Holy Spirit, they rightly observe that, impelled by the divine motion, he so uses his faculties and powers, that from the book composed by him all may easily infer 'the special character of each one and, as it were, his personal traits.' Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed.

"Thus can he the better understand who was the inspired author, and what he wishes to express by his writings. There is no one indeed but knows that the supreme rule of interpretation is to discover and define what the writer intended to express. . . .

"What is the literal sense of a passage is not always as obvious in the speeches and writings of the ancient authors of the East, as it is in the works in our own time. For what they wished to express is not to be determined by the rules of grammar and philology alone, nor solely by the context, the interpreter must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and with the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology, and other sciences, accurately determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the authors of that ancient period would be likely to use, and in fact did use.

"For the ancient peoples of the East, in order to express their ideas, did not always employ those forms or kinds of speech which we use today; but rather those used by the men
of their times and countries. What those exactly were the commentator cannot determine as it were in advance, but only after a careful examination of the ancient literature of the East, ... "For of the modes of expression which, among ancient peoples, especially those of the East, human language used to express its thought, none is excluded from the Sacred Books, provided the way of speaking adopted in no wise contradicts the holiness and truth of God, ... "Hence the Catholic commentator, in order to comply with the present needs of biblical studies, in explaining the Sacred Scripture and in demonstrating and proving its immunity from all error, should also make a prudent use of this means, determine, that is, to what extent the manner of expression or the literary mode adopted by the sacred writer may lead to a correct and genuine interpretation; and let him be convinced that this part of his office cannot be neglected without serious detriment to Catholic exegesis.) Not infrequently—to mention only one instance—when some persons reproachfully charge the Sacred Writers with some historical error or inaccuracy in the recording of facts, on closer examination it turns out to be nothing else than those customary modes of expression and narration peculiar to the ancients, which used to be employed in the mutual dealings of social life and which in fact were sanctioned by common usage.

"When then such modes of expression are met with in the sacred text, which, being meant for men, is couched in human language, justice demands that they be no more taxed with error than when they occur in the ordinary intercourse of daily life. By this knowledge and exact appreciation of the modes of speaking and writing in use among the ancients can be solved many difficulties, which are raised against the veracity and historical value of the Divine Scriptures, and no less efficaciously does this study contribute to a fuller and more luminous understanding of the mind of the Sacred Writer." 16

16 Pope Pius XII, Divino afflante Spiritu, in Rome and the Study of Scripture, op cit, 95-99, Nos 33-41; EB Nos 557-561. See also the Holy Father's warning in his encyclical Humani generis, loc cit.

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In 1948, The Biblical Commission in its letter to Cardinal Suhard stated concerning Genesis I-XI:

"To declare a priori that these narratives do not contain history in the modern sense of the word might easily be understood to mean that they do not contain history in any sense, whereas they relate in simple and figurative language, adapted to the understanding of mankind at a lower stage of development, the fundamental truths underlying the divine scheme of salvation, as well as a popular description of the origins of the human race and of the chosen people. In the meantime it is necessary to practice patience which is part of prudence and the wisdom of life." \(^{17}\)

**Historical Character**

We shall, therefore, consider briefly the historical character of Genesis I-XI. Father John L. McKenzie writes: "A. Bea, S.J., commenting on the response of 1948, has pointed out that the first task of exegesis is to determine the intention of the sacred writer." \(^{18}\) Father McKenzie continues, referring to the article of Cardinal Bea:

("The intention of the author is manifested in his manner of speaking, the concrete circumstances in which he writes, and his choice of literary form.) Genesis I-XI appears in the dress of a historical narrative; but the meaning of history must be determined. In the literature of ancient Semitic peoples, history means the transmission of particular facts in the forms of annals, a mixed presentation of fact, and legends, or myths, or popular tradition orally transmitted. It is for the exegete to determine what events and doctrines the sacred author intended"
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

to relate, speaking the language of his time, using the literary forms of his contemporaries, speaking to a people of a determined profane, intellectual and religious culture." 19

The discussion concerning Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch can be found in any standard commentary on Genesis. The Biblical Commission in 1906 spoke of "substantial Mosaic Authorship." 20 For our present purpose, it will suffice to point out that in 1948 the Commission gave what is considered a clarification of this phrase when it spoke of "the large contribution and profound influence of Moses as author and as legislator." 21

We have already referred to the fact that archaeology has verified the accuracy of the Patriarchal account in Genesis. Moses could have used sources, oral and written, for these narratives. But the problem still remains for the earlier chapters of Genesis. Father Vawter makes the observation: "Tradition can be preserved with astounding accuracy of detail even over centuries, as the Pentateuch makes clear, but who could imagine a tradition kept intact for hundreds of thousands, a half million or more years? For the life of man upon earth, we now know, is no less than this." 22

10 McKenzie, op. cit., 543-544.
20 Sutcliffe, op. cit., 68, EB No 184
Where did the sacred author, whether Moses or a later redactor obtain the information he gives us concerning the origins of the world and the creation of man? Was he merely relating for future generations the facts of creation as he received them from oral tradition? Or did he have fundamental religious truths, which he wanted to teach, that there is one God, Creator of all, that man rebelled through sin, was punished, etc., which he clothed in graphic and concrete language?

Father Hartman writes: "We cannot, of course, rule out the possibility of God revealing this whole story in a vision to the inspired author. Miracles can happen, but they are not to be unnecessarily multiplied when there is a quite natural explanation for some phenomenon. If God saw fit to reveal all the details of this story to the hagiographer, it is hard to see why He should have taken so many elements from the pagan mythologies, even though purged of their unbecoming aspects, or why He should have had the conversations in Paradise include so many plays on words which make sense only in Hebrew, a language which was certainly not spoken in Paradise." 

Father Robert writes:

23 Biblical criticism today looks upon the Pentateuch as a composite work. Cf. Robert, op cit, 160-170, for a review of the reasons for this position (161), a summary of the development of the documentary hypothesis (162-166). Cf also the commentaries of De Vaux, op cit, 9-21, Clamer, op cit, 10-57, Vawter, op cit, 21-28, Monarty, Introducing the Old Testament, op cit, 2-8, W M Vulk, Pentateuchal Criticism in La Bible de Jerusalem, in Sept 5 (1952) 99-102; Dyson, Some Recent Viewpoints on the Pentateuchal Question, in CCHS 174-176, and MacKenzie, Before Abraham was, in CBQ 15 (1953) 131-140. It should be understood that the acceptance by Catholics of the sources involved in the composition of the Pentateuch as we have it today does not affect the inspiration of the text. The final redactor who combined the different sources and even added his own work to them certainly worked under the influence of inspiration. Cf. Clamer, op cit, 57, Vawter, op cit, 18, and R. R. Rau, O.F.M., La femme et son langage dans Genisse III, 14-15, in RB 61 (1954) 329-331.

An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

"The modern reader, who is usually too much concerned with material details, does not give enough attention to the fact that these chapters are intended primarily to furnish doctrinal instruction of the greatest importance. Creation, the original happiness of man, the fall and its consequences, the increasing degradation of mankind despite the first achievements of civilization, the great punishment of the Flood and that of the confusion of tongues, all these are truths which manifest the power, wisdom, holiness, and mercy of God, and, at the same time, explain the present condition of man. These truths are facts, or they are essentially connected with facts. Our sources relate them with the same gravity and the same authority as the whole subsequent history, and, consequently, they certainly intend to make them a matter of belief." 25

Later on Father Robert remarks, "The religious teaching of these chapters, together with the essential facts with which it is indissolubly connected can come only from a revelation that was made at a time and to recipients that we do not know." 26

Accounts of creation have been found in ancient Babylonian narratives. Scholars are today studying the "numerous and undeniable resemblances between the Biblical narratives and the ancient traditions of Babylonia." 27

25 Robert, The Literary Genres, in Guide to the Bible, op. cit., 479
26 Ibid., 482; cf. Chaine, op. cit., 71, McKenzie, art. cit., 571
27 Robert, op. cit., 481 Cf. Moriarty-Gundon, art. cit., in CBQ 12 (1950) 434 "Notwithstanding the high probability that the Hebrews brought with them from their original Mesopotamian home the cosmogonic narratives which they had learned there and which have certainly influenced their own cosmogony, the parallel accounts of creation in Genesis are unique in ancient literature. Despite the reminiscences of early Near Eastern literature, these narratives have been transmuted by the pure monotheistic doctrine which, it is a commonplace to remark, is one of Israel's great contributions to the world. It is only when we examine the gross religious concepts enshrined in the other Semitic narratives of creation that the biblical account stands out in all its purity and force."
Father John L. McKenzie, S.J., has reviewed the material so far discovered. He writes:

"It is an accepted conclusion among modern exegetes that there is no extant piece of literature which is the source of the Paradise story. The attempts which have been made to establish a dependence on Mesopotamian literature have all broken down against the unique character of the story.

"But it would be a mistake to conclude from this, as some have done, that there is no connection between the Paradise story and other ancient narratives. The story as a whole is independent, but this does not imply that it is independent in all details. An examination of the relevant texts on the origin of man discloses that any similarity in detail is to be found in the Mesopotamian stories alone. These relevant texts are few and fragmentary. No Mesopotamian account is as anthropocentric as the Paradise story; this is one of its most striking and distinctive traits." 28

We know also that Israel alone of all the ancient nations had the true knowledge of God, divinely revealed to it. The loftiness of the account of creation in Genesis therefore is shown by its monotheistic character. Thus, for example, there are no other gods to question Yahweh's word. At His word, creation takes place.

We may conclude, then, that the first eleven chapters of Genesis give us a popularized account of the beginning of the

28 McKenzie, art al., 549. Cf Hartman, art al., 28, who writes "Suffice it to say that, while these coincidences undeniably exist, they are rather mere 'echoes,' that is, elements common to the folklore of all these peoples, including Israel, rather than conscious literary borrowings on the part of the author of Gen 2-3. Besides, all the elements of polytheism and the other 'abominations' of pagan religion have, of course, been automatically 'purged' from these folklore stories as they were retold by the monotheistic worshippers of a righteous Yahweh. Finally, it can be safely predicted that no account will ever be discovered in ancient pagan literature that could be shown to be a source of the essential, characteristic elements in this masterpiece of Israelite religious literature."
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

It is religious history, and facts are introduced to make a religious point. But the accounts are historical in the sense that they tell of real events.”

Analysis of the Text

The context of the Protoevangelium is well known. It is the story of man’s fall into sin. After the second account of the creation of man (Gen. 2:7f.), man is placed in a luxuriant garden, and “woman” is created to be a helper to him (Gen. 2:21f.). Father Arbez summarizes the following: “Man’s disobedience (3. J) destroys the goodness—harmony—of creation. The temptation, described with remarkable insight, at the instigation of the serpent, is followed by God’s sentence on the actors of the drama: the original harmony is destroyed by man’s sin. However, there is left to man the hope of final victory.”

The “hope of final victory” is contained in Gen. 3:15. The words of Yahweh to the serpent read: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel.”

We will examine the text from a philological point of view to determine its meaning as accurately as possible.

1. The particle waw which connects vs. 15 with vs. 14 signifies a logical connection. It can have a co-ordinating sense or subordinating sense.

30 Arbez, op. cit., 172. Cf. Hartman, art. cit., 27 “We are justified in studying Gen 2, 4b-3, 24 as a literary unit.”
32 M. Brune, S.D.B., De sensu Protoevangelii (Gen. 3.15), in VD 36 (1958) 194. He takes it in a causal or explicative sense (207). It is usually not present in the modern translations.
2. "Enmity—'ebhah—in Hebrew occurs only four times in the Old Testament (Num. 35:21; Ex. 25:15; 35:5) and always indicates a conflict between rational beings, between God and men, between different nations, between men of different opinion. From its use by the sacred authors, we can conclude that 'ebhah means an irreconcilable, and deadly antagonism between the parties involved. Enmity should be read in the singular according to the Hebrew and the Greek, not plural as in the Vulgate.

3. "I will place"—askith—is the Hebrew imperfect of the verb shith, to place, put. The form of the verb can indicate an action of any time, past, present or future. Ceuppens prefers a present signification because the imperfect indicates an action already begun, but not yet perfected; therefore, an action that still endures. Others prefer a future sense, as is found in the LXX. From what follows it will be evident that at least the idea is future. The subject of the verb is God, Yahweh—Elohim.

God decrees that enmity will exist
(A) "between you and the woman"
(B) "between your seed and the seed of the woman"
(C) "between the seed of the woman and the serpent."
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

(A) "Between you": the preposition bhem with personal pronoun. Since God is speaking to the tempter, "you" directly designates the serpent. There is no doubt among Catholics concerning the identification of the serpent. It is Satan.37

Taken in its proper sense, the name 'serpent' can designate an animal in Sacred Scripture. The name can also be used in a metaphorical sense, for in Apoc. 12:9, by the name of serpent, the devil is meant: "And that great dragon was cast down, the ancient serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, who leads astray the whole world . . ." 38

"And the woman," in Hebrew—ha-ishshah—a singular substantive determined by the definite article. The word ishshah is derived from ish—man (Gen. 2.23) and can also signify a wife, especially when it occurs with a possessive suffix (2:25; 3:8, 20, 21; 4:1, etc.). Already in chapter 2, ishshah has a double meaning in 2:23; it indicates women in general, every woman; in vs. 25, the wife of Adam 39

The definite article present in the text has led some to the hurried conclusion that Eve is the woman of the Protoevangelium. Prof. Bonaventure Mariani, who has devoted seventy pages to the study of this text in Virgo Immaculata, remarks that "with regard to the article: ha-ishshah, the more recent authors are much more cautious." 40

The article in Hebrew has many uses.41 The Hebrew article can determine an individual, but it is also used to de-

37 Mariani, art cit, 80
38 Bruce, art cit, 194, Mariani, loc cit, the serpent appears in the context both as an animal among all the other animals (Gen 3, 1 with definite article) and as an intelligent being who thinks and speaks, who tempts to evil and to revolt against God, therefore, an evil spirit who has taken on the appearance of a serpent to approach Eve. Cf Ceuppens, op cit, 3 "The serpent is the devil himself." See Calandra, op cit, 351
39 Mariani, art cit, 82-83
40 Mariani, art cit, 72 "Riguardo all'articolo ha-usah, gli autori più recenti sono molto più cauti"
41 Cf P Jouon, S J., Grammaire de l'Hebreu Biblique (Rome, 1923) 137.
termine a species; thus "man" with article (ha 'ish) can indicate the human race, and "woman" with the article, women in general. Grammatically, therefore, it is possible to interpret "the woman" either in an individual sense (i.e., Eve, who is spoken of in the context) or in a collective sense (women in general).

A third possibility must also be considered. The article can be used to introduce a person or an object not yet named nor known but considered as perfectly determined by the circumstances in which it is presented, as by reason of a prophetic context. Thus the prophet can refer in our case, not to Eve, but to a woman who in the prophecy is present to the spirit of the one talking, i.e., to God. Thus God, in the Protoevangelium, can refer, not to the woman who is spoken of in the immediate context, but to her whom He sees with His divine eye, as present with the victorious Messiah, just as Eve was present with the vanquished Adam.

(B) "Between your seed and her seed":

"Your seed"—zerah—in Hebrew, is first used of the seeds of plants (Gen. 1:12); further, the word "seed" can refer to an individual, as a sin (Gen. 4:25; 21-13), or a collectivity which in our case would be "progeny." Ceuppens adds that zerah also admits a moral sense, namely men who seek the

42 Cf Bea, art cit., 7
43 Marian, loc cit., and 70 Bea, art cit., 7 f., indicates that all the verbs, "I will place," "he will crush," "You will lie in wait," are in the future and even the word "seed"-offspring shows this to be the case. The verse predicts a future victory.
44 Bea, art cit., 8 Cardinal Bea also refers to ls 7, 14
45 Ibid. Cf V G Bertelli, Il senso mariologo pieno e il senso letterale del Protovangelo (Gen 3, 15) dalla "Ineffabilis Deus" al 1948, in Rm 13 (1951) 383 f
46 Marian, art cit., 83 f. Cf L Koehler and W Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, 1 (Grand Rapids, 1951) 268. The word zerah occurs 228 times, in Gen 3, 15 with the meaning of "offspring" of the woman and of the serpent. Zerah is a masculine noun. Cf Clamer, op cit., 139
An Exegetical Approach to Gen 3:15

same end. We will postpone the identification of the phrase until we finish our analysis of the words or the text. The Greek uses sperma—a neuter noun.

Seed of the Woman, in Hebrew is “Her seed.” Zerah would have a physical sense, either as a collective—the post­tenty of the woman or an individual. Again we will postpone our identification of the seed until we have completed our study of the words of the text. We are sure that the en­mity will exist between the serpent and the seed or offspring of the woman.

(C) “He”—Hebrew, hu—The Massoretic text has hu which today is commonly read as a masculine and refers to zeraḥ—the seed. The personal pronoun should be referred to the substantive immediately preceding. In the text, this is zeraḥ which is masculine and the pronoun should be the masculine hu and not the feminine hi. Therefore, the seed of the woman, not the woman, will crush the head of the serpent (15b). The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Peshitta have the masculine. It is true that the Massoretes sometimes pointed the consonants Hu as a feminine (Gen. 3:20) but the textual evidence in Gen. 3:15b is against such a reading.

Further confirmation of a masculine reading of hu in MT

47 Ceuppens, op. cit., 3, e, 9, ls 4, 1 48 Ceuppens thinks the phrase should be understood in this moral sense. The devil has no physical seed, and any collectivity here would refer to the individuals having the same nature as Satan. These individuals—devils or diabolical power—will carry on a conflict with the seed of the woman. For the individual interpretation, cf. Marani, art cit., 85 f., esp. 87–88. According to Marian, Satan and his “seed” constitute a whole, a clan, a family which is not multiplied as time passes through generation, but is already completed, and as a block are drawn up in the field.

49 Marani, loc. cit.


51 Koehler-Baumgartner, op. cit., 226.
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3.15

is had from the masculine form of the verb, *yeshuphka* and likewise from the masculine form of the suffix of the verb, *teshuphen nu*. There is no doubt that the Hebrews understood a masculine pronoun in the text, namely the posterity and not the woman alone.

The translators of the LXX used *autós*, the masculine pronoun, though *sperma-seed* is neuter in the Greek. The Itala faithfully follows the LXX. St. Jerome translated ‘ipsa’ in the Vulgate, but he certainly knew of the Massoretic reading. We will follow the Hebrew text.

“Will crush”—in Hebrew, *yeshuphka*—is the imperfect Kal form of the verb *shuph*, the meaning of which is still uncertain. The verb *shuph* is used in only two other places in the Sacred Scriptures (Job 9:17 and Ps 139:11). The word *shuph* has the meaning of “to crush,” “to snatch,” “to trample,” “to bruise.”

The word appears twice in vs 15b and should be given the same meaning in the same context unless there are reasons to the contrary. The LXX has done this with *teresci* (“he will

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52 Clamer, *op cit*, 139; Ceuppens, *loc cit*


54 Brunec, *op cit*, 199 “Sensus proprius videtur esse ‘conterere, contundere,’ ut nos docent lexica hebraicae linguae. In Job 9, 17 interpres LXX reddit hanc vocem verbo *ektirbo* quod est ‘penitus praeterere, ut contundere, ut res contrita tamquam ad nihilum redugatur et comminuitur’; in Ps. 139 autem reddit eadem vocem verbo *katapetdo* seu ‘pedibus ad terram conculpares’ Ut in alius linguas, ita etiam in lingua hebraica idea conculpandi, contundendi, contendendi aptam metaphorum praebebat ad exprimandam idem perfectae victorie de adversario”

55 Kochler-Baumgartner, *op cit*, 956 from Shaaph, “to pant after, to long for”

56 Marian, *loc cit* “pestare, tritare, calpestare e quando schiaccare.” *Tritare* is translated “to grind, to pound,” “to examine, to consider.” So also the Sam Pentateuch, *percussit* and *percussus*; Aquila, *prostriptei*, Symmachus, *thiupet* with the meaning of “crush.” Cf Hummelauer, *loc cit*
be on the look out for,” “he will watch for”) and tereseis ("you will, etc."). The Vulgate uses two verbs, contrect, insidiaberis, contrary to the other versions.57 In the first part of 15b, shumph is to be taken in its proper sense, and in the second part we must understand it in a metaphorical sense, for a serpent cannot trample the foot of the man.58

"He will crush your head"—head in Hebrew is rosh, i.e. of the serpent, and indicates the destruction and elimination of his diabolical power which was used against humanity. An individual man can kill a serpent, but one human being or all of sinful humanity together cannot eliminate Satan and his diabolical powers 59

"You will lie in wait for his heel"—heel in Hebrew is 'acheb. The Greek has pterna—heel. The enmity will continue until the destruction of the serpent. The seed of the woman will seek to bruise the heel of the woman's offspring. Since this verse is part of the curse of the temptor, we can justly argue to a victory for the woman's seed in this moral conflict. Rosh (head) and 'acheb (heel) are accusatives of limitation.60

One last word should be said on the tenses of the two forms of shump and the conjunction waw. Both forms are im-

57 Clamer, op cit, 140 contrect—"to trample under foot" and insidiaberis —"to lay in ambush, to regard with hostility." To give the Hebrew shumph that double meaning one must appeal to the Assyrian respu—"foot," respu—"to trample under foot, to crush with the foot" and to the parallel passages Job 9, 17 and Ps 139, 11, moreover, we have the agreement of the verb shump with so 'aph which has the two senses of "to look for," "to entrap" and "to tread down, to bruise." Nevertheless, these agreements are not decisive; the affinity with the Assyrian is not certain, etc. Therefore, it seems more prudent, because it conforms more to the Hebrew and the LXX, to maintain the same sense for the same verb in its double use in vs 15. Especially since the origin of the double translation seems to stem from the position of the two adversaries Cf Ceuppens, op cit, 142-146, who discusses the various opinions.

55 Bea, art cit, 4, note 6
56 Mariam, art cit, 89
56 Jouon, op cit, No 126g
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

perfect Kal and the waw has been separated from the second form, thus avoiding a wayyiktol form of the verb.\footnote{ibid, No 118ef Cf Brunec, op cit, 200} In this way, the idea of a temporal succession of actions is avoided and the waw will indicate a relation of simultaneity. "He will crush you on the head when you will seek to bruise him on the heel."\footnote{Brunec, loc. cit, has discussed the various uses of the particle waw On p 215, he translates 15b "Iposum percutiet (victoriosae) ibi caput quando (in momento quo) tu conaberis percutere (victoriosae) et calcaneum"}

Interpretation

His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical \textit{Humani generis}, repeats the position of the Church which was contained in the letter of the Biblical Commission to the Archbishop of Paris mentioned above\footnote{See note 19.} He says: "This letter clearly points out that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, although properly speaking not conforming to the historical method used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense, which, however, must be further studied and determined by exegetes; the same chapters (the Letter points out), in simple and metaphorical language adapted to the mentality of a people but little cultured both state the principal truths which are fundamental for our salvation and also give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the chosen people."\footnote{Pope Pius XII, \textit{Humani generis}, in \textit{EB} No 618; English tr. from Paulist Press (New York, 1950) 20}

Keeping this directive of the Holy Father in mind, let us now try to examine the context in which we find the Protovangelium. Dom Charlier writes concerning the literary form to be found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

"Here we have a form which is quite unique and found nowhere else in the Bible. Elements of history, legend, parable and apocalypse are all combined, but it can be called neither strict history nor pure legend. Still less is it myth. The ancient Semitic conception of the creation of the world, built up on a nucleus of real happenings, has here been stylized, enriched and purified from the lees of polytheism. Into this framework have been woven the threads of the great religious themes—the creation, man, the fall, sin, and the promise of redemption. It would be wrong to interpret these chapters as symbols, without foundation in fact. It would be just as wrong to see in them a scientific account of the pre-history of man. They are a graphic and concrete presentation of the beginnings of the human drama and of the plans of a merciful God." 

Modern Catholic critics attribute chapters II and III to the inspired writer who wrote down a tradition existing among the Hebrews. This writer shows a preference for the divine name—Yahweh—which was given to Moses, and his composition is called the Yahwistic tradition. Father Clamer dates the Yahwistic composition in the first half of the tenth century, B.C. Among the qualities of the J tradition that are obvious to the reader are: the charm that flows from the text, the fact of the brilliance, the variety and the richness of the images, qualities which are particularly evident in the narratives of Genesis, for instance, the terrestrial paradise, the fall of our first parents, the story of Sodom and Gomorrha, of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca.

67 De Vaux, loc cit. Vawter, loc cit. "One of them (the groups), called 'J' by the critics because of its affection for the ancient Hebrew proper name of God, Jahweh, is more 'primitive' than the others in its theology..." Cf also Clamer, op cit., 83, 33-39.
68 Clamer, op cit., 38.
69 Clamer, op cit., 35.
From the pen of the Yahwist come distinguishing traits of living persons. The characters in his account stand out in relief. To the ancient narratives which he has collected to pass on to us, he has been able to impart a poetical spirit. This poetical inspiration, says Father Clamer, together with the religious spirit (souffle religieux) makes his work a truly national epic, dominated by the majesty and the power of the Yahweh.

So the writer of the J tradition could be classified as a narrator rather than as an historian, because of the character of his account, consisting, as it does, of a series of tableaux and episodes, which have been placed more side by side than connected by a logical or chronological literary bond. Nevertheless, one will not be able to question his general views, his entire plan, nor fail to recognize the bond which he establishes between the reported facts, by connecting closely the effects with their causes. Thus we see that his preoccupation to answer the grave problems which the existence of evil poses, in a world, however, which was created good by God, is expressed in the responses which he gives to questions of what is the reason for death in the world, for the sorrows of women, the difficult work of men, the dispersion and mutual lack of understanding among nations.

The Yahwist sees the problem of evil and the promise of redemption. Sin has caused suffering, death, concupiscence and discord. He tells us the story of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the sons of Noe; he relates the crimes of Sodom, of Lot and his daughters, the incest of Ruben, the crimes of the sons of Jacob. But the sacred writer balances these repeated falls into sin with repeated assurances of redemption by God.

10 Clamer, loc cit.
11 Clamer, loc cit. See on the context what was said above, p. 13, note 30. Cf. also Rigaux, art. cit., 331 f
12 Rigaux, art. cit., 332.
Sin and redemption, interwoven into the history, surely constitute the great preoccupation of the one who wrote Gen. II and III.

In the mind of the sacred writer, therefore, what can we say is the meaning of the Protoevangelium, the first good news? Let us recall once again that we have deliberately restricted our approach to the text of Genesis, because of the papers that will follow concerning Patristic Tradition and the Magisterium in their use of Gen. 3:15. Further, since most authors in interpreting the text appeal to these authorities—and rightly so—it seems best not to attempt to give an exhaustive bibliography on the subject. Such bibliography can be found in the works and articles cited.

In the mind of the Yahwist writer does Gen. 3:15 offer a promise of redemption? Can we speak of the messianism of Gen. 3:15? This is very difficult to determine. Father Heinisch writes: “Prophecies which concern man’s redemption are called Messianic even when they do not treat directly of a personal Saviour; for it is sufficient if they have some relationship to the work which the Redeemer would accomplish.”

We have seen that the sacred writer was concerned with the problem of evil. He was looking for answers. On the second and third chapters of Genesis, P. Rigaux writes:

“In the past twenty years Catholic exegesis has made real progress in the interpretation of these chapters. It realizes that the reports of the sacred writer have a historical value only in the degree that the history is the bearer of a religious doctrine. It admits that the religious teaching circumscribed by certain great truths, has been clad in the symbols of sacred trees, the rib of Adam, the splendid garden and the serpent. It has emphasized that the Yahwist writer did not write the histories and

73 P. Heinisch, Christ in Prophecy (tr by Wm. G. Heldt, O.S.B.) (St Paul, Minnesota, 1956) 17.
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

report the oral traditions for the mere delight of writing nor to amuse a primitive people. The chapters offer clear solutions to the problems which torment men.”

All that God had created was good. Through the temptation of the devil, sin entered in the world. The harmony that existed between Creator and creature was disturbed. The peaceful existence in Paradise—men and women being equals, animals being subject to man, food being provided in abundance—ceased to exist. Only in the Messianic era would it reappear (Is. 11:6f.).

Thus it was that God punished Satan by cursing him. The man and the woman are not cursed. In Gen. 3:15, we have part of the punishment of the serpent. As we have seen, the serpent is the devil. God punishes the devil by placing enmity between the devil and the woman, between his seed and her seed. Her seed will ultimately crush the serpent’s head.

The enmity will last until the destruction of one party. This is the usual meaning of the term in Sacred Scripture. The enmity will be supernatural because it (a) has been placed there directly by God; (b) has for its object the devil; and (c) should inflict on the devil the greatest punishment by his complete destruction.

There is symbolism in the sacred author’s use of a serpent. But should it be restricted to a symbol associated solely with male and female fertility duties? Authors are not agreed. McKenzie argues that “the serpent appears in other forms in

74 Rigaux, art. cit., 335. English tr. from ThD 6 (1958) 28
75 McKenzie, op cit., 559. “The narrative treats woman as an equal and a partner of man. This feature does not appear in any ancient Near Eastern story.”
76 See above, note 33
77 Mariani, op cit., 77-80, 91
78 McKenzie, op cit., 563 ff and note 30
An Exegetical Approach to Gen. 3:15

the Bible ... In Isa. 27:1, Job 25:13, the serpent is a monstrous adversary of Yahweh." 79 The symbolism of the passage, therefore, should be more general. The Yahwist writer would place the devil and sin in general at the root of all evil. 80 When the seed of the woman conquers the devil, then the diabolical power will come to an end.

The individual serpent is opposed to the seed of the woman in the final conflict. Does that mean that the seed of the serpent will not be overcome? The answer must be negative. The "serpent" and the "seed of the serpent" indicate the same thing under a different aspect. 81 The term "seed" is present

79 McKenzie, loc cit In his discussion of the threefold curse, to serpent-woman-man, he remarks "Perhaps, therefore, the curse, like the serpent itself, should be understood more broadly, with sexual sin in the foreground, but with sin in the general sense as the proper term of the symbol . . .

"In no theory has an entirely satisfactory symbolism been found for the curse of the serpent. The mistake perhaps lies in searching for too recondite a significance. Symbolism which is not fairly obvious loses its point . . . The serpent itself suggests, in the popular mind, a degraded, stealthy, malicious being, and no more is necessary to understand the terms of the curse."

80 Rigaux, art cit, 336 See Rigaux, The Woman and Her Seed in Genesis 3 14-15, in ThD 6 (1958) 28 "Evil entered into the world by the intervention of a perverse but intelligent being, an enemy of God and of man, a culpable being who would be the first to be punished.

"We are not dealing here with a serpent, not with a simple reptile, not with some animal of fable. Nor are we dealing with an abstraction or a symbol representing sensible pleasure as opposed to reason, such as the world turning man from God or the sex appetite. For the disordered appetite of the couple carried them beyond the world and beyond themselves to be like to God. And the serpent was not the symbol of that likeness, but its instigator. He influenced them, but not to make them desire himself. Adam and Eve sinned by love not of the serpent, but of the good which he promised. He is, therefore, a demoniac being.

"Hence to be eschatological and messianic, our text has to be situated in the perspective of the battle between God and the devil, in the perspective of the relations between God and man, before and after the Fall."

in the text referring to the serpent for a literary reason only, because of parallelism with the "seed of the woman." As is evident, the devil has no body, and cannot have physical offspring. Human beings are rather the prey of Satan than his offspring.

It is important to determine, as far as we can, who is meant by the "seed of the woman." As we have seen, the word *serah* (seed) can have an individual or a collective meaning. The individual sense seems to be meant for the following reasons:

(A) At the time that the sacred writer penned the curse of the serpent in *Gen.* 3:14-15, about the middle of the 10th century B.C., there had already been born in Israel a messianic hope. The Yahwist himself reports these facts to his readers. To the Patriarchs God not only promised aid and prosperity, but to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God gives a blessing in which all nations share (*Gen.* 12:1-3; 24:7; 28:13-14). In the blessing of Jacob to Juda (*Gen.* 49:10) and the oracle of Balaam (*Num.* 24:17) we find a reference to and a promise of a future ruler.

P. Rigaux, therefore, argues that we should not isolate the promises of the future in the Protoevangelium from these promises and hopes for a Messias. But the hope of the Protoevangelium is not like all the others. A society attributes a unique importance to its beginnings. There it finds its reason for existence and its glory. Only in *Gen.* II-III has Sacred Scripture touched on the source of the worldwide and human problem before coming to the philosophical problems treated in the Book of Wisdom. It has tackled the problem clearly and definitively. Satan will rule in the world. On the other

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82 See above, note 47
83 See note 68 The Israelites were governed by a monarchy. The king took the place of Yahweh for the people
84 Rigaux, art. cit., 340 ff
hand, God will rule, as in paradise, only through a human representative. The faith of Israel and the Sacred Writer, therefore, constitute a backdrop against which the Protoevangelium should be interpreted. 85

(B) If we take the “seed of the woman” in a collective meaning, we upset the balance in the final battle between the “woman’s seed” and the individual serpent. If we try to refer the “seed of the woman” to the human race, which gains a victory over the devil or diabolical powers, we find that this is contrary to the mind of the inspired Yahwist. 86 The sacred writer, as we saw above, is concerned with the problem of evil. For him, the human race has been corrupted by the devil. Adam and Eve have sinned, turning away from God. The story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Noe, Sodom, etc., show his attitude toward the human race and argue against a collective sense. 87

Could part of the nation be the offspring of the woman? As Father Rigaux points out, the Yahwist does not think with our individualist mentality. He judges the world to be bad. For him everything happens in the affairs of the people through the ruler of this chosen people, directed by the law and the king. Why then should the final victory escape from this law of the history of the time? Evil will disappear only through the removal of Satan, that is to say, after the victory of the Messias, the offspring of the woman. 88
Finally, we must recognize that the LXX confirms an individual meaning. The text is certain. The word *autós* in the clause “he will crush you on the head,” agrees with the individual, masculine interpretation. As noted above, “seed” in the Greek is a neuter noun, *sperma*. So the LXX translator has given us an individual, not a collective, interpretation.

For these reasons, we can conclude that the sacred writer has intended the seed of the woman to be understood in an individual meaning. The final word to be identified is “the woman.”

Who is “the woman” in Gen. 3:15? Roschini, Mariani, and Rigaux distinguish five groups of authors, each of which has a different identification for “the woman.” These opinions range from an identification which sees Eve alone, or understands it of all womanhood, or identifies Eve as a type of Mary the Mother of the Messias, to an identification that understands “the woman” as Mary in a literal sense with the exclusion of Eve, or Mary in a literal fuller sense with women in general as a basis.

Space does not permit a review of all the opinions which can be found in the articles cited. The typical sense, the literal sense and the literal-fuller sense are all true senses of Scripture. If we can show that Mary, the Mother of the Messias, is included in the Protoevangelium in any of the three senses,

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89 Mariani, *art cit.*, 41-60
90 Rigaux, *art cit.*, 343, also 321-323
91 J Coppens, *La Mère du Sauveur à la lumière de la théologie vététostreamante*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 103
92 R C Fuller, *The Interpretation of Holy Scripture*, in *CCHS* 54-57
An Exegetical Approach to Gen 3:15

then we know that the Divine Author, the Holy Spirit, intended her to be included in the first Good Tidings.

First of all, we should state a fact that is evident to all, namely that the term ishshah—woman—in Gen. II-III does not always refer to the wife of Adam. In fact in Gen 2:24, the word is used to refer to any woman: “For this reason a man leaves his father and mother, and clings to his wife. . . .” The term “woman” even in the immediate context, therefore, can be a common name. 94

Secondly, Gen. 3:15 is an oracle of Yahweh and predicts a Messianic and eschatological victory over the devil. 95 The setting of the victory is in the future. The idea of “offspring” connotes a future event. There is no indication that Eve or Adam were even present when the devil was judged and sentenced. Why should the devil have remained in the garden after having tempted our first parents to fall into sin?

Eve as the woman is excluded from Gen. 3:15 by the meaning of the “enmity” which God places between the devil and the woman. It was a total and perpetual enmity which hardly fits the woman—Eve. Scripture says of her: “In woman was sin’s beginning, and because of her we all die” (Ecclus. 25:23; 2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Tim. 2:14). The only woman the world has ever known who qualifies for such an enmity with the devil is the Immaculate Mother of the Messias. Can we suppose that Eve, even though repentant for the original sin, never again yielded to temptation? Hardly. 96 “The type of enmity predicted in Gen. 3.15 is perhaps the strongest reason for rejecting the view that Eve, here, is a type of Mary. 97

94 Manani, art cit., 70
95 F. X. Pierce, S.J., The Protoevangelium, in CBQ 13 (1951) 239-240
Rigaux, art cit., 146, and ThD 6 (1958) 30
96 May, Mary in the Old Testament, in Mariology (ed J B Carol, OFM) 1 (Milwaukee, 1954) 59 Father May refers to Father Pierce, art. cit., 251, who he says, “quite correctly ridicules the idea” (note 20)
97 May, loc cit.
For this same reason, a series of women or all womanhood would be excluded from the text. Just as the first woman never had a complete enmity with regard to the devil, so other women, Mary alone excepted, were sometimes subject to his power.

The woman of Gen. 3:15 is associated in the mind of the divine Author and the inspired author with the seed of the woman who gains a complete and final victory over the devil. The victory is shown by the position of the two adversaries. The serpent is pictured in the state of defense: he can attack only the heel which is already raised to crush him.

Father Rigaux shows that in the writings of the Yahwist, women have been associated in the history of the chosen people in the work of salvation and the redemption of men. Is it not, he asks, a preparation for the birth in Israel of the hope that will occur in the time of the prophets? If the Messiah is to be born of the race of woman, he will have a mother, and is it surprising that the mother is united to the son in Is 7:14 and Mich. 5:1-20?

The prophecy is veiled, but the association is true. The woman and her seed have a relationship of mother and son. Under the general title of woman, the sacred writer indicated the source of God’s victory over the devil and sin. Later
revelation will show that Jesus Christ achieved this victory. Thus Father Hauret writes:

"In the vast perspective of the divine plan, later stages teach us the meaning and orientation of the earlier ones; more recent oracles clarify and complete the older ones. It is thus that God, the author of the whole of the Scriptures, explains His own words and gives us their true meaning. On the other hand, a prophecy proposed in vague and obscure terms is made luminous by comparison with the event which is its fulfillment. "Theological" exegesis thus enriches historico-philological exegesis.

"We know with certainty that one born of a woman (Gal. 4:4) gained a decisive victory over the devil and so avenged the defeat in the garden of Eden. In Jesus the ancient prophecy was splendidly fulfilled. He was the living antithesis of the devil (John 14:30), and His mission in life was to dispossess Satan of the Kingdom usurped by him. 'To this end the Son of God appeared that He might destroy the works of the devil' (1 John 3:8). The formidable duel in which Christ was engaged with the age-old enemy of mankind came to an end with the crushing of the serpent. 'Now,' said the Saviour on the eve of His death, 'now will the prince of the world be cast out' (John 12:31). All during Jesus' public ministry the devil pursued Him, stirring up persecutions against Him raising doubts as to His intentions. Christ generously endured all these sufferings and finally offered His life to His heavenly Father in expiation for the sins of the human race. How often was His heel not bruised!''

The Gospels (Luke 1.26; 2:34 f; John 19:26 f.) bring out the role of the Virgin Mary and her close relationship with her Son, Christ the Redeemer. "The Virgin was associated with her Son in His enmity, in His struggles, and in His victory."

Further study on the fulfillment of the First-gospel and its relationship to St John's Apocalypse will furnish additional

102 Hauret, op cit, 220-221
103 Hauret, op cit, 226
light on the theological significance of the message contained in God's first promise of a Redeemer. Let it suffice here to point out that such work is being done with fruitful results.

Conclusion

From our examination of Gen. 3:15, we can conclude that:
1. The "enmity" placed by God between the devil and the woman with her offspring was a complete and perpetual enmity;
2. The "serpent" is the devil and the seed of the serpent refers to the same thing, the devil or diabolical power;
3. The "seed" of the woman should be taken in an individual sense and refers to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who achieves complete victory over the devil, in the literal sense;
4. "The woman" (Eve would be excluded from the prophet's view) designates, in the literal sense, the only woman who holds a relationship to Jesus Christ, as Mother to Son. The woman of the First-gospel is, therefore, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

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