

VOLUME TWO: KNOWING WOMAN:  
THE BIBLE AND WOMAN

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## PREFACE

Without the base laid in the first volume, the reader will find this volume tottering, unintelligible, from the first. It's stability in the reader's understanding depends on all the careful ground work found there. As in that book we use "Man, man and woman, or Man, male and female." A capital M is for mankind, followed by the sexes. Bypassing use of inclusive language for clarity, Man takes the pronoun "him."

In the first volume of this series we delved into a scriptural theology of Man, male and female. This led us to consider woman as she was created perfectly. Then on to her sadly fallen life under the Law. In following God's action to once more establish Man, man and woman, fully forgiven, back in his high place, we must continue our exploration of Scripture. The Bible records the historical progress of the salvation plan of God, and the reception, or often the rejection of it on Man's part.

We leave the two Genesis myths upon which we have relied, moving on through the Bible to ponder the steps God has taken over the centuries to effect this great salvation on our behalf culminating in the woman Mary and her Son, Jesus Christ.

The Biblical texts, from Genesis onwards, constantly enable us to discover the ground in which the truth about man is rooted, the solid and inviolable ground amid the many changes of human existence. This truth also has to do with the history of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

In the history of salvation how will the Authority Problem that is peculiarly Man's be solved? Now divorced from the holy marital union of the Original Order, growing in aversion to submission of will to God's will, each day adjusting more to the Adversary's evil intent, how will Man, man and woman, be reached? When he is reached, how can the Good God preserve the integrity of Man's free will while demanding repentance? How may God woo Man, motivating his will away from Satan's deceits and easy comforts, to what is hard for him to accept and grasp?

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., *Mulieris*, 111.7. (Op cit references are to references in Book I)

When God judged Eve's disobedience, he also gave her a promise. Though Satan had used woman to bring the Original Order to ruin, necessitating the Fallen Order, she by being God's instrument of restoration is promised to balance out the universal scale. Through woman will come the one who will crush the Evil One. For those who believe in him, he will regain what was lost and bring a state of union that will be eternal, beginning an earthly Redeemed Order. Woman will be the appropriate vehicle, for just as she manifests the Second Person's divine principle of reception/submission making her the only logical place for Satan to instigate his rebellion, so she provides the logical beginning point for God's action of reinstatement. Upon her understanding and acceptance of her inherent signification in imaging the Second Person of the Trinity, restoration depends. Eve's "no" to her dependent, obedient stance must be reversed by a woman whose "yes" thoroughly accepts this position.

God will mission the Second Person to be Redeemer; to fulfill His mission He will wed Himself to human flesh in woman's womb. To be consistent to the sign of sexuality (God, the eternal Initiator, to Man, the eternal Receiver) the Redeemer necessarily will carry the sign of authority which within the realm of human sexuality is maleness. In order for Man to accept the Savior as Model of what God created him to be, this man will come bearing all Man's attributes without sin.<sup>2</sup>

For this to happen, God prepares a second sinless virgin - one woman whose femininity is whole and holy, perfectly mirroring the feminine principle she was created to image. To be prepared to act with an informed will, this woman will know the historic Plan of God revealed to her people. Yet, her faith in and obedience to God will be tested. Will she freely say the essential "yes?" There looms the "no" response of the other free virgin, Eve, who also was without original sin. To become the perfect matrix for the Savior, God awaits her act of faith both for conception of the baby, and for his flawless human development into manhood.

For Mary, as for Abraham, faith is trust in, and obedience to, God, even when he leads her through darkness. It is a letting go, a releasing, a handing over of oneself to the truth, to God. Faith, in the luminous darkness of God's inscrutable ways, is thus a conformation to him.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the rule of Satan on this earth, and odds now stacked in his favor, this woman has God's protection by special graces, though this cannot include any abnormal intrusion upon

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<sup>2</sup> These theological statements are fully substantiated in Volume I

<sup>3</sup> Ratzinger, *The Sign of Woman, Mary the Church at the Source*, (Ignatius 2002), p.49

her free will. From her conception, she will have alleviation of the inherited flawed human nature. She comes unto earth's scene as integral as Eve. But will she cling to that integrity any more successfully than had the other perfect woman? If she perseveres in it, even under inevitable pressures of her earthly experience, she will need to make a further step, the acceptance of the Divine Plan. This, despite the difficulty and personal suffering perceived to be its essence. She is a adolescent, unmarried virgin.

This woman, restored to pure, feminine self-giving, will be tested to the utmost. Being fully human, with human will and understanding, she must choose to live out yielded love in the most bitter of worldly circumstances (Revelations 12). For this task God gives her a wonderful head-start, but the rest is up to her. Be sure, Satan will test her. Will she turn and expectantly wait for and trust in God, or somehow distracted, will she succumb to the same temptations as Eve? Even for her, the supernatural gifts and preternatural gifts of the Original Order are held in abeyance for the eternal life in heaven. Though "full of grace" she also will grow in grace. The gifts God intends for her won't be more than he ultimately will offer to all those who believe - healing from original sin and complete freedom from it, relief from Satan's jurisdiction, restoration to wholeness and holiness, and open-ended growth in grace until the fullness of Perfection.

In God's prophetic word to Eve, only woman's seed, not man's, will result in the Redeemer. This baby to be born will be God's only Son. Mankind, bearing the feminine principle in the once triune unity of God and Mankind ( this statement is undecipherable without volume one, page 99), will thus provide the female gamete; God, bearing the masculine principle<sup>4</sup> will provide the male gamete, not through any sexuality on the part of God, but through the creative action of the Holy Spirit. The child to be born will be called:

Wondertul Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be *no end to the increase of his government.*<sup>5</sup>

Through this male child God's government, the law of love, will be reinstated securely on earth for the governance of those people who are to be saved.

Even as Eve and Adam are turned out of the garden of Eden, woman is the key to this continuum. Holding constant, she will consistently bring the principles lying at the heart of the Trinity to Man's understanding. In her acceptance of God's plan, echoing ideally the principle of

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<sup>4</sup> carefully explained in volume one.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 9:6 italics added

response and obedience at the heart of the Trinity, she will once more epitomize perfect Man in relation to God.

Just as Abraham's faith was the beginning of the Old Covenant,  
Mary's faith, enacted in the scene of the Annunciation, is the  
inauguration of the new.<sup>6</sup>

To prepare the "fullness of time"<sup>7</sup> when the virgin Mary faces the angel Gabriel to freely and willingly inaugurate the new, God reached into time some eighteen hundred years earlier to choose a man and his family. Abram, despite the upside-down culture from which he came, had the essential core - willingness to listen to God and believe him. From Abram God forms a people to be progenitors of this chosen woman and her seed. Man was worthy of extinction, but through the faith first of Noah, and later of Noah's descendent, Abraham, he will be offered a second chance for holy life.

This Semitic family, a people sharing the culture of other Semites, like all humans was primitively fallen away from the ways of God. They stood in need of very physical, elementary lessons. Based on their intimate experience of male and female, God had just such a physical lesson prepared. From sexuality, God the Teacher provided in sequence stepping stones, from the most elemental understandings to the most sublime. Not artificially contrived, these steps had been laid as consistent expression of divine principle by which creation was made. Satanic rule could not erase them, though he, recognizing their potential to undo him, could raise a smoke-screen between these principles and immediate human perception.

Satan had not created the creatures he intended to master; he had stolen their allegiance and perverted their wills, but except in isolated cases, he could not erase from their natures the mark of him to whom they really belonged. He had not reckoned on God's action to levy the Law over his newly acquired realm<sup>8</sup>. Simply as his Creator, God had impressed the moral rule on Man's conscience; Satan's own jurisdiction would always be limited by that serious handicap. He would never be the complete ruler he lusted to be. Man's spirit has that indelible affinity to him who will restore the Holy Spirit.

The pressure of the Law on Man's conscience kept a modicum of order within which the purposeful work of redemption had a chance. Despite her unwillingness, the Law, most imperfectly but all over the world in every time and clime, forced woman to be in position

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 4:4-5

<sup>8</sup> see book one, section two, chapter six

where the seed of Man would continue. For that reason Salvation History was possible, and at the same time, the eternal sign of the feminine is kept before Man's eyes. In all cases the obedience or submission of the one, even when unwilling, would be the means of a coming salvation for many.

## CHAPTER I THE SEXUAL IMAGERY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

If the theological interpretation of Salvation History and of woman's place in it, proposed in the first volume of this study, is credible, Scripture should be replete with sexual analogies that hold true on every level, physical and metaphysical. If the principles of life and relations within the Trinity are expressed from the transcendent spiritual to the elemental physical by masculine and feminine understanding, then the word of God will have a primary expression, a basic expression that is sexual, rooted in male and female and their intimate, marital relationship.

The most consistent and recurring, the most pervasive analogy of God and Man's relationship, expressed directly and presumed in oblique reference in Holy Scripture, is the sexual relationship of man and woman. Biblical faith esteems this physical reality for bearing, despite all the fallen injury to its purity, the imprint of God truer to the love God has for his creation than any other, and of the union he wills Man to enjoy forever with himself. Such is the only image available for describing the bliss of eternal oneness of God and Man in the Original Order before the Fall and meant for full experience in the Redeemed Order. In our time, the Theology of the Body of John Paul II is rediscovering the reality and meaning of this sexual analogy.

To interpret the sense of this analogy, one is called to remember the facets of the biological sexual experience, ignoring common modern misconceptions like - "to assume female passivity" as normal in personality or "sexual expression is substituting aberration for healthy assertion . . ." <sup>1</sup> Such rubbish is part of daily endurance.

Scriptural assertions follow observable human realities - a woman is *wooed* and *won*, she *surrenders* to her lover, and after *covenanting* with him, bodily *receives* him. In the fullness of that moment of union. the past is healed, the future is held in the now, only the present exists. Each loses the isolation of his individuality in the experience of the other. In receiving the man, woman's contact is internal. Such contact brings latent potency to fruition. In the self-gift of happy yielding, the woman gives the man pleasure, and in his pleasure she experiences pleasure. They give each other, in Saint John Paul II's words, "the sincere gift of self." As surprising as it may seem, this is the covenantal reality that lies embedded in Holy Eucharist.

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<sup>1</sup> Milman and Goldman, op.cit., p.84 American Academy of Psychoanalysis.

Sexual relationship is a positive image extending beyond the physical to describe many facets of spiritual experience: faithful Israel who is the spouse of God; a believer who receives Christ and the Spirit; and the Church who is the ultimate Bride of Christ.

A new principle of order is introduced in the universe. Its created image is marital, in that the New Creation in the image of God is precisely the marital union of Christ and his church. . . In particular, the principle refutes the pagan conviction that order is necessarily the suppression of freedom by the submission to a monadic authority principle.<sup>2</sup>

Not a monadic authority principle that demands mere subjection of the other, the positive image of the masculine agent is given to the Lord, to Christ Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit. The positive image of masculinity is necessarily given to the three Persons of Godhead that they freely enter into marital union with the Beloved who is given, amazingly, free equality.<sup>3</sup>

### Covenant

The vehicle God uses to commit Man to himself, beyond the indelible Law which does not expect free commitment, is *covenant*. Reaching down to touch fallen Man and bring him back, the Lord, from the first, prepares him *to covenant* with him. The covenants with the Lord are a series of events designed to prepare Man for salvation - reunion with God; they are taken over wholly and fulfilled in the Mass of the New Covenant.

The covenant is free: it is not imposed by a despotically omnipotent divine will and has no authoritarian content. The categories of law must be utterly transformed if they are to deal with it.

The Mass is the sacramental mediation of the New Covenant, where Christ mediates between the trinitarian freedom of God and human freedom. This freedom. . . combines marital freedom and marital love. *Perhaps no element of the Christian revelation has been more difficult to grasp than this, the transformation of the notions of freedom, of authority and of love in the New Covenant.* Three centuries of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment rationalism have led us to think of divine freedom as brute omnipotence, unqualified power. This presents the impossible task of explaining how such a freedom can be real without annulling our own.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., Carter Pastoral, 1.4.

<sup>3</sup> This concept was explored thoroughly in volume one of this series.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 111.14. (italics added)

These high ideals, these principles of freedom, 1. true authority without authoritarianism, 2. response and authority as equals - are based, each one, in the self-giving of the Persons of the Trinity. *Covenant* is thus the heart of the argument for the meaning and role of woman in her relationship to man *in marriage*. Uniquely found in the revealed religion of Judaism, these covenants are most sacred contracts sealed in blood, the sign of God-given life, by which both parties are irrevocably sworn to fidelity to each other.

The three persons of the Trinity have exhaustively personal relationship with one another. And the idea of *exhaustive personal relationship* is the idea of covenant.<sup>5</sup>

Such exhaustive personal relationship is the meaning of the marriage contract when consummated.

*covenant and covenantal* . . . . In its original form the pact described the relationship between Jahweh and his chosen people Israel "I will be your God and you will be my people." This living relationship is perfected in the gift of the Son designed and carried out in love with the Christian people of the new alliance. Covenant as we will see, says much more than contract. It is loving, it is marital.<sup>6</sup>

God promises on his part to provide bountifully for the needs of his people if they on their part listen to him and are faithful to his word.

Hear, therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them (the commandments); that it may go well with you and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.<sup>7</sup>

On Israel's part, any lapse toward idolatry, the acceptance of false gods, will be understood to be adultery. These two concepts in Scripture are so close they merge into each other. A similar understanding is engraved on the heart of man and woman, which is why adultery is the sin that lies most heavily upon the conscience. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse violates a sacred trust and promise.

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<sup>5</sup> Schaff Herzog, Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, "Covenant" (Grand Rapids 1955) p. 306 italics added

<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit., Carter Pastoral, 1.1.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 6:3 parenthesis added

For this reason it is precisely idolatry which can be described as the sin of sins from which all other sins derive. For in Israel's choice of other gods besides the Lord, the Lord himself is precisely supplanted. . From early times onwards, we find sin regarded as adultery. The marriage between people and God is broken. The marriage of Hosea . . . God loves his people as a wife, with a perfect and boundless love. Every time she is unfaithful . . . he follows her to induce her to convert her ways and return home. . . .with all the urgency of a husband who cannot go on living without her. Thus the very punishment inflicted upon sinners by God can be regarded as an expression of his love for them. For if he did not love them, then he would not chastise them in order to induce them to convert their ways.<sup>8</sup>

If one cannot be faithful to the spouse given by God in perpetual union, then one is not faithful to God. Just as the worship of a false god is a violation of love and trust, so is unfaithfulness to the sacred bond of man and wife. Faithfulness in marriage is essential to the Divine plan because it mirrors God's faithfulness to his people. In the heart of Man the two breakings of trust seem to be inseparable. Worshipping an idol in place of the one true God, giving love to a lover not one's own spouse; idolatry, adultery, in both God is not loved.

So watch yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you, for the Lord your God is devouring fire, a jealous God.<sup>9</sup>

When Israel forgets her marriage bond with God and turns after others, the Lord's word describes feelings of love's betrayal:

For long ago you broke our yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, "I will not serve!" Yea, upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down a harlot. . . .You said, "It is hopeless, for I have loved strangers, and after them I will go."<sup>10</sup>

For his beloved, who has gone astray from their once perfect union and who has forsaken and broken her marriage agreement, God grieves.

"Israel has said to the trees, 'You are my father,' to a stone, 'You gave me birth,' in her idolatry. For they have turned their back on me and not their face. But in the time of trouble they say, "Arise and save us!"

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<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology, p.849

<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 2:23

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 2:20-21,27

But where are the gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you in your time of trouble.<sup>11</sup>

### Adultery: Idolatry

Through the centuries, Israel keeps her covenant with the Lord, her spousal relationship to him, more in neglect than observance. From prophet to prophet, the Old Testament carries the ache of God's rejection and his longing for her return. She is betrayed by an illusion of freedom, even as she encounters more and more the miseries and barrenness of her adultery/idolatry.

"Why then, do my people say, 'We are free, we will come no more to thee?' Can a maiden forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number . . . You have played the harlot with many lovers; and would you return to me? says the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

Again and again God forgives, accepting the return of his foolish, fickle bride.

For you Maker is your Husband, the Lord of Hosts his name, and the holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called . . . For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.<sup>13</sup>

Overlooking and forgiving all the disgraceful causes of her barrenness, God makes promises that encourage her to hope for fruitfulness in the future. This she understands to be *the* fruit promised so long ago - the Redeemer.

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.<sup>14</sup>

### Fruitfulness

Fruitfulness shall be *the sign* of Israel's submission and fidelity to her Husband, her Maker. It cannot be that she will be fruitful when she is parted from him, or when hardness of heart causes her to refuse him. Either a blessing on her faithful love, or a curse upon her profligate ways

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<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 2:31 -32

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 2:31 -32, 3:1

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 54:5

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 54:1

will be discernible by her fruits or lack of them. This truth is confirmed again by Jesus who gives only one criterion for knowing those who are truly his;

By their fruits you shall know them. Are grapes gathered from thorns,  
or figs from thistles?<sup>15</sup>

“By their fruits you will know them” is the one way we know Mary to be the closest of all human beings to God.

Blessed is the fruit of your womb. . .<sup>16</sup>

At the other extreme, Man without God is dried up, miscarrying in all his hopes and dreams. Ephraim (the chief tribe of the Northern Kingdom), another name used for God’s people, hears God speak against that people, his own Beloved. Her perversity of will and fickle love are like that of a prostitute. When God asks him to marry the village cult prostitute, the prophet Hosea enacts with his life the whole sad story.

The prophet suffers what God suffers in order to speak from the heart to his people. Hosea’s prophecy is full of tears, the heartbreak of the lover for his one true love. She refuses him in order to lie with the Baal-gods in harlotry.

I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly  
to her. And in that day, says the Lord you will call me, My husband,  
and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’<sup>17</sup>

The ugly result of Israel’s not consorting with her Husband but with Baal is that she is left fruitless.

Ephraim’s glory shall fly away like a bird. No birth, no pregnancy, no  
conception! Even if they bring up children I will bereave them till none  
is left.<sup>18</sup>

The rejected prophet of the Lord goes on to describe the fictitious rewards of false lovers who are wrongly praised for gifts that only God provides. His whole prophecy is based on the prior understanding of the masculine/ feminine relationship of God to his people.

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 7:16-17

<sup>16</sup> Luke 1:42

<sup>17</sup> Hosea 2:14-16

<sup>18</sup> Hosea 9:10,11,12

And she did not know it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil, and who lavished upon her the silver and gold which they used for Baal.<sup>19</sup>

It is within his power to put an end to it all, to no longer protect her; but in compassion for her, he relents from threatened revenge, and continues to woo her.

(a quote from Is 54:4-8, 10.. .) in this text . . .expression of God's love is "human" but the love itself is divine. Since it is God's love, its spousal character is properly divine, even though it is expressed by the analogy of a man's love for a woman. The woman-bride is Israel, God's Chosen People, and this choice originates exclusively in God's gratuitous love. It is precisely this love which explains the Covenant, a Covenant often presented as a marriage covenant which God always renews with his Chosen People. On the part of God, the Covenant is a lasting "commitment"; he remains faithful to his spousal love even if the bride often shows herself to be unfaithful.<sup>20</sup>

### Wooing to Repentance

The Lord recalls when, after the Exodus, the great Covenant was made with his people in the deserts of Sinai. It was his wedding day. That day Israel had no one but him. He will remove her from the seductive habitations; he will take her back to the desert and there help her to remember their pure love - the promises that they pledged to each other, promises of everlasting faithfulness.

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. .And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

This, however, cannot happen unless the faithless one will repent and be healed, because unfaithfulness has brought hurts and wounds, a general sickness. She is no longer the whole and holy bride set apart for intimacy with him. In great need, she finally recognizes where her restoration to wholeness lies.

Come, let us return to the Lord for he has torn, that he may heal us; for he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will

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<sup>19</sup> Hosea 2:8

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., Mulieris, VII.23

<sup>21</sup> Hosea 2:15-16,19-20 (Notice the use of *know* in this scripture – yada, explained in the next section)

revive us; on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him.<sup>22</sup>

With prophetic insight, the sacred writer pictures not only the present, but the transcendent fulfillment of time when the healing powers of Christ's resurrection are available to his Bride, the Church. All of these cumulative sexual connotations, ultimately defined by woman, continue again:

Let us *know*, let us press on to *know* the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

### "Yada"

"Yada," that potent Hebrew verb, is the *knowing* sought by the beloved in this last reference and the earlier one. Explained in Book I, this is also the verb used by the Hebrew for *sexual intercourse*. The extensive use of this word, over 650 times directly translated "to know", with variations for perceiving, understanding, and discerning used numerous other times, permeates the scriptures with a sexual imagery immediately present to the Hebrew, but lost to us with our limited way of thinking about "knowing." We can only begin to appreciate its pervasive coloring of the Chosen people's understanding of their relationship to the Lord.

Adam *knew* Eve and she conceived..

*Know* that I am the Lord your God..

The Lord *knows* the way of the righteous.

Before I formed you in the womb, I *knew* you. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice; the *knowledge* of God, rather than burnt offerings.<sup>24</sup>

When 'yada' with God is refused, there is an instantaneous flashback to the original break between God and his beloved in the garden of Eden, then Man, male and female, chose as his way of knowing, his own idea of good and evil, rather than the intimate acceptance of the self-giving "yada" of God. That break is expressed, as we have seen, in terms of idolatry/adultery.

But at Adam they transgressed the covenant. There they dealt faithlessly with me.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hosea 6:1-2

<sup>23</sup> Hosea 6:3 italics added

<sup>24</sup> Taken in order: Genesis 4:1 ,Exodus 1 6:1 2,Psalm 1:6, Jeremiah 1:5, Hosea 6:6, (italics added)

<sup>25</sup> Hosea 6:7

All of this sheds light on the reality of the triune unities we explored so thoroughly in book one. There is no other human way of expressing all that is at stake in the breakup of God's Perfect Plan, of his beautiful Original Order. This constant reiteration of sexual expression brings to Man's understanding both the heartwarming possibilities of that original relationship and its heartbreaking refusal on Man's part. All the tragedies of life began in the tragedy of that unrequited love -betrayal, unfaithfulness, barrenness, loneliness - just as all the joys of life can be described by faithfulness: the loving giving of two to each other in the Third, attended by all the bounty and fruitfulness promised in that exquisite union.

Motherhood is the fruit of the marriage union of a man and woman of that biblical "knowledge" which corresponds to the "union of the two in one flesh" (cf.2:24). This brings about - on the woman's part - a special "gift of self," as an expression of that spousal love whereby the two are united to each other so closely that they become" one flesh."<sup>26</sup>

The "authority problem," a stiff formulation of the manifestations of disobedience, cannot compare to the pathos of the "lover's problem" which is the human-feeling description of the same alienation. It is the Lover's problem that Man responds to, and which is, therefore, the way the Scripture presents it. Jesus does not apply himself to the "Authority Problem" as to an intellectual thing; he comes among Men as the Bridegroom ardently seeking the Bride in order to solve his poignant lover's problem.

If God from the beginning intends marriage, the blessed sexual union of man and woman, to epitomize the transcendent knowledge of himself and his love, he requires that marriage be all that it can be. Marriage, a symbol of truth which carries revelation of the Godhead, must be protected by the Law; it and its facets, which tell the deeper truth, are not allowed to be totally perverted. Man has always been tempted to remove the legal restrictions from the sex act for his own momentary satisfactions, but he has known all along that it was wrong. He is still purposely ignoring the worth and meaning of sex, transgressing and injuring self and others in the process, but, in a giant step down, he has allowed himself to be convinced that there is no wrong in it.<sup>27</sup> Need the defeats of truth in our society, legal system, and politics here be numbered?

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., Mulieris, VI. 18.

<sup>27</sup> However, as J. Budziszewski had wisely written "We Can't Not Know."

The good and evil *knowledge* has climbed the top of Babel's tower; by Man's understanding has come the disestablishment of any norms of good and evil at all, or even more disastrously, they have been transposed - the true good is evil; the true evil, good. Discarded is the idea that there are moral norms that are always valid. As far as such belief prevails, the word of God in scripture meets ears that simply cannot hear, and eyes that cannot see. Commitment, faithfulness, a marriage covenant, a sexual union reflective of Salvation - the Union of God and Man, what sense can this make in an intellectual atmosphere that denies the basic premise? No wonder the signness of male and female is irretrievably disfigured and lost.

It is against this kind of background that, as the Lord directs, the prophet Malachi speaks; unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant is unfaithfulness of mankind to God. St. Peter will also give husbands the same direction<sup>28</sup> - prayers of men who are unfaithful to their marriage vows will not be heard.

You cover the Lord's altar with tears, and weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. The Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? What does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce," says the Lord the God of Israel.<sup>29</sup>

Holy Scripture is not the carrier only of admonitions from God, nor does it present only the negative images of unfaithfulness, divorce, and the pain of unrequited love. As if centering the whole Bible in the pure, sexual love of man and woman, the Song of Songs finds its position right in the middle of the Book of books. In keeping with the sentiments of many saints the faithful scholarship of Jean Danielou extols the beauties of this significance:

The Canticle of Canticles (which we know as Song of Songs) is not a love poem that found its way into the Bible by mistake; it is the very heart of the Bible, it is the marriage song of the covenant between God and his people, between our soul and the Word. It is at once the great ecclesiological and cosmic poem singing the union of the Word with each soul, with all its changing pattern of infidelities and fidelities, which reaches its culmination in the perfect union we find in the great mystics.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>1 Peter 3:7

<sup>29</sup> Malachi 2:13-16

<sup>30</sup> Danielou, Jean, *The Advent of Salvation*, (N.Y. 1962), p.48

The authenticity of this book as being God's word was one of the most debated of the Old Testament canon. Alongside the other clearly revelatory writings by inspired writers did a passionate oriental love song really belong? It was as a parable of divine love that it was finally accepted into the canon of Sacred Scripture. As a parable we are again confronted with the meanings we have come to expect in the Word of God. Israel, the chosen of all mankind, can be, as we have seen, either an Eve with all the attendant dissolution of love and life, or, as in this parable, she can be the obedient, faithful, and happy beloved with all the attendant blessings - a Mary.

### **Bride and Bridegroom**

From the preceding, the conclusion is plain - the Bible considers the perfect expression of the right relationship between God and Man to be the love of Bridegroom and bride. It is toward "the bridal chamber of the Lord" that all the work of restoration aims. That place of intimate union is wholly apt as a description of the life experience in the Original Order and the life-experience when perfected in the Redeemed Order.

St. Therese of Lisieux used the prayer of the bride of Song of Songs, "draw me after you," for her prayers of intercession, explaining that "when Jesus draws me, he draws me and all in my heart." "Draw me after you," she pleads to Our Lord. The nard which spreads its perfume and draws the heavenly spouse (a variant translation of Song of Songs 1:2), St. Bernard interprets as humility.

My humility has pleased thee, it is not my wisdom, saith the bride,  
not my nobleness, not my beauty, in which I am lacking, which  
have exhaled their odour, but it is humility, my only treasure.  
Humility has the gift of pleasing God, and the Lord is wont to look  
upon that which is humble. Furthermore, whilst the divine King was  
on his throne in the highest heaven, the odor of my humility went  
up to him.<sup>31</sup>

Since earliest times, the Church has taken this poetry to picture Our Lord and his bride, the Church; as well as, in personal devotion Our Lord and his beloved, that is, you and me. The happiness and bliss of their oneness, best expressed by the nuptial relationship, speaks authentically of God's communion with redeemed Man.

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<sup>31</sup>quoting St. Bernard, Pierre Pourrat SS, *Christian Spirituality* Vol II Newman Maryland 1953 op.cit., p.28

The Church is the fairest of loves. St. Paul carries out the analogy to describe her as sanctified and cleansed in Baptism by her lover, Jesus Christ, so that she might be brought to him in splendor with no wrinkle or any such thing, holy and without blemish.<sup>32</sup>

Christ has entered this history and remains in it as the Bridegroom who “has given himself.” “To give” means “to become a sincere gift” in the most complete and radical way: “Greater love has no man than this” ( Jn 15:13). According to this conception, *all human beings - both women and men - are called through the Church, to be the “Bride” of Christ, the Redeemer of the world.* In this way “being the bride,” and thus the “feminine” element, becomes a symbol of all that is “human,” according to the words of Paul: “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” ( Gal 3:28).<sup>33</sup>

The woman of the Song of Songs is everywhere presented as fit to carry this transcendent meaning. Somehow like flowers in amber the mystery of Jesus and the Church, and foremost, the Blessed Mother Mary is encased in this poem. Mary becomes the first, the second, or the third meaning of the lines, ‘O fairest among women.’”

The Lover King is described as a shepherd, an oriental title of authority and kingship. A lovely hymn “The King of Love my Shepherd is” captures the essence of Jesus our lover/shepherd. The kings of the region carried such a title among their royal ascriptions. The Lover, King, Shepherd, with a sweet authority, will come to his beloved in time, and she will give herself to him with joy. It is the King’s beloved who is described in Song of Songs:

My dove, my perfect one, is only one,  
the darling of her mother,  
flawless to her that bore her.  
The maidens saw her  
and called her happy;  
the queens and concubines also  
and they praised her.  
“Who is this that looks forth like the dawn,  
fair as the moon,  
bright as the sun

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<sup>32</sup> Ephesians 5:26-27

<sup>33</sup> cit. Mulieris, VII. 25.

terrible as an army with banners?”<sup>34</sup>

Later we will recall St. John’s Revelation of the Apocalypse and his vision of this same imagery, which holds truth about the Blessed Virgin Mother, the Church, and all women. <sup>35</sup>The Magnificat, Mary’s glorious Hebrew song, also closely parallels the phrase which the RSV loosely translates, “The maidens saw her and called her happy,” which could read just as well, “her daughters declared her blessed.” This would be close to “all generations shall call me blessed” as extolled by Mary in her Magnificat.

Written into this love poem, is God the Father as he looks upon Mary and sees her as the beautifully fit spouse for the Holy Spirit. Typical of poetry, the images overlap, recede and advance, fading only to become vivid again. By now, it is clear that the sexual analogies of Scripture are often layered in meaning. Alongside of the one about whom the poem is written, Solomon’s bride, we see also Mary, the Church, Everyman, and woman.

The house where the lovers meet - the very room in which the bride was conceived - is the mother’s house. The house of Mother Mary is the Church. It is here that we are reborn in Baptism. Mary is the rebirth mother of all Christians. The mother of our Head, she is given by him to all as mother, and when he commands, “unless you become as a little child” does he not mean a little child of this mother? We are his body, hers is the womb that bore that body. It is to this bridal-conception chamber that the Bride and Groom come. In the Church, God’s people and his Son in a marital figure, meet in loving embrace at the Holy Eucharist, each giving the other the whole self.

This [ Eucharist of] this New Creation, has the marital structure of the Covenant which is mediated. By it, the bridal Church is one flesh with her Lord, her sacrifice responsive to his . . . It is only in the New Covenant that the problematic character of the relation of the bridal people of God is resolved: only this makes it possible to understand a maritally structured covenant which does not place sexuality in God.<sup>36</sup>

The Son gives himself in a sacrifice of blood; his beloved gives herself in a sacrifice of praise. This is the mystery of their spousal love which relies on sexuality as the potent purposely created analogue.

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<sup>34</sup> Song of Songs, 6:9-10 (parenthesis added)

<sup>35</sup> Revelation 12

<sup>36</sup> Op. cit., Carter, Pastoral, 1.3.

The renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the completing love of Christ and sets them afire.<sup>37</sup>

The image of spousal love, together with the figure of the divine Bridegroom - a very clear image in the texts of the Prophets - finds crowning confirmation in the Letter to the Ephesians (cit). Christ is greeted as the bridegroom by John the Baptist (cf Jn 3:27-29). Indeed Christ applies to himself the comparison drawn from the Prophets (cf. Mk 2:19-20). The Apostle Paul, . . . writes to the Corinthians: "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor 11:2). But the fullest expression of the truth about Christ the Redeemer's love, according to the analogy of spousal love in marriage, is found in the Letter to the Ephesians: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (5:25), thereby fully confirming the fact that the Church is the bride of Christ: "The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer" (Is 54:5).<sup>38</sup>

A full exposition of Jesus the Bridegroom, and the Ephesians reading is yet to come. Meanwhile, Song of Songs imagery, which these later scripture sources complement, interweaves to form a vibrant tapestry in which sexuality, with all its ramifications, is the carrier of profound messages from God to his creation. Is it just coincidence that the Lover and his beloved are separated as the poem ends?

O you who dwell in gardens, my companions are listening for your voice. Let me hear it.

Make haste my beloved and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices.<sup>39</sup>

The Church, with intense longing for union with the Bridegroom, cries out at the very end of Sacred Scripture.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Vatican II *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* 1.10

<sup>38</sup> Op. cit., *Mulieris*, VII. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Song of Songs 8:13-14

<sup>40</sup> Revelations 22:17

## Mother Church

Significantly then, *mother* also becomes part of the important sexual imagery of Scripture. Jerusalem, the great center of Davidic rule, early in Jewish thought became laden with connotations of a community of the faithful where the Lord God justly ruled his people with everlasting love. The very human city of Jerusalem thus projected a glorious supernatural city upon the screen of Man's spirit. Herein the faithful were free from fear, from slavery, from every threat of sorrow and pain. Here they were marvelously ruled with great wisdom, even beyond that of Solomon, by the Messiah Son of David. All their needs were met. Worship in Jerusalem meant worship in the very presence of the King of Kings. Tough hearts, who found response to God difficult, would be stripped down to sensitivity in Jerusalem, and "Amen" would be their response in the intense fervor of worship.

The New Testament presents the New Jerusalem, who emerges with the same meanings, but now as the figure of the Church. The New Jerusalem is a reality beyond realities of the moment. Just as Jerusalem herself was only the instrument by which the transcendent Jerusalem was symbolized and envisioned, so the visible Church, lacking all her adornments and perfections, is, nevertheless, the spotless and perfect Bride above and beyond all that is now visible.

Jerusalem of the Old Testament, fittingly, is proclaimed to be the Mother; because the community it describes is the spouse of God to whom he has promised abundant children.<sup>41</sup> Here is a circle of divine feminine constructs which closes upon itself. Note that it is *not God* who is mother; these verses are often mistakenly used to bolster that serious error.

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory."

You shall suck, you shall be carried on her hip, and dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. . .<sup>42</sup>

St. Paul well knows this figure and its meaning, and now speaks of Jerusalem as the Church.

But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Isaiah 54

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 66:10,12,13

As Mother, the Church protects Man, male and female, her children. Mary, too, the Mother whose image melds into the image of Mother Church is known as the Protectoress of the faithful who are her children. Jeremiah, prophesying the restoration of Mother Jerusalem, exults,

The Lord bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill! For the Lord has created a new thing on earth: a woman protects a man.<sup>44</sup>

A real city of fallen people, sinners who for the most part acted against God, Jerusalem was, at the same time, a point of hope for the opposite reality, the glorious espoused bride of the Lord who would mother his children. The Church, likewise has been both the unfaithful spouse of Christ, and his spotless bride.

Ezekiel speaks disturbingly of both aspects of Jerusalem. He reminds the city of her pagan, unsanctified beginnings as part of the Amorite people; how, after her unattended birth, God came by to pick her out of the filth and wash her. Caring for her till puberty, he pledged his troth to her and made her his own.

Thus you were decked with gold and silver; and your raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered cloth; you ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and came to regal estate. . . But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot . . . Adulterous wife who received strangers instead of her husband.<sup>45</sup>

The Church- New Jerusalem, in her human way, has exhibited all the idolatries and adulteries of the wayward adolescent, while at the same time in divine overlay, she has been perceived as the pure bride. God, who is faithful with steadfast love, has been true to his word. The human, erring Church, forgiven and cleansed continually, receives reestablishment of the marital covenant in each Eucharist. She is growing from glory to glory.<sup>46</sup> In the words of St. Leo the Great:

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<sup>43</sup> Galatians 4:26

<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah 31:32

<sup>45</sup> Ezekiel, parts of chapter 16

<sup>46</sup> It is hard to resist further speculation that an elder and a younger sister, also unfaithful and erring, mentioned in this same chapter, are not a figure of the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches. They are finally given to Jerusalem as daughters. Also, though it has been stated so by some, there is not a place where God presents himself with the image of mother. The Isaiah 66 is often referred to, but Jerusalem clearly is doing the mothering for God. In this matter, it is puzzling that the holy Father in *Mulieris* quotes Is. 42,49, 66 (see 111.8.), in defense of "feminine" qualities in God. Of course, we have seen that all possible masculine and feminine qualities originate in God, but God never refers to himself in any feminine form.

Nor would there be any limit to (her) upward course until humanity was admitted to a seat at the right hand of the eternal Father, to be enthroned at last in the glory of him to whose nature (she) was wedded in the person of the Son.<sup>47</sup>

The New Jerusalem, the Bride, in immaculate attire awaits her Bridegroom for the consummation of their eternal union when she with him is at last enthroned at the right hand of the eternal Father.

For Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Liturgy of the Hours St. Leo the Great, (Sermo 1 de Ascensione, 2-4: FL 54, 395-396) parenthesis have changed ‘it’ to ‘she.’

<sup>48</sup> Ephesians 5:25-27

## CHAPTER 2 THE SEXUAL IMAGERY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus loved to use parables of weddings - nuptial feasts, royal marriage invitations, virgins and bridegroom. He presents himself to be that Bridegroom.

Christ is the Bridegroom. This expresses the truth about the love of God who “first loved us” (cf. 1 Jn 4:19) and who, with the gift generated by this spousal love for man, has exceeded all human expectations: “He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). The Bridegroom - the Son consubstantial with the Father as God - became the Son of Mary; he became the “son of man,” true man, a male. The symbol of the Bridegroom is masculine. This masculine symbol represents the human aspect of the divine love which God has for Israel, for the Church, and for all people. <sup>1</sup>

To the Jewish people of the promise, whose faith had been steadily expressed over centuries in sexual terms, whose ears were used to hearing scriptures proclaimed that spoke of sexual intercourse as the knowing desired by God, it was not surprising that he spoke of “yada” and that his parables were dotted with wedding feasts, virgins and grooms. What was astonishing was that he spoke of himself as the Bridegroom, as the one who *knew* even as the Lord had spoken of himself through the prophets, “I, the Lord your Maker, am your Husband.” Because this imagery was traditionally descriptive of God alone, it vividly stuck in his hearer’s memories, and in his enemies’ craw.

That Jesus commenced his public life at a wedding, and was launched by his own mother, was not lost on St. John who found it apropos to his deep knowledge of who Jesus was - the Word of God, who gave the power to all who *received* him to become the *children* of God.<sup>2</sup> Early in his gospel he quotes St. John the Baptist;

No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., Mulieris, VII. 25.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:12

greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease.<sup>3</sup>

"Received," the feminine stance to the Bridegroom, is a key concept in St. John's writings. Though his disciples fear it, the Baptist realizes that the crowds now following Jesus do not make him a rival to John's ministry. The bride will open her arms to the Bridegroom who speaks, and John himself, part of that collective bride, rejoices in recognition of the Bridegroom's voice. St. John the Evangelist, too, thoroughly acclimated to the Jewish sexual connotations of prophecy, describes Jesus as fulfilling God's role in coming to his people as a loving Groom comes for his Beloved.

When the author of the Letter to the Ephesians calls Christ "the Bridegroom" and the Church "the Bride," he indirectly confirms through this analogy the truth about woman as bride. The Bridegroom is the one who loves. The Bride is loved: it is she who receives love, in order to love in return.<sup>4</sup>

Later, when Jesus is criticized for not fasting with his disciples as John does with his disciples, he reminds these critics that he, the Bridegroom, is with his wedding guests; therefore, among his group there can be no fasting. Later when the Bridegroom is taken away they will fast. In this way he confirms St. John's own understanding; he is the Bridegroom fulfilling all of Israel's expectations for the Visitation and more.<sup>5</sup>

Anticipating how the expectant Church over the centuries waits for his return, Jesus tells a parable of wise and foolish virgins. The wise shall wait with oil ready, prepared even for a long delay, but when the Bridegroom comes they will be the ones who go into the marriage feast. Afterward the other maidens come also saying,

Lord, Lord, open to us. But he replied, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."<sup>6</sup>

Such a rebuke to followers who call him "Lord" is also recorded by Matthew. Here the Greek translation of the Aramaic variant of "yada" is used, *ginosko*, for "to know." Particularly pertinent to this study, for the insights "yada" (*ginosko*) brings to the way Christians "glorify the Lord by their *fruits*," it anchors a theme particularly illustrated in and indicative of the lives of women.

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<sup>3</sup> John 3:27

<sup>4</sup> op.cit., *Mulieris VII*. 27

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 9:14-15

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 25:11-12

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, thus you *will know* them by their fruits. Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And I will declare to them, 'I never *knew* you; depart from me, you evildoers.'<sup>7</sup>

It must be clear by now that the key word in these rebukes is “to know” which to Jesus and his hearers meant an intimate receiving of the Bridegroom into one’s inmost being. Such “knowing” transforms the person who is never the same again and thus impregnated will “bear fruit worthy of redemption.”

### **Fruits, not Works**

The works of prophecy and exorcism that Jesus mentions in the preceding reference, as well as the other “mighty works,” are among the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to believers. They are described in much detail by St. Paul in I Corinthians, 12-14. Works done with these spiritual gifts Jesus once said would exceed his own works.<sup>8</sup> Nowhere does he minimize their importance to the work of the Kingdom or to the individual soul. Why then, as evidence of those who are truly in the Kingdom, does he not accept *the works* done in his name with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, powers otherwise impossible to Men? These are good works like unto his own, yet he rejects them as indicative of his own. Here the sexual meaning of “yada” plays up important possibilities.

Gifts of the Spirit are bestowed upon believers when they ask for them.<sup>9</sup> These gifts are given to edify the Church and to be a witness to unbelievers of the power of God and the claim of Jesus as Lord. St. Cyril links receiving these Spirit gifts with *fruit*.

In the same way the Holy Spirit, whose nature is always the same, simple and indivisible, apportions grace to each man as he wills. Like a dry tree which puts forth shoots when watered, the soul bears the fruit of holiness when repentance has made it worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit never changes, the effects of his

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 7:18-25 (italics added)

<sup>8</sup> John 14:12

<sup>9</sup> I Corinthians 12,13,14

action, by the will of God and in the name of Christ, are both many and marvelous.<sup>10</sup>

In this lovely instruction, St. Cyril, however, mixes fruits with works, a common confusion that is usually unimportant unless we are trying to see the difference between the two. Can we sort one from the other? Continuing:

The Spirit makes one man a teacher of divine truth, inspires another to prophesy, gives another the power of casting out devils, enables another to interpret holy Scripture. The Spirit strengthens one man's self-control, shows another how to help the poor, teaches another to fast and lead a life of asceticism, makes another oblivious to the needs of the body, trains another for martyrdom. His action is different in different people, but the Spirit himself is always the same. In each person, Scripture says, *the Spirit reveals his presence in a particular way for the common good.*

In the previous references to I Corinthians, works are done with the power of the Spirit's gifts outlined by St. Paul; nothing is more important in the Church, *except* one thing. And this is so exceedingly more important, that its lack can cancel out for the wonderworker any eternal credit just as Jesus warned. The will of persons exercising these Spirit-gifts must be wholly wedded to the will of God, so that the powers trustingly given by the Spirit, are used only in accord with the purposes of God.

Is it possible for these Holy Spirit gifts to be used some other way by believers? Obviously, it is so. The gifts and powers given to perform the works of Jesus are put, as are all the other of God's good gifts, into the dominion of Man to use according to his own will. It is not works, therefore, that mark the alignment of Man's will to God's will. It is the fruits of a life that mark that alignment.<sup>11</sup>

There will be healers, prophets, and other miracle workers amazing men with supernatural powers, who will not be building up God's kingdom because they do not obey the will of God. They were never submissive, as the word *knowing* implies must be of the receiver. Jesus did not *impregnate* them for fruitfulness that would mark them as being his Beloved. They were not open *to receive him*, and therefore, because they are unyielded persons the fruits of the Spirit which are

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<sup>10</sup> Liturgy of the Hours: St. Cyril of Jerusalem, A Catechetical Instruction, (Car. 16, De Spiritu Sancto 1, 11-12. 1 6:PG 33,931-935, 939-942)

<sup>11</sup> During the Donatist heresy, the Church determined that the Sacraments were valid even though the priest administering them might be in sin. It is something similar here - the gifts of God may be exercised by disobedient men and women.

*the sign* of the Christian: love, joy, peace, patience, longsuffering, gentleness and self-control, are not theirs.<sup>12</sup>

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.<sup>13</sup>

These persons may have gifts, they may even look like sheep, but the real motivation of their lives is self and it will eventually show up; they will not display that *gift of self* which is the required stance of those who *receive and know*. Jesus warns that at the end of days:

. . . false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even God's elect.<sup>14</sup>

Though in the same breath we are told not to judge, we are also told to discern the difference between wonderworkers who are doing God's will and wonderworkers who are not. We will know them by their fruits, not by their works. In the Old Testament these same contrasts are often found, and the same rule followed. Bathsheba, despite her weakness and moral failure, is the fruitful wife for David (and the Lord); Abigail, also a wife of David, and just as strong a woman, is not. The heart condition of the two is the distinguishing difference.

"Yada" carries into Jesus' ministry and teaching the same importance it held throughout the spiritual experiences of Israel with the Lord. The union of Man and God, in heart, mind and soul, is the goal of the redeeming efforts of God. To know God, to allow God to know Man, like a man knows his wife - Jesus reiterates what throughout Jewish history was part of God's self-revelation. Man and woman were created for just such a purpose; to depict in flesh and blood the truth at the most exalted level. Mankind must submit to God; lovingly yielded mankind must receive him experientially, if the Perfect creation is to be restored.

### Receiving

It follows therefore, that *receiving* becomes part of the sexual analogue. *Lambano*, translated "receive" and meaning "to take to ones self" is used almost one hundred-fifty times in the New Testament; *dechoma* also meaning "receive" is used another fifty or so times, and several other Greek verbs are used with varying frequency.

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 5:22

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 7:15

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 24:24

St. Paul in a passage very close to the words of Jesus, above, says that not receiving is the cause of those who perish.

The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they *received not* the love of the truth, that they might be saved.<sup>15</sup>

Again and again the New Testament speaks of receiving Jesus, or of receiving the Holy Spirit.

He who receives you, receives me, and he who receives me, receives him who sent me.<sup>16</sup>

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.<sup>17</sup>

. . . receive with meekness the implanted word this is able to save your souls.<sup>18</sup>

He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name he gave the power to become the children of God; who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.<sup>19</sup>

Just as in the conception of biological children, the process is begun by receiving the agent who fructifies, so it is that God begets spiritual children; by reception of him they become his children. When Jesus' mission drew to its culmination, he began to promise that another Missioner would be sent by him and the Father to finish the process of restoration and redemption he was instituting. Jesus' language about the Spirit's contact with men is held complete in one word, *receiving*.

Persons believing in Jesus, and accepting forgiveness of their sins in his baptism, would open their inmost beings, and be receptive of the Spirit who would no longer be outside of themselves, but within them. Thus the reunion of Man and God would be accomplished; holy and whole Man would become a possibility once more. No longer the fallen Man of only human capability, Man would again be a spiritual gifted Man, God's son, capable of a place in a triune oneness. Again Perfection of being and Perfection of union would be possible, like unto the Original creation.

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<sup>15</sup>II Thessalonians 2:10. The RSV translates *dechomaias*, refused, rather than received with the negative, not.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 10:40

<sup>17</sup> I Corinthians 1:14

<sup>18</sup> James 1:21

<sup>19</sup> John 1:12

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, who, the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him or knows him; but you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.<sup>20</sup>

So we come back full circle in sexual imagery - *knowing* and *receiving*.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>21</sup>

After Pentecost, Peter, in explaining the outpouring of the Spirit, proclaimed to all who questioned the sobriety of those on fire with him,

Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>22</sup>.

Even more intimately Jesus speaks to his disciples about abiding in him. For this he uses the illustration of vines and branches. The result of this abiding, like branches and vines, is fruitfulness.

He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.<sup>23</sup>

For those who would believe in time to come, Jesus, in his final prayer, begs the Father;

The glory which thou has given me, I have given them that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou has loved me.<sup>24</sup>

The picture is complete; the salvation of Men will result in perfect union once more. Sex, so omnipresent in Man's mind and experience, so potently persuasive over his will, is the wholly adequate teaching form used by God to reveal himself and his Purpose for Man. Simply, man and woman, sexual beings, ob-positioned, were created in the image and likeness of God to fully express God and his nuptial love for Man. In Scripture, therefore, woman and her sexual function of receiving and conceiving for fruit-bearing, is a powerful sign of Redemption. In the most physical way, the people chosen by God are taught early lessons which in the development of their understanding of the higher and more spiritual overlays, never are revoked, but are simply opened to the more profound meanings of the amazing continuum. This is the ultimate

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<sup>20</sup> John 14:16-17 italics added

<sup>21</sup> John 20:22

<sup>22</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>23</sup> John 15:5

<sup>24</sup> John 17:22-23

understanding eventually to be gained in John Paul's Theology of the Body – the significance of the different roles of male and female.

### CHAPTER III WOMAN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Embedded within the women of the people whom God was forming as his own, was the desire, even the passion, to be fruitful for The Lord. Not unlike the women of all cultures, but enlightened by the revelation given to her people of God's purpose, she knew fruitfulness of her body to be the very purpose for her being. Woman's grief, her mourning and weeping, arose at two tragic occasions, the untimely death of the fruit of her body, and barrenness.

If Saviour, Redeemer, King, Prophet, or Priest are to be, they must first be in her and of her. Therefore, we see that before the Mosaic Law, all other morality aside, fruitfulness of her body comes first. Tamar comes to mind (see Genesis 3). Becoming a people more and more impressed with their mission as the espoused of The Lord, bearers of his name and message to all nations - the woman knows the fulfillment of it all rests in her biological progeny.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." It is significant that the foretelling of the Redeemer contained in these words refers to "the woman." She is assigned the first place in the Proto-evangelium as the progenitrix of him who will be the Redeemer of man.<sup>1</sup>

This special call and meaning of woman is enmeshed with the stories of the patriarchs; a thread which must be highlighted because it carries significance to the design of this fabric we are weaving.

This motif (barrenness) which spans the entire Old Testament, haunted Jewish thought. Reflection brought more and more clearly to light that it was God himself who played the principal role in these begettings and conceptions. God's power quickened the dead seed and the barren womb. Paul says that Abraham fathered Isaac in faith in "the God . . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. . . he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good a dead because he was a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb" (Rom4:17,19).<sup>2</sup>

Previously, in the powerful story of Noah, we are told of a covenant made with Noah on behalf of all the earth's people, not just the Chosen People, promising that Almighty God would

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., *Mulieris*, IV.11

<sup>2</sup> Von Balthasar, *Mary, The Church at the Source*, op.cit quote within Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, p.150

never again attempt to destroy Man, even though Man deserved it. That covenant put a moral law on all Men as part of the agreement.<sup>3</sup> The covenant itself was an expression of the inner relationship of the Trinity, made tangible in male and female and their union, as we explored in the first book of Knowing Woman.

From the very first contact with Abraham, God began a teaching that was to distinguish, motivate, and enlighten the great familial nation he was fathering.

Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you; and I will bless you. And make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you. And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.<sup>4</sup>

Now, God's historical covenanting with Man through Abraham and his descendents becomes salvifically purposeful. The word of the Lord comes to Abraham in very physical ways; in mystical appearance, vision, and personification by deep symbolic expressions of smoke, torch and voice.<sup>5</sup> Through these manifestations, he won Abraham to himself as a faithful listener and believer of his word. The Mosaic law is two hundred years away, and God overlooks many of Abraham's faults in light of the virtue of his belief. . . "he believed in the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness."<sup>6</sup>

### **The Patriarchs Wives**

In Abraham, God contacts a responder once more. Despite all of his fallen ways, God cherishes him and because of his faithful belief the Lord establishes with him and his descendents an everlasting covenant. These descendants will be God's Chosen People with whom he will work to bring salvation to the whole world. For their part in the marital covenant, the Chosen People are to circumcise all their male children to establish a this special identity with The Lord. The agency organ of the male is thus marked by God to procreate children who will be his people; this

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 9

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 12:1-3

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12:7, 17:1, 15:1,18:1-2,12:17,15:17,22:1

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 15:6

sign in the foreskin of the males of Abraham's descendents identified all sexual union in marriage to be subservient to the Lord resulting in progeny who were specially his. Even though other Semitic peoples practiced circumcision, to Abraham and his family it became a significant mark of being bound in covenant to God.

With the patriarchs of succeeding generations God appeared externally in continuing vision and appearance. He established his covenant with them in every generation, each time solidifying his promises in marital terms with a pledge for eternal faithfulness, a faithfulness that would have external signs. For his part, God would prosper his people among all the nations; and on their part, the male heads would carry the sign of that covenant in their flesh.

It was the male, "the first person" of the marital union who carried headship and the name of the people from father to son. He bore the responsibility of this covenant, passing it to son's son. The man received the promise and ratified the covenant, then acted to bind himself to it with the circumcision of his flesh. God thus acted in accord with all the principles of agency that spoke of his own triune Being. He had made those principles inherent in the created order, and though damaged, he did not allow them to be lost in the Fall. The means he took to impress the order on fallen Man may seem simply physical and legalistic to our modern minds, but they speak truly of the essential principles lying behind and beyond them, and of the condition of Man's consciousness. These means will provide the ABC's necessary for the eternal lessons God will build upon them.

What of woman, the "second person?" The men of Israel were not monogamous in marriage as we have come to understand monogamy. Yet, in a real sense, in establishing principles Genesis demonstrates with the early patriarchs that each man had one wife - a woman who was the true "other," the true complement and completion of a unity recognized and joined by God. Abraham's life partner and wife was the unique woman, Sarah.

Abraham received the manifestations of the Lord and had dealings with him that engendered this new relationship with the Almighty. Because of his belief, Abraham was promised the fatherhood of many nations, but Sara, the beautiful, was barren. Abraham thought, in view of the impossible obstacle, he would help God fulfill his promise; he agreed with Sarah that he would impregnate her maid for the necessary heir.

God did not need this kind of help. From the first, Sarah was the chosen woman; she would not be by-passed. She was the woman God recognized as Abraham's intimate other; these

two were one in union. First said about Adam and Eve, “the two shall become one flesh,” Sarah is important to Abraham, more important than either of them realizes. She is the individual essential to God’s plan, and though Abraham had concubines and slaves, fathering many offspring (who became other nations), it is always Sarah who is “his wife” and only through her offspring will God fulfill his promises to bring about the Chosen Nation. We have heard often about our “father in faith,” but in the case of the Chosen People, woman’s seed is the more critical; Sarah is our mother in the ongoing fulfillment of the promises God made to woman in Genesis 3.

She is *the* woman as Abraham is *the* man in this opening scene of Salvation History; God is the third One in their union. Others mothered by other women, *though fathered by Abraham*, will not be considered sons of the covenant. It is Isaac, the son of Sarah, who alone will have this designation and this because of her motherhood, not Abraham’s fatherhood alone. God, the third partner in their union, will empower a miraculous conception overcoming Sarah’s old age and long years of barrenness. Sarah conceives and bears the miracle-successor to the promises given Abraham, the only son, Isaac.

St. Peter presents Sarah to be the model for all Christian women. Her attitude toward Abraham of trusting obedience is as key to the story as is Abraham’s trusting obedience toward God. This attitude or stance of hers all mankind must imitate in order to regain union with God. Sarah is presented to the woman of the Redeemed Order by St. Peter to be the mother and model for her faithful, obedient daughters:

So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you.<sup>7</sup>

What Peter is referring to is startling. On two occasions Sarah is faced by a frightening situation actually brought about by her obedience to Abraham, yet she is not overcome by anger or fear, displaying instead calm trust in the protection of God. Twice in the territory of pagan kings where Abraham’s entourage was sojourning, Egypt and the territory of the Negeb, Abraham expediently chooses to lie about his relationship to Sarah, both times sending her into the king’s harem so that he can save his own skin.

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<sup>7</sup> | Peter 3:5-6

“If I say, ‘This is my wife,’ then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.”<sup>8</sup>

It is not recorded that Sarah makes any objection. Eventually because of the calamities that fall on their houses, the kings discover the truth and send her back to Abraham. Stated in one case, and implied in the other, she comes back untouched. By way of reimbursement for their offense, the kings send Abraham off richer than before. The morality of this is not of consequence to the sacred author, he is more interested in Sarah’s trust and God’s response. It is God who acts for her - Pharaoh’s house is afflicted; in a dream Abimelech is threatened with death because of Sarah. In both cases, her obedience to Abraham and her faith in God is vindicated.

This is the truth that Peter points to while exhorting women to pattern their own obedience to their husbands with unruffled, complete trust in the God who cares, and who will vindicate them. The cultural pattern itself may be sinful, the man may not be able to discern God’s ways from the fallen ways of the world around him, but God saves the woman who trusts in him while obeying her husband. She is a sign that points sturdily toward Man’s ultimate reunion with God and the way it is to be achieved.

Through Sarah God blesses Abraham with a male child, his heir, through whom the promises would continue to this particular family; the covenant begun with them is kept. The gift of the child was the sign that the promises of the Lord extended into the future, and that they would all come to pass, despite time and obstacles. With Isaac, and with his son, Jacob, God renews the covenant and the promises.

I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you and kings shall come forth from you.<sup>9</sup>

Isaac’s God-given other is Rebekah. This particular woman was specially chosen as the account in Genesis clearly states, and again, yes, God chose a barren woman. It is this union that God again enters into as the third Person to bring fruitfulness.

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 12: 12-13

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 35:10-12

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.<sup>10</sup>

Does the reader hear the echo from the marital poetry in the Song of Songs that the conception chamber of Isaac, his mother's tent, also becomes his bridal chamber? But the wife of his heart, Rebekah, is sterile! This woman, whom God himself had picked by pointing her out to the messenger servant, could not conceive on her own. He had ordained the barren woman to become the mother of his continuing people. How else to make it plain to all, that this people is his people? St. Irenaeus understands the way God is working in the nitty-gritty with his people through their own consciousness:

Through many acts of indulgence he tried to prepare them for perseverance in his service. He kept calling them to what was primary by means of what was secondary, that is, through foreshadowings to the reality, through things of time to the things of eternity, through things of the flesh to the things of the spirit, through earthly things to the heavenly things.<sup>11</sup>

Generations are not merely the biological offspring of man and woman; God himself brings this fruitfulness. Earthly things point to heavenly things. It is a union of two in One, or of three in the Third.<sup>12</sup>

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah conceived.<sup>13</sup>

The pattern is repeated: God works with external words and signs with the Fathers of the people, but in the Mothers he works an intimate, interior miracle which brings them, by his specific act and will, to biological fruitfulness. The child conceived by the *triune unity* of man and woman and God, carries on the covenant with its obligations and promises, and fulfills the projection of God's promise toward becoming a great nation.

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 24:67

<sup>11</sup> Liturgy of the Hours, Irenaeus, Treatise Against Heresies, ( Lib. 4, 14, 2-3; 15, 1: SC 100, 542.548)

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the earlier diagram in Book One (p. 104) can make clear that either way of looking at this relationship, is the same.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 25:21

The twin boys conceived by barren Rebekah, Esau and Jacob, each have a particular destiny in God's plan; but just as Rebekah ascertained from a seer before their births, it is the younger who is God's choice to continue the covenant relationship with him. She helps the plan along by surprising duplicity; however, because of careless disregard of his inheritance as the elder, Esau has already displayed unworthiness for headship of God's Chosen People.

So it is Jacob who carries the promise, and receives, even through trickery, the patriarchal mantle from his father Isaac. Though Jacob has two wives and two concubines, his love-match is Rachel. With her, the other wife, Leah, and the concubines, he fathers twelve sons who will head the twelve tribes; but the future of the chosen people rests in his union with Rachel; Rachel is, of course, barren! God remembers Rachel's prayer and opens her womb for the blessed child. Joseph is born; the saviour of the Chosen People; he will deliver his brothers and their families from a sure death in famine.

For moral reasons (sexual incest and murder), the first three sons of Jacob are disinherited as unworthy, and the patriarchal mantle passes to the fourth son, Judah, who is chosen by God to carry the covenant headship. It is to Judah that his elderly father prophesies, foretelling that the promised one of woman's seed for whom they wait, shall come from Judah's loins.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from  
between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him  
shall be the obedience of the people's. <sup>14</sup>

Someone is coming! But who is to be the important woman through whom he comes? Judah's eldest son, Er, proves wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord slays him. In this, God does not disregard the rights of his lawful wife, Tamar. After the Semite custom, his second son, Onan, is to take Tamar and raise up children for his dead brother. But he refuses, and spills his semen on the ground rather than impregnate her. The refusal to fructify the woman brings down the displeasure of God who slays Onan. (How realistic the Hebrews are – all cause finally is God's.) Judah promises Tamar his third son to wed, but the boy is too young. Before her right to raise up offspring is met, she must wait. Even when the boy is old enough to marry, Judah procrastinates; he fears that this woman carries not life but only death to his sons. Tamar is blocked from her rightful destiny as mother.

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 49:10 (RSV translation is preferred; subject to variant translations in other versions)

Judah has been chosen head of the People; he is to father the continuing line, but none of his sons are worthy. What is wrong? It is the wrong woman, the wrong mother. Judah has married a Canaanite, Shua, who though Judah's wife, is not chosen by God; he passes her by entirely - her seed is not *the* seed. Yet, Tamar, the daughter-in-law, he recognizes and favors. A new lesson is added about the woman. She is to be, in the early generations, *one of the People*. The continuance of the faith in the Lord, so tenuous, depends on nurture at the mother's knee, and the Canaanite Shua's religion is totally unacceptable. In a sequence strange to our Christian sensibilities, Judah's daughter-in-law seduces him for the fulfillment of her right to fruitfulness. She determines a course of action around the obstacles that will keep her from her destiny. Tricking Judah, she poses as a cult prostitute, and bears twins from their union. One of these is the male heir of covenant-promise, Perez, who is in the lineage from which David, and David's greater son, Jesus, will come. After he is forced to admit he is the father of her twins, Tamar is exonerated, and even commended by Judah for her persistence in achieving motherhood.

She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her my son, Shelah.<sup>15</sup>

The identifiable leadership of the people of God is marked by *the mother*. Unless we grasp how strong and how godly was the desire to be fruitful for the Lord, Genesis records things otherwise hard for us to understand. Abraham's nephew Lot's daughters fear that, "there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth."<sup>16</sup> They, in turn, seduce their father in order to become pregnant. Mothering two nations, Ammon and Moab, these will plague the peoples' future as Israel's historic enemies. Their enmity to Israel is related to the incest involved in their founding.

God continues to make covenant promises with the patriarch, but these promises are dependent for their fulfillment on the inner miracle he works in the woman. For her part, she is determined to have her seed fructified. In the first four generations, all the chosen women, acceptable to God as mothers of the next generation, are barren – Tamar, barren by circumstances beyond her control. All grieve over their unfruitful lot, and by prayerful tenaciousness (amoral resourcefulness on Tamar's part), become happy bearers of the prophesied line.

The man may carry the promise and act as progenitor, but he cannot overcome the obstacles to the fulfillment of that promise. God must act, and he acts *in the woman* who receives his miracle through her faith. It is her seed by which the Lord redeems. Significantly apparent in the

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 38:26

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 19:21

beginning of God's work with his chosen people, this pattern is fully consistent with the principle of act and potency, masculinity and femininity, that lies at the heart of perfect creatures made in the image and likeness of God. (Fully explored in Book I.)

The same principle shines through the history of the Chosen People till the prophesied apex when the one is born of a virgin of the tribe of Judah, who will rule all nations. Around the obstacle of her virginity, which is, in Mary's case, a barrenness by choice, God works the miracle in a woman's womb fulfilling the marvelous promise given to generations of Israel's patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, each of them an agent of God authorized to ratify the covenant between God and Israel; but woman remains the medium of the miracle. In her womb, by her obedience to her nature and by her submission to the male, obstacles to his plan will be overcome. Each one, man and woman, has an important role; they cannot be exchanged, and are seen consistently throughout Old Testament history.

### **Moses**

Through Salvation History we trace this theme of the fruitfulness of the woman by God and man's action. A few generations after the death of Joseph, Judah and their brothers, a Hebrew woman preserves the fruit of her womb against the edicts of Pharaoh of Egypt. Of the tribe of Levi, the priestly clan of the Hebrews, Moses is saved by his mother's ingenuity and the compassion of an Egyptian princess who accepts the infant into the royal family and raises him as her son. This one will lead God's people out of the slavery that has developed during their four-hundred year sojourn in Egypt.

Moses, well-educated by his princess foster-mother, is equipped to become the leader of God's people. In Midian, where he has fled after murdering an Egyptian, he is ineffably confronted by the Lord, God of the universe, who speaks from a burning bush. Commissioned then, to be leader of the people, The Lord sends him back to Egypt. It is during this encounter that God reveals his Holy Name, which is his nature, "I AM WHO AM." For this holiest name, the tetragram YHWH of the Hebrew verb "to be" becomes, by adding vowels, "Yahweh" in English, but is best verbally addressed, in respect of his awe-inspiring holiness, by "the Lord." I avoid using this holy name in this writing, preferring his title, "God" or like the Hebrews who also venerated it, "the Lord."

In his desert exile, Moses has married a Midianite woman named Zipporah. On the way back to Egypt, lodging in an inn with their two sons, a very strange episode takes place.

Now it came about at the lodging place on the way the Lord met (Moses) and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. Then it was that she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.<sup>17</sup>

An enigmatic story! Moses, three months with his Hebrew mother before being set afloat in the Nile, was no doubt circumcised in accordance with the covenant made by God with Abraham. He was, after all, just six or seven generations removed from Abraham; and the tradition of their heritage though perhaps grown murky, did not die.

In neglect of the covenant, the implication is that Moses had allowed his Midianite wife to stand in the way of the circumcision of their boys. God had called Moses to a very exacting mission of leadership; yet, either he was not master of his own household, or he was neglecting the spiritual headship of his family. Either way, he must assume his role of head over his family or he is not fit for the extended role of this headship over God's family.

The story says, "the Lord met him and sought to put him to death." This out-of-orderedness is so serious God threatens the life of the very one whom he intends to deliver and lead his people! The life and death character of the confrontation is so apparent that Zipporah immediately understands its nature. If she had not, Moses might have died. That it took Zipporah's action to avoid God's hand, lends to the first theory, that she had opposed Moses (he is later described as "very meek"), and her act was one of capitulation to his authority. She circumcises the child herself, and touching Moses' feet (a euphemism for his sexual organs), she accepts her union with him on a whole new level, on the level of his Jewish faith, saying, "You are a bridegroom of blood to me." At the moment of her submission to her husband, and to all he was - a Hebrew of the Covenant - the "Lord let him alone." Moses' family is unified; his wife has become one with him; his headship is established and the danger of her lack of commitment to Moses and his mission is removed.

Defeating the strong Egyptian forces of powerful Pharaoh Ramses II by the strong arm of the Lord, Moses leads his people out of Egypt. At Mt. Sinai, in the dramatic bonding of the definitive Covenant, God and People in marital union, they are transformed from a motley band of slaves into a family, which though broken and disobedient, are capable of fighting the Lord's

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<sup>17</sup> Exodus 4:24-26

battles and worthy, at least occasionally, of worshipping him. That they immediately break their covenant promise does not deter God in keeping his. Through forty years of wilderness wandering, through good times and bad, the people grow in their understanding of what this communal covenant is: that it demands obedience on their side in turn for blessings from God - total self-giving of both.

Moses' sister, Miriam, is called "prophetess." When Moses marries a Cushite (isn't this Zipporah? Midian was sometimes called Cush), Miriam is angry, and along with her younger brother, Aaron, who is also Moses' spokesman, she begins to undermine Moses' authority among the people:

Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also? And the Lord heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all the men that were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out you three to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out.<sup>18</sup>

The Lord is not gentle with this insubordination. It is serious. Moses is no ordinary prophet who speaks from dreams and visions; with Moses, God himself speaks "mouth to mouth." Moses beholds the very form of the Lord; to him God has entrusted his whole house. If she compares her prophetic gift to the prophetic powers of Moses, Miriam badly misjudges it and herself. God's anger is kindled against her arrogant challenge to what is really God's own authority. She is made leprous, and, except for Moses' intervention, would have been kept permanently outside the camp. For his sake, after a week's ostracization, she is healed.

Miriam's act of challenging authority is more serious than Aaron's. The chances are that her dislike of the Cushite wife pulled Aaron along rather than the other way around. Aaron seems to have been easily influenced; earlier, when Moses delayed on the holy mountain, Aaron had allowed the people to construct the golden calf. His excuse then was that the people pressured him; he merely threw in the gold, and out jumped this calf!

Miriam does have prophetic gifts. But these are of a different order than Moses'. They give her no reason for misunderstanding her importance to the point of trying to displace his authority. This tendency to presumption happens again in the early Church, as we will see; one that St. Paul hastens to correct. It is a common misunderstanding that sharing the Holy Spirit gifts means sharing

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<sup>18</sup> Numbers 12:lf

the station of authority. It does not mean that. The roles of authority and obedience are sharply demarcated; and though difficult to discern as equal roles in the Old Testament because of fallen consciousness, their equality will be made clear in the New where the Redeemed Order restores an enhanced Original Order. Miriam's mistake is more serious than Aaron's whose transgression is once more overlooked. Aaron had delegated authority through Moses - in a certain sense higher than Moses since Moses was never a priest; Miriam had none. Miriam's disobedience directly threatened the order of the people by instigating the old bug-a-boo, envy of authority. The overtones of this incident are as up-to-date as today, and as ancient as Eden.

In punishment for his own moment of presumption, Moses dies before seeing the land flowing with milk and honey and the fulfillment of the promise. Joshua, who has been in training since a youth in Egypt, is to be Moses' own replacement. At Moses' death, Joshua assumes command of the people of God and is presented in the Bible as a mini-Moses.

### **Joshua – Judges**

During two chaotic centuries between the Conquest and David's rule, women's contribution is intriguing. The book of Joshua records a victorious conquest – south and north, until the whole land of Canaan is in the possession of the Israelites. The initial embarkation of the army depends on the help of a woman, Rahab, a foreigner and a prostitute. Professing faith in the God of Israel, she hides their spies from discovery by the King of Jericho.

I know that the Lord has given you the land and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and the earth beneath.<sup>19</sup>

As a result of her aid, the spies carry back vital information that results in the fall of Jericho, and the death of every living thing in it, except for Rahab and her family. Later this non- Israelite woman marries a Hebrew, Salmon. It is her faith that makes her an acceptable mother of generations to come. He is in the lineage of Judah and she figures importantly in the genealogy of Jesus. This woman whose initial importance to Salvation History is an act, will ultimately be remembered because of her fruit.

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<sup>19</sup> Joshua 2:9-11

Though the book of Joshua proclaims proudly the glorious victories of the Lord's army, there is another side to the story. Partially overlapping Joshua's time, the book of Judges poses a grimmer picture. Yes, God has conquered gloriously, but he works his marvels despite the miserable state of men - a state which on closer look finds faithfulness and obedience to the Covenant promises most often lacking. The inspired writers of Joshua and Judges both proclaim the truth. Great victories, explainable only by the grace of God during the time of their accomplishment, are notable only by the weakness and unfaithfulness of the soldiers. Israel knows in looking back that only God's act accounted for an impoverished band of slaves escaping a strong empire against that empire's wishes; that only God opened the sea, brought food in the desert, and made the wilderness trek survivable. Only God could account for Joshua's ragtag army taking over a country of strong city states, each well defended against the attacks of other nomads who, like the Israelites, regularly threatened them. God alone brought them from bitter bondage to glorious freedom in a land flowing with milk and honey. This amazing story is what the book of Joshua trumpets.

Judges, on the other hand, speaks the truth about the human condition. Hard-hearted, cowardly people listen to God rarely; and as a result first fall under the influence, and finally into a new bondage, by the people with whom they settle. The process of gaining the promised territories is slow and painful. For two hundred years the people scarcely listen to the Lord at all. In order to get their attention, God must discipline with threats, whacks and slaps.

At the death of the able Joshua, the People enter a trying time of disorganization and lawlessness. Neglect of God's command and Sinai's laws lead to punishment with a near loss of identity. People, singled out by God as deliverers in national emergencies, arise to lead the people. Called "judges" they function as both civil magistrates and military leaders. When all seems lost, the Spirit comes upon a chosen man, and then another who lead cursorily, freeing people in certain locales, only to have them fall again. For two hundred years these individuals sporadically lead armies to free Israel from entanglements. How God manages within a few generations to form a nation from these squabbling, amoral people is the wonder. But succeed he does, not through the mighty acts of warriors, but through the submitted lives and fruitfulness of women, who raise up inspired sons, able to assume godly authority furthering his plan of Salvation.

A woman is among the judges. Deborah prophesies as well as acts as a leader of the fighting men. She is immortalized in the Song of Deborah, among the oldest of all Scriptural writing.

The peasantry ceased in Israel, they ceased until you arose, Deborah, as a mother in Israel.<sup>20</sup>

Another woman is involved in Deborah's greatest victory. And Deborah prophesies to Barak, her male compatriot who will not lead without her, about the reversal of roles:

I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.<sup>21</sup>

Jael, a Kenite woman, pins the enemy commander, Sisera, to the ground by hammering a tent peg through his temple. By this audacious act, a woman outside of Israel, temporarily regains deliverance. Why these two women? Where are the men? The warriors of Israel, in large part, are phlegmatic and dispirited lacking the strength of men of God:

Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Why did you tarry among the sheep folds to hear the piping of the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan: and Dan, why did he abide with the ships? And Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, settling down by his landings. Zebulun is a people that jeopardized their lives to death; Napthali too, on the heights of the field.<sup>22</sup>

The men are unmotivated, so women come forward to display the strength necessary to carry out deliverance. Neither Jael nor Deborah are remembered for a fruitfulness contributing to the promised lineage; it is only their works that briefly flash across Israel's dismal sky, and fade quickly away.

Warriors again arise. Against a chronic turbulence, the people constantly do evil in the sight of the Lord. The consequence: God must allow them to be persecuted and held as slaves by their enemies. Sorely out of joint, bitterly experiencing a lack of order, the people only occasionally catch a glimpse of what God has promised.

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son . . . Therefore the boy shall be

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<sup>20</sup> Judges 5:7

<sup>21</sup> Judges 4:18

<sup>22</sup> Judges 5:15-18

a Nazarite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.<sup>23</sup>

In carefully knit circumstances, by the reestablishment of the original order of husband and wife in God, another leader arises, Samson. For a time he successfully outwits the Philistines, only to succumb to his weakness for . . . women. By relinquishing his godly call to the negative woman, he falls. It is not only positive examples of woman whom we meet in the pages of the Bible. Delilah uses her physical charms and persuasions to “vex him to death.”

The last verse of Judges aptly sums by these years of trouble and confusion:

In those days there was no King in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes.<sup>24</sup>

Without recognized authority, with no obedience to headship, each man does whatever he wants. During these years, woman’s role among the People of God is ambiguous; she seems to have achieved notoriety by being either the warrior or the treacherous seductress. It may look like a time not unlike our own.

### **Ruth and Hannah**

It is in keeping with God’s promises in Genesis 3 that a woman will be found to reestablish the path for his people. God, unpredictably, reaches outside of the disintegrating tribes and finds one woman after his own heart. If this seems contradictory to the early story of chosen women being taken only from the Chosen People, remember the Teacher. He begins with the elemental, basic lessons, and adds to these, further truths. It is essential to establish that the woman must be one with the man, in her heart of hearts - of the same faith and people. When that is in place, it can be understood that a woman outside of the people might be found, *with the right heart condition*. Tamar is the first (though I believe her to be an Israelite, it is unstated). And with this Teacher it is first things first.

Two women are found. Alongside the choice of Ruth, he finds another woman, one of the daughters of Abraham, a faithful believer. Ruth is a despised Moabitess; Hannah, a woman of Israel. By seeking their feminine destinies both will prepare the way for the reestablishment of godly authority - the glorious Kingdom of David. This earthly kingdom shall, in retrospect, be regarded by the Jewish people as the apex of their national life. David’s Kingdom will be a

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<sup>23</sup> Judges 13:2-5

<sup>24</sup> Judges 21:25

foreshadowing of the future Reign of God when all nations will be restored to his rule. It is during the Davidic Kingdom, whose seed lies in these two women, that the city of Jerusalem will flower, becoming a symbol of all heavenly community, the Church, in time and eternity.

When we meet Hannah and Ruth, just two generations before that flowering, not even the spadework is done. Why does Scripture acquaint us with these two women contemporaries, the mother of Samuel, and the great-grandmother of David? What is the importance to the Holy Spirit that their story be told at all - two undistinguished women who don't seem to do anything? Scholars have concluded that the little book of Ruth is merely a pastoral interlude of dubious historic or theological interest, or else, simply a tract against Ezra's purging of foreign women after the return from Exile. It is certainly more than that.

During Hannah's lifetime, but for the grace of God, the turbulent time of the judges threatened Israel's continuance. But Samuel is born, a man very like Moses, to be the last judge of Israel. A priest, though not of the priestly clan, a prophet of great intimacy with God since a child, a spiritual giant with gifts of wisdom and clairvoyance, he is wholly dedicated to God's purposes for Israel. He is, therefore, commissioned to heed the people's desires and anoint a first King over the Hebrews, Saul, and then the second blessed king, David.

With Saul's eventual loss of reason and failure as king, Samuel anoints his successor, Israel's everlasting favorite son, David. It is David's physical kingdom, small in the world's measure, which provides the base upon which God presents the underlying principles of the Kingdom that is not of this world. That is to be *the* Kingdom, eternally ruled by great David's greater son, Jesus, whom David himself foresaw; and for whom, in his life, he played the imperfect foreshadower.

Samuel's birth is the reiteration of the now familiar story. An Ephraimite husband named Elkanah has two wives, Peninnah, who has children, and Hannah, who is barren. Elkanah loves Hannah and tries to console her for her failure in childbearing. But she is not to be consoled. She vows before God that, if he will remove the affliction of barrenness, she will give her son back to him. Her prayers in the house of God are so fervent, her weeping so bitter, she is accused by priest Eli, of drunkenness. She leaves the house of prayer, however, with his blessing, secure in the belief that her prayer will be answered. Elkanah "knows" Hannah, who conceives.

They arose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord;  
then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew  
Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her; and in due time

Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."<sup>25</sup>

When he is weaned, the little boy is taken by his mother with his father's consent back to Shiloh where he is given to the Lord under Eli's tutelage. Hannah's song of exultation is well known by Mary when she is herself in a similar situation.

My heart exults in the Lord;  
my strength is exalted in the Lord.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in thy salvation ..."<sup>26</sup>

In Hannah's case it is the beginning of renewed contact with God, which will bring his people back on course with his plan. Samuel very early exhibits the ear that hears, and the heart that heeds the Word of God. With maturity, he singlemindedly administers to the people what he hears God say. It is he who hears God speak, when confronted with the youth, David,

"Arise and anoint him for this is he." And Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.<sup>27</sup>

From what unlikely ground did God raise up that handsome and gifted family of Jesse of whom David was the youngest son? Jesse's grandmother, an obedient and the Lord-fearing woman, was not an Israelite, she was, as we have seen, one of the despised enemy, a Moabitess. Her husband's family, a man with his wife and two sons, were Hebrews who migrated to Moab during a time of famine in Canaan. There the father of the family died, and then disastrously, one after the other, the two sons sicken and die. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law find themselves in the most wretched of circumstances, widows without issue. Naomi will go back to her home country to find sustenance. Both of the younger women are begged by Naomi to leave her in order to find new husbands among their own people. One reluctantly does, the other has absorbed too much of Naomi's faith and wants only to follow her. The beautiful words are well known:

Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> | Samuel 1:19-20

<sup>26</sup> | Samuel 2:1f

<sup>27</sup> | Samuel 16:12-13

<sup>28</sup> Ruth 1:16

God will work in this humble woman, Ruth, to fulfill his prophetic word. In doing so, he will give her a full, happy life, and will bring offspring into her mother-in-law's lap once more.

Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David.<sup>29</sup>

Boaz responds to Ruth's need taking up his familial responsibility by marrying and impregnating her. He is a God-fearing man, son of a God-fearing woman, Rahab! Yes, the prostitute of Jericho, with Ruth, is welded into the lineage of the people of promise despite their pagan origins. Both are found in St. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, signs that his Lordship will be over all nations. Both are mothers of Israel because of their faith in Israel's God which overrides their pagan origins embedding them in the People.

The courtship of Boaz and Ruth brings into the otherwise bleak time of the judges, a picture of people, who in the midst of fallen mankind, still reflect something of the image of God. These two exercise a kind of godly masculinity and godly femininity, through which The Lord brings a fruitfulness which depends upon, yet transcends the biological. The text reads:

. . .she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.<sup>30</sup>

Samuel, the fruit of Hannah and Elkanah's union (with God, the third party) anoints David, the fruit of Boaz and Ruth's union (with God, the third party). Between these two sons, the Davidic kingdom will become a reality. Does it seem mere coincidence, in the dearth of such specifics about a multitude of Bible characters that the women, the mothers of these great instruments of God, are brought compellingly to our attention? No conclusions are drawn from the descriptions of these women; that is left for discovery by eyes of faith. It is only with reflection, that the Holy Spirit's selection of women with barriers to their fruitfulness, is seen again as a sign in the course of Salvation History. Both Hannah and Ruth are important women in the continuum which culminates in Mary of Nazareth. These women, along with their sisters, speak of the special meaning of the feminine in God and Man's relationship - a meaning nearly lost in the Fall, and today in danger of obliteration.

### David's Women

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<sup>29</sup> Ruth 4:16

<sup>30</sup> Ruth 4:13

And what of the women in David's life? He married many times. A born leader with gifts of the highest order: a military commander, a wise administrator; a great poet, a man in love with God, he was, on the other hand, "no stalwart when faced with temptation." Women were much attracted to him, and he to them. It was on this account that King Saul's jealousy first developed which became a psychotic envy, and finally, a devouring hatred.

And as they were coming home, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing to meet King Saul with timbrels, and songs of joy, and with instruments of music. And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him; he said, "They ascribed to David ten thousands; and to me they have ascribed thousands; and what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that time on. And on the morrow an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house.<sup>31</sup>

David's first wife is Saul's daughter, Michal, whom Saul gives to David as a snare hoping to be able to repeat the Samson story in David's life.

Saul thought, "Let me give her to him that she may be a snare for him, that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."<sup>32</sup>

But Michal saves David, intervening between her father and her husband. Later, however, the marriage dissolves when during David's guerrilla year, Saul gives Michal to another man as wife. Only near the end of Saul's hold on the kingship does David in final negotiations demand that Michal be given back to him. It cannot be a happy reunion, for shortly after, as David exultantly dances before the ark of the Lord clothed in an ephod, the apron-like priest garb, Michal "despises him in her heart." After receiving the ark with joy, David gives offerings, blesses the people and returns to bless his own household only to find a bitter wife.

But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself before the eyes of his servant maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" And David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord - and I will make merry before the Lord. I will make myself even more contemptible than this and will be abased in your eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." And Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> I Samuel 18:6-8

<sup>32</sup> I Samuel 18:21

<sup>33</sup> II Samuel 6:20

David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, Maacah daughter of a Canaanite king, Haggith, Abital, and Eglan.

Besides these, David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron; and more sons and daughters were born to David.<sup>34</sup>

About these women we know nothing, and of their progeny, very little. There are, however, two other women who marry David, whose stories we know well; one is Abigail, the widow of Nabal, the other Bathsheba, wife of a Hittite warrior of David's army. These two women give us another window from which to view the scriptural woman and her role. In some important ways, in contrast to each other, they reveal a side to femininity that is often misunderstood. One exemplifies that side with a weakness, while the other does so with a strength that made her David's singular wife through whom God would carry on his work of restoration. In light of the sign importance of woman, the story of Bathsheba dramatizes this striking contrast.

Abigail first comes across David's path quite literally. She is not an ordinary woman. Described as of good understanding and beautiful, her actions show her to have uncommon courage, strength of character and decisiveness in action. She displays all the qualities of the strong masculine side of feminine nature that we applaud in the whole woman. Nabal, her husband, for his part, is a downright disagreeable human being. Scripture calls him "churlish and ill-behaved, ill-natured and a fool." his own actions might lead us to call him worse. This marriage displays no sign of the union of two persons, descriptive of the divine union. It is an unhappy marriage.

When David encounters Abigail, David is not yet in control of the kingdom that Samuel has anointed him to rule. He lives in the wilderness with a considerable band of men, hunted by Saul, and biding his time till Saul's end comes (not by David's hand). In the course of such extremity, he is dependent on friendly herdsmen and farmers to supply him and his men with food. Nabal is one of those rich farmers. David's men, camping around his herds, have never touched one of his animals, but instead, have protected Nabal's shepherds from danger. David, intending to profit something from this honest service, sends messengers, asking Nabal to come up with some provisions for himself and his men. But Nabal lives up to his reputation with rude remarks, and sends David's messengers away insulted and empty-handed - dangerous instigation for this proud young man.

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<sup>34</sup> II Samuel 5:13

David said to his men, 'Gird on your sword!' And every man of them girded on his sword; and about four hundred men went up after David..<sup>35</sup>

The report is carried to Abigail that they are coming, and she gathers a large amount of various kinds of food, and rides to meet him.

And then she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband, Nabal.<sup>36</sup>

Needless to say, with such a display of food, and a beautiful woman who does obeisance to him, David is turned aside from his evil intent against Nabal. Abigail flatters David, but is hardly flattering to her own husband:

Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.<sup>37</sup>

Could she have been an influence for her husband's softening, on his "heart condition," if she had even attempted to honor him? She then blesses David with a benediction that has prophetic overtones, and he is swept off his feet.

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you who have kept me this day from bloodguilty and from avenging myself with my own hand!"<sup>38</sup>

Abigail goes home with David's blessing, to find her husband drunk at his own fancy feast, which, in light of his denial of any food for David's men, is ironic.

And in the morning when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. About ten days later the Lord smote Nabal; and he died.<sup>39</sup>

With Nabal's death, David sends for Abigail, and makes her his wife. She later bears him his second son, Chileab, of whom not another word is written. With her own biological fruit thus not ripening into significance for God's people, Abigail's mark on Salvation History is minimal, except as a foil for another strong woman - Bathsheba.

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<sup>35</sup> | Samuel 25:13

<sup>36</sup> | Samuel 25:18-20

<sup>37</sup> | Samuel 25:25

<sup>38</sup> | Samuel 25:32

<sup>39</sup> | Samuel 25:37

Abigail was his third wife, after whom David had many others. With all the loves of David, what was his need of Bathsheba? It is she, the wife of another, bathing in the warm afternoon sun, whom David observes from his balcony. The outcome is well known. After an interlude as sinful lovers, followed by the darker sin when he conspires and murders her husband, the two become husband and wife. This one, even though an adulteress, becomes David's true wife in Scripture. It is she, through whom God acts to carry on his people's destiny. Are Abigail, Ahinoam, Michal, Haggith, Abital or Eglah names which anyone recognizes in the salvation story? It remains for Bathsheba to become one of the great mothers of Israel.

And what kind of a woman is this? First of all, to account for David's primary interest, she is beautiful and sexually responsive. But she has other sustaining qualities making her the ideal mother of the next great king, Solomon. Known as the wisest of Israel's kings, he will bring the nation to the climax of its power and wealth. It is Solomon who contributes as much as David to actual Bible literature with songs and proverbs. Still other writings were attributed to him because of his reputation for exceptional wisdom.

Hebrew tradition has it that Bathsheba on the day of his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, composed and recited the poetry of Proverbs 31 both for an admonition and a blessing on her son Solomon. Reflecting Bathsheba's values of womanhood, these words serve as insight into what it was that God and David saw in her to make her specially chosen.

The opening inscription reads: "The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him. . ." <sup>40</sup> and the words are understood by Bible scholars to address Solomon. *Lemuel*, unknown as a specific person, means "Godward." *Massa* has the translation of "the oracle", a kind of kingly ascription. Bathsheba inscribed this poetry for her son , "To the Godward, who is wise as an Oracle of God."

Bathsheba proceeds to write an acrostic poem to exhort her son to morality and justice in his reign, and culminates it with a description of the wife who will cause him to prosper. We can suppose it is an image of the woman who comes close to Bathsheba's ideal, an ideal which nourished her own character. The strengths of this character she, as his wife, contributed to his father, David, and as his mother to Solomon. The full reading is rewarding in all its verses, which are abbreviated here:

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<sup>40</sup> Proverbs 31 :1

A good wife, who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.  
The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.  
She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life..  
She girds her loins with strength  
and makes her arms strong.  
She reaches out her hands to the needy.  
She is not afraid of snow for her household,  
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.  
Her husband is known in the gates,  
when he sits among the elders of the land.  
Strength and dignity are her clothing  
and she laughs at the time to come  
She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
Her children rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:  
“Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.”  
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.  
Give her of the fruit of her hands  
and let her works praise her in the gates.<sup>41</sup>

Bathsheba shows herself to be a woman, not less strong and resourceful, nor less active and decisive, than Abigail. Bathsheba’s poem praises the woman who is concerned about an efficient household, with its many decisions; who is involved with domestic commerce, and who displays a profitable business sense. Both women balance out any consideration of holy womanhood. The very image of a submissive woman as fearful, lacking in common-sense, and always in need of permission, is repellant to the divine feminine principle invoked for women. Bathsheba would pass the modern test for wholeness which sets a premium on assertiveness, yet her whole concern is furtherance of her lord and king, David.

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<sup>41</sup> parts of Proverbs 31

The crucial difference between Abigail and Bathsheba lies in a short phrase of Bathsheba's poem, and a comparative verse in Abigail's story. First, Bathsheba's testimony about the virtuous woman is: "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain." The testimony from Abigail's life: "his wife told him these things, his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." Two male hearts - one rests in trust of her, the other dies within a husband whose wife gave him no reason to trust her.

Not for herself, all of Bathsheba's many accomplishments and strengths were a self-giving for David. This is the need which she of all his wives supplied for him; perhaps it was this essence of her being that attracted him as much as her bodily beauty. Her acts were not for self-promotion, or vanity, or even for her own well-being. She was totally for David, whose heart could rest in her. Her activity, so purposeful for David, made sure that he had no lack of gain, and was honored amongst his peers. Her orientation, in the fear of the Lord, is to face him as her pivotal point. For understanding the place of appropriate masculine strengths in the feminine nature, Abigail is the contrast. Masculine abilities are harmonious and life-enhancing in the true woman, but destructive in the woman who is not self-giving.

Nothing is necessarily wrong with Abigail's actions. It is her own words that speak of a motivation of self preservation, rather than any care for Nabal. It is this attitude that gave him no reason to rest his heart in her, and might it even be wondered what difference it might have meant if Abigail had attempted to care for him? David praised her common-sense and discretion - they are praiseworthy in all women. But beyond that, there is the question of what Abigail's womanly effect on Nabal was overall. Churlish, was she an instrument to ease his temper, or had she never been submitted to him? Like a woman who does not think in terms of headship, she neither informed him of the effect of his dangerous rebuff of David, nor of her own decision to handle the problem. With scornful words, she betrays her lack of commitment. Lovingness and loyalty even undeserved, are woman's gift to the redemptive process for many a man. In this case, a disobedient and hard-hearted man will not be modified in "knowing" his wife. Her wisdom will not become his; there is no union, no oneness. The last of her decisions apart from him, one terrifyingly crucial to the two of them, quite literally snuffed the life out of a heart which already was deprived.

Breaching the Law in adultery, Bathsheba is far from perfect, but her loyalty to Uriah the Hittite warrior husband is a reality, and her penance for sin, acute. David, moreover, is the one called accountable by God.

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband as dead she made lamentation for her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife, and bore a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.<sup>42</sup>

This time the woman is not chastised, the man only; although his punishment, the death of their son, inflicts great sorrow on her as well.

There is no word of Abigail's mourning Nabal; all in all that seems unlikely. Of all the women of the Bible whose personality is unfolded, she contributes little to Salvation History, other than keeping David from a blood guilt that he heaps upon himself with impunity on every other occasion. Bathsheba, on the other hand, becomes one of the mothers in the line of godly women by whom God's plan is furthered.

Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him, and sent a message by Nathan the prophet; so he called his name Jedidiah (beloved of the Lord) because of the Lord.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of David's life, when his other wives are jealously contending for position to be Queen Mother, and when at least one of his sons has already usurped his old father's prerogatives, David, with the prophet Nathan's encouragement, calls Bathsheba to his bedside. She is the one trusted wife.

As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel saying, "Solomon, your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so I will do this day," then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king and said, "May my lord King David live forever."<sup>44</sup>

### Solomon's Women

Loved by God, Solomon loved the Lord in return, and honored him by the establishment of a great house of worship, the world renowned Temple. Because of the humility he displayed in wanting only to rule wisely over his people, God gave him an unsurpassed gift of wisdom. If his

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<sup>42</sup> II Samuel 11:26

<sup>43</sup> I Kings 1:28-31

<sup>44</sup> I Kings 1:29-31

love of God had excelled, all would have been well, but Solomon's love excelled not with God, but with women.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women: daughters of Pharaoh, and Moabite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn your heart after their gods;" Solomon clung to these in love. he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.<sup>45</sup>

Again, the scriptures relate the power of women over the hearts of men. Was there no woman among all these to give Solomon that union that would have anchored him to the God of Israel? No single woman has left a name we recognize as his true other (perhaps with so many, no one had a chance). Upon his death, the kingdom broke in two, precipitated by that sour young son, Rehoboam, who inherited none of his father's wisdom.

The influence of the feminine side certainly was not lacking in Solomon's life, but it was not an influence that flowed from woman toward God, bearing her husband upon that flood of loving "yes" to him. Instead, it turned Solomon to the direction in which it did flow, an allegiance to, or at least a softness for idolatry. Woman is either a sign toward or away from God - it is impossible for her to be neutral. With Solomon's disintegration, the kingdom disintegrates as well. If godly women attuned to his will and purpose had been important instruments for the founding of the Davidic kingdom, idol-worshipping women were the instruments for its dissolution.

### **The Divided Kingdom**

The kingdom splits; Judah holds the south, Israel the north. And during their turbulent histories, developing over three hundred and more years, except in progeny who arise as historical figures, woman's contribution sinks out of sight,. We know nothing of the mothers of the prophets and kings. Overall the faith level is low. Almost all records of the kings end with the final bleak obituary, "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord." Thousands of false prophets, receiving their sustenance at the king's table, were lackeys who mouthed, not the word of the Lord, but what the various fickle kings wished to hear.

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<sup>45</sup> 1 Kings 11:1-5

Elijah, the enigmatic and solitary desert man, changes all that; but his origins are shrouded in mystery, even as his end, when he is assumed into heaven in a chariot of fire. “Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead,” is all we know of his beginnings. Two of the most dramatic characters Israel ever produced, Elijah and his disciple Elisha, who will inherit his mantle, are holy men who appear from the desert to the discomfiture of the Samarian (Israel in the north) line of kings - none of them authentic, none of them Davidic - whom the two prophets berate and punish for their idolatries.

The one prominent woman to emerge from this long historic period is a villainess; her name a household word - Jezebel. She venomously plots against Elijah. A daughter of the high-priest of Baal of Sidon who presides over child sacrifice, her name alone is sufficient to bring up everything in human experience that is at odds with redemption. Killing the priests of the Lord, she supports a band of priests who serve Baal and Asherah. Asherah is the goddess who is appeased with little babies. Unearthed in ancient Carthage were multitudes of earthen pots full of bones of infants sacrificed to her.

These Israelite rulers Elijah overcomes by spiritual power rooted in faith in the Lord, which he caps by killing eight hundred and fifty of Jezebel’s darlings who “eat at her table.”<sup>46</sup> Jezebel is now his mortal enemy. Accustomed to getting her way, she is not married to a man who ever withstands her; her husband is a force to be reckoned with only because he listens to her.

Ahab, however, unlike Jezebel, does not misjudge the truth of the one true God. Though he hates to hear the truth when it goes against him, part of his Hebrew heritage is that he knows a false prophet from a true one. With a holy woman, he might have led Israel aright, but Jezebel’s influence on him is totally evil, and together they are a wicked pair. In time, the disasters they court overtake them.<sup>47</sup>

Before her ghastly death, the venom of Jezebel seeps out into the life of the whole country, and finally even into Judah, where a semblance of true Davidic rule fitfully waxes and wanes. Jezebel’s daughter the frightful Athaliah intrudes into the royal rule at Jerusalem by marrying the king of Judah of the Davidic lineage! A true daughter of Jezebel she is instrumental in

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<sup>46</sup> 1 Kings 18:17-40

<sup>47</sup> II Kings 9

poisoning of God's people which becomes nearly total. Baal worship is everywhere. The effect of the lives of these women, Jezebel in the north and her daughter, Athaliah, in the south, threatens the extermination of the true revelation of God so painstakingly built up in the thousand years since Abraham. The second millennium opens in near hopelessness of that revelation continuing - that, is except for an act of God.

God's antidote to counter the poison is to raise up an equally rash and violent man, Jehu who is marked for kingship in Israel by the prophet Elijah in accord with God's will. His anointing as king is carried out by Elisha. With the bloodbath he wreaks, Jehu relieves the threat of universal idolatry in both Israel and Judah. It is a gruesome story; the purge by Jehu encompasses all the brood of Jezebel and Athaliah and thousands who were in their favor.<sup>48</sup>

At this low point in the history of God's people, Isaiah, the great prophet arises to speak his word powerfully to Judah. Two most significant verses, which are well known to us, stand out among his prophecies. They form a double sign that was probably not comprehended by the very prophet who uttered the words. The Holy Spirit who inspired them will fulfill them in a most auspicious way more than 600 years in the future.

The historic background to these words outlines a troubled time. Ahaz, the weak king of Judah, is frightened by the threats of his near northern enemies, Syria and Israel. But he is even more concerned about the audacity of the great armies of Assyria further to the north. The Lord sends Isaiah to hearten him with prophetic words: if he will but believe and trust in the Lord, Isaiah promises the enemy will not vanquish Ahaz. To prove it he need only ask God for a sign. But Ahaz has already decided in his mind what he will do, so he equivocates. He has neither the faith to trust, nor the desire for faith.

"Ask for a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, I will not put the Lord to the test."

Perfidiously, his decision is to call upon Assyria, the threatening giant itself, to save him from lesser foes. Urgently, God speaks to him again through Isaiah,

And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you should weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you sign. Behold, a young woman (virgin) shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. he shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose

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<sup>48</sup> II Kings 9,10,11

the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day when Ephraim departed from Judah- the king of Assyria.<sup>49</sup>

The very power Ahaz hopes to help him will turn and enslave him, but Ahaz turns anyway to that vicious warrior whose very name sent chills, Tiglath Pileser III, King of Assyria. According to their agreement, 'Pul' readily does away with Ahaz's enemies, and then turns and makes a vassal out of him. Poor Ahaz, in a mixture of ignorant pride and humiliation, he brings the pagan Syrian altar into the Lord's holy temple as a sign of his subservience to the great power.

The context of the remarkable verse "a virgin will conceive" is clearly this political upheaval of the Eighth Century before Christ. But the buried gem of truth, to be eventually revealed, will point to the birth of another who will be "God with Us," Immanuel.

So weak in faith and vacillating that he turned from God, preferring "Pul" of Assyria, Ahaz is bypassed by God, who declares that the sign will be given anyway. His young wife will bear a son. The prophecy continues - by the time the child arrives at the age of discretion, Syria and Israel will no longer have any power; and only evil days will come with the Assyrian King.

Yet, is that all? The Hebrew word used to describe this young woman is *almah*, which has two meanings, "young woman," and "virgin." *Almah*, therefore, relates to two different prophecies combined together in the same words. One meaning is for the turbulent times of Ahaz; the other meaning, much more significantly, is for another child to be born of the same lineage - the Davidic line. In the context of Ahaz's reign, *almah* refers to his wife, a young woman of royal lineage, who will bear a son, the good king Hezekiah. Heading a reform that will bring Judah back to God's law after years of disregard, Hezekiah's years will be blessed by relief from the pressure of his enemies. Such is the sign that God has committed himself to time and again throughout Old Testament times, as we have seen - "a woman will conceive."

However, inherent in this same sign is the promise of the word of God given over the centuries that the lineage of David will continue until the Messiah comes of that line. Unlike the apostate north, where the mothers of kings make no difference at all to the apostate rule, the mothers of all the Davidic kings are solemnly noted by name in the south, in Judah's historical record. Eventually, within that dynasty, through the womb of "the mother" foretold in Genesis will come Immanuel, God With Us, and then the second meaning of the word *almah* becomes the

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<sup>49</sup> Isaiah 7:11-17 parenthesis added to the RSV text where the word is in the footnote.

climax of all feminine signs, “a virgin will conceive.” A woman is integral to this dynamic sign, and upon her pivots all God’s revelation of himself.

Jewish Christian scholar, Roy Schoeman, offers a helpful commentary on this pivotal word.

Jewish apologists argue that the underlying Hebrew Word for “virgin” in this verse, (“almah”), is ambiguous and could alternatively simply mean “young woman”; however, a young woman giving birth would hardly constitute a miraculous sign. Furthermore, in the centuries before the birth of Christ an official Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek was made for the use of Jews who no longer spoke Hebrew. This translation, known as the Septuagint, uses the Greek word (parthenos), which unambiguously means “virgin.”<sup>50</sup>

In retrospect, after centuries of unfolding experience, we discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the choice of a single word uttered by the mouth of his prophet, Isaiah, who, though knowing much of the majesty and power of God, could not yet have known the full intent that was carried in the choice of that one word. We cannot overemphasize the importance of this sign, so fully consistent is it with all God’s work in Salvation History. Hidden in the greatest simplicity, it marks woman’s importance to God’s divine Plan of love for his creature Man. All other understandings about woman find their base in it.

As for the woman of the Eighth Century B.C., to whom the first interpretation of the prophecy applied, we know very little. Her name was Abi, and her father, Zechariah, was one of those men of the priestly tribe of Levi who helped cleanse the temple during the reform of Hezekiah. More importantly, the woman to whom the second interpretation of the prophecy belongs is Mary of Nazareth.

Two generations pass more wickedly than before, and then another good king of the lineage of David arises, Josiah. Shortly after his tragic death at the hand of Egypt’s Pharaoh Neco, the Kingdom of Judah is destroyed by Babylon. That tiger nation has ended the rule of fierce Assyria in order to begin its own sway over the world. About one hundred and fifty years earlier, the northern kingdom reaped the reward of its sin and fell to Assyrian armies, its people scattered among the nations. Now by Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian armies, Jerusalem suffers ruin and her people, exile. No account of any woman relieves the story of either the painful exile, or, fifty years later, of the return of the poor remnant to Jerusalem, or of the faltering attempts to rebuild the invalid city.

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<sup>50</sup> Schoeman, *Salvation is From the Jews*, Ignatius 2003, p.85 He further notes that “this was a translation made by Jews for Jews.” They, therefore, anticipated a virgin birth.

When Israel is once again established as a God-centric nation, we do have some prophetic utterances relating to woman. The returnees come back with zeal to live out the Law. In retrospect they concede that when they turned from pure worship and observance of the Law of Moses, all their troubles came upon them. They are helped to make their orientation to God absolute by the ministry of a priest named Ezra, who is himself a child of exiled Judeans. He is appalled, when coming back to the struggling city of Jerusalem, to find Jews with strict genealogies married to women of dubious Israelite heritage, or even from pagan backgrounds. Horrified at the implications of these marriages to the future of faith, he demands that these women and their children be put aside.<sup>51</sup> It seems a cruel fate for innocent women and children, yet the very existence of the people of God once more hinges on women, and now their orientation to the true God is questionable. As it is, their children cannot even speak the sacred language; how can they possibly carry the lamp of David till the Davidic Messiah comes?

During the same period, the prophet Malachi prophesies, giving us more insight into the blighted situation.

You cover the Lord's altar with tears, and with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless."<sup>52</sup>

Not only have the men of Judah married foreign women, shades of Solomon, but to do so they dumped good Hebrew women, women whom God had joined to them in sacred covenant. Their faithlessness, both to this primary covenant and to their God-joined wife, makes their prayers futile. For the fruitful continuance of his people, God requires of faithful marriage, godly offspring.

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<sup>51</sup> Ezra 9,10

<sup>52</sup> Malachi 2:13-16

When the returning exiles had stabilized their lives in the regions surrounding Jerusalem, a fad of admiration for the different looks of the resident women, who were by now a mixed race of idol worshippers, caught the Hebrew male's eye. Leaving his legitimate wife, he took a foreign woman whose presence scandalized Ezra. As a result, these women were purged to assure the fidelity of the people to God. In the process, we have the prophetic words which warn all to observe the sanctity of the marriage vow and its significance to overall faithfulness; "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel."

## CHAPTER IV OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS NAMED FOR WOMEN

### Esther

Of the three books in the Bible named for women, two, Esther and Judith, have a different purpose than relating historical happening. This, as we have seen is not an obstacle to these stories being bearers of God's word. The historical truth has an interest and a lesson of its own, but for the desired enlightenment of the mind and motivation of the will, even history must be interpreted in terms of a higher truth. Man does not live by historical or scientific truth, the truth of facts, alone. (We state this acknowledging fully, the importance of the factual, historic reality of Jesus, his life, death and physical resurrection- which is ultimate Truth; in him historic happening and Truth merge.)

The book of Esther claims a historical setting during the time of the exile when the Persian emperor, Ahasuerus, also called Xerxes, ruled. In place of the former Queen Vashti, Esther, a beautiful Jewish woman, has been chosen to be the royal consort. The religious value of the book is sometimes questioned because the older Hebrew version never mentions the name of God. The later Septuagint version, which is the Catholic antecedent, adds prayers and references to God, but the relation to Salvation History seems obscure. However, from our point of view, the story carries a forceful message illustrating the way God honors and works through a trusting, obedient woman in the most dire of circumstances.

With the two other books bearing women's names, a complete picture of woman and her response to authority is painted for us. In uncounted ways, Christians are presented daily with real problems in their relationship to authority, and these godly women provide insights into the steps all may take to solve difficult authority problems.

Esther works in a situation in which she is dependent and powerless (in terms of authority) to overcome seeming insurmountable obstacles. Here the submission, the obedience, is on a different plane than wife to husband though that's involved, too. The Jewish people face

annihilation by the plot of a powerful and bitter enemy who has cornered the king's own power to further his plan for genocide. Through this obedient, heeding woman, God works to overcome evil, and free his people from the impending doom. The story is written to demonstrate to Israel how to overcome evil when perpetrated by an enemy who seems to have lawful authority on his side. While the Persians were in power, many foes tormented the returning exiles; these enemies spoke and acted just like the evil Haman. How should Israel defend itself? Should they rise up against the Persian overlords?

This Persian king of total power, Ahasuerus, is the earthly authority God himself set over the Hebrews. Beginning with the prophet Isaiah, who welcomed the first Persian king, Cyrus the Great, the prophetic voice of Israel recognized Persian rule as being God's will. Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus with these words:

Thus says the Lord to his anointed Cyrus whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue the nations before him.<sup>1</sup>

This pagan, notwithstanding his Zoroastrian religion, is recognized by the prophet of God as the legal and godly authority. When such authority allows a decree which threatens the annihilation of God's people, the Queen fasts and prays for three days in preparation for an act she hopes will save them. Seeking an audience with the king unbidden, she courageously faces his possible interdict on her life. Because of her respect, he happily receives her, listens to her request, and allows the steps necessary to unmask the enemy. In keeping with the powers of the oriental potentate, however, the king's word, once given, cannot be revoked, even by the king himself. Thus, the edict against the Jews, though made by intrigue and now regretted by the king, must be carried out. How can Esther's faith in God accomplish the people's salvation against such power already set in motion? How can God work through her to vindicate and save his people?

Ahasuerus gives Esther the power to make a counter-edict. Sealed by the authority of his ring, the Jews, her people, may defend themselves against the attack that is coming by those who hate them. The killing that results, abhorrent to our sensibilities, allows the Jews to legally dispose of those who would have killed them. The seeming insurmountable problem is solved through the faith of an *obedient* woman. Because of her, God's appointed earthly ruler, though not sensitive

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 45:1

to God, is still under God's control. The flow of the woman's will toward her husband and thence toward God once more turns the man in the right direction.

Queen Esther's obedience and respect is contrasted to the deposed Queen Vashti. Previous to our story, when her drunken Lord wanted to show off her beauty at a banquet, she refused to come. In our day, a refusal of unwanted ogling would be commendable as a demonstration of self-respect, but in the Bible's judgment it is the pride of a woman who will not yield, especially under circumstances she considers to be contemptible (reminiscent of Michal's reaction to David's semi-naked dance). This creates a problem in the whole realm - the words are humorous, they are so true. If the Queen gets by with such a display of arrogance, the women of the realm will no longer be pleased to listen to or obey their husbands. The sacred author is accurate about the mind of women bound by the law, women in the Fallen culture who must fulfill obedience to authority by neither knowledge or will.

Esther, however, is a woman of a different mind. Hers is meekness and trust, in contrast to Vashti's independent willfulness. Her listening, accepting attitude is noted early by the eunuch in charge of the harem; and it may be assumed that to be pleasing to Ahasuerus, chosen for his consort, she was yielding to him as well. Though she wishes no personal gain from her high office, and in the Greek additions, relates her abhorrence of his bed, she must have been just as obliging there. It is her sweet attitude toward him that shines through, even when under deadly pressures. For his part, it is evident he loves her.

Esther is a treatise on God's value system and Man's. By placing a woman as the key to an otherwise hopeless situation for his People, God demonstrates a truth that is workable even in the fallen condition of this world. It is not by striving, by opposing, by rebelling, or by outwitting authority, that lawful authority is forced to reflect the will of God; it is by the obedience, faith, and trust in God of those subject to that authority, those who put themselves on the line in asserting their position, but who then "trusting him who judges justly" put themselves at the mercy of that lawful authority. Then God's power will use that authority as his own for the furtherance of his will. This is the view of Christian obedience that St. Peter will present as being like Christ's. (This is not the prescription that suits a Hitler who will be considered in the story of Judith.)

It is fitting that this truth, which is proclaimed by Jesus in "turn the other cheek" teachings, and St. Peter in the instruction to women in his first Epistle, is here storied in the woman. For it is woman who epitomizes, on every level, the practice and promise of obedience - yielded, self-

giving love. She and the values she represents will be vindicated by God; her particular stance is essential to the restoration of the perfect union of God and mankind. In this she solves the Authority Problem begun in Eden.

### **Judith**

The book of Judith is also placed in an historical setting though it has no historical footing. The sieges of the great war machine of the Assyrians are slowly swallowing up the cities of Israel. Threatened by the furious onslaught of evil forces, the Jewish populace of a small but key city looks out with dread and horror. A young widow, faithful to the memory of her husband, comes to the council of elders of the town with a plan she will not disclose in detail, but she assures them will save the town and all the people of Israel. After correcting the leaders' faulty theology, she exhorts the council to courage, and they ratify any action she will take.

Judith and her maid, exemplifying pious obedience to the Jewish law, go out to the camp of the commander of the evil armies, Holofernes. She seems to offer sexual favors to the fear-inspiring head man of the Assyrian army. After an interlude which Holofernes interprets as seductive, he is drunk; Judith takes his own sword and cuts off his head. By following a routine she has established and which the guards expect, she is able to slip back with his head to her own city. The army finds itself with a headless leader - by the hand of a woman. Thrown into confusion, it is overcome by the jubilant defenders, and Judith becomes a name of continuing honor among all Jews.

A new facet is given to woman's relationship to authority, and, thereby, mankind's relationship to authority. Holofernes and his Assyrian hordes are not lawful in God's sight, but the usurping, evil sort - he is a stand-in for Satanic authority who is symbolized by his overlord, Nebuchadnezzar. He says of him:

"Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar? he will send his forces and will destroy them from the face of the earth, and their God will not deliver them - we the king's servants will destroy them as one man. They cannot resist the might of our cavalry. We will burn them up and their mountains will be drunk with their blood and their fields will be full of their dead. They cannot withstand us, but will utterly perish, for so says King Nebuchadnezzar, the lord

of the whole earth. For he has spoken; none of his words shall be in vain.<sup>2</sup>

When the people of Israel hear these words, they fall down and worship God, crying out:

O Lord God of heaven, behold their arrogance, and have pity on the humiliation of our people, and took this day upon the faces of those who are consecrated to thee.<sup>3</sup>

In answer to their prayer, God motivates Judith, a woman who meditates and prays, to undertake for them. In her heart obedient to God, devoted to her dead husband, and respectful but assertive toward the council of elders, Judith is a living demonstration of the godly woman. However, the authority against which she will move, in this case, is not legitimate. Neither she, nor Israel whom she represents, can be submissive to an evil power attempting to subject the people of God. Representative of the diabolical Adversary, such “principalities and powers” are confronted by a woman who shows all mankind the way to overcome them with righteous opposition. Be courageous! It may certainly mean your death, but use all the resources and gifts one has, trust God, and claim his authority over evil! Holofernes’ sword in Judith’s hand is resistance against evil, powered by God himself. “Submit yourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Judith 6:2-4

<sup>3</sup> Judith 6:19

<sup>4</sup> James 4:7

## Ruth

The third book of the Bible named for a woman, we have already considered. The story of Ruth is an important link in the genealogy of Judah that will bring the Redeemer. In all three of these books named for women the age-old authority problem is addressed; the three women are each instruments for the deliverance of Israel. When the Chosen People floundered in anarchy, Ruth, the quiet Moabitess, is the woman God chooses as his instrument to restore the good kingdom; when a hated enemy manipulates the legitimate power of the king to annihilate the Jews, a respectful Esther confronts that authority, risking her life to win her people's vindication; when the power of evil attempts to usurp authority over God's people, Judith, a woman of humble heart and courageous spirit, confidently repels it by unflinching trust in God.

These three women first solved the authority problem within themselves. They were, in the right way, submissive, self-giving women from whom women of faith may learn the attitudes of heart and mind appropriate to their own relationships with authority, whether with husbands, their priests and bishops, or others. But that is not their first importance to the Church; to Christian people they are demonstrative lessons of obedience to God's command, and of how true obedience works in a fallen world. Anarchy, pagan authority, and demonic usurpation - all are common problems century in and century out, with perhaps an apex of the demonic in our own. How would God have Christians cope with these in his salvific light? If he asks for a heart reformed to obedience as a step toward Man's restoration, how does a Christian do both - obey the authority one is set under, and yet, not succumb to unholy circumstances? The truth lies at the heart of these three humble women and their stories.

Trust in God is paramount. A listening and attentive attitude which can only be described as submissive in the graced sense, is closely second. Appropriate action, motivated by enlightened understanding and fearlessness in the face of death is the last response. These women are not simply actors in an archaic culture, irrelevant to us; rather, Scripture brings them to us as strong allegorical figures working out Man's relationship to God and at the same time, overcoming the power of evil. But the women, themselves, never transgress the true, archetypal feminine.

## CHAPTER V IMPORTANT FEMININE IMAGES

### The Feminine Image of Jerusalem

In the Old Testament, Jerusalem is a prefigurement of the Church; in the New Testament Jerusalem stands for the heavenly city, a graced community, which the Church is. Whether Jerusalem, Church, or Heavenly City, in all three cases the figure is the abode of the People of God, but more than merely abode - the People of God are a part of that place; they are the living stones that make it up.

We have seen that the Old Testament continually presents that living edifice, Jerusalem, as feminine. She is the mother who nourishes and cares for God's people. God continually presents himself as provider and protector, the Husband to this feminine community. The prophets and inspired writers, notably Hosea and Isaiah, accepted this masculine/feminine understanding of the relationship of God and Jerusalem without, of course, ascribing sexuality to God. Sometimes, in the uncritical haste to find a mother figure for God in the Old Testament, as we have seen, the Isaiah references have been taken out of context. It is important to see that the masculine to feminine relationship is never reversed; God is never referred to as mother. The most important of these references reads:

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory. For thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her knees, As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup>

The second to the last line is often quoted out of context and leads to all kinds of erroneous conclusions.

### The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 66:10-13

As a final consideration of Old Testament woman, the genealogy of Our Lord has its own special message. Who are the women mentioned in the line of descendents from Abraham to David to Joseph, “the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

While Matthew names four women (five with Mary), Luke’s different version of the genealogy names no women. The four in Matthew’s lineage, we have already met. An interesting group they are: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Each presents according to her own understanding, in circumstances appropriate to her time in history, the eternal principle of the feminine. It cannot be lost on Matthew, the most Jewish oriented of the gospel writers, that two of these women were not Jews, Ruth of Moab, and Rahab of Canaan; yet both were staunch believers in God. Their inclusion in his blood line suggests Jesus’ universal mission to all nations. Nor should it be lost on Christian readers that the morality that these women portray is anything but unstained.

Tamar assumed the role of a cult prostitute in order to bear a child of promise; Rahab was a harlot; Ruth, an abhorred foreigner; and Bathsheba, an adulteress. Their moral failures are never commended, but these do not overshadow the significant facet of character for which God looked. All were intent on the will of God as they knew it - to be fruitful for The Lord. As a result, each furthered Salvation History and fulfilled her role by nurturing the seed that would flower in the Redeemer of Israel. They understood this role in a physical, down-to-earth way, yet they stand as signs of metaphysical truth. As Jesus said of Mary, his mother, it was not her physical bearing of him that was so wonderful, it was what made her fruitful in the first place, her obedience to God’s will.<sup>3</sup> So it is with these mothers of spiritual Israel.

From the feminist perspective these women were victims of a male dominated society. They have all been used as examples, along with other women of the Bible, for a supposed cultural bias of the Hebrew-Christian tradition against women and their rights. About that these women would be amazed. They were each women who with verve and determination acted for God in strength of her character. The modern criticism of them relegates to ambiguity the scriptural meaning of woman and her special mission. The fallen nature of circumstances, through

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:16

<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:27-28

which Salvation History continues, means that woman too suffers from abuse of authority and abuse of her role of obedience to authority. We may expect that fallen values will always oppose the very principles of creation, but the Christian is to suffer these with hope like the Master.

### **The Sorrowing Woman**

Throughout the Old Testament, woman longs to be fruitful for the Lord believing that her seed will bring the salvation of Israel. This strong impulse causes her to do things hard for us to understand, but it was always in accord with the way she understood her purpose in being - she suffered no noogenic neurosis. For her to be unfruitful meant that God was withholding his blessing; it was a reproach from God. She wept, she repented, she begged, all the time believing God would hear and answer.

With God's action in their three-way union, man-woman-God, and by submission to her husband, she bore new life for God. Spiritual understanding builds on this. New Testament people, bound to God in the New Covenant sealed in Christ's blood, when not fruitful spiritually, look for the block to their fruitfulness, and repent (do penance).<sup>4</sup> Secondly, they deepen their belief in the Good-news who is Jesus, then, learning obedience by laying down their wills for his, they receive him, and become fruitful.<sup>5</sup>

Penance alone is not enough. It must be a penance that is true sorrow for the lack of spiritual fruitfulness, coupled with renewed belief in the gospel who is Christ. These two are not enough, the will must melt and flow with the Will of God, allowing him to fill the individual with the Holy Spirit. The pattern consistent in both dispensations, the old and the new, when followed, promises to make us fit once more for divine Perfection - Repent, Believe, Submit/ Receive (Obey, Abide, Love), Bear Fruit. The sequence stated in lover's language is, "Turn back to me, trust in me, yield to me, and I will make you fruitful." All souls are feminine in this intimate relationship to the Holy One; all souls enter into the whole ecstatic fulfillment, intimate exchange, in the Eucharist.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>5</sup> John 14:15, John 15:10

Besides barrenness, there is another source of grief for Scriptural woman - the untimely end of the fruit of her body, the death of her child. It would seem the most natural thing in the world, that the mother grieves over her child's death, and that women grieve over the impending, premature death of Our Lord.<sup>6</sup> Yet, when the weight of scriptural descriptions are put together, they too, point out a further truth which reaches its zenith with the resurrection of Jesus: God is moved to compassion towards woman in her grief, and because of her sweet submission, and her signness in his plan, acts with a marvelous gift of new life. It is a potent symbol embedded with layers of spiritual meaning.

Soon afterwards he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you arise." And the dead man got up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. And great fear seized them all; and they glorified God saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us," and "God has visited his people."<sup>7</sup>

So it is that many times in the Bible history God chooses to visit his people through answering woman's grief. Here we have the essentials of a story that is to be found many times over. Our Lord, God himself, is compassionate toward the grief of a widow with no further possibility of offspring, whose only son has died. Surely this sheds light on Jesus' own death and resurrection. If God's compassion for this widow is so intense as to bring her son back to life, what of Mary, a widow whose only son is dead? Gently the Lord says to the widow of Nain, "Do not weep." Did he say less to his mother, Mary? And the Father restored Jesus, "Young man, I say to you arise," and gave him to his mother.

This, though it is only one aspect of the Resurrection, has deep roots in the Old Testament. In a time of famine, Elijah is sent to a widow of Sidon who believes his word. For many days because of her faith she feeds Elijah, herself, and her son, and finds her little cruse of oil and jar of meal unspent. But, then the son of the woman falls ill.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 23:27

<sup>7</sup> Luke 7:11

. . .his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her bosom and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him upon his own bed, and he cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again." And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and delivered him to his mother.<sup>8</sup>

Again, in a story about Elijah's successor, Elisha intercedes; and a barren Shunamite woman conceives in old age. Later, this child dies. Going to Elisha, bitterly distressed, the mother moves him to pray to the Lord. He stretches himself out on the boy;

. . .the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. Then he summoned Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunamite," So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, "Take up your son." She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took up her son and went out.<sup>9</sup>

The theme is repeated - an anguished mother beseeches the Lord for a dead son, another son who had been a special gift of God, and she is answered. At the death of her first son, David knew that new life alone would comfort Bathsheba's sorrow. A grieving mother again receives the gift of new life.

And David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went into her and lay with her, and she bore a son and called his name Solomon.<sup>10</sup>

In St. John's gospel there is the well known account of the raising of Lazarus:

Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled, and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept.<sup>11</sup>

On Easter morning:

Mary (Magdalen) stood weeping outside the tomb and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb . . .she turned around and saw

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<sup>8</sup> I Kings 17:17-23

<sup>9</sup> II Kings 4:34-37

<sup>10</sup> II Samuel 12:24

<sup>11</sup> John 11:32-44

Jesus standing but she did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" ... Jesus said to her, "Mary."<sup>12</sup>

Accompanying every raising from the dead in the New Testament there is the grieving, but believing woman. And lest we think it is only males worthy of resurrection, Jesus raises a little girl<sup>13</sup>, and St. Peter raises Dorcas, restoring her to her faithful women friends.<sup>14</sup> These sequences from the Bible link into further meaning of woman.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.<sup>15</sup>

Women mourn, grieve, anguish over the pain, hurt, sin, disobedience and destruction that comes with the broken covenant; and they call the whole community to sorrow. The Lord himself, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," was called to that sorrow on the first day of his ministry by his mother when she said to him at the marriage feast in Cana, "They have no wine." The world lay in darkness and bondage awaiting the gift of life in his blood. Woman calls man to sorrow for sin:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider and call the mourning women to come; let them arise a wailing over us, that your eyes may run down with tears . . . Hear, O women, the word of the Lord, teach the lament, the dirge.<sup>16</sup>

Woman's ancient enemy, Satan, is the author of sin and death - she stands opposite him as the instrument and nurturer of life. He hounds her, seeking to destroy her life-giving capability. By whatever means the world affords, he twists her nature to bring her to abort, to contracept - the expression of his hatred for her natural love of life, and her life-giving nurture. She cries out against his tactics, against the death-face by which he taunts her. Jesus, knowing woman, didn't choose without thought the sex of the persistent character in the following parable

In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.' And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, *who cry to him day and night?* Will he delay long

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<sup>12</sup> John 20:11-16

<sup>13</sup> Mark 5:41

<sup>14</sup> Acts 9:39-40

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:4

<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah 9:17-20

over them? I tell you he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?<sup>17</sup>

The Lord! Deliverer! will vindicate those who cry against Satan, Adversary and lord of death. Woman in the face of barrenness, and at the tomb, cries to God to unseat the Adversary, who, with death, claims victory over her. As Ratzinger tellingly says, “the cruciformity of faith!”<sup>18</sup>

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” It is significant that the foretelling of the Redeemer contained in these words refers to “the woman.” She is assigned the first place in the Proto-evangelium as the progenitrix of him who will be the Redeemer of man. And since the redemption is to be accomplished through a struggle against evil - through the “enmity” between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of him who, as “the father of lies” ( Jn 8:44), is the first author of sin in human history - it is also an enmity between him and the woman.

. . . The words of the Proto-evangelium, re-read in the light of the New Testament, express well the mission of woman in the Redeemer’s salvific struggle against the author of evil in human history.<sup>19</sup>

God, unlike the righteous judge, is compassionate, and is moved not to merely rid himself of a nuisance, but to comfort and vindicate her with life, even life eternal. For her, he defeats the enemy, Death. But will this faith, held in the heart of woman, meet him when he comes again? The hearts of women are too often ensnared in lies of the Evil-one.

Eve, “mother-of-all-living,” became the instrument of death by cooperating with Satan. Mary whose name means “bitter anguish” became by the agency of God, the restorer of Life.

When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers her anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world” (Jn 16:21). The first part of Christ’s words refers to the “pangs of childbirth” which belong to the heritage of original sin; at the same time these words indicate the link that exists between the woman’s motherhood and the Paschal Mystery. For this mystery also includes the Mother’s sorrow at the foot of the Cross - the Mother who through faith shares in the amazing mystery of her Son’s “self-emptying”: “This is perhaps the deepest ‘kenosis’ of faith in human history.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 18:2-7 italics added

<sup>18</sup> Op. Cit. p.50 Abraham and Mary both knew it.

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., Mulieris IV. 11,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., IV. 19.

The Father through her “yes,” sends the Son, Jesus. By the overwhelming event of his resurrection, he then validates that Life, at the same time validating Mary’s cry of anguish at Satan’s seeming victory. Together they neutralize Satan’s power by abolishing death’s hold on those who believe.

## Chapter VI NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

### Part 1 The Woman, Mary

All the women recorded in the Bible, who give themselves to God for the purpose of his word, are like the prelude introducing a grand symphony. Mary's Hebrew sisters form the background against which we see her; she is one of them, but inestimably by the grace of God more than they. The strains of melody which they contribute, in the opening works of God, become by God's grace in her, a fully orchestrated complexity of design and variations. It is she in whom all these godly themes are culminated into divine harmony.

It remains impossible for music to be adequately communicated by its symbols on paper, yet that is the task when relying on the written word to describe Mary. Scripture attempts only a slight sketch of her, perhaps for that reason. Yet if only the Bible, the source for this present writing, is used for reference, the insights she brings have resulted in thousands of volumes over the centuries.

As we have presented her Semite sisters, precursors emerging from Scripture's shadows, so we must bring the Virgin Mary out of a deliberate hiddenness. She does not exist as an end in herself, even as they did not; their notion of worth was only in their gift of self to God, so that they could bring forth fruit. Her sisters stood aside, pointing with appreciation and pride to their sons now upon life's stage, who undertook their missions for God. Receiver of heavenly visitors, soil in which God's seed sprouts, nurturer to all mankind, link between Man and God! In you the Word became flesh to dwell among us.

Mary, you are the very matrix of salvation.<sup>1</sup> Yet, should we look to you for the truth, and not heed your desire, "Don't look at me, look at him as I look at him," we lose the essence of

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<sup>1</sup> Eucharistic liturgists have considered the link between the first and second halves of the mass weak, perhaps in need of liturgical strengthening. The first part of the mass, the Liturgy of the Word is strong and whole; the second part, the Sacrifice of the Altar, is complete in itself. The transition between the two might appropriately be strengthened by considering the verb, *became*. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In this sentence from John 1 we have both halves of the mass linked by the verb *became*. The participants at mass receive the Word who is Jesus in the Holy Scriptures, especially the Gospel, then mystically he becomes flesh in the Sacrifice of the Altar. The matrix of *that becoming* is Mary. There can be

truth you are. Woman is not created to be the flower, she is created to be the plant upon which the flower grows; she is not made to be the end, she is made the beginning where she points to the end. There we must obediently look, following the direction of her gaze.

We may be tempted to see in her the whole answer to mankind's anxiety and sin, but only the beginning of the answer is there - her Son Jesus is the wholeness and the end of it. But where the two cease to merge in their being is difficult to say. Is there anything he taught or was that she was not?

Yes, there are some things - she did not share his Godhead, or his authority, or the dominion he had over nature, evil and matter - of that, what was appropriate to her humanity was left for her full inheritance in heaven. Powerful as an intercessor, she now has that dominion first given to her sister, Eve, as is demonstrated in her earthly apparitions. She did not have the authority her son bore as God, the authority to overcome the principalities and powers and to set things right - that was not nor ever will be hers. He is the new Adam, the head of the Church, she the new Eve, the Mother of the Church, the great Fathers of the Church have always taught it.

The comparison Eve-Mary constantly recurs in the course of reflection on the deposit of faith received from divine Revelation. It is one of the themes frequently taken up by the Fathers. . . from this comparison there emerges at first sight a difference, a contrast. Eve, as "the mother of all the living" ( Gen. 3:20), is the witness to the biblical "beginning," which contains the truth about the creation of man . . . the truth about original sin. Mary is the witness to the new "beginning" and the "new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17), since she herself. . . is "a new creation": she is "full of grace." It is difficult to grasp why the words of the Proto-evangelium place such strong emphasis on the "woman," if it is not admitted that in her the new and definitive Covenant of God with humanity has its beginning. . . The Covenant begins with a woman, the "woman" of the Annunciation at Nazareth.<sup>2</sup>

Together Jesus and Mary present to mankind the models of Perfect man and perfect woman, though she, in her earthly life, had not attained to the full promise of supernatural and preternatural gifts of the Original Order. Jesus is, however, more than perfect man; he is God. Mary worships him; no one worships her. Yet she is more than perfect woman, she represents Perfected Man, male and female, and Man is always the ob-positioned pole to God. Creator

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no liturgical recognition, of course, but an individual prayerful remembrance of the *who of the becoming* could speak truth of her being and honor her as the instrument of God.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., *Mulieris* IV.11

stands over-against the created, unified through love in the Holy Spirit - the Original Covenant that the woman of Nazareth will re-initiate with her Son.

We first meet beloved Mary with the angelic greeting, "Hail, favored one (full of grace) the Lord is with you."<sup>3</sup> Other ancient authorities add, "Blessed are you among women." We are told that Mary is a virgin, engaged to a man named Joseph of the lineage of David. The translation familiar to Catholics, "full of grace," is fully cognizant of the Greek word. In a relaxing posture toward the usual Protestant translation it is often translated "highly favored."<sup>3</sup> John Paul in the passage just quoted above, uses "full of grace." A passive form of a Greek word meaning "to make accepted," its use is difficult to pin down literally because it is used little in Greek as a whole, and only one other time in the New Testament. There, in Ephesians, we find St. Paul writing of the grace God gives to make us accepted in Christ. A more literal translation of Paul's words would be:

. . .to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he has made us accepted in the beloved.<sup>4</sup>

In the angel's greeting, Mary is then addressed, "Hail, *Made Accepted*, the Lord is with you;" the word, *charitou*, is translated above by the italics. To be made acceptable to God, one must be full of grace, the grace by which "he has made us acceptable in the beloved." The action that makes Mary acceptable comes to her from outside - she is *made accepted*. The one who makes accepted, is of course, God himself. God has made her acceptable to himself. She is "approved, received as adequate, full and complete, satisfactory, to be received willingly and gladly," such are the dictionary definitions. This action of God has been carried out in a time previous to the greeting by Gabriel. God has preserved her from all original sin that would have made acceptedness impossible; Gabriel's impressive salutation (not given to any other human being in Scripture), marks her as fully satisfying to God himself. In her, more than in anyone else, God's redemptive and messianic preparation has been achieved.

"Full of grace" . . .means . . .that Mary is a wholly open human being, one who has opened herself entirely, one who has placed herself in God's hands boldly, limitlessly, and without fear for her own fate. It means she lives wholly by and in relation to God. She is a listener and a prayer, whose mind and soul are alive to the manifold ways in which the living God quietly calls to her. .

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:28, parenthesis added as another fully adequate translation, but not the RSV translation.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:6

.she is therefore a lover. . . who has its unerring powers of discernment and its readiness to suffer.<sup>5</sup>

Though the meaning of the Greek in Gabriel's greeting is somewhat obscure, it is not right to think that the Church, in re-analyzing scriptural translations, has been led to demote Mary's level of grace. 'Highly favored' is an adequate translation, but only barely, and does not reveal the glory of the grace which made her person accepted by God. That she is not deficient, that she has a maximum of wholeness, that she abounds in grace, that she is totally qualified, thoroughly and generously prepared for her mission, is the full meaning of his greeting. Yet, that fullness does not exclude further increases of grace relative to that mission. Humbly, she still presents herself in the Upper Room to receive yet more of the Holy Spirit with the Pentecostal outpouring. This humility in itself, expressing the openness of her being, is indicative of the fullness of grace. Had she been full, as meaning unable to accept more, she would have been full of pride, not of grace.

An unmerited gift sustained by God for sanctification, the grace of God is his divine love and protection bestowed freely on Man. In more human terms, grace is "effortless charm of movement and proportion, a sense of fitness, a disposition to be generous and helpful, full of goodwill and mercy, clement, rendering favors when one does not need to do so, and giver of immunity from penalties."<sup>6</sup> All of these definitions for the words *full* and *grace*, have become for the faithful, literal articles of belief about Mary.

Yet, writes Cardinal Ratzinger:

Feminism has portrayed the Church's representation of Mary as the canonization of women's dependence and the glorification of their oppression. The veneration of the Virgin and Mother, the obedient and humble servant, has been, so it is said, a means of fixing woman's role for centuries. It has glorified her in order to suppress her.<sup>7</sup>

Such is the peculiar reading of the true feminine by our twisted culture.

This woman, so whole and holy in God's sight, was probably no more than fourteen or fifteen years old when approached by the archangel. This teen-aged girl was to be entrusted with a decision that would be the pivotal point in all history and change the course of the world. With

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<sup>5</sup> Op.cit Ratzinger, p.68

<sup>6</sup> American Heritage Dictionary, op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Op.cit. p. 37

her “yes” she was to be entrusted to bear and rear the Son of God! We would know, even from common sense, that God had graced her beyond all women.

Now, this means that even Jesus himself has above all his Mother to thank for his human self-consciousness, unless we suppose that he was a supernatural *wunderkind* who should not have to owe this self-consciousness to anyone. But such a hypothesis would jeopardize Jesus’ genuine humanity. This idea itself suggests new reasons why Mary’s motherhood had to be of a singular purity. . .this process must by no means be underestimated; this, too, would offend against the learning process of a normal human child.<sup>8</sup>

The risk, however, was great. How willing would she be when Gabriel faced her with the question? The enormous responsibility, with all it entailed, had to be chosen by exercise of her free will. When asked to enter a life not of her choosing, to die to herself and her own hopes for the future, to take-up a day to day suffering (the cruciform of faith) united to her son - would she will God’s will, or like the other fully graced woman, Eve, turn away? Eve had not consciously chosen pain, she thought she had chosen the good, but pain had been the outcome of her choice; Mary, living in a fallen creation, would need consciously to choose a life of consummate challenge to courage, which meant consummate suffering. Did she foresee this reality?

Why wouldn’t she? To a girl of fifteen the immediate suffering was apparent; she would disgrace all who knew her and her fiancé would discard her as unfaithful. More unfaithful than for the obvious reason, for it seems true to the whole context of scripture, as we shall see, to believe that Mary and Joseph had pledged themselves to the celibate service of the Lord, a spiritual marriage only. So, a pregnancy would not only appear as a transgression of Joseph’s human trust in her, but she would also appear to have fallen miserably from a commitment that he knew she had made not only to him but to God.

In making Mary accepted to himself, the Trinity could not cripple her humanness by giving her less than the full human heritage, a free will. The grace he gave could only protect that will from the ravages of the prince of the world, Satan, through original sin. The exercise of will Mary herself must do in perfect freedom. God would not manipulate that will; it must move toward its own choice. So the angel was sent, the great messenger of God, Gabriel.

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<sup>8</sup> op.cit., Von Balthasar, p. 103

Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. (Blessed are you among women.) But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.<sup>9</sup>

She was not a dreamer or a mystic; she was a practical girl. She was not having a fit of hysteria. The whole angelic confrontation was troubling, very troubling, but she *thought* about it. We have no idea in this simple abbreviated account how much time was involved. It could have been minutes, or hours, or the slow sorting out of days with the angel, who didn't experience time, silent and present. Her mind was not idle, nor did the greeting leave her stunned; it must be considered carefully. She was a reasonable person who obviously ordered her emotional life by mature will and principle.

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name, Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."<sup>10</sup>

Mary well knew the background of what was happening to her. She, with her sisters, had for generations longed for the promised Redeemer. She had absorbed the hopes and promises of the Messianic longing of her people with her mother's milk. She saw herself as one of the "remnant of Israel," so well she knew and waited for the Lord's vindication of his people. Had she lived during David's reign, her imagination could not have held more of the dynamism of that person who someday would come to be God's agent on earth, king over a new Davidic kingdom far greater than the first. She knew, too, that woman's seed would bring the promise to actuality; not man's, but woman's. She had never dreamt that she would be *the* woman; she had chosen celibacy with Joseph as a second best in the total service of God that bearing this child would be. She needed no one to fill in the pieces of the angel's startling proposal to her. God's preparation of his people for 1900 and more years was now to culminate in her.

Though the angel spoke as though the decision was made, we can see that he spoke provisionally, for Mary's questions continue - questions that she could not have asked had his demeanor been one of sheer demand. In obedience God asks not for compliance to a greater force, but an obedience born of the will, motivated by the emotions, and enlightened by the mind - a perfectly free, wholehearted and whole-minded human obedience,

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 1:28-29

<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:30-33

And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no husband? (Literally, since I know no man, or am knowing no man?)"<sup>11</sup>

It is her answer alongside of other hints in Scripture, and the full experience of the Church, that has culminated in the belief of Mary's perpetual virginity. We see her adherence to this principle even before God offered her the opportunity to bear his Son. In Jewish custom, the engaged pair could have had sexual intercourse without condemnation, though with a certain denigration. Had Mary intended to be a normal conjugal wife, she would not have asked this question; she would have assumed that Joseph was, or would be the man, and would have needed correction by the angel about the mode of conception.

Though this concept of celibacy seems a strange intrusion into the thought life of the Jews, especially the Jewish woman whose existence had to do with her fulfillment in bearing children, we are not dealing with something isolated from other strands in Scripture and of what we know about contemporary practice.

A known community of religious people, the Essenes, contemporaneous to Mary and Joseph, had for political and religious reasons withdrawn from Jerusalem and taken up the celibate life. These people did not condemn marriage or the propagation of children as did some later heretical sects. Some commentators, Josephus and Philo, thought this reflected lack of confidence in the faithfulness of women, but the motivation was for holiness and service to God's written word.

(They live) without any women, having renounced all sexual relations . . . day by day the multitude joining them of its own accord is regularly renewed since many flock together whom, wearied with life, fortune . . . its storms drives to their way of living. Thus through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, a people in which no one is born is eternal, so fruitful to them is the repentance of others!<sup>12</sup>

Pliny, AD23-79 recorded his impressions of the celibacy of the Essenes, seeing it not as a barren exercise but spiritually fruitful in outcome.

Mary was thinking along these lines about the same time, just fifty years prior to St. Paul who wrote instructions about *spiritual* marriages. Inspired to write by the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul

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<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:34

<sup>12</sup> Burrows, Millar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, (NY 1956) p. 291 quoting Pliny

testifies, did he also have in mind the Blessed Virgin and Joseph, or even John the Baptist, thought to be an Essene, as well as this counter tradition that was well known in Israel.

If any one thinks he is not behaving properly toward his virgin (his betrothed), if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry - it is not sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her a virgin ( or his betrothed) he will do well. So that he who marries his virgin (his betrothed) does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.<sup>13</sup>

We remember that St. Paul does not consider marriage or marital intercourse less than godly, but echoing Jesus, he believes some are called to an “undivided devotion to the Lord.”<sup>14</sup>

Jesus’ own convictions on celibacy were shared with his disciples though he knew not all of them were able to accept it. Where had he experienced this truth, but through his own family? At the end of a teaching on marriage by which Jesus put aside the Mosaic law of divorce and reestablished the command of God given at the beginning, “The two shall become one flesh,”<sup>15</sup> he said,

Not all men can receive this saying, but only to those whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. he who is able to receive this, let him receive it.<sup>16</sup>

Pliny’s observations about the Essenes are even more fitting in regard to Jesus and Mary; “Thus through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, a people in which no one is born is eternal, so fruitful to them is the repentance of others!” No one is physically born of Jesus or Mary, as no one is born a Christian. But uncounted children belong to them both, having been born to them by repentance and baptism;

“Repent and believe the good news . . .”<sup>17</sup>

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I Corinthians 7:36-38 *betrothed* is the RSV translation

<sup>14</sup> I Corinthians 7:35

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 19:3-9

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 19:10-12

<sup>17</sup> Mark 1:15

Yet virginity is not for all, only for those to whom God gives the gift. It is not perfection for anyone to “transcend” sex otherwise. So, though a choice of celibacy for life is almost unknown in the Old Testament (except for figures like Elijah and Elisha) and unknown for women (except perhaps in the instance about to be explored), for Mary it had become a viable choice and she chose it. We can say this with assurance, for aside from these substantial scriptural supports, already cited, the Church from earliest times has been guided by the Spirit to affirm her *perpetual* virginity.

It was precisely her vow to God to be celibate for him that culminated her preparation as “*the made accepted.*” God had in the past worked miracles in the barren to fulfill the promises he had made to the patriarchs. He would work now a miracle in one who had willingly sacrificed her biological fruitfulness for a higher fruitfulness, only now to be given both. “A virgin will conceive.” Over her dedicated barrenness he would create in her his Son. Her abdication of biological fruitfulness had not been a rejection of her biological femaleness, which she wholly accepted, else God could not have chosen her to be *the* mother.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren, for with God nothing will be impossible.<sup>19</sup>

Mary’s visitation by the angel has thus been preceded by another miracle of conception by God. Marvelously, by God’s intervention, Elizabeth after years of sterility has conceived a child who will be the anointer, the baptizer of Jesus, even as Hannah’s miracle son, Samuel, anointed King David. The mothers of the previous pair foreshadowed in remarkable degree the mothers of John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah. Hannah and Ruth prefigure the relationship of Elizabeth and Mary, as their sons prefigure John and Jesus, the Son of David. The two couples, Hannah and Elkanah, Elizabeth and Zachariah parallel each other closely, and Hannah’s song is faithfully echoed both by Zechariah at the birth of John, and by Mary as she exults with Elizabeth over the surpassing miracle God has wrought in her.

Ruth’s foreshadowing of Mary is equally wonder-filled. A woman whose hope of marriage and children lies with staying in a home country among her own people, in a culture that is comfortable, in whose ways and language she is at home, chooses to leave it all in order to follow

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<sup>18</sup> John 3:3

<sup>19</sup> Luke 1:35

the God she has seen reflected in her mother-in-law. As an alien woman among people who despise the Moabites, she will have little chance to find a husband. Even if Naomi, her mother-in-law, should be able to remarry at a late age which is unlikely, she is too old to raise a son to be a husband for Ruth. Neither mother-in-law nor daughter in-law have anything to offer a man in dowry or bride price, both are destitute except for a small parcel of land, and they must glean after harvesters for their sustenance.

Naomi therefore encourages Ruth and her sister-in-law to leave off following her back to Judah to return to their own people.<sup>20</sup>

“May the Lord grant that ‘you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I sons in my womb, that they may be your husband? Return my daughters! Go your way for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I hope, if I should even have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? *Would you therefore refrain from marrying?*”<sup>21</sup>

The sister-in-law is reluctant to leave her mother-in-law, but returns to her homeland for she will not “refrain from marrying” or give up the hope for her future that lies in marriage. Ruth, on the other hand, has found a value that lies beyond her own biological fulfillment. Regardless that her choice makes it seem certain that she will not marry, she follows Naomi, moving closer to Naomi’s people, her values and her God.

In such faithfulness and trust, God has found one to be a mother in the lineage that will bring a king over his people, a man after his own heart, the one who will precursor his own Son on earth.

Ruth and Naomi, as widows, need a redeemer - one of their own kin who will take up the family responsibility toward them. Such a concept also prefigures Mary’s need for a Redeemer, as the first one redeemed by the merits of Christ.

Ruth meets a man who is a near relative through Naomi, a man eligible to redeem her and Naomi, if he will. She goes to him at night and on the threshing floor where he sleeps guarding the harvest, she intrepidly lies down at his feet.

At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! he said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I

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<sup>20</sup> See page 47 and following

<sup>21</sup> Ruth 1:8-14 italics added

am Ruth, your maidservant; spread your skirt over your maidservant for you are next of kin,” And he said, “May you be blessed of the Lord my daughter; you have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men whether poor or rich. And now my daughter do not fear, I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of worth. And now it is true that I am a near kinsman (“gaal” means to redeem and is translated in versions other than RSV as “redeemer”) yet there is a kinsman (redeemer) nearer than I. Remain this night and in the morning if he will do the part of next of kin (redeemer) for you, well; let him do it, but if he is not willing to do the part of the next of kin (redeemer) for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.<sup>22</sup>

By buying the property that Naomi still held in her husband’s name, Boaz makes the legal arrangement with the other eligible kinsman before the town elders, redeeming Ruth and her mother-in law. Then he marries Ruth.

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son.<sup>23</sup>

Parallel to Ruth, Mary’s hope of having a normal family is to remain culturally at home with her people, where celibacy for God is a concept strange and somewhat foreign - beyond any normal expectation. But Mary has seen something different, a value, very possibly in or with a person, Joseph, who has drawn her into a strange land on a hard course.

Mary, the Church declares, is saved by the redemption offered by her son, just as the rest of the children of God are saved by him. Her need for a Redeemer is like Ruth’s; and as Ruth lies down at Boaz’s feet in a demonstration of absolute trust and givingness, so may Mary’s attitude toward God be depicted as total trust and self-giving. Boaz receives Ruth kindly and gladly institutes for her the process of redemption. Ruth in asking for redemption offers herself, “I am Ruth your maidservant “( Hebrew, *almah*, handmaid. This is the key word in the Isaiah passage, “A virgin will conceive. . .”). Mary in offering herself no doubt uses the same Aramaic word, saying, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, *the almah of Yahweh.*” Amazing when you stop to think about it!

Ruth’s offering is made on the threshing floor which in Scripture symbolizes the great sorting out, sifting and separating that will go on characterizing the reign of God. It is by Mary that comes the sorting of Israel by which the “thoughts of many hearts will be laid bare.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ruth 3:10-13 parenthesis added

<sup>23</sup> Ruth 4:13

<sup>24</sup> Luke 2:35

Boaz becomes Ruth's husband, and in a phrase used only this once in Scripture, "the Lord gave her conception," prefiguring what will be more intensely and perfectly true of Mary. Again in the human dimension, it takes three to bring the generations of the Chosen People into being, Boaz, Ruth and God. Say the elders to Boaz:

May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like  
Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel.<sup>25</sup>

That the story of Ruth takes place in Bethlehem, the birthplace of both David and Jesus, gives the other parallels more significance. Mary, like Ruth, has chosen a life quite apart from the experience of most women, and with great strength of mind and inner assurance, she has set a course God-ward. In this she has been given a good partner, Joseph, who is likewise of exceptional devotion in heart and mind. Together they shall share a celibate marriage, fully devoting all their energies to the worship and service of God.

God's intent for their self-offering will overrule any biological fruitlessness apparent with virginity, while finding that very resolve to remain virginal the medium necessary for his plan. With the angel's disclosure of Elizabeth's conception, and the assurance that virginal conception is not impossible for God, Mary makes the response God awaits from all mankind, the sign of the total return of mankind to be his spouse as Man, male and female, was in the beginning. In Mary the preparation of a people, and her own preparation, has carried true; the threshold of the Redemption has been gloriously reached. With a will flowing freely with God's will, and supported by an intellectual understanding that has enlisted all her emotional energies, Mary responds; "Behold, I am the almah of Yahweh, let it be to me according to your word." Thoroughly satisfied, "the angel departed from her."

In accepting her life as one of servanthood to God in total self-giving, Mary shares the mission of her son, fulfilling all he taught about servanthood and the Kingdom. The stance of servant is the feminine stance to which all are called; call it the "yes" stance, it is first exemplified in woman.

If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ruth 4:11

<sup>26</sup> Mark 9:35

In surrender to God that had begun long before the arrival of Gabriel, Mary abandons herself into God's hands. Then begins another episode which is prefigured in the Old Testament. Acting on her own decision, she

. . . arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>27</sup>

In an intimate and loving interchange of rejoicing in God's greatness in their lives, the babes in their wombs respond to each other joyfully, and the Holy Spirit is bestowed by Jesus on John. Elizabeth, the elder, immediately treats Mary with greater honor;

Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>28</sup>

She holds back nothing in her praise;

Blessed are you among women (eulogeo - well spoken of) and blessed (markarios - blessed as in the beatitudes, meaning happy) is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.<sup>29</sup>

Mary responds in rejoicing with Elizabeth in the words of Elizabeth's prototype in Scripture, Hannah,

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

The Magnificat shows Mary's depth of understanding of the purpose and plan of God in Salvation History, and the acute relationship of her experience with all those women of faith which preceded her. In her intelligent comprehension, and her familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures, she displays a learning appropriate to the studious Hebrew scholars of her time.

As the Church has observed for centuries, not only is Mary's song of ancient lineage,<sup>30</sup> which she knew well, and significantly made her own, but the whole time in the house of Elizabeth has threads which run far back into Israel's past.

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 1:39-40

<sup>28</sup> Luke 1:43

<sup>29</sup> Luke 1:42,45 parentheses added

<sup>30</sup> The Magnificat has echoes of Genesis 12:7, I Samuel 2:1-10, Malachi 3:12, Zechariah 3:7, Psalm 138:6, 11:9, 33:10, 98:1, Isaiah 40:29-31, 41 :8-10,41 :17-20, 42:7, 57:15, 61:1-3

The Book of Second Samuel tells of a trip of the ark of the covenant, the great, sacred golden box which held the tablets of the Law, the Word of God. The ark had traveled with the Jews wherever they sojourned, except for a period of bitter defeat when it was in the hands of the Philistines. Recovered because of plagues rained on Philistia, it was on its last journey born on an ox cart to its final resting place in the tabernacle at Jerusalem when a man reaching up to steady it is struck dead by the power of God. David is horrified at this display of the power of God.

So David was afraid that day; and said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?"<sup>31</sup>

David gives up bringing the ark to Jerusalem and places it in a house along the way for three months. With the ark's presence that household thrives. David, after learning and righting the ritual proceedings of handling the sacred ark, which he found had been ignored, finally brings it up to Jerusalem. This is the occasion when David's exuberant and less than modest dance offends Michal.

The Church has long seen Mary, bearer of the Word of God, as the Ark of God (so also at the end of the 11th chapter of Revelation), and these words repeated by Elizabeth, as well as the three months time which Mary spent with Elizabeth are the work of the Spirit in identifying Mary with the ark of the covenant. David's ecstatic dance of joy before the ark, himself holding the seed of the lineage of David, tells the joy of his future household who will in all generations call her "blessed." Caught up in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth shouts for joy over Mary's child, and the babe in her womb leaps in the presence of the Word in the Ark of God<sup>32</sup> – prefigured by David's dance.

If Mary had met the angel's initial greeting with troubled thoughts, they have given way to unwavering trust in God. Joseph, who at first considered her unfaithful, has a dream in which God validates her when she could not validate herself. Removing all his fears, he takes Mary into his home for his wife. From this time on Mary no longer is approached directly by God, but Joseph assumes the headship of what will soon be a family. It is now Joseph who carries the responsibility of the family and receives the directives of the Lord about their common life.

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<sup>31</sup> II Samuel 6:9-11

<sup>32</sup> Luke 1:44

When Joseph must go to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the tribal family seat, she goes with him. With the insights given her that her child would be given the throne of David, and that he would reign over the house of Judah forever, what were her thoughts when painfully astride a small donkey close to the time of her delivery, she arrives before the entrance of a cave-barn? Her trust in God's message was never shaken, but how much she depended on Joseph who continually assured her with "this, too, is God's plan." Together they trust that it is God, indeed, who has led them to this very extremity. The baby will not be born in a home, the young mother will not have the assistance of a mid-wife relative, there will be no clean bed or familiar, comforting sounds, sights, and smells (a stable) for her who had never had a baby before. Only women who have delivered that first baby can understand how important Joseph was to her under these circumstances. He was her whole support. He carried her faith when in the present suffering all the visions of joy and glory seemed far away. (Some who have meditated on this birth have thought Mary not to have experienced the pains of normal childbirth. She was, however, not spared agony at the foot of the Cross.)

Unshaken, Joseph recognizes God has purpose in it all; he does not doubt, and with the first sight of the child it is confirmed. A man of God, living out the realities of a situation which he totally accepted, but did not always understand, he was not anxious or surprised when the shepherds came proclaiming an angelic vision. Any deep meaning to each unfolding event was easily lost in the face of the pressing responsibilities that absorbed him. But to Mary it all had deep meaning; it must fit with what went before; inwardly she searched for it, sorting away the bits and pieces as they fit the whole; she could not assimilate now all that was happening, but each impression was safely gathered in for later reflection. Such activity was hers by nature, as it is the nature of all women, but in her the light which illumined her meditation was twice-bright. Luke tells us:

Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.<sup>33</sup>

So common to a woman's experience, the meditative reflection thriving even in the midst of upheaval, Mary also had the founding of a home to accomplish. A place must be found in Joseph's old tribal city for them to live until Mary and the baby can travel again. The boy, named Jesus by the command of the angel (in Hebrew his name was Jeshua or Joshua), must be circumcised after eight days, and after a month (thirty-three days according to the law of Moses),

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<sup>33</sup> Luke 2:19, 2:51

Mary must offer sacrifice to the Lord for her purification. Because they are close to Jerusalem (Bethlehem is about six miles away), they plan for the day, traveling to the great temple which is still in the building process. Here more wonders are encountered for Mary to contemplate; two elderly people, a man and a woman of the devout poor of the Lord, are moved by the Spirit to prophesy over the baby. They are persons of the faithful of God who lead lives of prayer so purely that they are sensitive to the imminence of God's visitation.

At the sight of this humble family, the quiet young mother, the happily sober husband and the perfect babe-in-arms, an emotion of great gladness rises in their breasts. Together they greet the uncertain couple with the warmth of elderly relatives over the new life of an heir. And so he is. Simeon and Anna, elderly Hebrews of faith, with great thanksgiving, speak for a whole people (who should, but do not speak). They greet the long awaited "seed of woman" the Redeemer of Israel. Simeon says of Jesus,

(he will be) "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to thy people Israel. " And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.<sup>34</sup>

So it is that Mary learns from others truths not revealed directly to her. This new prophetic word adds the surprising dimension of her child's further mission to the Gentiles. She is not given revelation like a first lady, or an ascendant figure given a seat above mankind from which all mysteries are first revealed to her. God would not so violate Mary's beauty radiating from a restored humanity which lies in her obedience and humility. She must learn as others learn, she must share experience of other human beings in whom God loves and works. Hers is a special mission, but she must not be treated specially. The donkey ride, the stable, the purification requirements laid on all women, the concern for daily bread as Joseph finds work in Bethlehem - nothing is missing from or added to her sharing the common life. She knows herself to have experienced an angelic encounter, to have rejoiced in blessed circumstances with her cousin, to have borne a child of miracle, but she also knows herself to be an ordinary wife and mother, quite unknowing, still hungry for more of God. Full of grace, she is empty still, else she would not be full of grace. To be knowingly full of grace would turn to pride in a human being. Simeon speaks to her directly; it is easy to believe he was struck to the core with her purity and simplicity.

"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (an a sword will pierce your own soul also), that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Luke 2:32-34

Wise old Simeon, in studying his Torah, in praying and listening to the Lord for a great many years, by the help of the Spirit, had understood his Scripture well; the Messiah would enlighten the Gentiles, but the people who awaited him as part of their own flesh and blood would overall reject him most bitterly. Haughty in spirit, many would stumble over the humility of his coming, while the humble would be exalted in him.

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.<sup>36</sup>

But the humble do not have the power of the rich and proud. Jesus will suffer and his suffering will pierce his mother. The suffering will open the hearts of many, even Mary's. The storehouse of her years of pondering, her contemplations will be revealed, and against that understanding - how they respond to it, others will be judged.

Anna, one of Israel's widows, also understands the full implication of these two standing innocently holding a child in the midst of Herod's temple. Her years of solitude have opened up in her wide, quiet places where the truth of God is heard. "Worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day," she proclaims to all who will listen that this is the very babe awaited by all Israel – the anointed one, the Messiah!

Hearing these prophetic words, in wonder at all the latent meaning, Mary and Joseph take their baby back to Bethlehem for a time of preparation when they hope to return to Nazareth. Here they stay till the baby is almost two years old. Then one day another astonishing thing happens. Strangers arrive, assembling outside their door. Centered in three men of prominence dressed in foreign attire, the group with sedate joy honors the young Jewish mother and her unweaned child. At finding the object of their long search, they present rich gifts and express devotion, even to prostrating themselves in worship. Mary learns that the stars have been their guide. Astronomical signs have sent them on a journey of two years, during which time they traveled without the confirmation of the special star. It reappeared only after a stop in Jerusalem where they conferred with the wise men of Israel. The star reappearing had led them to the very

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<sup>35</sup> Luke 2:34-35

<sup>36</sup> One of the most repeated phrases in Scripture. Psalm 138:6, Matthew 23:12, Proverbs 3:34, I Peter 5:5, James 4:6

house. Its reappearance had assured them of the rightness of their long mission, and they encounter the child designated by these cosmic signs with “exceedingly great joy”. To the amazement of the villagers, in pavilion-like tents of dusty splendor, they spend the night under the same sky and stars where the angels had announced the birth of “the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” The fickle shepherds may already find that memory a receding one, having noted nothing special in the young couple, Mary and Joseph, or their baby, but the wise men will not forget. Their quest is at an end; they sleep soundly except for a dream. Consulting together, it is clear they are not to return to Herod as he had requested. They remember him seated among his counselors, then the way he drew them aside for questions,

“Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”<sup>37</sup>

The dream confirms their suspicions of Herod’s intent. They assemble provisions for their long return journey and set out, carefully avoiding the Jerusalem route.

Herod’s soldiers will be sent out as soon as he realizes that the royal visitors will not report. Within a night, Joseph too is warned in a dream. Following the instructions of the dream, he bundles together enough for the journey. By night, without the observation of anyone, he leads the donkey bearing Mary and Jesus south into Egypt.

Behind them in the village of Bethlehem, a happening of blood and grief takes place, which still chills the soul. All the baby boys of Jesus’ age and younger are put to the sword, a payment to Herod’s consuming jealous ambition. There will be no rivals to his power - “Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?” - indeed! These innocent souls, the first small martyrs for the faith, shine in the Church’s liturgical memory.

In this danger, Mary is dependent upon Joseph’s leadership and judgment. Nothing is told her. All contact with God about their destiny as a family comes through her husband as her head (that is not to say that she personally is not close to God). With all the honor that God has given her, he does not confuse her with agency or authority in her family’s affairs. This family, too, must exemplify God-given headship.

Herod goes the way of all flesh, when his turn comes ambition and power cannot save him from death’s dark angel. Joseph is then told in a dream to go straight to Nazareth. It has been four years or so since they set out for the enrollment in Bethlehem; it will be good to be home.

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew 2:7-9

(St. Matthew's source seems not to know that they had ever lived there - it is not part of his information.)

Some years later, out of the multi-layered family in Nazareth, sisters and brothers of both Mary and Joseph, and the broods of all these as well as other miscellaneous relatives, a caravan of relatives and friends makes the annual trek to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Jesus is twelve; it will be a significant feast year for him, the first one since he has come of age as a man of Israel. It will be significant for his father and mother too, though they do not foresee it; Jesus is to assert possession of himself, breaking away, as the bar mitzvah intends, from his childish dependency upon them.

The situation of the return trip to Nazareth provides clues about certain statements in Scripture confusing even to those who accept Mary's perpetual virginity. Brothers and sisters of the Lord are mentioned - James and Jude are called "brother." On the trip to Passover, obviously an extended family cared for the children without differentiation. In their language the same word designated brother and relative, just as "cousin" meant anyone of the same race. So, as in certain cultures today, the adults and children formed one big family, and Joseph and Mary thought nothing of it when Jesus did not check in or travel with them. Such exchange of children was common because the whole group was family.

The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the company, went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances, and when they did not find him they returned to Jerusalem seeking him.<sup>38</sup>

His slighting of the trouble to which he has put them and his lack of concern is heard in Mary's words of reproach, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."<sup>39</sup>

Jesus, however, has taken his new manhood seriously. He is no longer under the authority of his mother and father's will. He is now a man under the direct authority of One alone – his Father God. Do they not want him to be about that business? His words correct Mary. She has called Joseph his father. God, he says, is his only father. In stating it, he confirms personal knowledge of his origins. At the same time, to be a person of respect who can call disciples, a

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<sup>38</sup> Luke 2:44-45

<sup>39</sup> Luke 2:48

person who will be heeded in the synagogue and who will be acknowledged in his community, it was essential that he have a legal, human father, the role that Joseph so honorably filled. Joseph's role as legal father in the lineage of David, so essential to prophetic fulfillment, is confirmed in the genealogies of Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

. . . Jesus Christ's relation to his divine Father cannot be compared with that of any other human being. Jesus uses a child's word to address his Father: "Abba", "Daddy", and it is simply inconceivable that Jesus first spoke this word and its full meaning to a human being (by the name of Joseph) and only at a later (or even the same ?) time transferred it to his heavenly Father. If this were the case, the most we could say is that Jesus calls God his Father in much the same sense in which all owe thanks for their existence to the Creator in addition to their parents. But this would never enable us to infer the once-only rapport with God that distinguishes Jesus' words, indeed, his entire comportment [*Verhalten*] and in which – as in his own personal privilege – he eventually (through the Cross, the Resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit) allows men, out of pure grace, to participate.<sup>40</sup>

It may have been the ideal - that a boy truly breaks all his childish dependencies at the age of manhood and looks to God alone, but Mary and Joseph aren't prepared for it. How does Joseph feel when Jesus seems to reject his fatherhood? Nor are they prepared to find him in disputations with the elders and temple teachers. He is, after all, still a boy in their sight; it is difficult for them to see those boyish years merging already into the calling they hazily knew lay in the future. Jesus could not develop, however, in an arrogant, isolated way. This was not the meaning of his proclamation of independence. He had severed the ties; now he could by the exercise of his own will return and submit to his parent's authority. In this, he exemplifies the kind of dependence that is psychologically wholesome, liberating, and necessary for further spiritual growth. Mary adds his words to her treasury of inner thought where her wisdom about all of this ripens.

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.<sup>41</sup>

Nothing in Scripture marks the passage of more than twenty years. From the silence, we assume that Jesus and his mother live a normal daily life of village people. They were well acquainted with their neighbors: Joseph's work, the extended family names of supposed sons and daughters were spoken about familiarly. Sometime during these years Jesus and Mary mourn the

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<sup>40</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary* (Ignatius 1997) p.130 see also p.148

<sup>41</sup> Luke 2:51

death of Joseph, who had, by his protection and provision, so greatly and generously served them both. He had given Jesus the legitimacy of a good name, essential for his later mission; and we cannot doubt that God gave Jesus the best of all human fathers to further his humanity.

The lives of Jesus and Mary seem normal, but the interchange of life and thought between these two is building an interior reservoir quite beyond the ordinary. For Jesus it is to be the storehouse of understanding of the ways of Men, the homely thoughts of Men, the hopes and dreams, the failures and griefs of those into whose lives he will weave the message of the Kingdom and its King. That message is built in him as he absorbs the contemplation and wisdom of his mother, and like the boy Samuel, he hears God for himself. As a life of deep communion with God is manifest from his earliest lisp, he understands who he is and learns more from his mother about the mystery of his own birth, which is fully confirmed in his personal experience with God. Unimaginable conversations are shared, as Mary listens and speaks out of her inner depth, knowledge and intuition.

Jesus' family is not so wealthy or well placed as to own a sacred scroll, but together they memorize the sacred words from Sabbath readings, and from Jesus' synagogue schooling. Moses and the Prophets, the Psalms, and Wisdom are indelibly scribed upon their memories. Jesus' mother *is* those words writ large; there is no discrepancy between the Word and her being and actions. He learns from her in the way of a human boy and his mother. Her intuition often guides him; she teaches him the importance of the little things upon which rest the timing and the meaning of the great things. He has assumed his human father's adeptness at carpentry and works to earn them their living. At last the process which has so absorbed them both is complete. In Mary the peace of that mother and Son relationship begins to give way before a sense of his preparedness for mission. This demands an end to the life they have known together. He senses it too, and yet humanly resists - not yet.

St. Luke is the gospel writer who relates the few incidents about the birth and early life of Jesus. Tradition has credited Luke with a reporter's interest in interviewing witnesses for their first-hand accounts. He had the opportunity to search for first hand witnesses during the three years in Caesarea when he waited for St. Paul's trial. The intimacy of detail of the first three chapters of Luke entice us to believe that Mary herself related the poetic canticles of praise, and other details of the Incarnation known only to her. Did St. Luke find her living with St. John before their move to Ephesus? If he did not speak with her, he spoke with someone close to her who had been

entrusted with the whole story; it not improbable that Mary wrote down these hymns, marking the great God-incidents in her life with words both her own and from her scripture memory.

St. John, one of the younger disciples and his cousin, was Jesus' closest friend. From the cross, Jesus gave Mary to John as his mother, an act far transcending the mere concern for her physical well-being, as important as that was. She went with John and "from that hour he took her to his own home."<sup>42</sup> (Tradition is strong that they later lived in Ephesus where St. John was bishop.) Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger points out the way that John Paul II understood the original Greek of these words: "he took her into his own."

For the Holy Father (JPII) this implies a quite personal relation between the disciple – every disciple - and Mary; a letting go of Mary into the inmost core of one's own mental and spiritual life; a handing oneself over into her feminine and maternal existence; a reciprocal self-commitment that becomes the ever-new way to Christ's birth, and brings about Christ's taking form in man. In this way, however, Mary's task sheds light on the figure of woman in general, on the feminine dimension and the specific mission of women in the Church.<sup>43</sup>

The fruitful conversations that had gone on in Jesus' home continue again; now, another young man listens, asks, records and absorbs. The wisdom of *the woman*, as John reports Jesus addressed her twice (an unusual form for a man to use for his mother) permeates his own understanding. From this union of contemplation is born the Gospel of John, mystifying to the scholars who search for reasons to account for its deep philosophy so different from the synoptic gospels.<sup>44</sup> The answer is before us - it is Mother Mary. True to her being, not an end, but only a means, there is no indication of her importance on the surface, nor on the surface of Jesus' life or of John's, nor in the Gospel that develops in that house; but to those who seek beneath the surface, she is joyfully discovered.

She it is who accounts for the similarity of style and content that has been noted by Bible scholars between the Gospel of John and Luke's opening chapters.<sup>45</sup> It seems evident that St. Luke took material either from Mary or from women who knew first hand the tradition that grew up around her; St. John's whole gospel is permeated by the same woman's contemplation.

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<sup>42</sup> John 19:27 Carefully translated as "he took her into his own." Op.cit., p.58

<sup>43</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, *Mary* (Ignatius 1997) p.58

<sup>44</sup> Jerome Bible Commentary ( N.J. 1968) *The Gospel of John*

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

The story of the entrance into his mission, which we will study for insights into Mary, is written only by St. John. As John organizes his gospel, it is on the third day after his return to Galilee, four or so miles from Nazareth at Cana, that Mary and Jesus appear at the wedding of a friend. Jesus already has a few men from around the Sea of Galilee who are his disciples. Some of these followers are his inheritance from John the Baptist's group of disciples; those who heard and heeded when the Baptist pointed him out as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,' Israel's long awaited hope, the Messiah. Jesus had gone to John for baptism; and in that baptism, which for others was a sign of repentance in preparation for the great act of God, he received a supernatural confirmation of what he already knew through the witness of the Spirit and his mother, that he was the very Son of God. The confirmation was less for him<sup>46</sup> than for the other witnesses. His Father had not been Joseph, but the Holy Spirit of God.

Beginning with the testimony of John the Baptist, men now called him, "Rabbi," and followed him, both because of the intensity of their first encounter with him, and the depth of personal relationship he entered into immediately.<sup>47</sup> They needed no other indication - no declaration that he was a prophet or messianic leader. It was not for their benefit either, that Jesus performed his first sign which inaugurated the public ministry; it was for himself and his mother and for us that it was important.

Mary was a social person; her life amidst friends and family (those journeys to Passover in Jerusalem each year must have been like extended camping outings) was full of happy involvement. This wedding was a typical small town occasion lasting days, and she entered into it heartily. Her woman's eye took in all the little and big human happenings. Where people were concerned, nothing missed her observation, or loving concern. Not only the externals gained her attention, but she was aware of all those wordless currents which carry unspoken needs. When the bride first seemed anxious, and a few nervous whispers were exchanged, she knew at once, not only that the wine supply that should span days had run out, but that this was the unsurpassed moment of decision for Jesus.

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<sup>46</sup> quoted earlier ". . . Jesus himself has above all his Mother to thank for his human self-consciousness, unless we suppose that he was a supernatural *wunderkind* who should not have to owe this self-consciousness to anyone. But such a hypothesis would jeopardize Jesus' genuine humanity. . . new reasons why Mary's motherhood had to be of a singular purity." Op.cit., von Balthazar, p. 103

<sup>47</sup> John 1:28-51

Was this a fussy, over-concerned woman's reaction? Jesus, we see, reacts to it. She had a clear sense that it "must be now." She had often acted on this sense before - after the Annunciation, when she went in haste to Elizabeth, a three days journey. After her marriage she had submitted these impulses to the discernment of Joseph, now she submits them to her Son. With Joseph, a normal man, she was used to having her intuitions laid aside almost heedlessly, only to be taken up later and given credence, often after just whose idea it was had been forgotten. She had learned to state her insight, to trust that if it were right, it would be accepted in time, or if not, rejected, without entanglement of personal feelings. Her inner sense could, she knew, be influenced by other things, and she rested it with the judgment of those given the gift to discern. Usually, God would validate her through those who were his authoritative voice in her life.

To her "now!" Jesus' reaction was certainly not from fear; yet, he was not anxious to begin this road, the end of which was obvious to both of them. Not now, not just now. He knew his mother sensed the timing, but he was not eager to push out further into looming notoriety than the few men he had begun to disciple. Later he would demonstrate his humanity in the garden, begging his Father to let the cup pass, and on the Cross he would cry echoing the twenty-second psalm of despair; but now the first step to those agonies, he would delay. Not a masochist, he did not desire to end his good life. If his mother was assuring him of the timing of this step onto the road, and if she expected the step to be taken, he found it difficult. Besides, even though this *was* the time, it must be clear that he was not maneuvered only by a mother's concern, but that he freely chose to act in response to God himself.

The intensity of his relationship to his Father, whose will was his will, every day pulled him toward this moment, as had days of wilderness fasting and prayer following his Baptism; but really, was it now? Mary knew so; he read her purpose and the situation before she reached his side.

"They have no wine."

"Woman, what have you to do with me"

"My hour has not yet come."<sup>48</sup>

"Woman!" She of all women deserves the word as a glowing title. Jesus will use it twice, at the beginning of his work and at the end. And in this instance she acts out the role of woman, which is to lead by being an obedient follower. The moment for the first move is no longer to be

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<sup>48</sup> John 2:3

postponed. Jesus hears in her words the double meaning they both know - "the world is dying of lack; come, set out, my dear son Jesus, supply the wine, the cup. . . (eventually) the blood." The decision is made; Jesus cuts his mother free from the responsibility. She did not make the decision. "Woman, what have you to do with me?" Is he also saying, "This is the beginning of my hour. Are you ready for it with me, for you will suffer, too; you have to do with me, you know?"

Not stopped by the abruptness of his reply or the possible rebuke, she does not react. There is no self-pity, her vision is not shaken, she knows he will respond; the course is set, the mission begun. "Do whatever he tells you." The servants hear the strange request, but follow orders, and six twenty to thirty gallon jars are filled with water. The feast continues with gaiety, all tension and worry is over, for the best wine has been saved till last. It has become a proof to these green disciples that they are not wrong in their assessment of the rising Messiah Jesus. They believe.

John's Gospel is doubly and triply layered with meaning. Each one peels back with successive meditation, revealing a new insight buried underneath. It is no mean thing that Jesus, the Bridegroom sent to restore the Bride, should begin his public ministry at a wedding feast, or that the covenantal woman should be there, too. Her words to us who are that Bride, remain, "Do whatever he tells you." They ask of us a submission fitting for a humble and obedient people in relation to our Maker, fitting for a Bride to her Bridegroom. Jesus then goes out and for a time Mary follows.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers  
and his disciples, and there they stayed for a few days.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps helping through the transition, for a brief time she is with him in his new life. It is difficult for all mothers to see their beloved child set out, in her case especially so, because the outcome has been prophesied.

But soon she goes back to her home, content to follow him in her heart and with her prayers, to see him when she can which is less and less often as crowds begin to insulate him from those he loved, his family and friends. Besides, he has become an enigma to everyone who knew him to be only one like themselves. The rapidity with which he is engaged in his mission, and the way it engulfs him, concerns her mother's mind. She hears through the family that when he comes

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<sup>49</sup>John 2:12

back to his lodging in Capernaum there is such a crush of people that he and his disciples cannot eat. Once so extreme is the excitement and turmoil of the crowds, they had tried to get him out, fearing he was beside himself. She and a couple of the young men of close kinship go to see for themselves how it is. When they approach, the news is carried along through the crowd. "The rabbi's brothers and mother want to see him." His mother's face and form flash through his mind - she epitomizes what he is teaching - obedience and trust - if all might be like her! And closing the door on his physical relationship, he opens up the same intimacy with her that has been his to all these who may choose to be his kin.

"Who are my mother and brothers? Here are my mother and brothers!  
Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."<sup>50</sup>

Hans Urs von Balthasar writes movingly of the many times Jesus is sharp with his mother, proposing that he was preparing her for the Cross, sharing his suffering with her.

The scene in which Jesus, teaching those gathered around him in a certain house, refuses the visit of his Mother, who is standing outside, seems almost unbearable to us. "Here are my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk 3:34-35). Jesus means her more than anyone, though he does not mention her by name. Yet, who understands his meaning? Did Mary herself understand it? . . . The point of this constant training in the naked faith Mary will need under the Cross is often insufficiently understood; people are astonished and embarrassed by the way Jesus treats his Mother . . ."<sup>51</sup>

On another occasion one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb which bore you and the breasts at which you nursed." And he said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."<sup>52</sup>

The danger was, as Jesus knew, that any emphasis which placed his mother as an end would misuse and misrepresent her. If what she was, and her importance, were turned around, he clearly foresaw the errors that would come about. It was not her womb, her breasts, but the fruit of her womb that made her blessed. And that fruit had come about because she had willed God's will. She had allowed herself to be the object of divine Love, had given herself entirely to that Will. Fruitfulness resulted - a tremendous fruitfulness, it was true; but not of her own making, and not because of her womb, her breasts. What despair it would cause her, if she were mistaken for anything more than an instrument, if she should be elevated by men forgetful of why God had honored her - forgetful of her feminine stance of obedience to the will of God. It is not because

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<sup>50</sup> Mark 3:34-35

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p.108-109

<sup>52</sup> Luke 11:27

she physically bore the Son of God, marvelous as that is, but because she had wanted only God's will in her life, and had abandoned herself to it. Any worship of her, in the terms of those apostates of Jeremiah's time, who burned incense, poured out libations, and made vows to the Queen of Heaven,<sup>53</sup> contrary to her inestimable position as the Mother of all those who "keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."<sup>54</sup>

Mary's abandonment of self, her total self-giving, goes deeper and deeper until the last bit is given at the cross where she stands with St. John. There is no word in Scripture to account for the depictions of Mary fainting, swooning, or leaning for support by some of the great artists. She stood, says the Word describing her posture.

There have been years of preparation since Simeon first told her that the sword would pierce her heart. Each word against him, every misconception spread about him, the rumors, the hatred of him, all had pierced her. She had clung to God trusting that his mission was according to his will. There was nothing else but to hold firmly to the goodness of God by faith, and to accept the wounding of her soul. He, for whom her life had been lived, in whom was all she adored, how could he be despised by the very ones he loved so much? The King of the Universe was so humbled and so loathed!

The poor in spirit, and then only a few, heard him gladly though they did not always understand; the rest clamored for the bread he provided, the healing and relief of their suffering bodies, not perceiving who was among them, or what God was offering. Oh, "If you had known the gift of God." The rest ignored him, were bored with him, shook their heads, and laughed him off; or sensing the danger to their own authority, grew restive and angry, gradually becoming more dangerous than a hive of killer bees. The Messiah of Israel, the King inheritor of the throne of David, walked unrecognized through the countryside, with no place to lay his head.

All the tremendous promise that Mary and Elizabeth first rejoiced over was true; but how could those great things come to pass when each day brought his doom nearer. The sword turned in her heart, it was moment by moment present; but faith did not waver, something would occur, a great something, and all would see Jesus beyond hate and fear, elevated before Men. Finally the scales would fall from their eyes, and those who did not accept him would be a vanquished minority. God was not deserting him, or failing him. It could not be. She believed right up to this

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<sup>53</sup> Jeremiah 44:15ff

<sup>54</sup> Revelation 12:17

fateful hour. Even now, when it seemed to be over, Mary continued to endure and trust. She remained united to Jesus to the end, she shared his lot, she drank his cup. The sword, which St. Bernard said did not touch his soul which had already fled, pierced hers right through at the last. Nor did it end then, for the good God had not yet vindicated his only Son, her Lord, the Lord of all now lying in a tomb.

How long, O God, will the adversary revile,  
And the enemy spurn thy name, forever?  
Do arise, O God, and plead thine own cause;  
Remember how the foolish man reproaches thee all the day long.  
Do not forget the voice of thine adversaries,  
the uproar of those who rise against thee which ascends continually.<sup>55</sup>

Two endless nights pass. Then on the morning of the Third Day, sometime in those early hours, the Three in One says, "Arise, young man," and restores Jesus to his waiting mother. (Can we believe anything less of him who spoke to the widow at Nain). No one is a witness; no word has ever been spoken, nor will any suffice to speak of that reunion.

For forty days following, Jesus walks among his friends again, perhaps many times he is with his mother. Peace is hers. Nothing has either reach or force to disturb her completeness. It is in that eternal peace that she lives out her life in the house of John, whatever length of earthbound life is left. Yet, as whole and holy as she is, she gathers with Jesus' disciples and friends to await his promise of the descent and infilling of the Spirit. She loves to be with these children he has given her - another addition to her spiritual fruitfulness. All the apostles must have lovingly called her "mother." Always open, always receiving, she epitomizes the eternal feminine, the Second Person Himself, until she walks quietly out of Bible telling. Our last glimpse is the mystical one from Revelation where St. John,<sup>56</sup>an old man, describes her in his vision:

God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of the covenant  
was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, loud

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<sup>55</sup> Psalm 74: 10,22,23

<sup>56</sup> Some scholars studying language differences between the writings, insist that St. John, the writer of the Gospel, did not write this book. However, anyone acquainted with prophetic style of language that occurs in charismatic groups, knows that it imposes a form and verbiage all its own. I believe, with many others, that there are other internal proofs of John's authorship as well, language usage and especially the authority he carries. Who other than the Apostle John could use that name and carry that authority?

noises, peals of thunder, and earthquake, heavy hail. And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. Another portent appeared in heaven; behold a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God to be nourished . . . Then the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.<sup>57</sup>

“...the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.” Her children are discerned by their likeness to her - she who kept the commandments of God and bore testimony to Jesus. They are the obedient ones, the ones who again say, “yes” to God. St. John himself opens his Apocalypse with:

God’s servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup>

In this pregnant phrase, he places himself as one of her children, remembering well that it was the Lord himself who had made him such a son of Mary. It was the Lord himself who said, “unless you become a little child” . . . and to what mother if not Mary? Just as the Church has taught, St. John universalizes her motherhood which was given to him at the Cross, by extending it over all who meet these criteria. Though this vision may be extended to include the feminine Church/Bride, and further, all womankind symbolized in this woman of the vision, it is clearly and primarily a vision of Our Mother Mary. What other woman or feminine image dares to accede to be the golden ark of God, holder and bearer of the Divine Word with which image St. John begins his vision? See the preface to the vision in Revelations 11:19.

Perfect woman by God’s grace, Mary models once more the monad of obedience, the place Eve scorned. Perfect Man, Jesus, has come from God, once more to enact both perfect obedience to the Godhead, and perfect authority over the created realm. God is come to display the loving agency of God, who only asks the willing acceptance of Man in order to restore Perfection once more. God has died to overcome Satan’s death-power, and to forgive the most rebellious of Man’s thoughts and perverse of his actions. Jesus has risen, breaking open the prison

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<sup>57</sup> Revelation 11:9-12,17

<sup>58</sup> Revelation 1:2

of sin and restoring freedom for all Men everywhere. A pattern has been revealed whose principles are eternal. It speaks of God's intention for man and woman's relationship, of the Godhead's perfect relationship to Man, both in reflection, or better, in image of the relationship of the Persons of the Trinity.

All this hinged on one woman, one young, simple Jewess, who had been given the same integrity as Eve, but overcame tests to faithfulness more difficult than Eve ever faced. She clung to her given integrity, carrying out the fullness of the meaning of her feminine nature. God blesses all people through her.

“For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me.”<sup>59</sup>

## Part 2 JESUS AND WOMAN

Jesus walked away from the wedding feast of Cana and from the normality of homelife and Mother Mary with a few convinced disciples and began to preach the way of the Kingdom of God. His later apostles record his first message : “Repent and believe the good news.” He began to mend souls, and heal every disease; he restored twisted limbs, he cast out devils from disturbed minds. Reaching out, he touched; he looked into eyes; he spoke a few words to sickness, deformity, and insanity – every evil affliction fell away. Here was the Good News - the Kingdom of God *in its King* was in the midst of his people. For relief of all fallen needs, the long awaited Davidic Messiah had come.

Woman was not the least or the last of his concerns. The woman was incomplete, she knew no peace, she suffered. The list is long; the hours he spent healing, teaching, talking and listening to women go uncounted. Everywhere he gently restored her worthiness with new visions of herself as she was meant to be. Her deepest sin was not condemned. He left her moving into a new wholeness, so she could again know true worth in the Kingdom of God. He did not drive or push, but by the magnetism of love drew her to obedience. After first healing the grateful

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<sup>59</sup> Luke 1:47-48

penitent, Jesus drew her to obedience like he drew everyone to obedience to God.

By the harassment of Satan, each woman endured an imprisoned will unable to make free choices. She was trapped in the treadmill of hurts and reactions, often hurting others to even the score. She did not believe or care to be a woman of God, able to carry on woman's work of reordering fallen creation - or as St. Paul would write, "of bearing the Divine Child."<sup>60</sup> Her outer life impeded any inner life, and the inner impeded any order in her outer life. Webs of sin had to be disentangled, inner and outer demons expelled. Then to the submitted one who believed, he gave the promise that through the Spirit her spiritual nature would be renewed, and for those who longed for it, a new life in the Holy Spirit would blossom into life eternal. This transformation in woman would form the heart of a Redeemed human community - the bridal Church.

To place her there, Jesus accepted and met her need whenever she came to him; many more times than the few deliverances and healings that are recorded. The woman was incomplete, she knew no peace, she suffered. Through these briefly told accounts in scripture the Holy Spirit has reached multitudes of women through countless generations. Men, too, to make the first step into the Kingdom must be healed. Man, male and female, cannot obey the command of God without first experiencing redemption by the Savior Jesus beginning with deep healing and forgiveness, followed later by infused gifts of the Holy Spirit breathed upon believers.

In these encounters with women we observe at first hand, how the Lord looks at women, how he sees them. These days questions swirl about First Century culture and the Christ being a man of his time. He did not choose a woman to be among the apostles, or even among the seventy disciples sent out to minister. Can we accuse him of culturally formed bias – this One whom the Word from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him?" No, the reasons for his call only to males must certainly be apparent to those who have followed the argument this far. It is the fabric of the first book of this series and continuing.

Woman, under the law was compelled to accept *subjection* and suffered from the perverse values of Satan. Satan's own disobedience pervades the Fallen world, and he accounts any submissive role to be abhorrent while reveling in subjection. Again: submission incorporates a *mission*; subjection is to be "thrown down." Even those totally under the grind of Satan were not knowingly obedient to him, but simply assumed and aped his attitude - arrogance and

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<sup>60</sup> I Timothy 2:15 alternate reading, and the only one that makes sense.

rebelliousness. He convinced his subjects that woman was meant for nothing more than to be the chattel of men, useful for bringing more men into the world and serving them, but worth nothing if she could not fulfill that female function. The accusation against the patriarchs is that they, too, held this view, but many of the wives, even though barren, were much loved, were heeded by their husbands, and highly honored. We think of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Hannah.

Compared to unenlightened nations, the Law of Israel actually protected women from degradation. Though social or political authority were never theirs, and they were separated from men on public occasions women had rights. They held the right to property and divorce. Both of the latter conditions were originally related to a higher ethic of the Original Order, but the glories of authentic headship and the honor of service had been lost to human understanding. Separation and lack of authority were assumed by cultural criteria simply to be the just state of unworthy women.

Jesus' contact with woman, even on the everyday plane, was strikingly different. Beginning in his home, Mary, the whole woman, gloried in her womanhood. Of low station, she was not of low self-concept. Her understanding of the Scriptures and her comprehensive grasp of God's plan for Israel were beyond learned men of her time. Never did she assume a false, subjected attitude; yet, she was obedient at heart. She was a woman who made decisions, lived easily alone, had a great inner strength through long periods of stress, and at one time traveled with a group of young men without embarrassment.<sup>61</sup> All in all *the* submissive woman, she is so by choice and in the best sense of the word, its full Christian sense made honorable by Our Lord.

The respect his mother had for her womanhood, Jesus had for each woman. He came to right the upside-down values of the Fallen world that polluted Man's consciousness, making them incapable of perceiving the woman's inestimable worth in the sight of her Creator. He understood her plight, her confusion, her distress; always with piercing directness, he freed her from sin gently without condemnation. From her point of view, how was it to meet him, face those laser eyes, to talk with him, to be healed by him? What follows are some short vignettes from scripture, embroidered by imagination, and as though spoken by the women themselves.

"You know me as Peter's mother-in-law, the first woman Jesus healed. In telling this story I will call my son-in-law by the name Jesus gave him, odd as it often sounds to me - Peter.

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<sup>61</sup> See John 2:12

“Have you ever considered what it means that we stopped calling Simon by his name but came around to calling him “Peter?” It has become so common in your day that you must stop and consider what it meant in ours. If someone you knew started a big fire, and from then on everyone called him “Smoky,” each time his new nickname was spoken the origin of the name would be recalled. Well, when my son-in-law began to be called “Peter” we all knew and remembered where and how he had got that strange name. Jesus had given it to him. We began calling him “Rock” in our language, and it meant what Jesus said it meant, our Simon, with all his weaknesses, was Rock. Jesus was building something, we couldn’t imagine just what, upon him. It was a very sobering thought, hard to keep in mind, because we weren’t sure what “his Church” could possibly mean. But nevertheless, we no longer called him Simon, but called him “Rock” knowing full well when it was given and who gave it to him, even if we don’t understand what it is all about. That is what I will call him as I relate this story.

“So, ‘Rock (Peter)’ brought him to the house because he was worried about me; and he was disturbed by the way my daughter and I were taking the news. He had told us that he had met a great man, a man like the prophets of old; so compelling, that with Andrew and others, he’d made a decision. He was leaving his business, at least for a while, to become one of this man’s band.

“Can you imagine what that did in this house? . . . and Andrew’s who lives just down the way? And it wasn’t they alone, but also Salome and Zebedee’s two boys, James and John.

“This small community is ruined - they’re the backbone! What are these men thinking of? How can they leave their women and children to fend for themselves? These questions just kept going around in my head; I hadn’t slept since Peter made it clear he meant to go. Could my daughter and the little ones survive if the men-folk go off following some rebel?

“Chances are in a year they will hang twisting on crosses like so many good men from this region who have conspired against the hated Romans. Now, these usually dependable fellows are falling for another of these messiah schemes, and nothing we say makes any difference. Begging, pleading, crying; they are silent and stubborn. . . they don’t answer our questions. I’m heartsick. Finally, I just went to bed - feverish with a pounding head, I doubted that I would ever get up again.

“There’s so much hidden in the simple words you read there, ‘he came and raised her up, taking her by the hand.’ That may be all - it was done without fanfare - but I knew with one look

(and I had never wanted to set eyes on him) that the men had done the right thing; and whatever became of the rest of us, it was all right. It's not that he's outstanding in appearance; he's not handsome; there is no fanatic fire in his eye - nothing like that. He doesn't even strike me as pious. But, I'm an old woman who's seen a lot, but I've never experienced such certainty. I know myself - nobody else does. But he knew me as I don't even know me, and he confirmed without a word that he's my elder, as old. . . , well, as old as the hills and in that young body, I'd say, with wisdom beyond telling. That indescribable sureness surged in, the aches and fever flowed out. I was able to go right out, and pick up serving with the other women. I began to reassure them, 'the men should go with him,' 'everything is all right.' Their mouths hung open at me, but the fears and anger eased - I've never been called a foolish woman.<sup>62</sup>

“When Jesus met me, it was under pretty unlikely circumstances for both of us. We were both in the wrong place but it wasn't coincidence. He was traveling through my country when he shouldn't have taken the risk; and I was drawing water at the wrong time of the day. Most Jews walk the long way around rather than coming through Samaria. My people don't like Jews, and they hate us; we can be inhospitable to them, to say the least. As for myself, I had gone out to the well on the outskirts of our village - it is a great well, dug by our forefather Jacob a long, long time ago. It was hot, right at noon. He sat there looking travel-weary, perspiring. I knew that no one would be there - that, in fact is why I go at noon. The villagers are a snooty lot (that's what I always thought), and because they go early or late when the sun is low, I avoid their superior looks and snide remarks by coming out at midday. But here is this figure at the well! I saw from a distance it was a man, and a Jewish man, at that. More easily frightened women would have turned back, but I was intrigued. I thought he would turn his back, that's the usual reaction of these Jews who don't look at women, and they totally ignore us Samaritan women. Funny! But he was different, exciting in some way I couldn't put my finger on, and he didn't turn around. Instead, he looked right at me. Well, when a man stares, I know how to stare back. Yet, there was something different about his look, and when he asked for a drink it didn't exactly sound like a ruse to . . . well, to talk. So I thought I'd test him - I'm not shy. I've always spoken up and spoken back, especially with men. I suppose that's why I am at the bottom of the heap. Who cares! I asked him, stranger and Jew, but an attractive man, why he asked me for water? Didn't he know the custom, or was he looking for something else . . . really?

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<sup>62</sup> Mark 1:29-31

“He began to talk over my head, too deep, too high, or both. He mentioned the gift of God, and that if I knew who he was, I would ask him for living water. Believe me, it was confusing. Perhaps he was one of those flighty prophet types, I thought, not quite all right in the head. But no, he was immensely calm and assured - so masculine. Nothing crazy about that. But he had asked me for water, and now he was saying that he had water. I felt off balance for the first time in a long time. I’ve been good at sparring with men and keeping my mental feet, but I was tottering with this one. I struggled to keep it going, and perhaps to regain my poise.

“The well is deep, you don’t even have anything to draw with, and where are you going to get this living water?”

“He said that this water he had would keep me from ever being thirsty again, and that it would well up within me like a spring. Suddenly, for some reason I wanted to cry. Why? It didn’t make any sense. I had felt dried up and old for a long time, not even sure I had any tears. I’d even thought lately that all men were boring, that there was nothing left to be interested in - this fellow I was living with . . . well. I looked up, and there were in the Jew’s eyes two bright points that looked right into that dry and barren me who stood there in front of him, parched. Those sharp points surveyed my stretch of sand, and told me I could be a spring of water, not the kind that runs out, but *living* water. I tried to cover my confusion, fighting back the tears. Never had I let down my guard, and was proud of it. So, I made a kind of joke,

‘Sir, give me this water and I won’t have to walk way out here anymore.’

He wasn’t put off, but just pushed by the defenses. Straightforwardly, in square-cornered words that seemed hewn of marble, he said,

‘Go, call your husband here.’

There was a lot surprising about that! I had nearly recovered my equilibrium, but this found me with no smart reply, just a futile attempt to get him off the track.

‘I have no husband.’ I thought it was a lie; I’ve always lived with someone, but I didn’t want my relationship with men to come into this. Besides, he had ordered me - ‘Go, . . .’ I already knew for some reason he had real authority to send me off. At first it seemed it was just that masculinity - it was unaccountably sweet to have him order me. But I wasn’t about to admit it, not then - men have such a way of ordering women around.

But then he did it. He told me the truth he couldn’t have known!

‘The man you are living with is not your husband.’ (Yes, that’s true, I can’t see going through any more of these hypocritical formalities) and ‘You have had five husbands.’

My strategies were dead. Clearly this was no ordinary man. I didn’t relish having my whole life laid bare; desperately, I tried one more diversion. Jews, I supposed, especially this prophet-type Jew, are always good for an argument about where the correct worship should be. And he rose to the bait! By this time I should have known better. His reply wasn’t just Jewish; he didn’t insist that the Jerusalem temple was the only place God could be worshiped. I found myself agreeing, that true worship comes from inside. Something like that living water he’d promised me. And I began to wonder.

‘I know the Messiah is coming, when that one comes, he will declare all things to us.’

“It was the reply that in light of everything else, I had begun to expect. I no longer felt cute, or smart, or defensive; I did not try for repartee; I didn’t even wonder how he knew all about me - why not?

‘I who speak to you am he.’

When he said that, I just turned around and walked straight back into town. I forgot the water pot, looked not to the right or left, his words in phrases now disjointed from the context came rapidly through my mind; the command, ‘Go!’ I felt I never wanted to do anything more than that - Go! Where? ‘Go, tell . . .’, so I did that.

I wasn’t surprised that for the first time people listened to me. The words were coming out so straight, just like his - complete squares holding every bit of meaning they were meant to - I was so sober. I could feel my eyes looking out wide, as calm and assured as his had looked at me. This was the real me and everybody knew it. They listened; and people began to move to the well road. Soon they were all hurrying along and, right there, in the same cloud of dust, I was with them. It was the first time in years that I was really “with” others. We spent the whole evening at the well, most of the folks of our town. At dark the elders begged him to stay, and he did, two whole nights and two more days – yes, in a Samaritan village! I hear that it isn’t often that almost everybody in a village believes him, even among his own people; but it was so in ours. And it was this woman, out of joint with herself, with others, and mostly with God, who

was used to bring together all three, each one to each one. It's a new me. . . living water? . . . Oh, yes . . . living water. I fetch the usual water in the morning now."<sup>63</sup>

"I had tried every known remedy to be healed, and had gone to many doctors. My funds were nearly exhausted, as were my body and my hopes. For twelve years I had been hemorrhaging. The doctors mostly shrugged. "Female trouble," they said. Whatever the cause, it was bringing me physically and emotionally to the end of my strength and most probably my life.

"I was brought up to know my place - a woman of little importance. I accepted that, but now added to it was this horrid ritual uncleanness. It kept me away from family and friends. I was not really worth asking for his attention. Others gathered around his lodging places, taking their turns asking for healing, but I couldn't do that. It was only that I had this chance, quite by accident - this big crowd came hurrying along the way, just where I was about to cross. I saw in a moment who it was - I had prayed for such a moment, and imagined how it might be! Moving quickly along through eddies of dust, he was preoccupied with several impressive looking people. Obviously the whole crush of them had some important destination. But, how lucky! My position was just right; he would stride right in front of me. I had only to wait a second and then - I reached out, and the fringe of his robe brushed over my hand. He hastened by. It was enough! I knew immediately. And he would never know!

"But - he stopped. So quickly did he stop that people tumbled into each other.

'Who touched me?'

"Men said to him, 'What do you mean, who touched you? Dozens of people!'

"I was terrified. I shouldn't have done it. Now he was unclean, too. Something was wrong - to be such a disturbance. Why hadn't he gone right on? It was wrong to think I should have a chance of healing. All this trouble! Then he was insisting that I come forward and tell my name. I was so ashamed, and now I was delaying him.

I fell at his feet, 'Mercy, mercy.'

I thought it was a hemorrhage that needed healing, but he knew a deeper bleeding. Now there was no hurry to be anywhere; his whole purpose was - just me. He had me tell him everything, the whole story of my suffering that had bored so many people, though I had never

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<sup>63</sup> John 4:7-20

told it all. Everyone else just faded from sight. He and I, right there, hung suspended in the glowing dust above the road. After what seemed to me a very long time - my friend tells me it was but moment, he said,

‘My daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace - shalom.’

I couldn’t imagine - me, a middle aged woman, his daughter? But the inner wound was sealed.

The word which heals me still, whenever I whisper it, and I do, is - ‘shalom.’ It means, you know, peace, ‘be whole.’ Each time I say it a lost part of me is found, a part I did not know existed - ‘Shalom.’ Do you see me - more a real person all the time? <sup>64</sup>

She thinks she is not important - and she was born a decent girl child. Let me tell you my story. I have always been ugly, everyone has told me so for as long as I can remember, and every reflecting shiny thing proves it. One morning, eighteen years ago, I could no longer straighten up. Inside, I had curled up long before, and I remember saying to myself that I didn’t care about it any longer, that I just wished . . . to die. I’d always been shy - but on that morning, when I was not only ugly, but misshapen, I began to avoid everyone. That’s why I rarely attend synagogue. But I knew about him; people were talking about him everywhere. So when I heard he would be at synagogue, I went. I only wanted to hear him speak, so I could tell what the fuss was all about. Standing at the back in the women’s enclosure, I was sure he couldn’t see me. But then he began to shift around, bending his head, as if looking for someone; and even though I stayed behind the others, he beckoned. The elders up front were irritated with this interruption. I looked in back of me, who could he want? His eyes seemed to seek mine out, but it could not be that he meant me to go up there. Who on the face of the earth could be of less interest to him? But he continued to look, yes, at me. The elders were getting cross; I felt ashamed and wanted to sneak away - but also wanted very much to stay. My feet decided before my head; they moved toward him. They shuffled me past the screen, past those others, and then he spoke those words that struck like small mallets. His words - they actually hurt - hit hard and dislodged something that fled away from their firm insistence. The words towards me had been soft, but they were a veritable roar towards something or someone else.

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<sup>64</sup> Matthew 9:19f

Suddenly, with no stress, I was standing straight, looking right at him. I could see me, just for a moment, reflected in his eyes, and then I couldn't look again - I was not so very ugly. Just then, the rabbi began to complain. Something had happened he didn't like one bit.

'There are six days on which healing can be done,' he said, 'come and get healed then, not on the Sabbath.'

"It flashed across my mind, 'who'd ever been healed in this place at any time?' But then I began to comprehend - this Jesus had risked himself for me - for me, do you hear that? For a woman! A woman better off dead. He had taken all this trouble for me not minding at all. He had actually found me; he had sought me! And now anyone could see that I had made him awfully happy. There was glee in the way he answered those critics, and the way he talked about me. .

'And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is. . . '

"Yes, can you believe it, Abraham's daughter?. . . They comment - I hear it, that I've grown a little easier to look at every day. If so, it is just for him, and his work isn't done."<sup>65</sup>

"There are more than a few of us who could tell you this story. We know five others personally, and we've heard of many more. But we two will tell you what he has done for us.

"You know me as the woman with the alabaster jar, and this sister of mine here, is the woman who was almost stoned one morning in Jerusalem. It's true that neither of us have been paragons of virtue, as they say, but neither were we common harlots. Don't misunderstand me, he has no reluctance to help them either. But, I always felt myself a stripe above selling myself for money. I've just been an affectionate sort, that's all. I like men; they like me; and I find it very hard to say, 'no.' To tell the truth, I don't often see any reason to say, 'no.' I never thought of myself as gushy, one of those emotion-ridden people, but from my new vantage point, I must admit feelings often got the better of me. I used to think, 'why not?' It was fun and it didn't hurt anything. The world seemed awfully serious, and men seemed burdened down with it. I just felt sorry for them.

When I first met him, Jesus, it was at a party put on by some friends who happened to be tax-collectors and publicans - a political party. I thought he was real attractive - I was open with him, like all the others, 'Here I am;' I said in so many words, 'all yours.' And he really wanted me.

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<sup>65</sup> Luke 13:10

No, not anything for himself, but only for me. It was wonderful! All that passed between us that night would take more space than you've got - he showed me what I was, that I had some needs that were real. I knew that a good cleansing and straightening was in the offing; maybe hard, but it was O.K. He let me know that basically I was, well, delightful. I wouldn't have said it, if he hadn't. He just said my price was too cheap - way too cheap. To be warm and loving was good, he said, but I must realize that men were coarsened by the way I used my love. I didn't make men better, but just more self-gratifying, like hungry animals. I used myself poorly. I knew I was always disappointed in men afterwards, but hadn't known why. Maybe it was degrading for them - but it was more degrading for me. Jesus reminded me of the story of Ammon hating Tamar after he had forced her - first burning with passion, then burning with disgust. Oh yes, I knew all about that!

Then, be surprised! He sent me back under my husband's authority. Yes, I'm married, though my husband has lost face and place because of me. Jesus told me that though my husband may be cold to me because of. . . , well, you know, I should endure this and turn all my love towards him and him alone. He says my warmth flowing in the right direction will thaw him. Doesn't sound like much fun, huh? Well, somehow it does to me

"The alabaster jar of perfume? Well, I had to do something to show my gratitude. Our marriage is coming back to life. I've begged my husband's forgiveness, and very slowly he's giving it to me. I am channeling this passion only to him, and then only when it is discreet. Now that has been a hard lesson! I threw this discretion to the winds just once more, I went to where Jesus was having that fussy dinner with a Pharisee - you know what they're like - and I walked right in. I saw all the uncomfortable glances. It may have been the last publicly impetuous thing I do, but I went over to where he reclined and poured that rich perfume all over his feet; my hair is long, I undid it right before their scowling faces, and wiped his dripping feet. Sorrow for my sins poured out with gratitude for his forgiveness. My tears mingled with the ointment, and everyone was shocked; everyone except him and me. My affections outside the bedroom have always been a threat, but he had no fear of them. He accepted them naturally, and defended me against that room full of snobs. I have been misread, misunderstood. I really can't blame them, I misread myself, but he is sure of me - I can't forget that. He's not anxious; he knows I'm under the right control now, and he reads me right. That control will always be his love that demands I become all I am meant to be, not a whit less than that."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Luke 7:36f

She's right. He does understand us women as none ever have. You've all heard about that awful dawn when I was discovered in another man's bed. I won't go into the background of that - my story is just a little different from hers. My husband had plotted to catch us, and believe me, he'd even arranged the stoning. Our lives had sunk that deep into hatred. There hadn't been many other men, just this one. And though Jesus has turned me and my life around, I wonder if such bitterness can be sweetened. In those terrifying moments when Jesus asked the guiltless to throw the first stone, my husband was the first to leave the courtyard. He faced the truth right then; he has not been more faithful to me than I to him. But when have men ever been made to answer? It has been always us women lying dead right under a pile of rocks. I stood shaking, and Jesus never looked up, but stooped down and kept writing figures in the dirt. Some thought it was the ten letters for the numbers of the Ten Commandments - I couldn't tell, it could even have been my name - I don't read, and my eyes were blurred with tears. But it seemed like my name - just think if you had seen him spell out yours! I fully expected that these self-righteous men would think they were sinless and would take him up on it. When at last they had all turned to walk away, I didn't know what to do - so I waited. He finally straightened up and his eyes met mine for just a second. It was to spare my feelings that he didn't look longer at me. I felt that he was hurt and in more pain than I could grasp. I've gone back to that moment many times. Was there something - something else at stake? 'Go and sin no more,' he said. He did not condemn me, he sorrowed for me - and for something else, something deeper. But, he called this. . . 'sin'. So it was. He set me free in that saddened love he has for me. *I must sin no more* - it would hurt him more than I could bear if I ever do." That was it ...the deeper grief. . .he was suffering for my sin but everyone else's, too. I only understood it when he died. . . You know, he died for me. . .oh. . . and for you.

Healing? What healing could I possibly need? That's what I always thought. Jesus was just swamped with people - all of them in need, but he came to our house to rest and refresh himself. I was so happy about that, it made my homemaking appreciated and worth doing. You see he loves us, Mary, Lazarus and me, and we love him more than our dearest kin. I was proud, yes, I admit it, of his being able to rest and have a good meal at our house. We didn't put pressure on him. I have life well organized; I never ask a thing of anyone. I enjoy being efficient, with things nicely done and under control. Oh, I've noticed that sometimes it seems to deplete people a bit;

that a kind of dryness travels with me that affects people like a hot day. But I've credited all my abilities for that; some people envy what I get done. Other's inertia in general, call it laziness, just stands in their way. Naturally they'd feel a little depressed at my accomplishments. It has occurred to me that perhaps I'm not always fun, but there are so many good things to do, I hardly ever think about fun. What pleases me most is a job well done!

"Then he showed me something important - about me! 'Martha, Martha,' he said. I hear him say softly still,

'Martha, Martha, you are busy about too many things. There is something more . . .'

Well, then, it made me angry. After all, I had just worked hard to prepare a good meal for him. The house never looked nicer - walls newly whitewashed, floor well tamped.

'Come, sit down. We'll have dinner in a while. Let's talk. I want you to be here, too.'

Mary had been sitting for hours, ignoring all the things that I wanted her to do. I struggled with it, this request of his, but one look and I knew he wanted me to be with him. How could I rudely refuse that love that reached out to pull me in?

"You see, he's teaching me - I am valuable, just ...well, sitting there. I am worthy and lovable - actually doing nothing. I'm not more lovable because of all the things I do; God isn't necessarily impressed or keeping count of my good deeds. He loves me - just plain, idle 'Martha.' It barely sinks in. I suppose I'll always be a doer, but I see now that all my self-sufficiency doesn't give me a special badge of honor. Perhaps I'm among the neediest and poorest who have felt his healing touch. Busy pride can cover a lot of inner destitution. 'Martha, Martha.' When was a name nicer? I hear his voice saying it again, the peace seeps in, and I sink down for a moment in quietude.<sup>67</sup>

"Martha had to learn to stop and listen, something I, her sister, Mary, had always known how to do. To listen to him is to enter into the depths of one's heart where love, unimagined before, rises above all the realities of life. Jesus is my All. You don't know unless you too have sat with him, quiet and still, or wept with him as I have. The inner clock is stopped and in long stillness the Word speaks a language all its own; weeping taps a well of deep joy. Do you

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<sup>67</sup> Luke 10:38f

understand that heights of joy are based on an abyss of sorrow? Do you know how full you become when you are emptied of everything? How does the circle come round to complete itself?

Jesus moves in realms beyond all knowledge earth can tell. He has opened a window in my being that looks upon a vista whose horizon meets the sky, but all is inner. I love it there! Yet, he doesn't let me stay. He anchors me in common sense. Allowing these flights to inner realms when appropriate, he's sandbagged me firmly by duty and responsibility to those around me. Martha does not know, but he corrects me too, and, when the time comes, sends me back to help. There's no "airy-fairy" dreaming here, no spiritual hallucinating. Spirituality with him involves the whole gamut of life's concerns with attention given down to the most tiny and prosaic. He has helped me find a balance to life, to avoid the pitfalls of my 'spirituality' by pointing out the needs to be met, and the right time to act. Though he draws Martha away from her obsession with broom and dishpan, and does not chastise me for hours of sitting at his feet, he still values and enjoys the results of Martha's practical hard work. It is honest, and brings an order and peace in our house that ministers to him, his friends, and to us all. Close to Jerusalem, our comfortable home has become his retreat. I will be sad, but prepared to live on when he no longer comes, and he has told me it will be soon. He will be taken away, he says; and . . . that we will meet in some other place, akin to that inner one beyond where the horizon meets the sky."<sup>68</sup>

I've never let men put me down. They've all tried. I don't care if they laugh about my sharp tongue. Phoenician women are not exactly timid; that Jezebel, remember her? Well, she was one of us. My husband even keeps quiet around me. Well, when there is a need, and I know the answer, why should I act dumb? These Jews! I don't know their beliefs, except that they scorn us as unclean. Hah! They look just like us - must be the same family tree. But I knew about this man, Jesus. He is a healer; we all have heard about him. And he came here to Sidon. Yes, even to Sidon! So he's not above us 'dirty' Phoenicians with our Lord Baal and Lady Ashtoreth - I know them and if they are really gods, they are sick! Sick! With their lust for babies. You know about that? I could show you a cemetery with urns of their burned bones, Oh, yes, Lady Ashtoreth has an appetite for babies!

My daughter, she's been sick - really sick. Out of her mind. We've even tied her down to keep her from hurting herself. And this Jesus, he could heal her - I knew it! I followed his disciples

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<sup>68</sup> Luke 10:35f and John 11

around for days, asking, even begging to see him. I was constantly at their heels. Can you see their faces? So sick of me? They kept trying to send me away.

And he - well, was he in hiding? A week and I didn't see him. Then I had my chance, and I cried at him at the top of my voice,

“ ‘Heal my daughter! I beg of you, Lord, Son of David!’ (Yes, we Canaanites knew about King David and those prophets of his – he wasn't too good to us either).

“He didn't answer at all. Didn't he understand my dialect? We all speak the same language. I kept yelling, ‘Heal my daughter!’ I would not be hushed!

“Who did these Jews think they were anyway? I pushed into the place he was, and fell on my knees. That's not a posture I'm used to, but it seemed the only one. It was true; he really didn't want to get involved. My insistence puzzled him, and he looked right into my mind - don't ask me how.

“He read me, and, it is hard to believe, he liked what he read. There'd be no appeasing or opposing my strong-mindedness, but I saw what was coming. He would test me . . . like an equal. (You're shocked.) I was to be examined for some kind of right stuff, and he had the authority to do it. I had no doubt of that. On my knees, yet I still knew this strange feeling of being treated like a peer, even though a Phoenician (they have this name “Gentile” they can hardly allow in their mouths, and a woman - even worse). On my knees, yes, but I liked it. He didn't expect any groveling, no flattery, or any of that. I could tell he wouldn't tolerate a fawning act. And there was this other thing, I felt. . . something I had never experienced before. I can give my heart to someone who honors me, even me, a sarcastic woman with a biting tongue could learn to be his servant, happy on her knees. Then he said to me, “It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs (there it was, the Jews so sweetly call us, “dogs”). And he looked hard at me. ‘Come on,’ he was saying, ‘Let me see your mettle. What can you do with your sharp wit, alongside your quite wonderful belief in me?’ (Oh yes, he liked me)

“Yes, Lord,” the right reply jumped into my head, “but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table.’

I had passed with all sails billowing. There was just this shade of smile, he was pleased. And at that moment, I learned - he was indeed the Master of us all, dogs or children, what did it matter?

“O woman, your faith is great,” he said, “be it done for you as you wish.” (He liked me, he really liked me<sup>69</sup>).

“I ran home. I felt so happy my feet would scarcely touch the road. I was happy because my child was healed, and I was healed. I was happy about my husband, my quiet, strong husband. So happy about my Master, my strong, strong Master! When I got there, there she was looking at me with big clear eyes. From that day, I lost all desire to get even. The hardness melts away; the tongue is just as clever but I use it less - saved, now, for just important times, if he ever comes here again.”<sup>70</sup>

“Others may follow him for intellectual reasons, or for some religious or political belief, but we follow him for what he has done for us. We are what you might call upper middle-class women; that is we’re materially secure, but we live where position and custom have circumscribed a narrow sphere. Our lives were shallow and empty since our children grew up; but then some of them began to follow him. Through them, one by one, we came to meet him. Surprisingly, mature women are not inane or boring to him. Where others seemed to look right through us, we’re at what they call ‘the invisible age,’ he brought us into seeing ourselves in a new light. We each have a story to tell of how something solid was revived in our souls with his handclasp, his look, his word that opened a new world. Our energies are reawakened and turned toward what were once, unthinkable directions. We can, while still living the same life, leave it all behind. We’ve set out on a secret, exciting way.

You see, we had grown aimless, only adornments to our husbands and our households. We all have servants. The position which the world envies, to be affluent and idle, was just our problem. When we saw him serving, giving of himself to everyone, with such energy and meaning, he brought us around to envy our servants. He opened our eyes to all those whom we could serve; we are learning to even serve our own maids without their awareness. It is the challenge of this twist in serving that has revived us, because the other one must not be conscious of our rendering them service. It is impossible to not see that they have become happier servants themselves.

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<sup>69</sup> Where did you think Sally Field got that line?

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 15:21f

“This giving of ourselves is really natural, a mothering kind of thing, born now of a renewed heart. Our hearts were only able to open to this dimension by the pressure of his love. To protect ourselves from the lovelessness in our lives, the meaninglessness, we had allowed our emotions to become quite dead. We had it wrong! We thought a heart revived only when people poured love into it, a husband, if he cared, or a lover - impossible for us who live God’s law. So, we had learned to live with dead feelings and impassive faces. But once he ministered to that stony need, we found that it was in pouring out love that our hearts expanded and grew; whether others loved back didn’t matter very much. But don’t let them tell you to love your husband, your family, or your neighbor until he first breathes his love upon you - it is quite impossible; a case of cart before donkey! The law had always told us to care about others - we were powerless to do it till he loved us alive.

“We longed for independence to move out into the world, and now we have it because freedom comes with him. Yet, strangely, we all remark that we are now more dependent than ever. We would not be alive like this without him; we are utterly dependent upon him. Does it shock you that since he departed, we pray to him?

“Who are we? You know us as those anonymous women who followed him, supplying his needs when he traveled, which he did all the time. For some, a brief day’s journey from the Galilee, for others, from Jerusalem, we or our servants could usually find him. We arranged among ourselves to supply for a week the food, the skins of wine, the clean tunics. His own mother had woven a wondrous seamless one. (She has woven herself seamlessly into our hearts in a way beyond telling). When he was further away, we formed a web of women, some our relatives, to keep him and the other men cared for. Yet, and this is the truth, never were our own households better served, our response to our children and our grandchildren more full and prompt. Importantly, our husbands were never happier - he made that a number one test of the rightness of our serving him. Beginning with Number One, closely followed by number one in our lives, we have learned to be happy servants to all! Who would have dreamt it?”<sup>71</sup>

### **Part 3 The Feminine in Jesus Teaching**

*If the Perfect relationship of mankind and God, and the Perfect relationship of man and woman really find their origins in the principles of relationship in the Holy Trinity of Divine*

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<sup>71</sup> Matthew 27:55, Luke 8:3

Persons, *if* Christian man and woman really are meant to reflect that relationship as they become new creatures in the Redeemed Order, and *if* Christian mankind, thus turned around, is really meant to reflect that same relationship to God, then we would expect two things: first, that Jesus' teaching leads directly to that end, and second, that the persons of Jesus and Mary will wholly model it. We will expect that his saving message from God, a message of word and deed, will enlighten and encourage Men to accept a responsive way of relating to God. This message will teach deep spiritual acceptance toward God's agency – his Commandment and Will, as well as a renunciation of independent action, of autonomous decision, and of any exercise of authority not clearly delegated by God - all in all, a way modeled most purely by woman.

We will expect that his teaching by word and deed beckons Man to a relationship with God that in anthropomorphic terms is to be regarded as feminine to masculine, and therefore has a special affinity to woman. In fact in her relationship to her husband, she would be the walking image of that relationship. Such a teaching would be delicate work. It must not be adaptable into a new legalism in the manner that Man usually defines 'submission' and "obedience." Deftly separating the requirements of the Law from the original command of God, it will reinstate a knowing and *willing* obedience like Christ's, rooted in the Spirit. Instead of the mechanical obedience seen in the context of the Law - that binder of Men, it will place obedience where it can be understood as a loving response, made by a free will fully informed about the Plan of God for the Redeemed Order.

The task to be faced by the Holy Trinity is how to bring Man, male and female, back to a full communion with God by the exercise again of his free choice. First, human nature without the Holy Spirit's gifts is unprepared for reunion with God. Secondly, Man's will is naturally inclined to self and not to God. Thirdly, Man no longer has a totally free will - it is in varying degrees restricted by his bondage to Satan.

Such enormous problems, the whole overturn of creation, can only be solved by Almighty God. Man is not able to contribute anything to his restoration except a certain amount of willingness. Otherwise, he is helpless. So, the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, is missioned, and the Third Person also; the Son as Truth who by suffering death and resurrection heals and frees from deception, forgiving the sinner, and the Spirit as Love, the One who unifies and brings the broken back together. Together, Son and Spirit from one self-communication of the Godhead - God in his love wills Man to be healed, forgiven, delivered, spiritually fed, enlightened, and raised to new life in the Holy Spirit. Given such a wealth of graces, he is able to resume an obedient

relationship to God by his own choice. Up to the point of his total restoration, Man contributes only repentance, an ear to hear the Word, and a will to believe. Afterward, he will contribute his continuing willful choice and heartfelt desire to be one with God.

How does Jesus' actual teaching meet these enormous requirements? His first words of ministry begin the process at the only possible starting point. They call men to genuine sorrow for the way in which they live apart from God's will.

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent (do penance) and believe the gospel."<sup>72</sup>

His precursor, John the Baptist, had preached the same message in preparation for the Word to be heard:

*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>73</sup>

A repentance message consistently opens the salvation campaign. Man, for his part, must accept responsibility for his plight. Genuine sorrow for which he is to blame, for the deliberate choices ignoring God's Command, his conscience and the Law, opens his heart to accept the rest. It had been prophesied by Moses twelve centuries earlier that such an opportunity would come.

When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God, and listen to his voice. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; he will not fail you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them.<sup>74</sup>

And Isaiah, too, six centuries later, prophesied similar words of Yahweh

For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved . . . But you were not willing . . . Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore he awaits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for him."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Mark 1:14-15, Mark 4:17 parenthesis added

<sup>73</sup> Mark 1:4

<sup>74</sup> Deuteronomy 4:30-31

<sup>75</sup> Isaiah 30:15-18

Jesus in the parable of the prodigal brought the situation alive in an immortal story. A young man had gone off, declaring his independence to act as he pleased - like all Men. Finally, in the face of distressing circumstances which left him broken and powerless, he “came to himself.”

“I will get up and return to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son,’”<sup>76</sup>

Acting on this resolve brought the straying son to wholehearted forgiveness and full restoration to the father’s family.

Contrary to a common assumption, we are not acceptable to God as we are, or on our own terms. We are loved, passionately loved, but we have been disobedient sons and daughters. It takes recognition of that fact, and true regret that leads to contrition, before restored childlikeness allows entry to the Kingdom.

Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless you turn* and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.<sup>77</sup>

This childlikeness can be visualized as pure love for the Father, which is dependence on him, trust in his provision and obedience to his will. The Blessed Mother waits, offering us her immeasurable help to become children again - the children of her motherhood, the children of God.

After turning around in repentance, Jesus describes the next step toward salvation.

“Believe!”

*Believe* the good-news, the gospel of God. Eve’s disobedient act was determined when she no longer believed the word of God which was given to her through Adam. Unbelief begets disobedience.

But with *belief* a new faith life of obedience begins. These steps are not accomplished by Man’s strength or on his initiative. Once he rejects his old disobedience and desires a life aligned with God’s will, he is *given* by the penitent’s loving Father, everything he needs: inner and outer healing; deliverance from Satan’s possession, oppression, or obsession; spiritual Food without equal; continued guidance. All this the Spirit provides for the interim until reunion with God is

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<sup>76</sup> Luke 15:18

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 18:3 italic added

complete. Hardness of heart is the stony bulwark that keeps Man, male and female, from accepting God's self-giving offer.

In another sharply focused parable Jesus contrasts two sons; one, hearing his father's request, seems to acquiesce easily, but never fulfills it; the other's first reaction is, "no." Later, this second son relents and does what the father had asked.<sup>78</sup> Some may react rebelliously and find obedience difficult, but yet, they truly desire the Father's will; on the other hand, some very agreeable people may never obey anyone. It isn't the surface or immediate reaction that counts - it is the condition of the heart. Repentance is beautiful to the Father; recalcitrance blocks his love.

And even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.<sup>79</sup>

I tell you, No; but unless you all repent you will likewise perish.<sup>80</sup>

Man is not trustworthy, he is not all right as he is; he must turn from his ways.

. . .but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.<sup>81</sup>

Man, as he is, cannot incorporate "what is in him" into godliness. No syncretism is possible, no bargains can be made. It is only thoroughgoing repentance that brings the person into new life of the Spirit. With the Spirit all becomes new. The penitent becomes a new creature in Christ, fit for restoration as a son of God. He said to them,

"If you then, who are evil. . ." <sup>82</sup>

And he taught them to pray,

Deliver us from evil.<sup>83</sup>

Man is not OK as he is; he cannot, without ado, act as God's co-worker, or pray "centering prayers" and be immediately in touch with the holy God. Nor can he affirm others as O.K., though he must love them.

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<sup>78</sup> Matthew 21:28

<sup>79</sup> Matthew 21:32

<sup>80</sup> Luke 13:3

<sup>81</sup> John 2:24-25

<sup>82</sup> Matthew 21:28

<sup>83</sup> Matthew 6:13

It is upon these teachings of the Lord, and his actions, that Baptism is the first great sacrament of the Church. In Baptism with and in Christ we die to the old and rise to the new. Now children of his Kingdom, safe from the Evil One, and secure in the Redeemed order of the heavenly King, we become obedient subjects of his loving reign. Life in the Kingdom, as children of the Father, or subjects of the King, is the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching. He describes such a child of the Father: he is poor in spirit, and except for the love of God, thinks of himself of small account. He mourns the disregard of God's ways; he is meek - hungry for the right relationship of God; he is merciful to those who don't deserve it, because God has been merciful to him; he is pure in heart with single-mindedness toward the Father; he is a peacemaker, even to acceptance of persecution in his devotion to God.

The redeemed Man's righteousness exceeds even those who are religiously picky over details of the Law (the Pharisees). He fulfills the Law by loving God and desiring his way in his heart. He has no contempt for the Law - and does not think of God as a taskmaster, because he embraces a higher ethic than legal requirements. Embracing God and his Will, he worries no more about keeping the Law. Not only will the child of the Kingdom fulfill the Law, he will go far beyond it - he will not commit adultery, neither will he lust after a woman (nor she, a man); he will not kill, neither will he call his brother a fool. Those who lust and hate are still supervised by the Law with its restrictions and punishments. The Law will condemn them for their transgressions.<sup>84</sup>

The child of the Kingdom will give without wanting anything in return; he prays by the now natural yearning to talk to his Father not so that people will think him holy; he forgives easily and readily; and when he fasts, hidden from the notice of everyone, it will be to become closer to God. This one will not desire earthly treasure, no goods of earth will hold his attention, nor be worth his striving, yet, at the same time he will be grateful and praise God for all the beauty and sufficiency that life gives him abundantly. His work and striving will be for the good of the kingdom and the will of God. The treasures he accumulates there are forever.

Fully trusting his Father to know and to provide for all legitimate needs, he will not be anxious about the practical necessities of life. He will not judge others as to their final desserts, and only after admission of his own sins will he try to help his brother to shed his. The things of God that mean everything to him, he will share carefully, being wise of the destructive power of Men

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<sup>84</sup> Matthew 5:17-48

who do not believe. He will continue to seek, asking the Father for all he has in store, never feeling as though he were accomplished. He will take up the narrow road of death to self and life for God, shunning the wide road which has room for self and selfish baggage. He will not be gullible spiritually, never confusing mighty works, which are not necessarily of God, with personal fruits, which necessarily are. He will listen to all of Jesus' teachings carefully and will take them seriously, heeding them and building his life upon them.

In such a way Jesus describes the obedient one in the Sermon on the Mount - the one of submissive heart and inclined will, the believing mind of that child who lives close to his Mother in the Kingdom of God.

To those living in a land where sheep and goats were the possession of nearly everyone, the recurring illustrations Jesus uses carry a long range of connotations. A goat has a mind of its own, it will not be led, but rather is tethered or driven. It eats what it feels like eating and tends to an ornery temperament. Sheep on the other hand, are easily guided in droves by a shepherd's leading; they follow, one indistinguishable from another; melding without difficulty into a body, they seem to move by one volition. They eat in the good pastures to which they are led, and drink where they are watered. Such a picture of submission has become repugnant to modern Man, male and female, especially female, who more and more holds as ideal the goaty temperament. Jesus, who emphasizes his role as the good shepherd of the sheep says:

When the Son of man comes in glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'<sup>85</sup>

To be a servant is another unwelcome idea in our age, almost as unwelcome as that of sheep- likeness. Yet, Jesus uses this analogy of the Kingdom-life more than any other. We are to be servants of the Master, not seating ourselves at the head of the table, but at the foot. Those who humble themselves and serve others will be exalted by God. The servant heart must extend far deeper and broader than to just a few situations and a few people, it must be indicative of the whole attitude toward life and God, because service is the high calling of Man. When perfected, the servant's will flows as one with God's will, so he serves that Will and that divine purpose as completely as he can even while God is working within to make him whole.

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<sup>85</sup> Matthew 25:31-34

The true servant, therefore, is a ways obedient, even when his Master is detained from the house, because it is not threat, or oppressive presence that keeps him submissive. This servant never feels self-pity for all his serving, nor does he look for his turn to be served. Service is like breathing to him, natural and continual. He *is* a servant. All the talents and gifts that have been given to him, the good servant will use for the benefit of his Master. He will work motivated only to have his Master Jesus profit as much as possible. Jesus made this requirement a criterion of those who hold authority in the Redeemed order;

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve . . .<sup>86</sup>

The force of the original of this word, *diakonos*, servant, and *diakoneim*, service, is better caught in the English word “lackey.” The menial washing of his disciples’ feet is the physical way Jesus demonstrated the down-to-earth quality of *diakonos*.

This person had a function not determined by his own will, but was entirely at the service of others. Jesus not only washes feet, he puts his life at the disposal of others.<sup>87</sup>

A Christian *diakonos* does not bend down, or submit, to please those served; he is, rather, centered in pleasing God. This is obedience. Jesus knew that it would be possible to accept him on a shallow level not reaching the heart. Many whose deepest self sadly went unmoved would accept his healing, his miracles, and claim to be his followers.

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord!’ and not do what I tell you?”<sup>88</sup>

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven.<sup>89</sup>

Into the last instructions of the apostles before his death, Jesus compacted appeal after appeal to heed his commandments and obey them. If, as they professed, they truly loved him, they would obey. On such obedience his friendship with them rested.<sup>90</sup>

Jesus completed his earthly work as the Truth of God by living out all that he had taught. He was obedient to his Father’s will unto the death. Not acting on his own initiative, he did only

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<sup>86</sup> Matthew 20:28

<sup>87</sup> MacKenzie. John F. *Authority in the Church* ( Garden City, 1966) p. 24

<sup>88</sup> Luke 6:46

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 7:21

<sup>90</sup> John 14:21, 15:10, etc.

what he was told to do by his Father. Accepting the cross and submitting to it, he trusted God to overcome evil. His own submission was complete, and he asks ours to be just as complete. Giving himself without compulsion, we do likewise not because we must (though if we would be his, we must) but because we may.

“I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”<sup>91</sup>

Jesus teaches in word and deed all we must know to live in his Kingdom, and he asks of us, even begs us, to assume these values with the help of the Spirit.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments, he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.”<sup>92</sup>

And I will pray the Father and he will give you another Counselor (Advocate) who will be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.”<sup>93</sup>

The attitudes of the Redeemed Order are first seen concretely in the woman. Mary has taught us that upon woman’s fragile acceptance of “objectness” God’s revelation rests. But did Jesus say anything about this divine order given to man and woman? Did he ever command or even suggest that woman be submissive, or to accept obedience to the headship of her husband in her heart?

There is a place where he did which we will present when we examine St. Paul’s teaching. But for now, the words of Jesus we have examined teach us to honor and aspire to the attitudes that are at their base exemplified in woman. In light of his elevation of servants, of sheep, of the humble, we can confidently see him elevating the woman he has experienced in his own mother, whose stance he himself lived out in relationship to his Father.

It might be asked, if it is so important to Salvation History that women discover her inherent signness and live it out, why didn’t Jesus make it more specific? In answering this question we cannot overlook his teaching on marriage in Matthew 19, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning male and female . . .” To plunge into the depths of Genesis and this “beginning” is what we attempted in the first book of this series. Every bit of that reflection here contained in three words “in the beginning” is germane to woman’s signness.

Then according to St. Paul, he made it specific in another way. But Jesus knew too well that Men had come to equate relationship with God to law-keeping. If he had said things directly

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<sup>91</sup> John 10:17-18

<sup>92</sup> John 14:15-16

<sup>93</sup> John 14:16

about roles of women, would we not in ignorance have been more tightly bound by the Law, interpreting such sayings as part of a code which meant women were really second-class? He did not want man or woman to miss the central and essential point by mere law-keeping. If some fundamentalist cults today make women slaves, distorting St. Paul's words unrecognizably, how much more implacable would be the bonds if Jesus own words could be turned into chains. It is not woman alone whom he desires to come into free obedience, all Men must. Therefore, the monad of obedience must be guided by gentle care into accepting wholeheartedly her essential place, and not be pushed back into legalistic morality, or placed under social mores that limit her true development.

We have seen, overall, what our Holy Father John Paul II means when he writes:

He teaches, therefore, taking as his starting point this feminine response of mind and heart.<sup>94</sup>

However, in this quest for Jesus' teaching about woman, we are saving the best till last. In order to emphasize the supreme importance of this message to women, especially women who would ask the questions 2000 years in the future, Jesus speaks strong words to women as his *very last instruction*.

The scene is the terrifying one on the Via Dolorosa. Crowds eager for the thrill of torture press in on Jesus who, bloody and weak, has fallen twice. Not mere stumbles, because of the weight of the cross which encumbers his arms, the falls smash his face to the ground. With cheek bones bruised and swelling, his broken, bleeding nose is flowing into the red stream from his thorn-pierced brow. A young, strong Simon has just been forced by the soldiers to carry the cross.

Gasping for breath, wobbling, Jesus is, nevertheless, sharply conscious. He has been meditating on scripture all along the way - a section of the Old Testament prophets that has most to do with the meaning of the convulsion of hate he endures. It has to do . . . yes, with woman, and is centered in the Book of the Prophet Hosea. How do we know that? Because of his words. Suddenly swimming into his troubled vision is a large group of women who stand out because they are not, like the others, pleasurably excited by the brutality. Rather, these women, are wailing and beating their breasts in anguish. His response is to stop, and with agonized effort speak to them on the meaning of what is happening right out of his meditation.

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<sup>94</sup> Op. cit., Mulieris V.15

The context is awesome; we looked at it in detail earlier. Hosea was told by God to marry a prostitute. He really loved her, and though she betrayed him again and again, making him doubt even the paternity of his children, he continued to seek, find, and bring her home. God told the prophet that now he knew how God felt. This, because God's "spouse", Israel, had treated him the very same way. She had gone after false gods and had deserted her Husband. God complained that they were not his People anymore. Yet God with a sorrowing heart loved them just the same.

All along the Via Dolorosa, Jesus had been experiencing again in his heart that old story. He the Bridegroom came in love, but his Bride had rejected him to the point of falsely charging him and handing him over to be killed. With the promise to his Beloved of great fruitfulness, he had wooed her, but she would not receive him. To understand the relationship that Jesus, the Bridegroom, desired with his people, women were the key, just as a woman was the key to understand the love of God for his People in the prophetic words of Hosea. A vivid prophetic pronouncement formed in Jesus' mind as he perceived where this rebellion would lead at the end of the age. Heed Jesus' words as he turned to the women who bewailed and lamented him.

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"<sup>95</sup>

It is these last phrases that Jesus quotes directly from Hosea, out of the ninth and tenth chapters. It is a passage in which Hosea laments that rejection of God leads inevitably to utter barrenness of his people. Death will rule; even if children come to be, they will sicken and die. If Israel depends on her false lovers, Israel will wither away. Fruitfulness of the beloved depends upon obedience and submission to the true Lover-Husband. When a rejecting people are this sick they will long for death, so Hosea cries, "Hills cover us, mountains fall on us."

Jesus is the rejected God-Lover. Rejection has come to this - God's own people will kill him. "Ahh," says Jesus, and we paraphrase, "this is not the worst of it. Now the rebellious fires against God are in the green wood; the time will come when the wood will have dried out. Then rebellion will flare. You women will find this very difficult to believe, but in those days women, the monad of obedient response and fruit-bearing, will rebel down to the most basic thing about

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<sup>95</sup> Luke 23:27-31

them, they will rebel against the very function of their bodies – that sexuality given them “in the beginning.” So much will obedience and submission be scorned, fruitfulness itself will be deliberately thwarted. Women will be happier to have abortions than to bear children, they will feel blessed to use contraception and deny pregnancy and birth.”

Such words would have been incomprehensible to those Hebrew women who believed that fruitfulness was the apex of their feminine being and meaning. Even St. Luke, who records them, doesn't seem to grasp their ultimate meaning. The rebellion of women against their physical form and function would have been undreamt of, but with full knowledge Jesus made this most mysterious forecast of the future. It can only be understood now because the fire of rebellion has reached dry wood. “Hills cover us, mountains fall on us.”

Are these words, especially in their context, revealing about Jesus' ideal of woman, which is, after all, God's own idea of his creation of one half of the human race? First on the agenda of the Woman's Movement has been “reproductive rights.” Hinged to this is the freedom women supposedly want and need from ties to home and family, alongside the independence women want from men - also their desire to be considered just the way men are considered. They perceive men to be free, unencumbered, and autonomous in every way. Upon all of this rests the demand for “inclusive language,” and gender sensitivity, the obliteration of designations that refer to sex. These demands have been infecting: if we believe the polls, 80% of Catholic women of child-bearing age use contraception. Are we near to that time of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy? Or are we in the post-time of that prophecy, which must be a dire time indeed.

## CHAPTER VII WOMAN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

When a woman realizes that her deepest longing is to be all Jesus wants her to be, she knows the deep need she has of the full gifts of the Holy Spirit. We cannot give what we do not have. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to grow in our capacity to give, and give again. Fallen nature simply interprets the words: “servant,” “submissive,” and “obedience” according to the values of a world totally engaged in two extremes: on the one hand, domination, on the other, unwilling servitude. To have her will joyfully under the will of another, to take on a life she had not sought - these are not the actions of the natural woman; rather they speak of the woman who is being restored by the Holy Spirit to holy womanhood. This woman sees a vision of her place as second person in her own triune unity, helping to right, by her simple inner acceptance, the whole people of God. It is the Third Person of Godhead who promises to grace her place with equality, freedom and unity. He will give Himself and all His gifts to her for her self-surrender to achieve full union with the Other.

For the cure of the perverse will, the Holy Spirit is given. That perverse will empowered by the Spirit surrenders. . . to its own death. By the gift of the Spirit, it dies daily to its own wants and desires, and rises in obedience to the will of God. A life of submission and obedience to God’s will, though never complete in this life, approaches the union of love of the Original order. Self-giving of redeemed man and woman is the model that foreshadows the union of love that will exist between God and Redeemed Man. Such a submission of will required by both men and women, however, will be seen in its most sublime beauty in woman. She, the monad of the feminine principle, will exemplify that quality of receptivity, acceptance and self-giving. Mary stepped, by God’s grace, back into woman’s rightful role - the maidservant of the Lord, the first one of the human race to return. Her daughters in calling her blessed realize how important it is to follow her. It gives them a special beauty not obtainable in any other way.

For a woman, this call to obedience is threefold; it is a call to Christian conscience to heed God, and if married, to heed her husband's headship, and as a member of Christ's body, to heed the headship of Christ in the Church. This call is not met in any formulated way, as we will discuss later on: what obedience is in a specific instance cannot be judged by anyone, except perhaps a spiritual director. As a people, man and woman are subject to the Command of God as it is mediated by conscience, human authority, and Church authority, all of which will dissolve into the direct Lordship of Christ Jesus.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are subjected to him" then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone.<sup>1</sup>

• . . .and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.<sup>2</sup>

The woman, and the man also, receives power to live out the new life - quite a different idea from what in the modern context is called "empowerment." Even the disciples needed the in-filling of the Holy Spirit despite the fact that for years they had preached and healed in Jesus' name. The Church is the instrument through whom this Spirit and the only empowerment comes. Jesus has instituted her sacraments to grant gifts of the Spirit that enable her children to receive this power. The suppliant brings only a penitent child-like disposition of soul.

By the sacrament of baptism, whenever it is properly conferred in the way the Lord determined, and received with the appropriate dispositions of soul, a man becomes truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ and is reborn to a sharing of the divine life.<sup>3</sup>

When these sacraments are received casually, the promised empowerment is given, but never appropriated. The effect in a life, then, is hard to see, and often questioned. It lies in this dimension of neglect that so many fail in Christian obedience.

But in order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their thoughts match their words, and that they cooperate with divine grace lest

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<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians 15:24-28

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:22

<sup>3</sup> Documents of Vatican II. Decree on Ecumenism III.22

they receive it in vain (cf I Cor 6:1). Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebrations. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully.<sup>4</sup>

It is only when the Christian woman has personally chosen to plunge into the life in Christ, to immerse herself in the Spirit and allow the Spirit full access to her being that the Church's expectations can be met.

For wherever they live, all Christians are bound to show forth, by the example of their lives and by the witness of their speech, that new man which they put on at baptism, and that power of the Holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at Confirmation.<sup>5</sup>

In the strength of the Spirit, the realignment of fallen creation is begun, and woman's place in it is unique and primary. All things will be put in order and all must resubmit to the will of God - woman begins it all existentially, following the first Woman. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit that prepare her to live out the life of obedience to which she is called? These astounding free gifts of grace, given by God through the Church, are not some outer application that effects their wonders in a magical way. Although the grace of the sacraments is so powerful that it does work on the hardest interior, and moves its object closer to a more total acceptance of God,<sup>6</sup> yet, the sacramental gifts are meant to effect transformation of his people. These are often received when personal choice is not totally involved, so they must sometime or other meet with a person's full volition and acceptance - the above Vatican II documents say so, and so have all those who have pondered Christian spirituality. It means real grappling with self, and deciding for God, time after time.

There is no radical deliverance for man which is not the fruit of interior struggle, in which suffering, distress accepted in faith, is the condition for a truly new life.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Vatican II, Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, I.11 italics added

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church, II. 11

<sup>6</sup> Or, if that will is hard set, then it moves the person further away, which accounts for St. Paul's warning that to take the Eucharist without faith is very dangerous. I Corinthians 11:29-30

<sup>7</sup> Bouyer, Introduction to Spirituality, op.cit.,p.?

As with the biological law of organic life, ontogenesis is reproduced in phylogenesis; what brought a race to development must be reproduced in the life of each individual in it. Following Jesus means incorporating in ourselves, His Word and His Way. When by personal decision, a person incorporates his Baptism, and activates the Confirmation gifts of the Spirit empowering him for his adult Christian life, it may be experienced as a kind of spiritual renewal or rebirth experience.

Leaving the arena of mere ideas and words, these concepts must become *experiential*. Such are the experiences of those in the charismatic movement where personal willingness and ardent seeking initiates a moment, or an extended moment, called ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit.’ The enthusiasm of these communities may be difficult for others to appreciate - they do need the oversight of the Church for discernment - but the reality of the experience cannot be questioned. Something happens. Individual Christians are enabled to progress through interior struggle, to slowly display the fruits of the Spirit. St. Paul was explicit about it; Christians need this further dimension of the Holy Spirit: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”<sup>8</sup> There can be no litmus test for this having occurred. The Church declares that all who receive baptism and Confirmation have received the Spirit of Christ, regardless of that Spirit’s seeming dormancy. It may remain hidden until readiness of the Christian to enter into the Spirit-life more consciously, which is where the charismatic experience comes into play. Receiving the Spirit, both men and women are then democratically given His gifts.

The Holy Spirit, who brings about this unity in the supernatural order of sanctifying grace, contributes in equal measure to the fact that “your sons will prophesy” and that “your daughters will prophesy.” “To prophesy” means to express one’s words and one’s life “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11), preserving the truth and originality of each person, whether woman or man. Gospel “equality,” the “equality” of women and men in regard to the “mighty works of God” - manifested so clearly in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth - constitutes the most obvious basis for the dignity and vocation of women in the Church and the world.<sup>9</sup>

St. Paul describes this active, committed possession *of* the Spirit as a free gift of self *to* the Spirit in order to be possessed *by* the Spirit - thereby a union of “flesh and blood” and Holy Spirit which brings into being the “spiritual man” and “spiritual woman”, or in terms we have used for this study, the Holy Spirit brings into being what was in the Original Order, “Man, male and female.”

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<sup>9</sup> Op. cit, Mulieris, V.16

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit this inner “spiritual” man matures and grows strong. Thanks to the divine self-communication, the human spirit which “knows the secrets of man” meets the “Spirit who searches everything, even the depths of God. . . The hidden breath of the divine Spirit enables the human spirit to open in its turn before the saving and sanctifying self-opening of God. Through the gift of grace, which comes from the Holy Spirit, man enters a “new life,” is brought into the supernatural reality of the divine life itself and becomes a “dwelling place of the Holy Spirit,” a living temple of God. . . Man lives in God and by God; He lives “according to the Spirit” and “sets his mind on the things of the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

This burgeoning spiritual awakening is not described adequately by words on paper. Who would not seek it as the pearl without price? With the amazing spiritual transformation which St. Paul nursed into life wherever he traveled, the phenomenon of change in lives is always explained in terms of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dead and resurrected, is preached; the Spirit is received, and the new life with the great spiritual gifts and power is experienced making each individual a witness to the living reality of the Lordship of Jesus. The Fathers of the Church wax lyrical about the change, and we note the sequence of ideas again of repentance, receiving, and the image of lovely fruitfulness in Cyril of Jerusalem’s instruction:

Like a dry tree which puts forth shoots when watered, the soul bears the fruit of holiness when repentance has made it worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit never changes, the effects of his action, by the will of God and in the name of Christ, are both many and marvelous.<sup>11</sup>

St. Paul could tell when those baptized Christians had not received the full gift of the Spirit. There must have been some dryness, some lack of spiritual awakening there that made him question the fullness of their experience. He spoke to these disciples of Jesus in Ephesus:

And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. “On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.<sup>12</sup>

He expected these gifts of tongues and prophecy to follow their infilling of the Holy Spirit. It is these among other spectacular gifts of the Spirit that are often noted in Acts, actually

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<sup>10</sup> op.cit., *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 3.4.59

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., St. Cyril on the Holy Spirit

<sup>12</sup> Acts 19:1-6

these are important transformations of consciousness, which allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the supernatural world that is now part of a Christian's inheritance. Though thoroughly edifying and essential to the beginner, these are not the gifts that are more important to the maturing Christian.

St. Paul brings these ultimately greater gifts of the Spirit to the Christian's attention in the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans. These powers of the Redeemed Order enable the Christian to grow in submission to God's ways - which are not Man's ways (Isaiah 55). They are especially necessary to the woman who seeks to be whole in the Spirit, obedient to God, yet, totally *free from the bondage of legalistic subservience*.

First, Paul describes the effects of the Law on one who is without the grace of the Spirit. Because we are writing for and about woman, we will transpose his words into the feminine pronoun - both sexes can certainly identify with the struggle he describes. The Law, says St. Paul, does its work by showing such a one how disobedient she is at the heart, because she continually does the things she hates. Sin, it is apparent, dwells in her who wishes for good, but who does not have the power to do right. Only Jesus has the power to free her from an impossible bind. In the Spirit of Jesus, she is transformed into a woman who can do what the flesh cannot. She has life and peace; the requirements of the Law are fulfilled "graciously." Her mind of the "flesh" under the Law is hostile toward God. The Spirit effects a new attitude toward God which is the mark of a man or a woman who is his.

By the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body - that is, sin. Freedom from bondage to sin and death is a freedom given to adopted sons, who cry, "Abba, Father."<sup>13</sup> The first gift of these powers is then a diminution of the spirit of disobedience, so common to our fallen nature. Stating it in the negative, St. Paul writes:

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot, and those in the flesh cannot please God.<sup>14</sup>

Positively stated, the *first power gift* of the Spirit makes the Christian able to submit to God. The hostility, so natural to fallen Man, is overcome. Five hundred years before Christ, the prophet Ezekiel foresaw the need for totally new hearts with a new disposition, and the gift of the Spirit.

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<sup>13</sup> The intimate form of address given to us by Jesus who called God, "Daddy."

<sup>14</sup> Romans 8:7

Ezekiel, the priestly prophet, . . . 'sprinkle (the Spirit) as the water of a cultic purification upon all the members of the community (Ezek 36:25) so as to purify them from all moral pollution. Then Yahweh will replace the 'heart of stone' in them with a 'heart of flesh, that is, he will give them a 'new heart' and will put a 'new spirit' . . . within them; he will make them into a 'new creature' . . . Finally the Lord will fill the hearts . . . for ever with his spirit, with a superhuman power to lead a holy life according to God's commandments and . . . it is only one step further to the mystery of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the just which is rightly considered as the climax of the process of grace.<sup>15</sup>

Ezekiel knows first hand the hard hearts of God's people before the advent of the Spirit. Before we have truly let the Spirit have us, we all experience that hardheartedness. Knowing that God expects loving-kindness, we chronically behave in a way that distresses us and him. Constantly judged, the Law succeeds in making us despise ourselves, as is fitting; on the other hand, once we receive him, the Spirit begins to build in us a supernatural conviction of self-worth. This is not the passing esteem of the up-by-the- bootstraps schools of self-improvement; not "I'm O.K., you're O.K." The Spirit, in the death of the old and establishing of the new, will not accept the denigration of a self destined to be the icon of Jesus. We are given a full inheritance which will lead to the "glorious freedom of God's children."

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.<sup>16</sup>

The *second power gift* is, then, the growing acceptance and right love of self, the self we are becoming for God's sake. True self-worth, a godly self-image, is thoroughly necessary for willing submission. Where this grace is lacking, submission is an ugly caricature, and the woman only becomes a proverbial door-mat.

The *third supernatural power* enabling man and woman to live the obedient life is a gift of prayer.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of

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<sup>15</sup> op. cit. Ency. of Biblical Theo. p. 876 - references to scripture are removed in this quote

<sup>16</sup> Romans 8:1

men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints *according to the will of God*.<sup>17</sup>

The Spirit intercedes for us in this gifted prayer. Obviously, this prayer gift is not on the same level as our good but human prayers; and for a person who may find submission to a difficult situation part of God's will, it is a most necessary gift.

Finally, these gifts, working together toward a free submission of will, are capped *by a gift of faith*. In order to persevere in adverse circumstances in this world, the supernatural gift of faith is essential for every believer. The Spirit engenders faith to enable submission to God's will when such action appears to human eyes a disastrous course. With supernatural faith, the believer can accept what comes, because she is assured that despite appearances to the contrary, God is control.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. What shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>18</sup>

Thus equipped by these four essential gifts of the Holy Spirit, a woman may gradually approach even in this life - the life she once was meant to know in Perfection, when, as the icon of the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus, she was to have lived in union with God.

To the redeemed woman, who under the Law was the mere subservient object of her husband, these gifts are essential to meet God's call to be his *willing* helpmeet once more. We will discuss in detail just how they are lived out in the third book of Knowing Woman. St. Paul in these very passages recalls woman's bondage to her husband under the Law as the point of departure for his argument. Analogous to the freedom from the Law a woman experiences at the death of her husband - she may marry another and not be an adulteress - St. Paul says Christians are free from the Law because of the death of Christ who took its condemnation to its death. So we no longer *belong* to the Law, but to *Another* -

. . .so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit from God.<sup>19</sup>

In Christian marriage, man and woman, to be reflective of the Holy Trinity to whom we belong and for whom we bear fruit, there must be death to all internal bondage: slavery, acceptance of poor self-image, unworthiness. We cannot appropriate the new life until all the

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<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:26 italics added

<sup>18</sup> Romans 8:28,31, 39

<sup>19</sup> Romans 7:4

accretions of cultural inhibitions are dead; then we can accept the pure thing, the marriage that is not of the Law, but of the free Spirit. So that marriage can be an inspired union, not deterred by the problems that man and woman personally bring to it, the Spirit transcends the sinfulness that the Law merely labels and condemns. The Spirit of Life brings those persons to peace within themselves, and most fruitfully with each other. St. Paul explains how two opposites are joined in a third - the principle of the Holy Trinity behind all union - in Ephesians, the same treatise that later speaks so eloquently of the marriage union.

But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.<sup>20</sup>

Two who are naturally hostile are made one in Him. Such a view when descriptive of marriage is symbolic of all God's contact with mankind, including Christ's Second coming, as we have seen from many points of view in this study. And it corroborates again, that in the Christian dispensation it takes three to form a union like unto that of the Holy Trinity.

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<sup>20</sup> Epheisans 2:14-18

### St. Paul, St. Peter: The Apostolic Teaching and Woman

With all the preceding in mind, there should be no difficulty in understanding the apostolic teaching in regard to woman. However, without study, this important instruction is consistently misunderstood and misapplied both on the right and on the left. It can only be seen whole when viewed in the light of the teaching and life of Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit - in other words, integral to the Redeemed Order. That is why we have so encompassed the reader in the Bible Word.

Obviously the woman who joyfully accepts the redemption of Jesus, believes in him and follows him, still may be tempted to rebelliousness toward the Law. The Law has been a wearisome taskmaster draining life of possible happiness. Jesus gives a life so freeing and so exhilarating that if his pleas to obey are not heard at first, as happens with many Christians, the second state of disobedience often degenerates into one worse than the first. Did the writer of Hebrews have that in mind when he wrote:

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.<sup>21</sup>

And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?<sup>22</sup>

Not yet comprehending the work of the Spirit to bring the will into harmony with God's will, like Jesus' to his Father; not able to see that the Law will be fully met when the Spirit activates a person's life, women let their still immature and recalcitrant wills enjoy that heady new freedom given with the faith. In the New Testament times, this threatened another Fall; this time disastrous for the new Christian community. A spiritually disobedient woman, a woman who saw no need for authority, unless it was her own, who made decisions based on her own judgment of right and wrong, had been the tool of Satan for the perversion of the feminine principle from the beginning. (We noted that headship had already been abandoned by Adam thrusting her into the path of Satan. But headship must be accepted by the woman to be safe

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<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 3:18

from the Tempter.) This danger presented again to woman by her Adversary must be made clear by the Apostles at once. (We will see that when her husband has in one way or another refused his headship, a woman obediently placing herself towards him will peaceably edge him to it.)

The oft quoted verse of Galatians<sup>23</sup> insists there is no male or female in Christ. The context is baptism. Everyone receives equally of all that Jesus gives in baptism - healing, deliverance, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit - but woman must, by these very gifts, understand and appropriate them to assume her place in the Redeemed Order. Baptism does not wash away a sexual difference that is rooted in the Trinity. She cannot be the last to do so because she carries in herself this sign of the Second Person; and all mankind follows her lead in seeking the obedient heart, mind and will. If she, the monad of the sign, will not be first to do so, no one will.

Aware of Satan's replay of the same rebellious theme, now singing his siren song to the redeemed woman, the Apostles spoke clearly and decisively. Marking the enticement to false freedom is always the overriding temptation to envy authority - the Enemy's work.<sup>24</sup> Against the background of Genesis, in full comprehension of the Original Order and how it was ruined, St. Paul took up his teaching work to prevent a similar collapse of the Redeemed Order.

He faced a most delicate job. How was he to further woman's freedom from cultural bondage, strengthening her self-respect and still convince her that this did not mean that she was to take up authority in the community? How to teach her that her obedient role was the most important - that the role of true authority given the apostles and their successors in Christ merely served and protected her, and was not a prestigious goal? He had to teach her Jesus' value system, that of His Kingdom, which placed the call to service and submission at the apex of values. He had to teach the men the same lesson about their exercise of authority. "The first will be last and the last first." But this "last-ness" was to be embraced from the place of freedom. To establish this "new" woman in Christ meant protecting her from the barrage of false notions about what her freedom meant.

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<sup>23</sup> Galatians 3:27-28

<sup>24</sup> If this seems at all far fetched, one should read Ronald Knox's book *Enthusiasm* (N.Y. 1950), which describes the problem of heresy arising from "spiritual" women who were their own discerners. Also, attending some fundamentalist Protestant churches, or some charismatic prayer communities, where women without headship have assumed authority and leadership, will open the eyes to what rightly distressed Paul. The Episcopal Church has severed any connection to Apostolic Succession by ordination of women. The same errors are repeated.

When Paul wrote to the young prayer fellowship at Corinth, this was one of the central problems to be confronted. This church, which he himself had founded in Christ, was a lively group of newly baptized charismatics now sorting through the problems of order. This is one of the first temptations of the babes in the Spirit. Immaturity breeds spiritual pride; spiritual pride assumes power is its goal; power tries to dominate and rule. The end is a result only indicative of the Fallen Order. It wasn't only problems with women in the community, but worship had degenerated into a sideshow of "spirit" gifts, and there were factions wrangling over authority.<sup>25</sup>

It is helpful to remember that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit are democratically and freely given, as with any other natural gift of God. There are no strings attached. Where a man determines without appropriate authority to use them immaturely, he invariably misuses them. Let some of those who have been turned away from the charismatic phenomena because of the immaturity of the practitioners note that it is not the gifts of the Spirit that are ugly, but only the displays of ego and self-will of those still "needing milk." (St. Paul's phrase for the immature.)

St. Paul patiently writes to correct these errors, while not wanting to dampen his spiritual children's ardor for Jesus. He attempts to turn their attention to what is far better than any of these exciting phenomena - love, and he describes that love in terms that can only be called *Christian submission*, a total self-giving to God and to others.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing.<sup>26</sup>

He seeks to balance, as well, all the fervent displays of religion which have caught the Corinthians in a storm of emotions. And what is the disposition of this love which excels all these excellent spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy? It is very plain and modest, the essence of Jesus' meekness.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See I Corinthians 1,2 and 13,14

<sup>26</sup> I Corinthians 13:1

<sup>27</sup> continuing I Corinthians 13

Gently, St. Paul shows that these enthusiasms of theirs are childish and that they should strive for maturity and the higher gifts of faith, hope and especially love. That love was hardly sentimental; it demanded true grit in self denial.

As order was clearly lacking in the worship of this young church, Paul proceeds carefully, explaining how things should be done, and calling each one to the responsible use of his supernatural gift. Tongues (gifts of exotic languages used to praise God with the heart, bypassing the mind) should not be forbidden, but when delivered in assembly, interpretation must accompany tongues - there should be no more incoherence; the mind too must be fruitful in community worship. Christian faith is intelligible and calls forth the whole Man, not just the emotions. No one should claim that he was “seized by the Spirit” or any such denial of the personal responsibility and control of these spiritual gifts. “The spirit of prophecy is subject to the prophet,” he taught, and is in no sense a seizure.

Disorder and ignorance were even more extensive. Women in the group were attempting to assume authority during this evolutionary time of leadership. Because spiritual manifestations are usually more defined in women than in men, and their gifts at times seem more intense because of their abandonment to them, women may have assumed a superior attitude. The report to St. Paul about them clearly caused him consternation. They were disregarding the Law entirely, not fulfilling it! In disregarding it, they were transgressing love and obedience; becoming a detriment and not the essential asset to the community they were destined to be. Paul puts them firmly back under the headship of their husbands. These women were not a “sign” of the gospel, but were on the brink of becoming again a counter-sign of the Fall.

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but they should be subordinate, even as the law says. If there is anything they desire to know let them ask their husband at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this he is not recognized.<sup>28</sup>

Earlier in the same letter Paul had outlined situations in which women could “speak in church” or “prophecy,” but it was when God’s order was recognized. Paul firmly links this order to Christ and to a tradition which came directly from Christ.<sup>29</sup> Many have pointed to the use of

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<sup>28</sup> | Corinthians 14:34-38

<sup>29</sup> | Corinthians 11:1

“tradition” in this passage to mean cultural traditions that should be discarded; it is certainly not that, as a careful reading will show.

Clearly, St. Paul was not a man bound by cultural traditions; some of those dearest to his Pharisaic heart, like circumcision, he had ditched. The tradition which he here demands to be maintained was no mere cultural tradition, but one which he had *delivered*, a *solemn handing on*, to the Corinthians because Christ Jesus Himself had *delivered* it to him. He had been given this understanding about headship *from Christ*. It is this that he is *delivering*. This is apparent in the passage, and he uses the same formal words further on when *delivering*, the same solemn handing on of the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharistic sacrifice.

The important words in these two references are: first, in regard to women’s role - “Be imitators (also rendered followers) of me, as I am of Christ... (you) maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you;” and second, in regard to the words said over the Eucharistic bread and wine - “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” The key truth is that the traditions are formally received from Christ, and formally delivered or handed on to His people by their bearer, St. Paul.

Vincent’s *Word Studies in the New Testament* says of the Greek words Paul chooses here,

By these words Paul avoids any possible charge of imposing his own notions upon the Church. He delivers to them what had been delivered to him . . . the preposition compounded with the verb received, the emphatic I, and the mention of the fact itself, are decisive of the sense of an immediate communication from Christ to Paul.<sup>30</sup>

And the Jerome Commentary adds,

It suggests a depositum that has been received and handed on integrally in the primitive Christian community, as having come from the Lord or from the first apostles. These traditions embrace customs and religious rites like the Eucharist as well as doctrinal and moral teachings.<sup>31</sup>

It is essential that the direct link to Jesus be kept firmly in mind because this passage, when judged to be merely cultural, is among the discards of modern feminism. That there is a

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<sup>30</sup> Vincent, Marvin, NY 1919, p.246 and 250 This reference is especially interesting because it comes for a noted Protestant scholar in early years of this century.

cultural element will not be argued, because we will see that St. Paul is clothing the principle he received from Jesus in cultural terms.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you, But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head - it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Nether was man created for woman, but woman for man.) That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head because of the angels. (Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, buy if a woman has long hair it is her pride? For her hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.<sup>32</sup>

This reading demands an analogic approach because St. Paul assumed the symbols he used were fully understood, yet, to us they have lost their symbolism. Nevertheless, we must treat the passage as fully credible in its underlying principles. Hair lengths, veils, all these had a common meaning to the Corinthians, and though these things were cultural, the principles they symbolized were not. It is the principle behind the form that St. Paul endorses as the command of God received from Christ (not just the Jewish Law, but something more elemental and original).

In outlining the headship of divine order, St. Paul clearly states the thesis of this study: for each triune unity made in the image and likeness of the Godhead, beginning with the Godhead, there is a head. In the Holy Trinity the head is the Father. For Mankind, Christ is the head. In marriage, the man is the head. Obedience flows toward the head in all three instances. Jesus' unequivocal relationship to God the Father is total obedience; Man, spouse of God, is unequivocally obedient to Christ as God; in marriage the woman is unequivocally of one will with her husband.

To the Corinthians and others of Paul's time, a veil is a cultural statement that a married woman is under the headship of her husband. It symbolizes her obedient relationship to her

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<sup>32</sup> I Corinthians 1:1-16

head. If a man should wear a veil, it would be dishonorable, because husbands give their wives veils to symbolize their headship of protection and provision. Whose veil could a man possibly wear? But it is just as dishonorable for a woman to be out from under her husband's headship and refuse his veil. If she acts like that - thoroughly independent and disrespectful of his headship, she should shave her head and look like a man because she is behaving like one. However, if she is covered by her husband's authority, respecting and accepting it in her heart, she is veiled and she may safely pray and prophesy in the congregation.

If a man covers his head, he is saying that he is not exercising his God-given role, something is between himself and God. He is, in the unity of Man, the epitome of the principle of initiative (agency, or generation) reflecting God the Father; woman is, within the unity of Man, the epitome of the principle of reception or acceptance, and as such she reflects God the Son. Man is the first principle of mankind and woman the second, and just as within the Holy Trinity, there is no hint of rank in first or second, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman.

“Because of the angels” is an enigmatic phrase that relates to another passage written by St. Paul. Found in II Corinthians, he mourns over the broken relationship between himself and the church in Corinth which his necessary correction has temporarily wrought. In another spurt of arrogant antinomianism, new leadership there has repudiated his apostolic authority altogether. Stung, he writes:

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches to you another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. . . . And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.<sup>33</sup>

. . .there are some who pervert the gospel of Christ. but even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>34</sup>

An unveiled woman, that is one who is not mindful of the need for headship, is like Eve ripe for disobedience, an accident waiting to happen within the Christian community. She is an open invitation for the inspiration of disobedient angels. It is the disobedient angels that cause St.

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<sup>33</sup> Ii Corinthians 11:2-4,14

<sup>34</sup> Galatians 1:7-8

Paul his concern. And he knows that this happens through her unsubmitted spiritual insights. Here Ronald Knox's *Enthusiasm* is the book to read.

I sometimes wonder if St. Paul would like a chance to rewrite this passage of I Corinthians in light of all the misunderstanding it has caused. He seems to reach a point of frustration where he simply lays down the apostolic command, "Do it because I say so." Because of the tradition received from the Lord, the command of God, Paul clarifies principles which are consistent with the gospel, and therefore he makes this apostolic pronouncement: churches failing to recognize this order ordained by God will not be recognized as legitimate. That would be a very harsh judgment over something merely cultural; it is clearly a most important concern for the apostle to establish a people responsive and obedient to the will of God.

In upholding the command of God St. Paul was not confused about the equality of husband and wife. Nor does the headship he outlines mean that woman has no direct personal relationship with Christ for her salvation. It is the divine order of New Covenant life that is reestablished here, not the soul's salvation or personal contact with God. Certainly her contact with God must be intimate for a woman and not dependent on her husband. Such an idea would fly in the face of all of St. Paul's teaching about salvation and righteousness. The total equality of the gifts bestowed at baptism is such that there is no male or female in Christ Jesus, this he made abundantly clear. For the times, he presents a surprising angle to the mutual self-giving in the marital relationship.

The husband should give his wife her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her body, but the husband does; likewise, the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse each other except by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then, come together again. . .<sup>35</sup>

Paul here gives the woman the rule of her husband's body for her sexual fulfillment - and we think we are discovering equal access to sexual love in our day. He also says that any abstinence should be by mutual agreement; there should be no refusals *on either side*.

In further instructions Paul protects marriage as embodying the fidelity of the covenant relationship - there shall be no divorce. If separation is necessary for peace, then the separated must live celibately or else seek reconciliation. This is appropriate to the fidelity God expects of

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<sup>35</sup> I Corinthians 7:3-5

His own people. They may not seek union with other gods - as we have seen in exploring the sexual imagery of Scripture.

Even should the spouse be an unbeliever, the Christian must faithfully tend the marriage bond as long as the unbelieving one will remain in the marriage. The believer's faith consecrates the spouse and the children. Jesus, too, stating that it takes three for the union of marriage, God, man and woman, says,

. . .so therefore, you are no longer two but one. What, therefore, God has joined together, let no man put asunder<sup>36</sup>.

In a letter to the church at Ephesus, a much more stable and mature community than the one in Corinth, St. Paul's tone is just as practical, but the higher spiritual meaning of submission is presented. An apex to his devout thought, St. Paul is sharing his vision of union with God and the disposition it requires of every Christian. Rightly one of the most famous passages of St. Paul's writings, it has received rich commentaries by the Father's over the centuries, and by John Paul II in *Mulleris Dignatatem*, excerpts of which we have been using as stakes to tie down our argument. (Note that we assume Paul's authorship of this letter, which is ambiguous in the Holy Father's work). St. Paul prefaces his insights with an injunction that in the current theological climate we do well to heed:

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things (disobedient acts) that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. . .<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to this disobedience, he summarizes the obedience of Christians to Christ in the analogy of man and wife. We will take the teaching, section by section, annotating it with Pope John Paul's thinking. The translation of St. Paul's words<sup>38</sup> that we use, begins with the use of *subjection*, which might be better translated, *submission*. From Latin, "subject" means to "throw under, while "submit" means to be "sent under" which is a more thoroughly Christian idea.

Be *subject* to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives be *subject* to your husbands, as to the Lord.<sup>39</sup> (Try *submit*, *submissive*)

John Paul II is concerned that in the present upheaval these words will be twisted and either rebelled against, or applied with legalistic vigor. Both are common errors, the first more often in our day, and the second more often in the past. If we consider them through eyes that

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew 19:6

<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 5:6

<sup>38</sup> The Revised Standard Version

<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 5:21

know only the values of the Fallen Order, they are the worst nonsense. But we do not stand in the Fallen Order, but in the Redeemed Order, therefore we see the Pope's emphasis is rightly placed:

The author of the Letter to the Ephesians sees no contradiction between an exhortation (Husbands love your wives) formulated in this way and the words: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife" (5:22-23). The author knows that this way of speaking, so profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time, is to be understood and carried out in a new way: as a "*mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ*" (cf Eph 5:21). This is especially true because the husband is called the "head" of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church; he is so in order to give "himself up for her" (Eph 5:25), and giving himself up for her means giving up even his own life.

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In relation to the "old" this is evidently something "new": it is an innovation of the Gospel. We find various passages in which the apostolic writings express this innovation, even though they also communicate what is "old": what is rooted in the religious tradition of Israel, in its way of understanding and explaining the sacred texts, as for example the second chapter of the Book of Genesis.<sup>40</sup>

The *old* subjection of women that reduced them to servitude is not the *new* submission that begins with woman, but is required of every Christian. Precisely because it is required of every Christian, the response asked of women is a response made to a man who loves, honors and respects her as an equal. In this he submits to her. It is a mutual submission. Her submission is to his authority, his submission is to her need for order, protection and overall care. Both roles are difficult for men and women who have come fresh out of the Fallen milieu, and as we have seen, if it were not for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the submission asked would be impossible to give. In a real sense the man patterns his submission on that of Christ to the Church. For certainly, Jesus in dying to provide for her, submitted himself totally to meet her need. Yet, we understand the viewpoint that the Holy Father expresses:

However, whereas in the relationship between Christ and the Church the subjection is only on the part of the Church, in the relationship between husband and wife the "subjection" is not one-sided but mutual.<sup>41</sup>

The old subjection must give way to the new mutual submission which affects both man and woman. The emphasis is certainly different in the Redeemed than in the Fallen Order.

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<sup>40</sup> Op. cit., Mulieris VII.24

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

The apostolic letters are addressed to people living in an environment marked by that same traditional way of thinking and acting. The “innovation” of Christ is a fact: it constitutes the unambiguous content of the evangelical message and is the result of the Redemption. However, the awareness that in marriage there is mutual “subjection of the spouses out of reverence for Christ,” and not just that of the wife to the husband, must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behavior and customs., This is a call which from that time onwards does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew.<sup>42</sup>

A further parallel to Christ and the Church is brought out. Jesus cleanses his Bride, making her pure. The husband has headship responsibility for the woman’s reaching perfection. His dying to self for her sake, his self-giving love, will help her arrive at her spiritual goal. The husband’s spiritual headship will be explored in a later section.

For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.<sup>43</sup>

The Holy Father emphasizes the man’s responsibility to affirm his wife so that she develop toward the spiritual goal. Affirmation, so often denied to women, may well smooth the road toward spiritual wholeness.

The text is addressed to the spouses as real women and men. It reminds them of the “ethos” of spousal love which goes back to the divine institution of marriage from the “beginning.” Corresponding to the truth of this institution is the exhortation: “Husbands love your wives,” love them because of that special and unique bond whereby in marriage a man and a woman become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24, #ph 5:31). In this love there is a fundamental affirmation of the woman as a person. This affirmation makes it possible for the female personality to develop fully and be enriched. This is precisely the way Christ acts as the bridegroom of the Church; he desires that she be “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). One can say that this fully captures the whole ‘style’ of Christ in dealing with women. Husbands should make their own the elements of this style in regard to their wives; analogously, all men should do the same in regard to women in every situation. In this way both men and women bring about ‘the sincere gift of self.’”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ephesians 5:23-26

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit., VII.26

St. Paul concludes his teaching with a crescendo, linking the Genesis Original Order to the Redeemed Order, and all in the analogical, but real relationship of man and woman in marriage.

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.” This is a great mystery and I take it to mean Christ and the church; however, let each of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.<sup>45</sup>

Meditating on that great mystery, which is the very mystery whose edges we have been attempting to probe in this study, the Holy Father unveils the central role of the Eucharist to the mystery. In the holy Eucharist is reenacted the unity of the two (in a Third).

We find ourselves at the very heart of the Paschal Mystery, which completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because “he has given himself”: his body has been “given”, his blood has been “poured out.” The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who “creates” the Church, his body. Christ is united with this “body” as the bridegroom with the bride. All this is contained in the Letter to the Ephesians. The perennial “unity of the two” that exists between man and woman from the very “beginning” is introduced into this “great mystery” of Christ and the Church.<sup>46</sup>

So Pope John Paul II follows St. Paul’s neat melding together of the two analogies, the relationship of the head of the body to the body, and the bride and groom who become one body of which the bridegroom is the head.

The name of bride makes us see unity through love and free choice; and the name body brings us to understand unity as natural.<sup>47</sup>

In further words from the Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church, which also rests on St. Paul’s sign of woman in marriage, her submission bringing a blessed unity is the focal point.

. . .the spotless spouse of the spotless lamb (the Bridegroom) whom Christ “loved and for whom he has delivered himself that he might sanctify her” whom he unites to himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom he unceasingly “nourishes and cherishes,” whom he has

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<sup>45</sup> Ephesians 5:27-33

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Maritain, op cit. p. 175

willed, having purified her, to be united with him, and subject to him in love and fidelity, whom he filled forever with heavenly gifts, in order that we may grasp the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge.<sup>48</sup>

What a straightened understanding of marriage this requires not only of the woman, but also of the man. It is not the woman alone who embraces a higher way. The man is to be like the Lord to his wife. It cannot be overlooked, however, that the one who first steps into obedience, in keeping with all we have claimed for her, the very monad of obedience in the created order, is the woman. Not only here, but wherever in Scripture this relationship is given, the woman's place in the relationship is stated first. "Husbands love," is never the first admonition, but always "wives submit."<sup>49</sup> Just as Jesus' loving friendship is dependent on our being in a position to receive it by obedience to His Word, so the woman must be submissive in order to receive her husband's love. Out from under his authority she is unreachable by the kind of love embedded in these directives.

Leaving the Ephesians reading, we continue with the apostolic teaching about woman, her meaning and role, with further attention to St. Paul. In writing to young Titus who is set to be bishop over the people of Crete, he has similar words concerning the women Titus will pastor there.

Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good (*Kalodidaskolos*), and so to train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste and domestic, kind and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited.<sup>50</sup>

The problems on Crete sound up to date. The need for teaching submission to women makes clear that it was no more the common practice among the redeemed then than it is today. Women may have had less overall status than men, but that did not mean they were submissive the way we have defined it. Here Paul says that by woman's acceptance of submission and chasteness, *not* in order to meet cultural standards but for Christ, will make God's word both credible (worthy of belief) and creditable (worthy of praise); whereas, their rejection of these

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<sup>48</sup> a variant reading of I.6 without numerous scripture references

<sup>49</sup> Titus 2:4-5

<sup>50</sup> Colossians 3:18-4:1, I Peter 3:1, Titus 2:4, and Ephesians 5:21 -33

attitudes will discredit God's word. Women have the power to make tangible the spiritual either by promoting His Word or disgracing it - such is the power of the sign of woman.

Here St. Paul uses a word found only this once in Scripture. It is instructive for the middle-aged or older woman who wonders about her role in the Church community. *Kalodidaskolos* means "teacher of good things." Here all older women make their greatest contribution to community life.

As his spiritual father, St. Paul writes to Timothy<sup>51</sup> who is another young bishop left by St. Paul to be overseer of that important church in Ephesus. To him Paul goes over pastoral points concerning women, but strengthens them theologically. He suggests that women should leave adornment mostly to good works, then -

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet, woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with modesty.<sup>52</sup>

Before the reader registers shock a careful examination is necessary. The translation "have authority over" is the Greek word *authentio* which means "to exercise power of one's self." It rings eerily of the very transgression Paul addresses here, the fatal choice of judging independently, which was the trigger Eve pulled that reversed the headship of the world to Satan's jurisdiction. Woman, not given a strong faculty of *self-discernment* among her gifts, is therefore more easily deceived. Paul concludes that she should not exercise authority *of herself*, not only for this reason, but for the eternal covenantal relationship of headship given to the male. The reversal is the root of original sin.

Woman's faculty for intuitive wisdom is her richest gift; which, being foremost, runs counter to a clear faculty of critical judgment. Her intuition, therefore, is to be judged by someone beyond herself in a kind of check and balance. As we have noted it is not uncommon in our society to meet the animus-dominated woman who is adamant about her reasons which upon examination are rationales. This is in keeping with her strengths which lie in emotion; her

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<sup>51</sup> Here it may be noted here that there is some controversy about Paul's authorship of these three pastoral epistles, I and II Timothy and Titus, but the evidence is far from conclusive that they are not his, and the theology in both of these letters follows positively from the same understanding found in Ephesians and I Corinthians. About the latter there is no doubt about Paul's authorship.

<sup>52</sup> I Timothy 2:9-15

logic tends to follow and not precede her conclusions. ( Defense of this conclusion is found in Volume Three of Knowing Woman). She needs the discernment of another. It is for this reason that St. Paul, in the passage in Corinthians referred to earlier, warns about the influence of the angels. A woman, exercising power of herself, *authentio*, or refusing appropriate headship, is easily accessible and deceivable by Satan. If this were not borne out in all that precedes in this writing, and in the history of the Church as well, it might be deserving of the neglect it gets, but it is based on much unhappy experience. It is not to be considered denigrating of woman, it is simply the quality of character essential to her being that God gave her. She is abundantly gifted in the areas where His command has made her queen.

The translation of *tekogonia*, “bearing of children,” which is also used just once in the Bible provokes many questions. It is not possible in the overall scope of St. Paul’s theology of salvation that we can seriously believe he thought women would be saved through bearing children. Another better possibility for this word is the translation “birth of the child,” or even “birth of the Divine child,” which is found as alternatives in ancient codices and is how the Amplified Bible translates it. Either of these is preferable to “bearing children,” not because the latter, if the full context is kept in mind, is not fully in keeping with the rest of Scripture about woman’s fruitful role, but because the first alternative gives us a breadth of meaning that also includes the latter.

The New Testament carries the criteria of fruitfulness beyond the biological though it never negates the biological. Another level is attained, fully compatible with and incorporating the old; woman will be saved because she transmits the seed which has brought the divine child through Mary. Paul says, in so many words, “let them continue in this fruitfulness, fulfilling their places in the divine plan by bringing into this world in tangible form, love, joy, peace, patience, longsuffering, gentleness, and self-control, with perseverance.” He has in mind as contrast, Eve whom he has just used as example, and the promise given her that woman’s seed would bring the redeemer.

Mystically with Mary, a woman thus brings Christ into the world as Christ-bearer. St. Augustine, not meaning it as an instruction for women alone, writes,

Every religious soul is the mother of Christ when she does the will of the Father with most fruitful charity in the actions she gives birth to, until Christ himself is formed in them.<sup>53</sup>

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Saint Ambrose, too, sees devoted souls as conceiving and bring forth Christ:

A soul that believes both conceives and brings forth the Word of God and acknowledges his works . . . Christ has only one mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith.<sup>54</sup>

Thus we all bear the gift of God to the world. The contemplative Catharine deHueck Doherty sees it in terms of prayer.

Your womb is a poustinia for the child, and you carry him everywhere you go. Wherever you go you are pregnant with Christ, and you bring the presence of a natural child. For when a woman is with child, people give her special attention . . . She is a witness to life. She carries life around with her.<sup>55</sup>

You live in the marketplace and carry the Poustinia within you. That is your vocation. You are pregnant with Christ. You are Christ-bearers. Where? In the market place. To whom? To anyone whom you meet there but especially to those whom you are mandated to be with.<sup>56</sup>

Against the background of all his teachings, we can be sure that this is the way St. Paul says women will be saved. It is a vocation that may be seen to be the least of all. In God's sight, by His values, it is the greatest of all. This calling is filled only by *believing God's word*, by faith - by the opposite of Eve who did not believe, was deceived, and fell into transgression. It is the Mary life that all women (and men) are called to. Mary, woman, and the Sacred Scriptures have a beautiful abiding affinity because each are primary bearers of God's Word.

Though up to now, we have concerned ourselves solely with St. Paul's teaching on woman, he is not the only apostle to teach about woman. St. Peter stands beside him in his general letter, I Peter, addressed to Christians of the Dispersion. Here we have a complete theology of submission and its place at the heart of faith. Is St. Peter any more liable to the charge of cultural conditioning and bias in regard to women than St. Paul? He relinquished his cherished Jewish prohibitions on ritual cleanness concerning foods and Gentiles. The Holy Spirit would have confronted any of his Jewish legalisms that offended against the gospel. Instead, both apostles teach firmly that headship is an important part of God's plan for redeemed Man, and neither wavers from it. Also, both teach as though submission of women is not a general

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<sup>54</sup> Saint Ambrose Bishop, A commentary on Luke, Liturgy of the Hours.

<sup>55</sup> Doherty Catharine deHueck, Poustinia (Notre Dame 1971) p. 89

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p.91

truth for society at large, but needs to be carefully presented in the context of Jesus as the example.

From beginning to end, this letter of St. Peter is a treatise by the first head of the Church on the exercise of godly obedience to godly appointed authority. Herein St. Peter solves, for those to whom he writes and to those who heed him now, the authority problems in the Church. He resolves it as Jesus does, and St. Paul, too. This strong, gentle and loving first Father of the Church, the shepherd whom Jesus left over his flock, begins by reminding his children that the sprinkling of an animal's blood in establishing the first covenant was just a foreshadowing of the sprinkling of Christ's blood which established the new covenant.<sup>57</sup>

The relationship, St. Peter stresses, is from then on to be as obedient children who are the spiritual house, the priesthood of all believers.<sup>58</sup> For the Lord's sake, this obedient people will submit to every lawful human institution. The authority of law is God's own authority. Wherever lawful authority orders, there is God's will.<sup>59</sup> Servants and slaves are to be submissive to their masters, not to just the good ones, but to the hard ones as well.

How can such abject meekness, lacking any demand for rights, bring peace and not further tyranny on the earth? To modern man who is galvanized to fight for rights, to oppose institutions and jurisdictions in the defense of individual freedom, this is a repulsive idea. It can be expected to raise the hackles of all of us who have been bred on the revolutionary ideas of the Eighteenth Century.

But these first saints of the Church did not think in the revolutionary vein. They would not agree. Their eyes, certainly St. Peter's eyes, are on Jesus. He, "a witness to the sufferings of Christ,"<sup>60</sup> has experienced a much deeper lesson, so that his heart and mind rest securely on this basal rock of truth. Jesus recognizing it, named him Rock.

To bring mankind into alignment with God's will, St. Peter knows from experience, necessitates pain. So warped and distended, man's will must be straightened and deflated.

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<sup>57</sup> Exodus 12:6-8

<sup>58</sup> 1 Peter 1:3 -4

<sup>59</sup> 1 Peter 2:13-17

<sup>60</sup> 1 Peter 5:9

Everything he wants or thinks he needs is not beneficial to him, rather the opposite. Pain or suffering, therefore, when inflicted by unrighteous but lawful authority, does a positive work on a believer who trusts in God. The pain whether physical or mental, softens and makes pliable a volition that has grown monstrously hard and immalleable. That is, if the pain is accepted as within God's *conditional* will. Such a background of cruel sin is not, of course, God's *perfect* will; but He allows imperfect circumstances and will work through them for good. There is no room for masochism; the hope is positive, anticipating ultimate victory through the power of God.

For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval.<sup>61</sup>

Such suffering not only brings one's will into close proximity with the Divine will, but works redemptively for others.

For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but now have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.<sup>62</sup>

Jesus was innocent. We humans rarely, or never are. But to the extent we are, our suffering alongside of Christ will be redemptive for others and an indication of sanctity. This is the co-redemption entered into by Mary and those who believe Jesus and love him. By their identifying with him and suffering with him they are allowed the privilege of sharing his redemptive work. Such a concept has its roots in what St. Peter is teaching here, and is therefore as old as Christianity. Jesus becomes a "bridegroom of blood" to each Christian, and as flesh of His flesh, the body experiences the passion of the head. Jesus asks, "Are you able to drink the cup I am to drink?"<sup>63</sup> It is the affirmative answer to the question that St. Paul gives which finds culmination in his exclamation:

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<sup>61</sup> | Peter 2:19-20

<sup>62</sup> | ibid, 21-25

<sup>63</sup> | Matthew 20:22

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is the Church.<sup>64</sup>

There is then a calling for a Christian beyond his own redemption, his own return to grace and restoration to Perfection. He can be sure that continuing to live in the fallen realm, as he must, there will be suffering to be endured so that others may be redeemed. Nothing witnesses to the truth of Christ more; upon this belief and the generous lives of those who lived or are living it, the Church thrives today. For as the old adage has it, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

St. Peter hinges all his argument on this example of Jesus, including the instructions to wives:

*Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior.*<sup>65</sup>

"Likewise" refers directly to Jesus' self-giving unto death on the cross. Thus, the theology of woman's submission to her husband steps down into another depth of profundity. Not for her own salvation alone is her submission to be carried out, not for the alignment of her will to God's will alone, as important as that is; it is also for the salvation of an unbelieving husband (even more hopefully, for a believing husband). For this word is not given only to women whose husbands obey the Lord and love them as Christ loves the Church. The word is just as applicable to those whose husbands do not heed God's word and way. Such men may be harsh and overbearing, they may transgress the commandments, yet a woman, "mindful of God," and "trusting in him who judges justly," a woman inwardly transformed and made whole by the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit (diminishment of rebellion, belief in her own worth, with gifts of prayer and faith), St. Peter believes may win such a man without a word - just by her submission. Does he say all will be won? The translation here is in doubt. It could read, "Be submissive to your husbands so that if some do not obey the word, they may be won. . ." A man's will is his own to set, yet a submissive and loving woman has more power over that hardened will than even the Holy Spirit!

As the elemental obedient one, moving with God's will the woman has great power to right the upside-down order of relationships. This is the lesson learned, negatively from Eve and

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<sup>64</sup> Colossians 1:24

<sup>65</sup> | Peter 3:1 italics added

positively from Mary. Putting her husband into the line of grace, is the hope of the woman who is totally self-giving. A new disposition transmitted to him will see him submitting to the Lordship of Jesus in his own life. Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the strength and inclination of heart for this submission, which John Paul II calls total self-giving.

But a man needs the tangible realities of her physical love. Sexual analogies in Scripture point to the man as more communicated to by her sexual submission than by other avenues. Perhaps that is why St. Peter says, "That they be won without a word," and why the verb "yada" finds itself such a potent verb in Scripture. Through the exercise of sex one comes to "know" another, says the Bible. When a woman opens herself to the new life of the Spirit with faith as a fruit, the best avenue for the transmission of this "yada" knowledge is through sexual surrender. In Peter's instruction, the Amplified Bible regards the adjectives reverent and chaste to refer back to the husband as their object. The woman is to reverence her husband with all that the word implies:

. . .to respect, defer to, revere him, revere means to honor, esteem, appreciate, prize and in the human sense adore him, and adore means to admire praise, be devoted to, and deeply love and enjoy your husband.<sup>66</sup>

St. Paul encourages spouses of unbelievers similarly. First, he assures them that because of their union, the unbelieving partner is consecrated to God. Though there is a strong possibility of their saving their spouse it is not to be assumed, so that if the unbeliever desires to leave the marriage, the believer is no longer bound. The NEB translation emphasizes the positive possibilities.

Think of it, as a wife you may be your husband's salvation.<sup>67</sup>

Peter, as we saw earlier, presents Sarah as an example of this wifely obedience to husband. Though sent into harems of foreign kings she let nothing terrify her, but trusted God to rescue her. Husbands are further instructed:

Likewise, you husband, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Amplified New Testament ( Grand Rapids, MI 1965) I Peter 3:2

<sup>67</sup> New English Bible (Oxford University Press 1960) I Corinthians 7:16

<sup>68</sup> I Peter 3:7

St. Peter did not hold women to be less worthy than men, they are joint heirs of the grace of life. He continues by addressing them both about the disposition that marks Christian male and female:

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil. Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? But even if you suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, be not troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> 1 Peter 3:12-16

## CONCLUSION

Both man and woman find God written in their bodies and using terminology gained from their senses have understood the trans-sense Divine relationships of the Triune Persons. God in his Revelation of himself and his plan has used this understanding to build the knowledge necessary for fallen mankind to comprehend the Truth. The sexual relationship has become the sign of the intimate, self-giving union God desires with his people, the relationship that he created them for.

He would husband Israel if she would be faithful to him; he would provide bountifully for his Spouse and make her fruitful. Her attitude toward him need be only receptive and responsive, trusting and obedient. All else the Lord will assume. Israel (and the New Israel, the Church) will be fulfilled in this love relationship with God just as a woman is biologically fulfilled in childbearing, though the Church's fulfillment as God's spouse will transcend the biological. Because the analogy is written in flesh, man and woman in themselves are signs of the eternal truth - that relationship in the Godhead, the basis of all relationship, is of diverse Persons held in the joy of eternal union. "Person" does not mean individuation, but the interpenetration of persons demonstrated in the earthly sphere by the yielding of one will to another.

Woman, chosen by God, works out this great theme in the temporal scene in the sight of all. Sarah, the mother of all the People of God, as Abraham was the father of the faithful, exemplifies a message proclaimed wherever her story is told. From barrenness God brings forth his family of people. One woman is sufficient, but a particular woman, and that woman is barren. None of Abraham's wives, concubines or slaves will do, a specific chosen woman is necessary to the plan. The miracle will fulfill prophecy, the great happening will insure God's promises to Abraham, and they will take place within woman. The promise will be given again and again in external ways to Abraham's male descendants. The covenant is to be ratified with male Israelites until the New Covenant, and the external authority is to be carried by males as consistent to their physical statement, but woman will be the vessel for the actualization of God's

plan. In woman all obstacles to its realization are to be overcome. This may seem evident - if history is to continue it must be through the womb. But it is not so evident that this biological role of woman extends to the spiritual. Just as important as heeding Yahweh's voice is for the man called to be a covenant ratifier, so the woman God chooses is not just any woman. She must have the right heart to stand as a sign of the "responder" principle carried within Godhead by the Son. To emphasize this action of God in her - that nature alone is not the cause of her fruitfulness which furthers Salvation History - the important women in God's plan were barren, either because their wombs were not "opened" (Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, Hannah, etc.) or because they were thwarted by circumstances (Tamar), or because they had deliberately chosen a higher form of fruitfulness than the biological (Ruth and Mary).

God thus demonstrated through their barrenness that for the furtherance of Salvation History, he, the Lord, was the necessary third party to the union of man and woman. Man and woman (united in God) also were the sign of the Truth of the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, for they were made in the image of that Triune Godhead. God made promises for the future, and he alone fulfilled them as man and woman yielded to him. The man received the external pledge, the woman received the internal miracle. The man received the Word in his soul as Promise, woman received the Word in her womb and brought the Promise forth as person.

As it is in the Trinity, so it is in Mankind. The First Person creates through the Second Person. That the eternal message might be made clear when at last God would culminate it in Mary, the lesson was to be repeated over again in the preparation of the people for the "fullness of time." God desired "yada" with his People, an intimate eternal union which alone would fulfill and fructify them, and for which alone they were created. Herein would lie the great mystery which transfixed St. Paul and which stops us still.

In order for woman to be the sign of mankind, she would exemplify in her relationship to the man what her created morphology already indicated: submission to the will of her husband, looking to him as her lord, obeying him while trusting God, yet being free in this relationship to act, to decide and assert (Esther, Rahab, Judith, Bathsheba). This was the pattern wherein wholeness and holiness for mankind could be found. Such a woman was the step toward God necessary if mankind was to have a Salvation History at all. It would take a woman so disposed to be first in the coming of the Kingdom on earth.

Yet, as history unfolded the division would grow between these who would be women of God's word and those who would not (Jezebel, Athaliah, Herodias) for the opposing value would be blatantly promoted in the world whose rule had fallen to the Satanic mind. The struggle would be intense extending to the doors of the Church itself. The Apostles, seeing the intrigue of the Evil one afflicting the woman "freed in Christ," warned of the error with a fervor indicating they sensed the root of apostasy found in the denial of the submissive sign of redeemed womanhood, even as Jesus had prophesied on his death-walk.

Salvation History would end when the submissive spirit found in godly women worked as yeast to ferment all mankind into the submissive spouse of God, then the Bride would be prepared sound and blameless, ready for the return of the Bridegroom, as whole and holy as her first exemplar, the Blessed Virgin Mother.

From the Cross, Jesus' last act before his Spirit left his body was to give Mary, the whole-holy woman to all Men as Mother. John, the beloved disciple, stood in for us to receive her, and took her to his home. In a highly significant ordering St. John then records:

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were finished, that the scripture might be fulfilled said, "I thirst."<sup>1</sup>

New translation's have interjected the "said" before the phrase "that scripture might be fulfilled" assuming St. John added this parenthetically about Jesus' thirst which reflects Psalm 69:21. However, a very possible translation is the above which strikingly appeals to the eternal sense with which St. John always undergirded his gospel, and of the significance of this act which brings Mary the Mother into the homes of Men – surely, it means into their intimate lives. For when this act works itself out through time, until she is indeed in every home in the heart condition of the woman who centers life there, then, indeed, all scripture will be fulfilled! The goal of Salvation History will have been met, and the Bridegroom will come for his Bride. Come Lord Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:28