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PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

THE QUEEN MOTHER OF ISRAEL AND HER ROLE IN CHRISTIAN DEVOTION

SUBMITTED TO DR. ROBERT BARRY, THESIS DIRECTOR
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGY DEGREE

BY
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CHAPTER 1: STATUS OF SCRIPTURE STUDIES AND MARIOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the status of Mariology in modern Theology, including what I believe to be most lacking. My proposal will be to turn to the traditional spiritual sense of reading Scripture. I will highlight each of the senses and their rise and fall in popularity through history. This is in order to show that the literal sense of reading Scripture has become the norm in modern scholarship, but to the detriment of the spiritual sense.

Historically these methods have shifted in popularity among scholars and church leaders, and it will be important to understand, for example, how some can reach Mariological conclusions where others do not. Therefore, we must first sort out these different methods or senses of Scripture to prepare for a responsible exegesis of certain excerpts which have been used in Mariology.

The focus of this thesis will be the concept of queen motherhood and how it can inform the field of Mariology. In Chapter 2, I will explain the literal sense of Old Testament text referring to queen motherhood, where in Chapter 3 I will move to the spiritual (specifically allegorical) sense and begin to draw out how each of these texts relate to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I will also be using the moral and anagogical senses, subcategories of the spiritual sense, in Chapter 4, when defending the following position: Marian devotional practice is fitting and all but necessary for a full Christian, spiritual life.

Status of Mariology Today

If Christ is the key to reading Scripture, and Mariology is simply a branch of Christology, then there should be a relationship between Mariology and Scripture, just as there is between Mary and Jesus. Let us see what can be learned about the Blessed Virgin from both the Old and the New Testaments, because if the allegorical sense (explained below) is valid, then some texts from the Old should foreshadow in the New this key figure of Jesus' life. We must first consider if there is a need for such exegesis in today's scholarship.

Mariology as a theological pursuit seems to have lost much of its popularity among modern scholars. Drawing from Charles W. Neumann, James J. Tibbets succinctly compiles six major factors which have led to this change:

Some of the reasons for this decline in Mariology are 1) a rationalizing tendency in theology; 2) a change in the focus of the theological interest (from revelation theology to the practical theology of ethics); 3) an anti-doctrinal bias; 4) a climax in the Marian movement of the 1950's; 5) a difference or split in method following the Council (those scholars who build on church documents and speculative analysis - Mary's privileges - and those scholars who build on scripture and patristics); and 6) a demythologization regarding the Christian kerygma, i.e., the historicity of the infancy narratives and the abstraction of Mary into a myth or symbol.¹

Tibbets goes on to show that, while Mariology has declined in recent decades, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leading up to the Second Vatican Council, saw a significant rise in both Marian devotion and Mariology. He states, "The dogma of the Assumption [declared in 1950] was the climax in a movement of piety and theology that had been going on for decades."²

Juniper B. Carol, in 1950, highlighted what seems to have been the popular goal of scholars of Mariology at this time:

The theologian of today, in contradistinction to the theologian of the Middle Ages, is not satisfied with knowing that Mary is the true Mother of God... The theologian of today seeks,

¹ James J. Tibbets, "*The Historical Development of Biblical Mariology Pre- and Post-Vatican II (1943-1986 American Mariology)*," (Licentiate Thesis, University of Dayton, 1995), 4, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/r/etd/search/1?clear=0,1,5,10,20,21,1001.

² *Ibid.* 15.

first of all, to analyze these various truths, to penetrate more profoundly into their very essence, to weigh and re-examine, in conformity with the critical standards of the day... Lastly, the theologian of today does not rest satisfied with the knowledge, however profound, of isolated doctrines; he tends toward systematizing; he wishes to bring out the logical nexus linking the various Marian prerogatives.³

One can see here that, at this climax of Mariological interest, most scholars were focused on “systematizing” and simplifying Mariology into an underlying, foundational principle.⁴

However, after Vatican II, this trend fell off dramatically, and the scriptural scholarship, strongly propelled by the historical-critical method, and which had been on the rise in the twentieth century, became the prominent area of focus for Marian theologians. While piety noticeably increased in the 1930’s and 40’s, seen by the numerous congresses, societies, and magazine publications that were instituted, it changed course and seemed to fade in the latter half of the twentieth century.⁵

While it is agreed that interest in Mariology has diminished greatly,⁶ there are still significant positive notes to be made on its status. For example, the scientific research in Mariology has continued to develop, and we are also seeing stronger ecumenical studies on the topic, including many books being written by Protestant scholars.⁷ So, despite the lack of popular Marian devotion in our society, there is enough high-quality work being done to build from. My concern now is to encourage a shift in focus within Mariology, toward the spiritual sense of Scripture. By using this method, I will show how Marian spirituality is not only a fitting component of the Christian life, but it is also critical to living out the Christian life in its totality.

³ Juniper B. Carol, "The Mariological Movement in the World Today," *Marian Studies* 1 (1950): 25-26.

⁴ Tibbets, "The Historical Development of Biblical Mariology," 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

⁷ *Ibid.* 3.

The Different Senses of Reading Scripture

Literal Sense

One might think that the literal sense of Scripture means reading every detail and narrative account of the Bible as if it happened in the exact way described, and then refraining from making any inferences or applying historical-critical methods. Instead, the term “literal sense” has been used to describe one’s attempt at studying an author’s original intent and message behind a given passage.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, gives three criteria for reading Scripture in this literal sense.⁸ One should understand the author’s words in an obvious or “direct” way, rather than reading into them any more than what may have been originally intended. (This includes reading concepts into the text which had not yet been developed at the time of the text’s writing.) Second, the literal sense reads the passages of Scripture from the perspective of the last editor or author of that text, whether it was re-written over the centuries or perhaps written in someone else’s name from a previous era. Thirdly, the literal sense must consider who the author’s audience was and what they would have been expected to understand or infer from the passage.

It should be noted that the Bible contains different literary genres and styles of expression among its books. Therefore, the literal-sense reader is responsible for taking the genre into consideration when looking for the original intent of the author. For example, a story about a prophet’s calling may or may not have happened historically in the way outlined in the Scripture text. However, the author’s intent may not be to give exact chronological details of the event so

⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Senses of Scripture Today,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 62 (1996): 102.

much as to present the readers with a literary theme or message. The author's intent may have been to portray someone as a protagonist rather than an antagonist, resulting in some historical details being left out and some moral details being included.

However, once the reader starts looking for a moral or theological message in the author's intent, however, this is when the definitions of the literal sense and spiritual sense can become confused. It is best to distinguish between what the author was likely expressing (even if it is indeed a moral message) and what underlying lessons their text might supply via the hand of God.

Spiritual Sense

The spiritual sense has typically been divided into three categories: the moral, allegorical, and anagogical. The moral sense is found when the reader learns from the text a principle that he or she can apply in his or her own life. This is not something not explicitly stated, but a virtue, for example, that an individual documented in the text may be exemplifying. The allegorical sense can also be called the typological sense. This is a foreshadowing of a future event or reality which an older text symbolizes. Oftentimes it is used by New Testament scholars as they read Old Testament passages, finding how these passages foretold the events of Christ's life on earth. Lastly, the anagogical sense conveys ideas about Heaven that can be gleaned from people, places, things, and events here on earth as they are described in the Scriptures.⁹

To give examples of these subcategories of the spiritual sense, we can look at the book of Jonah. If one were to read Jonah morally, they might see his fleeing from God's call and his

⁹ See Sebastian Bullough, "The Spiritual Sense of Scripture," *Life of the Spirit (1946-1964)* 8 (1954): 344.

subsequent punishment¹⁰ as an opportunity for the reader to take heart and respond positively to God's call in their own lives.

If one were to read Jonah allegorically, they must read it in consideration of the New Testament in order to see how it pointed to Christ. In fact, the work has been done for us by Christ himself who, in the Gospel of Matthew, states, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:39-40). Jesus is telling the crowd that Jonah's being swallowed by the fish (Jon. 1:17) was a sign signifying that he himself will also see death for three days. This allegorical way of reading the Old Testament is really a Christo-centric method, giving the theologian more insight into God's providential plan for Christ to fulfill the Old Testament and the history of his people.

Lastly, if we were to read this book of Jonah anagogically, we might surmise that God's last-minute saving of an entire city shows his abundant mercy. Thereby, one can see why other souls could be saved and brought to Heaven for similar acts of repentance. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the phrase "spiritual sense" mostly to mean its subcategory of the allegorical/typological sense, and I will show how Old Testament texts foreshadow what happens in New Testament texts.

Fitzmyer distinguishes what he calls an accommodated sense from the traditional spiritual sense of Scripture. This accommodation can occur "...when a meaning is foisted upon the words of the biblical text which is other than that intended by the human author. This is done either by way of extension or by allusion or reference to something extraneous."¹¹ The key here

¹⁰ Jon. 1:3-15 NRSV.

¹¹ Fitzmyer, "The Senses of Scripture Today," 107.

is that the theologian should not say that their conclusions are necessarily the spiritual meaning of the text, but that they are using it to draw inspiration from it and apply its principles elsewhere. While Fitzmyer seems to take issue with this “accommodated sense,” it should be noted that this is generally what all spiritual readings of Scripture will include: an exegete’s attempt to glean a deeper lesson beyond the literal meaning. Either way, we should bear in mind that distinguishing the spiritual and literal senses is appropriate for avoiding confusion for the reader.

Fitzmyer notes how Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, used Colossian 3:3 to draw upon the Blessed Virgin Mary’s hidden, spiritual life with Jesus in Nazareth. The actual text from St. Paul states, “...for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col.3:3). This statement is clearly not being addressed to the Blessed Virgin, but rather to the Christians of Colossae, as dictated in the beginning of the letter (Col. 1:2). Yet John Paul II draws inspiration from the principle being expressed, namely, that of unseen union with Christ, to the hidden life of God in Mary. Drawing a deeper meaning from a passage does not nullify the literal meaning, nor does it necessitate a presumptuous ambition by the exegete. Instead, it can be an attempt which, within the context of Christian devotion and discernment, simply seeks to make connections between various texts of Sacred Scripture, gleaning from them the underlying theological principles. The same principle of God’s mercy, as shown in the book of Jonah after the Ninevites repented, can be seen at Pentecost in the book of Acts when the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem repented and received baptism from the apostles. There is no explicit connection, yet the presence of a spiritual connection can reasonably be admitted. It is the same divine mercy throughout. Further such a method of making connections is fitting for instruction and should not be ignored.

Distinguishing between the Literal and Spiritual

To clarify, the spiritual sense can still be used to explain what was intended by the *author*, but that can depend on who is being considered as the author in any given exegetical attempt: the human writer or God. Even with merely the human author, one might think that what was intended by the text could have both a literal and a spiritual meaning. For example, the human author can describe an historical event while intentionally choosing to highlight certain details. Then he or she might order them in such a way as to evoke in the reader memories of previous events.

Therefore, we need to specify that the literal sense is what is conveyed through the words and what they directly signify, whereas the spiritual sense is conveyed through what the “signifieds” can further signify.¹² Mark F. Johnson similarly states, “The medium of words makes the literal sense different from the spiritual senses, since in the spiritual senses the medium of meaning is through the things signified by the words of Scripture and is intended by the Holy Spirit alone, whereas in the literal sense the medium of meaning is the words alone, intended both by the human author and the Holy Spirit.”¹³

If all Scripture is the Word of God, then, even the literal intent of the human author is shared by the Holy Spirit. Yet this need not confuse things, as the intended, literal sense remains one, even when it is shared by two (God and human). As for the spiritual sense, Johnson goes on to say that it is simply what is conveyed through symbols by the Holy Spirit, not by the human author, whereas the literal sense encompasses everything intended by the human author. The fact

¹² Leroy A. Huizenga, “The Literal and Spiritual Senses of Sacred Scripture,” in *Healing Fractures in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Peter John McGregor and Tracey Rowland (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 94.

¹³ Mark F. Johnson, “Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 119.

that sometimes the author can intend more than one meaning will be important to bear in mind. For example, the author of 1 Kings may have documented the actions of a king or queen to maintain an historical record but also to give a moral lesson. This does not mean that the moral lesson is automatically to be taken as a spiritual sense of the passage, because such classification should be applied only if a certain moral lesson can be shown from the passage which was *not* likely intended by the human author.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term “literal sense” will be used to denote the intent of the human author, while the spiritual sense will be used to denote the more hidden, or less obvious, intent of the divine author. The spiritual sense requires the exegete to work in communion with the Holy Spirit to build on his or her foundation of scriptural expertise. After distinguishing these two senses, I will highlight many Old Testament passages regarding queen motherhood, using their literal meanings as the foundation to develop allegorical, moral, and anagogical claims.

The Contemporary Preference for the Literal

So which sense of reading Scripture is preferred? The answer to this question is certainly different now than it would have been a millennium ago. In his forward to Henri de Lubac’s *Medieval Exegesis, Vol.3: The Four Senses of Scripture*, Robert Louis Wilken summarizes the style in which Scripture was read and understood for most of church history. He states, “Within this tradition, the unanimous tradition of the church in its first fifteen hundred years, the aim of

Christian exegesis of the Old Testament was to discern in it the sense that the Gospel had given to it, to read it in light of faith in Christ and hope in the Resurrection.”¹⁴

Here we can see that the spiritual sense rather than the literal sense had been the norm for the greater part of Christian history. De Lubac even references the “medieval charterhouse of Salvatorberg” which had a catalog for its library categorizing its texts into the four-fold senses of Scripture (the literal and the three senses of the spiritual).¹⁵ The use of both the spiritual and literal senses were so normalized and taken for granted that the categorizing of theological scholarship was at times based directly on them.

Leroy A. Huizenga describes the medieval perspective as placing one sense *above* and another *below*. “The literal sense belonged below the line, so to speak, in the physical, visible realm, as words are human signs. But the spiritual sense... was above the line: it belonged to the metaphysical, invisible realm while being rooted in the letter.”¹⁶ The literal sense was always expected to give the spiritual sense a foundation from which to build, but it was the spiritual sense that appears to have been more important to theologians of the past.

Modern exegesis, however, is typically more concerned with uncovering the most accurate historical context and applying such findings to each passage. The literal sense, what the human author intended, seems to have become the goal of most modern scholars of Scripture. The use of the historical-critical method, especially in the twentieth century, was given priority in biblical exegesis.¹⁷ Huizenga contrasts this with the Middle Ages perspective, wherein church dogma, Theology, and Scripture were bound up so closely that there was little distinction

¹⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, in his forward to Henri de Lubac’s *Medieval Exegesis, Vol.3: The Four Senses of Scripture*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Huizenga, “The Literal and Spiritual Senses of Sacred Scripture,” 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 93.

between the three, if at all. What the church taught was believed to be what the biblical texts conveyed, and theologians engaged in the task of reconciling the two.¹⁸

Much of this changed with William of Ockham's nominalism, the belief that there are no metaphysical, platonic forms or realities but rather names which we give to physical realities so as to categorize them.¹⁹ There are only individual created entities, which share merely perceived commonalities, not linked by anything higher than physical accidents. He thereby influenced many to focus solely on the physical realities, discarding the philosophical tendency of Christian theologians to build their assumptions on metaphysics.

Since Ockham believed that all things exist in the physical realm due solely to God's Will, with no secondary causality due to any spiritual realities or spiritual laws, he therefore denounced the idea of a spiritual reading of Scripture. No human being should suggest a specific spiritual reading which could be applicable to all since there is no actual spiritual or platonic connection between us all, no spiritual principles universally applicable to all. Instead, Ockham asserted that the literal sense should be the preferred and only sense of reading Scripture, and that if something more should be learned by any individual Christian, then God would reveal it to them in an individual way. This simplified explanation of creation, that of removing secondary, spiritual causes, gave rise to a school of thought that eventually would manifest in the Protestant Reformation. There was a large movement within Theology that broke away dependence on church authority for the meanings of the scriptural texts. This also coincided with a stress on the importance of individual, personal discernment.²⁰

¹⁸ Huizenga, "The Literal and Spiritual Senses of Sacred Scripture," 92.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 96.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 97.

After the push for the literal sense had been underway for some time, the Enlightenment rationalism developed and gained popularity, and there began a strong push toward historical-critical research of biblical texts in the nineteenth century. All this happened while there was a strong divide between the literal and spiritual methods of reading Scripture and between Protestants and Catholics. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church had shifted its position from being opposed to the trend of rationalism and literal reading toward now beginning its own push for more accurate biblical translations and understandings. This can be seen, for example, in Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus*,²¹ in which he urges a renewed fervor for academic scriptural studies so as to defend against the pure rationalism of his time that was denying the authenticity of the Bible.

In Catholic scholarship, there grew a better appreciation for the literal sense, which was shared by many Protestant churches, especially within Fundamentalist communities. However, since then, there has been an unfortunate level of neglect of the spiritual sense in the broader Catholic school of thought, while mainstream Protestant lines of thinking are not forecasted to develop this sense in the near future either. It is imperative to bring back to popular use this spiritual sense in modern academia so as to better form the twenty-first-century Christian.

The Necessity of the Spiritual Sense

An emphasis on spiritual reading of Scripture is critical for any serious Christian in their scriptural devotion. For the reader to receive what the divine author intends, one must be open to the potential significations that stem from the literal sense. Ryan A. Brandt states, "In other

²¹ Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, accessed March 29, 2024, Vatican.va, 10. This encyclical was put forth just before the turn of the century in 1893.

words, because of the divine nature of the Bible and the fact that it is God's word to humans for the purposes of spiritual knowledge and growth as well as volitional transformation, Scripture must have spiritual senses (the *triplex sensus spiritualis*) in addition to a literal sense."²²

Bullough adds, "... it is only when we see God himself as the ultimate author of the whole of Scripture that we can see the intention of the divine author to convey an inner sense, unknown to the human author."²³

Christ is recorded as saying, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). This shows any serious Christian reader that the Old Testament texts, taken on their own are, in a way, insufficient for true discipleship; they were written with divine anticipation of their later fulfillment, even if this fulfillment was not realized by their human authors. Therefore, to read back into them through the lens of Christ (the allegorical spiritual sense) should ideally be the end goal of any devout Christian scholar of the Old Testament.

This does not diminish the importance of the historical-critical method and the literal sense. Rather, it elevates them by treating them with a higher purpose. As stated above, the spiritual sense is founded upon the literal, much like the canopy of an umbrella is useless without the structure of the metal rods and pole. One builds upon the other to form a properly-functioning medium that God's uses to enlighten his disciples.

Further, as the Bible is read for the spiritual benefit of the Christian reader, it should be wondered how certain elements of the Old Testament are to be considered helpful at all. "... [W]hile all Scripture was given for the edification of the church and the nurturing of the three

²² Ryan A. Brandt, "Reading Scripture Spiritually: Bonaventure, the Quadriga, and Spiritual Formation Today," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10 (2017): 14-15.

²³ Bullough, "Spiritual Sense of Scripture," 344.

theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, not all the stories in the Bible are edifying as they stand. ...If it [the spiritual point of a text] cannot be found on the level of narrative, then it must be found on the level of allegory, metaphor, and type.”²⁴ For example, a specific Israelite victory in a battle against the city of Jericho might be useless in its literal sense for an average teenage boy from Dublin, but if he is taught to peer into its spiritual undertones, and if he is open to the spiritual exegesis of scholars before him, he will be able to find and apply in his own life the spiritual principles which could be gleaned from this story. Such principles are impressionable to the mind because of the physical signs (literal sense) employed by the human author. In this case, it would be the battle, its setting and context, and its specific details. The literal sense is the structure, but the spiritual sense is the higher purpose bringing the Christian to greater heights spiritually.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer comments, “It [the spiritual sense] seeks rather to accord them [the Old and New Testaments] their proper historical function and yet acknowledge their pertinence to the new people of God. It recognizes too that Old Testament themes have come to a divinely intended fulfillment, have been enriched by their New Testament counterparts, and are being progressively transformed by the New Testament’s thrust.”²⁵ This perspective of the “thrust” of continued theological development is one which bolsters the argument for the necessity of the spiritual sense. It shows that the New Testament’s prefigurement in the Old is something intended by God and therefore, infused with his wisdom, the Old Testament’s principles and connections can always be drawn out more and more, rather than being comprised of spiritually-stagnant stories with limited teaching power.

²⁴ David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 37 (1980): 30.

²⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Senses of Scripture Today,” 108.

But if Christ and the New Testament are the fulfillment of the Old, why can't a serious Christian reader simply focus on the New and receive all the necessary spiritual enlightenment from those texts alone? One answer put forth by Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering brings clarity to this topic:

This distinction between secular and higher time had obvious and significant implications for the interpretation of Scripture. The typological and allegorical exegesis of the church fathers generally did not result from an arbitrary imposition of alien meanings onto the biblical text, so as to avoid its more obvious historical meaning. Rather, premodern theological or spiritual interpretation resulted from the conviction that Old Testament events occurring in "ordinary time" were contiguous with (in fact, in an important sense, linked in with) their Christological fulfillment in the New Testament. This connection resulted from the fact that both events were linked in the providential rule of God in eternity.²⁶

The events and teachings of both the New and Old Testaments and their subsequent written words were all connected by the divine author simultaneously in eternal "time."

Drawing from this, we can see a profound way for interpreting Scripture: reading the text from the assumption that all its writings are providentially placed therein for our benefit and eternally connected to each other, the purpose and principle of them being Christ himself. In the next chapter, I will highlight key Old Testament texts which shed light on ancient messianic expectations, including the role of the queen mother, so as to give a foundation for their later, spiritual fulfillment.

²⁶ Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, "Spiritual Interpretation and Realigned Temporality," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 591.

CHAPTER 2: LITERAL SENSE OF QUEEN MOTHER PASSAGES

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, theologians have at their disposal multiple methods, or senses, of reading Scripture. While this thesis aims to exemplify the necessity of the spiritual sense, this cannot be done without first drawing from the literal sense. *Dei Verbum* states, “However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.”²⁷ In this chapter, I will demonstrate what I believe are the intended meanings behind certain Old Testament passages that pertain to queen mothers. Doing so will provide the foundation for the spiritual senses of these passages.

Via the use of these texts, I will show that this role of queen mother was an official, royal position, which held both authority and respect in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and which was second in power only to the king. In the first century A.D., a queen mother figure would likely have been expected to appear alongside the much-anticipated Messiah and his kingship.

Prevalence of Queen Mothers in Ancient Near East

It is of notable importance that the position of queen mother was not an Israelite invention in the Ancient Near East. Rather, it was very prevalent across many nations and cultures in that area of the world. Ginny Brewer-Boydston references nine such places where this

²⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* accessed March 30, 2024, Vatican.va, 12.

royal position has been found to have existed: Assyria, Babylonia, Ebla, Egypt, Elam, Hattusa, Sidon, Sumer, and Ugarit.²⁸ This was likely due to the common practice of polygamy by most kings, which thereby would result in the royal position being shared among many if it were a spousal queenship. Instead, the it was typically given to the one who helped to secure the kingship for him, his mother. It appears that the queen mother often had such a prominent role as to be esteemed for the very ushering in of the new monarch.²⁹ For the Ancient Israelites, the cultural background of the Near East and the concurrent traditions of their neighbors would have served to reinforce their own queen mother tradition.

An examination into one, particular culture will showcase very well the precedence of queen mothers in the Near-East, before Israel and Judah were established. Brewer-Boydston has more to say about Hittite queen mothers than she does for almost any other ancient culture, save the Assyrians. She says that the role, as exercised in Hattusa, the Hittite capital, is the one closest in comparison to the one exercised in Judah and Israel.³⁰ First, the Hittite queen was “the mother of the heir” and retained the title for life (unless legally deposed), thereby guaranteeing that there be only one queen at any given time. While there were times when the king died and his half-brother or son received the crown as king, the same queen would retain her position in the royal court, not having to cede to the mother of the newest king. This shows significant authority.

Politically, the Hattian queen mother exercised a great deal of power. She had royal seals with her sole image imprinted on them (not simply accompanying the king’s image), and she

²⁸ Ginny Brewer-Boydston, *Good Queen Mothers, Bad Queen Mothers: The Theological Presentation of the Queen Mother in 1 and 2 Kings*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 31-51.

²⁹ Edward Sri, *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary’s Queenship*. (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2005), 46.

³⁰ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 43.

owned individually a large amount of wealth and property. She therefore held sway over many in the kingdom and even had security and assets to guard against betrayal and usurpation.

The role of queen mother in Israel and Judah was similar to that of Hattusa in that she had a maternal relation to the king and shared that title of queen with no other woman. Still, these queen mothers had less power than their Hattian counterparts. She was rarely able to overrule a king or obtain lands for herself. However, there seems to have been more consistency in Israel and Judah in determining who the position was given to and how much power she was given, whereas the tradition was less strictly adhered to in Hattusa and other places. The Israelites usually gave the title to the king's mother, but it possibly would be retained by the previous king's mother if she was still living.³¹

Queen mothers in the Near East were often very influential for the religious practices of their people. However, in Israel and Judah, there is no evidence that the queen mothers ever served as priestesses or were worshiped as goddesses.³² So, the role of the Israelite queen mother was less independent and prestigious than in some cultures. Yet, for Israel and Judah, the role and its strictures surrounding it seem to have been maintained with a certain historical reverence.

Hebrew References

In narrowing our focus toward Israelite culture alone, we can first note the terminology used by the author of the book of Kings. The queen is sometimes referred to in Hebrew as the *gebira*, yet what is noteworthy is that the term used for the king in Hebrew is *melek*. If we look at

³¹ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 96-97.

³² The Queen mothers were often able to effect change regarding which gods or goddesses to worship and were even sometimes worshiped as goddesses themselves, such as in Egypt and Ugarit. (Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 42 and 49 respectively.) In Hattusa, and possibly others, the queen mother actually played a high-priestess role. (*Ibid.* 44).

the Israelite culture specifically, and their usage of these two terms, *gebira* and *melek*, we can see in these titles a preference by Old Testament writers to make a distinction between the queen mother and potential counterparts (spouses) to the king. If the queen were simply the wife of the king, for example, the writer could have used the feminine version of *melek*, whereas the use of *gebira*, feminine for *gebir*, indicates that she is a “mistress” or “great lady.”³³ It seems this position was held in such esteem as to demand a level of respect even from the king himself. Perhaps this was not out of legal responsibility, however, but simply out of filial love.³⁴

However, some scholars argue that there is not enough evidence to show that the concept of a *gebira* permeated Israelite culture throughout the centuries leading up to Jesus Christ.³⁵ This is an understandable position when looking at only the three usages of the term *gebira*. Yet, when looking at the greater context of Old Testament Scriptures, one can see how there was an influential queen mother prominently affecting the plot of many events throughout various time periods.

In 1 Kings Chapter 15, King Asa is shown removing his queen *grand*-mother, Maacah, from her position. This bears examining, as it gives evidence for two things. First, it is clear that Maacah is indeed the *gebira* in this court. The term *gebira* strictly means “great lady,”³⁶ and it can be inferred from the texts that it was reserved for “the foremost woman of the nation.”³⁷ In this instance, it was the king’s grandmother, not mother. Second, we see support for the opinion

³³ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 48.

³⁴ See Scott Walker Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God*, (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 81. I reference his sentiments below on page 25.

³⁵ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 56. Brewer-Boydston references three articles (below) that reject the idea of the *gebira* being a consistently sanctioned and exercised role in these two kingdoms: Ben-Barak, Zafrira, “The Status and Right of the Gebira,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3267147>; Nancy R. Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical ‘Gēbirā,’” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63 (2001): 597-618. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43727248>; Carol Smith, “The Queenship in Israel.”

³⁶ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 79.

³⁷ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 57.

that the *gebira* was an official position which exercised political authority, since Asa needed to exercise his own kingly authority in order to remove Maacah. This is opposed to the idea that the position was merely an honorary title, given automatically based on blood relation but without real power and influence.

In contrast, Nancy R. Bowen cites the context surrounding 2 Kings 10:13 as evidence that the *gebira* was not necessarily the king's mother or grandmother but could also have been his wife.³⁸ Such a finding would diminish the perception that this queen mother tradition was so reverentially adhered to. She shows that as Jehu, the king of Israel, had killed the previous kings of both Israel and Judah, he is met with ambassadors of Judah who request to search for a new ruler for their kingdom. They specifically say that they "have come down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the queen mother" (2 Kings 10:13). Bowen argues that this simply means that "the sons of the queen mother" are a specification which is meant to distinguish them from a larger group of half-brothers, sons of the king, and that the "queen mother" here is simply the king's wife whom he favored most. The reason for this argument is that it is more historically consistent within human culture that the heir apparent should be one of the king's sons, rather than brothers. However, as Brewer-Boydston counters, the old king, Jehoram, whom Jehu had assassinated, had himself ascended to the throne after the death of his own brother, Ahaziah. Therefore, since we see that brothers can succeed brothers, I argue that it is more consistent with Israelite culture to conclude that the queen-mother in this story was the mother of King Jehoram, and not his wife, and that the ambassadors had come to treat with his other brothers as candidates. There is no necessity of one of his sons automatically being the crown prince.

³⁸ Nancy R. Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical 'Gēbîrâ,'" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63 (2001): 611-612, quoted in Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 57.

Thirdly, Brewer-Boydston admits that, in the only other usage of the word *gebira*, found in the book of Jeremiah, the term is used too ambiguously to ascertain the identity of this great lady with more context.³⁹ “Say to the king and the queen mother (*gebira*): ‘Take a lowly seat, for your beautiful crown has come down from your head’” (Jer. 13:18). Later, in Chapter 29 the term is found again in the following: “This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother (*gebira*), the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem” (Jer. 29:2). Here the NRSV Bible translates the term as “queen mother,” but Bowen points out that there is no indication as to what the relationship actually is between the king and the Hebrew word here, *gebira*. Could this *gebira* be simply a great lady with no blood relation to the king? When delving deeper into this book, one can see that it is the king and his own mother who are meant to share God’s punishment: “I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another country, where you were not born, and there you shall die” (Jer. 22:26). This statement does not use the term *gebira*, yet, when the surrounding context of Jer. 13:18 and Jer. 29:2 is considered, we can see that the story is maintaining its focus on the same two rulers. Therefore, the mother of the king and the royal *gebira* should be regarded as the same person.⁴⁰

Of course, the king was seen as the sole ruler of the kingdom, yet, when formally introducing a new king into the story, the author of the book of Kings consistently pairs him with his mother. This could be due simply to a necessity of clarification, being that the previous king may have had other sons, and it was important for this new king to be distinguished by his maternal lineage from his half-brothers. However, it is unlikely that this would have been the case for the great numbers of the kings that are given this maternal pairing, especially

³⁹ Bowen, “Historical ‘Gēbîrâ,’” 613, quoted in Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 58.

⁴⁰ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 58.

considering if the crown were simply going to be passed down to the first-born anyway, on most occasions. Surely, at times the necessity to distinguish mothers was not always present, yet, nevertheless, the mother's name is, in fact, present. This would therefore seem to be rather redundant. Further, if it was the case that the motive was to give the king's maternal lineage in a formulaic fashion, for the general purposes of distinguishing him from others and for the keeping of accurate records, why are some mothers left unmentioned? The mother's name assumedly would have been known in those rare cases of omission. I posit that on these few occasions, there was indeed a known mother, but she had already passed away, and the mention of the mother in these regnal introductions was rather to indicate an *acting gebira*, rather than a deceased relative.

The author of the book of Kings has a common formula for these introductions, seen in the following example: "In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the sight of the LORD just as his ancestor David had done" (2 Kings 18:1-3). The formula consistently names the king, his length of reign, a separate sentence stating who his mother was, and then his moral standing "in the eyes of the LORD." Notice how, while it mentions Hezekiah as being "son of King Ahaz," the author waits to begin a new sentence to introduce his mother. This need not be seen as subjugating the mother to lesser honor further along the introductory formula. Rather, this hints at a cultural perception of the time, namely the note-worthy role of the *gebira*. This role seems to have been deemed worthy of its own, unique placement in the formula.

If this was simply a matter of distinguishing this new king from one of his half-brothers (much like the purpose of a surname or the inclusion of one's occupation after their first name),

then it would have likely been written as an addendum to the end of his own introduction. Rather, two distinct individuals are being recognized and honored by this formula, the king and his mother, who both occupy distinct, traditional roles in the royal court. At the least, this gives honor to the mother of the king in a unique way, after his preeminent recognition has been established in the first sentence of the formula. Therefore, there is some evidence that the king and the *gebira* cooperated in the governing of the kingdom and thereby shared that moral burden.

Judgment of Faithfulness

In these regnal introductions of the book of Kings, one element is even more necessary and consistent than the mentioning of the queen. This would be the theological assessment of the king's reign. It is said of each king that he either "did what was right in the sight of the LORD," or that he "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" or some other, more nuanced and conditional description. Brewer-Boydston states, "Beyond the name of the king and his kingdom, the theological evaluations seem to be the one element of the reports that is absolutely essential to convey the narrator's message."⁴¹

These evaluations do not appear to have any basis on military or political achievements, but only on fidelity to God and his commandments, specifically the first commandment: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me" (Deut. 5:6). The author's assessment of the king's reign has everything to do with whether he worshiped other gods or enabled his people to do so.⁴² In fact, the king was meant to be viewed as "the keeper of the kingdom" and responsible for maintaining

⁴¹ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 70.

⁴² *Ibid.* 71.

right worship among the people. The safety or destruction of the kingdom was attributed to him, as he is representative of the people for God and representative of God for the people.⁴³ All this considered, if the queen mother had a participatory role in governing the kingdom with her son, she might also participate in the king's guilt or merit regarding fidelity to God.

A Good Queen Mother

One excellent example of queenly influence can be found in the person of Bathsheba, King David's wife and the mother of King Solomon. Interestingly, while Bathsheba marriage to David may have been looked at as questionable in origin (2 Sam. 11), she nevertheless clearly earned the respect of the king and his court. This however is shown to vary between her time as spouse and when she had become the queen mother. As Edward Sri points out, in 1 Kings 1-2 there is a note-worthy difference between the way she interacts with each king.⁴⁴ With King David, her husband, she is shown bowing to him and calling him "my lord" (1 Kings 1:31), whereas when her son Solomon is the king, she becomes the one being bowed to (1 Kings 2:19). Her son also gives her a seat immediately to his right. Sri states that this "symbolizes her sharing in the king's royal authority and illustrates how she holds the most important position in the kingdom, second only to the king."⁴⁵ In fact, the king himself seems to hold such respect for his queen mother, that he would be willing to grant her anything she asked for. "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you" (1 Kings 2:20).

⁴³ Mary E. Mills, *Joshua to Kings: History, Story, Theology*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 127, referenced in Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 77.

⁴⁴ Edward Sri, *Queen Mother*, 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

This request, referred to here by Solomon, comes originally from his half-brother, Adonijah, who comes to the *gebira* because of shame or even fear of his brother, the king. In 1 Kings 1, Adonijah had attempted to seize the kingship for himself as David, his father, was dying. He went so far as to invite honored guests, especially the other princes, his brothers, to a ceremony so as to bolster its credibility, yet failed to invite his brother Solomon, the prophet Nathan, and many of the highest-ranking warriors. This is the context for why Adonijah will come to Bathsheba for a request, and not to Solomon directly. He previously was expected to rule as king, and now seems afraid or unworthy to approach his brother whom the Lord placed above him. It might even be a risk to his safety to show such audacity. Therefore, he sees the queen mother as a better chance of securing the request. “He said, ‘Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.’ Bathsheba said, ‘Very well; I will speak to the king on your behalf’” (1 Kings 2:13-18). This story shows how influential the *gebira*’s intercession was perceived (at least in the case of Bathsheba).

To draw a bit on Solomon’s reverence, I refer to Scott Hahn’s assessment of the situation in his work *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God*:

Undoubtedly this [Solomon’s bowing and placement of Bathsheba’s seat] describes a court ritual of Solomon’s time; but all ritual expresses real relationships. . . . his power and authority are in no way threatened by her. He bows to her, but *he* remains the monarch. She sits at his right hand, not vice-versa. Yet, clearly he will honor her requests - not out of any legally binding obligation of obedience, but rather out of filial love.⁴⁶

If this act of reverence is indeed a court ritual, as Hahn believes, then that alone gives considerable support to the claim that the *gebira* was an official, royal position. Even more significant is that the *king* is performing this bow of reverence, not just a court official or a common citizen. Still, the one claim of Hahn that most supports the argument of this thesis is

⁴⁶ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 81.

that Solomon is not merely showing reverence to fulfil the expectations of the court, but rather out of his “filial love.” This aspect specifically is one which sheds a typological light on the relationship between Jesus and the Virgin Mary, which I will examine in Chapter 3.

Bad Queen Mothers of 1 and 2 Kings

Contrary to what we see in Bathsheba’s account, there are also several queen mothers who used their position for evil, as described in 1 and 2 Kings. First, Maacah, as mentioned above, was removed from office by her king, Asa of Judah, who was likely her grandson. The reason given by the author is that “she had made an abominable image for Asherah” (1 Kings 15:13). The context the statement the author’s listing of all the righteous and faithful actions Asa had taken to restore right worship in his kingdom. To safeguard the traditional worship practices, the king would logically need to take Maacah’s royal authority away, after seeing her idolatrous actions. There seems then to be a distinction here between blood relation and governmental role. While the king can never reverse his being related to the *gebira*, he makes clear in this scenario that he can revoke her authority.

A second example of a queen mother who did evil in the sight of the Lord is Jezebel of the kingdom of Israel. While more well-known for her deeds as King Ahab’s wife (which, admittedly, does not support the consistent queen-mother tradition), I argue that this was simply an unfortunate exception to the rule. This may have been the result of Jezebel’s rebellious tendencies against God, the Law, and tradition. She may have asserted her will and inserted herself into the position of *gebira*, even if she was still a spouse of the king. She would later retain her title of queen when she ruled as queen mother for her sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram.

In the genealogical introduction to each of these two sons, their theological judgments are given against the backdrop of their parents, Ahab and Jezebel.⁴⁷ In Jehoram's introduction, it is mentioned, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, though not like his father and mother..." (2 Kings 3:2). We can see here that the author wishes to distinguish between the evil of the son and the evil of his parents. It can be seen in 2 Kings 9:22 that Jezebel's infamous evil deeds continued during the reign of her son. Jehu declares that Jezebel's actions are preventing the kingdom from enjoying any peace.⁴⁸ He does not say to Jehoram, "your actions" or "yours and Jezebel's actions" but only mentions the queen mother alone.

It seems that the author's intent here is to show that King Jehoram should not be judged for the evil of his mother. This is significant because it exemplifies how a queen mother alone can have dire, religious influence on the people. From a surface-level view, Jehoram seems to have exercised a mild rule, morally speaking. Yet, despite this, he was still deemed to have fallen short of God's standards. This was his judgment for two reasons. First, he allowed Jezebel to continue in her royal position (unlike Asa before him who removed Maacah). Second, he ruled and worshiped apart from Judah and the Lord's Temple. This failure to reunite the kingdoms, at least regarding worship, was consistently condemned in the regnal formulas by the author of Kings, ever since the division of the kingdoms took place. This makes sense when considering the first of the Ten Commandments:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Deut. 5:6-10)

⁴⁷ Ahaziah's and Jehoram's introductions are found in 1 Kings 22:52-54 and 2 Kings 3:1-3, respectively.

⁴⁸ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 102.

Not only were the Israelites supposed to worship God, but they were also expected to avoid worship of other gods. Further, God also gives his people both negative and positive motivation, regarding their posterity.

This passage of Deuteronomy warns that “the iniquity of parents” will have a major impact on their descendants. The people of God are adamantly exhorted to uphold right worship in their families, communities, and their nation as a whole, and since the king and his queen mother can easily be seen as something like “parents” of the kingdom, or least those with highest authority over them, it makes sense that they, their descendants, and their subjects could suffer due to their mistakes. As parents are responsible for bringing their children up in the Faith,⁴⁹ so too are the king and *gebira* seen as responsible for leading the people in righteousness and right worship. Brewer-Boydston states, “The theological evaluations located within the formulas function as the primary means for the narrator to judge the religious effectiveness of the king. The evaluations then serve as a lens by which one understands the historical events of the kings’ reigns. ... When the kings shirked their duties, the entire nation was punished.”⁵⁰ Regarding Jezebel, it is note-worthy that the author of Kings “singles her out for blame and utter shame and humiliation,”⁵¹ as this shows how impactful the position of *gebira* can be.

We can also see that such punishment can even be sanctioned by God through the prophets. In the beginning of Chapter 9 of 2 Kings, one of the prophets under the leadership of Elisha anoints Jehu with very foreboding words:

Thus says the Lord the God of Israel: I anoint you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel. You shall strike down the house of your master Ahab, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel.

⁴⁹ “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away...” (Deut. 6:6-7). “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Prov. 22:6).

⁵⁰ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 86.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 113.

I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and no one shall bury her. (2 Kings 9:6b-10a)

Not only will the rule of Ahab and Jezebel be terminated, but “the whole house of Ahab shall perish” and Jezebel will meet a particularly gruesome death. This chilling episode falls in line with the author’s theological motif, laying out the actions and consequences of the monarchs within the overarching theme of the fidelity to God. Since Ahab and Jezebel have done evil in the eyes of the Lord, there will be fair and just consequences. Further, this is another example of how others (like Ahab’s sons) are affected by the sins of God’s appointed kings, and it also exemplifies how queens, not just kings, were liable to judgment.

Examples from Genesis and Psalms

Extending beyond 1 and 2 Kings, one can find other Old Testament texts that support this idea of a ruling woman alongside a king, even if they do not explicitly refer to her as a queen. In the book of Genesis, we can find a salvific prophecy, often called the *protoevangelium*: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Edward Sri, in his book titled *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary’s Queenship*, points out first that the book of Genesis portrays man as a ruler. He is seen as God’s representative (Gen. 1:26),⁵² one who is given dominion and who should “subdue” the earth (Gen. 1:28), and who also names all other living things (Gen. 2:19-29). Psalm 8 tells us, “Yet you have made them [humanity] a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you

⁵² Sri, *Queen Mother*, 59. This is an inference drawn from the idea of being created in God’s image and likeness.

have put all things under their feet...” (Ps. 8:5-6). This context is important for understanding the *protoevangelium* within the theme of royalty and stewardship.

Further, God is shown as creating man out of dust much like raising up a king in 1 Kings 16:2-3: “Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader...” and also 1 Samuel 2:6-8 and Psalm 113:7.⁵³ This is the opposite of a typical situation in which a conquered king was made to bow down to the ground (the dust) before a new triumphant king (Psalm 72:9), which is what we see God telling the serpent will happen to him in Gen 3:15 (crawling and eating dust). So, Scripture seems to be telling us here of a future change in rulership.

However, Scott Hahn shows that something was still lacking in such a governance by the man, and he connects the solution to the Davidic monarchy:

In Genesis we see that Adam was created first and was given dominion, or kingship, over the earth. Yet he was never intended to reign by himself: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’” (Gen 2:18). So God created Eve, Adam’s helpmate and queen. They are to share dominion. When Adam awoke to find her, he said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23), a phrase that appears in only one other place in the Bible—when the tribes of Israel declare David their king. In acclaiming the youth, they say: “We are your bone and flesh” (2 Sam 5:1). Thus, Adam’s words take on greater significance: they are a royal acclamation.⁵⁴

Thus, we find that Eve was not merely portrayed as a wife to Adam but also as a co-ruler, much like Israelite kings and queens later in the Old Testament. Therefore, with this reading of Genesis 2, we see precedence for a co-ruling king with his queen.

Also, in the *protoevangelium*, we see the seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent. This also evokes an image of a king subjugating his enemies under his feet or forcing them toward the dust.⁵⁵ All of these are connections to phraseology and concepts used later in Davidic times and specifically in a royal context. Therefore, as Sri concludes, the author of

⁵³ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 60.

⁵⁴ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 84.

⁵⁵ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 62.

Genesis 3 is portraying a mother with a triumphant royal son. And this mother is none other than the royal, co-ruler with Adam. Hence, we see a “prototypical queen mother figure”⁵⁶ which can be used to support the position that, in the Davidic dynasty, such a position was a sanctioned and important one for Israelite culture.

Examples in the Prophetic Books

Finally, we can see further evidence of the importance of the *gebira* in the prophetic books. One very prominent passage in theological scholarship is the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah. Sri draws from the prophet’s words here to further show the queen mother’s prominence in the Davidic dynasty. The context consists of a threat from the kingdoms of Israel and Syria to overthrow King Ahaz, king of Judah. Isaiah informs Ahaz that God will protect his throne and is offering to give him a sign to confirm it. However, the king’s refusal results in a shift of focus toward the future *gebira*. “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel” (Is. 7:14).

The fulfillment of this sign has been debated throughout recent centuries. Sri offers four separate arguments that have gained traction during this time. One is very prominent and assumes that the young woman should be implied to be a virgin giving birth (hence, a miraculous sign). This assumption is used to support the idea that this sign never took place until seven-hundred years after Ahaz via the Virgin Mary’s giving birth to Jesus Christ. However, it would be unfitting for God to promise a sign of salvation from the immanent attack from Israel and Syria, but then not supply it until long after the attack had taken place.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 55.

There is also the idea that this young woman could be a communal reference to all the women of Judah giving birth in the year to come. Yet, in the original Hebrew there is a definite article used for the term “young woman” indicating that it is someone specific,⁵⁸ therefore this second argument is not as strong. Third is the possibility of this young woman being Isaiah’s own wife (Is. 8:3), but the usage of the term, in Hebrew *almah*, was usually reserved for women who had not yet given birth (unlike Isaiah’s wife) and who also were not yet married. Considering this, it is hard to see any significant likelihood of this third position being true.

Sri sides with a fourth view which places this young woman among Ahaz’ wives and therefore makes a future prince the fulfillment of the sign. He argues that the prophecy is given in the context of the Davidic dynasty’s seeming demise. Therefore, in the face of destruction, seeing the birth of an heir would fittingly give hope to the king and to the city.

All of this leads us to say that the young woman, if she was meant to bear the future king before the attack took place, is the one to whom God has turned his attention. Note-worthy is the fact that she, not the father, will give the child his name, Immanuel, which means “God with us.”⁵⁹ Further, if this is to be the promised future king who is to find favor with God, then this young woman will likely be the *gebira* on whom God’s favor will also rest.

As mentioned above, in Jer. 13:18, Jeremiah is instructed to address this warning of invasion to both the king and the queen, both of whom seem to wear a crown. Just two verses later is found a reference to the people that they are responsible for: “Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock” (Jer. 13:20)? They both share in the governing of the people,

⁵⁸ Sigmund Mowinkle, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G.W. Anderson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 113; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, (Yale University Press, 1999), 147-148; as referenced in Sri, *Queen Mother*, 114.

⁵⁹ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 57.

and in the honor and responsibility naturally given to such positions. Brewer-Boydston points out that the crown, as worn by the *gebira* (assumed to be Nehushta), likely signifies that she is serving as queen regent and counselor to her son. The child-king, Jehoiachin, is still too young to assume the throne on his own.⁶⁰ “Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon...” (2 Chr. 36:9). Jehoiachin was the last king before the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, which is the fate that Jeremiah warns about in Jer. 13. Being only eight years old, it makes sense that his mother would be ruling for him.

If we briefly divert to the book of Proverbs, we can find another example of a queen mother directing the kingdom’s affairs. Edward Sri uses Proverb 31 to show that the queen did not only possess authority in the court, nor only intercessory influence for the people, but also could be seen as an advisor to the king.⁶¹ Here the *gebira* advises her son on various matters. For example, “No, my son! No, son of my womb! No, son of my vows!... Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute” (Prov. 31:2, 8). Scott Hahn addresses this same proverb, referring to the *gebira* as “a political advisor and even strategist.”⁶² This is the role that we can surmise Nehushta was exercising for her child-king.

Interestingly, her son is said to have done “evil in the sight of the Lord,” despite being a child and despite the presence of the queen-regent. In this instance, one might think that the blame would be solely on the *gebira* for a failure to rule faithfully. However, this is consistent with the book of Kings, wherein typically blame is something shared, not meted out on a purely

⁶⁰ Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*, 125.

⁶¹ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 53.

⁶² Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 82.

individual level. As has been stated above, a king and queen could themselves experience the consequence of their own actions, like Queen Jezebel. However, those consequences could befall their descendants also, or they could even be experienced by the nation as a whole. In ancient Israelite culture, there was a sense of communal responsibility and also monarchical representation. Hence, we see that Nehushta's judgment falls upon her son as well. Her ability to exercise executive power is most noteworthy, yet she seems to have the burden of an added responsibility, namely, a spiritual weight attached to her actions. For better or for worse, this spiritual weight will merit salvation or condemnation on God's people as a whole.

We can draw a certain precedence for this from Genesis 3, where such communal blame can be seen deriving from the ruling woman. God tells Eve of the punishment that will come from the Fall, namely, severe pain in childbirth and a certain level of servitude under her husband. Any ancient Israelite hearing this story would know from experience or observation that this punishment had continued through all generations. This is especially obvious given the context in which it is given: the man and the serpent also receive punishments that clearly can be understood etiologically, explaining why men customarily toiled for food and why serpents had to crawl on the ground.

These consistent, communal consequences here add to the biblical theme of communal guilt and communal blessing. Geoffrey Turner explains, "Just as the guilt of sin can be inherited across time, 'visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me' (Exodus 20:5), it is also clear that guilt can be shared synchronically across the community, as is shown by the ritual associated with the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:9-34)."⁶³ Further, God says, "When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I

⁶³ Geoffrey Turner, "Collective Guilt and the Crucifixion," *New Blackfriars* 70 (1989): 128.

will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them” (Ex. 7:4-5). God had visited judgment upon the entire nation of Egyptians for their sins. Yet while the sin of slavery was so widespread in their lands, it was pharaoh’s obstinacy in particular, his consistent legislation of policies and orders against God’s people, which had a direct cause for the nation’s guilt. One individual’s sin is shown here to bring punishment to a multitude (at least when that individual is their sole ruler). These passages can serve as bridges for this theme of communal consequences between the Adam and Eve story, the rest of the Torah, and finally the kings and *gebiras* of Israel and Judah. In the following chapter, I will show how these examples are fulfilled in the New Testament.

Conclusion

We see that in the beginning of Sacred Scripture there was an intended sovereignty to be exercised by both a man and a woman. We have examples like Maacah and Nehushta who had a great deal of influence over their kingdoms respectively. They showed that the role of *gebira* was not likely a mere honorary title or a title reserved for one who would sit idly in the shadows behind the king. Rather, the examples they give are of someone who would actively influence policy and worship. Finally, there are even examples from the prophetic books, like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Proverbs, that show queen mothers sharing blame with their sons, giving advice to them, and even finding themselves mentioned in dire or glorious prophecies with them.

After reviewing the context, the position of *gebira* can be seen as a long-standing and well-established cultural norm within the Ancient Near East. It is unlikely that such a role would

have been neglected by the ancient Israelites or, worse, that they would have been ignorant of its cultural significance. Plenty of biblical evidence, from Genesis through the book of Kings and even Jeremiah supports the position that the *gebira* was expected to be a ruler to some degree or another. This role was respected and maintained throughout the centuries in both Judah and Israel. That is why, if ever there was to be a re-establishment of the Davidic kingship, it would be fitting for the king to be accompanied by his mother in the royal court. Therefore, I will show in the next chapter how the Old Testament passages regarding queen-motherhood foreshadow the Blessed Virgin Mary's role as *gebira* in the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 3: SPIRITUAL READING (NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS THAT FULFILL THE QUEEN MOTHER TRADITION)

Introduction

From a Christian perspective, we must use texts of the New Testament to better understand the divine intention of the Old Testament passages: pointing the reader to Christ. In studying New Testament texts relating to kingship and queen mothers, we will be more able to understand the divine intent behind the Scriptures, and history, as a whole. New Testament texts, once placed within the context of the *entirety* of Scripture, will ultimately provide the reader with a much clearer view of the Divine Author's story of salvation. In a sense, the two parts, the Old and the New, complementing and serving each other, give rise to one whole divine Word.

This chapter will highlight passages from Gospel writers Matthew, Luke, and John (including John's book of Revelation). I will focus on those passages which refer to kingship and queenship, or, specifically, Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Building from what has been outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis, we will see that the cultural and scriptural context of antiquity, from which first-century life emerged, gives such clarity as to see Mary of Nazareth depicted as the new *gebira*, the queen mother of the Kingdom of God.

Reemergence of the Davidic Kingdom in Matthew and Luke

The Gospel of Matthew, placed first among New Testament Scriptures by the early Church, begins with a genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth that shows proof of his Davidic ancestry. Such proof defends his qualification as heir to the throne. Matthew seems eager to drive home the point that this Jesus is indeed the Christ (in Hebrew, *Messiah*, meaning “anointed one”). It was the term used for the Israelite kings of old, but, by the time of Jesus, it was a reference for the one who was to come and renew the kingdom, reigning forever as “son of David.”⁶⁴ This Gospel makes use of the term *Messiah* five times in only the first two chapters, clearly invoking royal themes of the past.⁶⁵ What is more, Matthew stresses how this Jesus truly is the rightful king due to his being the *son of David*. He uses this term for both Jesus and Joseph, and even makes explicit how he is using a literary device to break up the genealogy up into three sets of fourteen. Sri points out, “... in Hebrew, the numerical value of the letters in David’s name add up to this very number (fourteen).”⁶⁶ The triple exclamation of the name David herein gives the sense that the author is treating this connection of Jesus and David with utmost importance.

Matthew next shows us the unusual circumstances of Jesus’ birth, namely, that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and not of Joseph. Joseph would still be Jesus’s legal father, and therefore the right to the throne of David would pass to Jesus, but his birth came about through a virgin rather than of natural procreation. Therefore, Matthew explains that this is a fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy highlighted in Chapter 2 of this thesis: “Look, the young woman is with

⁶⁴ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 68.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 69.

child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). (Matthew translates the term for “young woman” as meaning “virgin” (Mt. 1:23), thereby indicating that this girl, Mary, was the one prophesied about.) Further, as Matthew goes on through his infancy narrative, he will use the term “the child” nine times in an apparent allusion to the use of that term in Isaiah’s prophecy.⁶⁷

We can also see that in Luke’s infancy narrative, the theme is that of a new king. “In the Annunciation scene, Luke presents Mary’s vocation as mother of the Messiah within a Davidic kingdom framework.”⁶⁸ First, like Matthew, Luke shows Joseph as being a *son of David*. (Technically, he uses the phrase “of the house of David” (Lk. 1:27), but those can be interchangeable phrases.) However, not only is this son going to come from David, he will also “be called Son of the Most High” (Lk. 1:32) and “Son of God” (Lk. 1:35). This Messiah will not only reign as king but also have a filial relationship with God, as the prophet Nathan foretold in 2 Samuel: “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me” (2 Sam. 7:14).⁶⁹ While David enjoyed a type and foreshadowing of this relationship, we see from Luke 1:35 that this new Messiah’s relationship with God is on an elevated and unparalleled level. He has been conceived by the Holy Spirit himself. This does not nullify his human, genealogical qualification but instead gives him a stronger, divine right to the throne than any of his predecessors.

As Matthew was explicit in connecting Jesus to the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy, Luke seems to also tie his narrative in with that verse, albeit without outright saying so. There are several obvious correlations in the Annunciation scene with the prophecy of Isaiah. Both passages include the terms “House of David,” “virgin,” and “bear a son,” to name a few. Although there

⁶⁷ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 70.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 82.

are other annunciation scenes in the Old Testament that could be seen to correspond to Luke's account, it seems obvious that, when paired with the theme of the Davidic kingdom, Luke sees this Annunciation event as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and not simply a correlation to other Old Testament events.

To reiterate from my last chapter, there was an obvious theological motive behind the author's introduction of a new king and queen in the book of Kings. They were judged as either doing "what was right in the eyes of the Lord" or not. The Davidic dynasty did not continue to reign and, as the book of Kings seems to imply, this collapse was due to a lack of fidelity on the part of the rulers and the people. Having read about the new Messiah in New Testament texts, one might easily surmise from these texts of 1 and 2 Kings that the aspect of judgment in the introductory formulas were anticipatory of Jesus, the one who would reign with complete fidelity to God. They served to contrast the kings of old with the perfect king to come. "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:33).

New Queen Mother in Matthew and Luke

If this truly is the new Messiah, and he will reign forever, due to such complete fidelity to the Lord, then his queen mother would also participate in his merit as an ever-faithful monarch. As noted above in Chapter 2, the kings and queens were both listed in the regnal formula of the book of Kings and were shown to share in the theological judgment given by the author. It would be unfitting for the eternally-reigning king to rule with an unfaithful *gebira*. In contrast, it would be very fitting if the redeeming new Messiah and his *gebira* would reverse the Fall of Adam and Eve, the first rulers of humanity.

Matthew introduces this new Messiah and his mother with an extensive and unique genealogy. Not only was it not customary to include a woman in any genealogy of ancient Judaism,⁷⁰ but Matthew includes five here. Further, these five women partook in this lineage in ways that could be seen as scandalous: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, leading up to Mary and her shocking, unique pregnancy.

There may have been a double motivation behind including these women. Not only do they show Jesus' worthiness to receive the kingship, but they also show Mary's worthiness to be queen. Matthew shows the validity of Jesus' claim by contrasting his conception, and the scandal that may have ensued, against the Blessed Virgin Mary's female predecessors. First, Tamar conceives from Judah who would be given the blessing of his father Jacob to be ruler over his brothers (Gen. 49:8-10). Despite conceiving in an unorthodox way, tricking Judah to receive her rightful progeny,⁷¹ these circumstances seem acceptable to the divine author. At the least, they do not nullify the regal blessing that Israel gave to Judah. Eventually David is conceived from this same line, becomes "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), and reigns for forty years as king.

Rahab and Ruth are the great-great-grandmother and great-grandmother, respectively, to David himself. Rahab's history of prostitution clearly might have been an unexpected mark against the genealogy of a Savior-king, yet she sacrificed greatly for God's plan when she saved Israel's spies. Ruth, her daughter-in-law, proves herself to be a righteous woman. However, she is a Moabite, which means she is not a descendant of Israel or even of Abraham. It therefore could have been doubted whether God's blessing to the nations, originating in Abraham,⁷² would

⁷⁰ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 72.

⁷¹ See Genesis 38 for Tamar's deceptive conception.

⁷² Genesis 22:18, "and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

have continued in her own children. Lastly, Bathsheba, “the first and most prominent queen mother in the history of the dynasty,”⁷³ was not even initially married to David yet conceived by him nonetheless. Although we can assume her innocence in this matter, these circumstances were not what some Israelites would have expected or preferred in their Messiah’s genealogy. Nevertheless, the Abrahamic blessing continued through all these women. Solomon and several Judean kings after him, like Hezekiah and Josiah, found favor with God. The Prophet Isaiah exclaimed of the future king, “On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious” (Is.11:10). The Old Testament Scriptures time and time again show the permanence of both God’s covenant and the specific blessing of Judah.

As mentioned above, Matthew also relates Mary to the virgin in the prophecy of Isaiah, quoting directly from Isaiah 7:14 to portray her as the one through whom the prophecy is fulfilled. The king who will carry on the Davidic dynasty forever has been born through her. Further, she and her child are often mentioned together in Matthew’s infancy narrative, “the child and his mother.”⁷⁴ This naturally would invoke in the mind of a Jewish reader the regnal formula in the book of Kings, how the mother was always mentioned shortly after the son. As Brant Pitre states, “Any first-century Jew would have known, if Jesus is the royal ‘Messiah’ (Greek *christos*), then by definition, Mary, his mother, is the new queen.”⁷⁵

More can be said still of how Matthew shows Mary to be the new *gebira*. While his infancy narrative portrays Joseph as the main character, once the magi arrive to meet the king, it is only Mary who is mentioned with him. “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary

⁷³ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 75.

⁷⁵ Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*. (New York: Image, 2018), 81.

his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage” (Mt. 2:11). She has the honor of sitting with her royal son and making him known to the world, much like the *gebira* who sat enthroned next to the king and helped to welcome in the nations.

We also see allusion to the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy in Luke’s infancy narrative. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the prophecy ignores the father of the Messiah and instead focuses on the virgin mother. In Luke 1:26-38, we see exactly this happening, where the father is a background figure, and the mother is given the spotlight. Further, this is not merely an accidental happenstance that this woman’s son will grow up to be the Messiah, but rather a vocation to take up this role of *gebira* and invitation to cooperate with God’s redemptive plan. That this announcement came from an angel of the Lord seems to shed light on the importance of what is being asked of Mary, not simply to be a mother but to step into an official position in the Kingdom. As shown in Chapter 2, the position of *gebira* was likely an official position rather than a mere title that signified blood relation. Therefore, the position could be acknowledged and affirmed or even, in contrast, revoked permanently. Here we see Mary accepting such a noble role within the royal context portrayed by Luke.⁷⁶

Scott Hahn takes this noble role even further as he explains that the Mary should be seen not only as *gebira* but also as the Ark of the New Covenant. He explains various parallels between the story of the Visitation in Luke 1:39-45 and the story of the ark and David in 2 Samuel 6.⁷⁷ For example, Elizabeth exclaims, “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?” (Lk. 1:43). This question echoes the words of King David, “How can the ark of the Lord come into my care?” (2 Sam. 6:2). Pitre states, “Indeed, Elizabeth’s expression ‘the mother of my Lord’ (Greek *kyrios*) (Luke 1:43) clearly echoes the

⁷⁶ Sri, *Queen Mother*, 86.

⁷⁷ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 64.

biblical custom of referring to the Davidic king as ‘my lord’ (Hebrew *’adon*; Greek *kyrios*) (2 Samuel 24:21; Psalm 110:1).”⁷⁸ Both Mary and the Old Testament ark are seen as too holy to enter another’s home, because of the holiness of he who is being borne within them. If this be the case, if readers are meant to understand this Lucan scene as portraying a new Ark, then certainly Mary should at least be seen as the new *gebira*, or some position of an even higher esteem.

Further, Pitre gives us more cultural insight into how shocking this greeting of Elizabeth should have been to first-century readers. “In an ancient Jewish context, it would have been unheard of for an older relative to honor a younger cousin in this way—unless of course the younger person was *royalty*.”⁷⁹ As the Blessed Virgin responds we see her acknowledging the royal context and implications of what has been bestowed and asked of her.

She follows, in the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55), by mentioning both her “lowliness” and how she is simply a “servant” (Lk 1:48), reiterating her words from the Annunciation: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord” (Lk.1:38). Shortly thereafter, she exclaims how the Lord “has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Lk. 1:52). In this moment in history, Mary gives thanks to the Lord at the Annunciation, Incarnation, and Visitation because he is raising her, the lowly one, to an honored and royal position that had been previously reserved for “the powerful.”

New Queen Mother in John

John the Evangelist elucidates Mary’s role as queen mother in his own unique way, by opening his Gospel with an homage to the book of Genesis. He uses the same phrase, “In the

⁷⁸ Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, 84.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

beginning” for his opening line and proceeds to outline events that took place over seven days as did the first chapter of Genesis. Hahn notes that the story of creation is “perfected” on the seventh day, “the day of rest, the sign of the covenant,” and that “whatever happens on the seventh day in John’s narrative will be significant.”⁸⁰

In John 2, we are given a wedding scene on the seventh day. The first action that takes place is a petition from Mary to Jesus stating that the wine has run out. Jesus responds, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me” (Jn. 2:4). A modern reader might see this as a disrespectful way of dismissing her concern. However, when read in context (the emulation of the story of creation), it can be seen that the word “woman” is likely a reference to Eve, since in Genesis this was the term used to refer to her before Adam named her.

Some argue that this is not a responsible interpretation of the text, as there is not enough supportive evidence from John 2.⁸¹ Also, some of the arguments for such an interpretation are lacking on the surface. If we lean on the usage of the word “woman,” then how do we explain Jesus calling the Samaritan woman or Mary Magdalene by the same title? This seems to indicate that there is nothing unique about the role Mary plays here in John 2. Ignace de la Potterie suggests that the better explanation would be that Mary is here representing Daughter Zion, the people of God as a whole, rather than standing in as a new, individual Eve. However, Sri points

⁸⁰ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 35.

⁸¹ Ignace De la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, (New York: Alba House, 1992), 203, referenced in Edward Sri, *Rethinking Mary in the New Testament: What the Bible Tells Us about the Mother of the Messiah*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), 156. Sri points out that De la Potterie does not provide any evidence from John 2 of any other correlation of this term “Mother.” Therefore, it is likely a reference to the Genesis account. The argument is bolstered by the evidence of other allusions to the Genesis story in the beginning of John’s Gospel. For example, Adam Kubis states, “The fact that the Cana marriage occurred on the sixth day of the first week of Jesus’ ministry would indicate the sixth day of the first week of creation, when the first pair of humans had been created. The marriage at Cana would in fact symbolise the marriage between God – the bridegroom, in the person of Jesus, the new Adam – and Church, the bride, in the person of Mary, the new Eve. Taken together, it serves as a foretoken of the renewal of the covenant and of the creation.” (Adam Kubis, “The Creation Theme in the Gospel of John,” *Collectanea Theologica* 90 (2020), 388. doi:10.21697/ct.2020.90.5.16.)

out that there is even less evidence within the text for a Daughter Zion interpretation than for the Eve interpretation. He also states that the parallel from John 1 to Genesis 3 should be noteworthy enough to distinguish Jesus' mother from others (the Samaritan and Mary Magdalene) in John's Gospel.

Rudolf Bultmann, a Protestant scholar, holds the same position as Sri. He describes the context of this exchange between Jesus and Mary as curious, since Jesus is merely a guest at the wedding, not a servant or host, and Mary is not said explicitly or implicitly to occupy any role there either:

The question why it is Mary in particular who asks Jesus, can best be answered, not by wondering what particular position Mary had in the marriage-feast, but by pointing out that the narrative probably comes from circles in which a certain authority was already ascribed to the mother of the Lord as a matter of course; this is already suggested by the absence of any reference to Jesus' father.⁸²

Bultmann, a Protestant scholar himself, supports the claim that Jesus' mother was likely seen in the early church as a new Eve, even more honored than the original.

Further, as Hahn explains, the idiom Jesus uses to respond is meant to show deference rather than rebuke or dismissal.⁸³ Therefore, what is happening is that Jesus, the king, is deferring to the new woman, the new Eve, to grant her whatever she would ask for. Referring once more to 1 Kings, we see a correlation to Bathsheba who stands as an exemplar for all faithful, Old Testament *gebiras*. As noted above, King Solomon declares to her, "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you" (1 Kgs. 2:20). In John 2, we subsequently see that Jesus indeed fulfilled his mother's request, thereby giving stronger evidence that he was certainly not dismissing her but instead was honoring her role.

⁸² Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 116.

⁸³ Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 36.

To further support this reading of John 1-2, Hahn references Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Tertullian, whose writings evidence the early Church's recognition of Mary as this New Eve. Justin Martyr states, "He became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience that proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin."⁸⁴ The disobedience came from the serpent and passed through Eve to all humanity; now, in Mary, perfect obedience passes through her in the Incarnation to all the saved. Irenaeus outlines the similarities and differences of these two women in the following words: "And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin... having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race."⁸⁵ Lastly, Tertullian adds, "For it was while Eve was yet a virgin that the ensnaring word had crept into her ear... Into a virgin's soul, in like manner, must be introduced the Word of God."⁸⁶

Both Eve and Mary were virgins, sinless, who encountered an angel (if we are to take the serpent as Satan, a fallen angel), and the decision made by each woman therein proved to have life-changing effects for all of humanity. The parallels are strong, but it is specifically this *obedience* of Mary, contrasted against Eve's *disobedience*, which supports my claim above:

Jesus shows in John 2 a willingness to acquiesce to whatever his mother asks, which results in a

⁸⁴ Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," trans. Marcus Dods and George Reith, from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 100, quoted in Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 40.

⁸⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* III, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 22.4, quoted in Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 42.

⁸⁶ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, New Advent, trans. Peter Holmes, from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 17, quoted in Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 44.

beautiful reciprocity of generosity between the two. Because Mary has proven her own willingness to submit to God's requests, he is proving his divine willingness to fulfil any of hers.

While the climax of the first seven days of Jesus' ministry is his first miracle, here at Cana, we can see at the back end of John's Gospel a different climax to be reached at Calvary.

Jesus once more uses the term *woman* to address his mother:

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (Jn. 19:25-27).

Many scholars read into the text here that Mary is receiving a new role, or a fulfillment of her role.⁸⁷ I argue that this role is that of the Church's spiritual mother. To see this more clearly, we can look at the context of the whole crucifixion scene and the other statements that were made by Jesus from the cross.

In *Rethinking Mary in the New Testament*, Edward Sri draws out Raymond Brown's exposition of John's seven-segmented crucifixion scene. He shows that when all seven of Jesus' statements are viewed together, there is compelling evidence that this bestowal of the beloved disciple to Mary is the centerpiece.⁸⁸ Before it we see three events: (1) the nailing and raising of Jesus on the cross, (2) the writing of the title "King of the Jews" upon the cross, and (3) the garments divided. After the centerpiece there are also three events: (5) the reception of wine and the giving of his spirit, then (6) the piercing of his side and the pouring out of his blood and water, then (7) the descent of the body from the cross and placement in the tomb. It is suggested,

⁸⁷ See, for example: Sri, *Rethinking Mary in the New Testament: What the Bible Tells Us about the Mother of the Messiah*. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2018), 178; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 910-911; George T. Montague, *Our Father, Our Mother: Mary and the Faces of God; Biblical and Pastoral Reflections*, (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1990), 114-115.

⁸⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 910-911, referenced in Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 174-175.

considering the scriptural significance of each of these surrounding events, that the bestowal of a new son to his mother (4), especially in his final moments of life, must also be particularly important.⁸⁹ It shows us, not a new king in the beloved disciple, but a sharing of the king's sonship. As all Christians are adopted sons and daughters of God, because of their new life in Christ, so also in Christ can they be called adopted sons and daughters of *Mary*.

Here Mary is being a faithful disciple to Jesus, but she is also standing in as an Ancient Israelite queen. If we see the cross as the throne from which Jesus' judgment and forgiveness flow, we can also see that she is standing where the *gebira* would have stood, right by her regal son, as she fulfills the role of second-in-command. Notably, the term "hour" is used both here in Jn. 19:27 and back in 2:4 at the wedding at Cana, the last time that Jesus was shown calling Mary "woman." As his ministry began with a reference to his "hour," now we can see its arrival. As she was shown cooperating and even potentially influencing the king at Cana, it seems that Mary is intentionally shown next to the Cross cooperating with her son once again. However, now in the "hour" previously referenced, what seems to be a culmination of their roles as representatives for the human race, there is a new Adam and a new Eve, king and queen mother, sharing responsibility for the fidelity of God's people.

Another parallel from John 19 can be found in Genesis when Abraham offers up his son Isaac in complete surrender, submission, and *fiat* to the Lord. "Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together" (Gen. 22:8). In this journey, Abraham's son was spared. Mary, however, in uniting her will to her divine son's, committing to his same mission, can be seen as *spiritually* offering up this son of

⁸⁹ "At such a dramatic moment in this sophisticated and symbolic narrative the passage cannot simply mean that the Beloved disciple is to look after the widowed mother of Jesus once her only Son has died. ... The passage affirms the maternal role of the mother of Jesus in the new family of Jesus established at the cross." Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 504, quoted in Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 178.

hers, even without being his executioner. John has already included a passage which might be referring to Gen. 22. He writes, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). As Mary “walked on together” with him in their union of wills, the same way Abraham and Isaac cooperated in Genesis 22, she brought this passage of Genesis to fulfilment, showing profound similarity to the Father’s relationship with his son. To be a worthy *gebira*, one would need to be both a faithful follower of God and a faithful companion to her king. The Blessed Virgin proves her fidelity to both at Calvary.

As she is here given a new role as mother of the “beloved disciple,” Sri points out that this moment for the Blessed Virgin Mary is even more significant. In John’s Gospel, the formula: “Behold, ...” followed by a revelatory description of the person at hand, is used multiple times (for Jesus in Jn. 1:29, 35-36 and for Nathanael in Jn. 1:47).⁹⁰ Here at the foot of the cross, John is showing Mary to be receiving a new position in the Kingdom. While, before this, she would have likely been seen by the disciples as the new *gebira*, in the traditional, political sense, now she is becoming a *gebira* in a spiritual sense. Not only does she accompany her king in his ministry and ultimate sacrifice, she also accompanies the “beloved disciple” thereafter as *his* mother as well. This new role being revealed to Mary is that of spiritual mother to all disciples.

This claim is partially based on the fact that John does not mention who the beloved disciple is. There is a strong tradition of looking to this disciple as representative of all beloved disciples.⁹¹ John Paul II states, “Jesus words “Behold your son” effect what they express, making

⁹⁰ Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 179.

⁹¹ Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 33-77, referenced in Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 181-182.

Mary the mother of John and of all the disciples destined to receive the gift of divine grace.”⁹² If this is the case, then what we see Jesus doing here on the cross is installing a spiritual mother and cooperative queen to *all* Christians.

If John is explaining that Mary is to be a spiritual *gebira*, what is he intending his readers to understand about the beloved disciple? What would “Behold, your mother” mean? Ignace de la Potterie offers an insightful perspective, “[Jesus] reveals that the primary role of the disciple is to be ‘son of Mary.’”⁹³ This would be different from an ancient Jewish understanding of the roles of the *gebira*. The *gebira*’s official motherhood was based on blood relation and an individual, maternal relationship with one other (the king). This new *gebira* here at the cross has now become mother to *many*. This makes sense if we understand her other children as simply being conformed to her son, living in his spirit. “[B]ecoming Mary’s son means stepping into Jesus’ place in the world with not only a new set of chores and responsibilities, but also with a renewed existence.”⁹⁴ The Christian is called to continue Jesus’ salvific life here on earth, and in that way, they can truly call Mary their mother.

This scene takes on even more scriptural significance if one reads it with Genesis in mind. Here is the “woman” once again. The “hour” prophesied is finally here. In Jn. 12, Jesus ties in his hour with the *protoevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), the prophecy of the serpent’s head being struck. He calls the devil “the ruler of this world” but then mentions that he (Jesus) will take up his throne. He says, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn. 12:32). Now in Chapter 19, this hour has come, and we see that the woman’s offspring is indeed

⁹² John Paul II, General Audience (April 23, 1997), as translated in John Paul II *Theotokos*, quoted in Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 183.

⁹³ De la Potterie, *Mystery of the Covenant*, 218, quoted in Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 180.

⁹⁴ Denis Farkasfalvy, *The Marian Mystery: Outline of a Mariology*, (New York: Alba House, 2014), 45-46, quoted in Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 183).

supplanting the serpent from his throne.⁹⁵ Based on these interpretations of John 19, I argue that the author of this Gospel had a two-fold intent in making these connections: 1. to inspire his readers to develop a filial relationship with Mother Church, whom Mary represents (explained below), and 2. to inspire them to develop a filial relationship with Mary herself.

New Queen Mother in Revelation

We can see more evidence of this new *gebira* in Revelation 12. “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 pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth” (Rev. 12:1-2). First, it must be investigated whether the woman described here is indeed the Blessed Virgin Mary. This can prove difficult considering where modern scholarship tends to lean on this issue. As Edward Sri explains, “most interpreters today – Protestant and Catholic alike – hold that the woman figure is not Mary but a symbol for God’s people, whether Israel or the Church.”⁹⁶ However, he goes on to explain why this ‘woman clothed with the sun’ can (or perhaps *should*) be viewed as Mary.

The other characters in this scene will help to give illuminating context. They are easier to distinguish. The author explains that the dragon is “the Devil or Satan” (Rev.12:9), and therefore there is no need for further interpretation. It is said that the child of the woman will “rule all the nations” and is also taken up to God’s heavenly throne. We can safely assume this is referring to Jesus Christ. Considering both of these obvious interpretations, the context clearly gives support to the idea that the woman is the Virgin Mary. If the other two characters are real

⁹⁵ Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 185.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 193.

individuals and not mere metaphors for something else, then a consistent reading would interpret this woman in the same way.⁹⁷

Despite this evidence, Sri responsibly outlines all the reasons why the woman can be understood as a metaphor for Israel or the Church, a community personified in an individual. The twelve stars in her crown evoke the memory of Israel's twelve sons, including Joseph who had a similar vision of eleven stars bowing down to him (Gen. 37:9-11). Joseph would eventually become leader of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, much like how the *gebira* of the Davidic kingdom was second-in-command over all the twelve tribes of Israel. The sun can be seen as Jesus (God) clothing the spiritual *gebira* with his divine approval, foreshadowed by Pharaoh and the Davidic kings after him who "clothed" Joseph in one instance and the later Israelite *gebiras* with regal authority. On their own, neither Joseph nor the *gebiras* would have their authority over the people, much like how the Blessed Virgin Mary receives her mediated authority from Jesus Christ.

Another pertinent aspect of John's vision is that he describes the woman as having birth pains. This evokes Isaiah's prophecies which personified Zion using this same analogy. "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son" (Is. 66:7). Interestingly, there is evidence here of the analogy of Israel as a woman giving birth, yet the lack of birth pangs seems to differentiate her from the woman of John's vision. Additionally, if read within a Catholic tradition, the Blessed Virgin Mary might also be disqualified from consideration, as she has been understood to not have suffered any pain during the birth of Christ. (She is believed to be preserved from sin and therefore would not have incurred the feminine consequences earned by Eve in Gen. 3:16.) Lastly, the strife laid out here in Revelation

⁹⁷ Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 199.

between the woman and the serpent is clearly a reference to the *protoevangelium* of Gen. 3:15 which describes the woman's offspring conquering the serpent, as noted above.

Overall, it seems clear that John is referencing ancient analogies that Old Testament authors used to describe God's people Israel. Yet, it would be confusing for early Christians to be given a text like this, one which highlights a messianic mother but does not intend to portray the Virgin Mary. Fortunately, there is a solution. Simply put, there is no reason to limit John in his license to portray *both* a community and an individual using the same character. It has already been surmised that he is personifying both Ancient Israel and the church simultaneously. Why, therefore, could a portrayal of the Virgin Mary not also be interpreted? As Sri notes:

Mary, in fact, would be the perfect person to do this, for she herself stands at the threshold between the old and the new. Indeed, if there was one woman in all of salvation history who could represent both the Old Testament and New Testament people of God, it would most certainly be the Jewish woman from Nazareth who was the first to say "Yes" to God's call in the new covenant era and receive the Messiah in her womb: Mary.⁹⁸

John could have used a different analogy, but it was fitting that the Virgin Mary be included in this story, considering the way that it fulfilled previous prophecies and, also, that it would have been a confusing decision to include such a woman if it were *not* Mary. It is difficult to see how this double interpretation of Mary and the church is not the most likely one.

Protestant scholar Alan F. Johnson argues for singular, rather than dual, interpretation of this mother figure. He shows that there seems to be a problem in a literal reading of this text since the woman is said to be persecuted by Satan along with her other offspring, "those who keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 12:17). This phrase seems to be referring to the entire Church. Therefore, no single human could be credited with giving such a birth, if read literally. He states:

Who then is the woman? While it is not impossible that she is an actual woman, such as Mary, the evidence clearly shows that she, like the woman in Chapter 17, has symbolic

⁹⁸ Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 199-200.

significance. At the center of Chapter 12 is the persecution of the woman by the dragon, who is definitely Satan (v.9). This central theme, as well as the reference to the persecution of the “rest of her offspring” (v.17), renders it virtually certain that the woman could not refer to a single individual.⁹⁹

While it is clear that this woman mothers the whole church in some capacity, rather than just one child, Johnson fails to consider different modes of mothering.

These two reasons for a rejection of the Mariological reading, namely, battling Satan and his attack on the church as a whole, can be solved with one, simple maneuver. Mary must be seen not only as Jesus’ biological mother but also as his spiritual mother. Of course, it is impossible to have biologically mothered all Christians, but to spiritually mother them is possible in the Body of Christ. If she is the expected *gebira* who is meant to accompany her son, then she can spiritually take part in this battle against Satan. That he persecutes her does not disqualify the Mariological reading of the woman, as if a persecution can only refer to a whole group of people. There is precedence in Scripture for an individual to be named as a reference of many people. For example, “Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim” (Ex. 17:8). In such passages, it is common to conflate the individual and those that he or she represents.

Having shown that this woman of Revelation 12 was likely intended to refer to Mary, it is important to also remember that, in the Gospel of Luke, she was shown to be the fulfillment of her Old Testament type: the Ark of the Covenant. Based on its wording, the text of Revelation may not necessitate that it is specifically the Blessed Virgin Mary being referenced. However, there is a strong possibility that John is alluding here in Revelation 12 to that long-lost Ark. At the end of his previous chapter, he states, “Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals

⁹⁹ Alan F. Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 12: Hebrews to Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 513, quoted in Tim Staples, *Behold Your Mother: A Biblical and Historical Defense of the Marian Doctrines*, (El Cajon: Catholic Answers Press, 2017), 105.

of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (Rev.11:19). The very next verse says, “A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun...” (Rev.12:1). In one breath he dramatically announces the unveiling of the one-and-only Ark, lost for centuries, and in the next breath he proclaims this glorious woman. Therefore, it seems John is referring to Mary as the New Ark of the Covenant, who in the next verses is shown also to be the new *gebira*, giving birth to the Messiah. This can only be one individual who has ever lived, because the idea of a future woman who could be given the same honor is unorthodox and discordant with basic Christian doctrine. The analogy of the church is also easily maintained when Mary is seen now as the royal, feminine representative of the people of God. Like Eve or the *gebiras* of Israel and Judah before her, this new *gebira* stands in and represents God’s people.

These passages of Revelation thereby give strong support for the idea that there was an ancient tradition of reverence for Mary specifically as *gebira*. The support is made obvious when we understand historically how a king would typically rule with his mother’s aid. Revelation 12 would be a weaker text in this regard if it only portrayed a lowly handmaid instead of a regal and worthy opponent of Satan. Admittedly, this is what Mary refers to herself as in Lk. 1:38. However, in her *Magnificat* we see how “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Lk. 1:52). Now Christians can see her lifted up in Heaven as the royal figure that she is. Jesus himself says, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Mt. 23:12). So, we see the one who humbled herself at the Annunciation (a moment where the temptation to exult herself in pride must have been significant) now being awarded this glorious, heavenly crown of stars for her humility. These aspects of Revelation 12 (and 11) give strong evidence that there is still a *gebira* who rules over

God's people and supports right worship, and that this role is appropriately filled by the humble Virgin Mary.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that multiple New Testament authors used royal imagery when portraying Christ and the Virgin Mary, especially in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Although perhaps not obvious to the average lay person of antiquity, this imagery would have been clear for early church leaders who had studied Scripture. They would have seen Mary as a royal figure cooperating with Christ the king.

John provides allusions further back to the book of Genesis, as he begins his account of Jesus' ministry at Cana with a pivotal encounter with his mother. Later, at the culmination of Jesus' ministry, John repeats the allusion to Genesis (using the phrase "woman" in addressing Mary), which presents to the reader a new Adam and a new Eve at the cross of Jesus. Further, this shows the establishment of a new, spiritual kingdom or family ("Behold, your mother"). If this same John was also the author of the book of Revelation, then we see him maintaining a consistent theme of royal rule across multiple texts.¹⁰⁰

It is easy enough to make clear that the New Testament authors portray Jesus as the new Messiah, the one who is to rule forever. Yet these texts, when they incorporate royal themes, oftentimes portray Jesus with his mother Mary. The long-awaited Messiah was never meant to rule without the fullness and fulfillment of the ancient Judaism, including the prominent feature

¹⁰⁰ "The evidence, external as well as internal of the book, seems to favor the consensus that a Palestinian, Jewish-rooted Christian was the author of the book of Revelation... It seems that the most balanced and fair treatment of the available evidence should incline the interpreter to leave the question still open to further reflection and dialogue, without denying John the Apostle as a still viable option." Hugo Cotro, "Could the Author of Revelation Step Forward, Please?" *DavarLogos* 14 (2015): 89, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://ixtheo.de/Record/1639095004>.

of *gebira*.¹⁰¹ In Jesus' New Covenant, the Davidic monarchy is not only partially brought about again, but reestablished in full, with the *gebira* present beside the king. And this does not take anything away from her royal son; her role accentuates, beautifies, and complements his reign. She stands in for all of God's people who are meant to live in complete cooperation with his Messiah and Son.

As noted above, de la Potterie claims that a disciple of Jesus is meant to be a son [or daughter] of Mary. Such an aspect of the construction of God's family, the Church, is not often examined or explored, and it seems to be unnoticed by a great swathe of modern culture and Theology. Such a crucial distinction of Christian life, to take Mary into one's home, should be drawn out in order to further accentuate and beautify Christ's reign. I posit that filial, Marian devotion is severely underrepresented in modern Christian expression over the last half-century. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss why and how Christians might put this into practice.

¹⁰¹ "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Mt. 5:18).

CHAPTER 4: APPLICATION OF MARIAN DEVOTION IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

All Sacred History before their coming leads up to them [Jesus and Mary] and after their coming looks back to them, or should we say, up to them. They are the golden and silver threads that hold together, in a beautiful pattern, the history of the Old and of the New Israel. They put unity and meaning into what would otherwise be but fragmentary history of an ancient people. ... Since Jesus was to be born of her as Virgin Mother, a unique and miraculous event, we might expect that the Scriptures which tell of Jesus would also tell of His Mother, because mother and child are inseparable. (Dominic J. Unger)¹⁰²

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain and defend a traditional, Christian practice, one which fittingly applies the concept of *gebira* to the Christian's personal life. I will first show the necessity of baptism for one's adoption into Christ's family, but this will lead to practical suggestions for living as sons and daughters of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I will draw from St. Louis Marie de Montfort's treatise, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, to point the reader toward eight such suggestions, which include that which I believe to be the most fitting and efficacious of all: a consecration to Jesus through Mary. The following is an argument from Scripture and tradition, which builds upon interpretations developed in the previous two chapters. It will show that this application of Mariology, namely, a dedication of oneself to her, has both precedence and fittingness in the Christian, devotional life.

¹⁰² Dominic J. Unger, "The Use of Sacred Scripture in Mariology," *Marian Studies* 1 (1950): 70-71. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1657&context=marian_studies.

From “Listen to Him” to “Behold Your Mother”

Jesus Christ is the new king, not just of Israel, but of all creation.¹⁰³ More than this, Jesus is God himself (as Christian doctrine has always claimed) and therefore the Christian should both obey his commands and respect the position to which he has called the Virgin Mary. Not only do we receive from the Old Testament the commandment, “Honor your father and your mother...” (Ex.20:12) but also such other directives such as “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn. 13:34). These are just some of the scriptural evidences showing that God is commanding his devoted ones to have love toward the Blessed Virgin Mary if she is to be regarded as our mother in Christ.

Further, he tells us, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Lk. 11:28). This latter quote is most interesting, because it comes on the heels of another woman’s shout of reverence toward the Blessed Virgin (Lk. 11:27).¹⁰⁴ It appears to be an attempt by Jesus to divert the woman’s attention away from Mary. However, let it be noted that Jesus is giving a lesson here in how to apply the Christian way of life. He does this by guiding the crowd’s attention from physical, blood relations to spiritual relations. It is not as important to be a blood relative of the Christ so much as to be one of his *spiritual* relatives, i.e., a member of his Mystical Body. In this they can worship him “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24).¹⁰⁵

How does one become such a *spiritual* relative of Jesus? The answer can be found in his words to Nicodemus, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being

¹⁰³ “...I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:13-15).

¹⁰⁴ “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!”

¹⁰⁵ In his words to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus states, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24).

born of water and Spirit” (Jn. 3:5). Jesus himself shows us this in his baptism at the Jordan, initiating this mysterious union of water and the Holy Spirit. “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased’” (Mt. 3:16-17). We see Jesus coming out of the water and receiving the Holy Spirit which is immediately followed by words of parental love from the Father. What is encouraging for the Christian is that this baptism is open to all. Their divine adoption can be anticipated by these practical means.¹⁰⁶

Birth implies a *family*, which is how some New Testament passages describe the Christian’s relationship with Jesus. As St. Paul explains, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (Rom. 8:29). The Letter to the Hebrews points to a shared source, presumably God the Father: “For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers...” (Heb. 2:11). Also, Jesus himself explains that everything is shared between him and his disciples saying, “All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:15). This new birth at baptism clearly shows an adoption into a real, spiritual inheritance, sharing the Trinitarian life with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Some read the phrase “born of water and the spirit” to mean spiritual regeneration but without any sacramental actions:

‘Born of water’ evokes the image of water baptism rather than physical birth. ... Baptism means surrender to God and a new determination to live a new life. But ‘born of water’ is more than water baptism. Whereas the latter occurs one time, the former means one yields to

¹⁰⁶ In Acts 19, St. Paul explains the necessity of Christ’s baptism. “He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?’ ... ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:2-5).

God continuously. That is, one's new spiritual birth is not complete with one action of water baptism.¹⁰⁷

However, other evangelical scholars, such as George Beasley-Murray, share the Catholic stance on this matter.¹⁰⁸ According to him, assertions like the one above “do not do justice to the text [of John 3:5] and have not commended themselves to scholarly opinion. It would seem that the text relates birth from above to baptism and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁹ This is the interpretation that I will proceed with.

Fortunately, there is room for agreement on this matter within Catholic and Protestant Theology. While the presence of water can be found in baptisms throughout Christian denominations, the spiritual element of the Sacrament must be present as well. Along with the physical contact with the waters of baptism, what is also needed is for the penitent to come in contact with God in a spiritual way, the two of them being united in the will. This willing, spiritual contact with the Holy Spirit is intended to continue consistently throughout the Christian's life. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, “And by the fact that anyone loves another, he wills good to that other. Thus, he puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself; and regards the good done to Him as done to himself.”¹¹⁰ I posit that to act according to the Will of God himself, submitting your own

¹⁰⁷ Yung Suk Kim, “The Johannine Realism about the Kingdom of God: “Born from Above, Born of Water and Spirit” (John 3:1-21),” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 48 (2021): 23.

¹⁰⁸ “Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.’” *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition*, 1997, 1213, accessed March 30, 2024. <http://www.scborromeo.org/cc/p2s2c1a1.htm>.

¹⁰⁹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John, Volume 36: Revised Edition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 48.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 3, in *Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes, vol. 1*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 114.

human will to His, is to love God and to live in his Spirit. Thereby one maintains the privilege to be called his “beloved.”¹¹¹

Considering this, the Christian should be all the more motivated to obey Christ in each of his commandments, not least of all the very last one given before his death. As John records, “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home” (Jn. 19:26-27). Admittedly, these statements of Jesus appear more as exclamations than directives, yet John’s inclusion of the next sentence, “took her into his home,” is indication that such statements were meant to be acted upon, rather than merely appreciated for the moment. Instead of a solely historical and/or literal reading of the text, I suggest that the moral sense here has something crucial for the Christian. The text’s implication is that all Christians should act likewise, taking Mary as *their* mother. If this disciple is representative of all Christians, then Christians should hear this word of God (Jn. 19:27) and observe it.

This mothering of the beloved disciple must mean something dramatically different from what God’s chosen people have seen in the past. Whereas in the days of the kings the people paid respect to the *gebira* as the mother only of the king, now Christ shows that he will not keep his filial relationship with the her to himself. The people of God will now pay respect to the *gebira* as their *own* mother, and this is only possible because of Christ’s baptism, through which all are made one in him. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28-29). According to Paul, one’s

¹¹¹ We see the importance of maintaining one’s relationship with God in the following words: “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me” (Jn. 15:4).

union with Christ truly does confer on them the promises and rights that he earned for them, as they are now adopted children of the Father. Being assumed into his mystical body at baptism, Christians are privileged to call God “Our Father” alongside him and to additionally call the Mary their *gebira*.

It is true that one can go straight to Jesus in their mind and heart,¹¹² but ignorance of the role of the *gebira* would mean ignorance of God’s plan for salvation. If indeed God has promoted a new *gebira* and has given Christians a familial relationship with her (as has been made clear through innumerable Marian devotions throughout the millennia), it must be a part of his plan that is worth acting upon in the daily life of the Christian. Of course, veneration of the saints has consistently been seen throughout the Church’s history. However, I submit that the spiritual role of the new queen mother should influence Christian devotion and practice in a specific way. One should not only respectfully address and love her as they would their fellow Christians in Heaven, but should also rely on her intercession uniquely *as mother*. Mary is she who brings God to the world by her *fiat*.¹¹³ In this salvific plan, should we not show reverence to the one through whom this has happened? Or should we merely accept most of his plan and leave details like this out?

I posit that the prevalent tendency found in Protestantism to avoid a relationship with Mary, or with the other saints, would deprive the Christian of a necessary spiritual practice. This lack of Mary is a lack of full union into the family of Christ, and can lead one to a false idea of a binary, one-on-one economy of grace. This is admittedly an oversimplification, because Protestant Christians are perfectly capable of practicing the familial union in Christ with their neighbors. However, Christ is so powerful and merciful as to invite all souls into his *divine* life which transcends the physical and spiritual realms and where we are able to efficaciously pray for one

¹¹² “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (Jn.1:9).

¹¹³ “... let it be with me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38).

another, no matter what is separating us.¹¹⁴ One aspect of this Christian unity is Jesus' shared sonship toward Mary (and every child has to be mothered by someone). Ample reason has been shown as to why, throughout the centuries, Marian devotion has been elevated and of unique significance above that of other saints. The uniqueness of Mary in the economy of grace has been expounded upon by many theologians,¹¹⁵ but I will predominantly draw from de Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* to highlight some of the best practices in Marian devotion.

Practical Step Toward Union with God

How should one best incorporate this Marian aspect of salvation into the Christian life? Looking to de Montfort, we find what is possibly the most effective way to reach union with God, specifically through his humble mother in the form of a *consecration*. In *True Devotion*, he exhorts the faithful to consecrate their lives to Jesus Christ through the Virgin Mary. In other words, he believes it should be widely practiced among the faithful to give one's life to her, trusting that all will subsequently be given to Christ by her motherly hands.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Examples of evidence in support of the doctrine of the communion of saints can be seen in the following two passages. (These show efficacious intercession by angels who are already with God in Heaven.) Jacob prays, "may the angel who delivered me from all evils bless these boys" (Gen. 48:16). The angel Raphael states, "Now when you, Tobit, and Sarah prayed, it was I who presented the record of your prayer before the Glory of the Lord..." (Tobit 12:12).

¹¹⁵ In reverse chronological order, see St. Alphonsus Liguori's work, *The Glories of Mary*, St. Thomas Aquinas' treatise, *On the Angelic Salutation*, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux's four sermons on the Salve Regina, mentioned above. Lastly, St. Ambrose of Milan provides us with a succinct statement of praise: "Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which, as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected." Ambrose, *Concerning Virginity*, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin and H.T.F. Duckworth, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 10. ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896), II, 2, 17.

¹¹⁶ "By this devotion, we give to Jesus Christ all that we can give Him." Louis Marie de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1962), 90.

The background of royal *gebira* in the Davidic kingdom not only gives precedence for the role of intercessory power,¹¹⁷ but also gives precedence for such great honor being due to the king's mother. With awareness of the Old Testament tradition of the *gebira*, aided by the Church's history and doctrine of the communion of saints, the Christian can be confident in his or her pursuit of Marian devotion.¹¹⁸ De Montfort explains further why this practice of total consecration through the Virgin Mary is fitting and effective:

Since our perfection consists in our being conformed, united, and consecrated to Jesus Christ... since Mary is among all creatures the most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that, of all devotions, that which best consecrates and conforms us to Our Lord is devotion to the Blessed Virgin, His holy Mother; and that the more we are consecrated to Mary, the more perfectly we are united with Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹

Since the Blessed Virgin would direct all her thoughts and actions to her divine Son (as should be the case be for anyone in heavenly glory), then, walking with her will be an aid in walking with Christ. They are both on the same path pointed in the same direction toward the Father. It is both logical and historically defensible to journey with her as a helpful intercessor.

Still, skeptics may ask where such a practice of consecration can be found in ancient Christianity. Is this simply a more novel devotion invented by a small group of Catholic Christians in recent centuries? There is evidence that a consecration, or total entrustment of one's life to God, not only has its roots in the beginnings of Christianity, but even further back in ancient Israelite culture as well. I will first highlight evidence of consecration in general, before defending dedication to Mary specifically.

In the book of Exodus, it is written, "The Lord said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and

¹¹⁷ Admittedly, this merely shows examples of *gebiras* interceding during this earthly life, and not from Heaven.

¹¹⁸ "Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation." Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 61.

¹¹⁹ De Montfort, *True Devotion*, 88.

animals, is mine” (Ex.13:1-2). Because God had saved the first-born of the Israelites in Egypt, so now he wants them to set apart for future generations all first-born male offspring. In the book of Numbers, a similar idea is mentioned as God explains: “When either men or women make a special vow, the vow of a nazirite, to separate themselves to the Lord, they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; ... All their days as nazirites they are holy to the Lord” (Nm. 6:2-3, 8).

We see in the First book of Samuel how Hannah consecrates to God her son, Samuel. She prays, “O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death” (1 Sam. 1:11). The word *nazirite* here refers to someone who lives a life committed to God and to certain practices (i.e., vowing to abstain from alcohol), such as Samson in the book of Judges.¹²⁰

In the New Testament also can be found a few likely examples of consecration. First, regarding John the Baptist, the evangelist Luke relates, “for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 1:15). Secondly, there is a tradition which asserts that Mary and Joseph took vows of virginity (or at least Joseph upheld Mary’s vow) to be set apart for the Lord.¹²¹ Hence, she asks the angel, Gabriel, “How can this (conceiving) be, since I am a virgin?” (Lk.1:34). Thirdly, Anna the prophetess is said to have “lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and

¹²⁰ “...for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth” (Judg. 13:5).

¹²¹ See Christian P. Ceroke, “Luke 1,34 and Mary’s Virginity,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19 (1957): 329-342; Calloway, Donald H. Calloway, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2020), 127-135; and Sri, *Rethinking Mary*, 4.

prayer night and day” (Lk. 1:36-37). We can see that there are fitting examples in Scripture of people giving their lives to God in distinct ways, setting their lives apart uniquely for his service.

Lastly, such a practice still exists and has existed for millennia in the Sacrament of Baptism as one gives his or her life entirely to God. The Christian dies in spirit with Christ, symbolized by submersion under water. Then, they subsequently rise to Christ’s new, divine life, which is symbolized by the rising out of the water. Even before the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and before the establishment of Christ’s new family at Calvary, we see John the Baptist living as one consecrated to God, rejecting all possibility of thriving materially, and even preparing people for such a radical change in their own lives. The first moment that we see a death to self and an embracing of the new life of the Holy Spirit is when Jesus leads by example at the hands of John and institutes his baptism for all.

Seeing that there is scriptural and traditional precedence for such a practice of entrusting one’s life to God, St. Louis de Montfort simply suggests for its fulfillment a renewal one’s baptismal vows. He references the Council of “Sens” (or Paris, 829) and the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) to show that the Church’s authoritative approval is behind such a practice and to show the significance of the tradition.¹²² Since Christians do not remain faithful to this initial vow at their baptism (which is usually made by their parents and Godparents anyway), a conscientious renewal of these vows later in life will thereby remedy most quickly the waywardness that they may find themselves in. It is in coming to awareness of such necessity that the Christian should renew their baptismal vows but also do so “in a perfect manner.” De Montfort

¹²² *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, " Prochus fidelem populum ad eam rationem cohortabitur ut sciat aequissimum esse... nos ipsus, non secus ac mancipia Redemptori nostro et Domino in perpetuum addicere et consecrare." quoted in de Montfort, *True Devotion*, 93-94. Further, this catechism states, “[E]ach, admonished by what he sees done in another, may recollect within himself by what promises he bound himself to God when he was initiated by baptism, and may, at the same time, reflect whether in life or morals he approve himself such as the very profession of the Christian name promises.” *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. Jeremiah Donovan, (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1908), 143.

specifies, “I say in a *perfect manner*, because, in order to consecrate ourselves to Jesus Christ, we make use of the most perfect of all means for doing so—the Most Blessed Virgin.”¹²³ If this is the means by which God gave himself to us in his human nature, let it be the means by which we give ourselves to him in his order of grace.

Is there any scriptural evidence, though, for a dedication of a one to an intercessor rather than immediately to God? We see in baptism that young children are often unable to make the decision of their dedication themselves, but others are allowed to bring them to God. This happened for Samuel because of his mother, Hannah, as mentioned above. His dedication took effect by his living under the guardianship of Eli, the high priest. So, he was given to God, but in a specific manner, through an arrangement of mediation. More importantly, the dedication of the beloved disciple (Jn. 19:27-27) is compelling evidence. It provides God’s people with a prominent example to act as a family, to depend on one other, and to receive the *gebira*’s motherly and regnal influence in their own “home.” Therefore, there is considerable evidence that dedication to God in a specific, mediated way, such as a Marian consecration, is valid. It is in accord with the Church’s long tradition, it can be defended via the spiritual senses of various Scripture passages, and it does not transgress reason, but instead flows naturally from it.

Interior Practices

Within this context, de Montfort lists several practices of devotion toward the Blessed Virgin that a Christian should engage in, categorizing them into interior practices and exterior

¹²³ De Montfort, *True Devotion*, 94.

practices. The following is his list of suggestions for the interior life with Mary, which includes the ultimate aim of this chapter, namely, Marian consecration. These include:

(1) to honour her as the worthy Mother of God, with the cult of hyperdulia: that is, to honour and esteem her above all other saints, as the masterpiece of grace, and as holding the highest place next to Jesus Christ, true God and true Man; (2) to meditate on her virtues, her privileges and her actions; (3) to contemplate her splendour; (4) to make acts of love, of praise and of thanksgiving to her; (5) to invoke earnestly her intercession; (6) to offer ourselves to her and to unite ourselves with her; (7) to perform actions with a view to pleasing her; (8) to begin, continue and end all our actions through her, in her, with her and for her, in order that we may perform them through Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ, our Last End.¹²⁴

I will now address each of these practices in the same order so as to show why more honor is due to the Virgin Mary in twenty-first-century Christianity than is currently expressed.

First, he distinguishes between hyperdulia and worship, the former being what is due to her “as the masterpiece of grace.” An argument can be made that the most honor she should be given is that of first among saints, due to her queenship, fulfilling the role of *gebira*. However, de Montfort appears to make allusion to the Immaculate Conception with these words, “masterpiece of grace.”¹²⁵ And this is logical if, harkening back to Genesis, she is to be regarded as the New Eve or new “Woman.” Both her and Eve would have been conceived without sin and, therefore, conceived immaculately. Therefore, an elevated honor would be due to her, different than the way in which other saints are honored.

The second and third suggestions may have been inspired by St. Louis’ devotion to the Rosary as a Third Order Dominican.¹²⁶ This meditative devotion is traditionally believed to have been in practice since the early thirteenth century thanks to St. Dominic.¹²⁷ The Rosary is primarily

¹²⁴ De Montfort, *True Devotion*, 83-84.

¹²⁵ It would still be almost 150 years after de Montfort’s writings before the dogma of the Immaculate Conception would be officially promulgated by the Catholic Church. See Pius X, *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*.

¹²⁶ As well as with *True Devotion*, he is also well-known for his treatise on the Rosary, *The Secret of the Rosary*, (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1954).

¹²⁷ “Our need of divine help is as great today as when the great Dominic introduced the use of the Rosary of Mary as a balm for the wounds of his contemporaries.” Leo XIII, *Supremi Apostolatus Officio*, 7.

a spiritual weapon which draws the Christian's gaze onto Christ's life, accompanied by the Blessed Virgin. In Scripture, she consistently demonstrates the authenticity of such contemplation as an effective means of drawing closer to God: "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk.2:19).¹²⁸ While we might say that taking to heart Christ's mysteries is the true goal of the Rosary, de Montfort is here suggesting that the Christian take this one step further: to ponder how God has involved *Mary* in his mysteries and to hold her also in our minds.

The fourth suggestion is quite simple, but its necessity should be explained briefly. The First book of Samuel shows God stating, "for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). If one is to have true devotion to Mary, this fourth suggestion regarding interior acts of love is critical. Any alternative, outward practices employed so as to avoid true conversion of heart will end up fruitless. According to St. John of the Cross, "At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love."¹²⁹

The fifth suggestion is necessary by way of exercising the virtue of obedience. One way in which this virtue can be expressed is in offering signs of respect and salutation to those for whom it is socially expected and to those for whom it is due. The queen mother, when seen appropriately as the mother of all Christians, should be spoken to with more warmth and reverence than that which is due to the angels and other saints. While angels far exceed humans in natural gifts, power, and proximity to God, no one of them can claim to be the mother of God, nor a mother to any Christian, for that matter.¹³⁰ This is a mystery worth revering in its own unique manner.

¹²⁸ See also, Lk. 1:29 and 2:51. These moments always pertain to a divine revelation about her son.

¹²⁹ St. John of the Cross, *Dichos*, 64, quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1022. Accessed March 31, 2024. <http://www.scborromeo.org/cc/para/1022.htm>.

¹³⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas gives several reasons why reverence is shown to Mary above all other creatures, including the following: "But that an Angel should show reverence to a man was never heard of until the Angel reverently greeted the Blessed Virgin saying: 'Hail.' ... It was, therefore, not fitting that an Angel should show reverence to a man until it should come to pass that one would be found in human nature who exceeded the Angels ... and this was the Blessed Virgin. ... The Blessed Virgin was superior to any of the Angels in the fullness of grace, and as an indication of this the Angel showed reverence to her by saying: Full of grace." Aquinas, *On the Angelic Salutation*,

The sixth suggestion is what St. Louis de Montfort is perhaps most known for, that is, the total consecration to Jesus Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary, as mentioned above. As far as the Christian is aware of such Marian doctrines like the Immaculate Conception and the Divine Motherhood, they should be able to trust this process of intercessory consecration. Beyond giving their lives to Jesus Christ in an ordinary way, they can do so in a mediated but most powerful way through Mary, with the help of a fuller Mariology. This intercessory consecration means to give oneself wholly to the Blessed Virgin, trusting completely that for all eternity she will conduct them to her divine Son in “the surest, easiest, quickest, and most perfect manner.”¹³¹

The seventh suggestion pertains to the heart once again. While the fourth focused on the act or movement of the heart toward the queen, the seventh pertains strictly to the heart’s intention. Some may say that “to do all our actions with the view of pleasing her” is foolish and ill-conceived, since it fails to adhere to the greatest commandment, namely, “to love *God* with all your heart” (Mt. 22:37) (emphasis added). This could be interpreted as saying that one should only entertain the intention of pleasing God. To do anything with the aim of pleasing a human being would be to miss the mark. However, this kind of argument fails to consider the possibility that Christians who venerate the Blessed Virgin do so ultimately to please God as their end.

Furthermore, it is natural to allow one’s affection and neighborly love to flow towards someone who is so close to them, nor is it against grace to love one who is so close to Christ. In fact, the closer a Christian (in this case the Blessed Virgin) is to God, the closer other Christians should be to her. Also, more obviously, the closer one person is to another, the closer the second one is the first, necessarily. Therefore, those who are closer to God should, of necessity, be closer

trans. Joseph B. Collins, (New York: Wagner, 1939), ed. and html-formatted by Joseph Kenny, O.P., <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/AveMaria.htm>.

¹³¹ De Montfort, *True Devotion*, 35.

to each other as well. Christians who remain close to each other avail themselves to a closer relationship to God. This is the case for the Blessed Virgin par excellence, who is believed, out of all of Christ's disciples, to be the closest to him. It follows that one would of necessity grow in affection towards and union with her, as he or she grew more united to him, and vice versa. It would be an act against charity, to say to her, "I am sorry, but I do not want to do anything unless it is with the sole intention of pleasing God. Intending to bring you joy would detract from my relationship with the Father." Conversely, this decision would detract from God's beautiful order, rather than honor it, because within this order he has appointed Christians to "love one another" (Jn. 13:34), and to love another would imply an intention to please them (see de Montfort above).

Still, this does not adequately defend the idea of doing "*all* our actions" with such an intention, only the idea of allowing distinct intentions to coincide. How could one justify doing *all* our actions with the sole intention of pleasing Mary instead of God? This can be explained by once again noting God's beautiful order of intercession and communal love, at the apex of which can be found Jesus Christ himself. "For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human" (1 Tim. 2:5). It would not be surprising if God had refrained from mediation altogether and there had never been an Incarnation. Perhaps it could have been deemed inappropriate to allow his creatures such an undeserved honor as to share life with them. Yet, what he has condescended to do, coming to this realm through the consent and *fiat* of the Virgin Mary, and bestowing his Holy Spirit upon his Church, speaks to the beauty with which he chooses to express himself. He has already shown himself to be a mediating God, and he has made room for whomever may wish to participate in his economy of grace as a Christian.

This ordering and bestowing of grace from Jesus, through Christians, to other members of his Body, this intercession, makes it easier to see that the Body of Christ is a family and that his

members can and do affect one another. The Christian can show true trust in his salvific plan by entering his family, the Church, and entrusting themselves to the same mother to whom he entrusted himself. This mother could have abused her role or at least become self-seeking by it, but she remained faithful to the end, “standing near the cross of Jesus” (Jn. 19:25). It would be impossible now for the love of God, flowing through her from Heaven, to do anything but that which is most pleasing to him, since nothing imperfect can exist in Heaven.¹³² It follows that an offering of oneself to her (suggestion 6) and the subsequent acts done to please her (suggestion 7) would be entirely in accord with how God is already conducting his salvation from Heaven, as God gives her all of himself, and she reciprocates. Rather than a substitution for a relationship with him, Marian Consecration serves as a perfect conduit to him and a continuation of this reciprocal love.

Lastly, the eighth suggestion urges the Christian to execute all the previous suggestions by, in, and with Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin. If one is to believe that she, now in Heaven, does everything in union with her son, then there is no loss, and only gain, to include her in all of one’s actions. Moreover, Christ included her in his salvific acts in remarkable ways, i.e., assuming a human nature from her, growing up under her maternal care, being obedient to her,¹³³ and acquiescing to her requests in even in his adulthood.¹³⁴ If Christ lived with her all the years of his earthly life, and if that life was meant to be exemplary for us to learn from, then this eighth suggestion is quite fitting. Let all Christians practice living like Christ.

¹³² “But nothing unclean will enter it...” (Rev. 21:27).

¹³³ “Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them” (Lk. 2:51).

¹³⁴ “When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine’” (Jn. 2:3).

Mediatrix of All Graces

Many saints and theologians have supported the idea of the Blessed Virgin Mary being the Mediatrix of *All Graces*.¹³⁵ Being still unsettled and a widely contested idea, I will not attempt to give sufficient evidence or proof for it here. However, since there are plenty of historical references for it, I will use a few of them to argue that the spiritual *gebira* of all Christians would be worthy of such an honorable title. If highly influential theologians of the past have thought of her as mediating *all* of Jesus' graces, that makes it easier to at least accept that she is worthy of mediating those graces according to an individual penitent. This is what the Christian asks for when he or she makes their Marian Consecration, that she at least be *their* mediatrix, if not everyone's mediatrix.

Luigi Gambero points us to a great Marian saint on this matter, one who believes that the Blessed Virgin can even dispense of God's grace in whatever manner she pleases:

St. Bernardine of Siena links Marian mediation to the Holy Spirit and the life of the Church. He believes that 'all the gifts, virtues, and graces of the Holy Spirit are granted through her hands to whomever she wishes, when she wishes, and in the measure she wishes.' Bernardine also believes that because God relied on Mary to become incarnate, he grants her a type of universal maternal jurisdiction in the mediation of grace.¹³⁶

We can see from this that Bernadine viewed her motherhood as worthy of a certain "jurisdiction," and this is concordant with the scriptural examples from the second and third chapters of this thesis, which showed the *gebira* as having such authority that was second only to the king's. If

¹³⁵ Pius XII, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, 39. "Certainly, in the full and strict meaning of the term, only Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is King; but Mary, too, as Mother of the divine Christ, as His associate in the redemption, in his struggle with His enemies and His final victory over them, has a share, though in a limited and analogous way, in His royal dignity. For from her union with Christ she attains a radiant eminence transcending that of any other creature; from her union with Christ she receives the royal right to dispose of the treasures of the Divine Redeemer's Kingdom; from her union with Christ finally is derived the inexhaustible efficacy of her maternal intercession before the Son and His Father." See also Pius X, *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*, 12. "[S]he merited to become most worthily the Reparatrix of the lost world and the Dispensatrix of all the gifts that Our Savior purchased for us by His Death and by His Blood."

¹³⁶ Bernardine of Siena, *De Gratia et Gloria beatae Virginis, Sermon 61*, quoted in Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 296.

God's creation speaks of his glory, and the physical realm is to be expressive of the spiritual,¹³⁷ then it is all the more fitting that the order of salvation on earth (the Incarnation of Jesus through Mary) reflects the order of salvation in the spiritual realm (the mediation of his graces through her).

Aquinas states, "Whereas the Blessed Virgin Mary received such a fulness of grace that she was nearest of all to the Author of grace; so that she received within her Him Who is full of all grace; and by bringing Him forth, she, in a manner, dispensed grace to all."¹³⁸ This phrase "in a manner" that Aquinas uses should not be overlooked. With it, Aquinas guards against heresy and Marian worship. It truly is Christ who dispenses grace and delivers it as he wishes. It is only a question of how often he delivers it through the Mary's hands, whether partially or in totality.

He is not here saying that she "dispensed grace to all" in every understanding of these words. There is room for interpretation. Yet, the Christian need not believe in Mary's mediation of *all* graces to still trust in her general intercession and to believe that it should be of an unparalleled quality and quantity. What is important is an understanding of the fittingness of this economy. We receive his life by the same mode through which he received his. I suggest for this reason that out of all possible modes by which to come to God or to live out the Christian life, Marian Consecration is likely the one most pleasing to him.

Still, has he humbled himself so much as to even allow Mary to remain his *gebira* in Heaven? Would he still grant her whatever she asks? This would not necessitate any handing over of his proper authority and power. Rather, I posit that he simply involved her in his economy of grace in such a way where, like the woman unreservedly breaking open her

¹³⁷ "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Rom. 1:20).

¹³⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 27, a. 5, ad 1, Vol. 4, 2162.

perfume,¹³⁹ he lovingly chooses to hold nothing back from her, not even the slightest grace.

Whether or not she is Mediatrix of *All* of Graces, whatever grace she does request will be given to her to dispense as she pleases, for he will not refuse her.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

A life in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary is of such benefit to the Christian that it should not be left unconsidered. There is no sacramental guarantee that one will receive more of God's grace this way since it is not in the Christian's power to decide such matters for their God. However, to avail oneself of his gifts, especially one so honorable as his own mother, is a fitting way to show love for him. Let every Christian treat God as a father and receive his divine life through their divinely appointed mother, as if still small children, "for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Mt. 19:14). All have the opportunity to receive her spiritually into their "home" like the beloved disciple. Besides the very gift of himself, this is the greatest gift that Jesus Christ ever gave: a sharing in the king's filial relationship with his *gebira*.

Living the Christian life is more aptly described as living *Christ's* life, as St. Paul expresses, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, while we are freed from bondage and are able to take up any devotions we so choose, it is really this total consecration to him through the Blessed Virgin which gives God the most glory. This is because in our humbling of ourselves, we do not dare to assume our own

¹³⁹ "While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head" (Mk.14:3). Exemplified in this scene is a profound lesson about not counting what one is giving but instead giving freely and abundantly. Jesus subsequently defends this woman against the disciples' argument from practicality. The underlying meaning may be that unreserved charity is a higher virtue than prudence or justice. "Hence charity is more excellent than faith or hope, and, consequently, than all the other virtues..." (Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q. 23, a. 6).

¹⁴⁰ See again 1 Kings 2:20, "... I will not refuse you" as noted above on pp. 24 and 46.

approachability to the divine or assume “equality with God something to be grasped at” (Phil. 2:6). Instead, we trust in his condescension to us, first seen in the Virgin Mary.

If the Christian trusts in the complete humility and love which God has expressed in his human nature, he or she may thereby proceed with utmost confidence to fully embrace life with his holy family, as it is mediated through Mary. If we rely entirely on her intercession before the king, and entirely on his reciprocal love for his *gebira*, then we can confidently subject our wills and merits to hers and simply want whatever she wants. Thereafter, her divine Son will be even more pleased and consoled as he watches how his little ones and his mother now act in union with each other. His family can thereby flourish all the more while his request to his heavenly Father approaches fulfillment, “that they may be one, as we are one” (Jn. 17:22).

This thesis is not intended to suggest a necessity of total Marian Consecration, or even of simply incorporating her mediation into one’s life, but rather to show that it mirrors and perpetuates Christ’s very own life on earth, as the Scriptures show. I have shown ancient, cultural precedent for the *gebira* in the Davidic kingdom who shares with her son both authority and responsibility for God’s chosen people. Read allegorically, morally, and anagogically, Old Testament passages that pertain to these *gebiras* foreshadow the mother of Jesus, not only as she fulfilled them in her earthly life, but even now as she reigns from Heaven. Since she initially bestowed upon herself the title of “handmaid,”¹⁴¹ he thereafter “lifted up the lowly”¹⁴² and bestowed upon her the role of eternal *gebira*. Anyone who serves this mother will please her son and inevitably be united to him in Heaven, “because mother and child are inseparable.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk. 1:38 NABRE). Above, on page 47, I referenced Edward Sri’s point regarding how the word “behold” often precedes a new name and role that God is giving to one of his followers.

¹⁴² “He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly” (Lk. 1:52 NABRE).

¹⁴³ As quoted above on p.56: Unger, “Sacred Scripture in Mariology,” 71.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1657&context=marian_studies.

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