

Scripture

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BACKGROUND OF THE ANNUNCIATION

The formula of Duns Scotus is said to be the golden rule for Mary doctrine :

Si auctoritati Ecclesiae vel auctoritati Scripturae
non repugnet, videtur probabile quod excellentius
est attribuere Mariae.¹

Though we do not intend to contest this suggestion, it is clearly not within our present competence to avail ourselves of it. For we are seeking not what the Scriptures allow us to say but what the Scriptures teach us to say. It is prudent to make this remark at the outset in order to remove the impression, or refute the charge, of minimising where a mean view is most repugnant to the Catholic heart and mind. To consider Mary in the Scriptures is to contemplate the bud and not the bloom, though in the end we may find how surprisingly soon the bud started to open, because in the garden of Christian theology the Mary doctrine is a singularly precocious flower.

I have used the word 'theology' to kill with one blow the inarticulate, and proportionately dangerous, monster with the blasphemous name : 'Scripture and, after that, Theology.' The monster is real enough, as we all know. No, 'Mary in the Scriptures' means 'Mary in official early Christian theology.' It follows, then, that we are not looking for facts but for theological interpretation of facts, an interpretation to which faith makes its response, which indeed compels faith, for the interpretation is official.

In what has been just said you will have noticed what seems to be a dishonest, and certainly convenient, fallacy. What, you may ask, has become of the Old Testament? Now it must be admitted that the exegete is often embarrassed by what appears to him a mistake of method in connexion with the Mary doctrine. He feels strongly that it would be odd indeed if the Old Testament which only obscurely hints at a Word made flesh were to speak most clearly of the mother of the Word. The Old Testament, he says, is too often so used as to make it appear not only as anticipating the New, which is bad, but

¹ It would seem justifiable to predicate the highest of Mary provided this does not conflict with the authority of Church or of Scripture.

as excelling it, which is worse. Doubtless we are dealing with a revelation that can break into any human series, but Biblical experience teaches that even this free revelation is adapted to its time, and without overwhelming evidence we can make no exception for one doctrine out of all the rest.

This is far from saying that the Old Testament must not be used, only that it must not be used in isolation. The Bible is no juxtaposition of solid blocks of revelation, without life, without growth, without articulation. The great stream of revelation cannot be frozen at some given place and one slab of ice cut out of it that we can call the Word of God. For in fact the Word is not a word but a long sentence whose meaning is not grasped until it is finished. This remains true whatever side we may take in the great *sensus plenior* controversy which, some think, is little more than a fight in the field of apologetics. In any strong, conscious, literary tradition, Z in the series may use A for his purposes and thus force us back to A to understand his terms. A himself must not be used as an independent element unless we are clear in our own minds that we are not going to read back into him what we have already learned from Z. Nevertheless, only Z plus A will yield us the meaning of Z. If this is true in general, it is most certainly true of the Bible for which it has been abundantly demonstrated that the sacred authors are not independent of their predecessors. If this is the case with the Old Testament, how much more with the New whose authors felt themselves the heirs of the Old! The Christian Event dropped, as it were, into the solution of the Old Testament and precipitated what we see—a cloud of reference. Or, if you like, it changed the water into wine. And in this process the mother of Jesus was there.

Here, then, we have the basis for what has been called 'anthological' exegesis which is most sound in principle. But we must never forget that our feet are now on a slippery path and that we are walking in a world of allusion and subtlety. Many have and still do proceed too fast and too confidently and, when they fall, discredit the way they have taken. Others, by careful and minute comparison of texts, will establish a case which is most impressive in detail but which may leave the more cautious still hesitant. To determine when subtlety has gone too far is not easy, except for those rash enough to suppose that no subtlety is required. Appeal will sometimes have to be made to a kind of sixth Scriptural sense which may admit one allusion and refuse the next. One may be uneasy or content with a reference to the famous oracle of Gen. 3:15 as the background of Simeon's association of Mary with her son in the rise and fall of many in Israel; the same oracle may seem far from the woman clothed

with the sun of Apoc. 12, or from the 'woman' at Cana and the 'woman' at the foot of the Cross who, like Eve, became the mother of all the living. Within the last few years all these questions have been eagerly and competently discussed, and from the welter of divergence on detail there has emerged a conviction that the very early association of Eve with Mary and of Mary with the Church has very deep roots in the Scriptures. If it is impossible here to enter into the argument, it is at least prudent to record its outcome, this highest common factor of agreement which it would be foolish to discount on the ground that the reasoning is too subtle, namely that there is an interpenetration of Biblical thought between the collective 'woman' of Gen. 3 who is to wage war on the serpent, the individual woman who became mother of the Saviour and again the collective woman, the spouse of Christ, the Church. It is unnecessary to recall that such interpenetration of individual and collectivity is quite typical of Biblical literature. And so, to take one small example, it is not improbable that in the fourth Gospel, so profoundly symbolic, Mary stands for the Church when she asks that the water for the 'purifying of the Jews' should be changed into the wine of Christian sacrament.

But important as the fourth Gospel is in any discussion of Mary, and therefore inexcusably omitted if space were unlimited, we are going to concentrate our attention upon what, after all, is 'the unique Event in the sphere of soteriology and eschatology, which virtually contains all that follow,'¹ I mean the Infancy narrative of Luke and in particular the Annunciation to Mary which has been called 'the parent cell' of this whole narrative.² For it has been well said that Mary's 'yes' on Calvary simply maintains the 'Fiat' of the Annunciation by which she acquiesced in the Incarnation and all its consequences whatever they might be.

It is here, if anywhere, that the employment of the Old Testament of which we have spoken has been brought into play. Its ideas and expressions have provided the raw material; the elder has been made to serve the younger; the first has become last. In a recent and excellent study of the first two chapters of Luke³ considerable attention has been given to this process known as *midrash*, that is to say the scrutiny of ancient texts for the benefit of a new situation. It is well known that early in the post-Exilic period this organisation of old materials for a theological or apologetic purpose was already an entrenched method.⁴ At the root of it all is the conviction that the

¹ K. Rahner, *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, XLII, 1954, p. 492

² P. Benoit, *Revue Biblique*, 1958, p. 428

³ R. Laurentin, *Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II*, Paris 1957

⁴ cf. R. Bloch, *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, art. Midrash

word of God is living and valid for all times and applicable to all situations. Those who used this method were not at all concerned—as we are too much concerned—to analyse the conscious meaning of the ancient sacred author from whom they borrowed. In a sense the words were his property no longer—they had gone forth to perch wherever God made the dry land appear. And the New Testament in its turn takes up this tradition : it is confident of a God-given event to which the old God-given words cannot but be applicable. Its purpose in making use of this device may be apologetic, as in Matthew's Infancy narrative, or possibly (a theology with a conciliatory purpose) to comfort the converted, as in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but there is no doubt that Luke's purpose is wholly theological, and it is this theology we wish to examine. Since this is our aim, we need not attempt to assess the quantity of cold fact behind Luke's narrative ; the sacred author is interpreting a situation and our main business is to arrive at his mind. But it should be said, in passing, that the literary form he has chosen is by no means that of pure fiction : *midrash* does not invent, it investigates ; it assumes a datum and seeks its significance.¹ We are free to question whether Luke is giving Mary's *ipsissima verba* when he writes : May it be done to me as you have said, or, How can this be done because man I do not know ? We are still more free to reduce the pictorial element in, for example, the angel's apparition—though indeed it is not Luke's fault if we have exaggerated it. But we are not free to assert that the sacred author has misread the situation ; there is a formal teaching here in an inspired theological source.

It might be remarked also that from the purely theological point of view the date of the Lucan Infancy narrative is only of importance in tracing the development of revelation. After all, what comes last in our present gospel story, the Resurrection, was the first in the evangelist's concern and the stimulant of penetration into all that preceded it. Theological thinking and writing travelled in an opposite direction to the historical sequence, passing from Resurrection to Transfiguration to Baptism to Annunciation. It is not surprising if the interest in Mary's function is relatively late in the New Testament period and that the Infancy narratives are the product of reflection. Indeed, what at first sight might seem to cut us off from the earliest historical evidences—though this is far from being the case²—becomes

¹ J. Coppens, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 1957, p. 733, is uneasy about the term *midrash* in connexion with Luke 1-2 ; he fears that it is too strong and may mislead.

² The argument for an ancient Hebrew source (e.g. P. Winter, *New Testament Studies*, 1954, pp. 111-21) is impressive, though not conclusive (cf. P. Benoit, *New Testament Studies*, 1957, pp. 169-94). That Mary herself was ultimately a source of

an immeasurable theological gain. For the product of inspired reflection is to be preferred to the detail of inspired chronicle and allows, I should say it demands, closer literary analysis and a more profound examination. In these circumstances we should be very slow to accuse an exegesis of being too subtle.

After this long, but not unnecessary, preamble we may at last come to Luke's Infancy narrative itself. It has long been noticed that we have here a picture in two panels: the Baptist and Jesus.¹ There are two annunciations by Gabriel, two births, two circumcisions, two impositions of name. Each story ends with very similar words: The child grew and was strengthened in spirit; Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and man. But there is contrast, too. For Elizabeth, however great her own son is to be, Mary is 'the mother of my lord.' The contrast is most notably brought out in the fashion of the two births: Elizabeth conceives a son in her old age but Mary conceives virginally. It reaches its climax in the titles of the two children: Prophet of the Most High, Son of the Most High. In short, Luke's attention is focused on the one whom the Baptist in later years was to declare 'greater than I' and the evangelist establishes this perspective right from the beginning, and since it *is* the beginning, Mary is involved.

Mary's situation is not unlike that of Daniel who 'kept silent and sought to understand the vision' (Dan. 8:27), and indeed it seems certain that Luke is inviting the reader to think of Daniel. It is only in Daniel that the angel Gabriel appears, nowhere else in the Old Testament, and these are Gabriel's words:

Seventy weeks have been decreed
for your race and for the Holy City. . . .
to bring in everlasting justice,
to accomplish vision and prophecy,
to anoint the holy of holies. (Dan. 9:24)

Gabriel's reappearance in Luke is certainly significant; it suggests that the seventy weeks are up, that the time is fulfilled (Luke uses the word five times in these two chapters)² and the holy of holies must be anointed. It is Gabriel's business to announce this to Mary. Now the ambiguity of Daniel's 'holy of holies' is well known,³ it can stand for holy place or priest. Luke seems deliberately to prefer the personal reference when, instead of writing 'therefore the child shall be called Son of God,' he gives us the awkward sentence, 'therefore the child

¹ e.g. M.-J. Lagrange, *Revue Biblique*, 1914, pp. 199-202

² Luke 1:23, 57; 2:6, 21, 22

³ cf. *Bible de Jérusalem*, note ad. loc.

Luke's information seems certain; cf. Luke 2:10, 51 and the private character of the Annunciation.

shall be holy, shall be called Son of God.' One might go further and find that the evangelist sees a point in the seventy weeks also,¹ for if we accept the conventional thirty days to a month, the six months of Elizabeth's pregnancy before the Visitation, plus our Lady's own nine months, plus the forty days that elapsed before the climactic Presentation, we reach Daniel's figure of 490 days. But here, it may be, we are going too far; Luke himself speaks of five months in connexion with Elizabeth (1:24) and it is *in the course of* the sixth that Mary visits her. We may therefore discountenance this ingenious calculation but the substantial parallel still remains. To Daniel who 'kept these things in his heart' (Dan. 7:28) Gabriel appeared to declare the fulness of time; to Mary who 'kept all these things in her heart' (Luke 2:51) Gabriel appeared to announce that the time was fulfilled. For the first revelation God chose a man after his own heart (cf. Dan. 9:23), for the second he chose a maiden, an obedient handmaid of the Lord.

But it is a commonplace that the first two chapters of Luke are a tissue of Biblical reminiscence. If anyone doubts it he may glance down the margins of the *Bible de Jérusalem* where he will find seventy Old Testament references, and the list is not exhaustive. Now if this is true of the peripheral material, it should be at least equally true of the heart which is Gabriel's annunciation to Mary. And in fact at least three texts compete for the privilege of being Luke's source²; of these the two short triumphant messianic psalms with which the oracles of Sophonias ended³ come nearest to the angel's message:

Cry out for joy, daughter of Sion,
Shout for gladness, O Israel.
Rejoice . . . O daughter of Jerusalem,
Yahweh is king of Israel in your midst (lit : in your womb) . . .

On that day they shall say to Jerusalem :
Fear not, O Sion. . . .
Yahweh your God is in your midst (lit : in your womb),
a mighty Saviour (Heb. : *yoshia'*).

Before we quote Luke's text we must recall a point made by Père Lyonnet twenty years ago⁴ in respect of the translation: *Ave Maria, Hail Mary*. For Luke's *chaire* is not a polite introduction, a 'good-morning,' translating the Hebrew *shalom*. This last is customarily

¹ E. Burrows, S.J., *The Gospel of the Infancy*, London 1940, pp. 41-2. Laurentin, op. cit., favours the view.

² Soph. 3:14-17; Joel 2:21-7; Zach. 9:9-10. A schematic 'synopsis of contacts' is to be found in Laurentin, op. cit., p. 66, footnote (8).

³ The present ending of *Sophonias* seems to reflect the Exilic period (Soph. 3:18b-20).

⁴ S. Lyonnet, 'Chaire Kecharitomene,' *Biblica*, xx, 1939, pp. 131ff. The point is taken up by Laurentin. Audet, in *Revue Biblique*, 1956, p. 357, evidently regrets Osty's 'Salut!' in the *Bible de Jérusalem* translation of Luke 1:28.

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rendered *eirene*, Peace ! What we have just translated 'Cry out for joy' is, in the Septuagint, *chaire sphodra*. The word *chaire*, therefore, has a strong sense, it is an invitation to rejoice in the prospect of messianic times. We may now consider Gabriel's message :

Rejoice, *kecharitomene*,
 The Lord (Yahweh) is with you. . . .
 Fear not, O Mary . . .
 You shall conceive in your womb
 and bear a son.
 And you shall give him the name :
 Yahweh the Saviour (Heb. : *yeshua*).

To confirm the likeness to the Sophonias text, it has been rightly pointed out that with Zachary Gabriel is content with 'your wife shall bear you a son,' whereas with Mary he uses a tautology, uncharacteristic of Luke, that has its best explanation in the reference back to Sophonias which, in any case, it is hard to refuse.

To what purpose is Luke's deliberate assumption of the Old Testament text ? Clearly, of course, to signal the advent of messianic times. But may we draw any further conclusions ? Does Luke want us to consider Mary more closely ? If this question means : Does Luke want us to contemplate Mary in isolation and for her own sake ? the answer is plainly 'No.' It would distort the whole perspective of the *euaggelion*. We cannot judge Elizabeth or Simeon or Anna except in relation to the Child ; we cannot judge Mary either. Nevertheless, as this relationship is less or more intimate, the focus and magnification of the related figure is sharper and greater as it comes nearer to the Child. Now it is surely not incautious to suppose that Luke is thinking of Mary as the daughter of Sion of whom Sophonias is speaking : Rejoice, daughter of Sion ; Rejoice, *kecharitomene* ; Fear not, O Sion ; Fear not, O Mary. Sion, your God is in your womb, a mighty saviour ; You shall conceive in your womb and bear a son and call him Yahweh the saviour. Mary is the locus of God's salvation, the place from which his active Word was to go : *The Law will go forth from Sion, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem*. But the prophetic passage we have quoted is introduced by an oracle on the Remnant of Israel, the residue that survives, ever diminishing, after a series of trials at the hand of history, a remnant in which (as the progressive revelation of the Old Testament instructs us) membership is achieved by humility and complete submission to God :

In your midst I shall leave
 only a people that is humble and lowly,
 looking to Yahweh for its protection,
 the remnant of Israel. (Soph. 3:12)

Following this reductive tendency of the Old Testament doctrine, the New finds its ultimate goal in one who is the ideal Remnant :

The promises were addressed to Abraham
and to his seed.
Scripture does not say 'to his seeds,'
as if thinking of several,
but indicates only one : 'to his seed,'
that is to say, Christ. (Gal. 3:16)

Had Luke been asked to identify the Remnant he would surely have pointed to all the humble figures of his Infancy narrative who, he makes it clear, were eagerly awaiting the consolation of Israel : Zachary, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna—and of these Mary with her canticle of humility is evidently, for Luke, at once the humblest and the greatest. He would not disagree with Paul : the summit of the pyramid is Christ but the single stone beneath the summit is Mary. The daughter of Zion on the threshold of the latter days brings forth only one child ; the daughter is no longer many but one. Given this descent from the collective to the individual within a literary tradition in which the collectivity and the individual tend to fuse, it may be after all, though one has long doubted it, that 'the woman clothed with the sun' of Apoc. 12 is a truly polyvalent symbol in the Johannine manner, referring simultaneously, in the literal sense, to the Old and New Israel with its crown of twelve tribes and twelve apostles, and also to Mary, the ideal Zion, mother of the one who gave power to all who believed in him to become sons of God.¹

If such is indeed Luke's mind, the way is open—though it will need to be trod carefully—to a collective interpretation of other texts in which Mary appears. In the Magnificat, for example, Mary's 'my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour' will suggest Israel's canticle in Hab. 3:18 : 'I will be glad in the Lord, rejoice in God my Saviour' ; 'he has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid' will recall : 'Yahweh has looked upon our lowliness and brought us out of Egypt' (Deut. 26:7) : and the 'handmaid of the Lord' will find its counterpart in Israel's proudest title, the '*ebed Yahweh*, the servant of the Lord, which Mary herself uses (Luke 1:54) when in her canticle she passes so naturally, but to us oddly, from herself to all Israel. It may even be that Simeon's 'a sword shall pass through your soul' is meant to echo the sentence of Ezechiel (14:17) : 'a sword shall pass through the land (of Israel).'² It is true that the further we advance in this process the more extravagant it seems to become, but the practice of

¹ cf. L. Cerfaux, 'La Vierge dans l'Apocalypse,' *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 1955, pp. 21-33

² cf. Laurentin, op. cit., pp. 89-90

pirouettes may teach us to walk gracefully and to write poetry may perfect our prose ; if we explore all the possibilities of a text it will at least help us to appreciate the probabilities and identify the certainties.

Among the probabilities one is tempted to rank a profound and technical sense attributed to Gabriel's *episkiasai* : the power of the Most High will *overshadow* you.¹ It is suggested that the daughter of Sion is thus characterised not as mother, though the ideas are not unconnected, but as the home of a great presence. The word is unusual (four times in the Greek Old Testament) and appears to have its most technical meaning in Exod. 40:34f. :

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Assembly
and the glory of Yahweh filled the Dwelling.
And Moses could not enter the Tent of Assembly,
because of the cloud that *overshadowed* it
and of the glory of Yahweh with which the Dwelling was filled.

This 'cloud,' sign of the divine presence, is a frequent Old Testament symbol ; we meet it again on the mount of Transfiguration, and a voice speaks from it : This is my beloved son. If we accept this Exodus reference in Luke's words, there is no doubt that Mary is presented to us as the shrine of the divine presence, the ark of God's covenant. Perhaps we may go further, though here with much more caution. The story of David's reception of the Ark (2 Sam. 6:2-11) may lie behind Luke's account of the Visitation, as Fr Burrows suggested twenty years ago.² If we accept this, David's 'How is it that the Ark of Yahweh should come to me ?' is deliberately echoed by Elizabeth's 'How is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me ?' ; David's 'skipping' (unusual word) before the ark is matched by the Baptist's 'skipping' at the sound of Mary's voice, and the ark's three-month stay with Obed-Edom is paralleled by Mary's three months with Elizabeth. *Qui potest capere, capiat.*

We have shown with more or less probability and more or less conviction how the Old Testament text has been summoned to the help of the New. We may now ask if there is any Old Testament *literary form* that can come to our assistance ; has Luke been guided by the Old Testament in this field also ? We cannot forego the question even if we refuse the answer, for the identification of literary form is the first business of the interpreter, it is the outer key to the author's mind. The question has been most competently discussed in a recent article, the value of which is not diminished by a conclusion which

¹ cf. Laurentin, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-9. Lyonnet, 'Le récit de l'Annonciation,' *L'Ami du Clergé*, 1956, pp. 43-4. E. Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp. 107ff.

² Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp. 47f.

may seem to many, and to myself, I confess, extravagant.¹ The author distinguishes the three literary forms of dream, message, prophecy, and points out that in all three the initiative is God's, that the message, unlike the dream, involves dialogue since it is delivered in waking hours, that again unlike the dream the message is considered clear as soon as the messenger departs. The parallel chosen for the message to Mary is taken from the annunciation to Gideon in Jg. 6:11-24, which we abbreviate here :

Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress
to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of Yahweh
appeared to him and said :
'Yahweh is with you, valiant hero !'
'With all respect, my Lord,' answered Gideon,
'If Yahweh is with us, how is it that all this is
happening to us ?' . . .
And the angel of Yahweh said to him :
'Go . . . and save Israel from the hand of Midian.'
'How am I to save Israel . . . I am the least in my father's house,'
said Gideon, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, give me
a sign that it is you who speak.'

It will be noticed that the angel's 'Yahweh is with you' is not a mere greeting nor even a compliment but a promise—or rather, for the point to me does not seem unimportant—a declaration of present fact with future consequences. It will be observed, too, that Gideon is not addressed by his own name ; he is given a name, 'Valiant Hero,' that evidently does not recall his past history but indicates the part he is now to assume. Gideon then asks, 'How can this be ?' and a sign is given him. Mary's situation is strangely like. Gideon is chosen for a messianic deliverance, Mary is chosen for *the* messianic deliverance (Luke 1:31-3). The first word of the angel's message is in each case a presage of this liberation, for there is little doubt that the word we translate 'Hail' sounds the messianic note (cf. *supra*). Nor does Gabriel use Mary's name at the outset, as he did not use Gideon's ; instead, he greets her with a name of portent : it was 'Valiant Hero' before, it is *Kecharitomene* now. Mary asks, 'How can this be ?' and a sign, though unasked (and in this she shows more than Gideon's simplicity), is given her.

The first and most general conclusion one might draw from this parallel is by no means the least important, and here is the place for a remark to be made which has been made often and still needs to be made often. Behind the earliest sources of our Christian doctrine, and therefore behind our Mary doctrine, there lies the Semitic mind which does not address itself to the definition of being but to the

¹ J.-P. Audet, 'L'Annonce à Marie,' *Revue Biblique*, 1956, pp. 346-74

significance of action. We shall have to be careful, therefore, when we use the Greek word 'theology' that we strip it of all its speculative relationships. Our Biblical theology is not speculative but functional. The difference may be simply illustrated by contrasting the expressions, 'the second person of the Trinity' and 'the word of God'; the first is an attempt at definition, the second describes a function; the first is Greek, the second Semitic. Now if this is true of the central figure of Biblical revelation, it will be most certainly true of all the others. We shall not expect, then, to find in our early sources an *analysis* of Mary's dignity—much less a treatise on her personal sanctity—but a statement of her function and a description of her action. Now in the Annunciation narrative we are, if I may put it so, at two removes from the Mary doctrine as we know it today. There is this first remove we have just spoken of, and there is a second remove that is the result of the literary form of messianic annunciation. For in this second, it is not the personality of the messianic instrument that occupies the true centre but, in Gideon's case, the liberating action of God, in Mary's the child who is to occupy once for all the throne of David—and as such may be called 'Son of the Most High' (Luke 1:32-3)—and who, furthermore, is to be 'Son of God' in a quite transcendental sense (Luke 1:35). It is, I hope, needless to say that one is not questioning our Lady's creaturely unrivalled holiness. For despite all the reserves we have made, it still remains clear even to the casual reader of Luke that Mary's own person has for him a special interest and stands out uniquely from its distinguished entourage: Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna; and Luke could not have given her greater praise than to put the *Magnificat* into her mouth. But when we are speaking of Mary in the Scriptures, the Scriptural emphasis must be preserved.

• These remarks have a particular application also. They have to do with a word we have so far refused to translate: the word *kecharitomene*. Père Audet, in the article I have mentioned, here gives us a timely warning. He deprecates a sentence like this, for example: 'The grace of which the Virgin is "full" is that which Paul speaks of in Eph. 1:6, the grace that makes us pleasing in the eyes of God . . . *kecharitomene* indicates a permanent state of possession of grace not in the physical but in the moral order.' And indeed this does seem to be approaching the word from the wrong end, as it were; it is as if we were to understand 'Peace to men of good-will' making the 'good-will' man's and not God's. In fact, *kecharitomene* (if we are to judge by the parallel with Gideon and from the situation as a whole) is a title conferred, a portentous name as Abraham's and Israel's and Peter's were, a name expressing a function allotted by God, not a compliment to Mary for the way she had qualified for that function.

The messianic 'Rejoice' is immediately followed by this word, and conveys to it its own messianic flavour; in two words Mary has the substance of the angel's message: there is to be a messianic deliverance and she is chosen for its instrument, she is *kecharitomene*, privileged; God's choice has fallen upon her. What came before this choice, what prompted it, Luke leaves us to conjecture only. It is true that such submission as Mary's is not the work of one day but of years. As for what came after the choice, the fourth Gospel will lift the curtain twice: the mother of the One was to become the mother of the many-in-the-One. But here in the Annunciation narrative Luke places the Messiah himself in the centre of the stage. Undoubtedly Mary is for him the queen-mother, the *gebirah*, or Great Lady, of Judah's court,¹ but his light is turned directly upon the King, whose mother it is Mary's highest privilege to be. Luke makes us aware of her, there on her throne in the fringe of the light, but she does not distract us—she never could—from her royal Son.

When we move from Luke's theological field on to the ground of chronicle we are much less at our ease. Once it has been established that we have to do with *midrash*, the quantity of 'cold fact' becomes a problem, though of relatively small importance as some would hold. It is many years now since Ladeuze very cautiously suggested that the *Magnificat* may not have been spoken by Mary at the time but towards the end of her life when she had meditated on all that had happened since her son's birth.² On the other hand, few scholars today would ascribe the canticle to Elizabeth and thus cripple the march of the narrative; nevertheless it is now considered a legitimately debatable question whether the *Magnificat* represents not Mary's *ipsissima verba* (as many of our Lord's own sayings are not) but an interpretation of her mind by Luke or by his source, or an adapted pre-existing Jewish hymn (Benoit) perhaps (P. Winter) of Maccabean origin. Or, to take another example, it may be argued that the famous 'How can this be done because man I do not know?' is a hinge-verse of Luke's designed to lead the reader from the Jewish messianism of the first half of Gabriel's message to the second half with its transcendental messianism. Those who hold that all these questions are secondary point out that the object of our search is the theology of the New Testament and not the chronicle of detail, an inspired interpretation of the facts which is for us a norm of faith and a seed of faith's growth. This is true, though it would be prudent to recall that the interpretation presupposes

¹ cf. Elizabeth's 'Mother of my lord,' i.e. of my lord the king (Cerfaux, *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux*, I, Gembloux 1954, p. 50. For the *gebirah* cf. R. de Vaux, *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, Paris 1958, pp. 180-2. In Solomon's reign Bathsheba was *gebirah*, and Solomon had her sit at his right hand (1 (3) Kg. 2:19).

² J. Coppens, art. cit., p. 731

certain facts that are to be interpreted. Among these facts the reader of Luke would be inclined to rank the state of Mary's mind not after the Resurrection but at the time of which we speak. Luke scrupulously observes it on more than one occasion when the reader may feel it is not particularly necessary for his theological purpose. 'As for Mary, she treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart'; 'The child's father and mother stood amazed at the things that were being said about him'; 'But they did not understand what he had said to them'; 'His mother stored up all these things in her heart.'¹ It is therefore difficult to believe that in the Annunciation narrative Luke presents Mary merely as a passive figure, a pivot for the angelic message, and not as a creature of flesh and blood, intelligence and will.

It may therefore be considered a legitimate question to ask what Mary's own reaction was to Gabriel's words. Are we to gather that she understood, for example, the subtle Old Testament allusion to the *shekinah*, or divine indwelling within her (a contested allusion even now, we must remember) and carried it to its full conclusion, the divinity of her son? Now the question is perhaps legitimate, as we have said, but is it well put? We have spoken of the functional nature of Semitic theology. Would Mary have asked, 'How shall I define the nature of this child'? Would she not ask rather (as she did), 'Where is he to come from?' and ask herself, 'What is he destined for?' The answer to the first came from Gabriel, to the second from Simeon also: 'You see this child? He is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, a sign that is denied.' It is true to say, to use our Greek terms, that the second person of the Blessed Trinity could have assumed an already constituted adult human nature, but if in fact (as Mary well knew) this new creature comes so uniquely from God, what is she to think of it but that it is like and unlike all others, uniquely related to God? A divine, privileged, private, unmentioned revelation is beyond the reach of the interpreter who has to be content to note that the mind of a young Jewish girl, even so near to God, could scarcely go further. And hers would be an intuitive and not a discursive theology—or rather she would learn by a series of intuitions which Luke hints at broadly enough, a series of which the Annunciation is first and greatest, intuitions sad and joyful, Cana, Cross, Resurrection, what it was to be the mother of such a child and what the child was whom she had mothered. Once again granted the legitimacy of the initial question, she could not possibly have misunderstood that she was to be mother of the Messiah, for the Messiah is defined by his function, but the perception of divinity in our formulated sense is quite another matter. Quite apart from the

¹ Luke 2:19, 33, 50, 51

inconceivability of daily intercourse between a creature and one known to be God (for imagination is no fair argument), we have no strictly exegetical proof that Mary did not grow as the Apostles grew to know her son as God's word, God's unique expression of himself, God's son with the incommunicable name of Lord, only when the Resurrection had solved all riddles.

But what of the second half of Mary's mind? How did she understand herself, and by that I mean her function? This perception of hers is interpreted to us primarily in the great 'Fiat' of Luke 1:38 by which she establishes her position in the divine redemptive plan, a position theologians will discuss until the end of time and which the Church's own living will increasingly declare. But this is the great conclusion and climax to which the dialogue sweeps only after its momentary rest and hesitation that sets it on its way again: 'How can this be done, for man I do not know?' These four words, *epei andra ou ginosko*, have provoked volumes of discussion for which, it must be firmly stated, there is room. For if we may speak of 'tradition' in this matter, we must realise that we are speaking not of a dogmatic tradition but of an interpretational one which, moreover, cannot be traced back further than Ambrose. We are therefore driven back to the text. The theories range from 'interpolation' to 'vow.' Interpolation we need not consider: our business is to interpret the text as it stands which, moreover, is a powerfully forged unity. The 'vow' (or, more cautiously, the 'intention') of virginity theory is the view of many Catholic scholars with not a few notable exceptions.¹ Now it is not true that the opposition to the 'vow' hypothesis is based on a refusal to accept a private revelation made to Mary before the Annunciation, though it should be observed that an exegetical position is weakened by conjecture. The main difficulty is not of supposing a revelation but of accounting for the betrothal entered into before the Annunciation despite an existing vow of virginity made (unless we suppose an Annunciation before the Annunciation) quite blindly. In the hypothesis of a pious 'intention' of virginity with no private revelation required, the betrothal is still more strange. On the other hand, what is Mary's difficulty if she is betrothed and intends to marry in the ordinary way?

Père Audet's solution is surprising and one hesitates to accept it. We must re-translate *epei andra ou ginosko*: 'How can this be done, for in that case I must not know man?' The apparent artificiality of this use

¹ On various views cf. P. F. Ceuppens, *De Mariologia Biblica*, Turin & Rome 1951, pp. 68-74; U. Holzmeister, *Verbum Domini*, 1939, p. 74; M. Zerwick, *Notes ad usum privatum*, 1955. The last, pp. 123f., makes the objection referred to in the sentence following.

of *epei*, or at least the seeming overloading of the word, is justified by appeal to the Pauline use.¹ Why Mary should say such a thing must be explained not from a reconstruction of the 'facts' by conjecture (though one may feel that we are dangerously near it) but by an inquiry into Luke's mind as betrayed by his use of narrative, identical in literary form, of the annunciation to Gideon (Jg. 6:11-24). Gideon as he threshed, so unusually, not on the exposed hill-top open to any Midianite observer, had Israel's liberation very much on his mind; to this mentality the angel was the answer, for the literary form of annunciation, like that of prophecy and dream, presents God's rejoinder to man's thought. Gideon's objection is: 'I am the least in my father's house'; Mary's is *epei andra ou ginoko*. Mary belonged to that expectant group which Luke describes; she too was longing to see 'the Christ of the Lord,' but she knew and had ruminated the prophecy of Is. 7:14. At present she was no more than betrothed, she could be the *'almah* of Isaias, but she was betrothed with a view to marriage—and this was evidently now excluded if she understood Gabriel and Isaias correctly. She therefore replies quite naturally, 'How can this be done, for in that case I must not know man?' (i.e. get married). Now if one disagrees with this view it is certainly not because an intention to marry on the part of Mary is unthinkable. We must not confuse Mary's mind before the Annunciation with her mind after it. That she was in fact always a virgin is a datum of our faith and perhaps has some textual support in our Lord's final committal of his mother not to a brother but to John. It may be that Luke represents her as perceiving the force of an angelic reference to a divine indwelling, a contact with the divine which excluded the close human relation we speak of.² But it is not necessary to assume all this. After all, the knowledge that God had chosen her for such a purpose would surely fill her with a sense of sacredness such as a woman would understand and a man like Joseph respect. But to declare the opinion impious which holds that Mary, as yet unaware of her high destiny, intended marriage would betray an outlook far from robust and reverent. No, one's hesitation when confronted with Audet's view is linguistic, together with some misgiving about Mary's (or Luke's) conjectured reflection on the *'almah* oracle. Somewhere behind the *epei andra ou ginoko* must lie a Hebrew *chi lo yada'ti ish*, or *chi enenni yada'ath ish*, which could scarcely bear the weight Luke is supposed to have put upon it. And as for Mary's meditation of Isaias,

¹ 1 Cor. 5:10; 7:14 etc. To many the usage will seem too erudite within the literary style of the Infancy narrative.

² Abstinence was prescribed by Moses before the cloud descended on Sinai (Ex. 19:15f.; and cf. 1 Sam. (Kg.) 21:5; Lev. 22:3).

one feels that Luke will have left too much to the intelligence of his readers.

Despite Lagrange's rejection¹ and Laurentin's casual dismissal of it,² the opinion of Cajetan, taken up by Gunkel, seems the most natural one. If we may take Audet's own example from Gideon, it appears clear that the angel's word is immediately operative—as one might expect God's word to be; that very night Gideon gave the signal for revolt. We may assume the same for Mary; the delay, a literary delay after all, is negligible; we are surely meant to think, and she is surely presented as thinking, that the conception awaits only her *Fiat*. Gabriel's future tense, 'You shall conceive,' is no more future than his 'You shall be dumb' addressed to Zachary and simultaneously effective; the sense of Mary's 'I know not man' is 'I am not in the married state.'

We hope that all that has been said has put Mary where she would want to be, that is to say in the heart of God's plan to save all men. If we have turned the light from her to what surrounds her and what is within her (as if this were possible), it is only to see how, in the Psalmist's words, *mirabilis est Deus in sanctis suis*, God is glorious in his sanctuary. We have only stolen Mary's own way: The Lord has looked upon the worthlessness of his handmaid. Even Christ, in the end, will present his kingdom to the Father, and God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

I should like to quote a Biblical scholar who is not a Catholic:

She is the one who bears Christ within her; but she has no desire to keep him for herself for she is, after all, the one who gives him to the world. In this way she, like the Church, plays her part in what may be called God's 'conspiracy' to save the world, and she may be honoured as the woman who, in all secrecy, set Christ among men, Christ in whom the kingdom of God is present. What the Church will be until Christ's return, she has already been: the smuggler of heaven.³

It is strange how one can never think or write of Mary without being forced back to an inspection of foundations—apologetical, exegetical, theological. There is something provocative about her. She provokes whole volumes on the development of dogma,⁴ re-examinations of the Redemption doctrine, questions of interpretational procedure (as we have just seen). But above all she is that historical person who is the terminus—and the beginning—of God's climactic 'interference' in human history. She stands stubbornly, a

¹ *Évangile selon Saint Luc*, note to Luke 1:34. The author concedes 'exegetical probability' to the view and underlines its orthodoxy, quoting St Ambrose.

² *op. cit.*, p. 178

³ J.-J. von Allmen, *Vocabulaire Biblique*, p. 198

⁴ e.g. C. Dillenschneider, *Le Sens de la Foi et le Progrès Dogmatique du Mystère Marial*, Rome 1954

virgin with child, asserting that 'interference' in herself. There is a demythicisation which is in principle legitimate and certainly fashionable. The Church has not defined the limits to which it may go, but Mary is there as the fortified place past which it must not. She remains the guardian of the historical Christ.

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SOME NOTES ON THE SAGA OF SAMSON AND THE HEROIC MILIEU

The acute reader of the Sacred Scriptures can recognise without any great effort the heroic style when he meets it even if, as is usually the case, he does not pause to analyse it. There is a greater tightness, economy and tension about the writing; he feels a quicker pulse beating, a more instant march of the narrative. This 'large utterance' has, too, its great moments and is built around them: the paradox of the death and triumph of Samson at the feast of Dagan, the lad David holding up the head of the Philistine giant, the night march across the Jordan of the men of Jabesh with the mutilated body of Saul, the funeral pyre burning in the night. We can say that the heroic narrative is, by definition, that which captures and puts on record the great moment.

The great moment is made possible in the first place and, in a way, conventionalised by what contemporary society approves or disapproves—it depends, that is, on the organisation of society and the current values which make it what it is. With the age with which we are dealing—that of the great race migrations about 1200 B.C. and after—society is geared to war. It is the age in which Ugarit and Karkemish, Hattush and Troy were gutted in the track of the invading hordes from the north; it is also the age which sees the tribes of Israel fighting their way up into the cultivated land-belt for their place in the sun. The stresses and strains of that age provided experience which left an indelible impression on the memory of those who took part in it, an impression which, in the course of time, takes body in the storytelling which went to make the Iliad and the epic of the Philistine wars. This reminds us that the divisions which we introduce into our literary and historical studies of that age—Biblical, Semitic, 'classical,' pre-Homeric, etc.—can lead us to misrepresent the real state of the question. Communications between the Aegean and the Syrian coast, between Cyprus and Ugarit, between Egypt and Crete were not