ECUMENICAL TRENDS

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Mary as Ecumenical Enabler

By David Carter

In 1967, a Roman Catholic layman, Martin Gillett, and a few ecumenical associates founded a society, the *Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. They were convinced, in a way that seemed to many at the time counter-intuitive, that study of Mary and devotion to her could help transcend the deep divisions within the Christian Church.[1]

Gillett and his co-founders succeeded brilliantly in one sense, but not in another. They did seek and obtain valuable scholarly studies from eminent theologians in a variety of traditions, where little attention had been paid to the Mother of Christ within living memory.[2] Yet the membership of the society remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic. A few Orthodox joined, a few other free church people, and a few Anglicans who were not of the more catholic tendency – including the Irishman, William Bridcut, who spoke movingly on the humility of Mary but also added that Mary was currently doing nothing, just sleeping the sleep of the just awaiting the promised final resurrection. However, in the wider Church, at any rate in those traditions where Gillett hoped for a re-receiving of contemplation of Mary and her discipleship of her divine Son, little has happened!

The Society still exists, however, obstacles to its mission notwithstanding. The early work of the ESBVM has been complemented by four important ecumenical dialogues since the 1980s. They are, in date order: the US Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary* (1990); the British Methodist-Catholic dialogue, *Mary, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness* (1995); the (unofficial) Group des Dombes francophone dialogue, *Marie dans le Dessein de Dieu et la Communion des Saints* [Mary in the Plan of God and the Communion of Saints] (1998); and finally, the ARCIC document, *Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005).

The Roman Catholic Church, moreover – through both official magisterial teaching and the work of theologians – has striven to encourage dialogue with the rest of Christendom in a way that recognises why, to varying degrees, other traditions have found difficulty with Catholic marian piety and, particularly, with the marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950. The key statement to cite is that in *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 8, where it is made crystal clear that "we have but one Mediator, Christ, that all the saving influences of Mary flow from the divine pleasure... [and] rest on his mediation and depend entirely on it and draw all their power from it." We are also assured that "in no way is the immediate union of the faithful with Christ impeded" – this very sentence witnesses to Roman Catholic acceptance that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, as *individual* believers, through Christ to the Father, is acknowledged

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David Carter is a church historian and has been a member of the British Catholic-Methodist dialogue and the Roman Catholic-World Methodist Council dialogue. He has been a frequent contributor to Ecumenical Trends.

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alongside the more traditional Catholic stress on the *corporate* royal priesthood of the entire Body.

Pope John Paul II, in *Ut Unum Sint*, identified marian doctrine as an area in which there was still much to be done in ecumenical dialogue (at this stage only the American Lutheran-Catholic dialogue had been published).[3] Pope Francis has issued no detailed mariology but (as I will touch on below) his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and his belief in her relevance to the life of the faithful are obvious.

One of the most useful Catholic contributions to dialogue was made by Fr. Rene Laurentin, a peritus on mariology at Vatican II. At the ESBVM Congress of 1981, he admitted that the witness of the New Testament to Mary is varied, that Paul and the other epistle writers say nothing of her, and that it is primarily on Luke and John that we depend for the trajectory of pondering on the Mary who, herself "kept all these things in her heart and pondered them" (Luke 2:19, 51). He touches on a key Protestant concern when he mentions that the western liturgy is very reserved in mentioning her and faithfully maintains the tradition that Christian worship is worship of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit alone. He stresses that invocation of Mary, asking for her prayers for us or others, "is no more than a minor, secondary, complementary form of prayer, related not to the worship of God but to communication within the communion of saints."[4]

This last is a vital, helpful, and indeed, in Catholic-Protestant relationships, a very healing and reconciling statement. I admit to feeling that it seems inappropriate when Catholics interpolate a Hail Mary into the liturgy rather than saving it for private devotion or use in a prayer meeting. The question of what is liturgically acceptable was settled by the fathers of Nicea II in 787 when they distinguished between the *latreia* (worship) due to the Blessed Trinity alone and the *dulia* (respect) that is due to those whom God has called and given to us as faithful examples of Christian discipleship. The Council did allow for a higher degree of respect to Mary, *hyperdulia*, but this is still not worship. Mary is a creature, albeit one with a unique vocation and unique engracing by the Holy Spirit.

On this unique status of Mary balances the promise of an ecumenical consensus on the role of Mary in the divine-human economy. Orthodox Christians may, for example, dispute the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception for its overemphasis on relief from original sin, and Orthodox and Protestants together may question the right of Rome to define doctrine without either clear biblical foundation or the consent of the rest of the *oikoumenē*, but none would dispute that God never calls to any particular vocation without supplying the grace needed, and none would imagine Him unable "to accomplish in us abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20).

I was once told by a prominent Methodist liturgist that little was said about Mary in Scripture. My friend, the late Rev. David Butler, responded when I told him this that even less is said about the eucharist in Scripture, but we still do not dispute its importance. What little is said should be taken seriously by all in the *oikoumenē* insofar as we deem the written Word of God to be of the highest importance. We would also all echo the hope recorded at Vatican II, in the *Decree on Revelation*, that the Church "constantly moves forward towards the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."[5]

Let us now consider how the Church, across all its multiple traditions, can learn from Mary how to grow, helped by her example of faithfulness to Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, into that unity that Christ wills for her as the Bride, one and spotless. I want to look at what Catholic theologians sometimes call the marian dimension of the Church (as opposed to the petrine one which relates to structures of ministry and connection). Catholic theologians are quite right to stress that there is an intimate connection between the motherhood of Mary and the motherhood of the Church. Calvin recognised this, arguing that he cannot have God as his Father who will not have the Church as his mother. Calvin also held Mary in the highest esteem even though he also opposed invocation of the saints *as such* on account of the abuses that had been associated with it.

Elizabeth Johnson, the American Catholic feminist theologian, stresses that we must understand Mary in her exact historical context, much easier for us now to comprehend than for so many medieval and later generations who did not have the knowledge of context that modern

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historical, literary, and archaeological research can supply. Johnson's book, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (2003), shows that Mary's acceptance of her own lowliness was no exaggerated or false modesty. Mary was typical of most of her contemporaries, living in Galilee in villages where the men were largely peasant farmers or craftsmen, eking out a living which was little above basic subsistence level. They were oppressed by taxation for the benefit of the Roman Emperor or his local puppet rulers and, in addition, had to pay taxes which went to the Temple authorities. Mary was probably illiterate, though that did not prevent her from knowing the story of her own people, of its ups and downs, of its divine deliverance from slavery in Egypt, of its return from exile in Babylon, of its messianic hopes and promises. She would have learned this from both her own parents and the local synagogue. The Magnificat testifies to her knowledge.[6]

If Mary had ever, before the visit of the angel, wondered who might be the mother of the Messiah, she would almost certainly have assumed that it would not be anyone of her lowly status, from a backwater like Nazareth. However, when the totally unexpected happened, her faith in God's salvation at work in her people's history and in the promises of the God that had guided it helped her to make the response for which the whole of that history had been a preparation. Her fiat, her response, was the culmination, the crowning blessing, fulfilling everything for which the faithful remnant, the *anawim* or pious poor, had always prepared and prayed. It is with good reason that the Orthodox speak not just of Mary as the Mother of God but also of her own ancestors as the "holy, just, and righteous ancestors of God." In her, all the Spirit-empowered responses of the prophets, of the just kings like Josiah, all the promises and hopes of a reversal of oppression and the coming of a kingdom of perfect justice, came together.

In Orthodox churches, two icons stand to either side of the gates of the sanctuary, both pointing to Christ. One is of John the Baptist, the forerunner, the other of Mary – but whereas they are both witnesses to Christ, John is the less important. He is still the greatest under the Old Covenant whereas Mary belongs uniquely to *both* covenants. She will be present at the two stages of the final inauguration of the New Covenant, at the foot of the Cross and then at the final coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Indeed, as the late Cardinal Suenens stressed, Mary was the first charismatic.

Suenens was, not least, a key advocate of the charismatic movement when it spilled over into the Roman Catholic Church from the early Pentecostal churches. He and other Roman Catholics have recognised its significance both for the vitality of the *oikoumenē* and for ecumenical cooperation. Arguably, the most important dialogue for the future of the entire Church will be that between the two largest bodies in Christendom, the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal communities, now reckoned to number about 600 million globally. Can a consideration of the role of Mary, as engraced and enabled by the Spirit, contribute to this? There is no doubt that Pope Francis earnestly desires all charismatics, both catholic and non-catholic, to work together as vibrant communities of evangelical witness and service.[7] Some Pentecostals, such as Francis' friend Pastor Traettino in Italy, and Cecil Robeck, the American leader of the dialogue from the Pentecostal side, are strongly in favor of this.

I referred earlier to the title of the British Catholic-Methodist dialogue on Mary, *Mary Sign of Grace: Faith and Holiness*. Mary is hailed by the angel as *kechairotomenē*, that is, not simply engraced but lavished with grace, overwhelmed by grace.[8] What she expresses in her song of rejoicing is not the acknowledgement of such graces as she may already have had, but rather the sheer overwhelming wonder of God's grace so freely lavished on her as His choice of the person who should bring His eternal Son into the world, a choice which showed the extraordinary way in which His mercy was indeed over all His works, even to the extent of choosing one as lowly as her to use and share her flesh to bring about the fulfilment of all His promises and purposes.

Figures as significant and disparate as Martin Luther and Pope Francis recognize and celebrate the exceptional quality of Mary's pure goodness in the midst of her lowly, very ordinary station. Luther realized this in such statements as his catechetical reference to the Magnificat: "Since then, it is [God's] manner to regard things which are in the depths and disregarded... He has regarded me, a poor, despised, and lowly maiden... I must acknowledge it all to be of pure grace and goodness and not of any merit or worthiness."[9] Francis, in turn, stresses that Mary was "a normal girl. Nothing was exceptional in her life. She worked, went shopping, helped her Son, helped her husband. She lived normally, just like the people around her."[10]

However, it is Charles Wesley who perhaps best captures the spirit of Mary. His hymn, "Behold the Servant of the Lord," was not written as specifically marian, yet it undoubtedly expresses that spirit that she established for all time as paradigmatic of the true spirit of Christian worship and diaconal service of others:

> Behold the servant of the Lord
> I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
> To hear and keep thy every word,
> To prove and do they perfect will,
> Joyful from my own works to cease,
> Glad to fulfil all righteousness.[11]

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The last two lines sum up the entire content of the *Joint Declaration on Justification*. They spell out succinctly what subsequent theological dialogue caused Roman Catholics and Lutherans to work through in full and fruitful detail, so fruitful that it has since also been accepted by Methodists (2006), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2018), and the Anglican Communion (2019).[12] Truly, the Magnificat represents a key moment in Mary's ministry as ecumenical enabler for a future which she could never envisaged at the time, even though her reference later in the Song to the reversal of all the injustices known to her world shows that she had confidence in a God that would grant this eventual reversal in the coming kingdom.

Charles Wesley sees the joy of Mary in what the later Wesleyan fathers were to call "the true, the experimental religion": the religion in which, amidst an improvisational wrestling for understanding, deeper truth is discovered. In similar struggle and exploration, many of her later spiritual sisters were to be "true mothers in the new Israel." Pope Francis captured (at a papal mass on January 1, 2019) the amazement then expressed as an abiding experience for all the faithful as they seek to live in the experience which Mary shares with her sisters and brothers in faith: "Today is also a day to be amazed by the Mother of God. God appears as a little child held in the arms of a woman who feeds her Creator... God rests on the lap of his mother, and from there he pours out on humanity a new tenderness." Francis spoke then of the way in which Mary "generates in her children the amazement of faith because faith is an encounter, not a religion. Without amazement, life becomes dull and routine, and so it is with faith."

Mary's moment of triumph is, then, also one of amazement. We must remember that Mary, while obedient, also remained puzzled and questioning. The angel had told her that her baby had a unique place in God's plan of salvation, yet she still felt the qualms of a mother about his present activities and his future safety, not least in light of the troubling prediction of Simeon that "a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35). In her ongoing struggle with doubt and fear, argue both Elizabeth Johnson and Anita Baly (a Catholic and a Lutheran theologian respectively), Mary remains "truly a sister" for all of us who try to follow Christ.[13]

A key feature of her life was her pondering, to which Luke refers twice. We must not think of this as a smooth process such as we might imagine occurring in the heart of an exceptionally holy nun like St. Teresa of Lisieux. Bonnie Miller-McLemore states that "Mary attends to God precisely within the confused messiness of her life. She prays in the midst of tensions and questions, fixing attention so that she might see things otherwise hidden and make God's purpose manifest in daily toil."[14] Thus Miller-McLemore stresses that Mary is "not one to whom we pray, but one *with whom we pray*, as a sister in Christ and God's Mother, unceasingly, in the midst of our work and lives."

There is a danger both that we *overestimate* Mary, seeing her as so far above every other Christian that she can no longer be a fruitfully encouraging and enabling sister, and that we *underestimate* her, missing the lessons for devotion to God's will and Christ that we can derive from her example. Ultramontane Roman Catholicism and the more robustly reactive forms of Protestantism have fallen respectively into these two traps. Ultramontane Catholicism, as exemplified both by some theologians like St. Alphonsus Liguori and some forms of popular piety, has sought to glorify Mary ever more fully, overlooking her own desire to give praise and glory to God alone – a matter in which Luther, commending the Magnificat as a lesson for all time in giving full and hearty thanks to God, sees her as being of abiding significance for us. Protestants have regularly gone to the other extreme.

The way back to balance, as the fathers at Vatican II in Lumen Gentium and the French Groupe des Dombes alike saw it, is to locate Mary clearly within the full communion of saints – not just in the communion of the saints secure above, but in the communion of the saints below, those being formed in Christ, those pressing on to full salvation (as Wesley would put it), but still, in most cases, far from "having obtained the prize." That is, Mary was and remains on our side of the division between divine and human. One of the dangers of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is that it removes Mary too far from us – yet we all may grant that God offers grace proportionate to the need of everyone whom he calls to serve him, in whatever capacity or sphere of life, and therefore that Mary, in light of her particular calling and responsibility, needed a special outpouring of grace.

Mary was indeed called to a unique vocation: she received the eternal Son of God in her womb in order that he might assume our flesh. Charles Wesley captures the wonder as well as any poet could:

> O mercy divine;
> How could'st thou incline
> My God to become such an infant as mine?
> He comes from in high,
> Who fashioned the sky,
> And meekly vouchsafes in a manger to lie.
> Our God ever blest,
> With oxen doth rest,
> Is nursed by his creature and hangs at the breast.[15]

If she was called to such bliss, she was also called to incomparable sorrow. From the point of Simeon's prophecy, she must always have felt a shadow of fear. According

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> ***There is a danger both that we* overestimate *Mary, seeing her as so far above every other Christian that she can no longer be a fruitfully encouraging and enabling sister, and that we* underestimate *her, missing the lessons for devotion to God's will and Christ that we can derive from her example.***

to John, the disciples tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the family of Lazarus and thus getting near to the dangers of Jerusalem. When Mary heard that Jesus was insisting on going, all her fears may well have come back vividly – fears which, of course, were well-founded.

Laurentin makes an ecumenically significant point about Mary's presence at the foot of the Cross. He stresses the nuances in the description: "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother... when Jesus saw the mother and the disciple whom he loved, he said to the mother, 'Woman, here is your son' and to the disciple, 'here is your Mother.'"[16] At first Mary is referred to as mother of Jesus but then she becomes "Woman." Laurentin and other Roman Catholic exegetes see in this an indication that, for Jesus, his mother has ceased to be defined purely as his mother and is now to be a spiritual mother to all his followers.

Of course, this has sometimes been disputed by Protestant scholars who read the interchange as being purely Jesus' making arrangements for the future welfare of his grieving mother. No doubt this was part of Jesus' intention, but it does not exclude the possibility that Jesus was also extending a continuing function to Mary within the ongoing community of the disciples. I think the case for such a supposition is increased when we remember that John was the one other person particularly close to Jesus. He was the beloved disciple. There would seem to me to be an appropriateness in our Lord's commending of the care of the two persons closest to him to each other and seeing this as a pattern for mutual care within the community that would result from resurrection and Pentecost.

In recent years, Roman Catholic theologians have often made a distinction between the *petrine* face of the Church, as an organization of particular ministerial structures, and the *marian* face of the Church, as a community of fellow disciples, caring for each other within the common fellowship, proclaiming the Good News through the medium of their service of each other and their reaching out to the rest of the world. This is an important distinction: in a sense, it is a distinction between the inner essence of the Church as communion and the facilitating structures that secure the Church's endurance. It is helpful to make this distinction, as it allows us to recognize as authentic Christian communities all gatherings which love and serve the Lord and care for each other as well as those beyond their own community, while, at the same time, still needing to engage over the strictly secondary matter of appropriate ministerial structures. This, I argue in another study, is the trajectory of Pope Francis' own ecumenical approach.[17]

Although it is in the local, separate community (whether parish or congregation) that people grow in mutual learning and discipleship, Christians also need a strong sense of their belonging to the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church of God, called to preach the Gospel to every nation, and within which each nation and human culture can find its place and its fulfilment within God's plan to reconcile all things in Christ. And, both at this most universal level and at the local level of the day-to-day community, Mary finds her place as sister and as mother of the Church.

When I started preparing this article, I had a lingering mistrust of putting too much stress on Mary as mother of the Church rather than as *theotokos*, mother of God Incarnate. My mind was changed by an experience at a small Methodist church near Bristol. For many years, that church had been served by an extremely humble and self-effacing lady called Jan, who had spent her entire life in the local community and chapel. She had been church steward for heaven knows how long and an indefatigable carer for anyone in need or unwell. After a few years of declining health, in which she had continued nevertheless to give herself unstintingly, she died. Her assistant steward rang me to ask me to take a small service at which a tribute could be given to her and some of her favourite hymns sung.

I had always known how well-loved Jan had been, but what I grasped more clearly on that Sunday morning in her local community was how much she had been a spiritual mother of that church, praying regularly with some of its members during the course of her week as well as carrying out her various caring visitations. She had been, to use an old Methodist expression relating to exemplary women class leaders, a real "mother in Israel" to them. It struck me that if Jan, and others of her ilk, can be seen as mothers of the Church at the most local level, then one can, maybe *must*, use that expression of Mary in relation to the Universal Church.

Any parent knows that children vary, sometimes very much, despite being siblings. We do not and cannot know

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what exact state of knowledge the Church above has of the pilgrim Church, but I think that, precisely as a charismatic paragon, Mary may be uniquely suited to discern the complementarity of the charisms of the various traditions and churches. Her unending prayer may well be that we should grow in humility in receiving gifts from others, learning from them in truly receptive ecumenism. Mary will remember that her own spiritual journey was one in which she had to struggle to understand what God was doing in Our Lord's ministry and, above all, what he was doing as she stood at the foot of the Cross.

Sometimes remarkable insights come from unexpected quarters. Despite the veneration in which some of the Reformers (particularly Luther and Zwingli) held Mary, their successors, at least in the continental churches and English free churches, seemed until a generation or so ago determined to forget her. An exception was the early nineteenth century Congregational minister, John Angell James, minister of Carr's Lane church in Birmingham. He describes Mary as standing grief-stricken but in dignified, silent contemplation at the foot of the Cross. He describes her as a "wondrous woman," not shrieking or cursing or even loudly crying, but simply being there for her Son.

Mary can be, if we but let her, an ecumenical enabler. She reminds us in the Magnificat of the whole heritage of faith of her people which remains that of Jews and Christians alike. She straddles the Abrahamic religious traditions in a way no one else does, a Jewish (and indeed a Muslim) matriarch of great holiness, and the first Christian disciple in learning from struggling with her Son. She is a pivotal figure for every generation. And although, over the centuries, the famous woman of Revelation 12 has been seen sometimes as Mary and sometimes as a personification of the Church, I think she must be seen as both – since, as Charles Wesley put it, her Son is "never without His people seen."[18]

Author's Note: This paper was originally commissioned by the Anglican-Lutheran Society for their 2020 Conference in Rome, which, of course, had to be cancelled as a result of the pandemic. As a relatively very new member, I felt honoured and thank them for their kindness in stimulating me to such reflection as I have tried to record here. The Society, on whose committee I serve as a Methodist observer alongside Fr. Philip Swingler, a Roman Catholic observer, does prodigious work in promoting Anglican-Lutheran understanding, dialogue and exchange. It has several American members from both traditions.

Notes:

1. For a short history, see Edward Knap-Fisher, *The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (ESBVM, 1997).

2. From my own Methodist tradition, they had papers from Neville Ward, Gordon Wakefield, and John Newton. Two eminent scholars in the reformed tradition, Dennis Dawe and Ross Mackenzie, also contributed. A little later we had papers from Tom Bruch and Sven-Eric Brod. There have also been many papers given to the ESVM by Anglicans, for instance Edward Knapp-Fisher and the late Canon Roger Greenacre.

3. *Ut Unum Sint,* §79

4. Rene Laurentin, *Pluralism about Mary: Biblical and Contemporary*, Supplement to *The Way* 45 (1982), 78-92, and specifically 88 for his statement about "the minor secondary nature of prayer to Mary."

5. *Dei Verbum,* §8.

6. Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (Continuum, 2006), 137-208, gives a very detailed survey of Mary's immediate social-political, economic, and religious context, as a woman of lowly status in early first-century Galilee.

7. See, for instance, Francis' address to charismatics on the 50th anniversary of the Catholic charismatic movement, as later cited by him at an audience with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (28 September 2018).

8. The French Jesuit, Bernard Sesboue, stresses this. Mary is in his rendering "comblee de grace," which certainly translates as overwhelmed. See Sesboue, *Pour Une Theologie Oecumenique* (CERF, 1990), 378.

9. From Luther's *Commentary on the Magnificat* of 1521, as cited in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed), *Luther's Works*, (Concordia, 1956).

10. From Francis' address to charismatics on the 50th anniversary of the Catholic charismatic movement.

11. *Singing the Faith* (the current British Methodist hymn book, 2011), no. 546.

12. This can be found online under the title *Notre Dame Consultation Statement* (March 2019)

13. See Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, *passim*; and Baly, "A Personal Approach to Marian Spirituality: A Lutheran Perspective" in *Mary is for Everyone*, edited by William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster: Fowler Wright Books, 1998), 220-36.

14. Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Pondering All These Things," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, edited by Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 97-111 (108-09 stress the anguish in which Mary prays, balanced on 109-10 by the stress on her amazement). She also here argues that the translation "kept in her heart" is not strong enough, and that it should instead be "treasured in her heart."

15. Cited in Elizabeth Hart, *All Loves Excelling: Daily Meditations with Charles Wesley* (Methodist Publishing House, 1997), 37.

16. Laurentin, *Pluralism about Mary*, 89-90.

17. See David Carter, "The Ecumenism of Pope Francis: A Significant Pontificate for the *Oikoumenē*," *Ecumenical Trends* 49.1 (2020), 4-11. See also Carter, "A Wider Role for the Petrine Ministry," *One in Christ* 54.1 (2020), especially 69-73.

18. *Hymns and Psalms* (Methodist hymn book, 1983), no. 622.

Mary's Role in the Incarnation through the Lens of Luke

By George T. Montague, SM

It is a blessing and an honor to have been invited to participate in the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue. And the reason is not merely one of theological curiosity or speculative interest on my part: like other Catholics at the emergence of the Catholic charismatic renewal, I owe a great debt to Pentecostals. I owe it to the anonymous Pentecostals who prayed over those two professors, one of whom then led the retreat at the *Ark and the Dove* in Pittsburgh in 1967 – the real beginning of the Catholic charismatic renewal. Shortly thereafter, their experience trickled down to San Antonio, giving birth to a prayer group at St. Mary's University. It was there that I was prayed over on Christmas Eve, 1970, by Catholics who were now being called Catholic Pentecostals or simply Catholic charismatics, and my life since, both personally and professionally, has never been the same. I wrote about the experience in a small book called *Riding the Wind*.

One of the blessings that Catholics and Pentecostals share is faith in the word of God and particularly in the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. In this article, developing my recent contribution to the Society for Pentecostal Studies' Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue sessions,[1] I expound on the marian understanding and vision of Luke in his gospel and in Acts, where the Holy Spirit appears more regularly than in any of the other New Testament books.

Mary in Luke's Infancy Gospel

Luke, as we know, wrote two books, the first being the gospel of Jesus, the second being the gospel of the Holy Spirit. Mary appears in both, but the most extensive portion is in what has been called the infancy gospel – Luke's first two chapters. These are often called Luke's introduction to the gospel, but they are more than that. They are an introduction to his double work, for many of the themes he introduces in this prologue anticipate, indeed point forward to, the themes in Acts. The infancy stories are thus like the prelude to a symphony where we get a taste of what is to come, the initial sounding of a possibility that will be actualized in the unfolding of the whole.

The major theme that arises in this way is that of the Holy Spirit. It is significant, for example, that during the public life of Jesus (as recorded in Luke's gospel) only Jesus enjoys the Holy Spirit, not the disciples, whereas in Luke's infancy gospel the Holy Spirit is on all the main characters, anticipating what will happen to the disciples in Acts. This anticipation offers what I would call a domestic Pentecost.

What at one level is simply a narrative of events of Jesus' childhood is, in reality, a theological interpretation of everything to follow in Luke-Acts. To achieve this, Luke does not use the meditative poetic introduction that John will use in his prologue but rather a blend of the events of Jesus' childhood with a profound reflection on their meaning in the light of Old Testament events and prophecies. Matthew does the same, but lest the reader miss how Scripture is being fulfilled, Matthew quotes the Scriptures at least five times. Luke prefers the method of allusion. Thus his readers, who know the Septuagint, will recognize the prophecies in the way we would recognize familiar melodies used in the prelude to a musical. Or, to think of another analogy, Luke's infancy gospel is a tapestry woven with threads of the Old Testament. The reader is thus given inside information that the characters in the narrative to follow may only discover in the process. It is as if Matthew, Luke, and John, each in his own way, is telling the reader: "You are going to see a very human Jesus in action, but never forget who he really is and how he fulfils beyond expectations God's promises."

Among the narratives in these opening chapters, the most densely theological is the angel's annunciation to Mary. The story tells us not only the identity of Jesus but the identity and the role of Mary. The story begins with the appearance of an angel. As in the apparition of angels in the Old Testament, this tells us that what is to follow is an intervention of divine magnitude into the sacred history of Israel. Unlike the working of Providence in the unfolding of a human genealogy, the angel (who "stands before God" – Luke 1:19) represents a direct invasion of God into human affairs. Mary will have a key role in the divine initiative.

The Greek *chaire* is usually translated "Hail," since it was the common greeting among the Greeks, like *Ave* among the Latins or *Shalom* ("Peace") among the Jews, although it literally means "rejoice." In the light of the whole passage, which is announcing the arrival of salvation, "rejoice" seems to be Luke's meaning, for it evokes several similar Old Testament proclamations of salvation. Most striking of these is Zephaniah 3:14-18:

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The Rev. Dr. George Montague is a Catholic priest of the Marianist order, who has taught biblical theology for 40 years at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. He has spoken or taught on all the continents except Antarctica. Author of 31 books, he is a former editor of the Catholic Biblical Quarterly and president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America. He has been involved in the Catholic charismatic renewal since 1970 and has authored books and articles on the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

> Shout for joy [*chaire*], O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!.... The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst [Heb. *beqirbek*], you have no further misfortune to fear. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Fear not O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst [Heb. *beqirbek*], a mighty savior. [NAB][2]

We recognize words that reoccur in Luke's account of the Annunciation: Shout for joy (rejoice, *chaire), King, fear not, savior* (the name of Jesus). I have also underlined *in your midst*. We are not sure if Luke was aware of the Hebrew text behind the Greek. If he was, perhaps he knew that the Hebrew word *beqirbek* could mean "in your midst" (as here) or "in your womb" (Gen 25:22), depending on the context. In either case the addition of "in your womb" is grammatically tautologous (where else is a child conceived?). But Luke knows what he is doing. His tautology is intentional, as we can see if we compare what the angel says to Zechariah with what he says to Mary. To the father of John the Baptist the angel simply says, "Your wife will bear you a son" (Lk 1:13), but to Mary he says, "You will conceive in your womb" (Lk 1:31). Theologically it suggests that the coming of the Savior in the womb of Mary is the fulfilment of the promise of the Lord coming into the midst of his people. Mary becomes Daughter Zion welcoming salvation.

After the word "Hail" we would expect the name of the person addressed. Instead of "Daughter Zion" we hear a title, *kecharitomenē,* "highly favored one" or "full of grace." The latter translation was used by Jerome in the Vulgate, whence it became commonplace in Catholic usage and is known in the Catholic prayer "Hail Mary, full of grace." The perfect tense in the Greek means something completed, perfect, adorned with freely and superabundantly given grace. Although Jerome certainly knew his Greek, and "full of grace" is a legitimate translation, it led later theologians to focus on the gift as a commodity, whereas "highly favored one" evokes more readily relation to the bestower. The text refers to a perfection already attained but it also points to the grace of the vocation to which she is now being called: to be mother of the Son of God. It is this vocation which the Catholic Church saw as supreme and sufficient foundation for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception:

> The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.[3]

As you probably know, the long hesitation about defining the doctrine was caused by the concern to maintain the universal salvation by Jesus Christ, but this was finally met by affirming that her immaculate conception was itself the effect of the grace of universal salvation, it being a preservation from sin "in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race."

Further on in the Lukan narrative, the angel describes the nature and the mission of Mary's son: "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, [thus indicating his divine character] and the Lord God will give him the throne David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." In other words, he will be the eschatological Messiah. After him there will be no other. His Messiahship is linked here to the title "Son of the Most High," which Elizabeth later echoes in titling Mary as "mother of my Lord."

This should lead us to ask what effect the angel's prophetic word has on the role of Mary. After Nathan's prophecy to David, the kingship in Judah became hereditary. The kings often had many wives, so who would be the queen? The concern to preserve the dynasty was the happy solution: none of them. The mother of the king would fulfill that role, being the link to the former king. Her importance was signaled by her mention in the king lists.[4] The *Gebira,* "the Great Lady," as she was called, was the queen mother. She shared a throne with her son. When Jeremiah predicts exile, he says, "Say to the king and to the queen mother: come down from your thrones; from your heads fall your magnificent crowns" (Jer 13:18). The fulfilment of this prophecy is described in 2 Kgs 24: 12, 15 (cf. Jer 29:2): "Then Jehoiakin, king of Judah, together with his mother, his ministers, officers and functionaries, surrendered to the king of Babylon, and also led captive from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother and wives, his functionaries and the chief men of the land."

A remarkable passage is 1 Kgs 2:19, in which Bathsheba, the queen mother, enters the presence of her son, King Solomon, on a mission of intercession: "Then Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, and the king stood up to meet her and paid her homage. Then he sat down upon his throne, and a throne was provided for the king's mother, who sat at his right." This passage shows not only that the queen mother occupied a throne at the right side of her son, not only that she had the right to intervene in the affairs of state, but also that the king, who was accustomed to receive the bowing homage of his wives (Bathsheba to David, 1 Kgs 1:16), would rise from his throne to bow in homage to his queen mother. The queen mother had the right to seek favors of the King, as we see in this passage.

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The queen mother's power was always subordinate to that of the king, but she had great moral influence. She was an honored counselor, at times representing certain particular political interests of the people to the king. In an astounding passage in Proverbs 31:1-9, the queen mother instructs the king on how to rule the kingdom – to avoid obsession with his harem and excessive drinking and to take care of the poor who are without recourse. Formulas of instruction such as this one are well known from the documents of the Near East, but only in this text of Proverbs is the instruction given to the king *by his mother.*

The reasons for this exceptional role were not merely her physical closeness to the king but the theological foundations of the Davidic dynasty going back to the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam 7:11-16). On the throne, the queen mother represented the king's continuity with the past, the visible affirmation of God's ongoing plan for his people, the channel through which the Lord's dynastic promise to David was fulfilled. Mother that she was, she was a living reminder of the present king's father by whose grace he ruled. She was a symbol of election, for it was not automatic that succession would pass to the former king's eldest surviving son. When David chose Solomon, he passed over the elder Adonijah (1 Kgs 1:11-40).

Later, when the Judean kings proved such miserable ministers of God's plans for his people, the prophets resolved their disappointment by proclaiming that the promises made to the incumbent king would be transferred to the future king. Since in some cases this future king had not even been born, the spotlight fell upon the woman who would carry the future of Israel in her womb—the next queen mother. The most outstanding example of this is the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah given to King Ahaz.

Let me recall the context for that prophecy. King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel, the northern kingdom, thought they had a chance to wrest themselves free from Assyrian domination, and they asked Ahaz to join them in this effort. When he refused, they sought to force his compliance by advancing their armies toward Jerusalem in the hope of deposing Ahaz and setting up their own puppet king on the throne. This would, of course, break the Davidic line and annul the divine promise. Ahaz, frightened by this unexpected enemy from the north, feverishly sought to shore up the city's defenses. He was hardly a sincere Yahwist, however, for he had immolated his own son by fire in sacrifice to the pagan god Moloch, thus showing himself indifferent to the Lord's promise to his dynasty. Isaiah met Ahaz as he was supervising the waterworks and advised him to put his faith in Yahweh rather than in the pagan gods: "Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm" (Isa 7:9).

That initiative having fallen on deaf ears, Isaiah again told Ahaz he should ask for a sign from the Lord – any kind of sign at all. Ahaz hypocritically replied that he would not dare tempt God by demanding a sign. To which Isaiah retorted: "Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary men, must you also weary my God? Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Isa 7:13-14). Isaiah addresses Ahaz as "house of David" because that is precisely what is at stake here, the dynastic succession promised to David. Although some modern translations render the Hebrew *almah* "young woman," (NRSV) others retain the older "virgin," (NIV, NAB). Suffice it to say that the Septuagint translates the Hebrew as *parthenos*, taking the term in its most common sense as "virgin," and that is how Matthew interprets it. There is little doubt that both Matthew and Luke hold to the virginity of Mary in the conception of her son by the Holy Spirit.

Two things are remarkable about Isaiah's prophecy: First, Messianism is no longer a program for the incumbent king but for a future king. Second, because it is a future king that is envisioned and because the present king has been an unworthy transmitter of the promise, it is the *mother* of the future king who passes on the promise. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, also speaks of future salvation in terms of the woman who will give birth (Mi 5:1-4).

Given the role of the mother of the Messiah in the Old Testament, it would be surprising if there were not some mention of the mother of Jesus in the New Testament portrayal of Jesus as Messiah. In fact, Luke alludes to the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 in the words, "*you* shall name him," and to the prophecy of Nathan to David promising him an everlasting dynasty. The difference is that there will be no king *after* Jesus, for he himself will rule forever over the chosen people.

There is, however, a significant development in Luke upon the motifs associated with the queen mother in the Old Testament. The texts of Isaiah and Micah, like those of the succession lists, say nothing about the conscious assent by the woman to the vocation to mother the future king. The most that we see in Isaiah is the use of king Ahaz as a counter example of faith response. But Luke chooses to describe the encounter with the divine messenger in detail, and he focuses on Mary's free, obedient faith response as a key element in the drama of salvation. She thus becomes the model of response for each disciple and for the church: "Blessed are you who believed" (Luke 1:45). To the woman who praises Mary for her physical motherhood of Jesus, the Lord replies, "Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" (Luke 11:27-28). In contrast to doubting Zechariah, Mary accepts fully and faithfully the

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call, resurrecting Abraham's faith response, which inaugurated the people of God. In the Old Testament the woman had no way of knowing that she would be the queen mother when she conceived the child who would be chosen king. But the Lord brings Mary into the picture at the very beginning, honoring her consent to mother the Messiah-King.

There is still another way in which Mary is the fulfilment of the queen mother beyond expectations. Her conception of Jesus is virginal. Thus she does not point to her Son's immediate predecessor on the throne of David, as did the queen mothers of the Old Testament. Rather, she points to the Father, the divine king who has sent his Son to take the vacant throne of David.[5]

Among the privileges we have noted of the Queen Mother, one that bears further examining is that she had a throne next to her Son's. During his earthly life, Jesus for the most part avoided pressing the title Messiah because of the temporal, political interpretation that was common among the people. John even tells us that after the multiplication of loaves: "Since Jesus knew that they were going to carry him off and make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone" (John 6:15). But Jesus' *resurrection* established him as the eschatological king, enthroning him as fulfilment beyond expectations of the promises of the Messiah. Peter says as much in his Pentecostal address, quoting the royal enthronement Psalm 110:

> God has raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God [an Old Testament term for the enthronement of the king in his palace at the right hand of the temple], he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father… For David did not go up into heaven, but he himself said: The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.' Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made *both Lord and Messiah,* this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:32-36)

Mary's assumption and coronation as queen of heaven is nowhere explicitly recorded in the New Testament. In his *bulla* declaring Mary's assumption to be a revealed truth, Pope Pius XII relied upon centuries-old tradition of the Church's faith with an array of witnesses. These included biblical texts that were applied to Mary, but none of these were presented as biblical proofs, only as witnesses of the faith of the church. However, that the Church should come to this belief appears a most logical consequence of what it meant in biblical terms for God to have chosen her as mother of the King who was enthroned in glory by resurrection from the dead. The prophecies that habitually proclaimed the king's mother alongside the king would lack fulfilment if she did not participate in the glorification of her son. So while it is true that no biblical text describes Mary's assumption, such a conclusion would seem to follow logically the biblical path prepared for it by the close association of the queen mother in the reign of her Son.

The angel's answer to Mary's question, "How can this be?" brings another Old Testament motif into the text.[6] "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will *overshadow* you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:34-35). Here Luke uses an Old Testament scene to help the reader understand the mystery of the Incarnation. Just as the cloud overshadowed the meeting tent and God's glory filled the Dwelling (the tabernacle) in the desert (Exod 40:34-35), so the Holy Spirit overshadows Mary (the exact same Greek verb, *episkiadzein*) enabling her to conceive the Holy One, the Son of God.

Can you imagine the challenge to convey in human words this mystery of mysteries? Matthew stops at the door of the mystery as the angel tells Joseph the child is "conceived through the Holy Spirit" (Mathew 1:20). No more details. John has the formula, "And the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), and his glory appears in his humanity once born: "and we saw his glory." But Luke describes the very *moment* when the Word became flesh. He does not give us entry into the tent where the wedding of God and humanity is consummated. Like Moses we stand at the entrance lost in the cloud that both conceals and reveals. But Luke lets us know the moment of the conception in an approximation which is the only language of mystery. It was like, but going infinitely beyond, the Lord's coming upon the desert tabernacle. Mary is the living tabernacle where the mystery is achieved. As the Lord's glory filled the dwelling, so the glory of the Son of God fills the womb of Mary, the new and living tabernacle of God the Most High.

The Visitation: Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

The same typological identification of Mary with the ark continues in the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth as an echo or a typological fulfilment of David's transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obededom to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:2-11). "The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obededom the Gittite for three months" (2 Sam 6:11); Mary too remains in Elizabeth's house "about three months" (Luke 1:56). David asks, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam 6: 9); and Elizabeth exclaims, "How does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). David dances with joyful abandon before the ark (2 Sam 6:14); Elizabeth's child leaps "for joy" at the sound of Mary's voice (Luke 1:44).

The Magnificat begins with Mary proclaiming her praise for what God has done for her personally ("The Lord

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has done great things for me") but then slides into the collective praise of all Israel, ending with recalling the promises the Lord made to Abraham, which are now fulfilled. The theme of the hymn addresses the problem: why was the birth of the Messiah hidden rather than trumpeted triumphantly to the nation. The questioner is told to look at the Psalms: God's method is to come to the lowly rather than to the great. Mary voices that truth.

Jesus Comes to the Temple

Chapters 1-2 of Luke are carefully structured into two annunciations, two births, and two manifestations in the temple. Behind the temple appearances lies the prophecy of Malachi: "And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord, whom you seek" (Mal 3:1), and indeed in Mal 3:3 he takes his seat there. The second coming of the Lord to the temple is, in relation to the first, climactic. Jesus is not brought there by his parents; he comes there on his own, takes his seat among the doctors of the Law and speaks his first words on his own behalf. The fact that he asks questions of the doctors can be viewed as what would be appropriate for a teenager. But even in his adult ministry Jesus most often teaches by questions, especially when addressing the doctors of the Law. In 21:37, prior to his passion, Jesus returns to the temple teaching with authority. In naming the temple as his Father's house Jesus identifies himself as the Son of God. Both comings are tinged with sorrow at the passion in which Mary will have a share: Simeon's prophecy that a sword that will pierce her (2:35) and the great anxiety voiced by Mary at the three-day loss of her son (2:48). Is it too much to suggest that the three-day loss and the joy of reunion anticipate her three-day grief at the death of her Son and the joy of reunion in the resurrection?

The parents do not understand what Simeon means. How can this be for Mary in the light of what she was told at the Annunciation? There she was told of the greatness of her Son and of what this would mean for her as Queen Mother and mother of the Lord. But she was not told how Jesus' relation with his Father would work out in the events of his life. His decision to leave his earthly parents for the temple is a forecast of the priority that he will give to the Father in his public ministry, a priority that will take him from his home in Nazareth and lead him to the cross. That was already forecast at Jesus' first appearance in the temple with Simeon's prophecy of the sword, and now it is declared by Jesus himself in his climactic visit to the temple. God's plan for his son, already mysterious in the theophoric titles in the Annunciation, will remain a mystery as Jesus' life unfolds.

"And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (2:51, the shorter version of 2:19): Mary learns to live with mystery. But this is not a passive surrender to the unknown. The word translated as "reflecting" is the Greek *symballousa,* which literally means to bring together, to join or to compare. She is doing exactly what Luke is doing: bringing together or comparing what she knows of the scriptures with the events unfolding before her. As we have followed Luke, so the text invites us to follow Mary: to ponder the mystery.

Conclusion

Viewed through the eyes of Luke, Mary has a unique and exceptional role in the way God chose to save us. There are those privileges of Mary which are so much a part of the mystery of the incarnation that they are inimitable, such as the divine motherhood and the mysteries that are inseparable from it. Luke is unapologetic for the great things the Lord has done in her. He rather hails them. But there are other marian honors upheld by Luke that are not only imitable by us but are supreme models for our imitation, primarily Mary's faith, contemplation of the mystery, and obedience to God's will. "Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) anticipates and models the prayer that Jesus teaches all his disciples, "Thy will be done" (Matt: 6:10). The pillars of Mary's privilege are like the poles of a magnet: the inimitable and the imitable. Those who see them opposed do so at the peril of defacing the plan of God. For the activation of those poles generates power for the people of God.

Notes:

1. An earlier version of this article was prepared as a presentation to the Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue sessions hosted by the Society for Pentecostal Studies, on March 18, 2021, at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, CA. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic the conference was held instead at Lee University on that date.

2. See parallels in Joel 2:21 and Zechariah 9:9 (addressing Daughter Jerusalem).

3. Pope Pius IX, Bulla, *Ineffabilis Deus*.

4. Naamah, mother of King Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:21); Maacah, mother of Abijam (1 Kgs 15:22); Azubah, mother of Jehoshahpat (1 Kgs 22:42); Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah (2 Kgs 8:26); Zibiah, mother of Joash (1 Kgs 12:2; Jehoaddin, mother of Amaziah (2 Kgs 14:2); Jecholiah, mother of Azariah (2 Kgs 15:2); Jerusa, mother of Jothan (2 Kgs 15:33); Abi, mother of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:2); Hephzibah, mother of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:1); Meshullemeth, mother of Amon (2 Kgs 21:19); Jedidah, mother of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:2); Hamutal, mother of Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:31); Zebidah, mother of Jehoiak*im* (2 Kgs 23:36); Nehushta, mother of Jehoia*chin* (2 Kgs 24:8); Hamutal, mother of Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:18). The only exceptions are Asa, whose grandmother is mentioned as the *Gebira,* since she was still living (1 Kgs 15:10) and retained her title until death; and Jehoram and Ahaz, both of whom are given very negative ratings by the author of the book of Kings.

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Response to George Montague's "Mary's Role in the Incarnation through the Lens of Luke"

By Daniel Tomberlin

I must express my gratitude for being invited to respond to Fr. George Montague. I have long benefited from his work, and from the work of his co-laborer, Fr. Kilian McDonnell. I am not the most qualified respondent, but I share a passion for the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue in general, and this subject in particular. I should also add that this is *my* Pentecostal response, not *the* Pentecostal response.

My first extra-biblical consideration of Mary came in a church history class in Bible college. The text for that class was Earle Cairns' *Christianity through the Centuries*. Cairns attributed the development of Mariology to "the false interpretation of Scripture and the mass of miracles associated with Mary in the apocryphal gospels" (160). Of course, the insinuation was that any understanding of Mary in human redemption is heretical. Many years later at Pentecostal Theological Seminary (then Church of God Theological Seminary), when discussing the role of Mary in the Incarnation, our professor insisted that Mary should not be addressed as "Mother of God," but as "Mother of Our Lord."

My interest in Mary was born out of travels in eastern Europe in 1999. As I visited ancient Orthodox churches and monasteries I was overwhelmed at the beauty of the art, and by the ubiquity of Mary. Yet, from my Western-Protestant-Pentecostal perspective, I could not understand why there were so many images of Mary and the Christ-child, but so few images of the crucified Christ, the resurrected Christ, or the ascended Christ. After returning home from my journey, I continued to ponder: "Why is the Virgin Mary so important to Orthodox (and Catholic) believers?" Then, one day I had an epiphany – it's not about Mary, it's about Jesus! It's about the Incarnation. I revisited the development of Mary as *theotokos* with renewed appreciation, and I began to consider: "Does Pentecostal spirituality have room for Mary?" I now offer a resounding "Yes"!

First, I found it interesting that, in his article, Montague refers to Mary not as "Mother of God" but rather as "the mother of the Lord," which is reminiscent of my professor at PTS. So, allow me to add that Mary, the mother of the Lord, is no less *theotokos* – the Mother of God. *Christotokos* will not do. Sometimes, sloppy preaching in Pentecostal churches lends itself to various forms of modalism, Arianism, and Nestorianism. Pentecostals need to be reminded that Jesus is more than the "Anointed One"; Jesus is the enfleshed Word of God. In my judgement, only *theotokos* is faithful to Nicene Christology. Jesus, the son of Mary, is fully human and fully God. The eternal Word assumed humanity in the womb of Mary. As Montague points out, the womb of Mary was the Tabernacle of the glory of God the Son. The divine-human Christ was nourished at the breasts of Mary. Mary is indeed the Mother of God.

Montague's paper presents Luke's infancy narrative as "a tapestry woven with threads of the Old Testament." I found this to be a fascinating and masterful presentation. With Fr. Montague, I affirm that the biblical evidence suggests that Mary had "a key role in the divine initiative" of redemption. Mary is the "highly favored One" – yet such language is rarely heard in Pentecostal spirituality. Montague's primary concern is to demonstrate how the Lukan narrative, informed by the Old Testament, inspires the Catholic theological imagination with regard to Mary. I will respond in terms of three theological icons: (1) The Immaculate Conception, (2) The Assumption of Mary, and (3) Mary as the Queen of Heaven.

The Immaculate Conception

Montague suggests that the Lukan greeting, "Hail Mary, full of grace," signifies "something completed, perfect, adorned with freely and superabundantly given grace." Therefore, "the text refers to a perfection already attained" and "to the grace of a vocation to which she is now being called." At its foundation, the issue at hand is not about Mary, but about the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. How is Jesus, conceived in the womb of a fallen woman, the sinless One? The Catholic answer is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in which "the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God... [Mary] was preserved free from all stain of original sin" through "the merits of Jesus Christ." Montague points out that this doctrine was affirmed after "long hesitation" (*Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854) for fear of misunderstanding. I would suggest that the "long hesitation" did not diminish misunderstanding in the least.

Mary is not the only person in Scripture to be greeted and called out by an angel.

- An angel of the Lord called out to Abraham to spare Isaac from sacrifice (Genesis 22:11).

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Dr. Daniel Tomberlin (DMin) is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry at Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee.

• To Hagar an angel declared, "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael" (Genesis 16:11; cf. 7-12). Later, when Hagar feared the death of Ishmael, an angel said, "Fear not" (Genesis 21:17).

• To Gideon an angel declared, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12).

• To Manoah's unnamed wife, the mother of Samson, an angel declared, "you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son" (Judges 13:3).

• Gabriel greeted Daniel as "greatly beloved" (NKJV) or "highly esteemed" (NASB) (Daniel 9:23; 10:11).

Although Mary's vocation is unique in Scripture, her angelic visitation is not. In most cases, the words of the angel signify an oracle of salvation and a call to vocation. But Mary is the only person in the redemptive narrative whose vocation is to offer her body as tabernacle of the glory of God's Son. So, consideration of Mary's uniquely favored status is warranted. Montague insists that Gabriel's greeting "highly favored one" refers to a "perfection already attained," which implies that Mary was perfected prior to the Annunciation, even conceived in perfection. I concede that Gabriel's greeting signifies Mary's predisposition to be utterly faithful to the call of God; but I disagree that it signifies an immaculate conception, a sinless birth. That Mary was fallen, herself in need of redemption, is implied by the very desire for a doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which indeed still needs to be effected *through the merits of Christ.*

Is there an alternative to the doctrine of Immaculate Conception (which, to my mind, unnecessarily removes Mary from the existential circumstances of humanity that it is her holy role and privilege to represent)? How might the divine-human Christ be born of a fallen woman and not inherit original sin? I suggest that Gabriel's Spirit-inspired greeting, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28 NKJV), was a prophetic declaration that effected Mary's unique sanctification. The same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the womb of Mary, also sanctified her in a unique manner, imparting to her the righteousness of God. This finds support in the works of Theophanes, the ninth century bishop of Nicaea, in whose works Mary declares, "The descent of the Holy Spirit has purified my soul; it has sanctified my body; it has made me a temple containing God, a divinely adorned tabernacle, a living sanctuary and the pure mother of life."[1]

I am suggesting that the answer to the problem of Mary's original sin is not a better developed Mariology, but a better developed pneumatology. Catholics have sometimes tended to lose the Spirit in discussions of church organization, liturgy, or Marian devotion. Protestant theology has sometimes been, more or less, binitarian (Father and Son), losing the Spirit in conversations about soteriology. Pentecostal spirituality insists on maintaining the personal (hypostatic) distinction of the Holy Spirit. Even so, with our Catholic sisters and brothers, Pentecostals should affirm that Mary is uniquely elect, highly favored, and therefore that she holds a special status in God's redemptive plan.

The Assumption of Mary

Montague holds that the assumption of Mary is "a most logical consequence" of the election of Mary as mother of the messiah-king who participates "in the glorification of her son." He admits that "Mary's assumption and coronation as Queen of Heaven is nowhere explicitly recorded in the New Testament."

Here we discover a major rift between Pentecostals and Catholics, that is, the nature of revealed truth. Montague has it that the Assumption of Mary is revealed in centuries-old Church tradition. Pentecostals maintain that Holy Scripture is the primary source of revealed truth. Both traditions insist that the Holy Spirit speaks through the community of faith. In Roman Catholic spirituality, Scripture and tradition are equal sources of revealed truth. However, in Pentecostalism, every prophetic utterance and every interpretation of tongues must be judged by the rule of Scripture. Therefore, as a Pentecostal, it is difficult to imagine that a major doctrine would find acceptance among the faithful without strong biblical support.

Ultimately, I find (and Orthodox Christians, who commemorate the Dormition or Mary's peaceful "falling asleep," would agree) that the Assumption of Mary is unnecessary to Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology. Remember, the designation of *theotokos* was born out of Christological concerns. If Mary is indeed the Queen of Heaven who acts as intercessor, then a robust understanding of resurrection is sufficient. All who die in Christ are resurrected and glorified. I have no doubt that Mary is alive in heaven, in intimate fellowship with her Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary as the Queen of Heaven

If my Pentecostal understanding on the role of Scripture in informing the theological imagination is to be followed, then this deserves serious consideration. Please allow me a word of caution. When discussing my work, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (2010, revised 2019), I have often been told that my view is too Catholic. My response has been, "I'm not concerned if it's too Catholic, my primary concerns are that it's biblical and

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faithful to Pentecostal spirituality." Too often, conversations among Pentecostals suffer from anti-Catholic bigotry. So, the challenge here is to put aside preconceived notions and engage in a respectful and serious conversation.

According to Montague, the Davidic queen mother, though "always subordinate" to the king, "occupied a throne at the right side of her son" as "an honored counselor" with "great moral influence," who sometimes "instructs the king on how to rule" and "had the right to seek favors of the King." Montague sees "a significant development" of the queen mother motif in Luke. Montague presents this as the biblical rationale that informs Mary's work as co-redeemer – a term not used directly by Montague but implied and affirmed by Pope St. John Paul II (*Redemptoris Mater,* 1987). In effect, John Paul suggested that Mary acts as co-mediator in a way that does not diminish the work of Christ as the "one Mediator" (1 Timothy 2:5). I find this tenuous. The prefix "co" signifies mutuality, commonality, and coequality. This has the tendency to deify Mary (not in the sense of *theōsis*), to view Mary as the "Mediatrix of all Graces," even as mediator of the Holy Spirit. Several years ago, I was watching EWTN, listening to a group of Catholic women testify about being filled with the Holy Spirit. One of the women declared, "I felt as if I stepped into Mother Mary." From my Pentecostal perspective, a theology that diminishes the unique status of Christ as the "only mediator between God and man," and as the Spirit-baptizer, is problematic. While it is likely that the queen mother motif is in the background of the Lukan infancy narrative, and further informs the uniquely favored status of Mary, I cannot find biblical justification for Mary as queen mother of Heaven *who acts as co-redeemer.*

Even so, there is sufficient biblical evidence to suggest that Mary has a unique and significant role in God's story of human redemption, a role that has too long been ignored by Pentecostals. Does Mary uniquely mediate grace? Yes! Through her obedience to the Father, the eternal Word was enfleshed in her womb, and she gave birth to Jesus who is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus Christ is the uniquely-begotten Son of God, the King of kings; therefore, the Virgin Mary is the unique-begetter, the Mother of God, the Queen Mother – *theotokos*.

Does Mary, as *theotokos*, occupy a unique status as Queen Mother, offering intercession on behalf of her petitioners? Does she offer counsel to the omnipotent and omniscient Lord? Should Mary be petitioned and venerated? I believe that Mary is alive and in fellowship with her Son, and with the great cloud of witnesses in heavenly places. Jesus declared that God "is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:37). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive. Moses and Elijah are alive. Peter and Paul are alive. St. John Paul is alive. My grandparents are alive. My niece is alive. All who have died in Christ are raised in Christ. I believe in the intercession of the saints, that the great cloud of resurrected witnesses are praying for God's kingdom to come, for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. I believe that Mary, as *theotokos*, is unique among the cloud of witnesses and that she has a unique relationship with Christ, even as queen mother. However, there is no biblical text to support that believers should offer prayers to Mary or seek her intercession. Pentecostal spirituality insists upon an unmediated encounter with God. Trinitarianism has room only for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as co-equal partners in human redemption. Only Jesus and the Spirit are co-equal mediators and advocates for human redemption.

There can be little doubt that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a major presence in the life of the apostolic church. Luke's gospel begins with the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel declared Mary to be highly favored and full of grace. The Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ. She was with Jesus at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, and she was seen with Jesus throughout his ministry. Mary was with Jesus as he died on the cross. She was a witness to the resurrected Christ, and she was present on the day of Pentecost. As we read the early theologians, we discover that there was indeed some reflection on the role of Mary in the redemptive story. Irenaeus writes that just as Christ is the New Adam, Mary is the New Eve (*Against Heresies*, 3.22.4). Furthermore, he declares that "as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin" (A*gainst Heresies* 5.19.1). The earliest pictorial images of Pentecost, moreover, place Mary at the center, which reflects her growing influence in the theological imagination of the church.

Montague's article reminds us that reflection on the significance of Mary did not begin with Irenaeus, but with Luke (and Matthew). Her story is essential to the Gospel. Joel (and Peter) declared that the Spirit of God would be poured out upon all flesh and that sons and daughters would prophesy. Luke suggests that the outpouring of the Spirit began with the Annunciation, when the Holy Spirit came upon and overshadowed Mary. Yet the fruit of her womb is Jesus, the Holy Spirit baptizer, the only mediator between God and humanity.

Notes:

1. Arthur A. Just (ed), *Luke*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19.

Reflections on the Virgin Mary from an Islamic Perspective

By Naz Ahmed Georgas

The piety, devotion, and mystery surrounding the story of the Virgin Mary, or Maryam as she is known in the Islamic tradition, has inspired many faithful practitioners, scholars, and mystics to delve into a deeper understanding of the meaning and essence of her person. In order to cultivate this understanding, there are four key points that should be discussed.

First, the story of Virgin Mary needs to be studied together with the account of Jesus (peace be upon them both) and in the context of the entirety of the message of the Qur'an. Second, while there are discrepancies between the qur'anic and biblical historical accounts of Jesus and Mary that shape their respective paradigms, we find upon closer scrutiny that there is much more consistency in the esoteric dimensions of the two narratives. Third, this esoteric narrative contains deep metaphysical wisdom and is effectively revealed by comparing the spiritual life and evolution of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with that of Virgin Mary. And finally, the inner nature of their mission is one of a dynamic presence found within the word of God that has a transformative value for humanity.

The Virgin Mary's account is of extraordinary significance from both the outward exoteric perspective and from an inward mystical one. From the onset of her birth, the Qur'an honors her with the assertion that "no male child could have ever been like this female" (Q 3:36). Maryam is the only woman named in the Qur'an with a chapter dedicated to her and entitled after her name. Moreover, the Qur'an not only validates the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus, but Mary herself is also celebrated as an example for all believers.

Despite this reverence accorded to Mary, the richness of her account does not stem solely from these praiseworthy facts of her history and personality. Rather, a fuller picture of Mary's life comes into view when it is studied together with the account of Jesus. The Qur'an uses the word "sign" (*ayah*) in its singular form to refer to both Jesus and Mary. Together they are a sign of "grace and mercy unto all people" (Q 21:9).

Similarly, the story of Mary and Jesus cannot be isolated from the overall core message and teachings of the Qur'an. The purpose of religion from an Islamic perspective is to intimately bind human beings to their journey with God, who longs to be known and worshipped. He achieves this by sending prophets and revelation to humanity. Though there are said to be 124,000 prophets, only 25 are named in the Qur'an. Each prophet comes with a unique path that guides humanity back "home" to their Creator. Jesus and Mary are both regarded as examples of the manifestation of such guidance. Through their life, work, acts of worship, and service, they are tasked among other prophets to be an embodiment of divine grace and providence upon humanity.

An important observation in studying the life of Mary is that comparing the narrative of her spiritual evolution with that of the Prophet Muhammad reveals extraordinary similarities, some of which have profound esoteric and metaphysical value that may provide a basis for interreligious exchange. For a start, like Jesus and Mary, Prophet Muhammad is also known in the Qur'an as "a mercy to the worlds" (Q 21:107). The Virgin Mary and the Prophet Muhammad were both instruments selected by God and purified for His service. While she was still a virgin, the angel Gabriel appeared before her to inform her that she would give birth to a son, Jesus, who would be known as the Word (*kalimah*) and the Spirit (*ruh*) of God (*Allah*). The astonished young woman answered, "how can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" (Q 19:21)

Similarly, the angel Gabriel appeared to the prophet Muhammad at the inception of his mission and commanded him three times to read. Not being able to read or write, the astonished Muhammad responded saying, "I cannot read." Angel Gabriel was commanding the prophet Muhammad to manifest "the word of God," or the Qur'an, which was already placed within his soul and to "read" or articulate its message from within him. Virgin Mary was also told that she would manifest and give birth to "the word of God" that was placed inside her womb.[1]

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Naz Ahmed Georgas is the Executive Director and a founding member of Cordoba House, a New York based not-for-profit organization. A graduate of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University, Naz has worked at various UN agencies and faith based organizations dedicated to poverty alleviation and sustainable development, including the UNOPS, UNDP, World Council of Churches, National Council for Women, and Women's World Banking. Since 1997, she has been actively engaged in lecturing and leading the Muslim and Interfaith communities in various joint initiatives promoting understanding among faith leaders and communities.

In each case, giving birth to the word of God is associated with purity. Mary was untouched by any man and was therefore physically pure. The prophet Muhammad, being unlettered, had a clean soul that was free from acquired knowledge and dogmatic religious ideas and concepts. It is in the backdrop of this physical purity that Mary was able to give birth to the word and spirit of God. Similarly, the prophet Muhammad articulated the unadulterated speech of God, whose verses were collected and put together in what is now known as the Holy Qur'an. This is why the Prophet's wife Aisha described him to be like a "walking Qur'an." However, the more significant resonance between these narratives is that Jesus, Mary, and the Prophet Muhammad were all instruments of the same God, delivering His guidance to the world.

It is worth reflecting briefly on the meaning of the "Word of God" which is a sign of mercy and therefore of tremendous significance in both Christianity and Islam, differences in interpretation notwithstanding. While it is challenging and difficult, if not impossible, to grasp and describe the meaning and nature of both the Word and Spirit of God, two worthwhile observations should be made. First, one thing that cannot be denied is that the life, teachings, and the presence of the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, and Mary have transformed human existence. Moreover, the Word is also a lived presence that is bestowed upon those who are purified.

In the Qur'an, the followers of Jesus are known as *al hawariyyun*, which translates as "the white-garbed ones" (Q 3:52). In his exegesis, Muhammad Asad points out that the "white garb" was a direct reference to a group "distinguished by their strong insistence on moral purity and unselfish conduct [who] always wore white garments as the outward mark of their convictions." It is no surprise, then, that these purified white-garbed ones were entrusted with the "Word" that transformed nations. Twentieth-century Egyptian playwright Abdul Rehman al-Sharqawi expresses this transformative nature of God's Word through the following verses:

The Word is a light and a sign guiding a nation
Jesus was a Word
He lit the world by Words
He taught them to poor fisherman
They went out directing the World.

According to chapter 48 of the Qur'an, the "word" is described as a gift of faith which God bestows on His believers. The "word" that Jesus taught the fishermen (as referred to in Sharqawi's text) cannot be acquired except by being transmitted with the permission of God. The "word" of faith described in the Qur'an that the fishermen used to direct the world is analogous to the faith that Jesus proclaimed could move mountains.

The Virgin Mary carried and gave birth to Jesus – the Word of God – while the Prophet Muhammad carried the speech of God to humanity.

Second, insofar as Mary, Jesus, and Muhammad are all revered figures known to be a mercy unto humanity, there is a connection to be explored between the meaning and nature of the Word of God and its relationship to how God's mercy is manifested with it. And perhaps this is what is exemplified by Christians like Mother Teresa, who manifested grace and mercy by becoming a divine mirror of God's Word to the homeless in Kolkata. Describing one who is deeply distressed and comparing taking care of his needs akin to taking care of Jesus, Mother Teresa writes:

Hungry for love, he looks at you
Thirsty for kindness he begs you
Homeless, he asks you for shelter in your heart
Will you be that for him?[2]

To summarize, the role of the Virgin Mary from an Islamic perspective is best understood when it is situated in the context of the overall message of the Qur'an. From this perspective, Mary and Jesus were both instruments of God and a mercy to the world, as was the Prophet Muhammad. In all three cases, the point of their existence was to manifest God's guidance to humanity, in their respective missions.

The Virgin Mary carried and gave birth to Jesus – the Word of God – while the Prophet Muhammad carried the speech of God to humanity. The Word of God is to be lived, experienced, and inhabited as a source of personal transformation. Such a transformation occurs for those who are purified and when the Word penetrates our beings and our consciousness, enabling us to act with humility and mercy – as exemplified even today in the service of such saints as Mother Teresa but paradigmatically known in the life and character of the Virgin Mary.

Notes:

1. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2000).

2. See Mother Teresa, *In the Heart of the World* (Novato: New World Library, 2007).

Learning from Mary in the Qur'an

By Klaus von Stosch

Most Christians, knowing little of how Mary the mother of Jesus appears in Islam, will be amazed by how much they can learn from Mary through a close reading of the Qur'an. In this brief article, I will discuss three examples. The first example will develop how the Qur'anic story of Mary tries to overcome supersessionism and highlights the vulnerability of Mary. Then I would like to show how the Qur'an tries to intervene against any political or imperial misuse of Mary. Finally, I will show how the Qur'anic vision of Mary resonates with Christian efforts to empower women in the church. All these examples are grounded in the research that I have done with my Muslim colleague at the University of Paderborn, Muna Tatari, research that is developed in greater depth in our recent co-authored book on Mary in the Qur'an.[1]

Overcoming Supersessionism

During late antiquity, many Christians came to believe that the time of Judaism was over – that the Jewish people no longer had a legitimate religion outside the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus. In these Christians' typological thinking, the deaths of Zechariah and John the Baptist represented the death of the Temple cult and the death of Judaism. The fact that Jerusalem came to be ruled by Christians in the following centuries was, moreover, interpreted as a rightful punishment for the Jews for the betrayal and murder of Christ. For this reason, Byzantine Christians struggled to interpret the empire's loss of Jerusalem to the Persians in 614. Jews, by contrast, welcomed the victory of the Sassanid Empire and hoped that it would create the conditions for coming back to Jerusalem and building the third temple. Apocalyptic hopes were mobilized on both sides and the future of Judaism was a central topic of debate. As we can see in the Sefer Zerubbabel, this debate was sometimes linked polemically with Mary from the Jewish side.[2] Whereas Christian sources were trying to show how Mary replaces the Temple and makes Judaism superfluous, Jewish sources questioned Mary's integrity and doubted her virginity. In other words, in late antiquity, the story of Mary was one of the places where Jews and Christians negotiated their hegemonic claims against each other.

In light of this history, it is particularly interesting to see how, in the closing years of late antiquity, the Qur'an defends (*pace* Jewish polemicists) Mary's integrity and virginity (Q 19:20-22) and even says that she has been purified and chosen over all the other women in the world (Q 3:42). At the same time, the Qur'an argues (*pace* Christian polemicists) against a supersessionist reading of the birth story of Jesus: Zechariah is portrayed in his integrity and his vivid relationship to God, and his prayer for a descendant is clearly understood as a prayer for a continuation of the temple cult (Q 19:4-5). When he cannot talk any more, this is not a punishment as in the Bible (cf. Lk 1:20), but a sign in order to encourage him (Q 19:10). And the fulfilment of his wishes by the birth of John the Baptist is understood as a fulfilment of a continuation of the Temple cult; in this light it is interesting that the Qur'an does not mention John's death. Even the Arabic name of John responds programmatically to the Christian supersessionist claims: whereas we would expect the name *yūhannān* as the Arabic translation of his Greek name, the Qur'an invents a new name: *yahyā* – a name which from its root means "to be alive." In other words, the Qur'an stresses that John is a living testimony of God's fidelity to the covenant with Israel. In this light, the great respect for John in the Qur'an and the parallel description of John and Jesus also is an anti-supersessionist intervention. Whereas the proclaimer of the Qur'an respects the uniqueness of Jesus (as only Jesus is accepted as the Messiah, the word and the spirit of God),[3] it still does not want to understand this peculiarity in terms of superiority. At the same time, through the fact that Jesus characterizes himself as the servant of God, the Qur'an opens up space for the appreciation of a very special I-Thou relationship (though, crucially, not a relationship of identity) between Jesus and God. Whereas John the Baptist is always characterized in the third-person perspective (Q 19:12b-15), Jesus and only Jesus says of himself: "I am the servant of God" (Q 19:30). Thus – just as in the gospel of John – the Jesus of the Qur'an is characterized in the first person, and the title of "servant of God" quotes one of the most important early Christian titles of Jesus.

So it seems that the proclaimer of the Qur'an tries to find a sort of middle way between Judaism and Christianity and makes truth claims that should be acceptable, or at least resonant, for both sides. In a seventh-century atmosphere of strong apocalyptic propaganda and mutual condemnations, the Qur'an offers a vision of mutual respect. And this respect is especially embodied in the person of Mary, who is portrayed in her vulnerability and loneliness. It is striking how much this vulnerability is highlighted – especially in Surah Maryam (Q 19), which was proclaimed at a time when

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Dr. Klaus von Stosch is Schlegel-Professor for Systematic Theology at Bonn University and Head of the International Center of Comparative Theology and Social Issues. His areas of research include comparative theology, faith and reason, the problem of evil, Christian theological responses to Islam (especially in Christology), and theology of the Trinity.

Muhammad was in a very similar situation of vulnerability as Mary and seems to see her as a kind of role-model for the message he bears. Mary and Muhammad are linked through their task of bringing the word of God to the world, and they are both in a very dangerous, exposed, and marginal position when they bring this word to birth.

Struggling with the Misuse of Mary in Imperial Theology

Let me go a bit deeper here and attend to some later verses of the Qur'an, exploring whether they still support the idea of this kind of solidarity between Muhammad and Mary. First, however, we should note that there are some verses in Sura *al-Mā'ida* (= Q 5) that seem in fact to polemicize against Mary. In Q 5:17, for example, the proclaimer of the Qur'an says:

> They disbelieve those who say, 'God is the Christ, the son of Mary.' Say, 'Who can prevent God, if He willed, from annihilating the Christ son of Mary, and his mother, and everyone on earth?' To God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and what is between them. He creates whatever He wills, and God has power over everything.

Why is it important for the proclaimer to highlight this in regard to Mary? It would not seem to be controversial, even for Christians, that God has substantial power and qualitative superiority over Mary. And yet, the propaganda of the Byzantine Emperor Herakleios tell another story. After his defeat by the Sassanids, Herakleios started his own military campaign against the Sassanid Empire in 622.[4] After a preliminary success in 624, he was with his army far away from the capital in 626 when Byzantium was severely attacked by the Avars. As the emperor needed all his soldiers for the campaign in the east, the capital had been left without sufficient defense. In this situation, the only solution of the Byzantine people was to pray to Mary and Jesus, asking them for help on the battlefield. And indeed, the Avars were repelled; thus the siege of Constantinople in 626 famously became the moment in history when Mary started her career as patron saint of the city and as a military emblem, in some sense even as a goddess of war.[5] The court theologians of Herakleios promoted the sudden and inexplicable victory at the siege of 626 as proof for the invincibility of Mary. They used her in their propaganda and claimed that nobody – not even God – could overcome her protective power.

There is a second event that has to be mentioned if we want to understand why the imperial propaganda of Herakleios insisted so much on the invincibility and indestructibility of Mary. In 619, during another attack of the Avars against Constantinople, Mary's clothes (being venerated at a church in Blachernae, just outside the protection of the city wall), were not destroyed during the attack.[6] The people of the city understood this as a miracle and the theologians seem to have developed the idea that Mary's purity could be understood as incorruptibility. Her incorruptibility, in turn, was transferred to her clothes and other relics, making these objects indestructible. Hence, they came to be venerated as powerful protective shields that would safeguard the city from any attack. The great siege of 626 would subsequently be understood as proof of this theological claim; we have some evidence that it was used thus in the propaganda of Herakleios.

This tradition is so striking because the idea of the immaculate conception of Mary (which in a certain reading is the foundation for the claim of her incorruptibility) had not been developed before the medieval age. Moreover, the doctrine of bodily incorruptibility that was applied to Jesus by many theologians in late antiquity (not only among heretics, like aphthartodoketists, but also within Chalcedonian Christianity) was not typically claimed to be true for Mary. The doctrine of the incorruptibility of the body claims that the body of the incorruptible person is like the bodies of Adam and Eve, with no need to eat or satisfy other bodily needs. As the church fathers explained it, Jesus – who is presented as enthusiastically eating and drinking in the gospels – ate not because of natural obligation but rather by his free choice, because of his solidarity with humans. In one of the dominant interpretations of this theological theory in late antiquity, the free choice of Jesus in regard of eating and drinking was understood as a consequence of his protection from the consequences of the fall. As he was free of original sin, he did not have the bodily conditions that came to pass following the expulsion from Eden. Hence he ate and drank, not because of a biological necessity, but because of his good will to live in solidarity with humanity.

From our modern perspective, we might think that Mary could easily be integrated into the very same theory if we simply conceive her without original sin – which has been official Roman Catholic doctrine since 1854. But in the theological sources we have from late antiquity, this idea of bodily incorruptibility was not used for Mary, with one exception: imperial court theology after the siege of Constantinople. In this literature it was argued that if even Mary's clothes are incorruptible, surviving the destructive Avar onslaught, how much more so would Mary herself have been – just like her son Jesus?

In this context, we can recognize the important interreligious intervention of the Qur'an. The key point here is that the Qur'an reminds us (5:75) that both Mary and Jesus had to eat their daily food. This apparently odd statement becomes clear if we bring it together with the Byzantine court propaganda after 626. As those verses are developed exactly in this time (probably 630/631), within the larger context of a polemical debate with Byzantium, this connection makes

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a lot of sense. The proclaimer of the Qur'an stresses the vulnerability of Mary and rejects the claim of her incorruptibility. She has to drink and to eat, and neither she nor her clothing are incorruptible. In other words, the war propaganda of Herakleios and his court theologians were outright rejected, and the Byzantine use of Mary's clothes and icons as instruments in war is denounced by Islamic revelation.

Hopefully, all Christians today will agree with the proclaimer of the Qur'an on this matter. But the polemics of this period provided an important lesson for late antique Christians. And still today the qur'anic depiction of Mary reminds us of the danger of misusing religious ideas within military campaigns. The qur'anic critique of supersessionist and imperial misuse of religion in war is still important to keep in mind – of course not only within Christianity.

Reconciling Mary 1.0 and Mary 2.0

Let me turn to a third and final lesson that Christians can learn from the representation of Mary in the Qur'an. Some scholars in Qur'anic Studies have already demonstrated that the Qur'an develops a female genealogy for Jesus.[7] Whereas the biblical genealogy always needs Joseph to provide the link to David and thereby relies uniquely on men (Mt 1:1-16; Lk 3:23-38), the qur'anic genealogy starts with two women: Mary and her mother (Q 3:35). Joseph does not exist in the Qur'an, and Mary's father does not have any active role. Of course, Mary is also mentioned in the genealogy of the Bible, but the genealogical line depends on Joseph, who alone is Jesus' link to the heritage of David. For the proclaimer of the Qur'an, however, such a male link is not necessary. The power of Jesus and even his purity is mediated through his mother and his grandmother. Most impressive in this context is the prayer of Jesus' grandmother. She promises to God that she will dedicate her child to the Temple because she hopes that this promise will help her to become pregnant – presumably hoping to have a son, because only men were allowed to do service in the temple (Q 3:35). Her request is fulfilled and she becomes pregnant, but not with a male child as she might have hoped. Nonetheless she does not hesitate to bring her daughter Mary to the Temple (Q 3:37). It is the mother's prayer that purifies Mary and Jesus and protects them from Satan (Q 3:36). Hence she seems to have ritual power and Mary is closely linked with the Temple without replacing it.[8]

From a typological perspective, Mary's relationship to Zechariah becomes very interesting. Zechariah serves the role of caring for her at the Temple, but she proves not to need this care because God provides her food directly through the angels (Q 3:37). If it is true that Zechariah is the representant of Judaism and is appreciated in his dignity in the Qur'an, it is also true that Christianity (represented in the person of Mary) becomes independent from him and develops her own independent and equally valid relationship to God. But the relationship of Mary and Zechariah also has a story to tell in terms of gender equality. Mary does not need the care of the male authorities. God cares for her as a child and also in the desert during her pregnancy; she can subsequently give birth to the word of God without any male help. After Jesus' birth, she is in a sense protected by him and can rely on him as the word of God, whose presence protects and exalts her from the beginning of his life. But even this protection is not the protection of a powerful man, but protection through God's word alone, manifest in her own child (Q 19:29), for whom she is responsible and herself protective.

It is clear, then, that Mary and her mother have both ritual and prophetic power in the Qur'an. What is so interesting in the story of Mary in the Qur'an is the fact that this female empowerment (which we moderns might be tempted to view as a later innovation) is drawn completely from a highly traditional retelling of the story. Mary remains a virgin in the perspective of the Qur'an and she is thoroughly linked to religious institutions. This too provides a helpful reminder for Christians today. In the Catholic Church in Germany today there is a movement of women who want to have more power for women in the church. They call themselves Mary 2.0 and they argue (among other things) for the priesthood of women. Conservative Catholics have responded to this movement with a campaign for "Mary 1.0," stressing Mary's virginity and servanthood. The intriguing message of the Qur'an for both campaigns is that the Qur'an clearly stresses Mary's dependence on God and Jesus, along with her virginity, which would seem to align the proclaimer with the conservative understanding of Mary 1.0. At the same time, it is precisely this traditional Mary and her mother who are invested with ritual power and who authoritatively mediate God's word to the world – all elements uplifted by Mary 2.0. That is why, in some sense, the perspective offered by the qur'anic Mary can indicate fruitful interpretive space between the positions of liberal and conservative Catholics. But, as we have seen, she can also bring together people who have reservations about Mary (such as Jews and Protestants) with Christians from the Catholic or Orthodox traditions who live with a strong veneration of Mary. Last but not least, the qur'anic Mary can serve as a bridge between Christians and Muslims insofar as the way that the Qur'an presents Mary is very much compatible with the core narratives of Christianity in which she appears. Christians and Muslims alike, insofar as they celebrate the holy purpose and significant status of Mary, have to reflect seriously on how their traditions have treated women over the years and continue in many ways to marginalize them. More specifically, in terms of the interreligious implications, Christians have to learn that they do

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What is so interesting in the story of Mary in the Qur'an is the fact that this female empowerment (which we moderns might be tempted to view as a later innovation) is drawn completely from a highly traditional retelling of the story.

not own Mary and that Muslims too have important things to say about her that add valuable perspective, even as they may challenge Christian traditions.

Let me conclude with one of these traditions within Christianity that may be fruitfully challenged in dialogue with Islam. For the traditional doctrine of Mary's virginity in Christianity, it is supposed that Mary remains a virgin during the birth of Jesus. This dogma, aside from its inscrutable biology, is in keeping with a theological tendency to downplay the pain and trauma of Mary's human birth-giving. Mary's birth pains are neglected, if not ignored, because as the "new Eve" she is meant to be free of the pain that, in Genesis, is associated with the disobedience of Eve and Adam. Such a typological reading extracts Mary from her role as representative of humanity and it permits some problematic, docetist assumptions about the birth of Jesus. But when the proclaimer of the Qur'an describes Mary's birth pains (Q 19:23) and her deep despair, he invites Christians as well to identify with Mary as he himself identified with her. Again, Mary becomes a figure that can bring Muslims and Christians together in shared insight; she is in this respect an interreligious enabler.

Notes:

1. Muna Tatari and Klaus von Stosch, *Mary in the Qur'an* (London: Gingko Library, 2021 [forthcoming]). All insights in this article are more comprehensively developed in this book. If I, as a Christian theologian, dare to say so much on the Qur'an's message in this article, this is only because I summarize insights that were collaboratively cultivated with my Muslim colleague.

2. Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah in the Talmud Yerushalmi and Sefer Zerubbabel," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture, III,* edited by Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2002), 369-390.

3. Cf. Klaus von Stosch, "Reflecting on Approaches to Jesus in the Qur'ān from the Perspective of Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, edited by Francis X. Clooney and Klaus von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 37-58.

4. Cf. James Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622-630," *War in History* 6 (1999), 1-44.

5. Cf. Martin Hurbanič, *The Avar Siege of Constantinople in 626: History and Legend* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

6. Cf. Antoine Wenger, "L'intercession de Marie en Orient du sixième au dixième siècle," *Etudes Mariales* 23 (1966), 51-75.

7. Cf. Angelika Neuwirth, "The HHouse of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Texts and Studies of the Qur'ān, 6), edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 499-532.

8. If we compare the role of Mary's mother in the Qur'an with that in the Protevangelium of James, it becomes even clearer how much the Qur'an empowers her: her husband plays a much more active role in the other source.

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Book Review

The Fruits of Religious Relationality

Review of *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*. Edited by Hans Gustafson. Baylor University Press, 2020. xv+295 pp. $49.99 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-4813-1254-7.

By Jude Lal Fernando

World religions are religions-in-the-world, but the traditional way of teaching world religions does not capture this most significant reality. Instead, religions still tend to be presented as hyper-realities that are separated from each other as well as from real life experiences. Deploying a wide variety of methodological and theoretical approaches, the thirty-six authors of this collection have problematized this dominant Euro-American model and authoritatively demonstrated multiple concrete ways in which religion is fundamentally relational in its lived reality. Such cutting-edge scholarship is the fruit of an awakening to the growing web of relationships between peoples and between the various traditions that construct worldviews and life-stances in our modern age. These encounters between religions – as well as religions' interactions and intersections with other personal and socio-political realities – bring about challenges in the form of various types of conflicts as well as opportunities for mutual enrichment of each other and for seeking common good together. This unfolding interreligious reality has given rise to a specific area of academic research among theologians and religious studies scholars as well as interfaith activists.

The thirty-six essays of *Interreligious Studies*, including the introduction and the conclusion, embody the breadth and depth of the scholarship that has been emerging from this area and lead to the continuous formation of interreligious studies as a field. Hans Gustafson, as the editor, has expertly mapped this nascent field and brought together a wide range of scholars (mostly Euro-American) who are not only perceptively critical, but also deeply self-reflective, of the dominant paradigm of teaching religion. Readers can interlink chapters with one another and enter into an enriching conversation in a way that gives them a sense of an interreligious studies community in the making. The volume has a created a rich and vibrant space in which a wide range of perspectives are presented, practices of different scholarly and activist constituencies are identified and interrelated, and many new possibilities are imagined in the still-emerging field of interreligious studies. The five sections of the book navigate the reader step by step, with great intellectual curiosity, from scoping the field, choosing one's method and disciplinary lenses, and identifying contemporary challenges to engaging practically and envisioning new possibilities. Each chapter's brevity, written as a promising research proposal, is pedagogically very effective.

The first section, "Sketching the Field," characterizes interreligious/interfaith studies as an interdisciplinary, and multi- or cross-disciplinary exercise, construing the subject under study as plural and relational. Oddbjørn Leirvik reminds us how religious studies and theology, as the closest associates of the field, can offer crucial perspectives through "self-implication" and "self-critique" (20). Such interreligious studies in turn will have a transformative effect on the ways in which we do religious studies and theology more broadly. Geir Skeie awakens us to the distance between content-oriented and practice-oriented study. By analysing the results of an international research project that replaced "interreligious studies" with "dialogue," the author notes how the latter term enhanced the study by including other worldviews (beyond what would conventionally be classified as "religious") and by engaging with the complexities of particular contexts. Eboo Patel maps the field with the story of a youth leader who intuitively detects ethical/practical orientations of each faith community in his city, in the course of mobilizing them to come together for a humanitarian cause. Patel wants such moves to provide a starting point for interreligious studies programs in broadening civil engagement. In her own mapping, Marianne Moyaert depicts the interrelationship between theologians, interreligious scholars, and interfaith activists – who come from different methodological and disciplinary orientations but are in need of each other in enhancing their own understanding for a productive engagement in pluralist societies. She convinces the reader that, for the optimization of interreligious courses' effectiveness, these three profiles need to be blended together in classroom. Through his work on Guatemala, Mark N. Hanshaw reminds us that it is necessary to recognise the local, popular, and indigenous traditions that intersect with the other religious traditions. A religion, moreover, has many attributes that will attract people with diverse dispositions, signifying to them differently and inviting different applications in their ways of life. So too, a

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Dr. Jude Lal Fernando is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of M.Phil Programme in Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin. He is the Director of the Trinity Centre for Post-Conflict Justice and brings praxis-based experience to the academic context in the fields of interreligious studies and international peace studies. His main research interests are religion, peace, and conflict, with a specific focus on the role of interreligious dialogue in peace-building, ethno-nationalisms, and geopolitics, especially in Sri Lanka but also in Asia more generally.

single life can contain multiple religious perspectives; therefore, argues Jeanine Diller, studying religion demands the intervention and cross-fertilization of many different disciplines. "Interreligion," her term for designating the open and relational quality of all religious life, necessitates cross-disciplinarity if it is to be comprehended. Anne Hege Grung poses questions to interreligious studies that have been honed in interreligious dialogue, questioning the male-dominated hegemonic character of each: for example, upholding institutionalized traditions as "we" and excluding many voices (of women, marginalised men, LGBTQ+ people, culturally and racially different people, and so forth) as "they." Hence, she suggests a "transreligious" approach that recognises the specificity of each tradition without privileging the powerful over the marginalized.

In the second section, scholar-practitioners explore some of their diverse methodologies. By contrast with merely comparative, detached approaches, Frans Wijsen holds that the self and the other are mutually inclusive, not least when juxtaposing the vantage point of the student with those of the communities studied. Following years of ethnographic research that helped develop friendships among faith communities, Nelly van Doorn-Harder recognizes with great humility that there is still "a cloud of unknowing" (88) about certain religious experiences. Hans Gustafson reiterates that "an appeal to the heart, to the person, to the lived experience" (91) goes deeper than a theoretical appeal to discursive concepts – a depth that is needed to capture something of the vitality of lived religion. Insofar as many societies are becoming increasingly religiously diverse, like in the Scandinavian countries, Ånund Brottveit recognizes the need for empirical research on interreligious communication and cooperation on many levels (formal and informal, local and national, organized and spontaneous). Yet, a normative approach to interreligious studies that is informed by conflict and peace studies rather than political science is no less productive; interreligious studies can draw crucial insights from ecumenical studies, argues Aaron T. Hollander, not simply analysing the processes of division or unity but also proactively resisting sectarianism. The architectural designs of places of worship, which are changing in our modern times, create space to look for meanings of the religious other; Timothy Parker sees the question of "why their sacred spaces are the way they are" (121) as initiating new interreligious conversations and requiring new research methods.

The third section, "Theological and Philosophical Considerations," is the shortest in the volume, demonstrating the importance of becoming aware of religious truths and evaluations of different truth-claims without simply limiting interreligious studies to the descriptions of truths about religion. J. R. Hustwit notes that, even though the methods differ, the relationship between the critical-explanatory model of religious studies and the hermeneutically grounded sensibility of theology is symbiotic and can "offer new possibilities for theological creativity" (132), critically enhancing the boundaries of particular religious traditions as found in Theology of Religion, Missiology, Comparative Theology and Transreligious Theology. Wolfram Weisse argues that dialogue has to be at the heart of this exercise, which cannot be done by Christian theology alone. Based on the fruits of a research project in Germany, he points out the need to contextualize interreligious dialogue not only conceptually but also practically, "analysing dialogue as it is practiced" (135), a process that he calls Dialogical Theology. There has to be a "hermeneutics of trust" in such a dialogue, as Perry Schmidt-Leukel posits, because the ultimate reality that is believed to be the ground of wellbeing of all in one's tradition can be known in another tradition in "different forms and different ways" (143). In other words, I can recognize myself in the other and the other in me: "Religions resemble each other in their internal diversity" (144). This pluralistic turn in philosophy, theology, and religion, as Jeffery D. Long reflects, has been embodied by the life and work of Swami Vivekananda, who upheld that "each of the world's religions captures some portions of the truth. Each is true, but each is a portion" (150). Without each other we cannot reach any fullness of truth.

In the subsequent section on "Contemporary Challenges," the hegemonic Eurocentric understanding of religion and indeed of interreligious studies is scrutinized. Resisting the portrayal of religion as an abstract category, Kevin Minister invites readers to adopt an interactive mode that relocates lived religion within material environments, including social and ecological frameworks. As embodied, religion is also intersectional and interpersonal. Insofar as it inhabits these features, interreligious studies can be liberative. Paul Hedges' postcolonial and decolonial lens problematizes the "bounded territories of religious participation," for instance in the Chinese cultural world and its "shared religious landscape" (168). Kate McCarthy attempts to decolonize both religiosity and secularity. For her, secularity, the condition of pluralist societies in which multireligious and nonreligious actors interact on putatively equal footing, manifests a critique of the pluralist approach to religious diversity – based as it is on a universalizing conception of religion – which is regularly hailed as a feature of American exceptionalism. Brian K. Pennington's appeal to separate the interfaith movement from the commodification of the education sector under the neoliberal agenda is worth noting as another decolonizing strategy. Russell C. D. Arnold questions the prioritization of neatly defined and easily separable religious identities, instead using the Way of Life Wheel to examine the intersection of "the complex constellation of

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experiences" (186) that shape our lives. In the context of reactionary politics, where religion has been highly politicized and racialized (for instance, circulating anti-Judaism and Islamophobia) Rachel S. Mikva adopts an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach capable of confronting the colonialist categorization of religions in essentialist terms. Caryn D. Riswold and Guenevere Black Ford point out how interreligious studies can disrupt xenoglossophobia (racial bias and fear of a foreign language, such as Arabic), reminding us that culture and language are always part of religious communities' power relations. Peter A. Pettit identifies the Israel-Palestine conflict along with its interreligious and intrareligious implications as another challenge, though one seemingly at odds with a decolonial interpretation.

The final section, "Praxis and Possibilities," presents a range of areas in societies that can be enriched by interreligious studies and interfaith activism. Barbara A. McGraw focuses on the formation of cross-cultural leadership in which the religious roots and branches of cultures are appreciated; she advocates for cross-sectoral engagement. In such a task, interreligious empathy, as highlighted by Catherine Cornille, is of paramount importance. Empathy is generated through "experience, participation, and imagination" and involves "the ability of conceiving of things existing otherwise" (225). Or N. Rose's narration of a deep relationship between a Christian leader and a Jewish rabbi proposes interreligious hospitality as requiring knowledge about the needs of the guest and a willingness to accommodate these. It is a reciprocal gesture of "being able to offer and receive" (232). Navras J. Aafreedi connects the above practices and possibilities to the challenges of peacebuilding in conflict-ridden societies. Interfaith activism should address the legacies of past conflicts by way of inclusive narratives, recognize reciprocal suffering, and promote open acknowledgement of wrongdoings past and present. A deep and deliberate awareness of minority traditions can create a democratic space that prevents majoritarianism. As certain social and political conflicts are associated with nation-building, Asfa Widiyanto argues that we need to go beyond the civic-instrumental dimension of nation-building and incorporate more robustly the cultural-symbolic dimension. Interfaith activism, as part of civil society, can contribute to a more humane nation-building by promoting "secularised religious education" and "transformed religious education" that self-consciously and effectively uphold diversity (245). With reference to Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue, Douglas Pratt invites the reader to recognize and critique patterns of antipathy (hostility), affinity (assumption of sameness), appeal (apologetics), and accommodation (as exemplified by Islam's notion of the rights and relationships granted to the "People of the Book" or by the history of Christian toleration of religious minorities out of a kind of *realpolitik*). Deanna Ferree Womack deepens the conversation by inviting those in the field to engage in hitherto marginalized areas of research. Her focus on gender in Muslim-Christian relations suggests a similar orientation with regard to other interreligious relations. The need to overcome the "façade of scholarly objectivity and disengagement" (266) that poses only theoretical questions is re-endorsed. Community-oriented interdisciplinary approach is emphasized in making the interreligious studies a practitioner's field. Jeannine Hill Fletcher's illuminating contribution, "Scholarship in Activism," defines the role of the practitioner as taking one's view "from the struggles of those without power in our society and [asking] what research is needed to address the reality at hand" (250).

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In sum, the authors' commendable reflexivity, continuous engagement across multiple dimensions of the academy and civil society, and rigorous analysis to further academic engagement with peoples' practical and religious needs not only create an encouraging space within the Western hemisphere for interreligious/interfaith studies and activism. They also initiate multiple points of contact while generating a promising bridge-building potential with the non-Western world of scholarship and activism in the interreligious field.

5. On the role of the queen mother see N, A. Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," *CBQ* 45 (1983) 192 and the references given by him: G.F. Kirwim, *The Nature of the Queenship of Mary* (PhD dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1973); B. M. Nolan, *The Royal Son of God* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 41-43; H. Cazelles, "La mère du Roi-Messie dans l'Ancien Testment," *Acta congressus mariologici-mariani in civitate Lourdes anno 1958 celebrati: Maria et Ecclesia* 5 (1959) 48-56.

6. In the themes of Mary as the Daughter of Sion and the Tabernacle I am indebted to R. Laurentin, *Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II* (Paris: Gabalda, 1964), and to the works of S. Lyonnet.

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