Deliver Us: The New Eve, Coredemption, and the Motherhood of God

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DELIVER US: THE NEW EVE,
COREDEMPTION, AND THE
MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

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DELIVER US: THE NEW EVE,
COREDEMPTION, AND THE
MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
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in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of
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with a
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by
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At the beginning of this Marian project, I offer a thought for her husband: the widower Joseph. Called to support a child who was not his, he provided the conditions of possibility for the “hidden years,” years deeply treasured by the Mother of the Lord. Jesus looked exactly like his mother, and henceforth all generations have called her blessed. Mary’s Son probably looked nothing like Joseph. Yet, the aged carpenter faithfully and silently cared for a child who would never be his and a mother who would always belong more to the child than to him. I thank God for Joseph and for the mystery of adoption. This project’s completion owes to similar acts of silent devotion and care. It bears my name, my interests, my writing style (for good and ill). But there are so many to whom it owes its life, whose bodies, minds, and energies are part of its completion. I would first like to express my gratitude to Natalia Marandiuc and Gary Anderson, whose expertise and attention has been needed by, and given to, a project that furthers no agenda for either of them. Indeed, they may feel it works at cross-purposes to much of their labors. But their conversation and gracious response means that it is better than it might have been. I owe thanks to the many colleagues and friends in the Graduate Program in Religious Studies at Southern Methodist University who gave critical feedback to the ideas found in this work, especially Justus Hunter, Danny Houck, Dallas Gingles, and Adam Van Wart. David Mahfood, without whose interest and advocacy I would not have come to SMU, has been arguing with me for so long I’m not sure which of my thoughts are mine and which are his. The same is true for Brendan Case, my co-worker and dear friend, who not only read every word in this project at
least once but also endured his extroverted friend’s verbal processing of virtually every idea in it. He made them better, and there will never be a way to compensate him for the gifts he, Alissa, and their four children have given graciously to me. Brian Biba and Laura McClain offered their house at a crucial point to give me space and time to write. Paul Griffiths, who taught me how to discover what I think and why it is probably mistaken, is due more gratitude than I have space for. All Saints Durham, All Saints Dallas, and the Mission Chattanooga were the womb in which I grew and was nourished as this project grew in me. Audrey Keown, Katrina Payne, Amber Busby, Erin Waller, Laura McClain, Mary Ferguson, Kathleen Weinert, Sasha Tatasciore, and Natalie Carnes, in interviews in writing, and in faithful friendship, gave me glimpses into a dimension of humanity I could never hope to fully understand, though I have done everything I can to see it well. In their wisdom and energy, I saw more clearly than ever the gift my mother had given to me in her tenacious single motherhood. To my mother Sharon first of all, my sisters Alicia and Chelsea second, and to my surrogate mothers Damaris and Susie and my mother-in-law Zanjula: this project is a hymn of praise to all of you and your wondrous gifts. My surrogate fathers, Ron, Dan, and Richard, my stepfather Wally, and my father-in-law Jim have each pushed and let be, and I thank them. Finally, I owe to Bruce Marshall a relentless quest for more clarity, more precision, and more brevity (on this last, especially, I expect I will always fail him). What I think is “my” grasp on the history of Christian teaching is actually just an inferior copy of his. To William J. Abraham, I give gratitude for a love of first principles, a ferocious intellectual energy, and a determination to grow in intellectual holiness. To my wife: “no country is worth the tethering to: it’s good that I circle, not the world, but you.” All of these people (and so many more) deserve more mention than I have given them. Like Joseph, they have cared for a project that was not theirs. They have challenged and inspired me, made me smarter, and built a world in
which my work on this project made the sense it did. Like Joseph, they are due a credit they will
never insist upon. Like him, they have given lovingly of their lives to fashion what is not theirs.
Unlike him, they are responsible only for its graces – its flaws are mine alone.
In what follows, I try to develop a speculative and constructive account of what Christians should say regarding whether and how Mary is a coredemptrix, that is, a partner in the redemptive work of her Son. My goal is to clarify what it might mean to say Mary is a co-redeemer, why anyone should say that, and what the consequences would be for Christian theology if they did. I take this doctrine to have critical importance not only for the individual loci of Christian theology (many of which are treated within) but for a meta-theological understanding of the God-world relation.

After a brief introduction (chapter 1), I start by observing a relatively widespread ecumenical consensus: that Mary, alongside the New Adam, plays the role in our salvation that Eve plays in our perdition. That is, like a large and consistent early Christian consensus, start from Mary as the New Eve. I then proceed to examine the depths and heights of that consensus for its implications in as far-reaching a way as I can. My second chapter traces the development of the “New Eve” motif from the earliest Christian testimony through the Second Vatican Council, showing how New Eve teaching grounds Mariology and then eventually disappears in the wake of speculative controversy about Mary’s graces and prerogatives. The partnership
implied by the New Eve teaching comes to be called coredemption and argued for (and against) on the basis of speculative prerogatives that were themselves based upon coredemption.

I then examine (in chapter 3) the range of biblical motifs and images applied to Mary by early Christians, especially from the Old Testament. I examine their origins in history and their evolution, concluding that the Old Testament concludes with an unresolved search for the Mother of the Lord. My fourth chapter then examines the life of Mary as it is given to us in the New Testament, concluding that the Scriptures and earliest Christian tradition present her to us deliberately as the end of the Old Testament’s search. That search is for Abraham’s Daughter, someone who will ratify the covenant with God by offering to him that which is all she loves in the world, the very offering God makes to us for love’s sake. Without that offering, begun in the Presentation of infant Jesus at the Temple but completed at his Cross, Jesus could not have performed the redemptive work that saves the world. When he goes to the cross, he goes only where she leads and sends him in love to the uttermost.

In chapter 5, I turn my attention to the covenant, to show that God’s covenant with Israel, when it is rightly understood, implicates God in a promissory debt to establish Israel, to ensure that Israel keeps His covenant. That covenant achieves its consummation at the point where Israel and God each make an identical offering to other of what each loves most, which is the very same thing: the Christ incarnate in Israel’s flesh. That covenant’s basis, then, is the love and partnership of the divine persons as they love and offer all they are to one another. God’s covenant promise is his commitment to raise up in the earth images to show his internal community; thus, the image would always be begetter, begotten, and the multi-personal love between them.
That the creation is destined to be divine images binds it all to the divine covenant to raise up the image of God, begetter and begotten. The creation goes on by generative imitation of God, and it is in this imitation that the creation becomes a divine image. Nature’s Motherhood (to borrow a phrase from Gerard Manley Hopkins) is the creation’s image of the Creator by the Creator’s own Wisdom. That Wisdom, in the creator and the creature, is the precondition of the economy of grace, which makes it possible for the Word of God to be meaningful. The creative and redemptive act of God, that is, is to speak not only a Word but a world in which that Word is meaningful. That world is, finally, the Mother of God, who brings the Word to birth. Israel’s great “motherhood” traditions, paganism and Wisdom, intuit the motherhood of God in the motherhood of creation and tend towards the day when Nature’s Motherhood and God’s motherhood will be the same.

In Mariology we see the partnership of the creature with God, not reflected but completed in Mary’s partnership with her Son’s redemptive work. In the end, the New Eve partners with her consort not just in redemption from Sin but in revealing His wisdom as he fashions a world that, even if we do not know how it is so, fashions him as its highest achievement and greatest treasure.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td><em>Church Dogmatics</em></td>
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<td>CDH</td>
<td><em>Cur Deus Homo</em></td>
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<td>JPS</td>
<td><em>The Jewish Study Bible</em></td>
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<td>LXX</td>
<td><em>The Septuagint</em></td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td><em>The Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible</em></td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td><em>The New Testament</em></td>
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<td>OT</td>
<td><em>The Old Testament</em></td>
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<td>PG</td>
<td><em>Patrologia Graeca</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td><em>Patrologia Latina</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PLM</td>
<td><em>Paradise Lost</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td><em>Summa Theologiae</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>VUL</td>
<td><em>The Vulgate Translation of the Bible</em></td>
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for Ana Beatriz
Mother crow
Feels no pain
Speaks no word

Speckled egg
Hatching slow
Bible black
Baby bird

One day, fly over me

Place you in
Flannel coat
Months fly by

Grow your bones
Feathers skin
Bible black
By and by

You will
Spread your wings
One day
Fly over me

(Thrice, “As the Crow Flies”)

I was – as my body swelled and I lumbered ungracefully around the house – like a god to you. Or, more modestly, I was your first image of divinity. My body was your cosmos, the source that filled your needs and sustained your life. Form your dark and watery perspective, I was your creator. In the beginning, I gave you a universe that was formless and void, and darkness covered your face. You knew me as a voice, a breath that vibrated over the waters of my womb. In the beginning, we were as creator and creature, playing out the story of your genesis.

– Natalie Carnes, Motherhood: A Confession
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In what follows, I try to develop a speculative account of what Christians should say regarding whether and how Mary of Nazareth is a partner in her Son’s redemption of the world. My goal is to clarify what it might mean to say Mary is a co-redeemer, why anyone should say that, and what the consequences would be if they did. I write as a Christian from within the spectrum of what might be called reformed catholic churches – communities of Christian faith that have endeavored, while descending from the Protestant Reformation, to lay hold even so of the whole Christian archive and work out, case by case, the intramural difficulties that attempt creates. In my judgment, those communities still struggle to incorporate the historic Marian teachings of the church in any robust way. In attempting to develop an account of Marian coredemption, I imply that the church communities of which I am representative should do the same. That attempt and its resulting implication condition this project in a number of ways, but none so clearly as in its starting points and method. Wherever possible, I attempt at least to begin with what has been thought *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*. Where that is not possible, I hope to make my commitments clear enough that they can be disputed.

This project is speculative and systematic, and therefore normative. In it, my endeavor is to work out what should or at least may be said to follow from positions I take the vast majority of Christians to hold in common. Briefly, those commitments are to the existence of God as a trinity of persons, one of whom (“the Word” or “the Son”) became Incarnate of the Virgin Mary
as the man Jesus of Nazareth, son of Israel and Son of God. That man lived, preached, worked miracles and delivered people from evil, and died at the order of Pontius Pilate. He was raised from the dead on Easter morning, and, before ascending to heaven, he entrusted his mission to his apostles and the church they gathered. My sources for these claims are historical witnesses and theological commentary upon them found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and the subsequent reflection of the church upon those witnesses. That reflection takes the form of authoritative summary statements (“Creeds”), liturgies and devotions, practices, materials (icons, artifacts, symbols), and people (Saints). Not all of these are held perfectly in common (ab omnibus), but where one of them proves important to my thinking, I try to signal that and give reasons for its importance.

The arguments and reasons offered here are in the end my own, even if they do not begin that way. Where they do not, I do my best to make the relationship clear, though it is near certain I will mistake for my own thoughts what has been said already without my knowing or remembering it. I am attempting to gain a greater grasp on the things I believe by pressing them for implications on a matter disputed by Christian communities. I obviously do not claim to have executed this task perfectly or even well. That is for others to judge. If I have, my hope is that those Christian communities for whom Mary’s partnership in redemption is already a central tenet will be comforted, edified, and assisted in clarifying their own thoughts. If churches for whom Mary has had little to no importance are moved to incorporate her more centrally into their doctrine and devotion, I would give praise to God.

So much for my starting points and aims. My method oscillates between deduction and abduction. At times, I try to point out what follows from some belief or set of beliefs I believe the church to have. At other times, I am offering what I take to be the best explanation for the
fact that the church has a belief, such as a historical or exegetical argument. In the end, I am striving for the warrant to claim something to be true regardless of who affirms it or does not.

It remains for me to map out the basic argument. I contend that the question of Mary’s coredemption, or indeed of any Mariology at all, arises from the early Christian description of her as the New Eve, his partner and associate in the work of redemption. That such a partner was called for emerges rather naturally from the vocation of Israel as it is described in the Old Testament. There, Israel receives a vocation to partner with God in the redemption and recreation of the world by offering to God its King and firstborn Son, in whose wise rule the nations will see God’s justice and wisdom put on display. That vocation is refracted chiefly through the language and terms of the covenant, through the summons of wisdom, and through Israel’s co-suffering of God’s alienation from the world. These three notes, which correspond to the three genres of Hebrew biblical literature (Torah, Prophets, and Wisdom), mark the preparation of Israel as a people who can bear, nurture, and offer the world’s Redeemer to God and lay him completely at God’s disposal for the mission on which God sends him. In short, the Old Testament commissions Israel to become a new Eve, and I argue that once that call is seen, it becomes clear that the growing devotion to Mary in the early Church arises from the internal logic of Israel’s relationship to her God as it is rethought in the light of Christ.

From the earliest days, the Church described Mary in the terms of several important Old Testament motifs, without necessarily spelling out the relationship of those motifs to one another or to the whole story of the Old Testament. But those motifs are themselves related across the developing canon of Hebrew Scripture and the literature of the intertestamental period. Once those threads are connected, Mary’s appearances in the New Testament take on new resonances and show her to play a crucial role in Christ’s redemption of the world. Though her role is an
ancillary one (Lk 1:38), it is a \textit{sine qua non}. She does what only she can do and what she must do; she offers a child that belongs by maternal rights to her completely and unreservedly as a living sacrifice to God. And she does it for the life of Israel and the world. In doing so, she ratifies and consummates the covenant that God had made with Israel by loving him as he had loved them, making to him an offering equal, identical in fact, to his offering to them.

The covenant is how God relates to Israel and, through Israel, to the world. In the covenant, God binds himself to the future of Israel and binds Israel’s future to himself. Because of the covenant, they are destined to be images of God, standing among the peoples of the earth as Adam and Eve did among the creatures of the garden. Reflecting the goodness and glory of God, the original pair do by Wisdom\textsuperscript{1} what the rest of the creation does unawares; Israel will do the same for the nations of the world. In the covenant, God thus claims Israel as his wise partner in the creation and ordering of the world. That claim comes under threat as Israel repeatedly turns away from God and towards the nations. But the covenant, because it is a gift and calling of God, is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Having made the covenant, he must ensure not only that he is faithful to it, but that Israel eventually proves faithful as well. Thus, to be faithful to Israel, God must and does preserve for himself a remnant within the chosen people through whom he wins the whole people in the end. The existence of that remnant makes of Israel’s history a dialectic. Israel becomes to God both friend and enemy; both son and orphan; both sin and atonement. Their sin introduces a contradiction into the covenant, where in order to establish Israel, God must lay waste to them; in order to be Abraham’s friend, he must be Jacob’s enemy; in order to

\footnote{\textsuperscript{1} Here meant merely as the knowledge ordered by love of God’s will and ways, but see discussions of Wisdom from various angles throughout.}
fulfill his promise, he must turn against his Word.

It does not follow from the existence of a remnant that Israel’s history would be a dialectic at all. God could, *de potentia absoluta*, simply bless the remnant and curse the rest. The dialectic arises from the fact that God’s covenant is with all Israel, not merely with those who are loyal to him. The logic of the covenant means that God must bring it about that all Israel fulfills the vocation. And by grace, that is what happens: what the people of the remnant do by wisdom, the rest do unawares. Mary-*cum*-Israel offers her son for the life of the world, while Israel-*cum*-Mary sacrifices its child Jesus to the gods of the nations. Mary suffers in Christ what God suffers in Christ, and for the very same reason. She experiences the wound of her people’s faithfulnessness: figured not only in their rejection of her Son but reenacted in his dismissal of her. In Jesus’s cross and Mary’s co-suffering with her Son the consequences of their people’s rejection of God, there is a perfect human image in the garden of the world. In their common mission, they unveil the face of God who loves Israel with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength and loves his neighbor as himself.

It is the attribute of “neighborliness” in God that brings about human partnership with God in the earth. The covenant binds Israel to become a divine image, but the God whose image they are is a single eternal act of begetting and being begotten in the Holy Spirit, of sending and being sent by the Power of the Spirit, of Speaking and being Spoken by the breath of the Lord. The consummation of human partnership with God, by which humanity becomes the divine image, must then consist in an act of begetting and being begotten, of receiving and being

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2 Clearly, there are texts pointing in both directions: Deuteronomy 28, for example, presents the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. On the other hand, Hosea 11:8 shows God unable to break the covenant he has made even in the face of Israel’s unfaithfulness.
received, of hearing and being heard. The Word of God must become a human word spoken and heard. Thus, the community of Israel gathers around Torah, Wisdom, and Prophet. Just as the Son’s identity just is his reception of the life of the Father, Israel’s identity as a people just is their reception of these gifts. At its consummation, however, Israel must be an act of giving birth by hearing and of being begotten by being heard. God offers his Son to the world in the speech act of the Word become flesh; Mary offers her son to the world in the paradigmatic act of obedience to the command, “Hear, O Israel.” It is this act, i.e., of so completely keeping the Word of God that she bears it, by which Mary becomes the partner of God, the one through whom, along with her Son, Israel’s vocation to be redeemed redeemers is fulfilled.

God’s act of faithfulness to his covenant is his superintendence of a history in which this comes about; God’s power is shown not just in his deliverance of a people but in his ability to raise up partners in that redemption. The covenant is one-sided in that the performance of it rests entirely on God’s unending love and abundant power; but in the end it cannot be a covenant without being accepted and fulfilled on both sides. The covenant requires that Israel be established, not merely that they be saved. They must, in the end, be the faithful people God has called them to be. They cannot merely be the recipients of his love; his love must bring it about that in the end they love him back. Everything that God gives, Israel must give, at some point or another. The hope of the covenant (and its judgment) is that Israel will become the images of God. It is therefore not enough for an Israelite to offer himself to God. Because Israel’s God begets and offers his Son as the King whose life ransoms the nations, Israel must likewise offer her children – and in Israel’s fulfillment it must be the same Son. The shadow of the akedah hangs mysteriously over the entire history of God’s covenant people: “because you have done this and have not withheld your only son from me.” It is by the cooperative offering of a son,
which Abraham did not do, that Israel will join God in his exhaustive demonstration of *chesed* for the peoples of the earth. Every theology that does not include this (and here is where the edge of my argument starts to sharpen) is a theology of Israel’s failure, consigning them to be vessels of destruction only, and that failure is a failure of Israel’s creator and redeemer. The Torah that binds Israel to obedience is not only an imperative but an indicative – “you will love the Lord with all your heart.” Jesus speaks entirely within that promise when he characterizes that love as an imitation of God: “be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.” The covenant binds God to Israel’s success as the hearers and imitators of God for the sake of the world’s redemption.

Mary’s hearing and obeying the Word catalyzes the reversal of the curses that have afflicted maternity, chief among which is the sting of death that she and her children are doomed to know. Many Christian writers speculated that her act of giving birth was completely unattended by the punishments pronounced over Eve. Whether or not that is true, all Christians believe that Mary was the first mother whose child was possessed of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16). Jesus’s defeat of death represents a restoration of the proper glory of maternity and an affirmation of its original goodness as an image of “the Childbirth” (1 Tim. 2:15) that sits at the heart of the divine mystery. But it is an act of *maternity*, graced but ordinary human maternity, by which it happens. The way human life endures in the world, by the self-donation of mothers to their children, turns out to be not merely how we survive but a window into God’s own life-begetting life.

This insight is contained in the suggestion of the Eleventh Council of Toledo that the

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3 There are, of course, two others in the Bible who are taken into heaven, but where the fathers of the Church have considered them at any length, they have concluded that they simply have not died yet. For a helpful summary of the existing options through the history of interpretation, see Thomas Aquinas’s discussion of them at See *ST* III, q. 49, a. 5.
divine Word proceeds \textit{ex utero Patris}.\footnote{“Nec enim de nihilo, neque de aliqua alia substantia, sed de Patris utero, id est, de substantia eius idem Filius genitus vel natus est” (Denzinger Schoenmetzer, 526).} That is, the relation that Mary has to the Son in time is the same relationship the Father eternally has to him. But if Mary’s motherhood opens up the being of God to our view, and if it is motherhood, then all motherhood, to some degree, becomes an image of God. Mary’s motherhood is the analogy that opens up a whole host of other analogies. Motherhood itself reflects the Father’s outpouring of His whole life into the Son. In this relationship as in so many others, \textit{gratia naturam perficit}. That is, Mary’s graced maternity reveals something that was always meant to be true in the orders of both creation and redemption. Her motherhood is that of the whole mothering earth, and through her one act of graced maternity, the world is recreated until it teems with life that cannot be taken away. As Gerard Manley Hopkins intuited, nature’s motherhood is explained in the end by Mary’s motherhood – because it is that. She becomes what I will call the unitive principle of creation, that which gives to the diversity of things their identity as Creation, so that in Christ’s taking of her flesh, he can sum up all things.\footnote{Eph. 1:10, Col. 1:17-20. See also “Nature’s Motherhood” below.} The annunciation, and Mary’s full response to God, is the paradigm of all creation’s obedience to God – her \textit{yes} of obedience is the event of which creation’s obediential potency is an image. God speaks \textit{fiat lux}, and in Mary and her Son, creation responds, \textit{fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum}, and \textit{voluntas tua fiat}. Mary is present, in God’s wise counsel, at the origins of all things, which become her children in their renewal. She is the mother not just of the Redeemer, but through him indeed the mother \textit{pantōn tōn zōnton}. Her universal motherhood is her acceptance of partnership with God. And this partnership with God in the rebirth of the cosmos through Christ’s flesh makes the dialectic of
Israel’s history the pattern for the origin and end of all created things. All of history is a dialectic as God lays claim to the whole human race and all of the cosmos via the world’s remnant, whom Wordsworth called “our tainted nature’s solitary boast.” Mary is God’s partner and creation’s horizon in her fulfillment of its obediential potency. Thus, she redeems the earth by being its most redeemed part. She is the earth on which God’s kingdom comes as it is in heaven, and the deposit of an order from which chaos, being a contradiction of God’s ordering Word, is forever banished.

Christians of many stripes have admitted to a weaker version of this claim. They hold that Mary, either as Israel or as the Church, or as both, is in some sense a “partner” with God. But they would balk at her being called a co-redeemer or even the idea that God needs or can have a partner. This objection is the explanation for the structure of the present work. In it, I try to work out in as precise a detail as I can, what Mary’s particular actions are. In the end, I take coredemption to be doctrine that owes to a particular theory of action. That theory runs as follows: actions are human attempts to apply causality to people, things, or states of affairs, with the intent of realizing a change. That means that actions are willful; to the extent that they are not, we are using the term analogously, when some other term would be more precise. We hold people accountable for actions, and we reward them. Actions, to be meaningful, consist of attempts to realize some intended reality. Coredemption is a kind of subordinate action, a joining of action to action for the realization of a joint result. In the sense in which I will intend it, coredemption is a strong word: it refers to an action, intent upon the redemption of the human race, itself insufficient to realize that intention, but related as a necessary cause to another action that is itself sufficient to realize the intent. This relationship amounts to a kind of joint sufficiency to the intention. Mary is rightly called a co-redeemer to the extent that an action of
This kind can be attributed to her.

This definition, though it tightens up our quarry, still leaves a lot unclear. What is “redemption?” That question could motivate a pile of other books (and it has). There is a sense in which the economy of redemption can be broadened out to include every contingent act of God ad extra whose purpose, solely or in part, is to redress the impasse that human sin has introduced between God and the world. Christian theologians typically narrow the question to the work accomplished by Christ on the cross and that work’s application to the lives and destinies of sinners. Further still, redemption often breaks down conceptually into “objective redemption,” which is Christ’s act of winning gifts and graces to us that restore us to God, and “subjective redemption,” which is the application and distribution of those graces. The question of coredemption cuts across all of these axes. At its most broad, it might focus on Israel as the intended partner for God in the divine plan to deal with human sin. At its most specific, it might deal with whether Mary (or anyone else) had a role in Christ’s merit of forgiveness for sins on the Cross. Possible partnership in that redemption, objective or subjective, can be proximate or distant, mediate or immediate. For my part, I am going to limit the term to the part that is most often the topic of controversy between Christians. That is, for the purposes of what follows, coredemption means, at least, immediate, proximate partnership in the objective redemption. In the theory of action being deployed here, that means a subordinate action, itself insufficient to realize the intention of saving the world, but causally necessary to an action that is sufficient to the world’s salvation, will be considered a proximate, immediate partnership in that saving action. Coredemption will refer to that subordinate action being joined to the act of objective redemption, i.e., Jesus’s suffering and passion on the cross, as a cause of it. If such an action can be attributed to Mary, she is a co-redeemer. If not, not. If it can be attributed to someone else,
they are a co-redeemer. If not, not.

One final formal point is in order. Each chapter includes as an epigraph a reflection from mothers that I know, and whom I interviewed about motherhood. Their comments, for me, crystallize a point I am at pains to make throughout this work. Mary, herself graced in an extraordinary way and blessed with a Son who is extraordinary as well, is nevertheless an ordinary human mother. Her motherhood as motherhood resembles the very phenomenon by which life goes on in our world. So much of our Mariological confusion arises from our inability to consider the New Eve under the aspect of motherhood, even as it is implied in the title itself. She is the Mother of all the Living who have been made alive in Her Son. But first, foremost, and importantly, she is this Child’s mother. The failure to gather that insight has led to enormous confusion; contemplating it afresh is the motivation behind each move in the present work. This work can only be described as an attempt at speculating well about the consequences, for the entire economy of salvation, of the Living God’s choice to be born of the mother who chose to bear him.

A final note on gender, language, and God. I will have much to say in what follows about various ways the Christian tradition genders its understanding of God in his self-revelation. I generally follow the traditional habit of using masculine pronouns for God, though at various points, where God is considered under the aspect of the feminine, I will use feminine ones. Both of these I take to name something in God; not gender but that of which gender is a sign, fallen in our fallen world but not necessarily so. I will explain this habit in some theological detail below.
CHAPTER 2

NEWMAN AND THE ANCILLA TO MARIAN THOUGHT: A PARABLE

This knowledge that this person already needed something from me – I felt a great restlessness for exercise, because it was as though the other person was saying “I need movement.” So, I’d get up early and say, “we’re gonna go for a walk.” And I meant “we two.” I was immediately responding and interacting with this person, whose existence was a 100% completely certain absolute truth. But only we two in the whole universe knew it.

When John Henry Newman set out to defend Catholic doctrine and devotion concerning Mary, his chief theological aim was to establish the Immaculate Conception as a teaching Anglicans could not deny without contradicting their own principles. As Newman understood it from his own days as an Anglican, the heirs of the English Reformation sought to pose the Vincentian Canon as a middle way between Popery and Puritanism. That canon held that true Christianity was discernible as that which had been believed “always, everywhere, and by everyone.” 6 Newman had his own reasons for being suspicious of the way non-Catholics deploy that canon. But the Anglican rejection of Catholic Mariology, as exemplified in E.B. Pusey’s Eirenicon, contradicts their own (and Pusey’s) adherence to the Canon’s tenets. So thought Newman at least.

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Newman proceeds by analyzing the teaching of two Christian teachers from the second century and one from the early third. From each of them, he traces a version of the New Eve typology that was the Church’s earliest Mariology. For Tertullian, Mary “blotted out” Eve’s fault and “brought back” the human race to salvation. Irenaeus calls her, by obedience, the *causa salutis*. Justin implies that she merits the Incarnation because she faithfully and joyfully accepts it: *fiat mihi...* (Reply, 33-35). The teaching of these fathers makes clear, in Newman’s view anyway, that they did not see Mary as a mere physical instrument of redemption. Such a thing could rightly be attributed, say, to David, or Judah, who, although following God by their best lights, might well never have dreamed of what God intended to do with their legacies. Or it could be attributed, more distantly, to the crib or the shroud of Turin. Mary knew, however, that she was bearing Israel’s long-awaited king, and – if her song of response is any indication – she knew or intuited already that he would be an instrument of the falling and rising of many in Israel; the mighty were soon to be cast from their thrones, and the lowly were to be lifted up. And when by faith she accepts the vocation of God upon her, she becomes not merely an instrument of the world’s salvation but an irreducible part of salvation’s explanation. As the Adam / New Adam typology works in Romans, so the earliest Christians would see in Mary an associate to the work of her Son, someone who plays the role in salvation that Eve played in perdition – a role of active and genuine partnership.

Newman establishes that Christians in the East and the West, within living memory of the Apostles, possessed a remarkably coherent and similar body of teaching about the mother of Jesus. That teaching is built on about as good a foundation as anyone to whom the earliest Christian testimony matters could hope for; and it is upon that foundation that Newman constructs an impressive edifice of early Marian doctrine, by adding on teaching found
throughout the testimony of the church of the first five centuries. Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephrem the Syrian, Epiphanius and Jerome, Peter Chrysologus and Fulgentius, to say nothing of the mighty Augustine and his mentor Ambrose, can all be found pointing to Mary’s faithful obedience as an active cause of the Incarnation and of the salvation it brings the world. In Mary’s obedience, the failure of Eve is redressed, and the child that is brought into the world brings eternal life with him, so that we can say most truly of Mary that she fulfills Eve’s vocation to be the mother of the living.

It is on the basis of this early consensus that Newman rests his conviction that Mary was – and must have been – utterly full of grace. She was to have the office in our Redemption which her distant ancestor had in our ruin. Thus, if Eve had need of “a large grace” merely in order to withstand temptation and remain in the happy state which her Creator had bestowed upon her, how much more would Mary need that grace, and how much more of it she would need (45):

is it any violent inference, that she, who was to co-operate in the redemption of the world, at least was not less endowed with power from on high, than she who, given as a helpmate to her husband, did in the event but cooperate with him for its ruin? If Eve was raised above human nature by that indwelling moral gift which we call grace, is it rash to say that Mary had even a greater grace? And this consideration gives significance to the Angel's salutation of her as "full of grace,"—an interpretation of the original word which is undoubtedly the {46} right one, as soon as we resist the common Protestant assumption that grace is a mere external approbation or acceptance, answering to the word "favour," whereas it is, as the Fathers teach, a real inward condition or superadded quality of soul. And if Eve had this supernatural inward gift given her from the first moment of her personal existence, is it possible to deny that Mary too had this gift from the very first moment of her personal existence?7

Newman concludes that this inference, unavoidable in his view, simply is what is meant by the claim that Mary was immaculately conceived. She was granted the grace Eve needed (as did she)

7 Reply, 45-6.
from the first moment of her existence. Whatever else flows out from this conclusion, this is how one arrives at it. That the fathers didn’t use the word Immaculate Conception – indeed, that many might have denied it in the terms that were available to them to state it with – is no great lack; it was some time before they used the word “Trinity,” although the reality the word picks out was arguably present in their teaching from the first. In the west, the dominant tradition regarding the transmission of sin effectively descends from Augustine; small wonder if the intricacies of the relationship between sin, transmission, Mary’s grace, and the consequences of all of these for her motherhood take a while to come fully into view.

What Newman so quickly captures as the origin of Marian thought, the historical basis for the first inferences about her prerogatives, is her role in salvation-history as the New Eve, the helpmeet of the Last Adam. This role contains important implications that took centuries to emerge clearly. From this historical (and eventually dogmatic) source, all the other Marian teachings spring eventually, like deep subterranean waters gradually working their way to the surface, or like a pregnancy that has not yet shown in the mother’s body. Still, for reasons that will become clearer in the remainder of this chapter, the source was not observed as insistently as what flowed out from it. Bizarrely, Catholic theologians began to reflect explicitly on Mary’s partnership in redemption at a rather late stage and largely in the wake of intramural conflict with the Protestantism. That is, some version of the doctrine of coredemption is our oldest Mariology (As Juniper Carol noted bluntly and aptly in the middle of the 20th century, wherever the New Eve acts in “antithesis” to the old one, we are witnessing what would later come to be called the coredemption). But by the time theologians began explicitly to reflect on the word’s meaning,

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there were already polemics at large that would obscure the source of the idea and the riches that flow out from it.

Newman himself expresses reservation on just this point; although he denies the legitimacy of certain critiques of the title “coredempress,” he concedes to Pusey that a huge strand of the teaching surrounding it is erroneous and offensive.9 By the time of Vatican II, a council of which many call Newman the father, detailed thought about the nature of coredemption came to be seen as a confusing and ecumenically embarrassing appendage to an already-overblown obsession with Mary and confusion of her merits and glory with those of her Son.10 A century before that Council, Newman concedes to Pusey that many Catholic theologians, in their zeal for Mary, have flown her too close to the redeeming sun. Their late-coming speculations have placed her in the center of the redemptive economy in a way that robs Her Son of the unique dignities due him. But it is precisely Mary’s role in salvation that gets his (and the church’s) Mariology off the ground. In this way, Newman’s dispute with Pusey serves as a kind of parable for the central problem in the church’s thought about the Blessed Virgin more broadly. Whatever the logical and ontological priority of the Marian dogmas, her partnership with Christ in the redemption of the world is the historical and epistemological basis for everything the Church eventually came to say about her. The failure to see this has led not only

9 “And how, again, is there anything of incommunicable greatness in His death and passion, if He who was alone in the garden, alone upon the cross, alone in the resurrection, after all is not alone, but shared His solitary work with His Blessed Mother,—with her to whom, when He entered on His ministry, He said for our instruction, not as grudging her her proper glory, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” Reply, §5.6. Amazingly, as will become apparent below, Newman somehow accepts what I call the scandalous reading of Jesus’s self-separation from His Mother, without considering just how much that scandal mirrors the scandal of Jesus’s rejection from Israel.

10 See Yves Congar, Je crois en l’Esprit Saint (Paris: Cerf, 1979) [ET I Believe in the Holy Spirit (New York: Crossroad, 2000)], where Congar (one of the most important bishops of Vatican II) notes (with sympathy) the Protestant critique that Catholics insert Mary into the place of the Holy Spirit.
to ecumenical disunity but also to confusion within systematic theology, to the eventual
impoverishment of both theology and the church. In the case of Mariology, laying out the history
of this impoverishment is necessary, not only so we may begin with a *status quaestionis*, but to
show how what may be most useful in redressing the poverty has in fact been in our possession
all along.

I. Coredemption and the Development of the “Marian Dictum”

a) The New Eve and Earliest Mariology

In claiming that Mary has the role in salvation that Eve had in perdition, the early Fathers
cannot have meant simply that she gave birth to Christ. Eve did not give birth to Adam but to his
lapsed children. Instead, it is Eve's part in the drama of the fall that merits, partly, what she
passes (or does not pass) to Adam’s children. Likewise, early Mariology is a reflection not just
on the wonder of the Incarnation (though it certainly is that) but on what Mary must have been
like in order to merit a childbirth so different from that of her ancestor. Keeping this idea in view
helps us to place not only the particular thoughts behind New Eve Mariology but also the origins
of works like the second-century Protogospel of James. That work exists not merely to provide
biography for Mary (though it is worth asking why anyone would want such a thing in the first
place?) but to answer the question “why her?” The Protogospel presents Mary as an exemplary
Israelite, with a life completely and conspicuously given over and devoted to the Lord and to His
temple.¹¹ She is herself the fruit of a miraculous pregnancy, predicted by an angel to her mother
St Anne. The parallels of this story to the Luke's Annunciation are clear; she is not the

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¹¹ *C. Protogospel* 19, where Joseph describes Mary as the “Mary that was reared in the Temple of the
Lord.” Joseph describes her that way to a stranger, with the intent of explanation. His description would explain
nothing if the story were not at least somewhat well-known and unusual.
protagonist of the world's redemption, but neither is she merely the closest member of its audience. The writer evidently sees the Incarnation as the continuation of a life already given over in a historically unique way to God.

The Protogospel also parallels, intentionally, the story of Adam and Eve. At the point of discovering that Mary is pregnant, Joseph cries out, “Has not the history of Adam been repeated in me? For just as Adam was in the hour of his singing praise, and the serpent came, and found Eve alone, and completely deceived her, so it has happened to me also” (PG, 13). As so many of the fathers would go on to say, for Joseph, quite the opposite was true. Mary, approached by the angel instead of the serpent, believes and obeys the word of God and not the words of the Devil. This faith, itself the fullest flowering so far of Mary's whole life of devotion, brings about the Incarnation that makes her mother of God. She bears that incomparable dignity because she is the New Eve, the mother of the truly Living One.

Her place as the New Eve anchors what very quickly became a centerpiece of Marian dogma and devotion: namely, Mary's virginity in partu. The early Christian writers honor not just Mary's purity of devotion but her virginity as an expression of that purity. Likewise, the Protogospel has as a key emphasis the perpetual virginity of the Lord's mother, going as far as to

12 Cf. Ambrose: “Imitate her [Mary], holy mothers, who in her only dearly beloved Son set forth so great an example of material virtue; for neither have you sweeter children [than Jesus], nor did the Virgin seek the consolation of being able to bear another son” (Letters 63:111). Cf., also, Didymus the Blind: “It helps us to understand the terms ‘first-born’ and ‘only-begotten’ when the Evangelist tells that Mary remained a virgin ‘until she brought forth her first-born son’ [Matt. 1:25]; for neither did Mary, who is to be honored and praised above all others, marry anyone else, nor did she ever become the Mother of anyone else, but even after childbirth she remained always and forever an immaculate virgin” (The Trinity 3:4). Also, Augustine: “In being born of a Virgin who chose to remain a Virgin even before she knew who was to be born of her, Christ wanted to approve virginity rather than to impose it. And he wanted virginity to be of free choice even in that woman in whom he took upon himself the form of a slave” (Holy Virginity 4:4).
have it verified by a third party, likely Joseph's daughter Salome.\textsuperscript{13} The birth itself occurs
miraculously, as light overwhelms the tiny cave and the infant emerges without either violence to
Mary's reproductive organs or the ordinary pains of childbirth. The painless birth shows that
Mary's perpetual virginity is not just a miracle but also a doctrine tightly connected to her status
as the one who redresses Eve's failure and judgment.

That Mary remained a Virgin, indeed that she was pledged to do so, is a commonplace in
the early centuries of the church.\textsuperscript{14} Odd as this particular point of doctrine may seem to modern
readers, it is not some stray bit of tradition scattered among early zealots for monasticism or
misogynists obsessed with sexual purity. Rather, though it is beyond my scope to defend the
claim in detail, it seems at least as likely as not that Mary's perpetual virginity explains, at least
partially, the appeal of monasticism.\textsuperscript{15} In either case, it is held in an all-but universal way as a

\textsuperscript{13} Per Richard Bauckham’s astonishing work on Jesus’s relatives in the early church. See Bauckham, \textit{Jude

\textsuperscript{14} Tertullian is the exception that proves the rule: “But with us there is no equivocation, nothing twisted
into a double sense. Light is light; and darkness, darkness; yea is yea; and nay, nay; whatsoever is more than these
comes of evil. Matthew 5:37 She who bare (really) bare; and although she was a virgin when she conceived, she was
a wife when she brought forth her son. Now, as a wife, she was under the very law of opening the womb, wherein it
was quite immaterial whether the birth of the male was by virtue of a husband's co-operation or not; it was the same
sex that opened her womb. Indeed, hers is the womb on account of which it is written of others also: Every male that
opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord. For who is really holy but the Son of God? Who properly opened
the womb but He who opened a closed one? But it is marriage which opens the womb in all cases. The virgin’s
womb, therefore, was especially opened, because it was especially closed. Indeed, she ought rather to be called not a
virgin than a virgin, becoming a mother at a leap, as it were, before she was a wife” (\textit{On the Flesh of Christ}, 23).
The context here is Tertullian’s conflict with the Docetists, and his aim is to clarify that Mary bore a human child as
a human woman, in the ordinary sense. He does not deny perpetual virginity so much as show no awareness of it,
denying rather anything that would imply that Christ did not have a human birth. The argument that Mary was
pledged to remain a Virgin has been restated recently by Brant Pitre, who points out that alternative construals of
what Mary could mean by her declaration to Gabriel that she “does not know a man” (Lk. 1:34) simply make a mess
of the passage. By the custom of the time, Mary is married. To say that she does not know a man in response to a
prophecy about the child she will have later would be absurd unless “I do not know a man” refers to a present and
ongoing disposition. He cites Gerd Lüdemann and J. Gresham Machen, the former of whom is an atheist and the
latter a Protestant, who point out as especially thorny problems precisely those that call for the interpretation that
Mary has pledged to remain a Virgin. See Brant Pitre, \textit{Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of

\textsuperscript{15} Along, of course, with the celibacy embraced by Jesus and Paul. Certainly, Mary’s virginity is named as
sign of her special purity. In monasticism, others imitated what she initiated out of her own love for God and that of her parents in dedicating her at the Temple. Why they might have done so is material for a later chapter.

My point in examining the Protogospel is not to claim that it exhaustively teaches all that I will argue later on, nor that, even if it did, that would settle the argument. Rather, it is to show that there is an underlying unity to a wide range of expressions of early Marian piety. That is, though it might be objected, as it often is in discussions around the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon (vide infra), that honor to Mary was in fact a way of talking about other things, there is a central biblical and theological core concept that organizes and explains an astonishing array of devotional displays. Because she is the New Eve, she is Immaculate, the Spotless One, pure and undefiled. That is why she is the Lord's Temple and Garden. And the Protogospel, whatever discussions may rightly be had about the historicity of its various episodes, shows how all of those titles can be rooted in a recognizable life - innovative but intelligible - within Israel. James, or whoever wrote it, answers the question “why her” with a narrative of Israel's coming to full fruition at long last in this young woman completely given over to God in soul and body. And it is this concrete life, or something very like it, that explains Mariology. The Blessed Virgin, so it was widely agreed upon from the beginning, merited somehow to be the mother of the Lord. She bore the Living One for the same reason her distant ancestor bore children unto death: as the fruit of her actions before the Lord. That is the explanation for early Mariology taking the shape it did.

If the foregoing is correct, the teaching about the New Eve gives an organizing shape to a large number of differing expressions of piety to the Blessed Virgin. And when it comes to the

Mariology that later generations inherit, these expressions of piety do much of the work. At the points where we see the beginnings of a handoff between patristic theology and the Middle Ages, we find statements like these cited everywhere:

Now with the exception of the holy Virgin Mary in regard to whom, out of respect for the Lord, I do not propose to have a single question raised on the subject of sin — after all, how do we know what greater degree of grace for a complete victory over sin was conferred on her who merited to conceive and bring forth Him who all admit was without sin.\(^\text{16}\)

Let us grant, then, that Newman might be right. Let us say that everything begins with the New Eve. Newman’s attempt to root the antiquity and the ubiquity of the New Eve motif in the actual teaching of the apostles will seem plausible or not based on a number of antecedent convictions. But it can scarcely be denied that there is an impressive frequency and consistency across the Christian world in this very early way of describing her. Newman’s notes capture some, but not all, of them.

b) Christology and the Post-Ephesian Shifts

Because the Councils debate the acceptability of the term *Theotokos* on Christological grounds, it has become commonplace to see the term as primarily intended to make a statement about Christ. In one sense, this is plainly true. When Mary arrives to visit Elizabeth, the latter names her “the mother of my Lord,” claiming Jesus as her Messiah before his birth. What makes her exclamation true is that the unborn Jesus is in fact the Messiah, the Lord before whose face Elizabeth’s son is to go (Lk 1:76). But the intent of her statement is to express wonder at her own blessedness at being visited by a woman as highly favored as Mary: “who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” This expression of wonder recalls 2 Sam 6:9, where David admits

\(^{16}\) St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, Patrologia Latina 44:267
to being afraid of the ark.\textsuperscript{17} Just as J.L. Austin proposed a difference between a statement’s content and its illocutionary force, we can see a difference between what makes Elizabeth’s statement true, i.e., that the unborn child in Mary’s womb is her Lord, and what she intends to do by making the statement, which is to honor the Virgin who has come to visit her.

The controversy surrounding the Christological councils concerns the content of the affirmation that Mary is the mother of God. It concerns what makes these statements true. Nestorius contends that the use of \textit{Theotokos/meter theou} is inappropriate not because it is excessively devoted to Mary but because it implies something that cannot be true, so he thinks, of the divine nature. Cyril, Leo, and others who object to Nestorius do so on the grounds that what is not assumed by a divine person is not healed in the human one. If we “protect” God from soiling himself with humanity, we do so at the cost of our own salvation. A range of exegetical, logical, and metaphysical arguments fold into the debates, and no less than four ecumenical councils endeavor to work out what is justifiably seen as the greatest mystery of the faith.

But the term was not only (and not primarily) deployed as a statement about Christology. What is missed in discussions about the role of Mary’s divine motherhood in debates about the metaphysics of the Incarnation is precisely the fact, as so many early witnesses describe, that early Christians understood Mary in some way to \textit{merit} the Incarnation. Newman points out that there is a difference between honoring Mary as a vessel through whom the Incarnate One would come and honoring her as one who “earned privileges by the fruits of grace.”\textsuperscript{18} The former devotion, Newman points out, might rightly be offered to David or to Judah. Amphilochius of

\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, just as the ark stayed at the house of Obed-Edom for three months (2 Sam. 6:11), Luke reports that Mary remains in her kinswoman’s house for the same amount of time (Lk. 1:56).

\textsuperscript{18} Reply, 36.
Iconium sings the praises of the City of Bethlehem and even to the manger that holds the Christ child. Early Christians marveled at the earthiness of the Incarnation, and, as the later reliquaries would show, nearly any part of the Creation supposedly touched by the Incarnation might be treasured in a unique way. But the honor early Christians show to Mary’s divine motherhood outstrips all such devotions of this kind.

Irenaeus, as Newman ably shows, attributes Mary’s role in the Incarnation to her obedience and her faith. Athanasius remarks that she is clothed with purity, and he praises her charity to the poor, her unceasing appetite for good works and prayer, and an intimacy with God that rivals that of Moses (“she spoke to God as one person speaks to another”). Epiphanius, like so many, praises Mary’s obedience as befitting the New Eve, because of which she becomes the “Mother of the Living” in a truer way than could properly be said of her ancient ancestor: “Mary [ . . . ] truly introduced life itself into the world by giving birth to the Living One, so that Mary has become the Mother of the living.” Ambrose claims that she alone “obtains that grace which no one else had merited: to be filled with the Author of grace.” Both Jerome and Augustine express wonder at the woman who merited to bear the Savior.

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19 Amphilochius, *On Christmas* 4, PG 39-40 D - 41 B.

20 Adv. Haer., 3.22


22 *Letter to Virgins*, in Le Muséon 42 (1929), 244-5, quoted in Gambero 1999, 104-5.


24 Expositio in Lucam, 2, 8-9; PL 16, 636
The devotion of Ephrem the Syrian to Mary’s divine motherhood makes the point well. His meditations on the birth of God from a woman find their place in continuous comparisons between the Virgin and her progenitrix:

Your womb escaped the pangs of the curse.
   By means of the serpent came the pains of the female;

Shamed be the Foul one, on seeing that his pangs
   Are not found in your womb.\(^\text{25}\)

Likewise,

Mary has given us bread of rest
   In place of that bread of toil which Eve provided.\(^\text{26}\)

His devotion to Mary’s Virginity was an expression not just of piety towards her purity but of the wisdom of God in redeeming the world by a new Eve:

as in the beginning Eve was born from Adam without a carnal relationship, so it happened for Joseph and Mary, his wife. Eve brought to the world the murdering Cain; Mary brought forth the Lifegiver. One brought into the world him who spilled the blood of his brother; the other, him whose blood was poured out for the sake of his brothers. One brought into the world him who fled, trembling because of the curse of the earth; the other brought forth him who, having taken the curse upon himself, nailed it to the cross.\(^\text{27}\)

He sums up this entire economy with the language of victory: “Because the serpent had struck Eve with his claw, the foot of Mary bruised him.”\(^\text{28}\)

Similar reflections are found in the homilies of Proclus, whose devotion to divine motherhood so provoked Nestorius. For him, the Holy Mother of God is the intended paradise of

\(^{25}\) *Hymns on Virginity*, 24.11

\(^{26}\) *Hymns for the Unleavened Bread* 6.6-7 (Found in Beck 1964).

\(^{27}\) *Comm. on the Diatessaron* 2, 2; SC 121, 66

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 10, 13; SC 121, 191
the Second Adam:

He who was born of woman is not only God and He is not only Man. He made woman, who had been the ancient gateway of sin, into the gateway of salvation.

Where evil poured forth its poison, bringing on disobedience, there the Word made for Himself a living temple, into which He brought obedience. From whence the arch-sinner Cain sprang forth, there without seed was born Christ the Redeemer of the human race.

The Lover-of-Mankind did not disdain to be born of woman, since this bestowed His life. He was not subject to impurity, being settled within the womb, which He Himself arrayed free from all harm.29

As the work of Ephrem and Proclus shows, for the fathers of the Church, especially prior to the controversy with Nestorius, the point of the title Mother of God was in reflection upon a woman so full of grace that she restarts the human race as Mother of the Living (ἡ ζωντος). Deploying and clarifying this language in response to controversy was a kind of second-order reflection upon the Church’s growing awareness of the treasure of the Incarnation and corresponding devotion to the woman who merited it. Despite appearances to the contrary, then, early Christian Mariology is of a piece. And early devotion to her is best explained not merely as acknowledgment of her role in the Incarnation of the Word, as if she were kind of a living crib, but as wonder at the uniqueness of a person who merits to play such a role in the plan of God as she does. And in the context of controversy over what makes it true and necessary to call her the Mother of God, it is helpful to understand precisely what people were trying to do when they did it.

Cyril of Alexandria is a witness to an event that is not at all surprising if the account I’ve given above is true, but that will make little sense if I am mistaken. Cyril himself relates that

Cyril of Alexandria is a witness to an event that is not at all surprising if the account I’ve given above is true, but that will make little sense if I am mistaken. Cyril himself relates that

29 Sermon on the Annunciation 1, 2 (PG 65, 681C – 683A).
after the Council at Ephesus recognizes the legitimacy of the title *Theotokos*, the bishops were escorted home by women bearing lighted torches. As John McGuckin observes, such a processional was an inescapable symbol of the Artemis cult. He notes “women bearing lighted torches were an integral part of her processional ritual.” If the issue of the Council were a pedantic point of teaching about the Incarnation, one would hardly expect such a response. If in fact, the Council was seen as safeguarding a deeply treasured matter of devotion, the response fits perfectly. Moreover, the fact that women particularly carried the *lampadas* suggests the kind of solidarity one would expect, given the picture that Ephrem and Proclus paint of Marian devotion on the eve of the Council.

The choice of the Council adds oxygen to a mariological fire that is well and truly burning before it. In the years after Ephesus, devotion to Mary consolidates, unsurprisingly, around her divine motherhood. Again, it is necessary to distinguish between what makes this title a true one and why it was said. It is true because she is the mother of the Second Person of the Trinity, who assumed flesh and was born of her. Early Christians said it of her in the way that they did because they wondered at her merit to be *Theotokos*. Had the Lord chosen someone who did not merit it (*per impossibile*), there would doubtless still have been wonder at the event. The paradoxes of the Incarnation are intrinsically wondrous. But the devotion to Mary, the intensity

30 He writes of it in a pastoral letter written after his return to Alexandria: “The whole population of the city, from earliest dawn until the evening stood around, in expectation of the council's decision. And when they heard that the author of the blasphemies had been stripped of his rank, they all began with one voice to praise and glorify God, as for the overthrow of an enemy of the faith. And as we [the bishops] came forth from the Church, they led us with torches to our lodgings, for it was now evening. Throughout the city there was great rejoicing, and many lighted lanterns, and women who walked before us swinging thuribles.” The letter, in both Greek and Latin, is found in Conrad Kirch, *Enchiridion Fontium Historicae Ecclesiasticae Antiquae* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1923), 461-62.

and the contexts in which she is called *Theotokos*, are not merely exhausted by these paradoxes. As an honorific, she is honored as Mother of God because she is the New Eve, the woman who by her obedience merited to become the true Mother of the Living (One).

At the same time, because the term was a term of honor, as it became clear, through the lens of ecumenical controversy, just what it meant to call Mary the Mother of God, the honor associated with the title grew as well. The New Eve “substructure” to the controversy meant that as the reward of being the Mother of God was better understood, it shed light on the merit of the one who received it. Augustine’s observation that Mary must have received a fullness of grace that no one could measure, if her reward was so great as to bear the Incarnate Lord on earth,\(^{32}\) becomes a commonplace as late antiquity rolls into the early medieval period.\(^{33}\) The perfections of the Lord are applied in an analogous way to the one who merited to bear him. Thus, in the sixth-century Akathist hymn, the eleventh stanza,

Hail! thou who raisest mankind up.  
Hail! thou who castest demons down.

becomes

Hail! pillar of purity.

and

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\(^{32}\) “Having excepted the Holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom, on account of the honor of the Lord, I wish to have absolutely no question when treating of sins – for how do we know what abundance of grace for the total overcoming of sin was conferred upon her, who merited to conceive and bear him in whom there was no sin?–so, I say, with the exception of the Virgin, if we could have gathered together all those holy men and women, when they were living here, and had asked them whether they were without sin, what do we suppose would have been their answer?” *Nature and Grace*, 36.45.

\(^{33}\) Augustine’s observation, made 16 years before the Council, appears in nearly every Western Mariological discussion, from Anselm to Aquinas to Scotus to Suarez to Salazar to *Ineffabilis Deus*!
Hail! holy beyond all holy ones.

Throughout the latter patristic era, Mary receives a range of titles, epithets, invocations, and hymns that offer praise to her for the part she played in bringing salvation to the world. She is called Holy, Pure, Immaculate, Spotless, Gracious, Merciful, Anchor, Guardian, Sure Pledge of Salvation, Mediator, Font of Grace, Paradise, Garden of Eden, Most beautiful of all things, Giver of Refreshing Bread, Star of the Sea, Seat of Wisdom, Advocate, and even Redeemer. After 431, these poetic expansions explode in popularity, use, and influence. And because there is agreement, by and large, that this is appropriate, the rationale for it, the “substructure,” sometimes disappears from view. Yes, the New Eve motif, which began in the second (or perhaps the first) century, remains with us all the way through. But there are in addition a number of people who harvest the fruits of that thought for other purposes, to answer other questions. Perhaps the biggest question is how to specify the interval that explains how, and to what degree, Jesus’s perfections are limited in their application to His Mother. As it happens, that last sentence is a pretty apt summary of medieval Mariological debates.

c) Our Lady in the Middle Ages

As the patristic age gives way to the medieval one, there are two crucial things to remember about the state of Marian thought. First, clarifying the relation between Christ’s

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34 Brant Pitre, in Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary ([New York: Image, 2018], 28-32), contends that the Johannine literature’s portraits of the “Woman” at Cana and in Revelation explicitly allude to the stories of Eve in Genesis. After showing how in John the first week of Jesus’s ministry is modeled on the 7 days of creation, he points out a number of similarities between the Cana story’s depiction of Mary and that of Eve in Genesis: 1) Mary, like Eve, is called woman, 2) Mary convinces Jesus to do his first sign, whereas Eve convinces Adam to commit the first sin, 3) she is with Jesus at the crucifixion (as Eve is with Adam when he falls), and 4) she is the woman whose offspring conquers the devil (cf. the promise in Gen. 3:15). Pitre also reads the drama of Revelation 12 against the backdrop of the promise in Genesis 3:15. Having previously shown how Gen. 3:15 was taken as a Messianic prophecy even in the Targums (Targum Neofiti on Gen. 3:15, quoted in Pitre 2018, p. 24), he then shows how the same characters found in the promise to Eve appear in Revelation 12: serpent/dragon, woman, Messiah. If Pitre’s argument is correct (and it appears to me to be), then there is a genuine biblical anticipation of and explanation for the body of teaching Newman surveys in his reply to Pusey.
perfections and those of his mother is an essentially negative task. That is, everyone basically agrees that Christ’s perfections, graces, and actions are applied in some way to his mother. Equally, everyone agrees that no creature is Christ’s peer, whether angel or saint. The question is where the limits are: thus, as Anselm says, “it is fitting that this Virgin should shine with a purity so great that, except for God, no greater purity could be conceived.”35 In another context, he states, “nothing is equal to Mary; none, save God alone, is greater than her.”36 This insight has roots in thinkers like Proclus and Ephrem, but medieval theologians, as they did with so much of the patristic archive, will formalize this statement into a premise for argument. So much of Mariological discussion — and particularly of coredemption as it emerged in the Middle Ages — will only make sense if this premise is accepted.

Second, the development of medieval theology toward increasing specificity requires a kind of efficiency of argument that can distort the train of thought for people unaccustomed to the genre. Conclusions of detailed arguments become premises for further arguments, where the prior history of argument is presumed as common to all parties. So, for example, what I will call the “Marian dictum,” which one finds throughout Mariological discussions in this period, is built on a whole history of argument that medieval writers held in common and did not see as contentious. This common ground can function like the music of the spheres, as a kind of silence bred from ubiquity; the “substructure” disappears beneath the structure. Thus, as controversies emerge in the medieval period over Marian prerogatives, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the premises are themselves built on the medieval harvest of patristic thought.

35 De Virginali Conceptu 18, Patrologia Latina 451.

36 Oratio 52, PL 158, 956A
That harvest is quite visible in the work of Peter Damian. Like the tradition before him, he roots Mariology in the reversal of Eve’s mistake by the Blessed Virgin:

‘Blessed are you among women!’ Through a woman, the earth was filled with a curse; through a woman, blessing is restored to the earth. The hand of a woman offered the cup of bitter death; the hand of a woman offered the chalice of sweet life. 37

Again, as with his patristic anticipators, Peter sees the crux of the New Eve typology not merely as a question of fact but of fit. Mary is not the mother just because the Lord chose her to be, but because she merited to bear Him. And the extent of her merit is revealed in the size of the reward she merits. Thus, in Sermo 45, Peter exclaims:

How can human weakness worthily celebrate the feast of her who merited to give birth to the joy of the angels? In what way could the short-lived words of mortal man praise her who brought forth from herself the Word who abides forever? 38

The Middle Ages would see the nature of Mary’s merit clarified in greater detail at the intersection of two great theological trends: 1) the relationship between sin, sex, and generation (which would occupy a discussion that begins with Anselm and ends with the wide acceptance of Scotus’s doctrine of the Immaculate Conception), and 2) the conferral of merit upon those in Purgatory. But the movement we have already traced, from New Eve theology, through devotion, to a kind of Marian maximalism, was presupposed in those discussions, even where not explicitly recalled. Thus, as Peter makes exactly the same move that Augustine, Ephrem, and so many others before him had made, so many will assume it after him. The question, “how can human weakness worthily celebrate?” mirrors Augustine’s “how can we know what abundance of grace for the total overcoming of sin was conferred upon her, who merited to conceive and

37 Sermo 46
38 Sermo 45
bear him in whom there was no sin?” There is an admission that the grace given to Mary is beyond reckoning, and that knowledge and words could not fittingly capture it. And it is this later intuition that swirls throughout the Marian debates of the High Middle Ages.

Like every other part of the Christian theological archive, Mariology receives an explosion of attention in this period. Some of the Marian discussions are well-known, because of their roles in later controversies and decisions. Whether or not she received grace at her conception or shortly after, whether she played a role in the satisfaction of sins, whether and how she mediates the divine grace of her Son, whether she died before being assumed into heaven: all of these debates occupied medieval theologians. But other questions arose as well. The Mariale, attributed to Albert the Great for centuries, asks no fewer than 230 different questions about the Blessed Virgin, including whether she has divine omnipotence, whether she has divine wisdom, whether she comprehends in herself the third benediction of Balaam. But the structure of the Mariale, its speculative range, perfectly encapsulates the point made above: that medieval Mariology is a negative exercise, in which one finds out just how many of the perfections she shares analogously with her son must be “pared back” in order to preserve the Creator/creature distinction mentioned by Anselm, inter alia, and the dignity of her Son.

The Mariale is in many ways the full flower of medieval speculation about the Blessed Virgin; it shows how theologians of the High Middle Ages engaged with the Marian legacy. But it will be helpful to look at a few other Mariological discussions from the medieval period in order to get a feel for how the principles I’ve outlined above actually work. The first of these will come from Anselm, who, like Peter Damian, inherits and synthesizes the whole prior (Latin)

tradition, but who, unlike Peter, activates the tradition after him in a preeminent way. Anselm writes on Original Sin and the Conception of Our Lady as a response to a growing cult in England around her conception. In 1060, English Catholics began to celebrate a feast for Mary’s conception, likely under the influence of Christian practices from the Eastern Church. Anselm contends that this feast undermines basic convictions about the way sin, nature, and grace relate. For him, original sin constitutes a lack of a will that is upright towards God for God’s own sake.\(^{40}\) The way original sin is transmitted is that the upright will one ought to have is not passed on. Thus, human nature becomes attenuated in the failure of our first parents to love and honor God as he deserves. And it is this attenuated nature that is passed down from every human generation to the next. Mary cannot have received from her parents what they were unable to give her – namely, a will possessing original justice. For Anselm, to claim that Mary did not have sin in her conception was to ignore her human ancestry and confuse her with God.

At the same time, it is worth examining the premise that undergirds Anselm’s rejection. “It is fitting,” Anselm claims, “that this Virgin should shine with a purity so great that, except for God, no greater purity could be conceived.” This premise formally resembles that found in another famous Anselmian argument, in which he claims that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought. Granted this definition for God, he contends, God cannot not exist. The logic of the position depends upon a second premise, namely, that existence in reality is a greater, more perfect mode of existence than the existence of an idea (or, in a later version, that “necessary existence” is greater than just happening to exist.\(^ {41}\) If this premise is granted as well

\(^{40}\) *De Conceptu Virginali* III.

as the first, it follows that any idea of God that does not include existence in reality is not an idea of God but of something lesser. The very idea of God, that is, includes God’s existence.

Regardless of the palatability of the argument for God’s existence from the idea of it, the exercise of thinking it is crucial for helping us grasp what Anselm’s influence does to Mariology as a whole. Any idea of God must be evaluated and examined for maximum greatness. The boundary of any idea of God is whether a greater can be thought. If so, the former idea must be abandoned. There is a pressure towards maximal greatness in the first premise, which means that any God the idea of whom does not include existence cannot be held as an idea of God. Similarly, the Virgin’s purity is that quo maius cogitari non possit, save that of God. The structural similarity of this premise to the other is not likely an accident. In either case, it provides a similarly maximizing pressure. The boundary of any idea of God is whether a greater can be thought; the boundary of any idea of Mary’s purity is whether a greater purity can be imagined without committing idolatry. The pressure toward that limit is unending, even as the limit itself is unyielding. What this means is that any Mariological proposal must be evaluated only negatively: is it idolatrous? If not, it is fitting, however unexpected and counterintuitive, to the extent that it involves attributing maximal purity to her. The problem, so Anselm understands it, with the Immaculate Conception is that it crosses the limit of idolatry. But even more important than Anselm’s rejection of the doctrine is his explicit statement of the principle that has been operative, so I have argued, from the beginning.

A similar dynamic is found in the thought of St. Bernard, whose sermons in devotion to Mary have rightly become some of Christianity’s most beautiful treasures. In a sermon on the Annunciation, he breathlessly glimpses the role she plays in salvation:

The whole world is waiting, prostrate at your feet. Not without reason, since upon your word depends the consolation of the wretched, the redemption of captives, the liberation
of the condemned; in a word, the salvation of all the sons of Adam, of your whole race.\textsuperscript{42} She not only merits to bear the divine Son, but she also consents to play this role in the salvation of the world. Thus, for Bernard, as for so many before him, the right response is one of unending gratitude and praise:

Oh, that you would observe whose Mother she is! How far would your admiration for her wonderful loftiness take you! Would it not lead you to understand that you cannot admire her enough? In your judgment, in the judgment of Truth himself, will she not be lifted up, yes, above all the choirs of angels, seeing that she had God as her own Son?\textsuperscript{43}

The maximizing tendency found in Anselm appears in Bernard as well. His resistance to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, like that of Anselm, arises from its apparent eradication of her humanity:

If Mary could not be sanctified before her conception itself, on account of the sin (concupiscence) involved therein, it follows she was sanctified in the womb after conception, which, since she was cleansed from sin, made her birth holy and not her conception.\textsuperscript{44}

The problem with the Immaculate Conception is, in Bernard’s view, that it denies the humanity of Mary’s conception. She could not be conceived by two parents without also being conceived in concupiscence (the influence of Augustine is strong on this point). At the same time, to say that Mary was conceived without sin, denying the role of concupiscence in her conception, is to deny the peculiar sanctity of the Blessed Virgin, who alone of all humanity merited to conceive a son without concupiscence in spite of having been born in it.\textsuperscript{45} Bernard’s reasoning is that the

\textsuperscript{42} Super Missus Est 4, 8; PL 183, 83D
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 1, 8; PL 183, 59D
\textsuperscript{44} Letter to the Canons of Lyons, 5, 7 (PL 182, 336A).
\textsuperscript{45} Super Missus Est, 2, 1; PL 183, 61 D
doctrine of the Immaculate Conception both a) confuses the relationship of human nature to sin (implying an idolatrous denial of humanity as Bernard understands it to Mary), and b) actually undermines her purity by making her superhuman instead of an ordinary woman utterly given over to love of God and neighbor. Just as with Anselm, the important element of Bernard’s teaching here is that she must have been sanctified in the womb after conception – probably at the earliest possible moment. That is because for Bernard, as for Anselm, she must shine with the greatest purity imaginable.

The obligation laid upon Marian thought, so say Anselm and Bernard, is to align two influences: the absolute limit of idolatry with the pressure to maximize the dignity, honor, purity, and sanctity of the Blessed Virgin. These influences are what Anselm attempts to capture in the Marian dictum. That he succeeds in finding a helpful way of expressing it is shown by the impact of this dictum on later Mariological discussion, which will shape the Marian thought of the two great masters of medieval theology, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus.

In article 3.27.2 of the Summa, Thomas addresses the debate over Mary’s conception. He starts with the Anselmian dictum. We are to ascribe to the Blessed Virgin, so the argument runs, the highest possible purity under God. But her purity would be greater, it seems, if she never

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46 This view treads into discussions about human nature that often arise in discussions about original and actual sin, and, hence, in debates about the Immaculate Conception. These debates are slightly to one side of our purposes here, but it is worth saying that insofar as Jesus had a complete, integral human nature, and it is therefore no slight against his humanity to note that he was protected from original sin by the providence of God, it would seem to be no similar slight in the case of any human whatsoever, Mary included. Certainly, not having original sin, and not being victim to what St. Paul calls the “law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2) which “wages war in my members” (Rom. 7:23), is shown in the case of Eve and Adam not to be sufficient for the protection from actual sin. Mary’s purity shines forth brightly precisely in that receiving what Eve received she did what Eve did not. Debates about grace, nature, and sin refract through Marian doctrine not only in the West but in the East. Sergei Bulgakov, whose veneration for the Mother of God caused John Maximovitch to write an entire book against them, nevertheless rejects teaching on the Immaculate Conception for reasons similar to Bernard’s, i.e., that it removes Mary from the human community. See Sergei Bulgakov, The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 47-64. See also John Maximovitch, The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press, 2012 (1978).
contracted original sin than if she had.\textsuperscript{47} Anselm’s dictum functions as the major premise of the argument and the judgment about contracting original sin as the minor. To argue against 3.27.2 arg 2 would seem to require denying one of the premises. But for Thomas, the conclusion entails an absurdity (and perhaps a blasphemy). As he sees it, being sanctified in this way would mean Mary does not need a redeemer. For Thomas, as for all Christians, the core truth of the faith is that Christ is the universal redeemer. That is, he has \textit{in fact} redeemed everyone. So, the argument from universal redemption functions for him as a comprehensive defeater. No argument’s conclusion can imply that Christ is not a universal redeemer and still be true. Interestingly, Thomas’s demonstration of the absurdity of the conclusion actually reinscribes the validity of the first premise. The conclusion he reaches, i.e., that Christ must be Mary’s redeemer, is a way of glossing Anselm’s “under God.” The premise could be restated, “It is fitting for the Virgin to shine with a purity so bright that, except by denying her need for redemption, a greater one cannot be imagined.” Thus, the argument for the Immaculate Conception stumbles at the gate of the minor premise. But having established his denial of the conclusion, Thomas does not make explicit the denial of the minor premise. The absence of that denial is crucial to the way Scotus would interact with the argument.

When Scotus takes up the question of grace and Mary’s conception, he also makes use of Anselm’s rule as reformulated by Thomas.\textsuperscript{48} He then takes up the second premise. If Mary was not holy in the first moment of her existence, it seems it is possible to imagine a higher purity

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{ST} 3.27.2 \textit{ad} 2

\textsuperscript{48} Scotus does not interact with the premise as restated above, but the way he deploys the premise shows that he accepts Thomas’s reformulation of it. That is, in his argument that the Immaculate Conception does not compromise the universal redemption of Jesus, he shows that he is glossing the major premise more or less as Thomas did.
under God than that which she has. That is, the minor premise of the argument Thomas refutes appears as the minor premise of this argument as well. Scotus does not in fact argue for the Immaculate Conception so much as argue that the truth of the minor premise does not violate the major premise as glossed by Thomas. It is a negative argument, an argument against the impossibility of Mary’s preservation from Original Sin. It can be summarized in three words: \textit{potuit, decuit, ergo fecit}. It is possible for God to preserve Mary from original sin, and it is fitting; therefore (Anselm again), he did so. He points out that just as there are those in the Old Testament who are redeemed from sin by Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection even before Jesus came, so God is able to apply the merits of Jesus to Mary from the first moment of her existence. That is, Mary is simply the pinnacle and summit of the Old Testament Church; in her is fulfilled the purpose of God in his election of Israel. If Christ’s merits are applied to Abraham, so that he is able to be justified before God by Christ’s faithfulness even before Christ was born (Rom. 4:1-3), then there seems to be no reason why Mary could not also be a beneficiary of Christ’s grace. As Adrienne von Speyr would put the matter simply, Mary is pre-redeemed.\footnote{Adrienne Von Speyr, \textit{Mary in the Redemption}, trans. by Helena M. Tomko (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 105.} Instead of placing Mary outside the economy of salvation, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception positions her at its pinnacle as the most redeemed person. Indeed, while every human has need of the redemption of Christ, Mary, its preeminent recipient, also stands in greatest need. \textit{Ergo, decuit}.

It is important to note that Scotus follows his predecessors in insisting upon Mary’s citizenship not only in Israel but \textit{ipso facto} in the human family. He does not deny the implications of having two parents for falling under the Law of Sin and Death. Indeed, following Galen rather than Aristotle, he rejects the medieval biological consensus that makes having two
parents necessary for contracting original sin. Scotus agrees with Galen that both fathers and mothers are active principles in the formation of offspring.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, against the majority of medieval theologians, Scotus thinks original sin could pass to the child of only a mother. Ironically, it is everyone else that has a defective account of the human family. The Immaculate Conception is simply not about that. Rather, it refers to how God’s grace comes to fallen human nature and saves it to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Mary is full of grace, and she is therefore delivered entirely of sin, but she is a human all the same.

Scotus’s argument, then, is a denial that the second premise is absurd in light of the first. Once that argument is made, Scotus can affirm the possibility that Mary was Immaculately conceived. Importantly, though, Scotus simply rescues the argument Thomas rejects. In that argument, which premise carries the main weight? It is the Marian dictum of Anselm.

Thomas and Scotus thus both perpetuate, even if they do not spell it out, a disposition towards maximizing that arises more or less organically from the patristic Mariological archive. At the same time, in both Thomas and Scotus we see evidence of the slow disappearance of the source of that disposition. Anselm’s rule, and the impulses that generate it, are authoritative for both of them. At the same time, for example, in Thomas’s discussion of Marian sanctification, he

\textsuperscript{50} This whole debate turns on a popular medieval consensus about the role of mothers in generation, which Scotus summarizes in \textit{Ordinatio} III.4.16–36. That opinion, descending from Aristotle’s \textit{On the Generation of Animals}, in which he describes fathers as formal causes and mothers material causes of their offspring. Another opinion (that of Galen) held that mothers are “active causes” (num. 26), but in a lesser, secondary, dependent way to the causal powers of fathers. The third opinion held that a supernatural power overcame Mary to give her the power to do that which ordinarily she would not be able to do. Scotus rejects all of these arguments because each one, in one way or another, abrogates the ordinary motherhood of Mary. The first makes her no more a mother than the host of a parasite would be (num. 24); the second and third attribute such a causal power to the Spirit that her causal power would be irrelevant. Scotus’s own conclusion is that the Spirit, by a sovereign act of grace, cooperates with Mary in such a delicate way, fructifying her natural potency by providing a more perfect version of what fathers provide but allowing her to make the complete, natural contribution a mother would make (num. 48).
articulates a rationale for Mary’s grace that centers on the way effects relate to their causes. The effect closest to a cause has the biggest share in its causal power. And because Christ is the principle, the source, of grace, Mary’s supreme nearness to him as the one who gives him humanity qualifies her uniquely to be a recipient of fullness of grace. Thomas’s point here is that the grace that allows Mary to be the Mother of God has as its basis the nearness she will have to him in the economy of salvation. As the first effect of this cause, she will participate in the potency of the cause to a greater degree than any of that cause’s other effects.

In other words, Anselm’s dictum warrants Thomas’s discussion on the possibilities of prenatal sanctification for the Blessed Virgin. But in his discussion of why she should be sanctified in this way, a doctrine of effects and causes replaces the early wonder at Mary’s merit to bear the Incarnation. To be sure, Thomas would not deny that she did merit it. But another current of thought opens up here, which will be exploited especially in the Mariological controversies that post-date the Protestant Reformation. In this current of thought, the intimacy of Mary’s motherhood of Jesus, itself and without ancillary consideration, is held to be the basis of whatever uniqueness she has. That is, the choice of her as Christ’s mother, independently of the cooperation of her will or early devotion to her merit, functions as the primary warrant for proposals about her uniqueness. In Thomas, this second line of thought lies alongside that of Anselm, providing yet another warrant for the Church’s devotion to Mary. In later centuries, Christians will adopt the second principle independently (or sometimes instead) of the first.

51 “quanto aliquid magis appropinquat principio in quodlibet genere, tanto magis participat effectum illius principii” (ST III, q. 27, a. 5, resp). Thomas goes on to say that Christ is the principle of grace in two respects: authoritatively as to his godhead and instrumentally as to his humanity. And the Blessed Virgin was closest to Christ in his humanity, “quia ex ea accepit humanum naturam.” For that reason, she is due a greater measure of grace than all the others. That nearness motivates the inference that any grace given to others, including that of being sanctified in utero, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, should be granted in a greater way to her (ST III, q. 27, a. 1, resp).
Mary’s divine motherhood will be used to provide warrant for prerogatives and participations in Christ’s qualities and work, without specification concerning the fact that in some mysterious way she merited to bear him. As we will see later, the doctrine of the Theotokos, when not rooted in her role as the New Eve, provides a shaky ground sometimes for the things Christians want to say about the Blessed Mother.

While the New Eve teaching of early years was slowly beginning to disappear behind other considerations in discussions about Mary and sin, new speculations about Mary’s role in salvation began to appear, motivated by Anselm’s dictum as well as by the Scriptural exegesis of two of the medieval period’s best preachers: Bernard and Bonaventure. Although speculation about Mary’s role in the economy of salvation is as old as the church, coredemption as such arises in the Middle Ages, largely in response to the work of Bernard and Bonaventure. Both men were gifted preachers, and their homilies show devotion to the Virgin and celebration of her unique role in the salvific economy. Indeed, one of Bernard’s biographers named him the Blessed Mother’s “most devoted minister.”52 In their homilies, the tradition inherited from the Fathers shines with an especially sharp hue. But the Middle Ages saw increasing attention paid to notes that had been softer in the early period as the feasts of Mary’s Purification (Candlemas) and Conception gained prominence and as Mary’s place in Holy Week came more solidly into view.

Bernard’s Marian sermons were of such beauty and renown that Dante had the Abbot of Clairvaux invoke her aid at the beginning of the 33rd Canto of Paradiso. Bernard’s sermon on the annunciation famously positions the entire creation on the edge of its seat as Mary weighs what to do:

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52 Alan of Auxerre, Vita Sancti Bernardi, chap 31, n. 88, PL 185, 524 A
The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us.

The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent. In the eternal Word of God, we all came to be, and behold, we die. In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life.

Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.

Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word.53

For Bernard, the Virgin’s consent is a crucial element in the redemption of the world. She receives the Word because she answers with a word. The Motherhood of God, itself mysterious and endless to contemplation, is an honorific for Mary because by her faith she merits to bear the Son of God. But for him and the medieval thinkers that followed his influence, new parts of the Marian story begin to speak powerfully.

Bernard’s sermons on the Purification of Mary commemorate the Feast of Candlemas, which came to the western church by way of the Christian east and gained prominence in the Middle Ages.54 “O consecrated Virgin,” Bernard acclaims, “offer your son and present to the Lord the blessed fruit of your womb. Offer for our reconciliation to all, this holy victim,

53 Hom. 4, 8-9, PL 188 83B-85A.

54 René H. Chabot, M.S., “Feasts in Honor of Our Lady,” in Mariology vol. 3, ed. by Juniper B. Carol (Post Falls: Mediatrix Press, 2018 [1960]), pp. 24-54, esp. 29-30: “The Oriental Church once again, may lay claim to having originated this Marian feast. Signs of its early existence in Jerusalem are found in the Peregrinatio ad loca sancta (between 383 and 384) of Sylvia (or Etheria), most probably a nun from the southern part of France” (29).
agreeable to God.” For Bernard, Mary’s fullness of grace is on display not only in the Annunciation but in her willingness to hold nothing back from God for his purposes in saving the world:

But this offering, my brothers, may seem rather easy to you since the victim offered to the Lord is redeemed by birds, and therefore released. The time will come when this victim will no longer be offered in the Temple, nor in the arms of Simeon, but outside the city and in the arms of the cross. The time will come when the victim will not be redeemed by anything else, but when it will redeem others by the price of its blood. Then it will be the evening sacrifice. Now we are still at the sacrifice of the morning. This one, surely, is more pleasant; the other one will be more complete. The word of prophecy comes through: “He has been sacrificed because he has wanted it” (Is 52,7). If he is offered today [at the Presentation], in fact, this is not because he needs to be offered, nor that he falls under the law, but because he himself wanted it. Also, on the cross he was offered, not because he deserved it, neither because the Jews could do it, but because he wanted it himself.

What is intriguing about Bernard’s insight concerning the Purification is the straight line it draws from the Temple to the deadly hill, from the morning sacrifice to the evening sacrifice, from Simeon’s arms to the arms of the cross. And Bernard’s point here is that the Mary who makes the one offering makes the other. There can be no surprise, then, when Bernard writes of the “martyrdom of the Virgin” at the cross, where she receives the sword prophesied by Simeon in her soul: for “only by passing through your soul could the sword pierce the side of your Son.”

Like Bernard, Bonaventure emphasizes Mary’s participation with the work of Christ at Temple and Cross. In Collatio 6 of his meditation on the gifts of the Spirit, Bonaventure

55 Sermo 3 de Purificatione; PL 183, 370.
56 Ibid. Bernard is mistaken about the purpose of the offering, however. The turtle doves do not redeem Jesus but express thanksgiving on behalf of the newly purified Mother. As will be discussed later, Jesus is not redeemed.
57 Sermo infra Octavam Assumptionis 14-15; PL 183, 437-38
explicitly draws out the Eve/Mary parallel that guided patristic reflection on the Blessed Virgin.\(^{58}\)

Bonaventure, however, emphasizes that Mary “paid off that price [of our redemption]” by offering her Son for the life of the world. Bonaventure’s view of Mary here is heavily inflected by the Old Testament:

Anna was praised, because she offered Samuel; whence it is said of her: “the woman went on her way and ate, and her expressions were no more changed into diverse ones.” She offered a son to serve; but the Blessed Virgin offered Her Son to be sacrificed.\(^{59}\)

Abraham, you wanted to offer your son, but offered a ram! but the glorious Virgin offered her Son. The poor little widow is praised, because she offered everything \(toton\), which she had; but this woman, that is the glorious Virgin, most merciful, pious and devoted to God offered her whole substance.\(^{60}\)

Moreover, whereas Bonaventure believed (as did all of his contemporaries) that Mary conceived and bore Jesus without pain, he expressly notes her pain afterward.

In her maternal compassion for her Son, Bonaventure argues, Mary not only partners with God; she also imitates him:

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\(^{58}\) Bonaventure, *De Donis Spiritu Sancto*, collatio 6, 12 (Quarrachi Edition, volume 5, p. 485-6): “And as by following the glorious Virgin we become precious and holy, so by following Eve we become evil and vile.” Cf. Ibid., 13 (p. 486): “Therefore fly concupiscences and let us follow the Virgin, who believed the archangel Gabriel, not the woman who believed the serpent.”

\(^{59}\) As a later chapter will show, this cannot be the case, though showing it here will suffice to demonstrate the increasing importance of the Presentation.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 18..

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 18, 19.
Can a mother forget her infant, to not have pity on the son of her womb? Even if she has forgotten, nevertheless, I will not forget you.” This is said to Christ. And here it can be understood that the whole Christian people have been produced from the womb of the glorious Virgin; that is signified to us through the woman formed from the side of the man, which signifies the Church.\textsuperscript{62}

Bonaventure is the first to explore a number of lines of thought that will occupy later generations and will occupy this work also in later chapters. For now, it will suffice to note how, on the one hand, this is all deeply resonant with themes that date from the era of the fathers. Most of these themes are contained, \textit{in nuce} at least, in the affirmation that Mary is the true Mother of the Living. At the same time, they are pressed down thoroughly in the Old Testament in a way that is specific to Bonaventure’s exegetical turn of mind. Later thinkers will adopt many of his views but without necessarily filtering them as completely through the whole range of the sacred text as has Bonaventure. As a result, some themes have lived on rather thinly in subsequent reflection on the Blessed Virgin, with clusters of images coming apart in later years.

One notes in Bonaventure’s Mariological thought the recurrence of the word \textit{maxime}. Mary’s identification with her Son is maximal; it actualizes every bit of potential. There is no way that she could identify with him that she does not, although there are ways that she does not because she cannot. Like everyone in the wake of Anselm and Bernard, the Seraphic Doctor is eager both to distinguish Mary from her Son and to apply the maximizing pressure of her intimacy with him and closeness to him. That closeness, particularly in the Incarnation, is the origin of so many prerogatives.\textsuperscript{63} Her titles and graces flow to her as a result of her unique

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 20

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Sermo 4 De Annuntione 1} (Quarrachi 6:672): “The Creator of all things rests in the tabernacle of the virginal womb, because here he has prepared his bridal chamber in order to become our brother; here he sets up a royal throne to become our prince; here he puts on priestly vestments to become our high priest. Because of this
proximity to the Incarnation. Although Bonaventure does not anywhere (so far as I am aware) explicitly cite either Thomas or the doctrine of proximate effects that Thomas uses to discuss Mary’s fullness of grace, he does nevertheless provide his own version of that Thomist doctrine.

At the same time, the Anselmian and Bernardian limit ("under God") that resists confusion of Mary with her Son motivates Bonaventure’s rejection of the doctrine of Immaculate Conception. It also motivates his attempt to clarify in what sense Mary “merited to bear” the Son of God. In his discussion of Mary’s merit, he is creative but not distinctive. The Blessed Virgin merits the Incarnation by congruous merit, i.e., the merit of fittingness.\(^{64}\) Her great virtues make it most fitting that she should be rewarded with the Incarnation, even if it is not strictly owed to her. Her devotion to the God of Israel, her dedication of herself to His Temple, and her great delight in the Lord’s laws and ways make her the especially fitting recipient, given God’s choice to bestow it upon anyone. Bonaventure also argues that after the Annunciation, Mary merits the Incarnation \(\textit{ex merito dignitatis},\)\(^{65}\) which refers to the added meritoriousness of her actions after the Spirit sanctifies and overshadows her: “from then she merited not just by fittingness but by her dignity to be overshadowed and impregnated by the power of the Most High.”\(^{66}\) Bonaventure explains the merit of dignity in a response to an objector’s claim that the merit of the Church exceeds the merit of the Blessed Virgin alone, and thus that if the whole Church cannot merit the Incarnation, neither can Mary. His response is that Mary, overshadowed and sanctified for the marital union, she is the Mother of God; because of the royal throne, she is the Queen of heaven; because of the priestly vestments, she is the advocate of the human race.”

\(^{64}\) Commentarium Sententiarum, III.4.2.2.conc: “Maria non merito condigni, sed tantum merito congrui et post annuntiationem etiam dignitatis potuit mereri concipere Filium Dei” (Quarrachi 3:107).

\(^{65}\) This formulation is, so far as I can tell, original to Bonaventure.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., conc. 2.
office of bearing the Son of God, is filled with such a grace for the job that she wins a kind of merit no one else but she and her Son can possess. She wins this merit, that is, in virtue of her unique nearness to the Incarnation.

But it was not possible for Mary (or anyone) to merit the Incarnation by condign merit. It is a wonder beyond all merit, an act of conspicuous grace. Furthermore, Bonaventure argues, the Incarnation, being the basis of all the Blessed Virgin’s merits (“erat ipsius meriti gloriosae Virginis fundamentum”), cannot be strictly owed to her in virtue of those merits. Bonaventure’s reasoning is not unique to him here, but he is shifting the ground ever so subtly. In a sense, it is utterly uncontroversial to say that Mary’s graces flow to her in virtue of her proximity to the Incarnation, but the emphasis has shifted away from her merit of the Incarnation by her great faith (per Augustine), or, as Bonaventure notes here, her “overflowing purity, humility, and kindness,” towards the way her proximity to the Incarnation exerts a kind of retroactive influence over her whole life. This subtle shift, seen here in Bonaventure as before in Thomas, creates new possibilities for thought and discussion about the Blessed Virgin.

Bonaventure and, to a lesser degree, his contemporaries, are the first to look concretely and extensively at the questions of coredemption, merit, sacrifice, satisfaction, and ransom. This development was probably inevitable, because these graces came newly into view as effects of the first grace of the Incarnation. They had been, in earlier eras, presuppositions of all that followed in the economy of grace, as water is the condition of possibility for the swimming fish or atmospheric oxygen for human action. That which is presupposed is often presumed upon, and the reflexive move of interrogating it can be counterintuitive. But it is just that reflexive move

67 Ibid., conc. 3.
that opens the way for the developments that would follow in the history of Marian teaching. The fathers of the Church had seen Mary’s privilege to be *Theotokos* as in some way arising from her presence in the world already as the New Eve. But medieval speculations about the way the Incarnation exerted influence backwards in time – and in this way, Thomas, Bonaventure, and Scotus are all quite similar – opened the way for causality to be invisibly rethought. The Incarnation, supra-temporally and in the counsels of God, causes that which, in time, makes it possible and causes it. That which had been presupposed becomes the newly examined effect of the very wonders of which it had previously been thought the cause. And it is in this way that coredemption, once the atmosphere of the Incarnation, is newly examined on the basis of the concrete reality it made possible. Speculations grew throughout the controversies of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation, and, understandably enough, those who came later and at distance, like Cardinal Newman, held those speculations at arm’s length.

d) Late Medieval and Post-Reformation Mariology

As is common in the history of theology, conflict accelerates and intensifies theological inquiry. The case of Mary was no different. In the couple of centuries after Scotus, reflection on Mary’s role from crib to cross, as well as explicit use of *coredemptrix* and related terms, became an increasingly important part of the Church’s thought. But the pressure driving reflection was primarily the pressure of theological debate between schools, including debate between Dominicans and Franciscans over Mary’s conception with or without sin. But in the late 15th

68 In the mid-20th century, Juniper Carol observed two witnesses to 14th-century use of the term but was corrected (as he acknowledged) by Laurentin. See Carol, *Mariology* vol. 2, p. 446 n. 84.

69 This debate could and did get fierce, so much so that in 1482, further debate on the Immaculate Conception was forbidden on pain of excommunication. See Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000 [1963]), 284-6. The command to cease debate on it had to be repeated in 1483 and again in 1503. Oberman concludes that this debate was not
century, these questions were all to receive a huge cross-pressure, as questions of merit became central to another theological debate that would change the church forever. The dominant message of the reformers was that human beings are made right with God by means of their faith alone. Luther and Calvin both insisted that God’s grace was given by faith outside of human merit. Whether this dictum constitutes a genuine disagreement with the myriad of ways Catholics had deployed terms like grace, merit, and faith is a difficult question and wide of our purpose here. What is clear is that their attack on questions of merit placed pressure on a number of points of Catholic doctrine and practice. The “commerce of the saints,” chief among whom was the Lord’s Blessed Mother, became irrelevant, though it would be a long time before that commerce disappeared from lay Protestant practice. The saints had no treasury of merit from which to draw, and the faithful on earth had no need of any merits but those of Christ. The Eucharist, so central to medieval Catholic life and even to Luther’s vision of sanctification, changed drastically as a matter of practice. And the entire basis on which the emerging doctrine of coredemption had grown all but vanished from underneath. Not only Mary’s holiness and partnership in redemption but even exceptional faith was called into question in a way that had not happened since Tertullian.

Excursus: Protestant Cross-Pressures on Catholic Marian Debates

Crucially, both devotion and debate were still in full swing on the eve of Reformation. There was not, it is important to note, a Catholic position against which to position the proposals of the Reformers. The Reformers' proposals participate in and instantiate the merely the biggest topic in Mariology but in all of late medieval theology.
debate, even as they thoroughly oppose much of what they perceive as devotional excess. The resistance to undue devotion was primary; theological speculation again lagged behind and appeared – when it did – as a kind of appendage to other doctrines the Reformers were far more eager to clarify, such as predestination or justification by faith. This dynamic creates the bizarre effect that Reformation Mariology is infused with the same tensions that appear in its theology more generally. And Mariology changes, as new debates present themselves.

(i. Medieval Mariology and the Reformation Upset)

Mariology in the medieval west was, as has been said, preoccupied with ubiquitous devotion and growing doctrinal precision. A cluster of images inherited from the Patristic period and the early Middle Ages were put to various kinds of liturgical and speculative use. Mary was the New Eve, offering her obedience where Eve had disobeyed. She was the ark in which the Law of the Lord lay and Aaron's staff budded in the form of Jesse's shoot. She was an icon of the Church and the fulfilled Temple. She was, for virtually everyone, the one to whom the greatest possible purity should be attributed (only God's, it was said, should be held as greater).\(^7\) For virtually all, this meant that she had been free from actual sin during the whole course of her earthly life. For some, it meant that she had never known even the touch of original sin, the New Eve given by grace the blessing her distant ancestor had enjoyed. She was the daughter (\textit{ipsa} – Gen. 3:15) who would crush the serpent, and the mother of God's Incarnate Son. She

\(^7\) Anselm, \textit{De Conceptu Virginis} XVIII. He thinks it proper "that this Virgin should shine with a purity so great that, except for God, no greater purity could be conceived."

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was the greatest of the saints, the highest of the elect, and God's most dear and cherished child.

Most of these descriptions arise in the Church's early centuries. But in the late medieval period, as theologians attempted to gather these images together and render a coherent picture of the woman to whom they refer, new things came to be spoken of her. Anselm had named Mary the "Mother of Salvation" and the "Bearer of Reconciliation." New Marian hymns and prayers began to circulate through the Church: the Salve Regina, the Alma Redemptoris Mater; and, most importantly, the Ave Maria began to occupy larger and larger places within the Church's liturgical and devotional life. Oberman sees in Gabriel Biel's work, a procession of successive elevations of Mary: as "Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, almost Concreatrix, and as we will have to conclude finally [...] Maria Spes Omnium." There is serious scholarly opinion also suggesting that for many medieval Christians, Mary came to embody the divine mercy in opposition to the iustitia of her son. Kreitzer notes that many also saw in Mary a fuller identification with themselves than Christ could accomplish. But whatever the merits of conclusions like these last two, it is certainly the case, as will be seen, that the early Reformers, and especially

71 Orationes 50 (PL 158, 948C): “o mater salutis,” and 52 (PL 158, 957A): “genetrix es reconciliationis et reconciliatorum.”

72 Kreitzer notes that the Ave Maria had been known in some form at least since the early 7th century in the East. But additions to it, which bothered both Lutheran and Calvinist Reformers, arose during the Middle Ages. See Kreitzer, Reforming Mary, 14.

73 Quoted in Heiko Oberman 2000), 308.

74 Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 137.

75 Oberman, Harvest, 319-22.
Martin Luther, saw in these titles and honors a slight to the mercy and tenderness of Christ. And it was this slight that elicits most of what the Reformers have to say about Mary.

ii. Tensions Within Reformed Mariology

Protestant Mariology is, like the tradition that it inherits, largely a negative exercise. The Reformers and their successors aim to refute what they view as the idolatrous practice of invoking and adoring Mary and the Saints. In other words, they see far more ruled out by the “under God” of the Marian dictum than their predecessors had. For both Lutherans and Calvinists, the primary thing to say about Mary is that she is not a Savior, a Mediator, or in any sense "our Hope" or "our Life," as the Salve proclaims. All of these ideas amount to a derogation from the glory of Christ as sole Savior. Positive Mariology varies. Allowable statements range widely and a diversity of opinions emerge in the first couple of generations. But the Reformers speak with one voice about what they take to be the main Mariological error of the Catholics: that of attributing to Mary the actions (and therefore the glory and praise) that is due to her Son.

a) Mariology and Justification Among the Lutherans

Lutheran thought about the Blessed Mother bears within its body marks of Luther's struggle to reform the Church's doctrine of justification. It was widely reported that he called justification by faith the articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae.76

76 It was first (as far as I can see) reported as a "proverb of Luther" by Lutheran theologian Balthasar Meisner. See idem, Anthropologia Sacra disp. 24 (Wittenberg: Johannes Gormannus, 1615).
Understandably, then, he attributes the Mariological errors that have arisen in the Catholic Church to an unhelpful trust in works. For him, the extremely popular medieval practices of invocation have at their roots not only the tendency of the human heart towards idolatry but also the false conviction that the saints (or anyone) merits anything from God. His commentary on the *Magnificat* explicitly folds these two themes together: "Remember that God also has His work in you, and base your salvation on no other works than those God works in you alone, as you see the Virgin Mary do here."77 He anticipates the pivot towards the exemplary nature of Mary's faith by noting "how full the world is nowadays of false preachers and false saints, who fill the ears of the people with preaching good works."78 Many of those entrusted with the responsibility of teaching the Church, that is, "preach human doctrines and works they themselves have set up. Even the best of them, unfortunately, are so far from this 'even and straight road' that they constantly drive the people to 'the right hand' by teaching good works and a godly life."79 Some even teach that human works will be sufficient to merit entrance into Heaven.

From errors like these springs a reluctance to rely upon God. Moreover, the confidence that humans can merit salvation becomes for many a ground for confidence in the merits of the saints; they thus turn to them for help and aid that, if only people knew it, Christ is super-eminently willing and obviously able to give. In doing so, they turn

77 Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 21, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1956), Kindle Edition, loc. 6067. Luther’s interpretation, as will be shown in the discussion of the *Magnificat* below, elides the clear representative nature of Mary’s song, and only in that way can he interpret it as a song about her own personal redemption.

78 Ibid., loc. 5936

79 Ibid., loc. 5930
away from Christ towards Mary and the saints and demonstrate their lack of confidence in his grace:

for, in proportion as we ascribe merit and worthiness to her, we lower the grace of God and diminish the truth of the Magnificat. The angel salutes her only as highly favored of God, and because the Lord is with her (Luke 1:28), which is why she is blessed among women. Hence all those who heap such great praise and honour upon her head are not far from making an idol of her, as though she were concerned that men should honour her and look to her for good things.80

Here, Luther clarifies that the proper way to honor the Virgin is to see her as she sees herself, as one of low estate and stripped of all honor, and to look past her to God "who regards, embraces and blesses so poor and despised a mortal."81 The point is to be moved to love for God who humbles the exalted and lifts up the lowly and poor.

Luther's deflationary reading of Mary (when compared with many Catholic contemporaries) takes nothing away from her sinlessness, at least not yet in 1521, when he wrote the Magnificat commentary. Although he is clear that she claims no merit for the great graces given to her ("how should a creature deserve to become the Mother of God?"), he nevertheless admits that she was "without sin."82 She is without sin by God's grace, a grace "far too great for her to deserve it in any way."83 In 1518, Luther had argued that although practically the whole church held that the Holy Virgin "was conceived without sin," those who hold the opposite opinion "should not be considered

80 Ibid., loc. 6117
81 Ibid., loc. 6130
82 Ibid., loc. 6205
83 Ibid.
heretics, since their opinion has not been disproved."\textsuperscript{84} Indeed, Grisar notes that in a sermon on the feast of Mary's Conception in 1516, Luther affirmed that Mary was conceived without sin: one pure drop in the ocean of the "massa perditionis," and that he still held this view as late as 1527.\textsuperscript{85} Although there need not be any difficulty in affirming both the doctrine of Justification by faith (in Luther’s terms) and Mary's Immaculate Conception, it should be noted that most Reformers, including the later Luther himself, did not see it that way. After 1529, the 1516 sermon in which Luther affirms the Immaculate Conception is redacted. And in a 1532 sermon, Luther asserts "Mary the Mother was surely born of sinful parents, and in sin, as we were."\textsuperscript{86}

Luther's successors were, for the most part, much more clear in their position. Most held that Mary was an ordinary sinner much as the rest of humanity. Johannes Wigand, for example, proclaims that Mary was a "weak, stupid human being, just like other people." Melanchthon would resume Tertullian's ancient critique of Mary in her loss of Jesus, calling her sin "natural infirmity."\textsuperscript{87} Likewise, Georg Walther tentatively explains: "Mary was also not totally without sin."\textsuperscript{88} Kreitzer notes that sermons published after 1570 contain harsh comments about Mary's weakness and (sometimes) her sin. These critiques could be blistering; Niels Hemmingsenrevives (and reverses) the


\textsuperscript{85} Hartmann Grisar, \textit{Martin Luther; His Life and Work} (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co, 1930), 500-1.

\textsuperscript{86} Johannes Wigand, \textit{Postilla} (1569), 63, quoted in Kreitzer 2004, 41

\textsuperscript{87} Quoted in Kreitzer, \textit{Reforming Mary}, 137

\textsuperscript{88} Georg Walther, \textit{Auslegung der Evangelien . . . an den Sontagen} (1579), 314-15.
Eve/Mary typology to suggest that while Eve succumbed to temptation "and thereby brought the whole human race into misery, so Mary thought that she, through her lack of diligence [in losing the twelve year-old Jesus], had lost the promised savior of the world." One hundred years earlier, devotion to Mary was ubiquitous and zealous. How it could be that within a century a German Christian could speak like this merits far more than the handful of studies thus far given to the question.

Surely, part of any answer would have to be that the Lutheran reformers felt something absolutely central to Christian faith was being challenged. The idolatrous devotion to the Virgin called into question both Christ's own dignity and glory and the very act by which he saves the world. And in the history of the Church, it must be noted that they were not alone in the worry. St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Anselm of Canterbury had all opposed the celebration of the Immaculate Conception because – though they agreed the highest possible purity and grace should be attributed to the Mother of God – they judged that the Immaculate Conception denigrated the redemptive act of Christ. The Reformers' zeal for the utter centrality of Christ's redemptive act is not unique to them; what is unique is their construal of the act and (thus) what kind of doctrine and discipline could denigrate it. As had always been the case in the Church, Mary's significance comes to be in dispute precisely at the point where differing visions of the Person and work of Christ come into conflict. This was to be the case not only in dissensions between Catholics and Protestants but also between

Protestant groups that had differing visions of Christ and his work.\textsuperscript{90}

\textit{b) Calvin's Augustinian Mariology}

John Calvin, as George Tavard observes, stands at one further remove than Luther from the medieval piety that forms the backdrop for Luther's Mariology.\textsuperscript{91} He is at pains not to cleanse his churches of their Catholic residue but to defend and justify them against Counter-Reformation attacks. Thus, the \textit{Institutes}, which are aimed at boiling down the essentials of Christian faith for those within his fold, treats of Mariology primarily by not treating it. He does speak of Mary in his commentary on the Gospel harmony and in occasional sermons, but it is in dispute with Catholics that he makes his most clear Mariological proposals. This rhetorical position makes his Augustinianism a convenient recourse in dispute with Catholics on a number of issues and on Mariology especially. On the question of the Blessed Virgin's prerogatives, Calvin claims Augustine for his cause, developing the Bishop of Hippo's thought for a new and contentious

\textsuperscript{90} Differing Christologies, for example, drove Lutherans to affirm Mary's virginal integrity \textit{in partu}. For Lutherans, a heavier stress fell on Christ's body as God's body (and hence on his mother as God's mother) than was found among Calvinists. A chain of implications follows for what is fittingly predicated of that body and its birth. Thus, Lutheran Andreas Keller argues that Eve was able to give birth without any pain. Freed from Eve's curse, she remains "a maiden "before, during, and after the birth," bearing Christ "without any stain." See Keller, \textit{Ain Sermon} (1525), quoted in Kreitzer 2004, 36. Likewise, Luther affirmed that Mary "brought forth without sin, without shame, without pain, and without injury, just as she had conceived without sin. The curse of Eve did not come on her, where God said 'in pain thou shalt bring forth children,' Gen. 3:16; otherwise it was with her in every particular as with every woman who gives birth to a child" (\textit{Sermon for Christmas Evein v. 1 of Sermons of Martin Luther, the Church Postils}, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, 8 vol. (Minneapolis: Lutherans of All Lands, 1904). Finally, the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord (Art. VIII) asserts that "the Son of the most High God [. . .] showed his divine majesty even in his mother's womb, inasmuch as He was born of a virgin, with her virginity inviolate." This will be explored later, but this doctrine is affirmed in part to show how Christ's exercises his sovereignty over time and space in his body. Calvin, on the other hand, found Scriptural evidence for perpetual virginity inconclusive, arguing that the ancient idea of her having taken a vow of virginity was ludicrous (John Calvin, \textit{Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke}, Luke 1:34).

\textsuperscript{91} George H. Tavard, \textit{The Thousand Faces of the virgin Mary} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 117.
The Antidote to the canons of the Council of Trent reveals both Calvin's position and his Augustinian leanings. Canon 23 on the Council's canons on justification states that no one, except by a special privilege, could hope "to avoid all sins, even those that are venial." Calvin agrees with the substance of the denial but rejects the proposal that anyone is exempt from it, even the Blessed Virgin herself. "As to the special privilege of the Virgin Mary," he responds, "when they produce the celestial diploma, we shall believe what they say." At issue here, given the context, is not Mary's conception but her life. The article exempts Mary from the actual sins most people commit. Calvin here treats not the long-disputed question of at what point, within the womb, Mary was sanctified but the much more widely and consistently held conviction that Mary was without sin during the whole course of her earthly life. Throughout the Middle Ages, there had been a range of views about Mary's conception tolerated within the Church, although it seems fairly clear that the Immaculatist position gained greater favor as time went on. But virtually all Catholics had agreed that Mary was without any actual sin. This is the contention reflected in Trent's 23rd canon, and Calvin rejects it.

He is aware of the exemption Augustine made in the On Nature and Grace concerning Mary on the question of sin. But he also cites another anti-Pelagian work, in

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92 Canons of the Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon xxiii.
93 Antidote to the Canons of Trent, Canon 23
94 "Let us then leave aside the holy Virgin Mary; on account of the honor due to the lord, I do not want to raise here any question about her when we are dealing with sins. After all, how do we know what wealth of grace was given her in order to conquer sin completely, since she merited to conceive and bear the one who certainly had
which he insists that none of the saints but Christ have no need of deliverance from sin: "they err greatly who hold that any of the saints except Christ require not to use this prayer, 'forgive us our debts." Calvin also claims to his side Sts. John Chrysostom and Ambrose, both of whom, he thinks, suspect Mary of temptation to ambition. He either does not know or does not report that Ambrose had been emphatic that Mary, however tempted, had not the slightest trace of sin. And given the context in which Augustine makes his famous exceptio, it seems most likely that the concession Augustine makes is in fact to the widespread conviction among western Christians of his time that Mary was free of actual sin. After all, the famous sentence follows his rehearsal of Pelagius's claim that piety demands we hold the Virgin to be sinless.

The historical questions aside, however, it is clear that Calvin takes himself to be reflective of an Augustinian and patristic consensus that Mary was herself a saved sinner. It could not be, therefore, that Mary's fullness of grace refers to some attribute or "habitus of the soul" possessed by her. Rather, she is "ignoble and contemptible" and altogether worthy of being passed over for any other. Thus, the angel's greeting to her is not a commendation of her but "of the grace of God." That the angel calls her "blessed" does not, for Calvin, mean "worthy of praise," but rather means "happy":

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no sin?" On Nature and Grace 36.42.


96 Sermo 22.30

97 John Calvin, Commentarius, col. 37

98 John Calvin, Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels, Lk 1:28
Thus, Paul often supplicates for believers, first grace and then peace (Romans 1:7; Ephesians 1:2) that is, every kind of blessings; implying that we shall then be truly happy and rich, when we are beloved by God, from whom all blessings proceed. But if Mary's happiness, righteousness, and life, flow from the undeserved love of God, if her virtues and all her excellence are nothing more than the divine kindness, it is the height of absurdity to tell us that we should seek from her what she derives from another quarter in the same manner as ourselves. With extraordinary ignorance have the Papists, by an enchanter's trick, changed this salutation into a prayer, and have carried their folly so far, that their preachers are not permitted, in the pulpit, to implore the grace of the Spirit except through their Hail Mary.99

For Calvin, it is ludicrous to think that Mary could give what is not hers. To either praise Mary as if what she has owes in any way to her merit or to implore it of her is to commit idolatry and to deny the heart of the Gospel – namely, that what the saints have they receive "from another quarter."

There is, in Calvin's thought, a proper way to regard Mary. "Let us learn," he counsels, "to praise the holy virgin. But how? By going along with the Holy Spirit, and then there will be true praises."100 Mary lives in grateful obedience to the Lord's will, recognizing that she was "chosen by God before she was born, even before the creation of the world, and she has been numbered among his own, and not as though she had come to him by her own motion."101 Like all believers, then, Mary was elected before she was born or had done anything good or bad (Rom 9:11). To accredit to her what was chosen long before the creation of the world is, for Calvin, the height of impiety. Rather, "the Holy Spirit [. . .] proclaims Mary blessed because she believed, and in praising

99 Ibid.
100 La revue réformée, vol. 7 (no. 28–1956/4), 24.
101 Ibid., 22.
Mary's faith generally teaches us where true human happiness is located."102

Mary is to be imitated, not regaled, and the imitation is praise enough. Calvin is much more antagonistic in his critiques of Roman practice than most early Lutherans were, although his tone does echo later Lutheranism. "The papists," he bitterly observes, attribute to her enough titles, but in this they blaspheme against God and take form him with their sacrileges what was proper and special to Him. They will call the Virgin Mary "Queen of Heaven," "Star to guide poor errant folk," "Salvation of the world," "Hope," and "Light"; in sum, God appropriates nothing in Holy Scripture that is not transposed to Mary by the papists [. . .], these poor baboons who are no more than vermin crawling on the earth.103 Calvin concludes that Mary herself will condemn those who attribute to her what properly belongs only to her son. Those who trust in Mary as "our Advocate"104 will find her ready to accuse, not defend. As is often the case in Reformation polemics, Calvin generalizes from this tendency towards Marian idolatry to the broader practice of praying to saints in general. Catholics seek out "patrons and advocates, infinite means to please God, ways of doing things."105

Yet, for all his resistance to what he thinks of as illicit developments in Roman devotion to the Virgin, he shares with the Catholics a vision of Mary as exemplar of the Church. Like Augustine, Calvin holds that to be the Mother of God is not the greatest

102 Commentarius, col. 36


104 Ibid., 24

grace; rather, although "one cannot deny that God, by electing and predestining Mary as mother for his son, adorned her with the highest honor," nevertheless "the greatest blessedness and glory of the Virgin lay in that she was a member of her Son, so that the heavenly Father counted her among the new creatures." Mary's chief grace is to be a member of Christ's body. Augustine had also proclaimed this to be so, and held Mary to be a figure of the Church's motherhood of all the faithful. At times, Augustine could even go so far as to say that the Church's motherhood was Marian, that she knit the members of Christ together as she had done the unborn body of her incarnate Son. For Calvin, Mary remains a figure of the Church's motherhood, which must hold sway in the lives of all the faithful, for "there is no entrance to permanent life unless we are received in the womb of this mother, and she begets us, she feeds us at her breasts, and finally she preserves and keeps us under her guidance and government, until, being freed from this moral flesh, we are similar to angels [. . .] It is also to be noted that outside the womb of this Church one cannot expect the forgiveness of sins or any salvation."

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106 His comments on Luke 11:27-8 make this clear: "what the woman considered the main honor of Mary is far less than the other graces: it was of more importance to be reborn by the Spirit of Christ than to conceive the flesh of Christ in her womb, to have Christ living in herself spiritually than to nurse him at the breast." See Commentarius, col. 348

107 Ibid., col. 350

108 Sermon 72A.7. Quoted in the Office of Readings for the Feast of the Presentation of Mary.

109 On Holy Virginity, 6, and Serm. 72A.8.

110 Institutes, part 4, ch. 1, 14.
c) Graced: The Protestant Mariological Synthesis

We are now in a place to draw some threads together. We can see that Lutheran and Reformed Marian teaching reflected the issues central to each tradition. There were emphases each tradition guarded, and even where those emphases did not rise to the level of explicit disagreement, the marks of the stress are visible. Calvin obviously affirmed justification by faith, and yet Luther's Mariology is more clearly and explicitly anchored in that doctrine. Luther taught, following Augustine, that followers of Jesus had been chosen from out of the massa perditionis before all creation, and yet Calvin's Mariology explicitly develops the implications of this election for fixing the Church's teaching about Mary. There are also, of course, controversies between the two traditions that emerge in their Mariological teaching.

Even so, there is broad agreement on a number of topics. It is agreed on all fronts that there is no place in the life of believer or Church for invocation of Mary in prayer. What she does not technically "have" she cannot "give," and to think otherwise is to attribute godlike status to her and thus to commit idolatry. With the exception of the early Luther, the Reformers are basically agreed in holding Mary to have been conceived in original sin and probably to have been guilty of at least some particular sins. She, like her son, has nothing intrinsic to draw either our attention to her or the Lord's. The choice of her is utterly gratuitous, unreasonable (in the sense that there could be no reason for the choice other than God's own desire), and therefore wholly a matter of God's own extravagant goodness and love.
Mary is thus justified by faith, a faith that is perhaps greater than that found in most anyone else. Both her *fiat* and the *Magnificat* are seen by both Lutherans and Calvinists as a confession of that faith. Both are equally clear that this faith is God's inexplicable gift to her; both in faith and in the fruits of that faith, she is totally and utterly passive. This point cannot be overstressed, for in virtually every place where Reformers speak of Mary, they oppose the invocation of her on just these grounds. She, like us, has no active role in her own salvation. In Mariology, as in soteriology, Luther's disavowal from the Galatians commentary applies: "thus, I abandon all active righteousness, both of my own and of God's law, and embrace only that passive righteousness that is the righteousness of grace, mercy, and forgiveness of sins."\(^{111}\) It is of this passive righteousness that Mary comes to be the chief image.

This passivity becomes most clear in the ways both Luther and Calvin translate the participle with which Gabriel greets Mary: *κεχαριτωμένη*. As Kreitzer observes, Lutherans see the Latin translation *gratia plena* as the source of a number of errors. Johannes Brenz, for example, explains in a 1541 sermon that "this should not be understood as the hypocrites explain, that Mary in herself is a 'chest' of graces and possesses as a kind of goddess a kind of treasure of all heavenly goods, which she distributes to those she wishes."\(^{112}\) Twenty years earlier, Andreas Keller had argued that Luther's translation, *holdselige*, or some other near-equivalent, was the superior way to translate the participle, precisely because the Greek word is Middle/Passive and partly

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\(^{112}\) Quoted in Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary*, 32.
because of the emphasis this allowed Lutherans to put on passive righteousness: "the little word 'full of grace' should not be understood as if she was through herself full of grace or favor, but that all grace and favor come from God, for grace is nothing other than the favor of God." Calvin likewise argues that "the participle κεχαριτωμένη, which Luke employs, denotes the undeserved favor of God. This appears more clearly from the Epistle to the Ephesians, where, speaking of our reconciliation to God, Paul says God 'hath made us accepted (ἐχαρίτωσεν) in the Beloved," that is, he has received into his favor, and embraced with kindness, us who were formerly his enemies." Especially in Calvin's discussion, Mary's redemption is explicitly assimilated to ours. She is redeemed as we are, and it is that assimilation that allows her to be what she properly is: the icon of the faith that justifies.

There is a connection, then, for virtually all reformers between the question of Mary's sinlessness, doctrines of mediation, and the practices of Marian devotion. The invocation of Mary and petitioning of favors from her was based, for many medieval Catholics, on her divine motherhood and her the belief that the merits of the saints or the Church could make satisfaction on behalf of sinners. It was because of her fullness of grace, or so it was thought, that she was able to hear and grant the petitions of her supplicants. Luther's insight that this practice reflected rampant error about justification, merit, and our status before God was basically a point of agreement for both Lutherans and Calvinists. The cure to this practice was to place, front and center and in terms as

113 Ibid.
clear as possible, that Mary was justified by faith and not by works. She had and has no merit. Of course, the early Luther's understanding of Mary's sinlessness by grace (noted above) might have been sufficient to make the point, but in light of continued Catholic attacks on the Reformers, that understanding became an albatross around the neck of justification theology. It became necessary to assimilate Mary as fully as possible to us, and to make her redemption as much like ours as possible, i.e., to make it a redemption from actually committed sins. Fortunately for them, there were resources in the Christian tradition to make the case (again, Tertullian) and the Scriptures are at least plausibly open to such an interpretation. But in their own minds, Reformers were doing Mary no disservice. Indeed, quite the opposite was the case: they were doing her the honor of imitating her, of honoring her son, of treasuring the things about him in their hearts, and thus coming gradually to look more and more like her.

### iii. Interrogating the Reformers' Concept of Activity/Passivity

The rejection both of Marian devotion and of doctrines of sinlessness, as we have seen, is rooted in the conviction that although Mary's place in the economy of salvation is exalted, her role in that economy is entirely passive. Thus, although she may have been the beneficiary of any number of graces, she has no part whatsoever in meriting them and cannot dispense them (note the complete shift here away from New Eve teaching and towards proximity to the Incarnation teaching). Christ is the sole redeemer and mediator of divine grace to humans, none of whom has the slightest claim upon it. But it is hard not to see beneath the surface of this argument a misunderstanding. The early Luther resisted Marian supplication and yet affirmed that such a grace was given to Mary that she was delivered from sin in her conception and did not sin in her life. On Luther's
terms, good works being merely the fruit of grace, a life entirely without sin need not be understood as meritorious. But in that case, it is apparent that “merit” is just being used in a different way altogether.

Luther had taught that faith is the work of God the Holy Spirit in the believer's soul for which the believer can take no credit. It "is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God."\textsuperscript{115} Of course, if this were true, it seems the dispensation of grace, which might be the basis for any number of instances of conspicuous sanctity, could never threaten the soteriology Luther wants the Church to embrace. That Mary is free from sin need not have implied that Mary had saved herself or did not need salvation; it is the effect of that salvation! Mary can be full of grace by grace through the faith that such a grace instills in her. She can be without sin and still (indeed, much more so!) be the icon of the faith that saves. Perhaps what we see most clearly in the German and Genevan rejections of Mariology is the extent to which the careful distinctions of inter-scholastic controversies in France, Italy, and England simply did not have the impact that their authors hoped.

Many of the Protestant Mariological objections are elegantly handled by the insights that arose in former controversies. First, if the redemption of a soul can nevertheless be destined before the creation of the world on the basis of the merits of the Savior who is to come, there seems no difficulty in applying those merits in other ways as

well. Christ's merits could, that is, be the basis for which grace was given to Abraham and his children. They could be the basis for the choosing of Israel and the deliverance of Israel from the yoke of slavery in Egypt. They could be the basis for the raising up of David as the late-born King and the promise that his throne would endure forever. They could be the basis for the promise that the Lord's people would never be without Him, even in their exile. They could be the basis for the promise that Israel would return to the Land again. And they could be the basis of God's dispensation of grace to the Savior's mother before his birth, to preserve her from actual sin, or at her conception, to preserve her from original sin as creation’s most redeemed part. Calvin's election theology makes extremely clear that Mary was predestined \textit{in grace} to bear the Son on the basis of the work the Son would perform. There is simply, on Calvin's account, no need for Christ's merits to have been earned in time in order for them to be beneficial to those who live before his birth. If grace can be operative in predestination, it becomes much easier to see how it could similarly be operative in preservation – in deliverance of Israel's most important daughter from slavery.

Second, Luther's insistence, and that of his successors, that Mary retained her virginity, even in childbirth, draws a number of important ideas into play. For Luther, the key fact about the Virgin birth is that it showed that Jesus is not born in sin. Following Luther, Andreas Keller proclaimed that Mary received three blessings: painless birth, virginity \textit{in partu}, and conception through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{116} Christ's is born from an Eve who is graced to such a degree that she could bear him without pain, thus escaping the

\textsuperscript{116} Keller, \textit{Ain Sermon} (1525).
universal judgment upon post-lapsarian women. There may be reason to doubt this; perhaps this is simply a vestigial Catholic leftover not yet rooted out of Protestant dogmatics. But it may be that Mary is "blessed (i.e., not cursed) among women" (Lk 1:42). But because Lutherans felt the need to affirm the virginity in partu of Mary, they show in yet another venue the complex ways that Christology implies Mariology. Christ, in order to be born in the way God intended, needed to be born of a woman who differed in important ways from every other woman who had borne children. She needed to be free of the curse that had afflicted childbirth for all of human history. Of course, there are many ways to take the phrase. But it is difficult to imagine how Mary could be free from Eve's curse if she was not also free of Eve's malady. After all, every baptized woman, however saintly, has given birth in pain. And Jesus needed to be born in a way that was not touched by the curse of Genesis. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Lutheran Caspar Huberinus insisted that the idea that "Mary, like other people, was conceived and born in sin," was a fiendish idea. For him, the notion that Mary was a sinner had led to heresy, such as the Eutychian notion that Christ's body had to be heavenly substance in order to avoid the stain of sin. But "Blessed is the womb that bare you and the breasts that nursed you" (Luke 11:27). Or, as Huberinus exclaims, "Mary must have had a pure, holy, blessed body" if Christ was to take his humanity fully from her.117

The early Luther had understood that the Virgin could be entirely without sin and that this could be entirely the work of grace. Even her Fiat, like every confession of faith, should rightly be called the work of the Spirit within her. Indeed, what is the grace given

117 Caspar Huberinus, Postilla Teutsch (1548), 28.
to her but the Holy Spirit, who enables us to do greater works than those Jesus did? The Immaculate Conception is simply the recognition that the task for which Mary was predestined was such that in order to accomplish it she would need to be gifted with a unique and incredible charism – to be fully graced. Her son is he on whom the Spirit is poured without measure (John 3:34); Luke 1:35 makes clear that she is the one on whom the Spirit must be poured in the highest possible measure. The Immaculate Conception neither leads to nor implies the conclusion that she is a goddess; rather, Jesus himself promised that those in whom the Spirit came to dwell would do God-sized works (John 14:12) as humans. At the end of the day, Mariology proves to be a rather ineffective locus for the litigation of Protestantism’s core claims, because Mary’s graces can simply be restated in the terms that Protestantism sets. The question is whether those terms are coherent; to what extent does it make sense to say human beings are not responsible for the works they do under the power of grace? Does such a view not finally undermine the redemptive significance of Jesus’s own quite human love for God and neighbor? Are we glimpsing in Protestant anti-Mariology yet another way, that attacking the Mother eventually undermines her Son as well? Cyril’s insights confront us resoundingly here. Might it be that further reflection on Mary’s role as the New Eve helps solve Protestant soteriology's controversy over whether faith is not itself a grace-enabled work?

I raise these questions not merely to show that Protestants can still be devoted to Mary in their own terms if they wish (though of course they can), but to show one possible outworking of the shift discerned in Thomas and Bonaventure’s Mariological thought. The slight shift in emphasis that relocates Mariology under the first principle of divine motherhood can, and did, have the effect of removing the proper sense in which
Mary is a partner of the Lord. The discussion of merit, which animated Protestant anti-mariology, was astonishingly divorced from any workable theory of action, and merit, as a non-abstract question, must always serve as a second-order discussion serving the discussion of particular actions. What Mary merits must be, in some way, tied to what her grace-filled actions make possible.\footnote{See the discussion of action and merit in the conclusion of this present work.}

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e) Counter-Reformation and the “Golden Age” of Mariology

It is easy to see why for those who resisted the new doctrines, Mary became a rallying point, not only for the sake of devotion to her but for the sake of all the theological currents that intersect in her: sacramentology, merit, grace, works, faith, and the Church, not to mention the person and work of the divine-human Savior. Whether or not his evaluation of it is correct, Barth’s perception of the way Mariology integrates the whole of Catholic theology is accurate: “In the doctrine and worship of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest.”\footnote{Church Dogmatics, I/2, § 15.2 (143).} What this means is that Catholics who rallied to Mary had a number of reasons for doing so. It also means that the explosion of Mariology in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century and after makes sense as an attempt to clarify issues all over this waterfront. Thus, Juniper Carol sees this century as “the ‘Golden Age’ of Mary’s Coredemption.”\footnote{Mariology II, 448.}

Carol groups the 17\textsuperscript{th}-century contributions to this discussion under four headings, according to the axes on which coredemption is mapped by different theologians: i) merit, ii)
satisfaction, iii) sacrifice, and iv) ransom-price. Each of these ideas draws on the long tradition laid out above, and none is held to the necessary exclusion of the others. One definite change, however, is the way the principle of nearness becomes the source of all of Mary’s prerogatives, including the prerogative to share in Jesus’s works. The first of these is, unsurprisingly, merit. The common Catholic way of speaking of merit became that Mary merits for us de congruo what Jesus merits for us de condigno, on much the same lines as we saw above in the work of Bonaventure. An important difference is that while Bonaventure’s discussions of merit tend to circulate primarily around the Annunciation (Sententiarum III.4.2.2),¹²¹ his 17th descendants focus on Mary’s compassion at the cross. In doing so, they develop Bonaventure’s own contemplations on the Blessed Virgin’s co-suffering with her son. Key to this insight is that although they merit for us in different ways, as Rodrigo de Portillo argued, Mary at the cross “merited the same thing which her Son merited.”¹²² At the midpoint of the century, a Franciscan Friar claimed that it was through the merits of Jesus and Mary that God had decreed to redeem humankind from the slavery of the devil.¹²³ This is a genuine development. At and before the annunciation, as most of the church fathers agreed or implied, she merited to bear Jesus. At the cross, so it was now claimed, she merited the salvation of the world alongside him. She suffered, alongside her Son, his rejection by the people of Israel, and thus, although subordinate to and dependent upon his suffering, she joined him in it. The speculations of theologians around this

¹²¹ Although Bonaventure reflected at length on Candlemas and the compassion of Our Lady at the cross, his more formal arguments about merit remain with the tradition at the Annunciation. Arguably, later theologians couldn’t have built the bridges they did without his help, but it was they who did it, not Bonaventure.

¹²² Rodrigo de Portillo, Libro de los tratados de Cristo Señor nuestro, y de su santísima Madre, y de los beneficios y Mercedes que goza el mundo por su medio (Tauri, 1630), p. 41.

theme, it is important to note, are driven by what Carol calls the *principium consortii*, which was Albert the Great’s own version of Thomas’s “principle of nearness.” Albert had argued that the principle needed to be applied maximally, to reveal the Virgin as a partner in all her Son’s works. The view won wide support, and in the post-Reformation period, Mary’s place in the economy of grace was understood to grant her a share in everything her Son does. By joining him in his works, Mary joins him in meriting what those works merit, i.e., the salvation of the world. Carol notes a dozen luminaries who speak along similar lines, concluding that by 1659, this doctrine was the common opinion of Catholic theologians. And if this wasn’t so at that time, it surely became so during the long Marian century that stretched from 1800 to 1950.

Many of the thinkers who wrote of Mary’s merit also speculated around other redemptive themes. Frangipane, Wadding, de Kreaytter, and de Vega speculate that Mary shared in Christ’s satisfaction for the sins of the human race, with de Vega theorizing that this satisfaction might, in some way, might be condign satisfaction. In general, the medieval consensus has held: a logic of fittingness is at play rather than strict justice. But where theologians have joined de Vega, they have rested their arguments on the principle of association. As Newman’s friend E.B. Pusey would claim, writing in the middle of the 19th century, this principle funds an entire theological system, exerting pressure in the same way Anselm’s Marian dictum had, to push Marian speculations closer and closer to the Son, which is their basis. But when some fly too close, as de Vega did in surmising that Mary had condignly satisfied for sin, or as others had in saying that

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124 In his commentary on Matthew, he claims that Mary, by a principle of association with or participation in the work of her Son, “participated in all of his same acts.” See *Comment. in Matt.* I.18, ed. Borgnet, vol. 20 (Parish’s: 1893), p. 36.

125 Carol *Mariology* vol. 2, 448-451.

126 Ending with the promulgation of *Munificentissimus Deus*. 

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she had condignly merited the forgiveness of sins, ecumenical confusion was bound to reign as many Protestants could not connect the dots on “nearness.”

Others in the Golden Age of Coredemption emphasized Mary’s share in the sacrifice of her Son. Portillo, who also writes eloquently of Mary’s merit, places primary emphasis on Mary’s oblation and offering of her Son at Calvary.\textsuperscript{127} There is a distinction to be made between, for example, the \textit{Stabat Mater} tradition, in which Mary suffers faithfully at the cross the pains that her Son also suffers, and the \textit{sacrifice} motif, in which she joins Christ in making the offering that causes both his and her suffering. Again, Carol notes over a dozen writers who emphasize Mary’s joining of the Son in his self-oblation. The questions are obvious, and the literature far too vast to summarize here, although these questions will play an important role in the solutions reached below: does she actually sacrifice her own child? Does she offer herself as he offers himself? Does she offer him? Who is the recipient of the offering? A specifically Catholic controversy arises from thought along these lines, as the sacrificial character of coredemption may be seen to imply that Mary is a priest, and a significant amount of the discussion on this theme centers around justifying the reservation of Holy Orders to men given some or other construal of Mary’s role in the sacrifice of her Son. Carol notes, in the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, two identifiable divergent schools of thought: the first affirming and the second denying that Mary’s oblation constituted “a sacrificial and sacerdotal act” in a true and proper sense.\textsuperscript{128} Finally, Carol describes the motif of “paying the price” or ransom.\textsuperscript{129} Carol names several writers

\textsuperscript{127} R. de Portillo, \textit{Libro de los tratados de Cristo Señor nuestro, y de su santísima Madre, y de los beneficios y mercedes que goza el mundo por su medio} (Tauri, 1830: 41), cf. Carol, \textit{Mariology} 2, 452.

\textsuperscript{128} Carol \textit{Mariology} 2, 461.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.,
already mentioned, and this theme effectively amounts to a way of arranging ideas about merit, satisfaction, and sacrifice.\textsuperscript{130}

These motifs are, for obvious reasons, similar to those that appear in discussions of in what Jesus’s redemption consists. Like that discussion, the question of Marian coredemption reflects various emphases and motifs more than controversies, though there are plenty of controversies to go around when attempting to define in what, precisely, coredemption consists. Carol, who was the President of the Mariological Society of America and (in his time) the foremost scholar of Marian doctrine in the United States, notes the principal disagreements at play on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council.\textsuperscript{131} For Carol, the primary existent debates concerned the modalities of coredemption. In the long century between the Councils, the medieval consensus around merit was increasingly challenged, including by Carol. A new distinction was proposed, between condign merit \textit{ex toto rigore iustitiae} and \textit{ex mera condignitate}. Granted the validity of that distinction, it seemed to some theologians that there was a sense – the latter sense – in which Mary could be said to merit salvation by condign merit.\textsuperscript{132} The argument, \textit{in nuce}, suggests that Mary’s cooperation in the redemption is, somehow, performed \textit{on behalf of} the entire Mystical Body of the Son.\textsuperscript{133} In her partnership with

\textsuperscript{130} My point in summarizing these post-Reformation discussions is not to catalogue every kind of contribution, something which would be impossible in any case, but to demonstrate how between the late medieval period and the time of Carol, the shift in Mariological foundations that is seen taking place violently in Protestantism happens in the Catholic tradition as well, if less abruptly.

\textsuperscript{131} Carol’s own contribution to the discussion was an exhaustive documentation of the discussion beginning with the Fathers and running right through to his own time. Juniper Carol, OFM, \textit{De Corredemptione Beatae Virginis Mariae: Disquisitio Positiva} (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1950).

\textsuperscript{132} Carol \textit{Mariology} 2, 460.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
Jesus, one sees the totus Christus, Head and Body. Thus, her cooperation is somehow intrinsically ordered to the redemption of the world and also, somehow, is the work of Christ. It must therefore be somehow proportional in reality to the reward received. Dignified “to an ineffable degree by her singular grace and the divine maternity,” she performs an act intrinsically pointed at the world’s redemption and ordered by God. In light of that act, God owes it to Mary and the world to reward her merits not only out of fittingness but out of his justice. Her cooperation gives her an immediate role in the salvation of the world, but the redemptive character of her acts of charity (and their intrinsic ordination to the redemption of the world) is conferred upon them by the nature of the case. They are virtuous actions accepted by God alongside the superior worth of Her Son’s work. Her actions are intelligibly human actions, endowed by the grace that catches them up into the redemptive work of Christ.

II. The Dictum as Dubium: The Vatican Pivot “Away” from Coredemption and “Toward” the New Eve

The intensity of speculation not only in Carol’s own theory but in those he rejects is remarkable. It is understandable, in light of thought like his, that so many people expected from Vatican II a Definition of a Marian Dogma concerning Coredemption. That it did not happen was a surprise whose influence on subsequent theological reflection was palpable. We know exactly

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid., 460. Along with various theories on offer concerning the mediate cooperation of Mary in her Son’s redemption, Carol distinguishes his own proposal from at least two other theories concerning her immediate partnership with Christ. According to the first, Christ’s redemptive act is at least in part the effect of Mary’s moral leadership: she “encouraged, entreated, and encouraged” him to lay down his life, and as a result “exerted an immediate influence on the will of Christ and directly determined the positing of his redemptive acts” (463, emphasis original). Carol’s problem with this theory seems to be related to causality; it compromises “the intangible rights of the unique Redeemer” (465). The other theory claims that Mary has maternal rights to preserve her Son from harm, and she waives those rights. In doing so, “she removed an impediment to her son’s sacrificial immolation and thus furnished the material principle for the redemptive act” (464).
why; the *Acta Synodalia* tell us that it was because the Council Fathers felt that the word “coredemptrix” would be misunderstood by the Protestants and the East.\(^{136}\) And we know what that refusal meant because no fewer than 266 Bishops spoke before the Council, requesting a dogmatic definition of the nature of Mary’s contribution to her son’s redemptive work.\(^{137}\) Vatican II’s lone contribution to Mariology was the powerful Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, which reflected upon Mary primarily as a type – the most important type – of the Church. The discussion of her role in the economy of salvation amounts to a mere 5 paragraphs. Juxtaposed with Carol’s enormous book on the same subject, the difference is genuinely astonishing. All of Carol’s controversies disappear in a brief summary of the Marian appearances within the New Testament with a few glosses from early fathers. Although magisterial pronouncements appear in the supplemental notes, they are neither cited nor alluded to in the main text. The document *does* say, with the full force of magisterial authority, that Mary freely cooperates “in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience.”\(^{138}\) But this document is as important for what it does not say as for what it does. The speculative genius of the previous century, along with the medieval archive on which it was based, was, as Aidan Nichols observes, “thrown into the shade – to put it kindly.”\(^{139}\) The upshot of that development was a widely shared conviction that “the magisterial trajectory of the pre-conciliar popes on Marian co-redemption had been deflected, or to put it slightly more brutally, that the conciliar majority had declared a maximalist theology of

\(^{136}\) Aidan Nichols, OP, *There Is No Rose: The Mariology of the Catholic Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 81-82: “The Synod does not . . . have it in mind to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which have not yet been fully illuminated by the work of theologians.” *LG*, 54.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{138}\) *Lumen Gentium*, VIII.II.56.

\(^{139}\) Nichols 2015, ix.
co-redemption, whether subjective or objective in character or both of these together, to be a cul-de-sac for Catholic thought.”\textsuperscript{140} The post-conciliar decade was described by some as “the decade without Mary.”\textsuperscript{141} The irony of the Council’s decision was that what they left in \textit{Lumen Gentium} was no less ecumenically difficult.\textsuperscript{142} Newman was right, it turns out: the Mariology that emerges out of the Scriptures and the Fathers simply does exert pressure in the direction followed by the Medieval inheritors of the patristic traditions, doctrines, and liturgies.

But if the speculative power of pre-conciliar Mariology was a faithful response to something that was actually latent in the tradition, then why did the Second Vatican Council evidently reject it? Why turn back the clock? If \textit{Lumen Gentium} is not a rejection of the Mariology that produced \textit{Ineffabilis Deus, Munificentissimus Deus}, and the International Mariological Congresses, indeed, if the Council Fathers commended and encouraged the essential work of theologians on the questions that were brought to the Council, then what accounts for the shift in direction? The foregoing has traced a subtle shift in the foundations of Mariology, in which the New Eve teaching that arises in the Scripture and the early Fathers slowly disappears behind speculation about the consequences of Divine Motherhood. It is not that later theologians denied that Mary was the New Eve; indeed, they often explicitly stated it. But the \textit{principium consortii} was formulated on the basis of Mary’s nearness to the Incarnation, and the New Eve prerogatives gradually came to be seen as implications of that principle. Even Carol’s own formulations of Mary’s partnership in her son’s redemption follow, he writes, from

\textsuperscript{140} Nichols 2015, 83.

\textsuperscript{141} Stefano de Fiores, “\textit{Marie dans la théologie post-conciliaire}” quoted in Nichols 2015, 83.

\textsuperscript{142} “Protestant observers at the council made it clear at the time that the Marian eighth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, \textit{Lumen gentium}, the place where the council’s teaching on our Lady is found, conveyed an appreciation of Mary’s role in salvation which they could not share.” Ibid., 81.
Mary’s divine maternity. Emphasis upon Mary’s place in the divine economy, if it is severed from the way her actions make possible in that economy what could not otherwise take place, makes possible the controversies of the Reformation. It allows the confusion Newman encounters in Pusey, who rebukes Catholics for attributing to Mary personally what was said to her in virtue of her closeness to the Incarnation. The ironies of history converge until, on the Eve of the Council, Mariology comes to feel viciously circular, assuming what it aims to prove. Perhaps the Council was wise to return \textit{ad fontes}, knowing that the energies such a return would release would eventually show that what theologians like Carol were arguing for was the very foundation on which their warrants stood.

If this resume of the history of Mariology is correct, then what is called for, in light of Vatican II, is not a step back from speculation. Quite the opposite! Indeed, as the prince of intra-conciliar Protestant theology argued, “fear of scholasticism is the hallmark of the false prophet. The true prophet will not shirk the challenge of submitting his message to this stringent test too.”

Rather, the task is to apply all the perspicacity of thought, care in distinction, and boldness in speculation to the Mariology that emerges from the archive Newman and Pusey hold in common: to return to the Scriptures, the Fathers, and with wonder and indefatigable energy to peer at what arises from contemplation on these things. It is to come to an account of Mary’s partnership in redemption that is as vast and capacious as precision allows and vice versa. If this is done well, we will find ourselves starting where Newman bids us to start and following with care the path down which he points. We will hold the roots of Mariology firmly in view, pressing the Christian archive as comprehensively as possible for every implication of her partnership in

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\item[143] Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} 1/1, p. 279.
\end{enumerate}
the work of her son. As this chapter has made clear, Mariological topoi run back and forth into and through one another. No proposal about coredemption could avoid speaking of the Divine Motherhood, the meaning and nature of Mary’s virginity, the nature of her deliverance from sin and sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and her glorification. But ordering these in the proper way should make each discrete Marian topos follow as an implication from others, themselves all implied by the doctrinal consensus explored by Newman and reiterated in the work of the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II’s considerations are followed here not because they are the deliverances of a Catholic Council but because they reflect a possible new avenue for thought that will allow a truly ecumenical Marian doctrine – rooted in the Scriptures and the early Church’s tradition, harvesting the best of medieval and post-Reformation speculation, and avoiding vicious circularities. We will do everything we can not to turn to the right or left, even if it seems in some places that Newman did, and even if in the end we arrive at different conclusions from his.
CHAPTER 3

BRIDEGROOM OF BLOOD: THE TRAVAILS OF ISRAEL’S FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

I have pulled out “because I said so” several times. I think that ought to be a good enough reason. Part of what a kid is learning is that not everything that seems good to them is best for them. Part of what they are learning is the goodness of authority and how to obey it.

This chapter traces within Israel’s Scriptures a developing network of concepts surrounding the divine plan to enlist a human partner in the redemption of the world. From the unfinished creation and redemption story of Genesis 1-2 (microcosmic of the whole Tanakh) forward, God shows himself perpetually unwilling to save or even act in the world without human beings partnering with him in it. That partnership, paradigmatically embodied in the covenant, drives the plot of the story whose central characters are God and Israel. That plot can be summarized: God’s covenant is the motive for creation. The world as the Old Testament relates it both is and is what it is because of God's desire to be in relationship with Israel. The

intent of that relationship was that Israel would be an image of her God, and that the nations would come to know God and be delivered of their enslavement to idols by way of Israel's beauty, goodness, and truth. This intent motivates a series of divine actions that bind God irrevocably to humanity, even when humans reject divine wisdom and rebel. Chief among those actions is the giving of his breath to them – making them his image and endowing them with authority over the earth. Because of this gift, their rebellion contradicts and therefore threatens the integrity of God's creative Word, and Israel's history moves forward as the mission of God to erase the contradiction. Israel, forever bound to the God that is bound to her, cannot help but reflect God’s labor to restore his good world, and that inevitable reflection, after the devastation of sin, constitutes the struggle from which Israel receives its name. In multiple senses, Israel struggles to introduce God to the world. With growing intensity and frequency as the story moves on, the Old Testament describes that struggle as the labor of God's partner to give birth to a world that must be born again lest God's Word return void. This is the story that creates the people of God, and it will give shape to everything that follows in this work, as it does in Israel’s Scriptures.

To clarify: I am not merely claiming that the ideas and images I will present here are discoverable in the Torah and Prophets. They are, but my claim is stronger. I'm claiming that at least some Israelites recognized their vocation in these terms after discovering in Scripture what I will draw out of it. Paul of Tarsus, who describes his ministry as that of a “co-worker with God” (synergoi Theou), portrays his own apostleship in exactly these terms. He suffers for the

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145 She struggles with the world, which does not want to know God. She struggles with God. She struggles with her own unwillingness to love God with all her heart.

146 1 Cor. 3:9
Gentile church, not merely as a consequence of preaching but in order to make the true Christ known and distinguish him from an array of imposters. He suffers, that is, as a sign and a means of God's reconciliation of the world to himself through Christ. That labor Paul describes as the suffering of childbirth, until Christ is fully formed in the womb of the church, a labor he shares with a creation that groans until the children of God are reborn and until the one holy family bears spiritual fruit in answer to God's creating Word. I contend that Paul's echo of the Old Testament story is no accident. We shall return to that story and find that rather than dampening the notes we find in Paul it amplifies them and makes them more precise, so precise that if the partner the Old Testament calls out for didn't already exist, the early church would certainly have needed to invent another person for the job.

I. Partnership in the Foundation Story

Read in their canonical order, the two creation accounts found in Genesis 1 and 2 encapsulate perfectly the story Israel will tell about God's dealings with humanity. Creation, fall, redemption, coredemption, and glorification are all present here. Modern readers have tended to emphasize the differences between the accounts and to question whether they belong together at all. They point out the creation of plants and animals before human beings in the first account, afterward in the second. They observe that men and women seem to have been created together in the first, while in the second there is obviously a considerable interval between them. Almost, it seems like there are two earths, two Adams, two divine persons in view. And in this, modern readers may have unwittingly stumbled near the truth. If the second account hadn't been added to

147 Jon D. Levenson, for example, notes the “God-centered scenario” in the first account, as opposed to the second, which is “centered more on human beings and familiar human experiences [. . .] even its deity is conceived in more anthropomorphic terms” (Jewish Study Bible [Gen. 2:4-25], ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], p. 15.

83
the first, it would have been much harder to see the lengths to which God would go, and the
depth of his desire, to find a partner in the divine purpose.

Twelve words into the (English) Bible, God is already fixing a situation of disarray. In
verse 1, God creates the heavens and the earth. But the very next verse gives us cause to be
uneasy. In language simultaneously evocative of both the flood and the confusion of languages at
Babel, the writer portrays the creation as a “waste schmaste” covered in the waters of death,
what Barth called a world without the Word. Into this semantic waste comes the Word of God.
Divine speech, that is, becomes the explanation for creation’s form. But the way that form
actually obtains is that the elements in some way participate in God’s creative act. The firmament
fights off the chaos by separating heaven from earth. And then, other separations follow as water
“gathers” (a liturgical term in the Hebrew Bible) and dry ground appears. Drawn together and
put in right order, the waters are able to give birth rather than cause death; they “swarm” with
living creatures. The earth likewise brings forth multitudes of creatures. The greater and lesser
lights “govern” the day and night. And the animals gather into their kinds, agreeing with the
logic that creates them. In each case, the elements echo the divine action as subsidiary agents,
reflecting and participating in the power that gives them life. In just this way, the chaos looks as
if it is being beaten back.

148 Jon D. Levenson’s informal translation of the nonsensical “tohu wa-bohu,” which are nonsense words.

149 The primary usage of the word qavah in the OT is “to wait,” i.e., to wait upon the Lord. This is true of
the other usage of the word in Gen. 49:18, as well as dozens of uses in the Psalms and Prophets. The sense usually
conveyed is a waiting expectantly, hopefully, with anticipation of God’s coming action and faithfulness. Another
instance of the term’s usage in the sense found here is that in Jeremiah 3:17, where the expectant waiting is
expressed as a “gathering” of the nations to Jerusalem, in a great expansion of the congregation of Israel. The
prophet tells us that in that day, the nations will “gather” to Jerusalem, to the Name of God. The Septuagint’s
translation of the phrase machom echad (Gen. 1:9) shows the resonance clearly: synagōgē, synagogue.
One thing none of the elements do though is govern with intention. There is a logic visible in the created order but no one who rules based on discernment of that logic. So, God calls human beings to life and invites them to “swarm,” to fill the earth and to rule it. Doing so, they will be his images, making earth the mirror of heaven. In their sphere, humans are echoes of the divine creator in his sphere, which includes but supersedes theirs. Their partnership with God is a partnership of wise oversight, of making sure that things “swarm,” but “according to their kinds” (hence the Adamic taxonomy in Gen. 2:19), that God’s initiation of creation continues, and that the world flourishes. In short, the human vocation is to do as God does. Adam speaks the names of the creatures and they are named. The Lord underwrites the thing. Is it constructive? Does Adam impose the creation’s order, or does he discern it in the discernment of forms and like with like? Or is there in fact an already-existent agreement between them, a concursus, a harmonious inverse of the ironically rhyming tohu wa-bohu, between what Adam would impose and the way the world is? We must account for that mutuality in its heights and depths if we are to understand why there needed to be two in the garden in the first place.

So much, in any case, for the first account. If that were all there was to it, we might not discern the crisis that is going to animate the entire book of Genesis (and by extension, the whole of Scripture). In the second account (again, read canonically, with one leading into the next), we discover that although God has commanded plants to grow and animals to be produced of the earth, none of it has happened yet. Some kind of distortion has intervened between the Word and its completion. The main reason for this distortion is that “there was no human to work the

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Again, this reading depends upon a kind of canonical imagination. But the writer or compiler has already signified that this kind of reading will make sense, at the interval between 1:1 and 1:2, where two seemingly very different stories are placed together for the light they might shed upon one another. It might be objected that 1:1 is simply a summary statement, and that v. 2 merely shows how that was done. As I noted before, though, I think
ground.” But they are there, as Genesis 1 reports: “he created them.” So, they are there and also, somehow, not there. That is, some crisis in the human being has taken place, such that they have proven unable to fulfill their vocation. Whatever it is, that crisis has left the earth barren, and in the absence of God’s elected partner, the divine purpose for creation stalls out. God acts to resolve the crisis, and the human race is reborn of water and the Spirit. The Giver of wisdom enters the human race, and so they are able to discern God’s good order and name the animals according to their kinds. “And whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2:19). Naming, in biblical language, is as much a verdict as an identifier: it pronounces destiny and promise. And we recall that in the idiom of the Old Testament, the animals are a

there are reasons to think differently. An important one is the way v. 2 alludes to the flood and the confusion of languages to describe the void. That is, the void is not, at first glance, an expansion of the creation in v. 1 but a threat to it. But the placing of the stories together signifies that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are a kind of tug-of-war between chaos and order. But the stories cannot reflect upon one another if the “earth” of v. 1 is not the “earth” that is formless in v. 2. Similarly, the canonical ordering of the two creation stories collapses them into a single narrative frame, where there is continuity of referent, even if it is obvious that they have come on different journeys to meet in this one place. That continuity of referent cries out for an interpretation not just of one story and then another but of both as one story.

151 Genesis 2:7 reports that God makes the man out of the “dust of the earth” (adam/adamah) and then breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. Irenaeus (Adv. Haer. 5.15.2) alludes to this verse in a discussion of John 9:6, where Jesus heals the man born blind by spitting in the dirt to make a clay or mud and healing the man’s eyes. For Irenaeus, Jesus’s action makes sense as recalling the second creation account, where God makes man out of dust (Gen. 2:7). But whereas Irenaeus speaks of “clay” in his reference to Genesis 2, the text itself refers to “dust” (aphar/chous), which in both Hebrew and Greek carries the sense of dry earth, more like ash than clay. As Daniel Frayer-Griggs points out, this fact has made modern scholars skeptical of this interpretation, with many preferring to see in Jesus’s actions a reference to ancient ideas about the therapeutic capacities of saliva. Frayer-Griggs shows an abundance of allusions to creation in John 9 (and John more broadly), before pointing out that interpretations of Genesis including wet clay rather than dry earth do exist in extrabiblical interpretive sources, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the community rule at Qumran, for example, a passage about the human origin from dust and fated return to the earth, it is said of the human creature that it is “spat saliva” (1QS XI, 21-22 [4Q264 8-10]). Geza Vermes translates the same phrase as “he is but a shape,” but Frayer-Griggs points out that this phrase has bedeviled translators throughout the history of Qumran’s reception. Frayer-Griggs’s interpretation rests on discernment that mtsyroq is a compound word – “saliva squeezed out” or spat. The latter interpretation certainly makes sense of the description of human creatures as “moulded clay” and “hand-moulded clay” (XI, 22, 23). Regardless of whether Irenaeus had access to such sources (though it seems evident that he did), his interpretation of John 9 shows that he follows these other interpreters in seeing the second creation account as one in which God takes dust and mixes it with water (or divine spittle?) and spirit. See Daniel Frayer-Griggs, “Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead Sea Scrolls,” Journal of Biblical Literature 132, 3 (2013), pp. 659-670.

152 Cf. God’s renaming of Abram as Abraham, and Jacob into Israel, both of which are signs of their
common figure for the Gentiles. So, the remade Adam rises in the renewed earthen paradise to judge, that is, to rule, the nations as the restored image of God. All of this thanks to the God (YHWH) who descends, to accomplish what God (Elohim) had spoken by placing his Spirit into the remade race that he builds with his own hands. This act not only renews the human race; it reveals the high God (Elohim) to be Israel’s God (YHWH).

destiny in God’s purposes. In biblical language, naming is ruling; humans are thus intended to be wise rulers of the created order.

Thus, e.g., Nebuchadnezzar lives with the wild animals and eats grass like an ox (Dan. 4:32-33). This ordeal befalls Nebuchadnezzar as a punishment for failing to acknowledge the Most High. The idolatry of the nations, often in the form of animals (as they are when Aaron forges a bull in Exod. 32:1-4), inverts the created order in which humans are to have stewardship and authority over the animals. Similarly, when Peter discovers that God is going to send him to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-23), the message comes as a vision about animals who are made clean. When Paul describes the Gentile turn away from God (Rom 1:21-27), he points out that they turn from God towards a descending hierarchy of animals, from human beings to birds to animals to reptiles. When Jacob prophesies about Esau’s future, he describes him as a yoked animal breaking free (Gen. 27:38-40). Similarly, when the angel delivers the promise of countless descendants to Hagar, he foretells that her (Gentile) son Ishmael will be “a wild beast of a man” (Gen. 16:12). There is an analogy between the “man” of Genesis and his lordship over the animals and that which Israel is meant to have over the nations.

There is of course a broad consensus that the first four books of Torah consist of a collection of several different textual traditions which have come to be known as the Jahwist (J), the Elohist (E), Priestly (P), and Deuteronomist (D) traditions. The first two, named after the most common name for God in each tradition, were discerned by Johann Eichorn in the late 18th century, and his theories were developed and modified over the next century. Between 1876 and 1894, Julius Wellhausen published a number of articles and books linking the textual strands Eichorn had discovered to particular moments in Israel’s religious history. Over time, a broad consensus has formed that traditions more or less like those Eichorn discovered do survive in the Torah as we know it, but there has been less consensus on where exactly the redactors have done their work, i.e., which specific texts belong to which tradition, or when in particular each tradition left its mark on the Torah as we have it. In spite of broad argument, it is widely (not universally) understood that the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 represent (perhaps among others) the work of the Elohist (ch. 1) and the Jahwist (ch. 2). The first creation account contains a number of themes traditionally understood to reside in Elohist texts: divine transcendence, voices from heaven, and a tendency to speak of God as El/Elohim. The second account (J, if that is where it comes from) discloses a God who is in many ways like human beings (“The Lord is a warrior; YHWH is his name” – Ex. 15:3) and reveals human beings to be, although similar in many ways to God, essentially walking dust. Whatever is true of these traditions ultimately, it is clear that the first creation account does emphasize God’s transcendence over the world and gives to God the name he had in many Semitic tongues: El. Meanwhile, the God who stoops down to sculpt Adam in his image is the God of Israel. Specialists in the documentary hypotheses have not been able to agree on the provenance and identity of their traditions; in the present work, my concern is not to arbitrate between competing positions in this debate but to focus more on how these apparently different traditions speak to each other. It is the canonical text that has been canonized as Christian Scripture, and while debates about intra-canonical traditions may open new vantage points onto the text as a whole, the revelation of the Old Testament as that the God who has revealed his Name to Israel is the God who is responsible for all that exists, and that while he has a history with other nations, that history runs through the history of Israel as its final explanation. Cf., finally, Margaret Barker, The Mother of the Lord, volume 1: The Lady in the Temple (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 124 for the
But if Genesis 2 hints at a second Adam to succeed where the first had failed, it also hints at a New Eve, one who is not only human but is made of the same flesh as the New Adam. And it is this Eve who is to partner with the second Adam in accomplishing God’s mission to rescue the earth and fulfill his original creative Word. She alone is the suitable helper, built not of the dust of the ground but out of Adam’s side. There’s an analogy here; God gives his own Spirit to Adam to enliven him. Eve’s life comes from the fact that she is one flesh with the Spiritbearer. By being of his flesh, she shares from the first moment of her existence in God’s gift to Him of the Spirit. By being his perfect image, she not only is a second image of God, but she is also an image of how Adam is an image of God. It is by looking at her that Adam (and the rest of creation) gets a glimpse of how he is a divine image, of what “image” means. Across an infinite analogical gap, Adam is to God as she is to him. She is not responsible for the fact that Adam is the divine image. But she does make “image” an intelligible category by the gift of her perfect resemblance.

The first account concludes with an emphasis in Gen. 1:31; behold, it was very good. Humans, that is, add to the splendor of creation by actualizing a potential in it, namely, that some part of the earth be able not merely to hear God but to answer him. The Word comes into the earth and forms it, but the human creature alone (so far as we know, anyway) discerns that form and cooperates with it. In the second creation account, that discernment is revealed as Adam is able to name the animals, to see that which God has created each in its kind and to order it. At the same time, it is that very ability that motivates in Adam the sense that something is missing –

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relationship about El to YHWH, his son.
that all the kinds have not yet been fully fleshed out. The abundance of goodness (tov m’owd) that satisfies God in Gen. 1:31 is strikingly contradicted by what Milton called “the first thing which God’s eye named not good.”\(^\text{155}\) God enlists Adam because it is crucial that Adam see what must be true of the one who can correspond to him and thus what is true of him as an image of God. It is crucial that he see the way the animals fit one another and the way their twoness enables the continuation of their generations in reflection of the boundless creative fecundity of the One who is also, somehow, more than One. The one Adam seeks is not merely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, though she is that; she is the living embodiment of his discernment of the fit of the world with God, the way it embodies the creative energy that has borne fruit in the wild abundance around him. It is the genesis of things according to kinds, and the existence of the mysterious hidden dicta that make kinds what they are, that explains the dejected coda of Genesis 2:20: “but he found no helper for himself.” It is his recognition of the world’s fit, of the vast similarity of things to each other, and of the potency within them to go on, that he comes to know what he and the creation both need. What he requires of the Lord is the person who reflects that vision, who can enable him to be fruitful in the way that God and God’s world are each fruitful. Eve is “suitable” not merely because she fits him but because she fulfills and embodies the promise latent within the creation, the promise Adam has discerned as he surveys the whole. She enables the fit between him and the world that verifies his recognition of the order within the world as it reflects and reveals the Wisdom of God. That order, the logos in things, exerts a pull even on Adam’s unfallen desire, and so Eve, in providing what is lacking, satisfies Adam’s intellectual and spiritual eros. She is the incarnation of Adam’s bliss at discovering a world alive

with signs of God.

That is why God says it is not good for the man to be alone. Adam’s resemblance of God is fruitless to him until the helper enables him to see what that means. Throughout the entire creation story, God is on the scene. But Eve’s reflection of Adam is what allows both of them to perceive God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Thus, while she owes her very self to Adam’s gift of Spirit-filled flesh, it is she who gives birth to the understanding of that flesh as image flesh. What makes her fitting and so desired (“at last”) is that in her, Adam glimpses what his own relationship to God is, in what way he sums up the created order’s potential to reflect the divine knowledge of and love for the world. His desire for a partner is a function of his being an image of the God who desires that the world should fit him; Eve’s presence to him is both a satisfaction of that desire and a way of understanding what that desire is in God.

Genesis 2 presents the frustration of God’s creative purposes as a result of human failure to rule and order the realm they were given sovereignty over. So, it is not surprising that the failure of the first Adam and Eve to rule over the first beasts is the first thing to happen after the creation stories conclude. A serpent usurps the rule of the first Adam and Eve, and before the project is really under way it is disrupted. The failure of the original pair to rule the serpent yields an unwillingness to be ruled by God in their members, the unruly and unruly will. As a consequence, chaos lays waste to God’s ordered world, and the clear window onto the divine goodness becomes dusty and opaque. Where God had once walked with Eve and Adam in the cool of the day, they are now separated from him by a sword. One cannot help but hear resonances in this original text of Israelites marched away from YHWH’s temple at swordpoint, the songs of Zion bitter in the throats of God’s people as they forsake the sanctuary he had built for them. In the garden, God makes provision. He provides garments of skin for the newly exiled
couple, which implies some kind of sacrifice. To see those sacrifices formally codified, we
will need to await the giving of Torah, but even on the porch of Eden, the sacrifice must take
place.

The meaning of the sacrificial system in Israel, and of sacrificial systems in general, is an
open debate. But in the grammar we have developed here from Genesis 1 and 2, the sacrifice
acknowledges sin’s frustration of the creative purposes of God. The original plan had been to
build a sanctuary, a place where God’s Name would dwell on the lips of the image-bearers. In
rejecting that plan, the image-bearers have forgone the wise rule of God and have allowed chaos
back through the firmament. From that moment, whatever God does with this world will take
place within a world where the wicked prosper and the days of the righteous are cut short.
Nothing could express the contradiction at the core of this consequence more eloquently than the
Creator taking up the sword to slay his own creation, as he does again and again throughout
Genesis, and here in 3:21 for the first time. It could, imaginably, have been different. God could
have made a world without image-bearers. But the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and
Jacob, creates by covenant. He has put his breath into human beings, and the gifts and calling of
God are irrevocable. What that means for him is a freely chosen vulnerability, in that he is
committed in some measure to the choices made by those who are animated by his breath.
“Whatever the man called each creature, that was its name.” So when humans turn away from

156 Another reading of these passages, common in the Greek East, is that the “garments” given to Adam and
Eve here are mortal flesh and blood. In Nyssa’s view, mortality is a “gift” to human beings, who, having sinned and
fallen into moral corruption, are protected from enduring that sorrow forever. Cf. St. Methodius, Discourse on the
Resurrection, Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 38, on the Theophany, and John of Damascus, The Orthodox Faith,
III, 1. That interpretation need not derail us here, however, since even in the East, the “garment” of mortal nature is
understood to be “the nature of dumb animal” (Gregory of Nyssa, Florovsky’s translation, found in The Collected
case, whether it is the death of an animal providing a covering for the pair, or mortality itself pointing towards the
redemption in Christ’s sacrifice, it is sacrifice that is in view.
the Word of God and open the garden of God to the forces of chaos, God finds himself implicated in the slaying of his own creation. Every single act of decreation lifts the sword of God forcibly against his own Word.

It may well be that this bind explains the preference of God for the sacrifice of Abel over that of Cain. Cain’s offering presents to God a world bearing fruit that is meant to be consumed. To be sure, he inherits the thorns and thistles and all of the frustration that goes with the devastated order. But in the end, what he presents to God is what was there and would have been anyway. In this offering, only the guilty are punished. Abel’s offering, on the other hand, acknowledges the depth of the corruption that has entered the world. The innocent die because God’s own word has been wounded; that new vulnerability requires a radical acknowledgment.

The sacrifice, then, is a way of reckoning honestly with the actual consequences of the human rebellion. But the consequences do not fall upon God alone. The judgments of Genesis 3 on the original pair and on the serpent show that God’s partnership with creation does not end at the Tree of Knowledge. God’s Word will suffer violence but it will not be overcome. And the purpose that bound him to human beings in covenant binds them to him in judgment. Adam will labor and toil in the earth. His hand and his brow will be pierced by the thorns and thistles of a recalcitrant earth unwilling to submit to lordship. The judgment falls on Eve as well. She will suffer with the earth the tribulations of fruitfulness.

But the judgment is also a promise: “you will eat food from [the earth] all the days of your life.” God’s gift of the earth to Adam for food will not fail, and Adam, now alienated from the accursed earth, will at last return to it, if not in the way originally planned. The earth of Genesis 2 was barren; but it was out of that dust that God brought forth the one who rules the nations. And for Eve, the pain of childbirth is the embrace of the creative Word that gives her
life. “In painful labor” she shares with God in the paradox and contradiction of an unruly world; but sharing in those sufferings brings the promise: “you will give birth.” Milton, it seems to me, was exactly right to see that Israel’s continuance as a people constitutes a defiant act of faith in the face of despair, a stubborn keeping hold of the promise that God’s Word will not fail.\(^{157}\) The promise is meant to steel her against the suffering, which is double in her case, for she not only suffers the pains of birth but she also will bear the wounds of her children’s alienation from God, one another, and the earth (Gen 4:25). Her children are beings-untodeath; there is no avoiding that judgment. But they will nevertheless fill the world as the stars in the sky, and, against all hope, one of them will feel the breath of life enter the dust, and he will rule the serpent on behalf of his ancestors and siblings. In her, the earth will be fruitful, and the alienation will cease, not in spite of her suffering but through it and because of it.

If this reading of the creation stories is right, then the willing embrace of suffering is a way of partnering with God in bringing about the renewal of the world. It makes visible what might otherwise be invisible: the travail of God to bring about his good vision for the flourishing of all the world’s creatures in spite of their willing alienation from him.\(^{158}\) If that God were to elect partners, they would be called to the willing embrace of separation from brother, sister, mother, child, homeland, and life, for the sake of the partnership with God. Hence, even the writer of Hebrews describes Abraham’s friendship as one of continual separation, from his father, from his homeland, from Lot, from Ishmael, and eventually, even from Isaac:

\[\text{PLM XI.334ff, where Michael reveals to Adam and Eve, until then in lamentation about the curses that are to afflict their generations, that those generations will nevertheless end in “one man found so perfect, and so just, / that God vouchsafes to raise another world / From him, and all his anger to forget” (876-878).}\]

\[\text{The consequences of human headship are important; for it is the grateful praise of humans that makes the life of the non-rational creation an act of praise. Their failure to love and honor God therefore has the consequence that the animals by instinct nevertheless suffer the law of sin and death.}\]
By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

[ . . . . ]

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. (Heb. 11:8-12, 17-19).

The Hebrews author commends “faith” as the willing embrace of suffering for the sake of unfolding the purpose of God in the world. What might be easily missed, however, is how that faith echoes God’s own faithfulness. Sarah, we are told, “considered him faithful who had made the promise.” Israel’s faithfulness is an imitation of God, and in just that way, Israel arises as the image of divine faithfulness under fire. By their “keeping” of God’s Word, they proclaim and embody confidence that God will rescue his Word from contradiction and fulfill the promise to raise up a ruler who will make it on earth as it is in heaven. Genesis clarifies that God creates by covenant. That means his creative Word, to be fulfilled, must establish a partner who is faithful to God's Word at any cost — faithful in the way God is.

II. Abraham and the Patriarchal Saga

The writer of Genesis portrays Abraham, Israel’s ur-patriarch, as a kind of new Adam. Several parallels in the text show this to be the case. First, there is the confusion of tongues. Just as “waste schmaste” precedes Adam’s creation, so “Babel” precedes Abraham’s call. Second, just as God destined Adam to rule, so he promises to make Abraham a great nation and to bring kings forth from his body. Third, just as Adam is to “be fruitful and multiply,” so Abraham will have
offspring as numerous as the stars. Fourth, both are promised long life. Fifth, in an echo of God’s prodigal gift to Adam and Eve of “every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit,” God promises to give Abraham the land on which he resides. In all of this, God marks Abraham as his partner in a new covenant. At the same time, Israel’s progenitor is not quite a new Adam. He not only suffers every one of the curses in his own way, but he also repeats the failures of his ancestors. He is therefore a siege of contraries, as all of Israel’s saints (except two) would be: he is a dark glass, both word and contradiction, loyal follower and faithless fairweather. And yet Israel (and God! – Is. 41:8) would come to remember him, primarily, as God’s friend. This fact, and what I take to be the reasons for it, deepen our inquiry into God’s search for a partner considerably, for Abraham is the Bible’s first attempt at finding who is going to be the second Adam.

Abraham does not come from the dirt. He comes from among the wild animals – or, that is, what Israel took the wild animals to signify. By birth and nurture, he is a pagan, his father Tera a Chaldean. The importance of this for all that follows, both for him and for Israel, cannot be overstated, as it will become clear below that the entire history of Israel is riddled with the memories of paganism. Every part of their religious, cultural, and political, and domestic lives bears the marks of a time when Israel’s ancestors (and Israel herself) did that which God forbids in the children of those ancestors. There is no use trying to pretend this is not the case. Paganism’s fingerprints are all over Israel’s religion, and it could not be otherwise.159 Only by those fingerprints could Abraham come to know the true God and distinguish him from the gods of the Chaldeans. To become God’s partner, he has to be able to pick out God from everything

159 The problem of paganism will recur at several points in what follows.
else that goes by that name.

Abraham is called to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Through him, the knowledge of God is meant to come to the Gentiles, just as through Adam and Eve it was to come to creation. But the problem has become more severe. Humans bear the image of God. But in the absence of some particular representative of the covenant, some divine partner, humans quickly lose touch with how they are images of God and fashion gods in the image of created things. In worshipping the creature, they lose sight of their own dignity, tricked – as Eve was – into giving their authority to gods in the form of the animals.\footnote{See the discussion on the “naming of the animals” above.} The book of Exodus dramatizes this problem perfectly; Moses goes up to the mountain to meet with God, and in the absence of the Partner, the people fabricate and worship a golden calf. Not coincidentally, Moloch was often figured as a bull, and the Israelites passed their human children through the fire to appease him.

It is crucial that Abraham come to know God because it is through him that all the families of the earth will be delivered of their captivity to this economy of deception and death. That deliverance cannot happen until some person becomes the friend of God. The Abraham saga shows that becoming God’s friend and offering that friendship to the world are mutually involved endeavors.

Initially, Abraham's partnership with God resembles stories of divine patronage that can be found among the pagans, stories like the foundation myth of Babylon as Marduk’s special people found in the \textit{Enūma Eliš}.\footnote{About which more will be said below.} Abraham offers loyalty to God: he renounces his father's gods and wanders out in search of YHWH’s lands. On the way, he experiences military victory by the
favor of the Lord, acquires wealth and status, grows in favor with the kings of the surrounding cities, and (eventually) fathers two of the great patriarchs of the human race. He receives from God the post-lapsarian equivalent to immortality,\textsuperscript{162} which is the promise of many descendants who will themselves be loved and looked after by God. At this point, anyone observing might be tempted to attribute Abraham's fortune to divine patronage.

But what kind of God? At times Abraham’s trust in God wavers. He fears, twice, that the God who gave Lot’s captors into his hand will not protect him from Abimelek or Pharaoh, so he gives his wife to them as a mistress under false pretenses to save his own life. He also repeats the failure of Adam, when Sarah offers him a shortcut to God's promise. Just as Adam had done, Abraham “listens to his wife's voice” in taking Hagar, which is the origin of all his troubles.

Abraham's wavering faith reveals an anxiety that the Lord who gives life unpredictably will take it away capriciously, that he is by turns generous and greedy, that he is both Word and contradiction. This God is not to be trusted. Like so many of his children after him, Abraham worships the Lord as if the Lord were a pagan deity. For him, and for anyone who observes him in these crucial early moments, distinguishing the Lord from Moloch or Ba’al would be a difficult task.

\textsuperscript{162} Thus, Jon Levenson observes that “Eve is understandably theological in her reaction to the birth of a third son. That Seth is a different individual from Abel and his birth therefore not in every sense a reversal of the latter’s murder is likely to be a point of more moment to us than to an ancient Israelite. For the culture that produced the Hebrew Bible was not so individualistic as to hold that the loss of one person can be made good only through the return of that same individual. Thus, for example, when ‘the Lord blessed the latter years of Job’s life more than the former,’ he gave him seven sons and three daughters – the same number that he had at the beginning of the tale, before he lost them all and his property as well. The greater blessing lies in his being given at the end twice the livestock as he had at first (Job 42:12-13; 1:2-3). Clearly, we are to understand that Job has been restored and then some, though the latter children are not the former ones resurrected, who are, in fact, lost forever. Similarly, though Seth is not Abel, he does, it seems to me, stand “in place of” (\textit{tahat}) the dead son in a more profound sense than is comprehended merely in his being the younger brother of Cain in a family of two male offspring. Within the limits of ancient Israelite culture before it had developed the idea of resurrection, Seth is Abel redivivus, the slain son restored to his parents.” See Jon D. Levenson, \textit{The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 78.
And yet at the same time, it is the case that every time God approaches Abraham, the patriarch responds with an offering. At Shechem, at Bethel, and Mamre, and at Moriah, and with Melchizedek, the partner of God repeatedly displays his willingness to continue and reratify the partnership. His failures redound to the generations, but his repeated offerings to God demonstrate that, in the language he knows, he desires the friendship of God, even if that God is still just a tribal god for him and his family and not yet in his mind the transcendent Creator of all things. This context of paganism is why I do not find readings emphasizing the horror of the Akedah convincing.\footnote{See, for example, Soren Kierkegaard’s \textit{Fear and Trembling}.} Nothing could have been more normal. As Jon Levenson clarifies, those readings retroject modern horror at the practice of child sacrifice, or at least the horror of the later Prophets, into the story.\footnote{Levenson, \textit{Death and Resurrection}, pp. 1-17.} In fact, Abraham would have seen it as normal. The one who balks at the proposed destruction of Sodom in Genesis 18 has not a word to say in protest of the \textit{akedah}. Rather, the problem is that this child is the child of promise. The pathos in the story is not the horror of child sacrifice but the specter of divine unfaithfulness. The writer to the Hebrews attributes to Abraham a (perhaps inchoate) faith in the resurrection. That attribution seems fairly reasonable, at least as the upshot of simultaneously holding true that he must sacrifice his son and that God will bring nations into existence through that son. What is settled at the fearful mount is whether the God to whom Abraham has bound himself is bound to him, whether he is a friend or foe. Is he yes or yes and no?

How does a God who is nothing like the other gods show a nation of people, who have no way to conceive of his difference, no means of grasping it, what he is? How does he make a
name as transcendent, glorious, faithful, devoted, rather than weak, thirsty, and capricious? This is the crucial place of the Akedah in Israel’s history. By forcing Abraham to bring Isaac up the mountain, to bind him and lay him on the altar, and even to raise the knife, God brings Abraham to the very brink of collapse into the ways of the nations. At the peak of existential identification with the nations around him, God stays the executioner’s hand and buys back Isaac at the price of the ram. By allowing the drama to proceed so far, God gives Abraham the awareness that he is dealing with what the pagans claim to know. By staying his hand, he shows that the pagans know nothing of him.

Israel would remember this as the defining act of Abraham’s life, the place where his friendship with God was cemented. And God likewise responds as if in this Abraham has demonstrated supreme devotion and love. In part, the reason for this is obvious: the one thing that Abraham had asked was an heir. But the Lord’s call to Abraham, “your only son, whom you love,” suggests that the test consists of something more than Abraham’s offering up his own child. In what sense is Isaac Abraham’s only son? Genesis 21 finds God promising to prosper Ishmael on the basis of his being a son of Abraham. But Isaac is the one who represents the faithfulness of God to the divine promise; it is in Isaac that Abraham’s offspring shall be named (Gen. 21:12). Isaac is the sign, that is, of Abraham’s covenant partnership with God, the one through whom God will bless all the families of the earth in Abraham. He is beloved in part because Abraham’s partnership with God is precious to him. God is precious to him.

The command to sacrifice Isaac, then, is the command to let go of the divine partnership for the sake of that partnership. It is difficult to make sense of a call like that, but if we recall

165 The contradiction apparent here is part of the point, of course.
the initial sacrifice in Genesis 3, it becomes a bit clearer. There, the issue was God’s gift of his own breath, his very self, to his image and the way the rebellion of that image implicates God in the destruction of his own creation. God is compelled by the covenant partnership to threaten his own creative Word with its contradiction. In my discussion of that sacrifice, I suggested that from that time on, partnership with God would mean acceptance of the consequences of the human/divine alienation for oneself. In the garden, the redemption of Eve and Adam requires of God that he take the knife to his own word. On Moriah, Abraham draws the knife not just against his own flesh but against his own flesh animated miraculously by the power and promise of God. It is the new Adam who carries the altar of his own sacrifice up the mount, and the knife of Abraham is his fellowship with the double bind of God’s labor to keep the promise he makes to Himself in the Word of creation. Abraham embraces, as fully as a person can who suffers the frailty of Adam, the paradox of election and alienation, and his friendship with God is ratified by an act of solidarity with the vulnerability to which God’s choice of a partner has exposed him.

This solidarity is the lens through which we should view all of Abraham’s suffering. Abraham experiences everywhere the contradictions of God’s Word, including but not limited to the word spoken to him. In order to claim the promise of God that he would bless all the families of the earth, he must participate in the alienation of those families by leaving his father’s house and wandering to a distant land. As his descendants will, Abraham journeys into Egypt and lives under the dominion of Pharaoh. There, in spite of God’s presence with him and favor on him, he narrowly escapes with his life. As the writer of Hebrews points out, he wanders his whole life and never receives himself the land that is promised to his descendants. He endures the long years between God’s promise and its fulfillment and participates with Sarah in the curse upon the wombs of Eve’s daughters. And after all the years of waiting, he then has to sever all ties not
only with his son but with whatever had been his vision of how God would fulfill his promise. Finally, although he receives what is the closest thing to eternal life that is possible between Adam’s fall and Christ’s resurrection, he still tastes the bitterness of death. It is not that he is innocent. The failures of his faith at crucial points in his story will haunt the pages of Israel’s Scripture from beginning to end as feuds and sibling rivalries and parental favoritism create scores that never get fully settled. It is just that, like his children, he receives “double for all his sins from the hand of the Lord” (Is. 40:2). He suffers the consequences of his own failure, but he suffers more than that as well in fellowship with YHWH’s sufferings.  

The trials that bind Abraham to God in friendship bind God to Abraham and, through him, to all the families of the earth as a tireless lover of humankind. God gives back Isaac, providing all that is needed to deliver him from death, and Abraham learns that God’s friendship does not rob the next generation of life but gives life to it even at cost to his own Word. Abraham’s offering of all that is dear to him, holding nothing back, is what enables him to receive Isaac back under a new aspect, that of divine friendship with no shadow of turning, which gives so generously that even human offerings to him redound to their offerers and their families, to the thousandth generation. That prodigality and generosity is what comes to define Israel in its own eyes. As Abraham offers to God his firstborn, the child of promise, so Israel

166 The anthropomorphic god that appears both here and in earlier comments about divine desire has occasioned its own massive debate throughout the history of Jewish and Christian exegesis. For the moment, it may be enough to say that I am simply following the discursive habits of the text under discussion and to point out that early fathers, who affirmed that God is without change or vulnerability, nevertheless saw no difficulty in celebrating and imitating “the suffering of my God,” who, as Cyril of Alexandria was to put it, “suffered impassibly” (Scholia on the Incarnation, 35) in the flesh of Jesus. See David Bentley Hart, “No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility,” Pro Ecclesia 11/2 (2002), pp. 184-206. Mutatis Mutandis, the entire biblical archive of anthropomorphic language about God is susceptible of multiple interpretations. My impassibilist convictions will become apparent later on, as will their importance for discussion of coredemption, but they do not, so far as I can see, present any problem for speaking in the language of Scripture.

becomes the firstborn of the Lord, the one to whom he is bound no matter what it may cost him. Israel becomes the irrevocably destined means of God’s fulfillment of his covenant with all creation. The entire history of this people, as they come to understand it, originates in that exchange of friendship: Israel is the firstborn, the beloved and favored child, the living fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that he would love Abraham’s sons as Abraham had loved him. They are, for as long as there are Jews on earth, God’s unbroken promise to his friend.

By Abraham’s friendship and faithfulness to God, he makes possible the revelation of the divine philanthropy that redeems him and the whole of the human race. Thus, it is proper in some sense (not every sense) to call him the new Adam. At the same time, he not only becomes God’s friend/partner/image, he reminds the human race of its destiny (which is his destiny) in the purpose of God to bring it out of ignorance and into the divine light. His service is an act of assistance to the adamah, the mass of humanity that has forgotten whose image it is. Thus, as the helper to the adamah, it is also proper to call him a kind of a new Eve but to the old Adam. Alone of the whole human race, Abraham is the one who shows, even in a dark mirror, not only that but how humans are an image of God, sharers in his sufferings and beneficiaries of his victory. That is because he experiences what is common to human beings but refers it to the God whose friend he is, which is its final explanation. He stands not only with Adam but also with Eve as the divine image to Adam’s sons, as the sign of the divine wisdom in the truth of their identity, and as a friend to them making possible their acceptance of friendship with God. The human restoration will be accomplished not just by a passive objectification but by the restoration of humans to their dignity as those who make it appear on earth as it is in heaven. The redemption both requires and is our full self-offering to God in partnership with his full offering to us.
Abraham receives that redemption as a share in the contradiction of God’s Word (in both natural and human evil) and in God’s victory over that contradiction as the resurrection of the beloved son delivered up to God.\textsuperscript{168}

**III. The Sign of Wisdom: Is the New Eve God’s Eve?**

I have suggested that the Old Testament is the record of the co-labor of Israel and God to erase from the earth the contradiction of God’s creative word that is brought about by rebellion. Israel is called to join with God and untie the knot of disobedience, reflecting to humanity whose image human beings are and restoring the human race to friendship with God. In short, Abraham’s family is called to be a kind of new Eve. If the Old Testament is the written record of Israel’s struggle to fulfill that call, then it is worth taking note of changes in the role Israel’s women, Eve’s daughters, play across the text. In the Torah, they play clearly supporting roles. With only a couple of exceptions, God does not address women. But somehow, they are present at key narrative “joints,” crucial ordeals that bring the promises of God to pass, even though they are almost never (directly) the recipients of those promises. Their presence at those moments makes it inevitable that women would grow, in Israel’s mind, to be emblems of God’s faithfulness to the covenant and his steadfast love. Thus, by the post-exilic period, Israel is personified as a Daughter of Eve, a woman, as God’s Bride, as “Daughter Zion,” as “Wisdom herself,” as the Beloved of the King, or even as “the Virgin, who will bring forth a Son.” It is arguable that women, or some woman, emerges to take center stage as the Hebrew canon takes

\textsuperscript{168} It is interesting, then, that Abraham plays his role as image to the images by being put into the place of Israel’s mothers. It is his firstborn that God commands him to sacrifice, not Sarah’s (though Isaac is that as well). By the time of the codification of the redemption rite into Torah, it is the first to open the womb that will have to be sacrificed. Of course, Ishmael is Abraham’s actual firstborn, but in the terms of the covenant, since it is in Isaac that his seed is called, I refer here to Isaac as his firstborn, mirroring the language of the passage that calls him Abraham’s “only son.” In this text, Abraham is called upon to do what falls later to Israel’s mothers.
shape as a kind of inverse mirror of the history of the people of Israel, so that what diminishes over time appears to grow in the text, from hints and crumbs to a fully rounded out character.

Thus, while canonically, women grow in importance and stature, the canon actually reflects the inverse of Israel’s history. That history, as a growing corpus of scholarship holds, actually begins with women occupying a center place in religious things. In the north, some scholars believe, a clash took place between Mesopotamian and Canaanite society, with the former being built around temples to the goddess of the moon.\textsuperscript{169} In those temples were found priestesses and temple prostitutes, sacred trees (emblematic of divinized feminine fruitfulness),\textsuperscript{170} and child sacrifices (this last was not unique to the goddess cults, though its meaning would obviously be different in that context from others). Those temples were popular with Israelites in the north, as the anger of the pre-exilic prophets at them demonstrates. Nor were they only northern phenomena. Recent work on Judah (and indeed Jerusalem) shows that if pagan deities were less popular, it may only be because practices and beliefs previously associated with paganism were actually part of the YHWH cult.\textsuperscript{171} On those accounts of southern history, Josiah’s reform (along with its literary expression in the work of the Deuteronomist) represents not a response to novel idolatrous practices that must be countered but a change in attitudes towards practices long part of Yahwism, including, so one recent proposal goes, the


\textsuperscript{171} Margaret Barker 2012, pp. 5-75. Barker argues, convincingly to my mind, that worship of YHWH during the First Temple was characterized by materials and practices that would later be identified with paganism: images, Asherahs (probably in the shape of the menorah), trees, astrology, and devotion to images of the Lady of the Temple.
veneration of the Lady of the Temple, YHWH’s Queen Mother,\textsuperscript{172} Wisdom herself, the Queen of Heaven.

Exile texts, those written on the eve of exile or just after, in some ways are \textit{nearer} to Israel’s origins than the Torah texts, many of which are compiled or find their final forms during the post-exilic or even diasporic periods. The earlier texts\textsuperscript{173} have a much more prominent engagement with women, or with womanized personifications, because they reflect then-current debates within Israel about the status of the feminine deities of the pagans or the adoption of those deities within Yahwism as devotion to the Queen of Heaven. If this account is even close to right, then the paucity of women texts of the Torah and of the Deuteronomic history owes to those texts being systematically stripped of the remnants of a form of worship of Israel’s God that had fallen out of favor by the time Torah was achieving final form. But they could not just erase history. Even a systematic revision of those texts would have to take the form of a negotiation of sorts, as some stories exert staying power too great to meddle with. Thus, the places where women appear in the early texts (speaking from within the canonical chronology) may be places where they were \textit{left} in. This textual situation would have the result that these stories were especially significant, pregnant with importance for the ongoing narrative in which they appear. It would also imply that the women in the early texts have a more or less direct relationship with the “women” of later texts. The “woman” texts in the Old Testament are, just as they appeared to early Christians to be, about someone. The significance of this will become

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{172} Of whom the earthly Queen Mothers of Judah were an image, as the King was an image of YHWH. Ibid., 79-80. Cf., also, the succession records in the Kings narratives, which make mention of the mother of Judean kings but not of those from the north.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Earlier in the time of their composition, probably, though as canonically situated they are later.
\end{enumerate}
This account of Old Testament origins is controversial, as is every such account. The Old Testament is not a text but a library, and each text within it is as it were three-dimensional, with depths and heights throughout. There is thus a sense in which, for example, Genesis may well be pre-exilic, although in certain respects it is almost certainly exilic and possibly post-exilic. And each layer may respond to texts that appear – canonically – before or after it. It is also true that the relationship of the texts of the Old Testament reflect widely varied interests, not only in their relationships with one another but within themselves. One could see the Deuteronomist as a kind of historical villain, whitewashing history and theology of the stories most dear to his opponents in order to make it look like Josiah really was the best thing that happened to post-Davidic Israel. One could also agree with the theological project of the Deuteronomist while disagreeing with those whose side the Deuteronomist historians take in offering the revisionist account. But Christian theology presents these problems to all who wish to take the Old Testament seriously as a source of revelation. Christian theologians will have a hard time maintaining hostility to the Deuteronomist, given that his words are on the lips of Jesus more than those of any other text of the Torah. His words emerge from Jesus’s mouth in response to all three temptations. Additionally, Paul’s letters are deeply influenced by the Deuteronomist. The Book of Hebrews, while it famously describes the First Temple rather than the second, nevertheless describes it as entirely void of a feminine deity or any of the trappings that accompanied her cultus on the historical accounts being proposed here.

To casual readings, Israel’s patriarchal narratives seem to be for men, about men, and by men. In them, Adam rises and falls again and again, as God’s ferocious energy keeps his covenant with ancestors by the unfailing approach and offer of friendship to their sons. He is
called the God of Abraham, the Fear of Isaac, the God of Jacob and Israel. The women of Israel appear, not unreasonably, like those who have been dragged into something, paying seemingly extreme costs for the friendship of their husbands with God. This is not the whole truth, but it is true. One only needs to witness Zipporah, chasing after Moses with an exasperation every woman I’ve ever met understands. Women do the invisible labor of the covenant, as those who have been included but not (usually) addressed. Of course, as noted above, I think there are polemical reasons for this in the text, related to Israel’s prehistory with female deities and cults. But this scarcely helps the situation, since if I’m right, then women pay the price not only for their men’s friendship with God but also for their unceasing flirtation with idols, primarily by being blamed for it, as Eve was, in the final form of the biblical texts. About this, I will have much to say later. But it is worth recalling that in the inverted canonical history of Israel, women move from the background to the foreground. This movement means that women exert a strong pressure on the story of Israel, and that pressure means that their co-labor, and the evolution over time in the way it is addressed, may, in some ways, be the point.

The women of the patriarchal sagas, for example, have their mother Eve’s penchant for jumping the gun on God as well as her gift for being the ones who move the covenant onward.\textsuperscript{174} The echoes in the case of Sarah are particularly illuminating. Sarah, who will one day see Hagar as a thorn in her side, is the one who offers her to Abraham, mirroring the scene in which Eve

\textsuperscript{174} Recall that it is Eve specifically who has enmity with the serpent, and that the promised One who will defeat the seed of the serpent is specifically described as Eve’s seed. While that child will also, obviously, be the seed of Adam, God points out here that it is the woman’s seed. It cannot be simply because she is the mother; Abraham has seed (Gen. 12:7), as does the serpent, who is clearly a “he.” The seed of Abraham is the seed promised to him and offered by him to God. The “seed” of the serpent inherits and prosecutes the enmity of his ancestor. Thus, Eve’s seed will inherit her particular enmity with the serpent, defeating him by doing that which Eve should have done, i.e., tempting him towards obedience of God rather than the evil one. Genesis 3, then, relates Eve’s misuse of a capacity she is supposed to have and an ability she is supposed to place at God’s disposal.
offers her husband the fruit of the forbidden tree. Like Adam, Israel's patriarch “listens to the voice of his wife” and takes what he is given and suffers for it. Later, Sarah’s angst and eagerness to protect the blessing and clarity of the covenant motivates her dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael. In this scene, God tells Abraham to again “listen to his wife's voice.” The first time he listens to her, just as in the case of Adam, the blessing to his children comes under threat, which is the motivator of Sarah’s banishment of Hagar and Ishmael: “for that woman's son will never inherit with my son Isaac.” Though her voice introduces confusion into the covenant in the first place, her voice will be the remedy as well, not only for Abraham and Isaac but also (unwittingly and unwillingly) for Hagar and Ishmael. There is an ambivalence about the voices of women, in the patriarchal sagas, perhaps amounting to a contradiction, whose reasons will become apparent later.

That ambivalence suggests that there is more to the question than whether or not the men of Israel are uxorious. It is the Lord, after all, who commands Abraham to listen (shema) to Sarah’s voice (Gen 21:12). The situation looks like a worry about inheritance, and it is. But the echoes between this scene and the akedah are worth observing. Genesis 21 amounts to a figurative sacrifice of Ishmael for the sake of God’s covenant to Sarah. Abraham is “distressed” because Sarah’s command “concerns his son.” The word used to describe the distress (ra’ā) is used, just as often in the OT, to reflect the performance of evil. In other words, for Abraham, the deed Sarah is commanding appears evil because it is the effective sacrifice of his son. It is the promise of a son, God’s promise of descendants, that creates the distress. Abraham suffers because it seems that Sarah is asking him to renounce or at least endanger the covenant promises

175 The same word, it must be observed, that is found in the Deuteronomist’s command of Israel to hear that the Lord is One (Deut. 6:4).
of God, to enact a contradiction to the word of God that has come to him. God’s reaction to Abraham’s distress not only ratifies Sarah’s command, but it also promises a figurative resurrection after the figurative death of Ishmael’s banishment (21:13). It would be strange if this scene isn’t a kind of preparation for what follows in the *akedah*. That is, if the writer of Hebrews is correct in attributing to Abraham a kind of inchoate faith that God would raise Isaac, isn’t it clear that Sarah’s voice (again, probably unwittingly) is part of the explanation of that faith’s origins? Her counsel, which is not motivated out of care for Hagar, becomes the salvation of Hagar and Ishmael. But it also, and so crucially, becomes the vehicle through which God brings Abraham to the place where he can go through with the ordeal that cements Israel’s friendship with God.

Sarah’s kinswoman Rebekah likewise has a gift for showing up at the appropriate moment. She arrives at the well of Nahor just as the servant of Abraham prays for a woman from Abraham’s family to appear. She does exactly as the servant prays she would, confirming for the servant that the God who was with Abraham is with his errand as well. Teubal interprets this entire scene as a self-assertion of Mesopotamian religion into the religion of Israel. For her, the servant is only there in the first place because Abraham and Sarah want their son’s wife to be, as Sarah was, a priestess. Whatever the merits of that interpretation, Rebekah moves in sync with God in a conspicuous way, both as one who hears the voice of the Lord and one who effects what the Lord promises. Her voice thus plays an unexpectedly large role, as did that of Sarah, her aunt. The marriage is effectively transacted between Isaac’s emissary and Bethuel and Laban, Rebekah’s father and brother. And yet, when the family expresses reluctance to lose her

176 Teubal 1984, 66, 77-87, and, esp., 97-98.
(unsurprising if she plays a role like that of Sarah), they ask Rebekah what she wants. She has no voice in the marriage but she does have a voice in the times and seasons.\footnote{An odd feature of the text here may show the uncomfortable tensions between the two ways of looking at the world. It has to do with conflicting ways of describing women’s agency within the story. When the servant first arrives at the well, the servant asks, “whose daughter are you?” Rebekah answers that she is the daughter of Bethuel, “the son that Milkah bore to Nahor.” Later, when the servant tells the story, he names Bethuel as the son of Nahor, whom Milkah bore to him. In the first account, the birth of the son is narrated matrilineally while in the second account, it is the opposite. Likewise, when Rebekah and the servant are preparing to leave, verse 61 first says “Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and left with the man.” It then continues, “so the servant took Rebekah and left.” The first of both pairs of accounts have women playing central roles, while those roles are diminished or even erased in the second.}

Rebekah is strong in a way unique among the matriarchs. If Sarah scourged with whips, banishing her rival into the wilderness, Rebekah beats with scorpions. She suffers no rivals to Isaac’s love during his whole life. And when it comes time to bear fruit, after a period of childlessness (vide infra), she bears twins, showing the extraordinary fruitfulness that is a conspicuous part of the covenant. While the twins are in the womb, they struggle with one another. She inquires of God and hears that the younger will reign over the older. Like Sarah, she hears and cooperates with God to effect the word God gives her, securing (קבר) the blessing for her son. Hearing that blind Isaac has the intent to bless Esau, she commands Jacob to deceive Isaac with what is by this point in the discussion a familiar phrase: “obey my voice” (again, shema).

The blessing of Jacob recalls the original blessing over the earth. Jacob is given “the dew of heaven and the fatness of earth and plenty of wine and grain.” The fruitfulness of the earth will be his, and he will also rise to rule, an image of his first father: “let peoples serve you, and let nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.” Esau, however, receives the judgment of Cain and post-lapsarian Adam: “behold away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high.”
Jacob receives the promise of the earth, while Esau receives the promise of exile.

The irony, of course, is that Jacob goes immediately into exile. Unsurprisingly, it is Rebekah’s voice that sends him into exile, and it is Rebekah’s voice, she promises, that will recall him from exile. In the exile, Jacob suffers the deferral that by now we can see to be part and parcel of divine friendship. God proves faithful and blesses his partner, while at the same time the partner participates in the divine suffering of alienation. Jacob returns to Rebekah’s (and Sarah’s) family, to wait out his term of exile and to find a wife like his mother. Unsurprisingly, this saga recalls the *akedah* afterward, in the way the banishment of Hagar prefigures it. But whereas Sarah’s voice initiated the course of action that brought the promise of (figurative) resurrection to Abraham, Rebekah herself explicitly affirms it: “I will send and bring you from there,” that is, from exile. The echo of texts portending the end of exile is suggestive. “Bringing home from exile” pairs with texts of divine salvation throughout the Old Testament. 178 That is to say that “bringing you from there” is one of God’s works. Rebekah’s voice, that is, contains promises of deliverance that only God can fulfill but attributed to her.

Already, I suspect my argument may be starting to tip its hand, so let me say again, what I’m drawing attention to is the knack Eve’s daughters have for being in the story at the crucial moments that move the story of the covenant on. When the women of Israel are so often just pulled along for the ride, why do they show up at just the right moments? And how do they know the things they know? Zipporah, brought into the covenant by marriage but also herself the daughter of a priest, intuits that the thing to do is to circumcise her children so God does not kill Moses. Somehow Rebekah knows to be at the well at the right moment. Leah and Rachel know

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178 Jer 29:14, Ezek 39:28, Deut 28,
how to get on, and Jocheved and Miriam hatch and execute the scheme that puts Moses safely back in his mother’s arms. These traits mean that the narrative of God’s acts to form the people of Israel often happen through them. Because of their savvy, their men routinely seek advice from them. Laban and Betheuel look for a word from Rebekah, as Abraham does from Sarah, Jacob from his wives, and Adam from his (apparently). Why did the serpent speak to Eve in the first place rather than Adam? Why did Adam listen to her? What did he need? Why wasn’t it good for him to be alone?

There is another woman whose voice the Israelites are told to obey: the voice of Wisdom.\(^{179}\) She (always she) cries out in the streets and shares long life and other riches with those who “hear her voice” (Prov. 8:6 – again, *shema*). Which biblical literature qualifies as Wisdom literature is contested, as is which wisdom literature qualifies as biblical. In recognition of this fact, I start where everyone is already agreed. That is, I begin with the Proverbs of Solomon, the first nine chapters of which are not even Proverbs. Rather, they are speeches to the king’s young heir by Wisdom herself and by Solomon, her most decorated disciple. Those speeches authorize the genre as a whole, not as the Word of the Lord but as the witness and observation of the one by whom YHWH made everything (8:22-31). Wisdom is portrayed here as a unitive feminine principle, holding all creation together (3:13-20). As a kind of anti-Job, Wisdom may speak because she *was* there when the Lord made Heavens and the Earth (cf. Job 38:4-7). In fact, she was his partner in the venture, constantly at his side, bringing him delight as

\(^{179}\) As other scholars have noted, there is evidence that Wisdom is a name or nickname for various goddesses worshipped in the ANE, and particularly in Jerusalem in and near the First Temple. 1 Enoch’s Apocalypse of Weeks seems to have something like this in mind when it points out that during the 6th week, the age of the monarchy, those who live in the temple will be blinded, “and the hearts of all of them shall godlessly forsake Wisdom.” Similarly, “Wisdom” named in Prov. 1:20 and 9:1, takes the plural form, hak’mowt, indicating a name (cf. Elohim). See Barker 2012, pp. 8-9, 353, et passim.
the principle of difference in all he made. Solomon writes that “by wisdom the Lord laid the Earth's foundations,” and by her he also set the heavens in place. By her, the Lord sets the firmament in place. She is the arch-structure, that is, of creation, the pattern of its likeness and difference from God.\textsuperscript{180}

This point will be revisited later. For now, it is worth mentioning that Wisdom’s speeches are meant to authorize the genre and Solomon (and his wife) as purveyors of genuine truth about God and the world. This Lady Wisdom, and Solomon as her devotee, are able to instruct the heir to the throne in the things that make for peace, in how to rule justly, and in how to succeed at

\textsuperscript{180} The Book of Jesus ben Sirach, which, along with The Wisdom of Solomon, is a kind of commentary on the speeches of Wisdom in the Proverbs tradition, makes this even more clear in its 24\textsuperscript{th} chapter:

From the mouth of the Most High I came forth,
and covered the earth like a mist.

In the heights of heaven I dwelt,
and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.

The vault of heaven I compassed alone,
and walked through the deep abyss.

Over waves of the sea, over all the land,
over every people and nation I held sway.

[ . . . . ]

The first human being never finished comprehending wisdom,
nor will the last succeed in fathoming her.

For deeper than the sea are her thoughts,
and her counsels, than the great abyss

(Ben Sira 24:3-6, 28-29).

Just as in Proverbs 8, Wisdom here appears as from the beginning, this time in a role similar to that of the Holy Spirit, covering the earth, traversing the heights and depths of creation, delving into the deep things of the universe that humans are not given to know. In spite of her glorious origin and status, however, she remembers an exile – she wandered the earth homeless until the Lord’s Temple was built, in which she came to rule. There, she took root as a tree (vv. 13-17 – note the Menorah in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Temple and its similarity to Asherahs), and offers her fruit to make humanity wise.
living well, because they are in deep touch with the grain of the universe. They have knowledge of what makes things what they are because they have deep knowledge of him who made them what they are. There's an analogy, then, that is meant to obtain: if the Lord can make the heavens and the Earth by heavenly wisdom, then the heir can build a good, orderly, just kingdom by the same wisdom, mediated through his parents.

The veneration of parental wisdom raises another important point: the origins of Wisdom in Proverbs parallel those of Eve and Adam in the garden. She “was given birth” at the beginning of creation, “brought forth” as the first of all God’s works. She brings delight to the Lord as he gives order to the entire creation, a mirror of what Adam and Eve had done. It is no surprise, then, to hear her described as a Tree of Life to all who find her. Solomon obeys and honors her as a Son would a mother, and in being the consort of YHWH, she is, in an important way, the mother of YHWH’s son, the King (cf. Ps. 2). Not only so, but she calls all of those whom she addresses, and most of all, Solomon’s heir, “my sons” (8:32). The kings of Israel are meant to be sons of Wisdom, and, according to Solomon’s testimony about her in Wisdom of Solomon, they always have been. In Wisdom 10, Solomon retells the entire history of Israel, starting from Adam. Eliminated from the story are any of the women, including Eve. In this version, Adam was created alone, and it was she who gave him the ability to rule all things. When she met Abraham, it was she who “kept him strong against his tender compassion towards his son.” Wisdom, on this telling, is responsible for Abraham’s willingness to go through with the sacrifice of Isaac. The entire history of Israel up through the conquest of Canaan is told as if it were the work of Wisdom, working alongside Israel’s patriarchs. Not a single one of the women is mentioned, for Wisdom is the all-woman here. In the version found in Proverbs, Wisdom plays roughly the same role but through the feminine emissaries—her “maidservants.” These women,
although Proverbs does not connect the dots explicitly, are Israel’s matriarchs, Wisdom’s emissaries, lifting their voices for the sake of the covenant. Her daughters and her sons constitute the nation God has made his own special possession, as she is, the wise Mother of the Living, the true Eve, both ancient and New, of whom Adam’s consort was a foretaste and type.

Given the resonances first chapters of Proverbs with Genesis, one more analogy deserves to be mentioned. If this reading of the Wisdom tradition is right, then Lady Wisdom stands in more or less equivalent relationship to all of the history of Israel as Eve does with the non-human creation. In the Genesis account, as each new created thing comes into being, that thing becomes part of the origin story for the things that come next. Every part of the creation was a created co-creator. The difference between the humans and non-humans is that they could discern the traces of the Creator in all created things and thus cooperate with God intelligently and willingly in the naming and ordering of creation. According to the Wisdom narrative, the entire patriarchal saga (and by extension all of Israel’s history) likewise proceeds according to the wisdom of God, but with the people in that story having fleeting ability to discern the Wisdom in it. She is YHWH’s intelligent, willing partner in the ordering of all things, and the principle of divine differentiation of all things from God and thence of all things from one another. She is the ground of creaturely identity and difference. What that idea might mean must await another chapter. For now, it must suffice to note that whatever it means, it is the Wisdom Tradition’s relatively straightforward answer to the question of the New Eve.

But it is an answer that leaves a number of related problems in its wake. The first is this: there is no goddess in Christian theology. It makes absolutely perfect sense that the Old Testament, the written legacy of the Lord’s attempt to win his people over from idols, should contain vestiges of goddess worship in it. Those vestiges have even left some theologians
groping at some way to include some kind of divine femininity within the Christian doctrine of God: whether through the divine sophia\textsuperscript{181} or, as has become popular in emergent and progressive Christian circles, through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{182} The problems with these theses are formidable; the first has to go to some great lengths to explain why “divine Sophia” is not a fourth member of the Trinity. The second has as its main problem that Lady Wisdom is a creature. The Lord brought her forth, as Eve was brought forth from Adam. Moreover, the feminization of the Spirit of God inadvertently masculinizes the Father and the Son in a way that threatens to leave the feminine as a lesser divine image.\textsuperscript{183} Eve is of Adam’s spiritbearing flesh, but she also began to be at some definitive point in time. Wisdom, likewise, was brought forth, formed, at some point before all things, but not in the beginning. The history of interpretation on Prov. 8:22 is instructive here: the Arians loved it because it seems quite clear that Wisdom is a creature – the highest creature to be sure, but a creature.\textsuperscript{184} Christianity does not have a goddess. What we do have is a text covered in fingerprints of paganism. Barker’s thesis, or some other one like it, is probably correct: the matriarchs of Israel are so canny because attached to their memories are a role they played as images of the goddess Lady Wisdom. But a Christian theology of Scripture requires that the exorcising hand of the Deuteronomist is also, somehow,


\textsuperscript{183} Moreover, as will become evident later, femininity is a reflection not just of the Spirit’s work but also that of the Father and the Son.

\textsuperscript{184} There is, of course, a problem here between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text. Sergei Bulgakov and the Parisian Russian Orthodox thinkers made much of the difference, arguing that the Hebrew text refutes the declaration of the LXX that wisdom is a creature. We will address this problem below (see the chapter “Nature’s Motherhood”).
the hand of God. At least, Jesus thought it was. That hand has left us women who both are and are known to be possessed of a unique wisdom, a wisdom that looks conspicuously like what Lady Wisdom offers her daughters and sons. Her voice is the explanation for the wisdom that fuels the brilliant mothers of Israel as they cannily read times and seasons, discern the grain of the universe, and (most importantly) identify in it the ways of the Lord. The Mother of Israel’s kings is the genius that arranges and brings about the conditions of their reigns. In nothing so much as in that does she show herself the mother of someone like Rebekah or Sarah. It is no wonder that the writer of *Wisdom of Solomon* envisions her, like Bathsheba or one of the other Queen mothers of Judah, on a throne next to God in his throne room, laboring on behalf of her children. The Lady’s wise voice calls out to heaven and earth, from one end of creation to the other, searching for children to bless with understanding of the deep things of the universe. It is not her voice but you can hear echoes of it in the demand of her daughter Rachel: “give me children or I’ll die!” The question is – and this is the second problem related to that of goddess worship – in the absence of a goddess, whose voice is it we hear in Rachel’s? Do we still hear it when Rachel is weeping about the loss of her children?

That question raises the third and final problem related to the problem of goddess worship and the problem of Lady Wisdom’s identity: that problem is, “where does she go?” It is beyond doubt that aside from a few communities in Egypt, most Jews abandoned wisdom literature for Torah and Prophecy. By the time of Jesus (again, excluding Egypt), what we call

185 None of which is to say, of course, that they do not sin or that they are unfailing in the application. But behind the Wisdom tradition is the ability to read the Word of God in creation. Note that in Ben Sira 24:23, Wisdom is simply identified with the Law of the Lord.

the Old Testament was called simply the Law and the Prophets. Wisdom Literature is not prominent in the New Testament, while the Law and Prophets (indeed, Apocalyptic) are everywhere. The Book of Wisdom may in the background of Rom 1:18-32, but if so it’s the largest allusion to Wisdom literature in the New Testament. Where does Lady Wisdom go? In Ben Sirah 24, she sings of the end of her exile and coming to rest as the Menorah and Tree of Life in the Temple of the Lord. The Book of Genesis, in a passage likely finalized in exile, tells of humans marched out of Eden at the point of a sword. Is it possible that the Tree lamented their absence as much as they mourned its loss?

It is worth recalling that the Lady’s first speech has some fairly ominous and threatening notes in it. What in ch. 9 is an invitation to the simple to “come and dine” is, in chapter 1, a full-throated and exasperated rebuke:

How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?
Repent at my rebuke!

Included in the offer of wisdom to the simple is that they may reject it. The Lady considers what could happen if people forsake wisdom. Wisdom here is prudence, the ability to discern the “grain” of the universe, the way it is related to the goodness and justice of God. That perception allows wise action, resulting in peace and safety. But to reject it is to be imprudent and to bring disaster down upon one’s head. To forsake the Lord’s wisdom is to turn the chaotic forces of decreation loose into the Earth again. Small wonder that the imagery of Genesis 3 is used here.

187 Occasionally, as in Lk. 24:44, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

188 Prov 1:22-23a

189 Borrowing the term, of course, from Paul Griffiths, Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), esp. IV §19, which speaks of these chaotic forces as fallen angels.
Wisdom says people who abandon her will “eat the fruit of their ways” (1:31). In spite of the stupidity of it, she imagines people will forsake her: “they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord” (1:29). She is a Tree of Life, but turning from her, as she says multiple times, will bring death.\(^{190}\) Falling away from Wisdom means falling in with wicked men (1:11) or adulterous women (1:16), and suffering consequences Israel came to know well.

The rejection of Wisdom is bound up, in the early chapters of Proverbs, with the visitation of the so-called “adulterous woman.” This is one of the prophetic literature’s favorite descriptions of the northern kingdom, and it does actually seem that may be in view here:

> Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant of her God.\(^{191}\)

Historically, Barker thinks the “adulterous woman” motif may refer to an incursion of a northern goddess after Josiah’s reforms removed The Lady of the Temple from out of the temple courts.\(^{192}\) It definitely seems like Lady Wisdom is being commended over the embrace of a strange goddess. But the opening speeches seem to imagine that already that embrace may be happening. Wisdom is already being rejected by her children, despite being the New Eve and perfect mother. She is no devourer of children; in fact, she rejoices in the inhabited world, and delights to see the children of men, pouring out her entire bounty for the flourishing and enjoyment of her children.\(^{193}\) Their rejection owes nothing to any defect in her. Her children simply do not fear the

\(^{190}\) Prov. 3:18

\(^{191}\) Prov. 2:16-17

\(^{192}\) Barker 2012, 195

\(^{193}\) The problem with this reading is, of course, that child sacrifice probably did take place in Judah, very
Lord.

It is the Lord’s reproach she bears and that of the king, her son, whose rule is rejected by those to whom he is sent. Her children act proudly and arrogantly. They fornicate just as the 10 tribes did, and make bad treaties with violent people, which wouldn’t have happened if they’d listened to her warnings about making covenants with strangers (6:1-5). The results are predictable enough not to need a prophet to warn about them:

for her house sinks down to death,  
and her paths to the departed;  
one who go to her come back,  
nor do they regain the paths of life.  
So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous.  
For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.\(^\text{194}\)

The Mother of Israel’s king watches as her sons are snatched away into exile, “cut off from the land” for their rejection of the Lord and his Wisdom. And as the monarchy crashes down and the children are cut off from the land, so their Mother vanishes from the pages of the Old Testament and suffers with God the erasure of his word and the wound of the unmade world. There was a time when she exploded in fruitfulness at the sound of his fiat. Now there is a contraction the size of the world, as her son the king is banished to Babylon, cut off from the land she built for him, and killed far outside the city that is Wisdom’s daughter. There is contraction, and there is probably in Yahwism, which included the cult of the Lady. It is possible, rather, that what we see here is a change in attitudes, where the cult of YHWH, after turning away from child sacrifice, remembers the old cult (or its lingering) as the sinful woman, whose tracks appear in the text as something new.

\(^\text{194}\) Prov. 2:18-22
shortness of breath, as there has been for generations. And there is the waiting – waiting with her bridegroom of blood. Waiting until she who is in labor gives birth, and the voice of a king rings out again with learned words at her instruction.

IV. Bridegroom of Blood: The Dangers of Divine Partnership

Immediately after receiving his commission to deliver Israel from the oppressor in Egypt, Moses grabs his children, his wife, and all he owns and packs to make the too-familiar trip back to Egypt. God’s chosen partner, he sets out hastily for the land where his people languish under the heavy yoke of Pharaoh. But in his haste, he forgets to consecrate his children to God and nearly pays for it with his life. YHWH, or an angel of the Lord (LXX) meets him at a lodging place intending to kill him. Zipporah wisely intuits the problem and circumcises “her son.” What follows is a mystery. She takes the foreskin and places at “his” feet (YHWH’s or Moses’s) and says (to whom?) “Surely, you are a bridegroom of blood to me.” Most English versions take it to be Moses, probably because of the word “bridegroom” in Zipporah’s complaint. But there is a problem with that reading, reflected in the NIV’s having to specify who the subject is of the first verb in v. 26. In the actual sentence, the singular masculine subject is included in the form of the third person verb: “he let him go.” If Zipporah’s complaint is to Moses, the most natural way to read the following sentence is “Moses let him [whom?] go.” But it is clear from context is that Moses is the one who is let go. Also, it is helpful to remember here that “at someone’s feet” is the posture of perfect supplication in the idiom of the Bible. The far more natural reading is that Zipporah throws the severed foreskin of her son at the feet of YHWH (or, again, his angel) and that he (YHWH or the angel) releases Moses from the threat of death. The only surprising

\[195\] I Sam 25:24, Rev. 1:17, Jn 11:32, Mk 7:25, i.a.
consequence of this way of reading the story is that it has Zipporah complaining to YHWH,  
*you are a bridegroom of blood to me.* This kind of reading would not be unheard of; marriage vows  
of the ANE often included adoption of the partner’s gods, as it did, e.g., in Ruth 1:16 and, to the  
narrator’s disappointment, in the life of Solomon. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall  
endeavor to show why that reading is not strange at all. Rather, a key element of Israel’s vocation  
to partnership with God is her fellowship in God’s suffering of the alienation of the world from  
himself.

There are texts in the Old Testament that seem to explain suffering as a consequence of  
unfaithfulness. Job’s friends repeatedly talk that way, asking “who that was innocent ever  
perished? Or where were the upright cut off?” (Job 4:7). The Book of Deuteronomy also  
understands suffering this way:

> They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. And in that day I will  
become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will  
be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come on them, and in that day they will  
ask, ‘Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?’ And I will  
certainly hide my face in that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other  
gods.  

Deuteronomy’s portrayal of suffering as divine punishment is not as absolutized as that of Job’s  
friends. It’s not the case that Deuteronomy explains every single case of possible suffering in  
these terms. But Job’s friends speak as if there is no other possible explanation to his suffering.  
The problem with such a view is that it ignores that the suffering at the core of Israel’s identity  
(sacrifice and circumcision) has nothing to do with the wrong done by the sufferer. Circumcision,  
commanded to all of Abraham’s descendants, takes blood (life! – Lev. 17:11) along with foreskin

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196 Deut. 31:16-18.
from the penis of infant males. The Exodus narrator inserts a rare parenthesis into the scene with Zipporah: “At that time, she said bridegroom of blood, referring to the circumcision.” But at least as Zipporah understands it, it’s a bloodletting, a sacrifice after which the victim is left alive.¹⁹⁷

That this interpretation is probably correct is suggested by the fact that circumcision and the sacrifice of the firstborn both took place (the latter, per the oldest laws) on the eighth day after birth.¹⁹⁸ Levenson has argued persuasively (to my mind) that the backdrop of the redemption rite of the firstborn is a time when Israel did not redeem their children. As paganism was driven out, what was left was a series of redemptions, in which children of men were returned to their parents alive.¹⁹⁹ Recall the voice of Wisdom, who rejoiced to see the world inhabited and who loved the children of men. There’s good reason to think that circumcision was one of those redemptions. The circumcision covenant is made with Abraham and el Shaddai (Gen. 17:1), which is a name of a deity that was probably added to the Lord as one of his titles after the exorcism of Josiah. The cultus to Shaddai was known to have included child sacrifice. And there are postbiblical Jewish sources that speak of the binding of Isaac as concluding with a sacrifice.²⁰⁰ There are tensions within the text of Genesis 22 itself, including two addresses from God, the first of which tells Abraham not to slay Isaac but continues “Now I know you fear God,

¹⁹⁷ Romans 12:1
¹⁹⁸ Exod. 22:29-30. Cf. Barker 2012, 130-131. The redemption rite, by the time it was instituted, was to take place at the age of a month (Num. 18:15-18).
¹⁹⁹ Levenson notes that these redemptions do not replace the actual fact of human sacrifice. Evidence suggests that both co-existed alongside one another for a long time. The redemptions merely survived as child sacrifice waned. Cf. Levenson 1993, 1-35.
²⁰⁰ Barker 2012, 131: “Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also remembered that Isaac had been killed, because it explained the Genesis text thus: ‘The angels on high took Isaac and brought him into the school of the Great Shem, and he was there for three years.’ The wall painting in the Dura Europos synagogue shows Isaac, after the sacrifice, passing through a curtain into a hidden place, that is, into heaven; and Ephraim of Bonn told how Abraham sacrificed Isaac, and a river of heavenly tears then swept him into Eden.”
because you have not withheld your only son from me.” But the second address is suggestive of a more ominous setting: “because you have done this, and have not withheld your only son from me…” (22:16). Likewise, v. 19 tells the story of Abraham’s imminent return back to his servants, but Isaac is nowhere to be found. If this reading of the background is close to correct, then the “little sacrifice” of circumcision not only is but is about the suffering of the spotless, blameless, and innocent.

In fact, it is like another Passover. The rite of the firstborn, given in Exodus 13, inter alia, references the deliverance from Egypt:

In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.”

The redemption of the firstborn, that is, is another commemoration of the Lord’s redemption of his firstborn and the striking down of all the firstborn in Egypt. Each son who opened the womb of its mother, then, was a spotless, pure Passover Lamb, slain and returned to life. And every mother in Israel knew what Job’s friends could not have: that suffering is part of the covenant, kept in a special way for every beloved son of the Lord and for his mother.

Thus, while the Old Testament certainly offers the covenant partner a blessing of long life, riches, and fertility – in short, reversal of the curse of Eden, it is also true, in spite of the seeming contradiction, that the mystery of God’s covenant partner is unmerited suffering. The Psalms resonate and echo with the question of justice in a world where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer:

201 Exodus 13:14-15
Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.

All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.²⁰²

The prophet Malachi echoes the question (Mal. 3:14), as does the weeping Prophet Jeremiah. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes observes that often the righteous die early and the wicked live long lives. For him, it’s a common enough thing to be a source of disillusionment. More than anyone, there is Job, interrogating the whirlwind, while his friends respond in virtual quotations of Deuteronomy and the parts of the Proverbs. Here as everywhere, the hermeneutics reflects the story being told: word and contradiction in one text.

The contradiction deepens as “righteous suffering” is not limited only to those who are righteous. The post-exilic prophetic literature repeatedly pronounces that though Israel has sinned, she has also been punished more than was her due. Zechariah rails against Babylon that the Lord “was a little angry, but they went too far with the punishment” (Zech 1:15). Likewise, through Isaiah, God taunts the king of Babylon with the news that:

the oppressor has come to an end!
How his fury has ended!

The Lord has broken the rod of the wicked,
the scepter of the rulers,

which in anger struck down peoples
with unceasing blows,

and in fury subdued nations
with relentless aggression.²⁰³

²⁰² Ps. 73:13-14.
²⁰³ Is. 14:5-6
And Jeremiah:

My people are like sheep whose shepherds have let them get lost in the mountains. They have wandered like sheep from one mountain to another, and they have forgotten where their home is. They are attacked by all who find them. Their enemies say, ‘They sinned against the Lord, and so what we have done is not wrong. Their ancestors trusted in the Lord, and they themselves should have remained faithful to him.’

When Israel sins, the Lord sends punishment. But the punishment seems fairly often to be in excess of the crime. The same people, wayward, unfaithful, and idolatrous, becomes at the same time the righteous victim, the alien, the abused spouse and the bereft mother. The same Israel that is the recipient of divine judgment becomes the woman whose

Hard service has been completed,
her sin has been paid for,

[ . . . ]
that she has received from the Lord’s hand
double for all her sins.

The double portion of suffering is a mystery. Deuteronomy 21:17 requires that the firstborn be given a double portion of the father’s estate. Of all the father has, the firstborn is entitled to a double portion. The firstborn of the Lord receives a double portion of suffering, in imitation of the Lord who is alienated from the earth and from his people. They reject him, his Word and his Wisdom, and yet his Word and his Wisdom are the principle that holds all things,

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204 Jer. 50:6-7
205 Is. 40:2
206 Astonishingly, the described here is that of the Patriarchs. Abraham’s favored son is the second son, Isaac, the one of his beloved wife Sarah. Similarly, Jacob’s favored son is Rachel’s firstborn, but Joseph’s older brothers are the children of Leah. The explicit prohibition of favoring the second son here references what had caused so much trouble in the time of the patriarchs, but it also contradicts Gen. 21:12, where it is the voice of God that tells Abraham that it is in Isaac that the promises are to be fulfilled. This is neither the first nor the last of Scripture’s contradictions that we will discuss in this study.
and the covenantbearers, together. In punishing them, as we have already seen a couple times, he
punishes himself. This bind is the explanation behind passages like Hosea 11:5-9:

“Will they not return to Egypt
   and will not Assyria rule over them
   because they refuse to repent?

A sword will flash in their cities;
   it will devour their false prophets
   and put an end to their plans.

My people are determined to turn from me.
   Even though they call me God Most High,
   I will by no means exalt them.

“How can I give you up, Ephraim?
   How can I hand you over, Israel?

How can I treat you like Admah?
   How can I make you like Zeboyim?

My heart is changed within me;
   all my compassion is aroused.

I will not carry out my fierce anger,
   nor will I devastate Ephraim again.

For I am God, and not a man—
   the Holy One among you.
   I will not come against their cities.

When the people go into exile, God goes with them. When their cities burn, it is God who weeps
in the words of the prophets. When the nations rage, it is the Lord in the infants whose heads
_crack open on the rocks (Ps. 137:9). That is why when the Lord speaks comfort to Jerusalem, he
immediately calls out to prepare his way home. He has endured the long years of exile with his
people. The mystery of divine suffering in the Old Testament is the mystery of God wearing the
wounds of his creation’s refusal of the life he gives. To be his people is to wear them with him.
The reason Israel receives double punishment is because God in his covenant has adopted them
as his firstborn; this is the inheritance he leaves. They suffer God’s suffering for the life of the
world. The Lord is Israel’s bridegroom of blood. To be in covenant with YHWH is to bleed along
with him. To be the bride of the Lord is to feel the pain of his world-forsakenness. If this
conclusion is painful, it also brings the comfort that Israel is closest to God when it feels him to
be farthest away. When Sarah wilts under the contempt of Hagar at having been blessed with a
child, she is as seen by God as Hagar will be when Sarah takes vengeance. He is close to the
alien, the orphan, and the widow, because they know him under his truest aspect here in the
devastation.

After the death of the patriarchs, their memory protects Israel for a little while. Pharaoh
honors Joseph, and hence his people, with good land in Goshen. It is not the fulfillment of the
promise, but it shows God faithful, and at that moment it is at least believable that the sojourn to
Egypt will end, as that of Abraham did, that God will come through and Wisdom will call her
children home from exile. But as the years pass, Exodus explicitly raises the question of
forgetfulness: “a king arose who did not know Joseph” (Exod. 1:8). Exodus knows Joseph and
his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but it does not know who the heir of those men is. The
people are sheep without a shepherd, and the loss of the heir raises again the question of
partnership and the spectre that God, like Pharaoh, may have forgotten. The text seems to
confirm that this was a worry, as the Israelites are surprised and overjoyed when they learn that
God cares for their affairs (Exod. 4:31). If there is no heir, who is God’s partner?

It is the revelation of God as co-sufferer that reveals to Israel the blessed, if frightening
truth that in those 400 years, as they carried the sins of the pagans against the beloved of God,
they were his partners. The ironies of Israel’s history are that it is impossible for that partnership
to break, no matter whom it hurts. And when God judges the nation they had served as slaves, he
turns Pharaoh into what all men are destined to be: the image of God. Pharaoh becomes the
living statue in the garden of a God awash in the grief of the multitudes of his children who have been slain by Egypt’s blindness. What Pharaoh does not have, and what he most needs, is a helper, to help him see the wisdom by which he is an image of God. He needs Israel, God’s co-sufferer, to make intelligible what is nothing less than chaos exploding the garden he has built in the name of gods who are not worth the devotion he has shown them. The loss of the firstborn is the sign and consequence of Egypt’s covenant with the beasts of the field. There was life and abundance, it seemed, as the Pharaohs listened to the literal voices of serpents. The Pharaohs were like gods in their own eyes. What they had failed to see was that all men are, insofar as they are images. The Israelites, whose spotless lambs lived under the unending sign of blood and death, find in God the one who can deliver them from that death, and who is therefore worthy of trust that he will one day end the exile and settle them in a good land, a walled garden where they walk in the cool of the day and the sound of doves is again heard in their land, when the sons of Wisdom are delivered up to God on the other side of death’s cruel exile.

V. Delivered Up to God: The Long Barrenness and the Coming Son

After the failure of the original pair in the garden, motherhood became the painful cross it has been since. Every one of Eve’s children was marked with the sign of death as the Word of God that had given them life was crossed with contradictions. Since then, motherhood, and the entire natural ecosystem that flourishes around it, is assymmetrically demanding of women. Civilization advances on the basis of the labors – seen and unseen – of Eve’s daughters. They suffer the fate of being the human race’s most valuable members, which has meant that societies protected them more than they did men. Men were sent to war, because it is far easier to inseminate a woman than to germinate and nurse a child. Men were sent to work for the same reasons, and when they weren’t killing one another, they were warring with Adam’s failures. This
pain in the generations was blamed on the ones who did the most work to preserve generation. The reward of their labor was not only to suffer the pains of their children but the angers of their men.

When all of this goes as well as anyone dared to hope, down the long millennia, the result was that children were born to mothers who didn’t lose too much blood. Surviving an ordeal like that was not the end but the beginning, as children nurse and depend on their mothers for everything. In the pre-toddler years, unborn and born are accidents of location. The children are just as dependent, but the mother feels it more, because that dependence occupies her hands and robs her of everything else she might do. The production of milk becomes her body’s main priority, just as the formation of blood and flesh and bones and organs had been before. So for the entire gestation period and for months or years after, every battle for resources is won by a child who has little to no idea such a war is being waged. He is not grateful. The goal of all of this is that well-grown and nurtured children grow in strength and leave. A good mother will have strengthened her children to the point that when they leave, they can survive. But all of this means that at the heart of motherhood in the devastation is a cruel paradox. The better you do it, the more unjust it is and the more it hurts. The survival of the race depends upon a deeply inbuilt asymmetry that, in all of human history, has never gone away. One could imagine technological advances that might ameliorate parts of this ordeal, but whether that’s possible without unbearable cost to other parts that are just as important remains to be seen. There is room for skepticism. But all of this is what every woman has known since time immemorial. As good as it gets is unfair, painful, and deadly.

In Israel, as we have seen, all of this was carried around, not only in story, but in a coded liturgy that marked every male child under the sign of death and every female child with regular
exile as soon as she reached puberty. What Wisdom had woven into the fabric of things, Israel’s mothers discerned and made visible like a confession of sin. Even their redeemed children were redeemed by blood. Recall that Zipporah circumcised “her son.” The obligation to give the firstborn to the Lord was an obligation laid especially upon women, as firstborn was defined matrilineally: “the first to open the womb” (Exod. 13:2). And yet, Israel’s mothers loved their children. Not perfectly, but well. At risk to themselves and by incredible genius, again and again, they willed good for their children and labored to keep their children alive. The secret to that tenacity becomes clear over the course of Israel’s story, but it is contained in nuce in the scene where Eve heard about the pains by which her children would live:

I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

It was Eve’s daughters, rather than Paul, who first believed that they would be saved by “the Childbirth” (he teknogonia) (1 Tim. 2:15). Every single child, every generation, is a call out to the future for the day when the promise made about Eve would come true. Every act of childbearing in Israel is an act, however mediately and distantly, of faith in God’s promise to Eve. Every woman who bears a child does so with a question: “are you the one who was to come?” Israel’s mothers claim the promise of the coming one every time they suffer the life-threatening pain of childbirth, and every time they confess the sin at the heart of the race in

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207 Hence, a father would say to his curious child, “This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.” (Exod. 13:15). But a father might not have to say that. One can imagine a man, all of whose wives might be widows, all of whom might bear him children that are not their firstborn. In that case, men could escape the burden of redemption entirely. Women, obviously, could not. That asymmetry and analysis of its consequences and implications recur in what follows.

208 Cf. Chapter 4.
offering their children to God. Claiming this promise, they suffer the effects of Eve’s failure in the hopes of participating in her deliverance. That faith, in spite of all the disappointment that came with it as Israel waited for its redeemer, was not only a discernment of nature. It was a struggle to hold onto the hope that God would at last prove faithful to the promises made to Eve, to Sarah, and thence, to every Israelite woman.

The very names of their children carry the idea forward, so that genealogies read – to those who know Hebrew – like a kind of prayer. “Cain” – I have acquired. “Abel” – a son. “Seth” – [The Lord has] appointed/kept his appointment. “Noah” – rest. “Sarah” – High Lady. “Abraham” – multitudes. “Isaac” – Laughter. “Ishmael” – God has heard. “Hagar” – Flight. “Rebekah” – bound/secured. “Jacob” – deceiver. “Rachel” – lamb. These names contain Israel’s history, and they hint, over and over again, at the idea that through Israel’s children, God is going to keep his original promise. These names are the words answering to the Word that created God’s people and, for their sake, the world. These words, Israel’s words, are God’s own Words, formed of the breath that animates the new human race. This is the people called to reboot creation, to discern its deep mysteries and share them with the pagans. (The Greek Theophrastus knew the Hebrews in part for their skill in astronomy!). They are meant to fulfill that call by succeeding where Eve had failed and by bearing the Wisdom’s son, the king who would end her exile and bring knowledge to the world.

As Israel struggles to fulfill this vocation in the dance of sin, punishment, exile, suffering, repentance, and renewal, those struggles are from time to time described as labor pains, as contractions and releases. But in the couple of centuries leading up to the exile of Judah, there

was an explosion of texts about Israel’s motherhood, and in Jerusalem, at least, that explosion did not end. In this tradition, Jerusalem’s, or Zion’s, or Israel’s rebellion and the suffering that attaches to it come to be figured as a kind of empty labor, all pain and no promise.

Excursus: Margaret Barker’s Brilliant Work and Some Developments on Divine Motherhood

Those texts have their origins in historical developments in and around Jerusalem in the 7th century BC, surrounding devotion to the Lady Wisdom.210 I have argued above that the Wisdom literature shows traces of having been adapted from an earlier period when Israel invoked an actual goddess of Wisdom. Before the Deuteronomist Redactors got ahold of Proverbs, that is, Wisdom was a Lady invoked, at least sometimes, by the name Wisdom (plural, evidence in Hebrew of a proper name). The Lady, at least as she says of herself, was to God as Eve was to Adam. That story is somewhat incomplete and needs to be supplemented here by the work of the brilliant Margaret Barker. My main problem above is that, following the idiom of Proverbs in its final form, I used “God” (El / Elohim) and “the Lord” (YHWH) interchangably. By the time Proverbs reaches its final form, that makes perfect sense. But in the early years of Israel’s religious pre-history, El was, properly speaking, the “high God,” and YHWH was his son.211 This proves crucial

210 Barker 2012, 5-75.
211 Barker 2012, 124: “The Old Testament is invariably read by Christians nowadays as an account of the work of Yahweh whom they came to call God the Father, even though scholars have long recognised that in the earlier period of Israel’s religion, the supreme God was named El. Now El does appear occasionally in the Hebrew Scriptures, for example as El Elyon, begetter of heaven and earth, whose priest was Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20); or as the father of the sons of God to whom the various nations were allocated (Deut. 32:8, a ‘corrected’ text). Most of the Hebrew Scriptures, however, are concerned with Yahweh, one of the sons of El, who was the guardian deity of Israel. Even as late as Philo, he was described as ‘the second God.’”
in what follows.

In her book *The Mother of the Lord*, Barker surfaces an impressive array of evidence for the claim that pre-Josian Jerusalemites and Judeans worshipped, along with the Lord, a goddess that Israel knew as Shaddai (later this would be one of the Lord’s titles, El Shaddai). This goddess was thought to dwell in the Temple and was represented there by Asherahs (which likely looked like almond tree menorahs) and possibly by an image of herself.\(^{212}\)

In most of the study of the southern Hebrew and paganism, the opponents of the “pagans” have been able to set the terms of discussion. So, when the opponents of the pagans call a pagan artifact, say, an “asherah,” their views have led scholars to believe that the problem in pre-Josian Judah was the worship of the gods of the nations. But Barker engages deeply with the work of archaeologist Raz Kletter to show that in fact Judeans had their own feminine deity, who may have distantly descended from Asherah but was clearly different in significant ways as well.\(^{213}\) Kletter notes the proliferation, in the archaeological record, of figurines of a feminine deity resembling Asherah but differing in crucial ways as well. The figurines date back to the 7\(^{th}\) century BC, and of the 800+ that have been found, 96% have been found in Judea and 47.5% of them in Jerusalem. The figures were between 8 and 14cm tall, with red faces that had only eyes and white dresses. The bodies were invariably those of women, holding very large

\(^{212}\) Ibid., 126-139.

\(^{213}\) Ibid., 119-122.
breasts. A few of them, found almost exclusively in Jerusalem, had a turban-shaped headdress. Originally, these figures (some of them found in the late 1960s), were thought to be goddesses from elsewhere. But the problem of their geographic placement is intriguing, as are several other features about them.

Barker shows that the figurines share several unique and characteristic features with the Lady of Jerusalem, as one would expect were she the local goddess. First, the exiles in Egypt tell Jeremiah that they worshipped the Queen of Heaven in the cities of Judah and in Jerusalem, which is where the figurines were found. The figurines near the Temple had a turban on, such as the high priest wore. Ben Sira 24 recalls Lady Wisdom as a kind of celestial high priest in Jerusalem (esp. 24:10). The figurines wore white dresses, and 2 Kings recalls women weaving linen garments for the lady (2 Kings 23:7). The figurines had only one facial feature, enormous eyes, and it was the role of Wisdom to open eyes, while those who abandon her lose their sight. The other prominent feature on the figurines was their breasts. Of course, the most natural translation of El Shaddai is God with breasts.

From Barker’s work we can see the likely origins of Lady Wisdom, recalling of course that she was in Jerusalem, or at least the texts about her were. In Proverbs, Lady

\[\text{\footnotesize 214 Barker 2012, p. 120}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 215 1 Enoch 93:8}\]

Wisdom is mother to the king’s sons. Barker recalls that for pre-Josian Israelite religion, El had not yet become one of YHWH’s titles. In the early days, both textual and archaeological evidence show, YHWH was seen as the son of El, the high God. Lady Wisdom, or Shaddai was the consort of El but the mother of YHWH. She was the Queen of Heaven, as the Queen Mother (gebirah) was the Queen on Earth (it is worth recalling that the Queen Mother tradition seems only to have been part of Judean court life; the Kings compiler knows nothing of the mothers of Kings in the northern kingdom). She was, also, thought to be a Virgin, in fact “the Virgin,” as LXX and MT both have it. Her analogue in Ugarit was a Virgin mother of the king. In this case, she is the Mother of YHWH, or, as translated, “the Mother of the Lord.”

This title is even used once in an Isaiah scroll found at Qumran, where the text reads for Is. 7:11, “ask a sign of the mother of the Lord, your God,” (one letter’s difference in Hebrew). 217 Given the context, the prophecy of the Virgin to conceive and bring forth the King of kings, added to the rule of lex difficileor, Barker thinks there’s a good chance the Qumran manuscript is a legitimate source (it is the only pre-Christian extant source for the Hebrew of the verse).

What these all amount to is a historical argument that there is a Great Lady, Shaddai, who was resident within the Temple, who may also have been known as Lady Wisdom. For as long as she was there, she was treated as a kind of patron for the city of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. Thus, when Sennacherib attacks the city during

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217 Ibid., 102.
Hezekiah’s reign, the prophet’s words begin with a statement of contempt from someone who is not God but is still part of the oracle:

Virgin Daughter Zion
despises you and mocks you.
Daughter Jerusalem
tosses her head as you flee.\textsuperscript{218}

This text, from the years after Hezekiah had begun the purge that Josiah would complete, but before Josiah had completed it, refers to a feminine patron and protector of the City of Jerusalem. This view agrees with what the Egyptian exiles tell Jeremiah:

We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.\textsuperscript{219}

The Egyptian refugees blame the woes of Judah on Josiah’s purge. Whether they are right or wrong, it is clear that they viewed the Queen of Heaven as a Lady Protector of the City. One of the most ancient texts in Proverbs (though Barker does not cite it) suggests the same:

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

Wisdom comes first: Get Wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{218} 2 Kings 19:21
\textsuperscript{219} Jer. 44:17-18, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{220} Prov. 4:6-7, italics added.
The king tells his heir in v. 7 to prioritize wisdom because she is the beginning. The word here (*reshith*) is the first word used in the Old Testament and has connotations of exceeding devotion. It is used to describe firstborn sons (“the beginning of my strength” – Gen. 49:3, Deut. 21:17) as well as the first and choice portion of “all your getting” that must be given to the Lord. Wisdom is the firstfruits, and so the language of value here should be seen as quasi-cultic; “love her [. . .] though it cost you all you have.” The offering language, given the Jerusalemite context, agrees with all that Barker has discovered; the Lady is the Lady of the Temple.

Barker’s suggestion, correct on my view, is that what are called “Asherah and Ba’al” on the lips of those who oppose them, are actually Judean Yahwism as it looked then. Instead of Asherah giving birth to Ba’al, Virgin Daughter Zion appeared as the Mother of Israel’s Deliverer. Barker contends that Is. 7:11-14 alludes to just this sort of thing, as the “birth of YHWH” is symbolically enacted every time a new king is born or enthroned (cf. PS. 110: “The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand”). Psalm 110, whose language in v. 3 is notoriously difficult, actually (for Barker) names an enthronement ritual, where the Lord’s appointed representative is begotten. The role played by the Queen mother in the royal court makes sense, if this is how the YHWH cult

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221 Exod. 34:26, Lev. 2:12, 23:10, Num. 15:21, 18:12, 24:20, Deut. 11:12, 18:4, 26:2, 10, inter alia.

222 In the speech of the Bible, what one loves is that to which one is devoted, to which one remains faithful, and for the sake of which one gives up lesser things. To love something is, instinctively, to offer one’s resources for the sake of it. The vast economy of supererogatory offerings described in the Old Testament is literally an economics of love. Similarly, the fourth evangelist records on Jesus’s lips an explicit relationship between them: “for God so love that he gave.” Paul likewise celebrates Christ “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Ephesians 5 likewise summons the churches to be imitators of God, walking in love “as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” In the letter to the Philippians, Paul characterizes their love offering for him as a “fragrant offering” to God (Phil. 4:18), and the first Epistle of John makes the negative point: whoever does not spend his wealth for a brother in need does not have the love of God in him.
looked at the time.

What happens just before the purge is not that new gods are introduced, leading Israel away from an initial purity; rather, attitudes change about what had been in Judah all along. 2 Kings and Chronicles disagree about when the Josian purge began. The Kings narrator has it that it began in the 18th year of Josiah’s reign, while the Chronicler has it beginning in the twelfth, perhaps embarrassed at the length of time it seems to take. In any case, when Josiah completes his purge, he burns the sign of the Lady and spreads the ashes at Bethel, the place where Jacob had first met Shaddai as a ladder that that took the messengers of YHWH from earth to heaven.

It is possible, of course, that Barker has all of this wrong. But the evidence she gathers is formidable enough to demand an alternate story, one that will embrace all the data she offers. And as with the question of divine Wisdom, this data presents a problem to the theologian who wishes to treat with the Old Testament. The Lady of the Temple seems to have fled before Josiah and the iconoclasts. By the time of Jesus, Paul, and Josephus, a whole different Judaism emerged, one as different from the old ways as a circle of Quaker friends is from a Corpus Christi procession. But early Christianity, with its washings and eucharists and long expositions of the first temple, with its icons and its candlelit processions of singing women accompanying the Ephesian fathers back to their rooms, looks like a renewal of the old ways.

There is simply no way to approach Christianity’s Jewish and pre-Jewish past without dealing in some way with paganism. I will have much more to say about that in what follows. For now, I will confine myself to some brief remarks on the textual
phenomenon that accompanies the exile (and return?) of the Lady. It is, as Barker notes, clear that what we call the Old Testament really begins with the Josian purge. The text would gradually come to lose many traces of the Lady that the citizens of Jerusalem once venerated as the Mother of the Lord. Eventually, all of her titles and prerogatives were collapsed into the one God of Deuteronomy. As a Christian monotheist, I could not be more grateful. But it is also the case that traditions like these could not vanish entirely. The text, as I have already remarked, bears in its body the marks of the Lady’s surrender to her Son. She leaves, but what remains is shot through with the traces of her perfume. The veneration of the Virgin Daughter and Protectress of Zion could not vanish from history. Its whispers are left in the wisdom of Israel’s mothers, the Queen in the king’s court, the marking of children in remembrance of their bridegroom of blood, and in the growing tendency to dress Israel along with God in the symbols, titles, and prerogatives that had once been identified the Lady of the Temple, YHWH’s Queen Mother. The post-exilic strands of the Old Testament show the fingerprints of Israel’s history in that way most of all. But that leaves a difficulty. The Deuteronomist stamped the transcendence of God irrevocably – as irrevocably as the Lady’s presence had been – into the mind of the people of God. The question that emerges is, “how could that God have a mother? And even granted that he could, how could that mother be a creature? *** 

The allusion in Isaiah 7 to the coming king who will deliver Judah from trouble echoes the promise given to Eve in Genesis 3. But it is a promise with urgency, meant to encourage and comfort King Jotham as the northern kingdom suffered Assyrian violence, which threatened Judah as well. The remedy for the king’s trouble is that the Virgin should conceive and a bear a
son, presumably Ahaz, who will sit on the throne of David as YHWH’s image. After more threats of destruction to Israel, the oracle continues:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.²²³

The prophecy failed, apparently. The son of Ahaz, with the help of the Virgin, repelled the Assyrians, but the sixth king from him would watch the Temple sacked and the people of Judah forced into Babylonian captivity. Around the lifetime of Isaiah, Micah called for a ruler from old times to arise out of Bethlehem. Until that ruler arose:

Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,

and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.²²⁴

Both of these prophecies probably date from the time when the Lady presided over Jerusalem from the temple. They both look forward to the Childbirth, when Eve’s long labors bring forth a

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²²³ Is. 9:6.

²²⁴ Micah 5:4.
son at last. The Lady, as we have shown, is the Mother of the Lord and Wisdom — the partner of God in bringing his King to Earth.

After the Josian purge, texts like these do not get reattached to God (for obvious reasons), but neither can they refer to the Lady. And that makes them especially suggestive and fertile ground for the later prophetic tradition. Micah, for example, promises judgment on Lachish for being the origin of the sin of “Daughter Jerusalem.” After several chapters in which judgment and exile are promised both to Israel and to Judaism, the Lord promises to reclaim his children from their exile:

I will gather the lame;
    I will assemble the exiles
    and those I have brought to grief.

I will make the lame my remnant,
    those driven away a strong nation.

The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion
    from that day and forever.

As for you, watchtower of the flock,
    stronghold of Daughter Zion,

the former dominion will be restored to you,
    kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem.”

Why do you now cry aloud—
    have you no king?

Has your ruler perished,
    that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?

Writhe in agony, Daughter Zion,
    like a woman in labor,

for now you must leave the city
to camp in the open field.

You will go to Babylon;
    there you will be rescued.
There the Lord will redeem you
out of the hand of your enemies.225

Here, Daughter Zion waits for the former dominion. But the promise is that after the exile, God will “gather the lame,” and return them to Jerusalem, where a king will reign again. But Zion will not just see the coronation of a king; her destiny is to give birth to one. The labor pains she experiences are of the Lord’s as-yet unfulfilled promise. The other source of the labor pains is the coming exile, when Judah will experience, along with her Mother, the expulsion from the garden of God.

There do seem to be “Lady” texts in Micah. But it is clear that the Lady did not go into the Babylonian exile. She was destroyed on the high place from which she came. Still, all of the themes from the Lady cult are present here, predicated of those who are about to go into exile. They suffer labor pains, in part because God has not yet fulfilled his promise, and in part because of judgment. The theme of God’s judgment arriving as labor pains recurs constantly in the later prophets, as does the promise that Israel will be God’s partner in birthing the king that will rule the nations.

The book of Jeremiah constantly figures the judgment of God as birth pains:

What will you say when the Lord sets over you
those you cultivated as your special allies?

Will not pain grip you
like that of a woman in labor?226

Similarly, in 22:23, the prophet judges the King and the Queen Mother, warning that to those in comfort, “pain like a woman in labor” is soon to destroy their comfort. The prophet continues: “I

225 Mic. 4:6-10.

will hurl you, and the mother who gave you birth into another country.” The labor pains, again, appear as the promised exile. Labor pains are threatened again in 30:6 and in 49:24 and 50:43. In chapter 4:31 the prophet hears a cry:

as of a woman in labor,  
a groan as of one bearing her first child—  
the cry of Daughter Zion gasping for breath,  
stretching out her hands and saying,

“Alas! I am fainting;  
my life is given over to murderers.”

Here, as so often elsewhere, the pains of this childbirth follow the act of prostitution with the nations and with their gods. The agony of this vain childbirth is the agony that follows unfaithfulness to the Lord.

In both Micah and Jeremiah, the agony of seeing their children devoured and taken into exile is added to the suffering described here:

Shave your head in mourning  
for the children in whom you delight;  
make yourself as bald as the vulture,  
for they will go from you into exile.

and

A voice is heard in Ramah,  
mourning and great weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,

---

227 Jer. 4:30, In Micah also, the sin of Jerusalem is imitating the idolatry of Samaria. The most astonishing examples are in Ezekiel 16.

228 Mic. 1:16
because they are no more.\textsuperscript{229} There are examples in Hosea and the Psalms that could be cited as well, adding to a list that would quickly grow too long.

Famously, Jeremiah utters his strongest condemnations not only against the idolatry of Judah but also against the offering of children, which “I did not command, nor did it enter my mind!”\textsuperscript{230} The voice of Rachel weeps not only for the children sent into exile but also – how far the fall from Eden and its multiplications – for the children dead by Daughter Zion’s own hand.

The theme of barrenness and infertility, so prominent in the patriarch narratives, reappears in this connection as a reflection on the failure of Israel to reach her vocation. Israel was born, so the latter prophets say, to teach the nations how to hear God. As his partner, she was meant to succeed where Eve had failed: to bear the whole world’s children and to be a light to the world.\textsuperscript{231} But that vocation came under siege as Israel gave herself to the gods of the nations. While in Isaiah 54, the prophet calls out to the “barren woman” (v. 1), the “desolate woman” (v. 3), promising better things, he alludes to a life of total barrenness up to that point. In this oracle, the “barren woman” is the one who never was in labor and never bore a child (v. 1). The most poignant expression of this barrenness, probably, is found in Isaiah 26, as the prophet calls to mind all that the Lord has done with Israel. “As a pregnant woman about to give birth,” he observes:

\begin{quote}
[She]

writhes and cries out in her pain,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{229} Jer. 31:15.
\textsuperscript{230} Jer. 7:31, 19:4-5, 32:35.
\textsuperscript{231} Is. 49
so were we in your presence, Lord.

We were with child, we writhed in labor,
but we gave birth to wind.

_We have not brought salvation to the earth_,
and the people of the world have not come to life.\(^{232}\)

In the Hebrew of this passage, as any close reader of Matthew 1:21 might suspect, the word spoken for salvation is “yeshuah,” given in the plural, as a name might be. The vocation of Israel was to bring salvation, to bring Jesus, to the earth. This vocation was part of the covenant. But it is also, crucially, part of the vocation that was given to Eve, to be fruitful and multiply. Israel is called to do for the world what Eve was called to do. In the background of their failure, as Israel, is the failure of Eve, as the summit of creation. That is why Isaiah brings this lament on the heels of a remembrance of God’s acts in history and follows it immediately with a statement of trust in God to hold the future:

> But your dead will live, Lord;
> their bodies will rise—
>
> let those who dwell in the dust
> wake up and shout for joy—
>
> your dew is like the dew of the morning;
> the earth will give birth to her dead.\(^{233}\)

This text, as so many others do, shows that what the post-Josian Lady texts did was more complicated than Barker seems to suggest. To be sure, many of the divine titles, graces, and even names, were annexed by the Lord. Shaddai, which had been the Lady’s name, became _El Shaddai_, the Lord Almighty (also, still, the Lord with breasts). But if God acquired many of the

\(^{232}\) Is. 26:17-18, italics added.

\(^{233}\) Is. 26:19.
Lady’s titles, Israel, the people created by God’s unchangeable Word, acquired many of her deeds. No longer was it Lady Wisdom, the principle of the creation, who was to bear the king. In fact, the question of intra-divine partnership, that is of a *divine* partner for God, was punted for another day. Rather, Israel was given the job of doing what the Lady had once done, even if it seemed impossible, even if it was to succeed where Eve had failed and to give birth to the king whose throne would never end (Is. 9:6).

As a theologian, then, interested not only in what happened but in what is true of God, I start here: Israel’s adoption of the deities of the nations was probably an inevitable mistake. The God of Israel is the God of Jesus, his Anointed self-Revelation. At the same time, the texts that relate the ongoing covenant relationship of Israel and God now bear in their body the marks of Israel’s pagan past. What the re-narration of the Deuteronomist does is reset the Lady not as a past glory to be recalled but a coming one, present for the moment in the mind of God but soon to be revealed. In the final form of the Old Testament, then, the Lady reappears as a promise one day to be kept, one who is to come, the seed of the woman whose enmity with the serpent was so important to early Christians.\(^\text{234}\) I take my view to be roughly equivalent to those of early Christians. What this historical discussion does, however, is set that view on slightly different ground: what for early Christians may have been accurate but creative discernment of connections deep in the joints and marrow of Israel’s Bible is actually just the accurate recognition of the Old Testament’s exorcism of pagan deity from its pages. Josiah sends away an evil and false woman, a greedy mother willing to see her children destroyed if only they remain

\(^{234}\) Throughout *Mother of the Lord*, Margaret Barker shows how often this sort of things happen, but an especially interesting discussion of the redaction history of Psalm 2 on pp. 50-53 gives readers a feel for what kinds of concerns might have been at play and how deep they might have gone into the textual tradition, especially when it is remembered that the canonical artifact inversely mirrors the historical situation.
with her (1 Kings 3:26). But stripped of that legacy, the woman sent out by Josiah reenters as Jocheved’s true daughter, a mother willing to lose her child if that is what will preserve its life. She arrives as an idea, a vision with no innocent blood on her hands, indeed willing to give her own flesh and blood. The Lady in Israel's Bible is a prophetic call to the future for the unveiling of a woman who would partner of God to become the fit Mother of the world’s Salvation.

The double collapse of titles and graces, some to God and others to Israel, creates the dynamic we have addressed several times already, by which Israel’s failure somehow counts against God:

On the day I chose Israel, I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of Jacob and revealed myself to them in Egypt. With uplifted hand I said to them, “I am the Lord your God.” On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. And I said to them, “Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

“But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So, I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt. But for the sake of my name, I brought them out of Egypt. I did it to keep my name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites. Therefore, I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.235

This is why Isaiah laments the failure of Israel to overcome Eve’s judgment. In the end, their success at accomplishing the missions the Lady used to accomplish redounds to God’s Almighty name (Shaddai), the name he acquired from her. Isaiah laments Israel’s barrenness because it is, he knows, up to God to make Israel do what she was commanded to do. In other words, Israel

235 Ezek. 20:5-10.
cannot fail without the covenant being falsified (more on this below).\textsuperscript{236} Israel must succeed at bringing forth the Redeemer, and to do that, she must succeed at overturning the failure of Eve and becoming the wise partner of God. The promise, after Josiah, is not humans living as copies of a quasi-human family structure projected into the Feuerbachian heavens. It is the promise of humans \textit{as humans} partnering with God \textit{as God}. The irony of divine transcendence is that it breaks down the temple wall, as Israel discovered in the years after 70. Gods are not big humans, and we are not small gods. We are vessels for divinization precisely because God can act in his perfect grace and freedom, without obviating human action but \textit{as} human action. The gift of Josiah to salvation history is divine humanity. But divine humanity requires that humanity replace the divine intermediaries as the partner of God. Israel must be the ladder by which the Redeemer comes into the world (Gen. 28:10-17) without ever \textit{being} the Redeemer. She must be the Mother of the Lord but not a goddess. In order for that to happen, she must, \textit{as redeemed humanity}, somehow untie the knot of Eve, for Israel’s history is a testimony of what will and must happen if that knot is not untied. As a redeemed person, she must become the mirror of God, whose every action corresponds to his, and she must do that without ever impinging – not by one step – into the infinite chasm that separates humanity and divinity. In short, Israel must become an analogy for God. Anything else is a giving birth to the wind, cementing the contradictions in place and leaving all the Lord’s dead in their graves (Is. 26:17-18).

This requirement, that Israel become a divine analogy, is the explanation of the mysterious co-participation discussed already in this chapter. This analogy is the reason that Israel is a light to the nations. Like Eve, Israel is meant to show the nations \textit{how} they are like

\textsuperscript{236} See “Ex Utero Patris: Intra-Divine Partnership as the Basis for the Covenant” below.
God by the gift of her resemblance to and difference from them. It is also why Israel’s rebellion and potential failure threaten to undo the fabric of creation. Israel, that is, is the wisdom of God on display, even if (as is usual) they do not discern that wisdom. Their failures involve the creative integrity of the word of God. This is why Adam and Eve bear the judgments of frustration after they sin; they are bound to God, and the contradiction of His will entails the contradiction of their wills. It is why those who carry the Word of God, namely, the Prophets, suffer the affliction of the Word they carry even as they are faithful to it and hence undeserving of the suffering they warn of. It is why Jeremiah goes into exile with those who have rebelled against the Lord. And it is why, when Jeremiah warns of the curse of Eve trembling again in the life of Judah, he cannot exempt himself. At one and the same time, he warns Judah of judgment:

At midday I will bring a destroyer against the mothers of their young men;
suddenly I will bring down on them anguish and terror.

_The mother of seven will grow faint and breathe her last._

Her sun will set while it is still day;
she will be disgraced and humiliated.

I will put the survivors to the sword before their enemies,”
declares the Lord.\(^{237}\)

and suffers from it.

_Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth,_
a man with whom the whole land strives and contends!

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\(^{237}\) Jer. 15:8-9, italics added.
I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me.\(^{238}\)

The prophet is the righteous sufferer of YHWH’s wrath, the enemy of both God and the world. The whole land strives with him because God strives with him. In the Prophet’s person is carried the divine rejection of unfaithful Israel, as well as Israel’s rejection of the divine Word that gives them life. The prophet is a contradiction to all things on behalf of all things, and only by doing so can he be the servant of the Lord. It is only by his alienation from Eve that he offers Eve the chance to make things right, and so his life must be one of continual abandonment of the mother who loves and claims him. It cannot be otherwise if he is to bear the divine and earthly contradiction. The Prophet utters God’s Words to the creature and, as long as they persist in their rebellion, the human rejection of those Words. The moment the people cease to rebel, the Prophet’s vocation is finished (tetelestai), and he falls silent. Until then, by his very impossibility, the state of ceaseless enmity with God and world, he embodies the possibility of that contradiction’s being undone. In other words, the Prophet is a condensation of Israel, a compression of Israel’s own being, both for and against Israel and the Lord. The Wisdom that surpasses wisdom is to hear the Word of the Lord and do whatever he tells you. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom, but the Word of the Lord is its summit. Wisdom, after the purge, is the Word of Wisdom, the discernment of the Word of God to me, here, now, and what it must mean for me to obey it. The partner of God must always be, in some measure, a prophet. Hence the apostle’s preference for prophecy above all gifts. Isaiah, in mirroring the suffering of his people, mirrors, analogizes, the Lord:

\(^{238}\) Jer. 15:10, italics added.
For a long time I have kept silent,
I have been quiet and held myself back.

But now, like a woman in childbirth,
I cry out, I gasp and pant.\textsuperscript{239}

It is this gift in the Prophet that allows him to call out to the future and hear the future’s answer. It is what allows (canonical) Isaiah to proclaim his faith that Israel will not fail in the mission to bear the Savior who can remove the contradiction from the heart of things (Is. 26:10) and then to see both that it will happen and how.\textsuperscript{240} As a sign of Israel’s success, he can perceive the dim-lit form of how God will redeem both his Word and the world; as carrier of the contradiction, he is prevented from seeing the whole. Truly, in the “servant” poems, Isaiah does see Israel’s Redeemer and God’s precious lamb led to the slaughter (Is. 53:7). But when he looks into the future, he cannot see the servant, whom he knows not to be himself, as anything but himself:

\begin{quote}
Listen to me, you islands;  
hear this, you distant nations:  
Before I was born the Lord called me;  
from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.  
He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{239} Is. 42:14.

\textsuperscript{240} Of course, the majority of scholars are probably correct to discern multiple textual traditions gathered up in Isaiah, reflecting vastly different historical moments: the 8th century BC (the actual lifetime of the son of Amoz) as well as (possibly) the exilic and post-exilic periods. It may be fair enough merely to note that my interest is in the Book as it has come down to us, as Hebrew and Christian Scripture. But there is perhaps another word to say as well, that Isaiah, as a textual tradition covering over 200 years of time in a single text in one prophet’s voice, has the bizarre effect of making the promises that start to emerge into view during the return from exile something that speaks, canonically, into the meaning of Isaiah’s time. One can imagine Hezekiah, comforted by the words of Isaiah 40, not because they were written yet, but because they were buried like seeds in his own encounters with the Lord and His prophet. This effect is crucial, in part, because the mystery of Isaiah 7:14, the Virgin who will conceive and bear a Son, while perhaps (See Barker 2012, 102) referring to a rich mirroring of the cosmic Virgin’s conception of YHWH in the events of 8th-century Judah, they are further explicated by the promises examined below, which are contained in chapters 52 and 54, the exilic/post-exilic strand of the book.
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;

he made me into a polished arrow
    and concealed me in his quiver.

He said to me, “You are my servant,
    Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”

But I said, “I have labored in vain;
    I have spent my strength for nothing at all.

Yet what is due me is in the Lord’s hand,
    and my reward is with my God.”

And now the Lord says—
    he who formed me in the womb to be his servant

    to bring Jacob back to him
    and gather Israel to himself,

    for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord.\textsuperscript{241}

This is not arrogance; it is the way the call of the Lord includes the particular way of carrying the contradiction of the people that is unique to Isaiah. Whatever the mysteries involved in that, it is the case that Isaiah’s first glimpses of the servant see the servant as a kind of enlarged version of himself. It is the sight of a renewed Jerusalem that purifies the vision.

It is too little observed that the most elaborate servant song, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is surrounded on either side by an exhortation to his mother. Both Is. 52 and 54 begin with imperatives for the woman (yes, the Woman) to mark that something incredible has taken place. The oracle names its recipient as Daughter Zion, Jerusalem, Holy City, the very human Mother of the Lord now returning from exile. The ruins of Jerusalem have been redeemed (v. 9), and in her “the Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (v. 10). Earlier, Isaiah described the way Eve’s punishment had

\textsuperscript{241} Is. 49:1-5, emphasis added.
endangered the mission of God to send salvation to earth and recall it to life (Is. 26:18). But here, Isaiah sees the Lord returning to the Daughter of Zion. The Virgin has conceived and has given birth to a Son, and when he returns to Zion, the ends of the earth see the Lord’s *salvation*. What Isaiah sees here is a Jerusalem, an Israel, that has fulfilled its vocation (*vocare*) to carry God’s call without contradiction. That contradiction had taken the form of Israel unable to do for itself what it had been called to do for the world. When God first sent Isaiah, it was to a city that had become “desolate” (1:7). His Jerusalem was full of people who were “ever hearing, but never understanding; ever seeing, but never perceiving” (6:9). Now, what the nations were not told, they will see; what have not heard, they will understand (52:15). Likewise, in Isaiah 54, “more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband” (54:1). The contradictions are contradicted, and Isaiah no longer has a vocation, except the vocation to be Israel, the faithful covenant partner of God and Mother of His Son. Shorn of the contradictions, the Word emerges clearly and distinctly, and Isaiah’s servant is no longer “I” but “He.”

“What is amazing about this song is how ancient it sounds to ears that have learned to hear the resonances. God’s king emerges with the Daughter Zion, his Mother, who makes of her Son a
sin offering. And yet, at the same time, it is different; here, there is the pathos of seeing this as a tragedy that implicates everything, including God. He is not a bright god but an ordinary human being, humble and unattractive, unmajestic. He is us, because Israel’s God is not more like kings than he is like the rest of us. Here is God, not as king but as all of us, God as all human being and hence as redeemer of all human being. The unassumed is unhealed; but the servant assumes everything. That comprehensiveness, that reach to the uttermost that is only possible if God becomes utterly human, is the source of the pathos in this story. It is the pathos of divine generosity once for all shutting the hungry mouths of the pagan deities. They hunger and are not satisfied; he suffers our wounds with us and yet the stability of his covenant is never fazed. And it is the pathos of divine meekness. He is not Saul but David, a man who behaves like lambs because he is so often in their company. His children suffer and he cries out like a mother in pain. The divine compassion on full display fills this story with everything that makes this not the pagan sacrifice. If this is YHWH’s authorized representative, he shows that God is humble, prodigal, all gift. Or, to give content to words Israel heard long before it understood them: The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenant love.

Israel, with all its contradictions, was the custodian of the secret possibility that God is nothing like the perpetually open mouths that fill the pagan pantheons. Israel’s partnership was the carrying of a Word to which everything in creation, even Israel, was a contradiction. But God’s unending pursuit of Israel to redeem her leads right here to Isaiah’s vision, where her Son refuses to answer violence with violence, and instead remains faithful unto death. Only a redeemed Israel can instruct her Son in the kind of wisdom that distinguishes this from child sacrifice. In child sacrifice, even as Israel would later revise it, the firstborn was redeemed at the price of some other contradiction of the divine Word, cast forth into the semantic confusion
Israel trusted one day God would unravel. He unravels it with the Word made flesh, placing his life at God’s disposal not for God but for the world, not only as partner but also as the partnership, as the covenant itself in flesh.

The contradictions in Israel prevent Isaiah from seeing that until he sees Daughter Zion, a fully human Daughter Zion as the perfect creaturely wisdom of God, the unitive gathering of created likeness and difference, and the analogy that makes the partnership of God with humans complete. Because the servant of the Lord has a mother, has this mother, he is concretized as this mother’s son. He is not us, or our noble aspirations, absolutized into some cosmic form, like some starry host. He is the Lord of hosts, the Servant of YHWH; he is the person he is, and that is guaranteed, as the Fathers of the Church agreed, by having this mother. Her flesh surrounds him like the pillars of the temple, or as the literary structure here in 2 Isaiah shows, and it is that flesh that makes him here, now, us as we are. But the question that leaves is, who is he? Rid of the contradictions, Isaiah gets a glimpse of divine humanity, i.e., that there could be a godman, and that he could only come from a renewed Israel. But the Old Testament closes with Israel still unrenewed. The Servant of the Lord, if he is to come, must have a mother, for the same reason that he must have Israel. Isaiah does not know who she is, though he does that know when she appears she will burst into song (Isaiah 54:1).
CHAPTER 4

MOTHER ZION

I can’t tell you how many times I have been brought to tears, just at the thought of my child experiencing hurt – that he might find it hard to know the truth of how wonderful he is. The thought of that, and that I can’t protect him from that is devastating.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
My spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
For he has regarded the humiliation of his handmaiden,
From this day all generations will call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
And holy is His Name.

It is in Mary’s song that we find the first statement, on her own lips, of her vocation. It is a song of deliverance, in which Mary explicitly places herself in the story of Israel’s liberation. Like so many before her, she sees God’s actions on her behalf as instances of his faithfulness to the covenant: “to Abraham and his children forever” (Lk 1:55). The song proclaims the mercy of God to lift up his downtrodden people and to overthrow those who have kept their knees to the necks of God’s beloved:

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

The context of the song is God’s fulfillment, so Mary sees it, of his covenant. She hymns a massive show of the divine strength, which would confound the proud even as it proves the Lord's faithfulness to Israel.

The Magnificat has, for good reason, often been compared to other songs of Israel's deliverance and vindication. The theme of the lifting up of the Lord's chosen against impossible odds is a centerpiece of Israel's faith:

The cords of death entangled me;  
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

The cords of the grave coiled around me;  
the snares of death confronted me.\textsuperscript{242}

Or:

He lifted me out of the slimy pit,  
out of the mud and mire;

he set my feet on a rock  
and gave me a firm place to stand.\textsuperscript{243}

Or:

He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes,  
with the princes of his people.\textsuperscript{244}

The last of these verses belongs to the Egyptian \textit{hallel}, the set of hymns sung on the eve of the

\textsuperscript{242} Ps 18:4-5.

\textsuperscript{243} Ps 40:2.

\textsuperscript{244} Ps 113:7-8.
Passover, perhaps the very hymn sung by Jesus on the night of his arrest.\textsuperscript{245} This cycle of hymns, comprised of Psalms 113-118, recounts God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt and faithful guidance and protection of them until they gather with the rest of the tribes at the Temple. To that story, Psalm 113 serves as an introduction. It begins with an exhortation to the ends of the earth that all should praise the Name of the Lord. In verse 5, the warrant for the exhortation appears: “who is like the Lord our God?” The singer celebrates the uniqueness of a God who, although he is seated on High, stoops low to look upon the heavens and the earth. He raises up the poor from the dust, and lifts up the needy from the ash heap, seating them with princes. This is the summary of all that will follow in the \textit{hallel}: God delivers his people from death and gives them a home, a city, and a Temple. Psalm 113’s second half makes sense as an epigraph to the story that follows; but unless all that was observed in the last chapter is remembered, the final verse will seem jarring and odd. “He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children.” Every year, at passover, the deliverance of God’s people from the death angel and the release of them to gather in worship (cf. Exod 8:1) is presented as the return of a barren woman to a home full of children.

For reasons that are probably obvious, Psalm 113 is often compared to the song of Hannah. Whether or not there is a direct literary relationship between them, 1 Sam 2:8 clearly resonates with vv. 7-8 of the Psalm. Verse 9 of the Psalm echoes the song of Hannah at verse 5: “the barren gives birth to seven.” Taken together, these two songs reveal a kind of identity: Hannah is Israel, and Israel is Hannah. Their stories are bound to one another: Hannah’s barrenness is wrapped up in the larger story of Israel’s mothers, and her miraculous fruitfulness

\textsuperscript{245} Mk 14:26 // Mt 26:30
is a sign of hope to the children of those who languished under the chaos of divided monarchy and exile. Just as Psalm 113 serves as the frontispiece for the long narrative that follows, Hannah’s song interprets the Samuel narrative as well as, in some sense, the entire history of the monarchy. Hannah’s song about being delivered from barrenness figures and is Israel’s story of the rise of David, the seventh son (cf. 1 Sam 2:5, “seven sons”).

As I labored to demonstrate in the last chapter, Israel comes to see her fulfillment of the divine vocation as an act of maternal fruitfulness. Just as importantly, their continuing struggle with failure of that vocation is repeatedly described as barrenness. These two images are pinned to Israel’s sense of its own history. The promise of a coming seed to Eve and to Abraham shapes every covenant hope into a hope for childbirth. In 4 Ezra 9, the prophet, while considering the destruction of Israel, looks to his side and sees a woman who tells him of her long-term barrenness. After 30 years of barrenness, the woman says, the Lord hears his “handmaid” and regards her “humilitatem” (v. 45) In Ezra’s conversation with the angel of the Lord in the following chapter, Ezra learns that “this woman, whom you saw [ . . . ] is Zion” (10:44). The birth that ends her long wait is the initiation of the worship of God in the promised land.

The echo in 4 Ezra also illuminates an oddity of Mary’s song. Like the weeping mother Zion, Mary is the “handmaid” of the Lord, and He looks upon her humiliation. That is, Mary sings the song of a woman delivered from barrenness, although she has never been barren. Indeed, she has been made ultra-fruitful by the grace of the Lord. Luke sharpens the point narratively by juxtaposing Mary to her elder cousin Elizabeth, “she who was called barren.” Luke wants us to see Mary as the opposite. In the Magnificat, crucially, Mary takes to herself a
barrenness that is not her own, for the sake of love for God, who is the object of the song. The song is an ecstasy of love for the God that delivered Israel, and a remembrance of his faithfulness to his friend Abraham, *kai to spermati autou*. At the same time it hints at what will be the act by which Mary partakes by choice in a barrenness that is not hers by nature. Abraham and “his seed” are a metonymy for Abraham’s act of faithfulness, the act by which he showed a greater love for God than for the promise God had made to him.

Nothing could be more important for what this chapter will propose: namely, that in Mary’s offering of the fruit of her womb to barren Israel, she takes an unimaginable barrenness to herself, a barrenness that is incalculably more than the judgment pronounced upon Eve. It is a barrenness, in the nature of the case, that no one could possibly take except they love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Positively, the offering she makes is of a value impossible to reckon; no one who valued anything in the least respect more than God could ever make it. In the barrenness of her offering of her son to the Lord, not as immolated victim but as a living sacrifice, she receives from the Lord’s hand double (and more) for sin. And yet, by binding herself to Israel, she binds Israel to herself as the Mothers of the Lord. In giving her Son to God, she makes possible the gift to Israel and the world. In willingly giving to God what Eve took,

246 Luther’s interpretation of the song as a paean of gratitude from Mary for her own salvation thus misses the entire point.

247 Note the singular dative in the Greek, cf. Gal 3:16.

248 Seeing Mary as a partner not only in the birth of the redeemer but in the suffering of both God and man also makes sense of one of the more common objections to holding Mary in any high regard at all, namely, the continued turn away from her on the part of Jesus in the gospels. This feature of the evangelists’ portrayal of the Mother of the Lord has been a sore spot at least since Augustine (*Tractates on John* 8.5, *vide infra*). If Mary is somehow indispensable to the economy of redemption, the objection runs, why is it that at every turn Jesus seems to emphasize or create separation from her? Even Newman, as we saw above, was tempted to think along such lines. But as the last chapter’s discussion of the prophet’s vocation made apparent, what this objection sees as a bug in the theory of coredemption is actually a feature. Not only does the denigration of Mary in the gospels not scuttle an understanding of Mary as co-redeemer; as will become clear in what follows, denigration and abandonment are the
she undoes the contradiction between God and humanity, allowing the Word of God to address the world clearly and without equivocation. The image of God comes free of the mire, and a living man (vivens homo) occupies the throne of the cosmos. God is like us, and we who are nothing like him are given over to the destiny the New Eve binds us to; our Mother has offered the human race (in the Son of Man) to God, and her offering is accepted, not because God is thirsty but because he loves the world.

I. Labor Pains and the Contractions of Israel’s History

According to Colossians 4:14, Luke is a physician by trade. As a writer, he shows himself to be an able historian. The events of Jesus’s life are everywhere placed into a context that breathes life into them and lets them resonate with the deep things of Israel’s long struggle with God. While each evangelist does this in his own way, Luke makes that long history present in the persons of Simeon and Anna, both of whom are waiting for the consolation of Israel. Regardless of whether Luke knew of them in fact, these two venerable elders enable Luke’s narrative reconstruction of the weariness of the time. For both of them, the Advent of Jesus is harbinger of a new day when God acts to fulfill the ancient promises and returns to Israel and to the world all that has been stolen from them — a day many must have feared might never arrive. For these faithful ancients, the birth of a child — of this child — signifies the turning of a great page. In Jesus, they discern the sign that the Lord (or his mother) promises in Isaiah 7:14. They, like Mary, see in this birth the promise that at long last, the curse that Eve bore, and that Israel bore a double portion of, was to be reversed.

basis of that understanding. Mary, that is, is Mother Zion, the righteous co-sufferer who answers the ancient search of God for a righteous partner who will offer Israel’s beloved son for the salvation of the earth.
A survey of the writings of the period vindicates Luke’s narrative reconstruction. The world in which Mary grew up was filled with expectancy for something to happen. Under the thumb of the Greeks and Romans, Israel stirred restlessly, and each spasm was imbued with apocalyptic significance. People on many sides of the Hasmonean revival of Solomon’s temple thought that history was coming to its crisis and that they were soon to be vindicated. Expectations ran high among many that soon would arrive the one who would bring all of these events to their denouement and reveal their meaning at last. To be sure, not all Jews were messianists, but those who were had a deep library of images and ideas (examined in the last chapter) with which to explain the paroxysms that dotted the more mundane experience of being an occupied people. But one particular image arises with astonishing regularity: labor pains. The fact that many were awaiting an actual birth may have made the idea even more irresistible, although the idea is more ubiquitous than the literal expectation. History was seizing up in contractions, and something enormous was immanent. She who was in labor was about to give birth. At least, so many hoped. Israel had writhed without birth before.

In 4 Ezra, as was mentioned above, events in Israel’s history are configured as the struggle of a woman with infertility and the death of her only child. The woman, who is Zion, gives birth after a long struggle with barrenness, as Hannah did. Intriguingly, the prophet learns, her childbirth represents the ratification of the covenant in Jerusalem by sacrifice. Jerusalem is born, that is, where sacrifices are offered to God on her altars. But at the moment when Israel should have been united completely to God, suddenly disaster overtook them; “when my son entered his wedding chamber, he fell down and died” (4Ez 10:1). Just as in Jeremiah, the entrance into exile is figured as a loss of the beloved child, so here is Zion weeping for her children, because they are no more.
In her lament, the woman refuses to return to her husband. Here as elsewhere, the loss of the child is a kind of barrenness. The prophet remonstrates with the woman, exhorting her to weep with the misfortune of Zion rather than her own misfortune (the parallel is ironic; the prophet does not know yet who she is). He also encourages her to trust in the faithfulness of God: “you will receive your son back in due time, and will be praised among women” (4 Ez 10:16). The scene ends with a transfiguration, as her countenance becomes brilliant “like lightning,” filling the prophet with fear of the lady. Then, suddenly, she vanishes, and in her place is a large and brilliant city.

In light of our previous discussion and present direction, there are a number of intriguing elements of this scene that deserve comment. First, the prophet promises her a kind of eschatological restoration of her son to her. It may mean that if she lives faithfully, she will join her son in the afterlife; more likely, the passage refers to the general resurrection. But in the same way that the death of the child overlaps with a kind of barrenness, the restoration seems to relate to an end of barrenness, another birth, this time without a husband. The prophet encourages the Lady to lay aside her troubles, “that the Lord may be merciful to you again” (cf. 9:45). The first demonstration of the Lord’s mercy to the Lady was the settling of Jerusalem and the worship of the Lord by gifts and offerings on the temple altar. The second act of mercy seems to be the return of the city witnessed here. There is a sense, then, in which the city is the woman, just as the angel says. But in another sense, the appearance of the city and its repopulation represents the rebirth of her son. And her cry and the trembling of the earth immediately preceding the reappearance of the city seem, in light of all that precedes, to be best understood as the pains of labor before the sudden rebirth takes place.
The lament also echoes the covenantal aspects of creation traced in the previous chapter. There, we pointed out that creation is described as a series of partnerships with God of increasing intensity until humans are born to be God’s images. The prophet reminds the woman (and it must be remembered that he is pointing out for her a reality that she understands better than he) that the earth, since the beginning, has “given her fruit, that is, man, to him who made her.” The earth has offered her choicest fruit to the Lord from the beginning as a response of praise and thanksgiving to the one who made her alive. The earth in some way sees itself as a partner with God in the fulfillment of his plan, and her suffering arises from the fact that death robs of her of the ability to be what she is called to be. The desired partner finds herself in need of deliverance from the mortal wound that afflicts her children. The lament is about how the entire covenantal structure of creation is threatened by the tyranny of death, exile, and barrenness over Zion.

Another image of the same lady (and the same pains) arises in the same period. In the Apocalypse, John the Seer lifts his eyes to heaven and sees a sign: “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.” Since the publication of the book, there have been debates over the identity of the woman. But debates over identity tend to overshadow the important resonances that the story has with its clearly intended context, the nexus of images and ideas in the Old Testament that we surveyed in the previous chapter. Whoever the woman is, it is clear that she is the mother of Judah’s anointed King. She is the gebirah, the Queen Mother at Zion, who gives birth to the King in Psalm 2. But in the Psalm, which was probably read at the coronations of Judah’s kings, the monarch is identified as the one begotten of God. This woman’s son is a son of God, and the son of God is

\[\text{249 Rev. 12:1}\]
this woman’s son, whoever they are.

Importantly, John sees the woman suffering the pains and groans of labor. Like others in the period who used this image, the pains precede the revelation of God’s anointed king, the rightful return of the kingdom to Israel, the exaltation of those who had been humbled and the renewal of the covenant. Micah had prophesied before the Josian purge that “Israel will be abandoned until she who is in labor bears a son.” The birth of Judean kings was seen as a renewal of the covenant God had made to make Sarah fertile. But Micah’s prophecy is not just that the son will be born but that he will gather “the rest of his brothers.” The woman in Revelation 12 bears a son whose father is the Lord. He is snatched up to the throne of his Father, and she is carried away and protected. But while she is carried away, she somehow receives other children, those on whom the Dragon makes his war. Her loss of her place and her loss of her Son somehow bring about that she has multitudes of other children. Her son, exalted, draws people to himself to become children of God, and they each become children of his mother.

The apocalyptic setting allows for a number of different themes to be woven dramatically into the scene. The woman is clothed with the sun, moon, and stars, recalling the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37, where Jacob is the sun, Rachel the moon, and the 12 brothers (and their tribes) are the stars. She occupies a place here as the hidden protagonist in the story of the patriarchs and their children, the pattern they did not know they were sketching out. She is the mystery behind God’s dealings with Abraham’s children, and she is the one who gives birth to the deliverer of Israel who rules the nations. In light of the evidence of the previous chapter along with that in 4 Ezra, it should be fairly clear that she is the woman Ezra sees in his

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Recall our discussion of the historical narrative of Israel found in chapter 10 of The Wisdom of Solomon, where Wisdom is seen to be the hidden protagonist of Israel’s calling and continued existence.
prophecy. But to set the point on even firmer ground, it is worth noting the narrative echoes between 4 Ezra and the second half of Revelation.

In 4 Ezra, the prophet marvels to see the suffering woman suddenly vanish and reappear as the great chosen city on the hill. “This woman,” he is told, “is Zion.” Although the drama takes place over a much longer block of story, the very same thing occurs in the last half of Revelation. The woman is carried away into the wilderness while the dragon makes war on all her children. The rest of the narrative is the “age” of the dragon’s war on her children, until her child demolishes the dragon at last. And the moment that the dragon is finally conquered, a city descends from heaven, a renewed Jerusalem, “prepared as a bride for her husband.” The twelve host that were her crown (Rev 12:1)\textsuperscript{251} are now the angelic guardians of each gate. The city of 4 Ezra appears here, wreathed with gems brilliant as stars, with no need of the sun or the moon. She is the dwelling place of the Lord Almighty with humanity, the place where the Edenic dream is realized. The woman disappears from the story, reappearing (as she does in 4 Ezra) as the city descended from heaven.

Revelation and 4 Ezra are so similar to the ancient myths that they seem like retellings of them. In the case of Revelation, as has already been pointed out, there are intentional echoes of Eden everywhere. The cosmologies and cosmogonies of Genesis are part of the symbolic universe of Revelation. Just as Genesis was likely written as a counter origin story to that of Babylon or other mythoi of the ancient near east, Revelation shows the eventual conquest of Israel and Israel’s God over that ancient rival: “fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great.” Just as in Genesis, the serpent is promised an eventual defeat, in Revelation, the woman and her Seed

\textsuperscript{251} Cf. the identification of angels in ancient Hebrew cosmology with stars, the “host.” See Barker 2012, 83 and Judges 5:20.
resume that ancient conflict. Just as Genesis positions the sun and the moon not as gods but as
divine viceroys over the earth, eventually having them bow to Joseph, Revelation ultimately
places them on the garment of the Queen of Heaven. The trajectory of that demotion is crucial to
understanding the way Revelation narrates the history of God with humanity. In the book’s first
chapter, the Seer points out the face of the one walking among the lampstands is brilliant like the
sun. The angel of chapter 10, likewise, has a face like the sun. And then, in chapter 12, the Lady
appears, clothed in the sun. Other figures in the drama have appeared, clothed in various
heavenly furniture. A sign of their dignity has been the likeness of their faces to the sun. And one
of their number, the one who appears between the lampstands, will eventually replace the sun
entirely. But between those two points of the narrative, the woman appears, clothed in the sun
and standing on the moon – the apexes of the created order, God’s two great lights, are the
fixtures of her clothing and the carpet her feet rest upon. Whoever she is, she is the highest being
in the book, except only for the one she bears. So, this woman, it would seem, is the woman.

Another sign of this priority is given in the presence of crowns in the book. The 4th
chapter of Revelation shows the 24 elders, perhaps the apostles and the patriarchs of the 12 tribes
of Israel, casting their crowns at the feet of the Lamb, who is crowned with so many crowns
(diademata polla – Rev 19:12). At the cries of the living creatures, the crowns leave the heads of
the elders, but the Woman of Revelation 12 is crowned with a crown that cannot be removed. If
it is remembered that stars, in ancient Hebrew cosmology, stand in for angelic host, it becomes
clear that the dignity of the woman can hardly be overstated.

And yet, she suffers the curse of Eve. Dramatized here are the pain of childbirth and the
ancient enmity between the woman and the serpent. She suffers not only the judgment upon Eve
but also the wrath of the dragon who threatens to devour her child the moment it is born. As was
pointed out in the last chapter, Zion (like Eve) pays double for her sins. Following the birth of the child, the serpent pursues her to destroy her, before God carries her into a place of preservation in the wilderness. The preservation recalls Hosea 2, when God promises to take Israel into the wilderness and “speak tenderly to her.” At the same time, Hosea’s prophecy is a reinterpretation of the desolation of invasion and exile, when “I will make her land like a wilderness” (Hos. 2:3) and “she will pursue her lovers but not overtake them” (2:7). Just as the prophets of exile grappled with the Lord’s promise of faithfulness in light of the devastation that came upon them, so the Woman of Revelation 12, dignified beyond all creation, nevertheless suffers the consequences of the ancient rebellion. As Israel (and yet different from them), she seems to be suffering what she does not deserve. She appears here, brighter than the sun and wreathed in the stars, possessed of a holiness that can only be described accurately by reference to the angels of heaven and her own divine son. And yet she suffers the attacks of the serpent on her and her children, the pain of childbirth, and the indignity of exile.

Worse yet, she undergoes separation from her son. The dragon lies in wait at her labor, with every intention of devouring the child once it is born. God protects both mother and child, and the dragon fails in the attempt. But while the mother endures the loss of home in the wilderness, the child is snatched up to God. She not only endures exile but she loses her son. There is the joy of divine protection and miraculous birth, but there is also the alienation that in order for her son to be the Son of God, she must deliver him up to God. To the mother, there is one precise sense, and one moment, in which it makes no difference whether God or the dragon is victorious. She loses her son either way. As the last chapter made clear, this is the central problem of Israel’s history: the cost of this partnership with God is the suffering of more than is one’s due. Revelation 12 pictures Zion as the woman who gives birth to the begotten of God only
to lose him. And yet it is in that loss that she who is in labor experiences the miraculous fruitfulness of God – bearing innumerable multitudes of children whose destiny is eternal life.

These two apocalyptic texts, probably written within a hundred years of each other, show that the question of fruitfulness, of whether she who is in labor was about to give birth, was a live and important question to at least a number of Jews in the period. Both texts understand Zion as a mother in the pains of labor, and both see the vulnerability of the mother and of the child she bears. Both texts are inflected by the memories of exile, encapsulated in Jeremiah’s moving vision of Rachel weeping for her lost children, of of Israel giving birth to the wind, of Eve losing one of her sons to the ancestor of the Canaanites. They express the anxiety of barrenness as a live one not just in the time of the prophets or even in the mists of a pagan past but in the time of Jesus. At the moment when Gabriel appeared to Mary, he spoke to an anxiety to which the Lord’s people had been giving voice for ages.

Luke takes special care to observe just how many old people are to be found near the events of Jesus’s nativity. Zechariah and Elizabeth are both very old (Lk 1:7) and childless, because Elizabeth is barren. Both her celebration and Zechariah’s doubt reveal that the passage of time had gotten to them: “I am an old man.” Likewise, when they present the infant Jesus in the temple, Luke tells us of Simeon, who is “waiting for the consolation of Israel” and seems to be old enough that there is reason to doubt that he’ll see what he awaits. Anna the prophetess, who is eighty-four, also celebrates and commends Jesus to all who were “awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.” The presence in the infancy narrative of aged Israelites reveals the anxiety that explains Elizabeth’s response when Mary arrives to care for her: “blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” The first half of the blessing recalls the
exultations pronounced when Jael and Judith delivered Israel from evil, while the second is a literal echo of Deuteronomy 28’s blessings upon those who obey the Lord:

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in obedience to him. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you. The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you.

(Deut. 28:1-11)

As it is a text (probably) finalized in or around the exile, Deuteronomy’s litany of blessings and curses was loaded with expectation about the end of Israel’s long barrenness, and it is clear that Elizabeth sees Mary’s arrival as a turn of the page.

But how can the fruitfulness of Mary have any effect on the barren womb of her people? Granted, God has made her fruitful. What good does that do for anyone else?

252 Judges 5 and Judith 13
II. A Sword Will Pierce Your Own Soul: The Presentation as Marian Paradigm

Mary’s participation in the contradiction that Simeon predicts (καὶ . . . δὲ ἀντίς) puts her right at the center of the redemptive act and the costs it will impose. The setting of Simeon’s prophecy has been a favorite topos of mariologists since at least the Middle Ages. As we have seen already, the feast of Candlemas, a popular feast from the 4\textsuperscript{th} century at the latest, became a major holiday in the high Middle Ages, as Mary’s cooperation in the work of her Son became a focus for a number of important theologians and a touchstone of popular piety.\textsuperscript{253} But Luke’s description of the events that became the basis for the feast is strange. Here, Joseph and Mary bring the infant Jesus to the Temple to present him there “when the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses.” The Law did require of women to come to the Temple at their purification, but no law required the presentation of the Son. Nor does that presentation seem to be common practice. The Scripture Luke cites in explanation of the presentation of Jesus is not Leviticus 12, where the purification after childbirth is described, but (probably) Exod. 13:2, which describes the redemption of the firstborn son. A number of scholars have tried to see in Luke’s narrative evidence that the two rites pidyot haben and qorban yoledet were performed together in the time of Jesus or shortly after.\textsuperscript{254} Others have seen in it evidence that Luke is actually not that familiar with Jewish ritual.\textsuperscript{255} But the evangelist clearly evokes both rites here, as well as (perhaps) the presentation of Samuel by Hannah at the Shiloh sanctuary. These rites,


and especially Luke’s blending of them together, have caused scholars some headaches, but they have proven rich fare for theologians who discern Luke’s placement of Mary and her son squarely within the nexus of hopes and visions pointed out in this and the previous chapter.

a) Every Firstborn Belongs to Me

The redemption rite, as was argued in the previous chapter, seems to recall the akedah, when Abraham encountered the God of the universe and found him to be different from the gods Abraham had known of in the land of the Chaldeans. It also explicitly recalls God’s sparing of the firstborn of his people in the first Passover. The rite’s history and prehistory in Israel are difficult to reconstruct. The dominant position, at least until Jon Levenson, held that the Israelites had rejected child sacrifice through and through. But in Levenson’s wake, a growing number of voices have discerned in the Hebrew Scriptures a more complicated attitude. Neither side of the debate would deny that by the time of the later prophets, there is universal rejection of the practice and wide association of it with Israel’s flirtations with idolatry. But those voices may represent, as Barker thinks Judean rebukes of the Asherah cult do, a change of attitudes rather than of actions. Either way, it is that history, and the tensions within it, that finally make sense of the odd way that Luke characterizes the redemption rite as Mary and Joseph perform it, after a fashion anyway, in Luke 2.

Barker and Levenson do a good job of cataloguing the evidence for the fact that child sacrifice took place in the deep past of Abraham’s family. One version of the command to bring the firstborn to God seemingly places the firstborn human child in a list of other offerings that are obviously meant to be sacrificed. The Chronicler seems to suggest that the monarchs of the

[256 Ex. 13:2.]
northern kingdom sacrificed children on the altars in the high places. But those altars were not only altars to the gods of the nations but also to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Deuteronomist seems to project (or, from the angle of the book’s completion, to recall) a time when Israel would worship YHWH on the high places as the pagans worshipped their gods: 257 “you must not worship the Lord your God in their way.” The Deuteronomist’s dark warning agrees with Barker’s characterization of practices like these. They may well have been part of Israel’s perennial temptation to idolatry; but it is also likely true that in some cases, the opponents of worship like that forbidden in Deuteronomy simply call it Ba’al-worship because they take child sacrifice to be idolatrous no matter whose name is on the worshipper’s lips.

Micah voices a question that cannot have been unique to him: “Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” 258 He clearly intends a negative answer, but the pathos would not be there if others did not think differently. And both Ezekiel and Jeremiah seem to struggle with an idea that cannot have come from nowhere – namely, that God had at some point seemed to command child sacrifice. Jeremiah has God not only claiming never to have commanded it but clarifying that never “did such a thing enter my mind.” 259 Ezekiel seems to suggest otherwise, arguing that God commanded (or might be taken to have commanded) that the firstborn children be brought to him as part of a scheme to defile the Israelites and show the true character of their hearts. It seems fairly clear, then, that at least

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257 Deut. 12:1-4; 29-31
258 Mic 6:7.
259 Jer. 19:5. Levenson is incisive here: “That YHWH did not command his people to offer sacrifices to his great rival Ba’al need hardly have been mentioned.” In the case of the sacrifices, however, it seems that Jeremiah is anxious not only to show that God forbids it but that it was never otherwise. Levenson sees the prophet protesting too much, here (Levenson 1993, p. 4).
some Israelites and Judeans thought God had indeed commanded the offering of their children to God and that they did it.

It is also worth mentioning that at one point, at least, they were correct: “take your son, your only son, whom you love--Isaac--and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”\textsuperscript{260} The parallels of this story with the denunciations of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are striking. It is not just that he is to sacrifice the child. He is to go up to the high place to do it – the very high place on which the Temple would eventually stand (cf. 2 Chron. 3:1). The sacrifice actually occurs in some variants of the story, and it may appear in an earlier version of the canonical one. As we pointed out in the previous chapter, the patriarch receives approval from God “because you have done this, and have not withheld your only son from me” (Gen. 22:16). In that same story, Abraham tells the servants that he and Isaac will go worship and that he (Abraham) will return to them.

Finally, in what is surely a bizarre passage in a canon that raises such a cry against it, child sacrifice seemingly proves effective for King Mesha of Moab as he attempts to stave off sure disaster at the hands of Joram. After failing, even with 700 of his best men, to turn the Israelites back in their attack, he sacrifices his son on the walls of the city, and a fury breaks out against the Israelites, who then withdraw, with their own mission unaccomplished. The slaughter of the firstborn is effective in the deliverance of the city somehow, and the Kings writer, for all his disapproval of the practice, does not dispute that it works, or at least that it seems to. Nor does he give us any clue as to why.

\textsuperscript{260} Gen. 22:2.
The opponents of this practice in Israel accuse those who offer their children to God of treating God like one of the deities of the nations. And if there is one consistent theme in Israel’s dealings with God it is that Israel’s God is not like the gods of the nations:

The Lord will vindicate his people and relent concerning his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free. He will say: “Now where are their gods, the rock they took refuge in, the gods who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up to help you! Let them give you shelter! “See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand."261

The Hebrew Bible holds idolatry to be the sin that begets all other sins.262 Debates about henotheism vs. monotheism notwithstanding, if there is one thing that every stream of the Hebrew Bible agrees upon it is the uniqueness, the eminence, the incomparability of YHWH. He is the nonpareil. For the Deuteronomists, this is why it matters little whether one worships the gods of the nations alongside YHWH or instead of him. And to worship him out of accordance

261 Deut. 32:36-39

262 Thus, the Decalogue begins with a command to worship YHWH only. Nebuchadnezzar’s refusal to honor YHWH results in him acting the part of a beast. The worship of the gods of the nations, over and over again, leads to behavior like that of the other nations. It is on this tradition that Paul meditates when he points out that in Rom. 1:21ff that idolatry has led people into every kind of immorality and impurity.
with the Torah is no better than idolatry,²⁶³ because it is to treat him as if he were one of the gods. The anti-pagan polemics of the Old Testament emphasize the independence of YHWH from the world. Meanwhile, the gods of the nations are vicious and vulnerable. The writer of Bel and the Dragon hilariously mocks the Babylonians for thinking that their gods eat and drink their sacrifices.²⁶⁴ The ancient epic Atrakhasis corroborates the Deuteronomist’s view of the gods:

The Annunaki, the great gods,
were sitting in thirst and hunger,

[ . . . ]

Like sheep, they filled the trough,
Their lips were feverishly thirsty,
They were suffering cramps from hunger,

[ . . . ]

[The gods sniffed] the smell,
they gathered like flies over the offering

After they had eaten the offering,
Nintu arose to complain against all of them.

The gods have hunger and thirst. They have needs, and their ways are like our ways.²⁶⁵ Sacrifice, on this view, denotes an economic commerce between gods and men, a relationship in which the flourishing of the gods depends upon the toil of human beings, in which their satiety depends upon our loss. The freedom of Israel’s God, on the other hand, means that nothing his people offer him adds to him. There is no footing on which one might base any economy with Him.

²⁶³ Lev. 26:30, 2 Kings 16:4, 1 Kings 11:11, and, of course, Jer. 32:35.

²⁶⁴ Bel and the Dragon, vv. 1-20.

²⁶⁵ Atrakhasis, incipit. Cf. Is. 55:8-9
As David Bentley Hart argues compellingly, it is this economy that the God of Israel completely rejects: “I have no need of a bull from your stall, or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine [. . .] the world is mine and everything that is in it.”266 The myths of the ANE position the gods as more powerful than us but still vulnerable, possessed of greater abundance but still needy. And this need poisons the relationship that God wants with his people: “the sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit.”267 The cornerstone of the biblical economy of sacrifice is that what God asks from us fulfills no need in himself. As the Israelite brings her offering to God, the act of bringing, and her gift, are no longer merely the conditions of the sacrifice’s possibility. They are the sacrifice itself, because she does not enrich God in any way. The substance, the matter of livestock, of grain, of money, is not the site of commerce but of communion; as Hart observes it, the core concept of the Old Testament sacrificial infrastructure is that of qurban, “a drawing nigh, an approach in love to a God who graciously approaches his people in love.”268 Each offering, however small, can be the place where Israel meets God, precisely because the world already belongs completely to him. And no offering, however large, curries favor with a God whose relationship to everything is one of sustaining love. In the sacrifice, there is nothing to gain but one’s own participation in the love by which God holds everything into existence.

The problem of worshipping God as if he were one of the deities of the pagans is precisely that this gratuity and generosity is undermined. The worshipper in commerce with God

266 Ps. 50:9-10, 12


268 Ibid., III.2.i., 350.
owes a debt and can pay it by the terms already fixed. That debt’s terms are fixed by the medium of exchange, and as such have no necessary relationship to anything outside of the exchange. The owed bull can be given in gratitude or in indifference. The obligation is contracted, and it is paid. But for God, no payment is required, because no contract can be made – nothing can be given, in that sense, to the one from whom it all comes and to whom it all owes its own existence. Rather, it is the heart that recognizes the source of all things, the gratuity of Israel’s own existence in that she, like all creation, was called ex nihilo to stand before God as not-God but God-given and God-loved. This precarious position - God is the one who is, and Israel is as one who is not - is nevertheless guaranteed by the God who neither hungers nor thirsts, neither slumbers nor sleeps. God’s ways are higher than ours, and for precisely that reason, we are summoned:

Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk,
without money and without cost.269

Everything we offer to God is returned in a kind of excess that overwhelms and multiplies any economic exchange except for that of God’s love for Israel, a perfect and unmovable excess that is related, as Hart rightly notices, is “simply another way of speaking of God’s apatheia”:

in either case, I mean the utter fullness of God's joy, the perfect boundlessness of his love, glory, beauty, wisdom, and being, his everlasting ing immunity to every limitation, finite determination, force of change, peril, sorrow, or need.270

This apatheia, for Hart, shows itself most clearly in the resurrection of Christ, the Passover


Lamb. But it is present even in the sacrifice itself, as the gift becomes the life of the dead tribe of Levites, who are first in the Lord’s long chain of redemptions for the firstborn. The symbolic grammar of the sacrificial structure, then, is one of redemption, where Isaac is placed on the altar and yet returns home with Abraham, to whom he is promised.

The history of the Levites intersects the very history spoken of here; the reason the five-shekel payment in the redemption rite is given to them is that they take the place, permanently, of the firstborn. The Levites are the ram in the thicket for the children of Israel. As such, although they are not immolated, they do perform what, in Israel’s terms, is a kind of liturgical death. God’s history with Israel, from Genesis on, is narrated as a demonstration of his ability to bring life out of death, good from evil, order and beauty from the primordial chaos that infects the fresh-created cosmos. That ability appears, over and over again, as the opposition of dry ground to floodwater. The third day brings earth out of the flood. Noah’s family is preserved in the ark until dry ground appears again and is given to them. Moses and his people pass through the sea on dry ground, as the waters part again. They do so still another time as Joshua leads the people across the Jordan River. And every tribe of Israel is promised its own portion of a land flowing with milk and honey. That land is the theater of Israel’s prosperity — the condition of possibility for livestock, farming, childbearing, culture-building, and even worship. Land is the first and basic fulfillment of God’s promises to his people, and it is the basis of his walk with them. It is life, and the loss of it is death. The judgment of Adam, which condemns him to death, also removes him from his land. Likewise, when Cain encounters the judgment of the God who will demand life for life, the judgment is exile. Conversely, when God wishes to communicate to

271 Numbers 3:12-13: “Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine.”

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Ezekiel’s plan to bring his people home, the first vision is that of a general resurrection. Exile, life without land, is a living death. And so it is not insignificant that the priestly class has no portion. In the symbolic universe of the Hebrew Bible, it makes little difference (not no difference) whether “belongs to me” refers directly to immediate immolation or the offering of temple service. Death pervades the reality of those who have no portion.

So it is remarkable that in the sacrifices, the Lord’s portion goes to the Levites:

The The Levitical priests—indeed, the whole tribe of Levi—are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the food offerings presented to the Lord, for that is their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their fellow Israelites; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them.

This is the share due the priests from the people who sacrifice a bull or a sheep: the shoulder, the internal organs and the meat from the head. You are to give them the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, for the Lord your God has chosen them and their descendants out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the Lord’s name always.\(^{272}\)

The language that describes the Levites is one of death, exile, and even reprobation: “no allotment or inheritance with Israel.” They live in exile; as such, the Lord is their inheritance, and his portion goes to them. His portion, as it happens, is the best, the choicest, the firstfruits. The Lord, who has no need of any of these things, shares them with those in Israel who are both a living reminder of the time when Israel were foreigners in Egypt and living prophecies of the time when Israel will be exiles again.\(^{273}\) To belong to the Lord, as the psalmists show over and over again, is to face death and to be delivered.\(^{274}\) The Levites perform a kind of death in Israel,

\(^{272}\) Deut. 18:3-5.

\(^{273}\) Deuteronomy, of course, positions itself as a book looking forward at the history of Israel. It is likely, of course, that the book reaches final form during the exile, and is as much a look back on exile as it is on Egypt. In either case, the point is the same.

\(^{274}\) Ps. 40:1-2, et al.
and yet God pours life, and life abundantly, out into their laps. In the Levites, God establishes a class of permanently vulnerable people, who live at the point of the angel’s sword, that which drove Adam and his children into wandering and waste, and in that inherited exile they are given the richest of God’s gifts. He who has no need to be kept alive instead gives his life to the vulnerable and the poor. And the donation at the Temple is poured back into the laps of those who, according to the promises made to their ancestors, are excommunicated and permanently separated children. There, they meet the fatness of God’s grace, the richness of an inexhaustible mercy, all gift, which offers life to his people and delights in rescuing those who have no other portion but him. In the sacrificial liturgies given to Israel, God gives life and receives only the sacrifices of praise and life shared with those who have no means to acquire it.

As Hart correctly argues, the conflict in the prophetic texts of later history is not between sacrifice and no sacrifice; it is between an order of sacrifice that enters into an economy of exchange with God and one that recognizes God is one like no other. His love, his gift, waits on nothing to move it; like him, it simply is. That life is a self-effusive good; it flows into all things because it wills to do so and nothing can obstruct it: in Dante’s lovely phrase, “vuolsi così colà dove si puote ciò che si vuole, as Dante would one day put it.”275 For that reason, the Lord’s portion goes to those who have no portion. The sacrifice, then, is the place where Israel must not appear empty-handed, even as there is nothing she can bring. The act, the gift, is valuable precisely in that it is useless; it is a sacrifice of praise. At bottom, every offering in Israel is a thank offering; and insofar as God pours the material of the offering back into the laps of those who have nothing, every Israelite offering not only brings the worshipper to God but also unites

275 “It is willed where there is power to match the will.” Inferno, III.95-96
the tribes. It gathers the whole people into an assembly, a *qurban*, in which God dwells with people and they with him. The offering brings the dead to life, redeems the poor, and gathers the world before the living God. Israel’s God commands redemption of the firstborn, and indirectly, of the Levites, because he does not hunger and thirst. He commands that Isaac return with Abraham because he is the resurrection, the God of the living. His covenant is with Israel and all of her children, because he needs no help, really no thing at all, to be the living God.

What’s missing from Hart’s account of sacrifice, however, is a thick account of the “exclusionary” moment in the sacrifice. Granted, in other words, that God gains nothing from sacrifice, and that the only true sacrifice is the sacrifice of praise: does the sacrificial economy itself have no actual meaning? One can imagine a restorationist, or the Jews after 70AD, taking this view in a completely different direction. Hart maintains the issue is not a choice between sacrifices and no sacrifices but rather one between two different orders of sacrifice, and two different sorts of deity thereby discovered. But what is not as clear is why there are sacrifices of praise, rather than, say, sacrifices of praise. What’s necessary about sacrifice? If God does not need our offerings, why is it that “no one is to appear before me empty-handed?”

Alongside that question goes another: why are animals not redeemed? The chain of redemptions in Israel’s sacrifice does end somewhere; the animals are not, in the end, redeemed. The first of every livestock to open the womb is slaughtered, and the priests perform an unceasing liturgy of immolation. Violence does not cease to be violence if it is performed upon animals, and yet, while God redeems human lives (Gen. 22:12), he pretty clearly gives the

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276 Ex. 23:15, Deut. 16:16-17
animals over to be slaughtered (Gen. 22:13, cf. Gen. 3:21). To be sure, the view of the world pretty consistently espoused in the Hebrew Bible is one in which humans are at the apex; they are the creatures for whose sake the rest of the world exists. But the God who lovingly holds humans in existence also lovingly holds the animal creation. The one who created humans nevertheless says of the non-human creation, “it is good” (Gen. 1:26). The redemption of the firstborn shows that God is not thirsty for human blood; but Hart’s claims on that score prove too much. God is not thirsty for anything, and yet the animals die in droves, not (only) for food but for fellowship. Why?

Part of the difficulty here is that Israel’s sacrificial system is about communion with God, and it will therefore always overdetermine attempts to theorize well about it. Theological accounts, at best, are synthetic presentations of the different notes in the cultus and attempts to say how they mean what they mean together. The difficulty is analogous, I think, to that found when working with theories of how the crucifixion of Jesus makes us right with God. The atonement is capacious. It reconciles the wayward human race and the whole of creation with the original intention of God for union and communion. Whatever we say about that, we should always expect our words to fall short. Still, Israel’s sacrifices take up an enormous part of the deposit of faith, and theology must have something to say about them. It is no great critique of Hart to say that his account is incomplete. We must now try to fill in the picture, and to do this we have to look for a second time at the catalogue of Levenson and Barker.

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277 Cf. the section in Nature’s Motherhood about the problem of animal death.

278 The providential care for animals makes sense of what might otherwise be a strange rebuke in Jonah 4:11: “should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”
In the last chapter, we analyzed the *akedah* along these lines. There, it was suggested that the sacrificial system occupies a pedagogical role in the Lord’s self-introduction to Abraham and his children. God reveals himself as what properly goes by the name “God” by bringing Abraham (and his children) to the brink of the act by which they had worshipped the gods. By pulling back the knife at the last second, he shows in what way he is not what the pagans say he is. There is a sense in which that answer may satisfy, especially for those who consider the difficulty of securing reference, which, since that difficulty bedevils even speakers of the same natural language, obviously creates extreme challenges in the case of Creator-creature communication. But the answer, if it solves one problem, creates another. Why is that the vocabulary in which God had to work in order to speak the language of the people? Additionally, to what end did God work that way? Why is it crucial for God to be revealed to humans in the first place? And how did it come to be that the practices God detests were the norm in the world?

Moreover, what is the sacrifice *doing*? Why, that is, can it not merely be that the sacrifice, once understood, becomes unnecessary? An analogy for the proposal of the previous chapter is that of translation, or, more nearly, a Lewisian Transposition, communicating the greater thing in the language of the lesser, revealing his difference to Abraham by assuming the language of likeness. But once translation has been made possible, why must we keep speaking in the new language? That is, again, if God needs nothing, why is it that “no one is to appear before me

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279 About which, more in ch. 5.

280 About which, more in ch. 4.

empty-handed?"

We can press toward an answer by examining the pedagogical role more thoroughly. The Old Testament abounds with pedagogical language. The Psalmist writes “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes.”\(^{282}\) Isaiah exclaims, “when the earth experiences your judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.”\(^{283}\) But the purpose of pedagogy, in biblical thought, is not merely to bring about assent to certain true propositions. It is halakhic, meant to create a form of life and way of being in the world. When the Psalmist says “teach me your ways,” it is “so that I may walk in truth.”\(^{284}\) But in Israel, divine pedagogy is about knowing the Lord. To know that God is different from the other gods is to embrace a way of life that is peculiar among the nations of the earth. To be ignorant of that knowledge is to walk as the nations walk, vainly. Obstacles to that knowledge are not to be taken lightly.

There are three main types of obstacles to contend with here. The first is ignorance, which is the total state of things for the nations and for Abraham prior to his encounter with God. After Abraham meets God, there is a changing stasis between knowledge and ignorance; Abraham sees God but through a glass darkly. He remains partially ignorant of the Lord and his ways. God narrates his behavior throughout the history of Israel along this axis: “then you/they will know that I am the Lord.” There is a sense in which this is an invincible problem for creatures under sin. The remedy for ignorance of God is redemption in an epistemic key, i.e., revelation. The second obstacle is amnesia. Israel receives repeated warnings about forgetting:

\(^{282}\) Ps. 119:71.


\(^{284}\) Ps. 86:11
they are to remember their slavery, the covenant, the benefits of their friendship with God. These commands reduce to one, ultimately: a command to remember God. The remedy, then, to forgetfulness, is commemoration, a calling to mind individually or collectively of the things Israel is commanded to hold in remembrance. The third obstacle is the set of vices whose intellectual or noetic effects predispose Israel to holding onto ignorance or forgetting what they know. Tracing out the network of relationships between the suite of vices to which a people can be disposed and their effects on ignorance and amnesia is long work, but at this point, we are only interested in understanding the formal shape a remedy might take.

The remedy in this case has to be moral, a reordering of the loves and desires of God’s people. The Old Testament preserves this effort by God to win the love of Israel, by delivering them from evil, by providing for them, by teaching them, and by occasionally punishing them. The moral vision of the Old Testament is complex, but it is also clear that God relates Israel’s failure to know and hear him to a failure to know and love his ways. Amos attributes a “famine of the Word of the Lord” to Israel’s failure to do justice. Micah and Isaiah both attribute Israel’s failure to know the Lord to a failure to love him. Perhaps the most frightening version of this phenomenon, however, is described in the book of Ezekiel:

Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me. Then the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all? Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: When any of the Israelites set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their

285 Deut 15:15
286 2 Kings 17:38
287 Psalm 103:1
288 Amos 8:11
faces and then go to a prophet, I the Lord will answer them myself in keeping with their great idolatry. I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.”

The turn towards the idols creates a situation where the Israelites are unable to discern the voice of the Lord. Even the sacrificial economy is afflicted with contrariety. As we have pointed out, it seems that many in Israel in Judah, up until the exile, continued the practice of sacrificing their children to the Lord, many apparently thinking it was the Lord’s will. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel have to deal with this confusion.

Jeremiah simply insists that Judah has gotten everything wrong. The command that Judah should sacrifice its children never entered into God’s mind. It is a thing that should never have been done in Israel or Judah. For Jeremiah, there is no question of someone worshipping God in this way; he gives no consideration to the possibility that anyone could offer a child to YHWH, though we know that such things seem to have happened. Rather, for Jeremiah, the act itself is pagan. To offer a child is to worship Molech. As Levenson notes, it hardly needs to be said that God did not command worship to Molech; the vehemence of Jeremiah’s rebuke, and the tone of the triple renunciation, suggests something else might be in view – namely, what Barker calls a change in attitude about something that had happened for a long time before the Josian reforms, reforms that Jeremiah clearly supports.

Levenson thinks that Ezekiel differs from Jeremiah on whether God has ever allowed children to be sacrificed to him. For him, Israel’s deceived blunder into child sacrifice was part

289 Ezekiel 14:1-5
290 Barker 2015, pp. 5-75
291 Levenson 1993, pp. 5-7.
of an elaborate plot by God to judge Israel for its deep-seated love of the ways and gods of the nations. God allows Israel to suspect that child sacrifice might be an acceptable way to worship him precisely because they are, in their heart of hearts, still pagans. Ezekiel 20 sets up the problem this way: after delivering Israel from Egypt God realizes that their hearts are still perverse; in too many ways, they resemble the nations that God has judged on their behalf – both the pagans in Egypt and the nations that are to be driven out before them as they enter the land of promise. Although God sets them free from oppression and proves faithful to the promises he made to Israel’s ancestors, they nevertheless turn away from him and “desecrate” his sabbaths.

“They did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt” (v. 8). To let them pass without judgment while doing the very things God judges in the nations would be unfitting, while to execute the judgment they deserve would undermine his promise. To be faithful to Israel, God must appear to break faith with the world. To keep faith with the world, he would have to abandon the promise to his friend, Abraham, which would then also break faith with the world: “for the sake of my name, I brought them out of Egypt. I did it to keep my name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites.”

292 Ezek. 20:13, 21

293 This profanation dilemma recalls a similar dilemma in Book 2 of Anselm’s Cur Deus Homo, where the Bishop of Canterbury points out the obstacle that sin presents for God. Rational creatures exist, Anselm argues, to know and choose [i.e., love] the highest good and be blessedly happy in God (CDH 2.1). Sin has created a problem in that they are now doomed to die, since God also cannot accept a sinner without that sinner’s making restitution, since then God makes no difference between sin and righteousness (CDH 1.12). As Anselm sees it, this constitutes something of a divine dilemma for God, since it is supremely unfitting that God, the Creator, should begin with an end in mine and have his plan frustrated by the powers of the creature (CDH 2.4). In a position that virtually all of his scholastic successors would reject, then, Anselm argues that a) God must bring humanity to beatitude, and b) it must happen by way of the Incarnation. Only by the Incarnation can God restore human beings to friendship with him, which he must do, given his initial creative intention. Anselm has rightly grasped the logic of covenant, in my view, not because the creature has any “claim” on God but because God, having purposed something for the creature, has a “claim” on Himself.
Thus, Ezekiel says, God gave them laws that were not good: “I defiled them through their gifts—the sacrifice of every firstborn—that I might fill them with horror so they would know that I am the Lord’” (Ezek. 20:26). This text is among the most astonishing in the Old Testament. For at least a few readers, Levenson among them, it has suggested that God at some point in the past instructed the Israelites to offer their firstborn children to him. Somewhere, in the prehistory of the Torah as Israel finally received and canonized it, the children of Abraham were commanded to offer their children on altars to the Lord. As Levenson points out, taken together with what seems to be a bit of protesting too much in Jeremiah’s denunciations of the Molech cult, Ezekiel strongly suggests that at least some of the people in living memory of the generation that went into exile thought that child sacrifice in the worship of Israel’s God was mandated or, at least, licit.294

Certainly, this idea is troubling – or would be for Josiah, for Jeremiah, and for a number of the later prophets. Historically, the conclusion seems unavoidable that many in both Israel and Judah sacrificed their children to the gods. And both Barker and Levenson make a compelling case that many thought that this was the will of God. What is lacking is evidence that, at the time of the exile, such people had good reasons to think it.295 The question of whether in history Israel and Judah offered their children to God can and should be distinguished from the question of what reality is named by Ezekiel’s reference to “laws that were not good.” After all, even Paul

294 Levenson 1993, pp. 4-8.

295 Warranting this claim would be a discussion about textual traditions present at the time of exile or at the time Ezekiel was written. The problem may be that Ezekiel, like the other texts in Israel, underwent revisions and redactions. Barker’s claim about the turbaned angel in Ezekiel, for example. These texts post-date Josiah, But did they go through a purge?
makes the point that at least in some ways, the Torah is not good. That there was a bad law that resulted in child sacrifice doesn’t mean child sacrifice was commanded.

Ezekiel 20 points to God’s intent to defile Israel by allowing them to think he desired children to be sacrificed to him. But Levenson’s reading, asserting that it is because the Lord commanded sacrifice at some point, does not quite make it out of the chapter home and dry. While it has some things to commend it, the matter seems more complicated. In verse 31, for example, the prophet seems to take the gifts to be explicitly offered to idols:

Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Will you defile yourselves the way your ancestors did and lust after their vile images? When you offer your gifts—the sacrifice of your children in the fire—you continue to defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. Am I to let you inquire of me, you Israelites? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will not let you inquire of me.

Levenson deals with the problem by saying that the sacrifice envisioned in v. 26 and that found in v. 30 and 31 are just different sacrifices. This reading seems implausible on the basis of a plain reading of the text. The prophet identifies the idolatrous child sacrifice he is rebuking with what was done back in the days of the “bad laws.” The sacrifice mentioned in v. 26 and 30-31 seem like they must be the same one, and it is implausible that Ezekiel thinks idolatry was ever commanded by God. Another interpretation of the “bad laws” appears in Origen. For him, the “statutes that were not good” (v. 25) are nothing more than the “the covenant of death, printed in

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296 Rom. 7:10
297 Ezek. 20:30-31
298 I have been helped immensely in discussions with my friend, Brendan Case, who includes an extended discussion of the problem of child sacrifice in his upcoming book, The Accountable Animal. That discussion cites the previous chapter of this work, on the pedagogical role of the Akedah. He and I disagree somewhat about how the “defiling” works in Ezekiel, about what Ezekiel claims God to have commanded, and about what Israel did.
stone letters, and the ministry of condemnation.” That is, the Torah as interpreted without divine guidance makes interpretations like that of the Israelites who sacrificed their firstborn to YHWH inevitable. But what is lacking from Origen’s discussion is how the Torah could possibly bring it about that the Israelites defiled themselves by sacrificing their children to idols. It is hard to imagine how the Torah, even if it is the ministry of death (ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου), could be the explanation of behavior like that. The dominant traditional reading, which denies on Ezekiel’s behalf that anybody could ever think God told them to sacrifice their children to him stumbles on Ezekiel 20, because it is difficult to see how God could have given a command that Israel would interpret as a command to sacrifice their children to him, if in fact no such command was ever given. Why did Israelites think that God had commanded child sacrifice? Why did they offer their firstborn to him as if to Moloch?

The question becomes even more acute if we consider that in at least one instance of child sacrifice, it could be argued that God accepts and honors the sacrifice. In 2 Kings 3, Israel wages a successful military campaign against the Moabites. The Moabites attack Israel and fail in the attack, and Israel’s counterattack proves devastating:

the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered the Moabites. They destroyed the towns, and each man threw a stone on every good field until it was covered. They stopped up all the springs and cut down every


300 2 Cor. 3:7

301 Jeremiah’s witness is echoed in Deuteronomy 12:31 and 18:10. See also, Roland de Vaux, Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964) 71 and Mosca 1975, 212. In 1993, Levenson argued against a critical consensus that child sacrifice had been condemned widely and thoroughly throughout Israel’s history. His work has changed that and made possible a book like Barker’s, which so thoroughly analyzes not just sacrifice but the entire pagan retinue of ancient Israelite cult.
good tree. Only Kir Hareseth was left with its stones in place, but men armed with slings surrounded it and attacked it. When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed. But in a last-ditch effort to turn the tide, the King of Moab takes his firstborn and slays him on the city wall. The result is both ominous and cryptic: “The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land” (2 Kgs 3:27). Levenson interprets the passage to say that the Moabites actually manage to turn the tide militarily. In his view, it is as if the sacrifice “works.” It either turns on some mechanism within the psychology of the Moabites or, more ominously, it activates some spiritual principle on their behalf.

There are a number of problems with this reading. First, the phrase “and there was a great fury on Israel,” comes at the conclusion of a long, complicated battle narrative, told by an author who clearly loves military strategy. If it is a new military effectiveness, this would be by far his strangest way to tell the tale. Second, as Levenson has noted, the particular emphasis on the ritual sacrifice of the firstborn seems to have been a peculiarly Israelite institution. Sure, Moabites probably sacrificed their children to their gods. But the writer makes a point of saying it is Mesha’s firstborn who is slaughtered. Thirdly, the word for fury (qetsef) is a word whose subject in Hebrew scripture, all but two of 29 times, is the Lord. The particular formulation here, qetsef al-Israel, is a phrase used only to describe the Lord’s judgment against them. No one has a right to judge Israel but the Lord her God. Even if it were plausible that the phrase could refer to some other spiritual principle as its agent, it’s clear that the Kings writer

302 2 Kings 3:24-26

303 Of course, keeping in mind that every author is also a redactor in this text.

304 Again, see Levenson 1993, 32-35.
does not think such principles have power to act, least of all to judge and defeat the Lord’s people after the Lord has already promised them victory through the Prophet with the double portion.

Another interpretation is called for, and it is this interpretation that begins to clue us in on how it is that the God deals with the divided loves of his people and draws them to a place where they can love him enough to know him well. That interpretation begins with Levenson’s insight that while Israel surely learned child sacrifice from the societies that surrounded them, it was Israel who placed liturgical importance on the firstborn. The nations gave their children to the flames, but Israel, in its prehistory, gave her firstborn children to the Lord. What Mesha does is imitate what he takes to be the source of his opponent’s power. Having failed to defeat Isaac’s children (indeed, this is the only time in Scripture when all the descendants of Isaac fight on the same side), Mesha imitates the act of their ancestor Abraham, slaying his son on the walls of the city — presumably in an attempt to draw the power behind Israel over to his side. That it works is not an indication that the sacrifice is valid but is rather a judgment on Israel for introducing this practice into the world. God judges them for their wickedness in not only imitating the practices of the nations but developing them. This judgment parallels the repeated denunciations of the prophets who complain that Israel not only commits the sins of the nations but actually exceeds them in doing evil. God punished Israel for the sins of a pagan because the pagan commits Israel’s own sins. He takes the name of Israel’s God on his lips but serves him as if he

\[\text{305}\] Thus, in the confrontation between Elijah and the devotees of Ba’al at Mt. Carmel, the ineffectiveness of the prophets’ attempts to “wake” their gods is a source of comedy, not fear.

\[\text{306}\] 2 Kings 3:18

were Molech. Israel, through whom God was to make his own name great, defiles it and injects confusion into the reputation the Lord has among the nations.

A kind of a dilemma arises here. The Lord cannot punish this sin without making it look, as it certainly does look to many hearers of the story (Levenson among them) as though the sacrifice of the firstborn is effective. It looks like God – or like some god – answers Mesha’s prayer. Mysteriously, the Lord allows it to seem as if those who in fact are far away from him are his favored ones; his friends, as the last chapter observed, participate in the alienation of God from the world, the contradiction between God and the fallen creation. And yet not to punish Israel is to leave within the minds of the people he has chosen a belief that God endorses the behaviors he fails to judge – in other words, to break his promise to be with them. Because of Israel’s own behaviors, it becomes difficult for anyone to discern the voice of the Lord. The state of contradiction between God and his people creates an almost unbearable tension; the Lord speaks, and both the word and its opposite are heard. Because Israel is a nation of idolaters, existing like all humanity in a state of contradiction with God, any Word that comes to them will be a sign of contradiction. Any Torah will be a bad Torah. In consequence, to be the people to whom God speaks is to experience the tension as desolation – to see the exaltation of everyone else and, in some ways, to enable that exaltation.

The means of that enmity is contradiction; God speaks to his people, knowing that it will be at least possible to hear the opposite. But the contradiction arises from God’s venture of friendship. For as long as they want to see themselves in an actual economy with God, it will be possible to see God on the side of Mesha. The irony is that for those who love God as a thing among things, the very command to redeem the firstborn will suggest the ascent of value that is found in Micah 6:6-8. It is God’s value of the firstborn, for those who think of him as a god like
those of the nations, that *creates* the ascent in Micah 6. For as long as Israel’s loves for God are divided, they will be convinced that it is possible to build an economy with him. Every word from him, taking the form of economy, will appear to confirm them in that delusion. God’s choice of Israel as his people has bound them to him with whom no commerce is possible, though the means of the relationship continually tempt them to think that it is. The Law divides the “I” chosen by God from the “I” who is his enemy; to be the recipient of God’s speech is to be in agony until the creation is renewed.

Israel attempts to make deals with God, and no matter what they do, God backs away from the table. It is only when Israel learns that God is God and they are not that they are able to see his approach to them as Gift, his love as an abyss of Mercy and mystery. Choosing that abyss over every certainty is what it means to be the friend of God. That choice embraces the Divine wildness, the love that is alive past every horizon of scarcity – that is action without transaction.

It looks like embracing apparent death because it knows that God’s love is stronger than death, because the lover called everything out of darkness. That choice looks into a world that contradicts everything God seems to be and says “though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” It says “not my will but thine be done.” It says “let it be to me according to Thy Word.” This choice is what Israel finds at the end of the long journey away from the gods of the nations. What Peter Leithart calls the Torah’s “schizophrenia” is overcome – the contradiction is contradicted – by the person for who will love God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength, come what may.

Friendship with God is to say, with Thomas, *nil nisi te, Domine*. It is to recognize, and in this the child-offerers are correct, that God is worthy of every offering one might make to him; nothing

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308 Peter Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2016), 141.
he could ask for world be too much.

By the time of Jesus, human sacrifice seemed to have faded into the mists of Israel’s ancient past (in fact, this is not quite true, about which, vide infra), successfully exorcised by the prophets, the Deuteronomist(s), and (possibly) the final form of the akedah, achieved on the verge of exile or during it

All of these revelations brought Israel into an encounter with a God that had no need of human blood. Abraham’s story exerts over at least some of his children the same influence it exerted over their ancestor. When Mary brings her son to the Temple to fulfill the rite of redemption, she carries no knife, nor are there flames through which to pass her son. Israel’s God is the god of the living.

At the same time, it is to the temple that she brings him. The vocabulary and imagery of death are close by. The temple courts are stained red, and the smell of burnt flesh hangs on the air like a garment. The outer precincts of the temple are a perpetual anamnesis of the God who covers the nakedness of Adam and Eve and who provides the ram to ransom Isaac. So, one could be pardoned, perhaps, for missing that the temple itself is the place of the living, not the dead.

Ezekiel’s train of thought puts the matter clearly; the nation emerges from its death to stand before the Lord. Their return from exile, a kind of national resurrection, brings about the renewal of the temple where they worship their God without the idols that have defiled his sanctuary. The temple is the place of return to God. Fabricated to resemble a garden like the one Israel was banished from, the temple marks the end of exile for every Israelite. The person who appears

309 Among the most important reasons for the judgment is the fact that the Akedah, offered in Genesis as the climax of Abraham’s growing friendship with God, is nowhere to be found in pre-exilic texts. It is Isaiah 41:8, probably written in or just after exile, in which God, repeatedly called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, remembers Abraham as “his friend.” The repeated reflection in the New Testament on the binding of Isaac makes the point with its remembrances and debates over the meaning of this foundational event for the life of God’s people.
there may pass by a bloody gate, yes, but into the land of the living. The worshiper who enters
the temple emerges from the valley of the shadow of death to dwell in the house of the Lord
forever. In short, death may mark the boundary of the temple’s encounter with earth. But its
business is resurrection. The temple commemorates God’s labor to find a partner in bringing the
world to life. And until that partner is found, the world suffers the consequences – both in the
field of blood that the earth is and in the liturgical observation of that fact at the Gateway to the
Womb of Life that the Temple always was.\textsuperscript{310}

\textit{b) She Will Be Clean: The Purification After Childbirth as Return from the Dead}

“The life of the flesh is in the blood.” So Leviticus 17 summarizes the prohibition in
Israel of eating blood, a prohibition that continued into the life of the early Church – Jew and
Gentile. But the statement also serves as a summary statement for a number of the practices
Leviticus commands around different issues of blood. In general, when Israelites come into
contact with blood, and especially in the form of discharge, there are a number of steps they must
take in order to re-enter fellowship with God and the assembly. When a woman menstruates, for
example, she is unclean for the entire duration, and then she waits an additional seven days
before she can return. Similarly, when a man discharges semen, he is unclean until the evening
after he cleans himself and then waits seven days to reenter the assembly. When a woman has
children, similarly, she becomes unclean and then has to wait until she stops bleeding to reenter
the assembly. In all of these cases, a sacrifice must be made before there can be a reentry. The
loss of blood is a loss of life, and the dead cannot stand in the presence of the living God. After
the loss of life, there is a need for life to be restored to the person who aims to reenter the

\textsuperscript{310} Barker (2012, 193 and throughout) lays out the resonances between Zion, the Lord’s holy hill (Ps. 2:6)
and the womb in which the kings of Judah were born on the day they were enthroned.
assembly and the temple to stand before God. The offering is a redemption in that the blood of the animal supplies the lack of the worshipper, and gives him life, echoing both Genesis 3 and Genesis 22. The determination of God that the human race should stand before him, after the fall, requires the contradiction of God’s creative word as it calls forth the animals that are supposed to swarm all over the earth.

After childbirth, women go through a complicated process of being restored to the life of the community. After the birth, they experience two kinds of uncleanness. They are ceremonially unclean for 7 days in the case of a son, or twice that in the case of a daughter (cf. Is. 40:2). Then, they are to wait for 33 or 66 days (the former in case of a son, the latter for a daughter) to be purified from their bleeding. After the bleeding is over, they appear before the Tabernacle (or, in Mary’s case, the Temple) to make an offering officially marking their reentry into the assembly and into the worship of Israel. In each case, the woman who returns to the Temple returns, liturgically speaking, from exile, from the wilderness, from the letting of blood outside the fellowship. That is, the Hebrew Bible understands childbirth as a kind of death for the mother. Her return to the Temple, offering in hand, is a return to the life of God’s people. It is restoration and redemption. It marks the woman’s experience of motherhood’s agonies and God’s faithfulness to bring her through her exile as he did Eve.

c) Mary’s Offering of Life

When Mary arrives to the Temple, she brings with her an offering of comparably small value, one reflecting her place in the hierarchy of the world, and one of inestimable, infinite value, reflecting her place in the economy of divine grace. It is crucial, if we are to understand

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Again, the Daughters “receive from the Lord’s hand double” for sins.
the act that is performed in the Presentation, and why devotion grew up around it in the Middle Ages, to observe both of these offerings in light of Mary’s understanding of her own vocation as proclaimed in the Magnificat. Her purification offering reflects what must have been the relatively modest means she had. At the same time, she knows that she has been raised up with the lowly in the gift to her of the Son who is the fulfillment of the ancient divine plan.

I argued before that the Magnificat reflects Mary’s willing assumption of the barrenness of Israel, a barrenness that is not hers. In order to see how that is so, it is first important to show in what way Mary does participate in Israel’s condition. Commentators have pointed out at length that Luke’s is a gospel more than any of the others with an eye on economics. It may be that the writer of Luke and Acts learned to inflect his gospel this way while traveling with the Apostle to the Gentiles as the latter wooed Gentle concerts to remember the poverty of the church at Jerusalem.312 If that story is correct, part of the plan in sending Jesus to unite the Gentiles and Jews in one body is to make the wealth of nations the inheritance of the Jewish people as had long been promised.313 In any case, it is clear that Mary’s song sees God not only as the forgiver of Israel’s sins but as the filler of their stomachs: the Lord fills the hungry with good things. Long before she hears the words of Ananias, Mary understands that her child is to be (somehow) the means by which God makes right the poverty of his people. To be sure, it can be argued that the image of material poverty in Luke are commonly deployed in biblical language to refer to the life of those who neglect God (Is. 55, et al). Images of barrenness and exile serve similar functions. But that argument can be run in reverse as well; the closeness of the

313 Proverbs 13:22.
Lord has much to do with the literal poverty or well-being of Israel. Mary carries into the temple precincts the answer to the question of God’s faithfulness to the covenant promise to provide for his people. In this child, God has filled the hungry with good things and has raised up the lowly. Indeed, her song of love to God makes clear that she has at least a glimpse of the way this child is going to overcome death: “generation to generation” and “to Abraham and his children forever.”

The last chapter showed that Israel’s mothers pay double for the sins of the people. But it is also true that Israel’s mothers have what, for lack of a better term, it is fair to call “rights.” The God who is worth anything he might ask makes clear that he is not bloodthirsty. It is his will that parents should enjoy the lives of their children, indeed that children are duty-bound to be the provision for parents in their old age (Exod. 20:12). The liturgy by which God reveals himself to be nothing like the gods of the nations shows not a permission but a divine will: “you shall redeem your sons.” The will of the Creator is done when his creatures live, not when they die. As a result, the worshipper whose offering honors God is the one who offers life rather than death. The command to redeem, and the command to honor, entitles the mothers of Israel to blessing of their children. Mary is entitled to redeem her child, the gift by which God has raised her up from the dust. Her journey to the Temple, not only to make the purification offering but also, somehow, to fulfill the redemption rite shows that she is aware of this right. It also shows the extent to which she, like her son, waives all of her rights out of love for God. It is crucial to see that in Mary the long pedagogy has been completed. She loves God for all of the things that God is. She knows him to be the God of the living and the life-giver: indeed, the promise of the angel had told her, her child would inherit David’s throne and occupy it forever. Her celebration of his empowering of the weak not only celebrates his covenant but his power. He calls the things that
be not as though they were, and they are. Mary’s prayer hallows the greatness of God who stoops
down to look upon Heaven and earth. She knows God as he is, and she loves him with all she is.
That is why when she brings her child to the Temple, she makes the offering for herself but not
for him. He is not redeemed, for he needs no redemption. Although Mary cannot possibly have
understood how it would be so, she knows already that he is destined for what the writer to the
Hebrews calls an indestructible life.

Mary receives from the Lord a gift that exceeds by an infinite amount any gift ever given
by God to anyone. The child to be born of her will be to her a source of unending honor,
unending because nothing will weaken his ability to give it. His unending life, his unending
throne, will establish Mary as the mothers of Judah long ago were established. The Scriptures of
her people had long said that children were the fruit of their parents’ labors, the provision of their
old age. The birth of this child to Mary offers to her a greater provision than Manna in the
wilderness, greater than quails to quench the people’s hunger or water from the rock to satiate
their thirst. Mary’s doxology to the God who fills the hungry may refer to more than actual
victuals, but it definitely does not refer to less. In a world where so many children died young,
this mother hears that her child will not only survive to adulthood but will be a living stream of
water, a source of provision that is as stable to her as God himself. Mary hears in the angel’s
announcement, and her song of praise to God reveals that she understands, that in this child she
has been given a life that will not end. As bizarre as the resurrection is, as bizarre as resurrection
faith must have been to those who first heard it commended to them, it is clear that many in
Jesus’s homeland awaited it with eagerness. And it is just as clear that his mother understands the
son that will open her womb to be, in some sense, tied to that promise of resurrection. In him,
she recognizes a gift that will undo the curse pronounced on her (and our) ancient mother. This
son will reverse that curse, and she will be the mother on whom that incredible benefit is conferred. To her is being given what every woman before her had longed for and not received. To her is given the provision that reverses every lack. Whatever in the creation had ever appealed to anyone was infinitely superseded in the gift by which God had blessed this latecomer among Abraham’s daughters.

But if this gift is incomparable in its value, it is also unparalleled in its ability to entice and solicit the sin of the world. Simeon himself discerns and points out the difficulty: “this is a sign of contradiction.” Indeed, both disciple and detractor would fall, one-by-one, under the sway of this temptation during this child’s unlikely career through the world. Unless this part of the Marian story is attended to, the stakes of Mariology are indiscernible. The entirety of Scripture, from the Torah through Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, and Romans, reveal the temptation of God’s people to turn his gifts to their own gain. The temptation to idolatry had overtaken God’s chosen people on the very mountain where He forbade it. Every created thing, because of the very goodness by which it participates in the gift of existence granted to it by God, shimmers with shadows of divine transcendence. And if this is so in the world Eve’s children have inherited, where death threatens and thorns pollute, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, how much more is it so in the case of the Son Mary brings into the earth. His goodness outshines every other thing. The first two chapters of Luke find the evangelist at pains, through biblical imagery, through a cosmic hapax phenomenon, through the Word of an

314 Thus, the sons of thunder wish for fire from heaven (Lk. 9:54). Their mother angles for their advancement (Matt. 20:21). The crowds follow only for bread (John 6:26). The Nazarenes long for the vindication against the Gentiles (Lk. 4:24-30). The crowds want to make him a king (John 6:15), the high priest wants political cover (John 11:49-50), Pilate wants an endorsement for his nihilistic truce with power (John 18:38), and Judas wants him to underwrite a rebellion against Rome and vindicate God’s poor (Matt. 26:9).
archangel and the song of the heavenly hosts, to show us this very truth. Mary’s son is the gift of immortality to a weary cosmos. It is not merely a great power; it is the power by which all power exists, and to which it must all give account. And if the temptation to lay hold of, to grasp and keep, proved too much for Eve in the case of Edenic foodstuffs, how could anyone hope to escape the allure offered to Mary in the advent of the Life-giver, placed completely under her power. Simply put, until this child was tempted as an adult by all the kingdoms of the earth, no remotely comparable temptation had ever faced man or angel. By comparison, the Ring of Power might as well have come from a Cracker Jack box.

In Romans 7, the Apostle to the Gentiles would tell a similar story about how God’s good gifts are a source of death to those who inherit the slavery under sin that Adam and Eve leave to their children. In Romans 7, Paul painstakingly insists that the Law itself is good but that to those who are evil it becomes an evil. Paul’s observation is a specific and exalted exemplar of the more general observation found in Titus that to the pure all things are pure, while to the impure, all things are defiling. In the case of the Torah, what God has given is good – the best thing, save the Incarnation, that has been given to the world. In the Torah, the world finds the will of God. But the Torah also, unavoidably, gives sin an opportunity, as we have already discussed. The Torah breeds its own contradictions. Lest we think that comparing the Torah to the Christ in this way is a category mistake, Simeon warns that Jesus will do the same thing. People turn every good gift of God to selfish ends, and those who surrounded Jesus (well, all but one) tended to do the same. That parents do this with their children is a fact obvious to observation. The guilt and unbecomingness of it is mitigated to a degree because parents are entitled to some things from their children in a way that, for example, no one was entitled to the Tree of Knowledge. Torah itself would speak up in defense, if Mary chose to assert her prerogatives. What must have been
true of her in order to make such a choice possible? What grace enabled her to relinquish her rightful hold over so powerful a gift? This question forces quietly into view the question of Mary’s fullness of grace. Opponents of that doctrine have historically proceeded by simply denying the Marian maximalism that constitutes its major premise. They have also refuted “fittingness” arguments by pointing out the possibility of infinite regress; if simply being the mother of the Lord has as its proper accompaniment a supreme prerogative of grace, why is it not so that being the mother of the Immaculata requires a similar grace? This question cannot be ducked. We must answer it, and we can. The mother of God would have entirely in her power a divine gift infinitely greater than either the Tree of Knowledge or the Torah. The question is not merely whether she could transmit to Jesus a sinful nature (though, since it seems that Galen and Scotus have been vindicated by modern biology, she clearly could). It is that divine gifts are bound to be misused when their recipients are subject to the Law of Sin and Death. If Mary was to let go of the Lord, as she absolutely must do, not only against her God-given prerogatives but against her own nature, it simply could not be that she was ever in the power of that which would make her do as she did not wish, or not do as she did. It is her role in redemption, and the person she must be to perform it, that explains the singular grace given to her, a grace by which she could merit not only the Incarnation but also all that is accomplished by way of it. This role was given only to her, not to anyone else in the Old Testament Church. The specter of infinite regress is wiped away in the singularity of Mary’s vocation. In her is nothing else than the gifts and graces that belong to Israel, but they are given to her in a singular way, in view of the singular task. There remains one final challenge, then. What it looks like for human concupiscence to encounter the divine law is transparent to thought, whether we consider Augustine and the pears or Paul and covetousness. These sins are easy to envision, because they are part of common
experience. What we need to hold firmly in view is that Mary not only does not clutch the Child but in a gratuitous act of supererogatory renunciation gives him entirely to the Lord. It is not merely that she does not snatch the fruit from the tree; it is that she receives it from the hand of Eve, her ancestor, and places it back upon the tree. There is as much to overcome as Augustine or Paul had to overcome, indeed infinitely more. We do not know what such a self-assertion would have looked like in the case of Mary and the child Jesus. It is difficult to imagine the New Eve clutching the fruit off of the tree, because, thankfully, it was not done. Mary chose a different path, by the power of superabundant grace, a grace that liberated her entirely from the cruel calculus of the Law within the members, and it is to that path that we must now turn.

Readers of the Magnificat have noticed down the ages its similarities to a number of older Hebrew texts. But perhaps no other Hebrew text has been compared with Mary’s song as much as that of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. After a long struggle with barrenness, Hannah prays that God would look upon her embarrassment and open her womb. If he does, Hannah promises that the child she is given will be given back to God. When God hears and answers her, she composes the song that may be a literary precursor to the song of Jesus’s Mother. But just as importantly, she is as good as her word and brings the child Samuel to the sanctuary at Shiloh and offers him (alive) to God. As far as we know, she never again lays eyes on the son God gave her.315

The Old Testament predecessor of the Lukan infancy story clarifies for us just what is happening at the Presentation. Just as Hannah leaves her son with Eli “for his whole life,” so

315 The text does not force us to read it this way. But there are good reasons to think that the earliest versions of the text did not contain the story of Hannah. There are awkward pronouns in the text at the edges of the Hannah story that suggest the story of Hannah may well have been added to a story that was not about her. If so, her perceived absence is, textually speaking, a real absence.
Mary, in bringing her Son to the Temple, gives him wholly over to God. Far from succumbing to
the temptation to turn the child to her own gain, she waives the wholly legitimate claim she has
to the life he will live and give. This is how she fulfills the rite; though Jesus will live, he will be
as dead to her. In a choice imitated by untold numbers of mothers whose children have entered
cloisters, Mary renounces all benefit that her child was to bring her. Given the nature of the
benefits, she makes an offering to God that no one could make who loved anything in the least
respect more than God. Often missed in portraits of the Blessed Virgin – and understandably
given her close connection to her Son – is this: when the Child, as a man, said “if anyone comes
to me and does not hate his father and mother and his brothers and his sisters and his wife and his
children and even himself, he cannot be my disciple,” he was merely giving words to the
example of a mother who loved with unquenchable fire the God of Israel.

That the gift accompanied her own liturgical commemoration of a journey to death and
back again must not go ignored if we are to understand the choice. In offering to the Lord her
Son’s indestructible life, she takes to herself the death that is the inheritance of all people. By not
redeeming him, she presents herself at the temple as one to whom life was due but unclaimed.316

316 Perhaps the least understood element of Mariology is the existence of parental rights to the productivity of their children. In the ancient world, such rights were intuitive as pillars of social order and survival. We have already discussed the resonances between Elizabeth’s greeting of Mary and the promises in Deuteronomy 28, promises in which the covenantal faithfulness of God appears not only as fruitful land and plentiful livestock but as numerous, healthy children to tend them. The children who come are a blessing from the Lord to ensure the continuation of the promises to their parents. It is for this reason that the command to honor one’s parents is, as the Hebrews writer notes, “the first command with a promise.” To honor one’s parents is to guard the length of their life, and to model that honor for each generation results in the preservation of one’s own life when it is one’s turn. The songs of ascent tie the existence and longevity of children to the promises of God; Psalm 127:2 rebukes people who toil and spin without rest, concluding that “the Lord gives rest to those he loves.” The next verse seems to come in sideways; “Children are a heritage from the Lord.” The blessing of the children of one’s youth (127:4) makes one less vulnerable to an uncertain future. Likewise, Psalm 128 promises satiation and prosperity to the one who fears the Lord, importantly, via the fruitful vine of his wife and the healthy shoots of his children. The Lord gives Seth to Eve after Abel’s murder, and his very name (“appointed, placed”) suggests that the loss of Abel is improper. Likewise, while Job’s story concludes with the Lord restoring to him twice what he had before, he receives back exactly the number of children he had lost, suggesting a meticulous and careful accounting on the part of the Lord.
She gives his life to God and in doing so gives up claim to all that his indestructibility was to bring her. Giving his life to God, she walks willingly back into the shadow of death, dying in order that he might live. He undergoes neither the literal death of sacrifice nor the figural “death” of redemption. Though she has survived childbirth, she is raised into a living death, as remote from her child’s life and gift of life as if she had slain him on the altar. All of him belongs to the Lord, nothing to her.\textsuperscript{317} In that way, she loves the God of Israel with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Her act of love is an act of love precisely because it is not required. She follows no command, and she fills no need in God. Unlike the mothers who offered children to slake the violent thirst of YHWH when it was not yet clear who he was, Mary offers her Son to the Lord in a mystery that no economy explains. Even Hannah, for all the beautiful self-renunciation in her holy act, fulfills a vow. Emblematic of an Israel somewhere between “sacrifice him to me” and “do not touch the boy,” Hannah stands in the thick mists of the Old Testament’s economy, when they were still being taught about the God with whom no economy is possible. She is not Jephthah, vowing her child’s death, and to just that extent she resembles more her distant daughter than her pagan ancestors. She offers his life, in exchange for having him once in her grip. She does not yet know what Mary knows: God is the living God. Hannah remains in the shadow of divine need, a necessary condition of the possibility to bargain. Mary strikes no deal. She receives freely and freely gives what can only be given if it is freely given. Because of the limitlessness of his life and unending capacity to give it to her, she gives in the only possible way such a gift can be given: by complete renunciation whose only explanation is the dark abyss of

\textsuperscript{317} See Revelation 12, in which the Messiah Child is snatched up to God while his mother languishes in the wilderness.
love for God.

The second commandment is like unto the first. The God to whom she offers her Son has no need of Him. There is no bloodthirst here, nor any way for the gift of this Son to add anything in any way to God. The God of Israel turns every gift of the people back to their own good. It is no accident that Mary’s “offering” of her child takes the form of handing him over to two ancient children of Abraham who awaited for the consolation of Israel. It is also no accident that one of them is a widow named Hannah.318 Mary’s gift to God is the gift that makes it possible for the womb of Israel, so long barren, to be filled forever. In Mary’s child, Hannah receives in the Temple the gift she laid down in the sanctuary at Shiloh. This child’s limitless life is the divine answer to every prayer of a barren daughter of Abraham. In giving him up, Mary hands his limitless life to all the mothers of Israel. He is the Son who can honor them all. Her act of love for God then becomes the means, as all such acts are, of God’s love for Israel.319 In her gift, she loves her neighbor not as she loves herself but as God does. Her offering to God is the means of God’s offering to Israel, and the possibility of their joining her as those who bear fruit unto God.

In Mary, there is at last no contradiction. She loves God and hears him clearly enough to obey the logos of a love past any law. If the divine nature of Jesus’s human person just is the Word of God clearly spoken, the human nature is its perfect audition. Mary offers to God not death but life. Her gift makes fruitful the womb of Israel and reveals God to be Israel’s faithful husband. In the Presentation, Mary takes the place as both recipient and giver of the Gift. She loves God and neighbor perfectly because she must – only in this way can God be faithful to the


319 It is worth recalling the logic we have been exploring all along, a logic that is – it must be confessed – Anselmian; all acts of love for God redound to His people.
promise contained in calling Israel out of the nations or light from darkness. She loves God for God’s sake and nothing else. She loves him to the renunciation of life itself. She loves him enough to love what he loves exactly as he loves it – up to the point of giving his life, which is her life, to the world.

In the gift of his life – which is her life – to God and to Israel, she undoes the ancient knot. The reversal is striking; after the Presentation, it is now her life that is his life. In what was to that point the one act that was truly an act of love for God and neighbor, Mary places her entire being at the disposal of her Son. What comes to him comes also – must come also – to her. From that point on, she has nothing except what he wills her to have. Even when he is a boy, she is “treated thus” by him as he moves toward God and Israel, away from her. Her life and death, her loves and hatreds, her joys and sorrows, are his as they are given to her. She only is insofar as she is whatever he needs from her, not as patient but as the most complete possible human agent. Her life is, as much as a created life can be, one of act rather than potency. She is, like every great human actor, gifted with the unique effectiveness of those whose very freedom occasionally leaves us with the question of whether they could do otherwise. When viewing the continuity of purpose, the seeming inevitability, of the careers of St. Francis, of Pio of Pietrelcina, of Therése, even of Washington or Lincoln or King, are we not tempted to see them more as forces of nature than deliberations of will? And what if it should turn out that they were the most free of all? The Mother of God is like them; rather, they are like her.

But if that is so, it means that every act of his will be borne by her alongside him. His triumphs will redound uniquely in every way to her. More ominously, his every confrontation

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This point, of course, awaits further unpacking in the chapters that follow.
with the contradictions of the world will belong also to her. He will be spoken against, and she will bear his shame (“whose father and mother we know”). He will be tempted of the devil, and she will bear the reproach. He will be the occasion of Israel’s apostasy, and when they rage like the nations against their own God, she will feel a sword pierce her own soul too. The contradiction between Israel and its God will play out in the theater of her flesh, as her offering of love is abused, tortured, and executed. She, who emerged with praise from the deadly vale of childbirth, stands at the cross, because she can be nowhere else. She has given her life and will not take it back again. In the bizarre transubstantiation by which creation can become His body, she stands dead but veiled by the accidents of life, suffering with her God the burden of his love for those who receive him not. She who loves him above all things, who would and did gladly give her life for his, must live to see in his death the undoing of all that was promised to her. She who would die of love must look on the one they have pierced, excluded by life from the death she would choose for his sake. For love of him, she must become an enemy to her people, whom she loves with the undying love that expires on Calvary’s bitter ridge, another child of Israel sacrificed on the high places. She, in whom there is not the slightest contrary impulse to love of God and neighbor, stands alienated from both, carrying even then the contradiction that takes the breath from the one in whose breath all things live and move and have their being.

This paradox of friendship with God, most evident as Mother and Son endure the cross together, has not always been allowed to exert its influence over interpretations of Mary’s life. To be God’s partner in the world is to suffer rejection, not only from those from whom one separates for God’s sake but from God. The cost of coredemption is to be the one who endures the contradictions at the heart of the dysfunctional relationship between God and unredeemed creation: “he trusted in God, let God save him, if he will have him.” The more intimate the divine
embrace, here in the devastation, the more it appears that God has turned away. This dynamic, so readily admitted when considering Christology, and argued for in the previous chapter’s meditation on Israel, must now make its point in the case of the Mother of the Lord. What the Servant of YHWH suffers, his mother suffers for his sake. And it is this observation that must be allowed to do its work in shaping our interpretation of the Marian narratives found in the Gospels. They must be framed by two explicit declarations about the Mother of the Lord, the Lord is with her (Lk 1:38) and she is with Him (Rev. 21:2). All appearances to the contrary must be held against that sure scaffold.

III. Why Have You Treated Us Like This? Embarrassment and the Possibility of Gospel Mariology

“Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed.” In the midst of Luke’s chronicle of the life of Jesus, one finds the words of nearly every devotee of his mother. Those who think Mariology to be a specious part of the theological archive have not been slow to point out Jesus’s sharp rejoinder: “blessed rather (μενοῦν) are those who hear the Word of God and obey it” (11:28). The exclamation of the woman in the crowd gives voice to what would be a fairly expected response to the phenomenon of Jesus’s life. Jewish culture, informed by texts like those we’ve examined in the previous chapter, associated powerful sons with blessed mothers. That culture creates an expectation that Jesus will echo the woman’s pronunciation of blessing upon him. His interruption of that expectation is conspicuous, and it takes place throughout the gospels.

Earlier in Luke’s own gospel (Lk 8:19-21 // Mk 3:31-35 // Matt 12:46-50), Jesus’s family comes to ask an audience with him, “but they could not get near him, because of the crowd.” Rather than grant the audience, Jesus gestures towards the crowd in front of him, and observes,
“my mother and brothers are those who hear the Word of God and obey it” (Lk 8:21). This story
is the only story about Jesus’s mother that appears across the whole synoptic tradition. It is a
crucial part of the evangelists’ portrayal of the Son of Mary that he clearly does not interpret his
obligations as her son in the way his hearers might expect. Augustine, and a long tradition after
him, take this passage to deny that being related by blood to Jesus is inherently praiseworthy:
“Did, perhaps, the Virgin Mother not do the Father’s will, she who in faith believed, in faith
conceived, who was chosen so that man’s salvation could be born of her and who was created by
Christ before Christ was created in her? Certainly, the holy Mary did the Father’s will and
therefore, it is a higher thing for Mary to have been Christ’s disciple than to have been Christ’s
mother.” Augustine, Sermones 72A, 7. For Augustine, the passage need not imply any particular
embarrassment but rather simply a recognition of priority. It is no great offense to a rock to observe that it is an inferior
creature to an archangel. In the same way, Mary’s real uniqueness is found in her rich faith,
which is the cause of her motherhood and of any apparent gifts or virtue that flow from it.
There is no embarrassment here but rather the roots of a Mariology centered around faith.

Other ways of handling it have been suggested. For many modern scholars of the Gospel
texts, Jesus’s repudiation of his own family members is a question not of soteriology but of

321 Augustine, Sermones 72A, 7.

322 About Augustine’s position, two things are worth noting: 1) that this has become the dominant
magisterial position of the post Vatican II Catholic church [cf. LG VIII.I.53: “she is hailed as a pre-eminent and
singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity.” Mary’s faith was also a
centerpiece of the self-consciously Augustinian Mariology of Benedict XVI. See Adam Wojtczak, “The
Characteristic Aspects of Benedict XVI’s Teachings on Mary,” Gregorianum, vol. 95, no. 2 (2014), pp. 327-348.],
and 2) that Augustine himself seems to waver at a crucial point on this observation. In his dispute with Pelagius, he
seems to want to shield Mary from discussion in regards to sin, theorizing that what ought to be impossible might be
possible in virtue of her divine motherhood. See, again, St. Augustine, De natura et gratia, Patrologia Latina
44:267.
ecclesiology. Jesus’s repudiation of his family members, so the story goes, is meant to resolve power disputes in the early church, where the relatives of Jesus seem to have wielded an influence that made many uncomfortable. In this reading, the gospel writers are keen to show that Jesus does not pay any abnormal respect to relations of blood. Those who are related to him by hearing and obeying God’s Word are those that are related to him truly. While this view would seem to harmonize neatly with that of Augustine, there is a specific negation entailed in it, because the contextual situation is one where claims of familial ties are utilized as the basis for influence. The party making those claims stands humiliated by the words of Jesus.

Augustine’s benign reading of the passage, I think, has much to commend it theologically. It has been the basis for a huge tradition of Marian discipleship. But I think digging particularly into Luke’s portrayal of the episode recovers something crucial to the story, which the modern scholars tend to retain. To be sure, Mary is a disciple, but there are reasons to think Luke is up to something more than a statement of priority. In Luke’s account, as in the

This was most characteristic of the Tübingen School. But in his book on the relatives of the Lord, Richard Bauckham points out that it is just as likely that there was no such problem, at least as reflected in the Gospel texts, since from a very early time, the authority of the desposynoi, or relatives of the Lord, was taken as a given in the Palestinian Church and abroad, while the communities that produced the gospels were not sufficiently under Palestinian leadership to create a power struggle. See Richard Bauckham, Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church (New York: T&T Clark, 1990), 57. Bauckham’s reading of the historical situation appears to me insufficient, in part because he underestimates the emphasis across early church documents on the trans-local unity and the appointment of officers specifically to serve that unity. The Apostle Paul explicitly defines himself with anxious reference to the Lord’s Brothers (1 Cor. 9:5) and the Jerusalem leadership. He also makes a number of trips to Jerusalem aimed at promoting just such a unified Church as Bauckham claims few were interested in. Sphere sovereignty and territory, which were explicitly discussed at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9), show that there was anxiety about control from Jerusalem all the way until 70. Still, the ubiquity in the Synoptic tradition of Jesus’s denunciation of the importance of blood relation, as well as the conspicuous exaltation of Jesus’s relatives (his mother, anyway) precisely in the very texts thought to devalue their importance, suggests that another rationale must serve as the explanation for the early Church’s regular remembrance of these words of Jesus. It cannot be that a text calling Mary the New Temple and New Ark of the Covenant could also be the text meant to devalue her. Perhaps, as N.T. Wright points out (Jesus and the Victory of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God vol. 2 [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 430-1), these words meant so much to the Church not because of who they disempowered but because Jesus’s self-distancing from his relatives redefined who could be his family, the desposynoi, those who belong to the Lord.
parallels, Mary and Jesus’s brothers are “outside” (ἐξω). For Luke, this preposition must have a specific connotation in relation to the gospel’s emphasis on the inclusion of Gentiles. The first use of the word in the gospel makes a contrast between Zechariah, who meets the angel Gabriel inside the temple, and the assembly gathered outside. The terms carry an association of favor and lack of it, which is compounded after Jesus’s sermon at Nazareth, where they drive him “outside” the city (Lk 4:29) to throw him down the cliff. In a parable found later in the gospel, Jesus exhorts his disciples to enter by the narrow way, lest they be found “outside” begging for entry yet refused by the master of the house (13:25). In the Gospel’s other parables, “outside” is used to describe the useless salt that is rejected (14:35), as well as the beloved son of the vineyard owner, who is cast out by the wicked servants (20:15). Jesus explicates the parable by pointing out that the surprise that will be felt by his opponents when they see people from the four winds brought into the Kingdom but themselves cast “outside” (ἐκβαλλόμενος ἐξω). Jesus clearly sees it as his vocation to deliver a verdict reversing traditional categories of “inside/outside.” But that makes it poignant when Jesus hears that his mother is “outside” and leaves her there.

Luke takes a story from the synoptic tradition and weaves it even more deeply into his whole narrative. Hence, the inclusion of scenes that echo this one but are not found in any of the other traditions – the discovery of Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:41-52), the denial of blessedness to

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324 Mark Goodacre explains this odd fact by pointing to “editorial fatigue,” i.e., that as the authors of Matthew and Luke were copying this section from Mark, they got tired and forgot to capture all the details. See Mark Goodacre, “Fatigue in the Synoptics,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), pp. 45-58. Whatever the origin of the problem, Luke in its present form amplifies the use of the preposition in theologically significant ways, while its seemingly most basic referent, the mere location relative to Jesus of his mother and brothers, vanishes. This detail cries out for explanation; hence the following.

325 Lk. 13:28.
the womb that bore him (Lk 11:27-28), and Simeon’s warning to Mary about the sword (more on that below). This is all quite surprising, given the comparably intimate portrait of Mary that Luke gives us. His is the only gospel that gives us any picture at all of Mary’s inner life. There alone are we privy to her thoughts, her worries and fears, her doubts and beliefs and the volition of which Bernard of Clairvaux sang so eloquently. With the exception of the resurrection appearances, in this gospel alone are we given the thoughts of a woman in any detail, and it is of this woman alone that we are given a view of her thoughts. Not only that, but we are also told that they are uniquely praiseworthy.

But this is precisely why Luke is helpful; Luke emphasizes the texts of embarrassment more than any other Gospel writer, but this emphasis cannot be said to arise from a conviction that nothing about Mary is special. Rather, as readers have noticed since antiquity, Luke’s description of Mary in the beginning of the Gospel shows a deep devotion, even, one might say, veneration. Luke is the only one to name the angel who appears to her, and the choice has among its effects that we know the angel who appeared to Zechariah is the same one who appears to Mary. That is, the angel who tells Zechariah, “I stand in the presence of God” is the one who says to Mary “the Lord is with you.” Likewise, Luke describes Mary in language specifically echoing the Ark of the Covenant.326 In other words, Luke sees Mary as the holiest thing in creation save only for her son, the Lord.

John’s gospel also gave early readers work to do to avoid embarrassment. In the book’s second chapter, Jesus joins his mother at a wedding. She brings to his attention that the wedding

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326 Elizabeth’s statement of wonder and disbelief at Mary’s arrival explicitly echoes that of David at the arrival of the Ark (2 Sam 6:9). Likewise, Mary stays at the house of Elizabeth for three months, which is the amount of time the Ark remains in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam 6:11).
has run out of wine, and he responds in a way that not a few readers have found jarring.

“Woman, what does this have to do with me? My time has not yet come” (Jn 2:4). Augustine, channeling a number of readers of the text: “What is this? Did He come to the marriage for the purpose of teaching men to treat their mothers with contempt?” Augustine answers in the negative, interpreting Jesus’s response to his mother to mean “That in me which works a miracle was not born of you, you gave not birth to my divine nature; but because my weakness was born of you, I will recognize you at the time when that same weakness shall hang upon the cross.”

Augustine’s reply is, technically, correct, though it implies a half-truth. Mary does not give birth to Jesus’s divine nature, though she does give birth to the divine person that he is, and so is rightly called the Mother of God. She gives birth to the Son of God, and it is he (not the divine nature) that performs the sign at Cana. Elsewhere, Augustine resists tendencies to split up the person of Christ in this way. It shows how arresting the question is that Augustine strains his own thinking into a quasi-Nestorian distortion to answer it.

The other famous Marian passage in John takes place at the foot of the cross, where Jesus consigns his mother into the care of the disciple whom he loved. While the dominant historical interpretation has seen this to be an act of Jesus providing for his mother by ensuring that she has a kinship network after he is gone, some readers have seen in the passage a moment of final

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327 Tractates on John 8.5

328 Ibid., 9.

329 See Craig Keener, The Gospel of John, 2:1444: “What we know of Jewish customs suggests that they invited a dying man, including one who was crucified, to settle the legal status of women for whom he was responsible; a crucified man could make his testament even from the cross.” See also Scot McKnight, The Real Mary, 91: [Jesus] provided a ‘last will and testament’ for his mother.” See also, Brandon Pitre, Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary (New York: Image Press, 2018), 185-193 and notes.
desolation for Mary. Here, she undergoes not just the loss of her son but his renunciation of her in the moment before he expires. Favoring that interpretation is the fact that networks of care for parents whose children preceded them in death were not unheard of; Jesus does not need to go so far as to give his mother to the Beloved Disciple to ensure she is provided for and protected. Likewise favoring the latter interpretation is the fact that the dominant spiritual interpretation of the passage reads Jesus as handing his mother to the Church as its mother. If, that is, the passage is primarily about what the Church gains in Mary, it is also about what she loses in receiving us. There is, on this view, an intention to what Jesus is doing here, a willful act of renunciation, and on Mary’s part a chosen desolation.

It is an odd feature of the two gospels that make the most of Mary that they go even further than the others to relate stories of embarrassment, loss, relegation, renunciation, and rejection concerning her. While the Reformers jumped onto these texts to claim that Catholics had been overzealous in their devotion to Mary, they were not the first to notice texts like these. But surely, from the standpoint of any possible Mariology, the far bigger renunciation

330 Von Speyr, Mary in the Redemption, 87: “The Son then lives his earthly life and, at the end of it, gives his Mother away as if she were a mere thing.” Cf. Ibid., 109: “Mary had been dismissed together with John.”

331 See the discussion of Mary, Church, and the Eucharist below.

332 Cf. Tertullian, On the Flesh of Christ, 7, 17:

“First of all, nobody would have told Him that His mother and brethren were standing outside [Matthew 12:46-50], if he were not certain both that He had a mother and brethren, and that they were the very persons whom he was then announcing.—who had either been known to him before, or were then and there discovered by him; although heretics have removed this passage from the gospel, because those who were admiring His doctrine said that His supposed father, Joseph the carpenter, and His mother Mary, and His brethren, and His sisters, were very well known to them....But there is some ground for thinking that Christ's answer denies His mother and brethren for the present, as even Apelles might learn. 'The Lord's brethren had not yet believed in Him.' So is it contained in the Gospel which was published before Marcion's time; whilst there is at the same time a want of evidence of His mother's adherence to Him, although the Marthas and the other Marys were in constant attendance on Him. In this very passage indeed, their unbelief is evident. Jesus was teaching the way of life, preaching the kingdom of God and actively engaged in healing infirmities of body and soul; but all the while, whilst strangers were intent on Him, His very nearest relatives were absent. By and by they turn up, and keep outside; but they do not go in, because,
has got to be the nearly complete absence of Mary across the pages of the New Testament as a whole. Given the devotion with which at least some early Christian sources treat of her, and given the role she came in fairly short order to play in the Christian understanding of the economy of salvation, the question that must be asked is “why has she been treated thus?” The previous chapter showed the paradox of human friendship with God. If the contradictions in the New Testament portrayal of Mary sit firmly within that tradition, and there is good reason to think they do, then the embarrassments are not an obstacle to Mariology; they are the essence of it. Like her son, she is a sign to be spoken against (καὶ σοῦ ὄστης τὴν ψυχὴν διελέσεται ῥομφαία). Before she is Our Lady of Sorrows, she is her son’s. These texts, along with the vast silence otherwise, are not the frustration but the foundation of Mariology – they are the jewel in the crown she shares with her son in his agony. Mary’s desolation makes the fruitfulness of Israel possible: “to us a son is given.”

IV. Mary-as-Israel and Israel-as-Mary

Mary’s gift to Israel allows for the resolution of the contradiction between God and his people. But how? In giving her child to Israel, she allows Israel to take her place as the Mother of the Lord. In the Presentation, and in the following-through of that gift throughout her son’s life, Mary places her Son entirely into the hands of God and Israel. In doing so, as was pointed out above, she places herself entirely into their hands as well. But precisely because there is a state of contradiction between God and his people, the gift results in the apparent destruction of

333 Is. 9:6

forsooth, they set small store on that which was doing within; nor do they even wait, as if they had something which they could contribute more necessary than that which He was so earnestly doing; but they prefer to interrupt Him, and wish to call Him away from His great work.”
his life. Israel, chosen and beloved of God, continually struggles with the notion that God’s choice should mean that they have what the nations have, only more of it. The gods of the nations underwrite their conduct, and so Israel’s aspiration to become like the nations forever tempts her to worship her own God as if he were one of the pagan deities.

To show this dimension of the event, it’s important to point out that Jesus is offered up by the rulers of Israel as an affirmation of their loyalty to Caesar (Jn 19:15). The uneasy peace between Israel’s elders and what Revelation calls the Beast out of the Sea was threatened by Mary’s Son. He summoned all and sundry to membership in a renewed Israel in which love for God was not to mix with the loves of the world. Jesus sets himself up as the decided enemy of the principalities of the nations: Legion and Mammon. These powers depend for their intelligibility on the tyranny of death. To one with an indestructible life, they are no more potent than houseflies, and thus the ministry of Jesus inevitably forces a crisis of consciousness. The embrace of Israel’s God as the God beyond economy would unleash the power of Resurrection onto the world, as it later did. But this had always been God’s offer to his people. Augustine’s prayer, da quod iubes et iube quod vis is not just a description of life in the Spirit but a strong reading of the plain text of the Akedah as he knew it. The struggle of Israel to serve a living God achieves its crisis in the confrontation Jesus initiated with all the powers of death.

The wisdom and mercy of God are on their fullest display, however, precisely at the point where the people show they have never known or loved him for who he is. In an attempt to placate the bloodthirst of Legion and Mammon, the people offer the Son they have been given. They intend his death for their own lives: “it is better that one should die for the people than that
the whole nation should perish.”\textsuperscript{334} But it is this offering that brings about the demonstration of an indestructible life and the forced liberation of human nature from the powers of sin and death. In their attempt to forge an economy with God, they make themselves responsible for the gift of release from economy. What they intend for ill, God turns to their own good as the permanent guarantor of their permanent election: “his blood be on us and on our children.” At the same time, just as Mary’s offering effects a reversal such that her life becomes an extension of his life, Israel undergoes, unknowingly, the very transformation that marks it as God’s special possession. In the act of sacrifice, in the nature of the case, they bind themselves to the life of the Son and to nothing else (“his blood be on us”). All of the promises now come to them through him, and in no other way. Of course, this is as it had been promised from the beginning: “to your children (\textit{zera, “seed”}) I will give this land.”\textsuperscript{335} If the sacrifice binds Israel to the Son and to his indestructible life, it also binds it to receive nothing except through him. Israel will inherit the whole earth, but only as it receives it from Christ. Except and until that reception, Israel wanders - as he does - with no place to lay its head.

Their two intentions towards the same act, then, bind Israel to Mary and Mary to Israel. By God’s mercy, Israel’s waywardness turns out to be the means of its election to God’s purpose. But it also dooms Israel to the loss of everything except for God. Mary, doomed for that loss by her membership in Israel, also voluntarily chooses it for love of God. She is due life and chooses her own death. Israel is due death but chosen for life. As Israel, Mary is chosen for life and it is due to her. Moreover, she must be given life at the moment that Israel receives the life it is

\textsuperscript{334} Jn. 11:50. Cf. Genesis 50:20: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”

\textsuperscript{335} Gen. 15:18
doomed to, a life of having no home except God in Christ. History’s contractions, then, remove Israel and Mary from the land promised to Abraham. But while Mary undergoes her own death in the accidents of life at the cross, Israel undergoes life in the accidents of death. In 70 AD, Mary joins her people in their abstinence from all that is not Christ but experiences it in a much different way, for, having already given the world away, she cannot die again. So, while Israel loses the earth that was promised to it, Mary is lost to the world. To my knowledge, no year has been decided for the date of the Assumption of the Lord’s Mother into Heaven, though there are some traditions that suppose her to be at approximately 70 years old. But given the reasons why it must have happened, it appears supremely fitting that she gain Christ at the moment her people lose everything else but him. She has offered her whole life and all she is to Christ; she has nothing but him and what he gives her. She has waived her right to honor and to the fruits of his indestructible life to give him fully to the world. Imitating her, he has given away all to be for Israel what Israel needed him to be; his resurrection cannot fail to be understood as the divine commendation of that gift and return of its fruits back, first, to him, and, second, to anyone there may be who has also emptied themselves of everything except whatever God may give to him.

Thus, she arises visibly to life at the very moment of her people’s invisible resurrection. They are, I suppose, the very same event.


337 That is, a corporate resurrection to life in the accidents of death.

338 If they had accepted him, it follows, they all would have been assumed as she was. That this is so is made clear by St. Paul, who understands their disobedience as the door into the Kingdom for the Gentiles. The implication is that if they were to have accepted him, no such door would have been open, for history would have closed its chapters in the consummation of all things.
That Mary and Israel are bound to one another in this way has important consequences for both of their conduct through the world since 70AD. What binds Mary and Israel to one another, is that they both receive their gift of existence as Israel from Christ. But Mary, who as Mother of the Lord gives her Son away to Israel, receives back, as Israel, all she has given. Israel, who as Mother of the Lord offers him to the idols, receives from the power of his indestructible life the assurance that they will be the world’s one indestructible people. But as they do not yet know the source of their life, they live out Christ’s indestructible life invisibly. A relationship therefore exists that bears comparison with that of the original human pair relative to the rest of the creatures in the Garden of Eden. All of them were given life by God, and their existence reflects his goodness. But Eve and Adam were aware of this fact and were thus able to celebrate and give thanks for it, to focus the praise that all creation offers just by being, and to offer it to God. What Eve and Adam are, all creation is – sheerly by its act of being but unwittingly and unwillingly. What creation is, Eve and Adam are by love and knowledge. They make visible and intelligible by their response the relationship that exists in all of creation. A similar relationship always takes place between Mary and Israel. Each of them, after 70 AD, receives their life from the indestructible life that belongs to the Son. This is the guarantee that Israel will not vanish from the face of the earth until they inherit all of it. Indeed, their presence to the earth is the ministry of reconciliation to the pagans.339 Their continuing ignorance of the source of their life opens the door into the kingdom of God for those who were without hope and without God in the world.340 Israel continues to play its necessary role in the redemption of the

339 Again, as St. Paul makes clear in his letter to the Romans (Rom 9-11).

340 Eph 2:12.
world as God’s beloved, enduringly and eternally dear to him. As such Israel cannot disappear from the earth any more than the gates of hell can prevail against the Church. This is the explanation for her endurance and survival, indeed her ability to flourish wherever she finds herself.\(^{341}\) Israel’s continued presence to the world is the sign Abraham’s God remains present to it.

Israel’s presence within the world as a witness of Christ and as the means of his outreach to the world is also the explanation for the curious fact that Mary is by far the most effective missionary of the Church. For as long as Israel’s presence in the world and ignorance of the Messiah persist, Mary must continue her mission to give her Son to God and, hence, to Israel, and, hence again, to the world. The mystery of Israel and its wandering is to be found in the counsels not only of judgment but of salvation. What is true of Israel invisibly is true of Mary visibly, and vice versa. So, for as long as Israel persists, Mary will appear in the world. Abraham’s children have wandered the length and breadth of the earth, residing in every nation under heaven. Thus, Mary has been outfitted for a Mission to every tribe and tongue. That is the reason for her unique missionary charisms. Through the history of the Church, God has gifted his saints with many and varied gifts. But Mary, bound to a people in exile everywhere, must surpass them all.

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us,” Paul writes to the Roman Church (Rom 12:6-8). He goes on to show how the gifts are dispersed because each part of the body will need the others. Each person is possessed of a particular measure of grace, and

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\(^{341}\) Indeed, no less a light than Alexander Hamilton observed that the success of Abraham’s children wherever they roam was a historical fact begging natural explanation and urging faith in their election by God. See Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 18.
so the Spirit’s creative energies operate in a measured way to each person. In contrast, Jesus is the one who speaks the words of God, because God gives Him the Spirit without measure. But Mary, who as a creature is not capable of receiving the Spirit without measure, is nevertheless full of grace, one on whom the Spirit rests in the highest possible measure. That measure is the explanation for her unwavering love, which Paul takes to be the one unmistakable sign of the presence of the Lord’s Spirit. Mary therefore possesses every one of the Spirit’s gifts. Her apparitions are so many, it would be tempting to catalogue and examine them all, though three of the most important will suffice to make the point.

In his discussion of the manifestation of the Spirit of God at the Corinthian Church, Paul gives a brief, probably not exhaustive, list of the gifts the Spirit bestows on the Church

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

If we observe the Marian appearances to Bernadette Soubirous, to Juan Diego, and to Lucia Santos and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco, we will see every charism Paul mentions on brilliant and creative display. “To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and to another the message of knowledge.” In all three of these cases, unlearned and unqualified people are outfitted with the ability to convince the powerful and the educated of their mission from God. Each of them speaks the words given to them by the Virgin, and people are won to

343 1 Cor. 12:7-13.
God. Indeed, Bernadette tells her parents and local church officials what the lady said to her: “soy era la Immaculada Concepció,” without ever having learned what that might mean. “To another, faith”: the boldness of Lucia and her cousins, as they report what they know will happen at the fifth apparition, is astounding, more and more so the more one considers what opposition they faced in the time between the first apparition and the Miracle. Bernadette and Juan Diego also faced intense opposition and remained steadfast. “To another, gifts of healing”: the miracles at Lourdes have been subjected to more independent scrutiny than any comparable claims in the history of the church, with the possible exceptions of those that presage the canonization of saints in the modern period. Tuberculosis, blindness, multiple sclerosis, terminal heart diseases, and paralysis number among only the confirmed miracles at Lourdes. And the process is such that many more such things happen than are finally confirmed. Similarly, pilgrims to Fatima have experienced cures at the hand of God. So have pilgrims who pray in front of Juan Diego’s tilma, as they have since the indigenous saint’s uncle was healed in confirmation of the Virgin’s Word. “To another miraculous powers, to another prophecy”: Hume’s skepticism about miracles works in a circular way. But if there ever was a time when it would be more remarkable that a claim to the miraculous was false than that it was true, it would be the solar phenomenon seen by over 70,000 people at Fatima. Explanations vary, and for my purposes it need only be observed, granted even a once in a millennium solar or atmospheric event, how vanishingly small the odds would be that an illiterate child would predict it so that so many people were in a place to see whatever it was they saw. The Lady of Fatima predicted this miracle along with so much else, as did the Lady at Guadalupe who predicted the cure of Juan Diego’s uncle. “To another, the speaking of different kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues”: at all three apparitions, Mary speaks in the language of those to whom she appears, Occitan (not French) to
Bernadette, Portuguese to the children at Fatima, and Nahuatl at Tepeyac. The significance of this last datum has not been lost on, for example, John Paul II, who at Juan Diego’s 2002 canonization dubbed Mary and Juan Diego “a model of perfectly inculturated evangelization.”

Israel was meant to stand to the nations as Adam and Eve had to the rest of the creation. For as long as they wander, the creation is subjected to frustration. And for as long as this is true, Mary will continue to her missionary work as an Israelite, offering her son to fill the barren womb of the world and her people, whom she loves. She stands as the widow, possessed of merely one mite, who nevertheless gives all she has to the Lord. But it is that one mite that grows, multiplies, like the plant that emerges from the mustard seed, like the loaves and fishes, until all Israel is fed and twelve baskets are left over. It is because of what her offering is that it is both enough and more than enough. Her seed energizes the ancient line with new vitality, and because it does, the hunger and thirst of the world will finally be quenched. Israel’s barrenness has been reversed; the Lord remembers the shame of Mother Zion, and through her labor pains he has brought salvation to the earth. Her vocation is fulfilled, although it is for the moment concealed from her eyes. And when it is finally revealed to her all that God has done, she will stand in silent adoration at what God has brought forth from her, the new Eve and Adam who will steward the renewal of all creation. Mary, by being the one who actualizes every possible potency of human will, by the utter completeness of her gift, will receive the renewed world as her harvest. Just as Christ will deliver the whole renewed cosmos to the Father, he will offer the indestructible Springtime of all things made new to His Mother, and at that moment it will be just as true of her as it is of God – though in a different key – that she has filled the hungry with

good things, for it happened by way of her being sent away again and again without her riches. Abraham’s true daughter, she will have done what was never asked of him. She is the perfect mirror of the God whose being is not merely an act of self-oblation but also of begetting and gift. In that begetting, gift, and self-offering by which the new human race is reborn, and in that gift alone, is God’s promise kept and His long Mission to find a partner successfully accomplished.
CHAPTER 5

EX UTERO PATRIS: INTRA-DIVINE PARTNERSHIP AS THE BASIS FOR THE COVENANT

When I was pregnant with my daughter, I thought, “this is the closest I will ever be to another person.” I felt like I knew her. And then when she was born, I thought, “stranger.” And I felt – “I don’t know you at all.” And I think the point of parenting is that you welcome a stranger into your home, and you give them the space to become who they are supposed to become.

An objection that might arise out of the previous chapter is this: if God is able to superintend history so that Israel offers its child to the nations, then why does Mary need to play the part she plays? If God can create the conditions in which Israel would give its son – give this Son – over to death, then why does God need Mary to offer him to the Lord in the way I have argued she does offer him? In other words, what is the need for coredemption? Behind that objection lies another, often expressed on behalf of divine dignity? Doesn’t arguing for any kind of necessity of coredemption place limits on divine wisdom and power? Is the Lord’s arm too short to save? God is the one who loves in freedom; is not coredemption a contradiction of that very freedom? 345 The objection could be – and has been – restated soteriologically. Is not this

345 Barth, as so often, has synthesized the Protestant logic so brilliantly.
entire endeavor in the end an attempt to justify human beings by works, yet one more in a long line of attempts to steal the Promethean fire? The objection is really one against partnership in general, and is reflected in one of the five solas: in the end, only God must receive glory for the salvation of humankind.

But these objections misunderstand in a pretty fundamental way the covenant that God makes with Abraham and his children and with creation – both how it works and what its goals are. They confuse the final responsibility for the fulfillment of the Covenant, which rests with God as the only one possessing the power to bring it to fulfillment, with the means of fulfillment, which can only be a mutual act. God’s love and freedom must be displayed not merely in the deliverance of Israel but in enabling Israel to love in freedom, to will and participate in its own deliverance. In the end, God must be the God the living and not the dead. An Israel lashed to the wheel of salvation history and dragged into life may be the object of salvation, but they are not the people they were promised they would be – a people that chooses life and not death. And the God who saves them in that way would not be the God of Israel but Moloch or some other one of the bloodthirsty deities whom Israel tried to appease with the blood of their children. On Moriah, Abraham found a God who does not steal children; it cannot be different on Calvary. The shape the covenant would take is dependent, finally, on who God is. In this chapter, then, I will examine the logic of covenant and argue that God’s mission to find a partner in salvation is

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Thus, for Karl Barth, “in the doctrine and worship of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest.” See Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/2, § 15.2 (143). It is important, in light of our earlier discussion of the history of Mariological thought, that Barth takes whatever we can say about Mary to flow from her nearness to the Incarnation and nothing else: “[The statement ‘mother of God’] has a biblical foundation and is very instructive in the Christological context. But its use as the basis of an independent Mariology (as it is called) was and is one of those characteristically Roman Catholic enterprises against which there has to be an Evangelical protest not only for their arbitrariness in form but also for the precariousness of their content” (Ibid., 139).
rooted in the triunity of God Himself. The vocation of the human race is to be the image of God, and the new Adam and Eve are charged with renewing that image. The Son of Man must have a Mother because the Son of God emerges eternally *ex Utero Patris*, as the Toledo fathers rightly discerned. The life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God are sufficient to restore the human race, but only because they *also* cause the election of Israel and the eventual emergence of the woman who would offer her Son just as the Father offers his own. Only when this woman and her Son arrive, with the multi-personified love between them that is the renewed Israel of God, can it be said that the image of God has arisen in the garden of the earth.

**I. The Logic of the Covenant**

At its core, a covenant is an exchange of promises between two or more parties around the achievement of some common purpose ordinarily not achievable without the fulfillment of each set of promises. In this way, they bind people to one another’s interests. As such, covenants are a species in a genus that includes contracts, agreements, alliances, testaments, wills, and accords. In many cases, more than one of these words can rightly be used to describe the same exchange of promises. There have been a number of attempts to distinguish covenant from contracts, but by and large those definitions are stipulative. In common use, they are interchangeable. But the ways some have tried to differentiate them are instructive to the endeavor to understand what it means for God to make a covenant with Israel and what fulfillment of that covenant would look like.

Arguably the most famous attempt to distinguish covenant from contract is found in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. There, Hobbes claims that contracts are related to the disposition of things presently – say, your goods and my money – while covenants, which are a species of contract, relate specifically to promises around future states of affairs. For Hobbes, cooperation
is crucial to society. Without it, we descend into a state indistinguishable from animals or brute forces of nature. But not all cooperation relates to the simultaneous division of effort or material. Often, there has to be a first mover. Once the first mover moves, she is at risk. If the second mover does not move, the first mover stands to suffer damages. If a farmer grows peaches rather than snap peas, say, even though the latter is easier to grow, because I commit to paying a certain price for them, the farmer will suffer harm should I decide not to buy them in the end. For Hobbes, a key responsibility of the State is to ensure that covenants are kept.\(^{347}\) The state, that is, enforces the voluntary sharing of risk, because it has a vested interest in there being first movers. Certain assumptions of risk are crucial to society, and a just state must protect those who take them from undue harm by default. The crucial move to note is that covenants are exchanges of promises related to the mutual sharing of risk. They ensure that each side has skin in the game. Because of this, they are future oriented, and they can only be fulfilled when a certain future state of affairs obtains because of the keeping of promises or becomes impossible in spite of the keeping of promises. If the desired state of affairs comes about in spite of failure to keep promises or becomes impossible concurrent with such failure, the covenant is not fulfilled. For Hobbes, covenants are the means of dividing up the risk necessary for society to exist.

Though Hobbes’s way of distinguishing covenants from other contracts might be disputed in modern parlance (plenty of contracts contain covenants that have little to do with risk or the future), it does suffice to pick out an important feature common to many contracts and to surface the motivation for them. It is worth noting that for Hobbes, covenant addresses the vulnerability that is common to creatures in relation to the uncertainty of the future. Covenants

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\(^{347}\) *Leviathan* 17.13.109.
share that vulnerability, but they do not eliminate it. A person with whom I have covenanted may become incapacitated or even die. Taking account of that risk is part of the process of making covenants. They are inherently conservative, because each person will try to minimize risk to herself in light of the vulnerability of the other. Thus, although covenants are necessary to rise above the brutish conditions of nature, due diligence and enforcement are necessary to ensure covenants do what they are designed to do.

Another attempt to distinguish covenants from contracts is found in the Reformed theological tradition. James Torrance, one of this branch of theology’s leading lights, claimed in an article on this topic that the distinction is dissolubility: “theologically speaking, a covenant is a promise binding two people or two parties to love one another unconditionally.” A contract, on the other hand, “is a legal relationship in which two people or two parties bind themselves together on mutual conditions to effect some future result. The business world and political world are full of such contracts. They take the form ‘If you do this, then I will do that.’"348 Future-orientedness is common to both contracts and covenants, for Torrance. But covenant binds each party to whatever future might exist. Conditionality is the defining feature of a contract. His paradigm example is marriage, in which two unconditional sets of promises are exchanged, which binds each spouse to the other for life. Marriage binds each party to the other’s future, come what may. In that way, covenants are extremely vulnerable to the future, the most vulnerable of all agreements.

Torrance’s source for thinking this way is Scripture, and the church’s marriage liturgies. They certainly cannot be empirical, as marriages have historically been breakable, even if with

difficulty. But Torrance’s definition ignores key instances of what Scripture calls “covenants” (ךְּרַmonic) that are explicitly conditional, even with God (Gen 31:34, Deuteronomy 28:21, et al). The suzerain treaties, so often examined by biblical scholars, are conditional. They can be broken. Covenant theologians often point out that the ceremony to establish the covenant was one in which the parties would carve animals in two and walk between them together. It was as much as to say, “may this happen to me if I fail to be true to my promises.” This is why the most common verb whose object is covenant is יָכַשׂ (“to cut”). In Genesis 15:1-15, God tells Abraham to cut the animals for a covenant. After Abraham falls into a deep sleep, he awakens to see a smoking firepot and a blazing torch” passing between the pieces. Reformed theologians have interpreted this scene as a theophany, in which God proclaims the one-sidedness of the Covenant. And certainly, it is significant that in the story, Abraham does not walk through the pieces. But the interpretation is not as obvious as many seem to think.

In the discussion of the Akedah found above, I suggested there are good reasons to think that Genesis was finalized on the eve of exile or even afterward. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine how the version of the Akedah found in Genesis 22 could have been known to either Ezekiel or Jeremiah without either of them bringing it up. Likewise, Jeremiah’s reference to the covenant of the pieces describes the leaders and the people walking between the pieces. If the soli deo Gloria interpretation of the passing was known to Jeremiah, he does not indicate it here. There is no rebuke for the foolishness of having walked through the pieces; rather, it is in not

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349 Levenson notes the parallel to Jeremiah 34:17-22 and argues that in light of it, “the essence of the ritual is a self-curse: those walking between the pieces will be like the dead animals if they violate the covenant.” JPS 2004, p. 35.

350 Jer. 34:18
complying with their promises that they have profaned the Covenant. God then threatens the judgment that comes to pass shortly after, as the Israelites march East from their Eden at point of the sword and the smell of fire.

There is a tension here, then. If Genesis achieves its final form near or after the time of Jeremiah, it is most likely that it refers to the Covenant cut between God and His people at Sinai, at Jerusalem, and in the court of King Zedekiah. At the same time, Abraham doesn’t pass through the pieces; God passes through them, under the sign of the torch and firepot. One can imagine, in the throes of the exile, having seen the consequences of Israel’s faithlessness, how the message that Israel’s hope to inherit the land lay only with God would have resonated deeply with that generation. But affirming that Israel’s hope is in God alone does not warrant the reformed interpretation of the covenant. Indeed, the Genesis writers are not the only ones who reckon with the frailty of human faithfulness in light of exile. Jeremiah and Ezekiel each see that the covenant is only secure if God guarantees it. Both prophets see that God’s covenant must be renewed, and both imagine a day when God will put a new heart and spirit in within Israel, motivating and empowering them to keep his laws. Christian interpreters have rushed to see in these passages the distinctive of the Christian dispensation. But it would be too easy to miss, first, that this is a promise made to Israel, second, that this “new” covenant merely fulfills the objective of the first one: “I will be their God, and they will be my people,”351 and, third, that they will dwell in the land God gave to their fathers.352 These passages suggest a different interpretation for Genesis 15, that God’s promises are fulfilled not merely when Israel is

352 Ezek. 36:28.
delivered but when they are established, not when they are saved from disobedience but when they obey the Law as naturally as they now follow the wayward inclinations of their hearts.

One of the reasons that God sends the Israelites into exile is that their failure of love for him is coupled with a failure to love neighbors well. The cries of the prophets on behalf of the poor are everywhere. It is sometimes tough to spell out, however, just what the particular sins are that God is rebuking. But there are a few verses that both give context to at least some of the rebuke and also assist us to specify how covenants are meant to operate in Scripture. They have to do specifically with how those entering into a covenant handle risk, given asymmetries in the power and position of those who make covenants. For contracts of a certain size, both then and now, it is common to take collateral against the risk of non-payment. Mortgage loans are secured against the house or land that they are used to purchase. Private loans often involve some kind of collateral, and the entire “credit reporting” industry is a way of placing a person’s financial reputation as collateral for any credit they try to obtain. In the modern west, freedom to leverage collateral is fairly unregulated, while in ancient Israel, important restraints were placed on the enterprise. In Exodus, the Lord instructs the people that there have to be limits to collateral:

If ever you take your neighbor’s garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering. It is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.  

In Deuteronomy, laws around pledges are even more far-reaching: “when you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to fetch his pledge.” Additionally,

353 Exod. 22:25-27
354 Deut. 24:10.
Deuteronomy forbids the taking of certain kinds of pledges: a widow’s clothing is forbidden,\textsuperscript{355} as is anything that serves as the basis for a debtor’s livelihood: “no one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for that would be taking a life in pledge.”\textsuperscript{356} Lending at interest to the poor was forbidden, as was making a profit on the basic needs of the poor.\textsuperscript{357} One of Job’s friends accuses him of secretly transgressing on this score:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Is not your wickedness great?} \\
\text{Are not your sins endless?} \\
\text{You demanded security from your relatives for no reason;} \\
\text{you stripped people of their clothing, leaving them naked.} \\
\text{You gave no water to the weary} \\
\text{and you withheld food from the hungry,} \\
\text{though you were a powerful man, owning land—} \\
\text{an honored man, living on it.} \\
\text{And you sent widows away empty-handed} \\
\text{and broke the strength of the fatherless.} \\
\text{That is why snares are all around you,} \\
\text{why sudden peril terrifies you,} \\
\text{why it is so dark you cannot see,} \\
\text{and why a flood of water covers you.}\textsuperscript{358}
\end{align*}
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Job’s echoes of other prophets in their rebuke of those who abuse the poor gives color to those other rebukes. At least some of the time, it seems the prophets are rebuking an overly severe shifting of the risk of covenants and contracts onto the party least able to bear the risk. In biblical terms, equity of covenantal risk is not assessed on the basis of the promises exchanged but on the basis of the ability of each party to withstand a bad turn. The more powerful party takes the greater risk, because if they do not, those with smaller means cannot participate in the economy.

\textsuperscript{355} Deut. 24:17 \\
\textsuperscript{356} Deut. 24:6. \\
\textsuperscript{357} Lev. 25:35, 37. \\
\textsuperscript{358} Job 22:5-11
of the people. To prevent that is effectively to kill them, as the prohibition from taking trade
instruments in pledge illustrates. Leviticus states the rationale clearly: “help them as you would a
foreigner or a stranger, so that they can continue to live among you.”359

There is no law in Israel that the wealthy must enter into covenants with the weak, but it
is inevitable that they will do so, for no one is so wealthy or powerful as to have no vulnerability.
Covenants are shields against vulnerability, and so all vulnerable and rational creatures will make
them. But once they are made, they are just insofar as they appropriate the risk
disproportionately to the one who can bear it most. It follows, then, that covenants are to place
greater obligations on those who stand to lose the least. The less vulnerable you are, the more
you shoulder the risk. Put positively, the stronger covenanting party has the greater responsibility
for the covenant’s success. This covenantal logic applies to the covenant between God and Israel
as well, and, in the nature of the case, given Israel’s weakness and God’s almighty power,
requires that God give Israel what it needs to fulfill the covenant: da quod iubes, et iube quod
vis.360 God’s covenant with Israel is made in absolute freedom; he has no vulnerability from
which covenant might protect him. But just for that reason, his obligations to that covenant are
absolute. Perfectly free to make no covenant, he must be absolutely devoted to it once it is made.
It is this tension that appears as a kind of divine schizophrenia in the Old Testament; under the
forma Dei, God pronounces himself free of those who have turned their backs on him. But under
the forma servi created by the very act of covenanting with Israel in its weakness, he is unable to

359 Lev. 25:35. For this entire line of thought, I am indebted to the work of Law Professor Richard H. Hiers,

360 Augustine, Confessions X. xxix. 40; xxxi. 45
turn away, whatever they might do:

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.\textsuperscript{361}

The Lord is free, but the exercise of that freedom is love that does what it must.

This is why no theology of Israel’s failure can be, properly speaking, a Christian theology. It purchases one version of God’s freedom at the expense of another: his freedom to enact his love for Israel. The theophany to Abraham shows that it is God who bears the responsibility to bring about what at the time of the exile must have seemed impossible. It is God who will ensure that Abraham’s children inherit the land that has been promised to them. The Lord’s arm will show itself strong to save but it will do so by making the arms of Israel strong (cf. Exod. 17:12-14) as Yeshua and his people enter into the promise that was made to them. The God who has chosen a partner must see to it not only that he is faithful but that they are as well. Thus, it is not just the torch that walks through the pieces but the fire pot as well – not just the fire but the firebearer, not just the theos but the people who have been chosen as theotokos who must not only be his people but must choose him as their God. There must be love and freedom on both sides.

This is the problem at the core of Barth’s reading of God’s covenant in Church Dogmatics II/2, even as it grasps the issues at stake so thoroughly. There, Karl Barth digs perhaps deeper than any previous theologian had done into the inexhaustible mystery of God’s mercy to a people who had turned their back on him, not simply in forgiving them but in allowing them to fulfill their vocation unawares. In his famous and lengthy juxtaposition of Peter

\textsuperscript{361} Hos. 11:8.
and Judas, Barth shows how the faithfulness of God overcomes even when he has to reject the faithlessness of those he has chosen.\textsuperscript{362} Judas, in Barth’s exposition, occupies the place of Israel within the apostolic band. The roots of his sin are not that he rejects Jesus but that he accepts him in such a way that he maintains his freedom. He accepts Jesus but in a way that preserves for him the right to judge and to act. Barth justifies this diagnosis of the situation by comparing John’s telling of the night of Jesus’s betrayal to the anointing at Bethany where Mary washes Jesus’s feet. In Jerusalem, in the shadow of the Temple, Jesus comes to his own. Knowing his own origin and destiny, he wraps himself in a towel and washes the feet of his disciples. He takes the place of the servant (\textit{forma servi}) and applies himself to the cleansing the feet of his followers. But it is in that very moment, as Jesus models prophetically the fulfillment of the Lord’s exhaustion of his freedom in a love to the uttermost (13:1), that Judas reserves to himself one final exercise of freedom. The proper correspondent to that act of Jesus is found not among the Twelve but in the anointing of Mary at Bethany.\textsuperscript{363} There, Mary of Bethany brings the jar of nard and ointment and pours it out on the feet of Jesus. In Jerusalem, Jesus comes to his own and his own receive him not. In Bethany, a half-mile away, he is received. Barth is surely correct to observe the contrast, for in the Lukan version, Jesus rebukes Simon for his lack of hospitality in not doing what the woman (Mary?) does. She receives him, while Simon does not. Jesus’s washing of the disciples’ feet is an affirmation to them of their part with him.\textsuperscript{364} Mary’s anointing of Jesus’s feet is the return of that reception. Judas is willing to love and preserve his freedom; Mary of Bethany

\textsuperscript{362} \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2 § 35.4., pp. 449-506.

\textsuperscript{363} \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2 § 35.4, p. 462.

\textsuperscript{364} Jn. 13:8.
pours her life savings and everything she has on the feet of Jesus.

For all the evil that arises as a result of Judas’s failure, Barth insists that he is not unique in the dispositions that lead to it. He notes, for example, that while John has Judas raise the objection about the prodigality of Mary’s offering, the versions of the story in Mark and Matthew are less specific. Matthew places the objection into the mouths of the disciples, while Mark records it having arisen from “some who were there.” The disciples join Judas, and Israel, and the nations, and all of them together join in the preference of God on their own terms, in the attempt to economize, and to hedge bets. Judas’s 30 pieces of silver come to stand for the whole Israelite economy: for the temple, circumcision, synagogue and Sanhedrin. And having given the Son of God over for these things, they cannot undo that choice. God cannot be bought and sold. In a bizarre negative echo of Zechariah 11, Judas stands for the human rejection of God but also for the divine rejection of that rejection. He makes himself impossible as an apostle by delivering Jesus into captivity of the nations instead of delivering the nations into Jesus’s hands. In that failure he abdicates a place and a vocation that is nevertheless irrevocable. The place must be filled, and if Judas abandons it, it is only the locum tenens (a favorite phrase of Barth’s) of the apostle who, though he begins where Judas ends, ends where Judas begins, not simply as an apostle but (in the New Testament’s view) as the apostle. The events Judas’s rebellion makes possible are the events without which Paul could not have fulfilled the mission given to him. And if Paul delivers the nations into the hands of Jesus, it is only by first handing Jesus over into their hands. Barth’s argument does not follow where it might:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is

365 Mt. 26:6-13, Mk. 14:3-9, cf. KD II/2, § 4, p. 471.
my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”  

This handing over of Christ is the *paradosis* both of betrayal and tradition, the means by which the covenant is both betrayed and fulfilled. As Barth positions him, Judas is the one who, on the basis of God’s unchanging purpose, cannot but do as God has determined that he do in his vocation as an apostle. His rebellion is the means of Israel’s deliverance, and of Paul’s salvation. This is not to place Judas into any positive place; in the end, he can make no restitution; he can only be forgiven. But just in that way, for Barth, he shares a space with Jesus the rejected. In him, the human race’s rejection of its Creator is itself rejected, and he stands where Judah has always stood – at enmity with God and with the world, yet squarely in the unshakeable love of God. If Paul stands opposite the zealous apostate, between them, as between the penitent and impenitent thieves, is Christ and him crucified. We are assured of the one, that he will be in paradise with the one who promises to remember him. But will he forget the other? Barth refuses to specify, affirming the unconquerable grace of Christ and the impossibility of return and holding space between them as proclamation.  

But just there, trouble emerges.  

The episode with Mary of Bethany raises a larger question about the role of women as disciples (to be addressed more fully in the next chapter), but just as importantly it problematizes Barth’s account in ways he does not account for. The deed of Judas stands in for the human preference of freedom over love, a preference from which Barth thinks none are immune. At the word that one of them would betray them, Barth observes rightly that all of the disciples

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366 1 Cor. 11:23-26

367 Ibid., 480: “But if it is Jesus Christ who stands dominantly in the midst, as the unattainable but mighty prototype of both, then the situation between the elect and the rejected is the open situation of proclamation. If the elect cannot create it, neither can the rejected destroy it.
question, “is it I?” The uncertainty that haunts the case of Judas, then, cannot fail to be a specter on the whole apostolate. Barth is aware of this and agrees to as much. But it is worth underlining in a way he does not. When Judas, as John tells it, takes offense at the lavishness of Mary’s outpouring of love, on Barth’s view, it becomes inevitable that he will hand him over:

This freedom of his own decision and disposal in the face of Jesus, this freedom to “interrupt,” is what he really intends and wills at bottom, and not in itself and as such the other purpose which he envisages (“not that he cared for the poor”); not the good work, but his own work; not the help that he will bring to others, but his own initiative in this work. It is in this way that he robs Jesus and the other apostles. It is in this way that he makes himself impossible as an apostle. It is in this way that he is from the very first the apostle who will hand Jesus over. If he were to “receive” him (Jn 1:11), he would acknowledge that he is right, surrendering this reservation of his own freedom of disposal, and renouncing these interruptions. But he does not see himself as being in a position to do this. He cannot and will not acknowledge that Jesus is right. Therefore he has already decided against him and made himself an accomplice of His enemies. For what stands between Jesus and His enemies except the claim of Jesus to all faith, absolute humility, and unceasing prodigality? From the position which he has taken up, Judas can only hand Jesus over to be crucified, to the radical elimination of this claim. The strength of Barth’s case is such that he proves too much. If he is right about Judas, the entire apostolate is guilty of bloodshed. Indeed, all Israel, and with them all the nations, hand over the Son of God to violence. They all reject him; there is none righteous, no not one. But if this is correct, if the possibility of betrayal is a disease from which none are immune, then the Word of God truly does return void. Mary of Bethany only apparently exhausts her freedom in an act of love. Jesus’s praise of her rings hollow. She is in fact merely trading one economy for another. Thus, she fails too and the comparison with Judas actually shows none of what Barth wants to understand by it. If Judas is what Israel finally is, and if the Torah and the Covenant in the end

368 Ibid. p. 471: “How else are we to explain the extraordinary fact that when Jesus declared: ‘one of you shall betray me’ (Mk. 14:18, Mt. 26:21), they were all exceeding sorrowful and asked [. . .] ‘Lord, is it I?’”

369 Church Dogmatics II/2, §4, p. 463.
are simply the devices and machinery by which Christ is sold to the nations, then it is not just Israel that fails but God’s Word.

The problem here is one of the remnant, the friend of God, which arises out of the irreducible conditionality of the covenant. As we have seen, Israel cannot forfeit the love of God, and yet God cannot be faithful to a people who is not faithful to Him. For Barth’s case against Judas to be sustained (as it must, in my view), the devotion of Mary of Bethany must stand. There must be those who do not hand Jesus over, or who do not do it in the same way that Judas does. There must be those about whom it cannot be said, “is it I?” On Barth’s analysis, although he does not put it this way, the difference between Peter and Judas can only be that God, by an inscrutable mystery of the divine will, preserves what in each is the same preference from having the same effect in each case. God preserves Peter from the worst effects of his equivalent frailty. But is Mary’s act liable to the same unmasking? Rather, “I have reserved for myself seven thousand, who have not bowed the knee to Ba’al.”\(^{370}\) There must be always in Israel a remnant, those for whom God’s Word has not become void. The love that Mary pours out on the feet of Jesus is a promise of God kept to his people that the gates of hell would not prevail against them.\(^{371}\) The stump of Jesse must be made fruitful, even if the rest of the tree has grown in vain and been lopped off. Barth’s reconciliation of this tension is the contradiction of Judas, chosen and called as an Apostle with an everlasting covenant, yet rejected. In the end, there is no solution to the conditionality of the covenant except the rejection of our rejection in the rejection that Christ bears and bears away. The contradiction remains forever as the space of proclamation,

\(^{370}\) Rom 11:4

\(^{371}\) Matt 16:18. This is, I take it, the sense of God’s promise in Jer. 32:38, Exod. 6:7, Ezek. 34:24, and elsewhere.
the thread on which each soul hangs as a spider over the abyss of divine mercy and wrath, loved and hated, elect and rejected, and in that way conformed, like it or not, to the image of Christ.

The better solution, however, arises precisely in the asymmetry of power examined above. The God who calls creation out of nothing and is able to bring his paradise peacefully out of chaos can be relied upon to make Israel stand. The conditionality of the covenant means that there can never be a moment when Israel fully and finally rejects its Lord. When the Son of Man comes, he must find faith on the earth, because he has promised that he would. Barth’s state of endless contradiction between Heaven and Earth brings no rest, no Sabbath, no walk with God in the cool of the day. And in the end, that would be a failure of God to be the God of Genesis. Because God is the Creator, he must create the conditions under which his covenant is fulfilled. Even if all seem to turn away, there must be at least a single faithful witness to the turning. Psalms 14 and 53 may state however emphatically they will that all have turned away and become worthless. But these must, absolutely must, be instances of biblical hyperbole, because if ever it became entirely true, there would be no Psalm to record the observation.

None of this is to downplay the reality and universal devastation of sin. The letter to the Romans makes clear that left to its own devices and under the sway of sin, the deviance of the human heart knows no bounds. However the difference between the Dominicans and the Franciscans is to be properly resolved, it must involve the Franciscans receiving their due this point: the Word came to His own, and His own received him not. The closeness of God in Christ actually exacerbates the evil that makes his coming necessary. If Judas prefers freedom, each step closer that God comes will result in ever greater rage. The more God makes himself known, the blinder his people will become. There may (and does) come a day when that blindness achieves its summit and goal, and Israel murders its own Lord in an act of devotion to the idols.
But if that day arrives, unless God is to be seen as a failure to his own promises, it must also be that some Israelite dies with Him. The closer the coming of God, the more he exposes every ulterior motive for economy, the more will his people depart. But the greater their departure, and the smaller the remnant, the more complete must be the devotion of the remnant for the Lord; even if there were just one to look upon the one that was pierced, there must be one who in that moment loves God and God alone – exactly as God loves Israel. Only if the remnant is preserved can the apostasy of Israel also be used to bring its covenant to fulfillment. Only if Mary of Bethany pours a year’s wages on the feet of the Lord can the 30 pieces be rejected as Israel’s attempt to economize with God. The remnant is the missing piece of Barth’s exploration of the depths of God’s mercy to Israel. Judas’s defection for freedom can only have a positive meaning for the covenant if Mary of Bethany chooses to hand her freedom over to an act of love.

And here we must move past Barth’s particular analysis, for the existence of a remnant, whose embrace of the covenant makes it possible for those who reject it to be embraced by it still, gives to Israel’s history an unavoidably dialectical shape. The covenant organizes Israel into the remnant and the rest, into those who love God and those who are claimed by His love for them, those who move the purpose of God along by their wisdom (again, love and knowledge) and those who are moved unawares by the Wisdom of God. And here, we tie in to the redemptive logic of the previous chapter. The Mother of God and Israel are bound not only by Mary’s offering of her Son to her people but by God’s fulfillment of the Covenant through the remnant and the rest. In Mary, the remnant loves what Israel hates and rejects what Israel loves. Israel leans again on the nations, no matter how many times their hands are pierced by the reed. Mary chooses to suffer and lose the vast riches she is offered, treasures infinitely exceeding the scraps Israel scavenges from Caesar’s table. Israel prefers its life over its God, and Mary offers her
entire life to God’s disposal. Israel cries out “his blood be on us and our children,” while Mary gives her own blood for his life. She gives it again as she stands near the cross, run through by the sword that claims her Son, asking nothing of life except to be where he needs her and what he needs her to be. She is a person for whom there is no untapped potentia, no otherwise that could be done, no other freedom than the freedom to love this Son and to be his mother. For her, there is nothing except to be near Him as He obeys the Word she has taught him to hear. In the darkness wrought by Israel’s rejection of the Sun, Mary receives again the dead fruit from the tree of her people. She had sown life, but she receives death in return. What more could be done for that vine than she had done for it? Why, when good grapes were looked for, had it yielded only bad? Still, the *pietà* tradition records in undoubtably true detail, she takes even that dead husk into her arms and lovingly drinks dry the cup of the enmity between her people and their God. She takes his torn flesh – which is her torn flesh – and holds it close as she had done innumerable times before. She wipes clean a familiar brow and removes the crown from a care-torn head. His blood smears her clothes, covers her as it would cover her children. The people had spoken, but they did not know what they said. Nor could they fathom what they had done. Only one other could reckon the anguish of that moment, one known specially for seeing mothers in their distress (*El-Roi*): one whose own house, a short distance away, had just torn its clothes at the blasphemy of this ordeal. Only one bereft of such a son as this could know what this mother endured in the endless prison of those swollen seconds, those moments impregnated by the eternity that would make them available to all times and all places. In asymmetry of nature, but cruelly faithful in every other possible respect, there stood in the wilderness a perfect image of the one and only God. The first images had failed in the midst of the perfect home curated for them. The pair of the *Pietà* succeed in the very grip of chaos come again.
II. The Covenant and the Triune Image

The logic of covenant makes it so that God is bound to the future of Israel, and, just as importantly, they are bound to his "future." But why does God make a Covenant in the first place? Why is Israel called into existence? This question is related, though not identical, to the question of why God creates. That answer must await the next chapter. But just as in Torah, while a covenant once made is binding on all parties, there is nothing that forces anyone to make a covenant. In the nature of the case with God, this is even more true. No vulnerability in him needs shoring up; there is no need that anyone can meet. Why is there a covenant, then? The Old Testament rings out with a declaration of the purpose: “they will be my people, and I shall be their God.” The consummation of all things depicted in the Apocalypse emphatically calls our attention to this: “behold, the dwelling (hē skēnē) of God is with human beings, and they will be his people.” The purpose of the Covenant is to bring it about that the people of the earth have God for their God. All that follows regarding the covenant refers to what follows from that goal and what originates it.

The first thing to note is the parallelism in the phrase. They will be my people and I will be their God. The Covenant creates a relationship such that what each is, God or people, they are for and to the other in an eternal reciprocation of possessives. The phrase is an absolute mystery, because on the one hand, the objects of the possessives carry an infinite difference. To be God is to be that which nothing at all is or could be like: Deus non est in genere. Cleverly hidden inside the formulae of the Covenant is the primary, original theological difficulty; in the sense that God

372 This is not to attribute temporality to God so much as to say that Israel is bound to center in whatever future God creates.
is, we are not. If he is Israel’s God, then Israel is not his people. And yet the Covenant insists it is true. Moreover, the Covenant’s possessives create terms whose intelligibility depends upon identicality of reference. Both Israel and God gaze upon one another and say “mine” and mean, must mean, exactly the same thing. Thus, the relationship created by the Covenant is one of analogy: there must be a frame of reference in which “to be x’s” means exactly the same thing, though in the case of the two parties, it cannot mean the same thing in every respect. The Covenant creates a relationship of analogous being-for, which governs the entire fate of Israel as a historical people. Both God and Israel must, in the way appropriate to the infinite difference in their ways of being, fulfill the same obligations to be for one another. Israel is God’s unique and treasured possession; God is their portion. They are the apple of his eye; they must choose no fruit or tree above him. He is their refuge and the one in whom they live, move, and have their being; they must be the people among whom he builds his skēnē.  

The purpose of the Covenant, then, is to fulfill the project begun in the garden, to raise up the divine image to rule over the earth as the Lord rules both earth and heaven. There is therefore a sense in which the reality the Covenant creates is simply a reality that already obtains. God is everyone’s God and all things that exist belong to him as the generous giver of existence. He exists a se and all other things exist from him. In his goodness, God begrudges existence to no one, and no thing’s existence can lessen His own. His delight is the sole explanatory cause of anything’s being, and therefore whatever exists is, so to speak, the apple of his eye. His eye is the reason there are apples! In this sense, then, the role of God’s covenant partner is to participate wisely – that is, by love and knowledge – in the relation that already obtains between God and all

373 Gen. 3:6
the things that exist because of his pleasure and bear his delight in them. The Deuteronomist is correct to emphasize that God’s transcendence means that he does not dwell in temples made with hands. But all things that exist are ultimately the work of God’s hands, and therefore exist to house his joy in them. All creation is God’s dwelling place to just the extent that he wills to be for it and in it. But the object of the covenant is to create a people who discern God’s for-ness and respond to it, who are for him in the way he is for them – who will and love the truth. In just this way, they present a view of God, becomes his images.

There is an important sense in which God is who God is by willing the truth. As Augustine rightly saw, the Logos just is the Father’s knowledge of the truth that he wills and loves to be. The truth of this sentence, if it is true, exerts pressure on the covenant. It has consequences for what sort of historical issue could rightly be said to fulfill God’s promises. Whether God has fashioned his image in the world is dependent upon whether there is a human family or community that wills and loves the truth as God does. So it is important to understand how it is that God loves the Truth and what the consequences of that love are.

If the Scriptures say any one thing clearly about the one whom Jesus called Father, it is that he is transcendent. None is like him. None are good save Him. He alone rules earth and heaven. He alone is the explanation for all things that are. He dwells in unapproachable darkness. Darkness is as light to him. None can hide from him. He is before all things, behind all things, and there is nowhere in heaven and earth that one may flee from Him. The single, original, unparalleled, holy and unique Ground and all-knowing Basis of everything is Israel’s covenant partner. Language describing this reality quickly escapes the orbit of biblical language, but not what that language intends. The ancient Israelites, even after the Deuteronomistic purges, were so intrigued by the stars because they thought that in their eternal changelessness they were
revealing something of the reality of the maker of all things, the originator and fashioner of the
olam. And when the Lord’s brother James writes that in God there is “no darkness at all, no
shadow of turning, he refers to God’s transcendence of the ceaseless revisions of “evening and
morning” that govern the earth. When the Scriptures, under the influence of the Deuteronomists
no doubt, insist that “I the Lord change not,” they may be referring primarily to the stability of
the covenant, but they ground that stability in a metaphysical claim about the nature of God. It is
God’s stability that gives continuity to his purpose. To put it in the Barthian terms that began this
chapter, it is possible for God to love absolutely because he is absolutely free.

This independence has important consequences for the act of Being that God is. About
God’s single, simple act of being, the broad majority of Christian thinkers have agreed. A smaller
but still majority consensus holds that God’s act of being subsists as an act of knowing and of
willing. These ways of speaking, as pointed out above, escape the orbit of biblical language, but
the consensus around them owes to the fact that they express what must be true for the Biblical
descriptions of God are true. But what interests me here is the light this view of God sheds on the
nature of the Covenant. The Father, possessed of the perfection of Being and of Knowledge,
knows himself entirely. But being himself perfect, that act of knowledge is one with the Act that
He is. This knowledge is unlike creaturely knowledge in that it actualizes no potential in God.
Creaturely knowledge completes a lack on the part of creatures. Each discrete act of knowing is
preceded for us by a time when we did not know it and may be followed by a time when again
we do not. Acquiring knowledge is an act of self-expansion and self-transcendence. In the
medieval Aristotelian dialect, the mind learns new things by fixating upon an intentional object
that is the mental representation of each object in the world. For the mind to have that object is to
grow. As the mind knows more and more truth, it gradually transcends the conditions of its own
limitation, even up to the heights of creaturely knowledge in the beatific vision, at which the point the mind knows its source and is aware of all the truth that it is possible for a creature to know.

The mind is not uncaring in the endeavor to know the truth. It is an active participant in that truth. It wills to know, has an appetite to know. That appetite is infinite in range - there is nothing the mind could know that it does not want to know. The mind’s appetites are towards self-transcendence, because the mind wishes to be like God, knowing good and evil. There are, in creatures, both good and evil ways for the mind to fulfill the appetite to know, but that the appetite exists reveals the finitude and contingency of the creature. Even the angels have these appetites, longing to look into the mysteries of salvation (1 Peter 1:12). And its desire to self-transcend is simultaneously the desire to realize an end that seems natural to it. This is a paradox; the mind cannot fulfill its end except by self-transcendence. This paradox has motivated theological and philosophical controversies both Christian and pagan, and even in a post-Christian subculture still serves as an object of wonder. But one of the implications of the mind paradox is that in self-transcending the mind somehow remains (and becomes) itself.

But in the Father, there is no lack to complete by the act of knowing and no possibility of transcending. The Father’s act of knowledge is not motivated by appetite in the same way that creaturely acts of knowledge are, because there is nothing that can be given to him that he does not already have. Rather, the Father’s willed knowledge of something grants it Being. At the same time, the knowledge that grants all things Being in this case has as its object the One to

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374 God’s knowing and willing something (“scientia approbationis,” cf. De Potentia 7.9, De Veritate 3.6) is the source of that thing’s existence, including that of rational natures. God’s being known and loved is the rest of rational natures.
know whom perfects every intellect. The Father’s self-knowledge, then, is a knowing without vulnerability of any kind; there is in it no discovery, no possibility of forgetting, and no possible change that would hinder the perfection of that knowledge in its object. The Father’s knowledge of something grants it Being, and his being known perfects every intellect; thus, the Father’s act of self-knowledge generates an act of knowledge that is itself, as it were, a “knower.” God cannot grant Himself Being (that which he already has) and he cannot perfect or transcend his own infinite self. Thus, the Father’s self-knowledge issues forth in a kind of “surplus” of reflexive act – which can only be the one divine act and is yet discernible, whose Source the Father is in Knowing Himself and the One whose intellect is perfected in the Father’s knowledge of Himself, who, because he himself has the one divine act of Being and Knowing is also the one who alone knows the Father in the Father’s knowledge of Himself. This reciprocated Act, which is the one divine act, is the object of the Father’s eternal and unchanging purpose, and the One in whom is summed up all the Father’s knows Himself to be. Thus, it is said, “no one knows the Father save the Son.” The Father is the source of knowledge; this other within God, perfected in the full and unchanging knowledge of the Father, must be the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

375 God’s love of the truth is his reception and delight in the truth that He is as if He were not that truth. It is that receptivity that is mirrored in human discovery. God who knows all cannot discover, but he loves as if he had discovered it. Loving it as if he had discovered it is the motive for the reflexivity that the Son is.

The creature’s command is “love your neighbor as yourself” because discovery is endemic to creaturely knowledge. We are to discover as we would have ourselves discovered. But for God, whose knowledge is complete and without any advent, self-knowledge is coupled with love as if loving a neighbor. It is that love that makes God’s act of self-knowledge generative of a reflexive act of being known as if one were a discovered stranger.

376 Mt. 11:27, Lk. 10:22, Jn. 1:18.
All creaturely knowledge is driven by an appetite. But those appetites are not equal - in themselves or considered morally. It is possible to approach knowledge avariciously or charitably. The medieval distinction between *curiositas* and *studiositas* was an attempt to illuminate how even the pursuit of truth could be perverted by the human disposition to obey the appetites at the cost of love for God or neighbor. The fountainhead within the Christian tradition of the distinction between licit and illicit ways of knowing is Augustine of Hippo, but the image, at least in the Christian and post-Christian west, has been that of Ulysses. Ulysses, the hero of the second of Homer’s great poems, is transfigured by Dante Alighieri, who sees in him the picture of the vice of *curiositas*. Modern moral imaginations can struggle to see the sense in the claim that there is anything we shouldn’t know, given the chance. Thus, the well-developed medieval taxonomy of intellectual vices can strike us as strange. Still, however strange their premises and aims, the medieval scholars took for granted that the human vocation was to know and love God, which entails the knowledge and love of creatures – so all things including knowledge must be evaluated according to their tending us towards or away from that end.

There are of course other intellectual vices besides curiosity. Sloth, for example, takes its intellectual form as a void of appetite to know. Dishonesty bears fruit intellectually as the willingness to misrepresent the truth or caricature a person’s opinion or testimony. These vices draw their vicious character from the fact that they make the truth harder to see. The vices, that is, are the opposed to virtues that shore up the infirmities of created intellectual natures. But

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377 Here, I acknowledge my debt to conversations with Brendan Case, who has written excellently on the topic of licit and illicit knowledge on Notre Dame’s Church Life Journal. See Brendan Case, “Curiosity’s Lure from Dante to Moby Dick.”
curiosity’s vicious character arises not from the fact that the truth becomes harder to know through it further downstream, but because one values the knowledge of the truth in an inordinate way. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between three types of curiosity: a) knowledge with the wrong motives, b) knowledge with the wrong sources, or c) knowledge with the wrong perspective. Common to all of the types in this taxonomy is the disorder in the appetite for knowledge – the willingness to satisfy that appetite outside of the disciplinary constraints of love for God and neighbor. It is in this sense that the failure in the garden is an instance of curiosity. The original pair sin not in their desire for knowledge (in which desire they merely fulfill their natures as rational creatures) but in their willingness to transgress the command of God in order to acquire that knowledge. Their failure in the garden is a failure to reflect the divine wisdom. They are destined to know, but the option that had been laid out before them was knowledge by love – to know as God knows. The consequence of their failure is knowledge without love or with a love disfigured. Thus, the entire economy of knowledge suffers affliction of the inability to love the right things in the right way. As the wisdom writers understood so well, knowledge in the devastation brings (along with its natural sweetness) a deep sorrow. We each come at curiosity with a network of attending vices, our own set of disordered loves, but the danger of curiosity is that the knowledge we gain by it confirms us in the vices we express in curiosity. Knowledge, for creatures, is an act of self-transcendence, and knowledge gained viciously re-fashions us after the image of those vices. The more we know via our disordered loves, the less

378 It could be argued, however, that curiosity creates a propensity towards downstream vices that do make it harder to know the truth.


380 Ecclesiastes 1:18
we become. This is not to say we shrink but that we become something new, smaller, less than before. And the downstream effects of curiosity are that eventually it undermines the ability to recognize the truth; we are predisposed to the other vices that do make us less likely to know rightly. We descend into the earth, eventually (as the serpent and Nebuchadnezzar do),\textsuperscript{381} taking on the form of the brutes for whom wisdom is no possibility.

What makes wisdom possible is the capacity both to know and to order our appetite to know, that is, for creatures, to choose not to know out of charity. The choice that was presented to the first parents in the garden was a choice to abstain from knowledge, for the sake of love. It was offered to them to refuse to know except by the will and permission of God. The paradox of the garden and the one condition of their residence there is that Eve and Adam are enjoined to govern an impulse and drive whose proper object is the infinity of God. The “no” of the garden is there like the beginnings of a shadow, in that it creates the opportunity that the Evil One seizes in his deception of the first family. It is in God’s forbidding something that the possibility of evils. But what is it for God to forbid that? The human appetite for knowledge knows no natural boundary. The romantic poets have a point. Ulysses, that great explorer and home-lover, whose career Dante refashions into a ceaseless quest for knowledge, may appear in infernal punishment, but Dante’s readers have discerned a little Ulysses in the poet as he journeys towards the land of the blessed. For Borges, “Dante was Ulysses, and in some way had to fear the latter’s punishment.”\textsuperscript{382} These comments from Borges echo Blake’s verdict on the latter’s own great predecessor: “the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty

\textsuperscript{381} Daniel 4:33

when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.” Tennyson’s romantic retelling of Ulysses’s story shows that he also is a member of that party:

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Tennyson’s lyric is powerful and inspiring, and it appeals to something in us that I think both Blake and his detractors are hasty to call “devilish.” The boldness of Ulysses, prefigured in the language of Milton’s Satan (“What though the field be lost? / All is not lost; the unconquerable

383 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
Will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield:’”),\textsuperscript{384} reveals something invincible in rational natures, and to that extent possessed by Dante’s reprobates and Milton’s Devil still. Our desire for knowledge has the divine life as its end and therefore, though it has capacity to know all manner of created thing, it is unsatisfied by these things. Except in the blessed, that longing never subsides, and therefore it is the hardest appetite to order.

The call to order this appetite is the call to walk by faith rather than sight. When Paul reminds the Corinthians that he resolved “to know nothing among you save Christ and him crucified,” he shows what a knowledge ordered by love might look like. And when he points out that eventually only love will remain, he shows that the appetite to know, rightly ordered by love, will one day each its intended end. Our attempts at knowledge will be subsumed when we know as we are known, but the love that orders the appetite for knowledge will play the role then that it does now. In putting the matter this way, Paul reveals that what we are called to in ordering the appetite to know here below is an imitation of the life of the blessed. But it is also, since the blessed know as they are known, an imitation of the life of God whose image they are. God’s unique act of self-knowledge is, like the knowledge of the blessed, an act motivated by love for the truth that He is. God’s act of knowledge is at the same time an act of love for the reflexive act that echoes out of the Father’s own knowledge. In short, the Father loves and chooses the Son, and it is in that love and choice that the Son emerges as that which is of the same divine substance of the Father but which is not the Father. God’s choice to know by love means that the Son emerges not merely as the involuntary emanation of the Father’s self-knowledge but as the Logos both necessary and chosen, both known and loved.

\textsuperscript{384} Milton, \textit{PLM} I.105-108.
In creatures, who are composite and finite, the refusal to know except by love must take the form of some concrete refusal of knowledge, some particular renunciation. The consequence of creating rational creatures is that there must be some horizon of prioritization, some place at which the priority of love occasions the choice of faith over sight. There would always be a tree of knowledge in the garden. But in the presence of that tree is the option to be like God, refusing to know the truth except by loving it. Because God’s goodness and love are one thing, because they are also his justice and knowledge, God is the source of Wisdom, of knowledge ordered by Love. That Love, through which God chooses the Son whom he knows, is the will that gives shape to the Son’s form. The Love for the Son is what imprints the image of the Father upon him. At the same time, the instant of the Father’s forming of the Son in Love, is the instant of the Son’s awareness that He and the Father are One and somehow not the same. In the eternal awareness of the Father’s beauty and goodness, the Love in which the Son is formed is also the Love in which he wills to be formed as He is - to be the perfect image of His Father, to be what and where his Father wants him to be. The Love by which the Father forms the Son is also the Love by which the Son responds “not my will but yours be done.” In a sense, then, that love is rightly said to proceed from the Father to the Son as that which gives Him the Father’s Being. But it is also that which receives the Father’s intention and, in receiving it, returns it.

This commerce of love by which what could not be otherwise is nevertheless willed to be (and thus it is) yields an act of knowledge of the truth for its own sake, the truth as God knows and loves it, the truth that is because God knows and loves it. The love by which God’s gaze is fixed upon what he knows (the love of which all appetite is a reflection) must be, in order to birth the Truth that is known, in the perfect form both of the one knowing and the one known. In the instant in which it loves what is known into knowledge, it imprints upon it all that it is known to
be. Because in God this takes place as knowledge without discovery, as knowledge of the divine Freedom, the Love that imprints, receives, and returns all the Father is must itself be Free. That is, it must owe its existence to nothing but itself - it must be an agent without any passion or potential. At the same time, it must originate (that is, find its origins) in the awareness that it originates (gives origin to), that of gift and receipt of gift. Just as the Father becomes the Father in the generation of the Son, what Augustine called the vinculum amoris becomes what He is in the love between Father and Son by which he implants all that the Father is into the Son and returns that implantation as perfect reception. The Spirit proceeds, that is, from Father and Son as that which makes the Son the perfect Father’s perfect Image. The vinculum amoris plays the role in the formation of the Second Person of the Trinity that the umbilical cord would play in giving his body the nature of his mother in the Incarnation. That is to say, whatever the Toledo fathers meant by pointing out that the Son proceeds ex utero patris, what they described is the role of the Third Person of the Trinity, who proceeds from them both as the necessary vehicle by which the Father’s infinite life is given to the infinite Son. Just as a womb is created by the presence of a child within it, the Spirit originates in the generation of the Child he eternally loves into Being.

The Father loves the Truth that He is with a supereminent moral perfection; he loves the truth that he is as he would even were he not the Truth. He loves it because it is worthy of love; and it is in that love that he offers all he is to honor it. The biblical (economic) events in which that love and devotion are seen most clearly are at the baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration. That devotion and love are unyielding, as is the knowledge of the Truth that comes by them. And it is that relentlessness that shimmers beneath the surface of Milton’s Satan, Dante’s Ulysses, and that of Tennyson. They receive their pathos from their determination to be that which they, in a sense, cannot help but be. Rational creatures are intellectually hungry creatures, and the devotion
to slaking that thirst has within it something of the interminable and unchanging character of the God in whose image rational creatures are created. But the tragedy of Ulysses, of Satan, is that like the original pair in the garden, their assertion of their own inner divinity comes at the cost of an even deeper alienation from their divine inheritance. In asserting the primacy of knowledge over love, they lose the ability to love rightly, and become slaves, as Augustine saw well, to the \textit{libido dominandi}. They are not too self-determined but not enough. What they are offered is a true self-realization as gods and goddesses; what they accept is a parody of that realization. For Dante, the problem with Ulysses is not the determination to sail beyond the sunset, to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield, but that after which he strives. To say “not my will but thine” is to raise the sail on an even more thrilling and dangerous adventure, one in which we actualize ourselves in discovery and mastery over our appetites and so come to know the one in whose will is our peace. Jorge Luis Borges worries, I think rightly, about the precariousness of Dante’s position as he sees in Ulysses the possibility of what he could become. But just as importantly, there is a sense in which Dante the pilgrim is a kind of redeemed Ulysses, discovering that God’s will is our peace. By resigning himself to the will of God, he comes eventually to see that which no human tongue can tell, \textit{l’amor che move il sole e l’alte stelle}. The Father loves the Truth that He is as though it were not him; Dante, in loving the truth that He is not, discovers his own vocation and destiny in the knowledge of the vision given to the saints, which sets their appetites finally to rest. And in the being of a rational intellect at rest in the vision of God’s glory, Dante offers his reader a vision of what it might mean to be gods by grace.

The love of the Father begets the Son as the perfect image of His own life. That is, as the Father is the source of all things, the Being \textit{a se}, the Father’s love for the Son takes the form of a statement of desire that there should be, a \textit{fiat}. The Son, elsewhere known as the Father’s Word,
is given all that the Father has and is by a divine fiat, a will that what is also should be. The perfe-
ction of God’s knowledge in His love is the precondition for the existence of all that is not God. Whatever God knows and loves cannot help but exist, having no power to resist His will that it be. The truth at the core of creation is that God says fiat and it is. But the divine act that creates the creative possibility for all that is not God is the act of begetting, whereby the Father not only knows the Son but wills him to be. This is the reality described by the Scriptures in their declaration that the heavens are created by the Word of God’s mouth. All created things have as the principle of their existence the fiat by which God generates His Son and the Son receives completely, and by receiving it returns, that fiat with a voluntas tua fiat.385 Thus, everything that exists has, according to its kind, a trace of the Trinitarian act that knows and loves it into life. Bonaventure’s description in the Itinerarium Mentis of the vestigia and imagines Trinitatis is nothing more than the recognition that things can lead us to God because they originate in him and bear the stamp by their facticity of the factor. The particular being of things is granted to them as a gift from the Father’s prior eternal gift of the Son and the Son’s imitative self-offering to the Father. Creation is and is what it is because the Father’s will and intent of His Son lets it be.

The non-rational creation reveals its Creator in the facticity of its existence. Each thing merely is what it is, and in being what it is reveals its origins in the divine act by which the Son is Who is. And yet clear distinctions must be made between the Act by which the Son is Who is and the subsidiary acts by which created things are what they are. The Act of the Son, the way of being God that is what the Father knows and wills and is also the knowledge and love perfected

385 Lk. 22:42.
in the perfect gaze upon the Father, returns and reciprocates all that the Father is by the act of completely receiving it. The Son’s Being, as a full and complete reception of the life of the Father, is therefore a complete, necessary, eternal, independent, undetermined, willed Act. No created thing is capable of receiving the life of God in this way. God pours out his knowledge and love upon the created things – else they could not exist at all – but that creation’s return of that gift is merely to be itself. The creation achieves its end in its own finite reception, according to each created kind – of the act of God’s Being. This creaturely reception of God’s knowledge and love is what is meant by discussions of a so-called “participatory” ontology. To be is to be known and loved by God as the Son is known and loved by the Father but to receive that existence in a creaturely way. But if the inanimate creation just is in the brute facticity of its own reception of God’s life, it remains a “vestige” rather than an “image” (to borrow Bonaventure’s idiom) precisely in that it can be willed but it cannot will to be, at least as far as we know.

The facticity of things, the unshakeable counsel by which they are what they are, is what is described by the idiom of “laws of nature.” Philosophically, the idea of a law undergirding each thing’s being what it is both helpful and bothersome. It is the latter in that it conveys a sense that what is could not be otherwise, almost to the extent that it is what it is by its own power. But created things are contingent; there is no reason they are at all. As Chesterton rightly described in one of his many arguments with the naturalists, the thing that determines creation is less like a law than a will. Anyone who thinks that what makes a pumpkin continue being pumpkin is merely that it was one up until now, is simply making a category mistake.386 It is a pumpkin

\[\text{perche vuolsi cosi dove si puote cio che si vuole.}\]

On the other hand, for precisely that reason, that

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in God will and power are one, this will takes on the indefectible and inevitable character of a
law. God says let it be and it is. But though the very act of existing by which non-rational
creation is itself the expression of a rational will, it does not will itself to be. Thus, the act by
which the Son receives His Being from the Father cannot be the act that gives Being to a non-
rational creation only. It is in the choosing of the Word, in the election of the Son that is the
Father’s Act that creation is willed to be. If it is not that act, the creation threatens to become a
change, or the actualization of some potency in God. That cannot be; the creation then must, at
some point, will itself to be. That is, creation must receive its Being as the Son receives it from
the Father. It must return the Love by which it is chosen in some reciprocal act, appropriate to its
kind as a creature. It must will itself to be what God wills it to be. In so doing, it receives the
Lord’s act of knowing and loving it as its own act of existing.

To will oneself to be what God wills one to be is to love oneself in God and, therefore, to
love God. It is to receive what God has made oneself and all other things as the gift that it is and
to offer gratitude to the Giver. It is to delight in the delight that God takes in all that he has made.
Thus, it is to love all things rightly and to wish them to be as they are, in other words to let them
be according to God’s will for them. Thus, to be the rational creation is to choose what is, to will
what comes to be, to love the truth, even – perhaps especially – the truth as it is not yet known.
The end of the rational intellect, then, is to will what God wills, to have as the object of its love
that which is also the primary object of the love of God, which is what God loves in loving what
he knows Himself to be. The Word that is the basis of the creation’s existence is also the object
of the creation’s love in its love of its own existence. The rational creature, then, does by love
and knowledge that which the rest of the creation does merely by being itself. In each case, the
world mirrors God’s intent that it be. And it is that reflection, the creature’s willing of the Truth
by which it exists, that is the object of God’s intent to have an image. To will that Truth is to will the Act of the Father’s begetting of the Word, the act by which God knows Himself and loves what He knows himself to be. The purpose of God’s action in creation, of His Covenant, explains its shape. In it, and in its instruments, God brings about a people that knows and loves the Truth as God knows it. The purpose of Torah is to shape the loves of God’s people, so that they will the truth that is expressed in the being and letting be of creation. And just the creation of the God who is the act of begetting and loving the Son is not fulfilled until the creation receives and offers its own gift of being back to God, the Covenant is not fulfilled until the people of God love God and all things in God as God loves Himself and all things in Himself. The elect must receive their Being in God’s elective Act, and offer that very act back to God. The Covenant, then, by which God fashions his image and fulfills creation, requires that at some point the Truth that God knows Himself to be must be offered to God in the way that he offers it to the world. The call of Israel was always a call to love the truth in such a way that they embody it, become it, and give birth to it as the Father does. And in the offering back to the Father of the Truth that would be the fruit of Abraham’s body, the Covenant would be fulfilled. As the story of the Akedah shows, it is in the gift to God of the very same gift that God has given Israel that the Covenant is ratified and the bond between God and His people unbreakably forged. Until Israel offers the fruit of the earth, which is the fruit of its body and is the Word of its existence, to God, God’s creation and his covenant remain unfinished.

The Torah’s purpose, then, is to form a people who act in the world as God acts within it, and who choose God with the same wholehearted devotion that is his act of electing Israel to be his people. The Torah’s commands to remember the stranger have as their basis a solidarity. Israel is to remember that those whom it will be tempted to oppress occupy the same position
that Israel once occupied. They are to treat them as they would wish themselves to have been
treated in their own captivity and weakness. That is, they are to treat the strangers among them
not as Egypt treated them but as God did. The ethical drive of the Torah is imitative – it is there
to so fashion the loves and actions of Israel that at the end of the day it acts among the nations of
the world as God had acted on Israel’s behalf. "Be merciful," they are told, "as I am merciful."
The Law of Torah expresses perfectly the will of God for a people who, in following the Torah,
will be formed into imitators of the God who has given it to them, until they love what he loves
in the way that he loves it. Jesus is not innovating on Torah but rightly interpreting it when he
tells the disciples to be perfect as their Father is perfect. But as we have discussed above, God's
covenant with Israel is such that they cannot fail to become what he purposes for them. To the
people who received it in every generation, the Torah is an imperative. But the logic of covenant
requires that from God's perspective it must be future indicative: *thou shalt have no other gods
before me*. Israel’s continued turn away from God in spite of their possession of God’s truth is a
theological problem, then. That is why the seeming failure of Israel is the subject of a number of
reflections, including perhaps most famously that of the Apostle Paul in chapters 9-11 of
Romans, which was discussed in the last chapter. Here, it is worth adding on that the purpose of
Torah was to create a people who loved the Truth as God loves it. All of that is to say that the
intent of Torah was to form a people who could bear the Incarnate Word of God and offer him to
God as God had offered him to the world. This is why, in the end, it matters little whether the
“maternity” texts of the Hebrew tradition, many of which were adduced in support of our
position in the previous chapter, are about Israel or about Mary; they cannot be about one
without being about the other. Until the fruit of one’s own body has been offered to the Lord, the
Lord’s work is unfinished. That is why the Sabbath cannot take place until after Eve is formed
from Adam’s side, and why the Sabbath of Sabbaths could not take place until the New Eve offers the fruit of her body as the complete receipt of the Lord’s gift of being to her and to the world.

Mary’s *fiat*, that is, her will that it be unto her according to God’s Word, is not merely her consent to bear the Redeemer but her consent to bear him up to God, to offer to God what had been offered to her. And in that offering, in the offering of that which is most valuable not only to her but also to God, she fulfills the promise that God had made, a promise to raise up a people who would be in and for the world as he himself was for it. That people arises within the sin-dominated world not only as a partner in creation but in redemption. God’s act of redemption is completed not merely by saving Israel but by making of Israel a people who offers to God the very gift that he offers it – the Word by which it exists. And just as the offering of God to Israel is the offering of the act by which God knows Himself as the Truth he is, the offering from Israel must be the offering of the very sign of its own election – the promised Seed of Abraham. The Word comes forth from the Father as an act of love for and from the Father. His being offered by the Father is also a reflexive self-offering. Because God is *a se*, that self-offering and son-offering are one offering. In the creation, they are necessarily two acts with the same object, namely the life and Being of the fruit of Abraham’s loins. But it is for that reason that the single self-offering of the Seed of Abraham is not by itself sufficient to fulfill the Covenant. Just as the Father’s act generates a reflexive act that also acts *upon Him* and constitutes Him as the Father, the self-offering of the Son must be reflexive of a prior offering and must be determinative of that prior offering as the offering of the Son of God. Jesus’s “*fiat voluntas tua*” must be the echo of a “*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*” that by referring itself explicitly to the later act (*secundum verbum tuum*) is determined, enabled, made possible by it. The Son’s self-offering as
a Son finds its completion in the cooperative act that it makes possible. But the way that it makes it possible, ontologically, is by making the prior act its own historical precondition. God genuinely partners with the world, not as its equal but as that of which the world’s participation in that partnership is an image. And it is that partnership that brings forth the completion of God’s goal in creation – the establishment of his image in the earth, so that it may be on earth as it is in heaven.

III. On Earth as in Heaven: The New Eve as Mother of All the Living

If the image of God is a triune image, it cannot be insignificant that the Lord who says "let us make them in our image" says, only two verses later, "be fruitful and increase in number." (Gen 1:26-28). The God who speaks into the chaos is also the Spirit who overshadows it and causes it to explode with fruitfulness. The Spirit, as the womb out of which the Son is begotten, is also the act of love that brings what God knows into being. The sure sign of the Spirit’s presence is generativity, multiplication, fruitfulness. His act is the effectuation of the Father’s will – the “and it was so” of the immanent and economic Trinitarian self-expression. And because in God, si puote cio che si vuole, because to will and to do are one in God, the act of choosing and of effecting what is chosen are also one act. In the creation, those acts are separate by necessity, but their relationship needs to be clarified. When Mary takes it upon herself to join in the divine counsel for the redemption of the world, she echoes the fiat of the Father. But just as he does with the Father, the Spirit comes upon her, and the power of the highest (si puote) overshadows her and makes possible that which she and the Father will together. It is the Spirit that activates the generativity in Mary and brings forth that which she bears. In doing so, the Spirit does in the recreation of the world that which he does in its creation. If the Spirit is the erat in the story of God, then all of creation’s generativity owes itself to his particular way of
effectuating the will of the Father. All of creation’s ability to be fruitful is a sign of the presence to it of the Spirit, who not only makes it so that God’s will is done but that the creation is able to do the will of God. In the Trinity, the Spirit makes the Son the image of the Father, enables him to do all that the Father does. The role he plays upon the earth is to join the creation to God’s power in such a way that the creation not only becomes what God wills but becomes itself able to effect the will of God. In our first chapter’s analysis of the story of creation, we noted how each of the created things plays an analogously partnering role in effecting the next stage of creation. The waters “teem,” the land “appears,” etc. It is clear in the story that the power of God is the power behind it, but that power’s effect is to enable the created things to do that which God does.

In the beginning of the farewell discourse in John 14, Jesus appears to suggest the same thing to the disciples. Just after letting them know of his particular intimacy with the Father (“anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” [v. 9]), he points out the extraordinary effect on the apostles that his return to the Father will cause. Jesus invites his apostles to infer the intimacy of his relationship with the Father on the basis of the works that they have seen him do: “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.” He then tells the apostles that their intimacy with him will generate in them the ability to do the same works that Jesus has done, those on the basis of which he says they should believe he and the Father are one. It is the coming of the Spirit, and his presence within the apostles, by which Jesus will come to them and not leave them as orphans. The Spirit, that is, brings Jesus and His Father (we will come – v. 23) to the apostles and to all those who

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387 Jn 14:11.
believe in Jesus through the apostles’ teaching. The presence of the Spirit communicates not merely the divine intimacy but its creativity and power to the apostles, as it had brought the Father’s vitality, power, goodness, and likeness to Jesus. The will of God will be done in the Church, that is, because the Spirit brings it about that the members of the Church can do the works of Jesus and can participate in the relationship that Jesus has with the Father, a relationship which is mediated to Jesus by the Spirit and to the Incarnate Word by the same means. The Spirit’s role in the Trinity is to bring the generativity of the Father’s intellect to birth as the reflexive knowing and being known, loving and being loved, that the Son is. But it is that role that also brings the whole of creation into an analogous relationship with the Father’s knowledge and love. The Spirit effects the creation of all things in the image of the Son’s reception of being from the Father. God’s infinity makes of the Son’s reception of Being an eternal generation. All things that are not God receive their being from Him and are necessarily finite; the Spirit’s empowering of them is necessarily then a multiplicative one; they self-transcend in the replication of things. The instrumental causes of that replication vary, but each of those causes is itself caught up in the origin of all fruitfulness, the procession into the creation of God’s presence to it in the Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them (1 Cor. 12:4).

Every conception, every single one, is a conception by the Spirit of God, for the Spirit is the generative principle behind every reproductive act’s effectiveness. As John Milton saw clearly, the Spirit’s chief effect on the creation is to “[make] it pregnant.”

388 The miraculous

388 And chiefly thou, O spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know’st. Thou from the first
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
conception of Jesus by Mary is not miraculous just because of the involvement of the Spirit. Rather, in the absence of the ordinary means by which the Spirit fructifies all creation, the Spirit must supply something else. Conception ordinarily takes place by the fusion of two human wills (or, tragically, sometimes merely by one will overtaking two sets of creaturely power), each of which necessarily wills the other’s will along with whatever it wills. But in the conception of Christ, what is important about the absence of a human father is that the will of Jesus’s mother need only be united to the will of God. As the author of John’s Gospel understood so well, the absence of necessity for “the will of man” enables God to be able to birth as many children as there might be who come to believe in the Son he has sent. 389 The will of the child to be born, and the mother’s will to birth them, are sufficient. Mary’s intent in her fiat is the Word of God, and her complete reception of the will of God alone enables the Spirit to give to her a unique generative capacity – one where the will of God finds a partner ever willing and able to be fruitful. She is able, that is, to fulfill the command of God to be fruitful in a way that no other created thing is. Her single focus on the will and Word of God means that the Spirit can enable her to bear, in bearing the Son, all of the children God will bring to birth through him. Hers is an endless fecundity, mirroring the fullness of the power in the Father who gives all things being. In Mary, the Spirit mirrors the endless fertility of the divine self-knowledge, which eternally generates the divine Word. The mirror is in some ways a dark one; the very limitedness of creatures is what enables the self-transcendence that is typically seen in the reproduction of

Dove-like sattest brooding on the vast abyss,  
And madst it pregnant. (PLM I.17-22).

Cf. Romans 8:22-23.

generations. But Mary’s unique fertility, one which does not require the will of a husband, and therefore requires no division of her will in conception, means that she self-transcends in a way no others do. Her love for her Son is the ground of endless images of him brought to birth in her by the Spirit that enables all creation’s productivity and, in a unique way, Mary’s.

The triune image, then, is completed on the earth not merely by the appearance in it of the Incarnate Godman, but of the mother who bears and loves him alone and in the personification of that love as the endless fruitfulness that generates the renewed multi-personal Israel of God, the total number of all the living whose mother is the new Eve. That such an image was intended had been hidden in the pages of Israel’s Scriptures, not only in the creation stories but throughout Israel’s long partnership with her God. In the Akedah, Abraham’s covenant with God was ratified by his willingness to offer his own son to God. The entire tradition of the redemption of the firstborn made clear, Israel would fulfill the covenant by offering its children as living sacrifices to God. But the Akedah also made clear that only the Lamb provided by God would be necessary and sufficient to bring the covenant to completion. In Mary’s child, both offerings are made together. And in Mary’s willingness to give her Son to God and to Israel’s barren womb, she imitates the Father whose gift of life and love to the Son creates the “space” in which all creation comes to be. Her willing self-emptying opens the way for the Spirit to make of her fruitfulness the space of a renewed Israel and, indeed, a new world. That is why it is at the moment of his expiration on the cross that Jesus offers his beloved disciple as her son and offers her as mother to that disciple. And one important reason for the anonymity of the disciple whose witness the Gospel is based upon is that his place in the narrative is meant to be fulfilled by each reader of the Gospel, who by their belief in his testimony becomes a kind of eyewitness to the story the Gospel tells. Every believing disciple is a beloved one. Each reader rests a weary head
upon the Lord’s breast on the night of his betrayal. Each runs into the tomb with Peter and not only looks but sees and believes the story related by the empty tomb and the neatly arranged graveclothes. And to each recipient of eternal life, Mary is given as a Mother and they to her as a child. She who refuses to pluck the fruit that is rightfully hers off the tree receives not only him (eventually) but all of his living brothers and sisters as her own. In this, she becomes the Mother of the Living, the image, along with the Son and the resurrected spirits that are the sign and bond of her love for Him, of God.

The Church, then, all those living of whom Mary is the Mother and Jesus the Head and Elder Brother, is the image and fruit of the Spirit’s boundless fertility. The Spirit who proceeds from the Father and Son and is the love they share for one another is reflected, then, in a Church that proceeds from both Mary and her Son. And it is this dual procession that makes sense of a kind of semantic excess in the description of the Church. The Church is somehow both the Body of Christ and also the people who receive and offer the Body of Christ. In its baptismal life, it takes up its cross and identifies with the Son of God. As those united to Christ’s passion, the Church recalls the teaching of Jesus, participates in his relationship with the Father, receives the power of the Spirit to do the works of God in the world. In its sentness, the Church walks the walk of Jesus into the world. At the same time, even as the Church is a sent Christ, it is also a recipient of Christ as sent unto it. Gathered together as the congregation of God, it hears the Word of God and proclaims as Mary did, “let it be to me according to thy Word.” The effect of that declaration, in the Words of Institution, is that the flesh and blood of Christ becomes resident within the assembly and then within each member. Mary’s gift of her own flesh to the Lord,

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390 See the discussion of the Eucharist below.
mirrored in the Church’s self-offering, was returned as the residence within her of the flesh and blood of Israel’s Incarnate God. In her offering of that flesh, his flesh and hers, back to God, she receives the Church as both his and her flesh. In the Eucharist, we make and receive the very same offering, joining with Mary in Israel’s imitative offering to God of the very thing God offers to Israel. The Eucharist, then, is not cannibalistic and violent; it is the surrender of self, body and soul, through which the children of God are formed into the members of His Son in the womb of their Mother, receiving from Christ that which she receives from him in the gift to him of her flesh and blood – the body and blood of Israel’s God Incarnate.

The Church’s essential act, then, is the offering to God of exactly what Mary offered to Him, and for the same reason. It is also, crucially, the offering to us of exactly what he gives to us. In the Eucharist, what Jesus receives from his mother, he passes on to us (1 Cor. 11:23). Since the Middle Ages, it has been an object of devotion that in the flesh Jesus gives to the Church and the blood of the New Covenant Jesus passes onto us what he received from His Mother (1 Cor. 11:23). In response to the Eucharistic Miracle that resulted in Pope Urban IV’s institution of the Corpus Christi festival, Thomas Aquinas composed an office that included the following lyrics:

Pange lingua gloriosi
Corporis mysterium,
Sanguinisque pretiosi,
Quem in mundi pretium
Fructus ventris generosi,
Rex effudit gentium.

Nobis datus, nobis natus
Ex intacta Virgine.

“Given to us, born unto us, from an undefiled Virgin,” Thomas writes of the eucharistic Body and Blood in the second stanza of his Corpus hymn. In the previous stanza, he describes Christ’s flesh on the table as the fructus ventris generosi, the fruit of a generous womb (cf. Lk. 1:42).
Thomas perceives the link between the generosity of Christ, who gives his flesh for the world and the generosity of his Mother who raises him for that work.

The Church gathers at the altar to receive the elements that have been changed by Word and Spirit into the Body and Blood. But that is not the first time the elements have been transubstantiated into the Eucharistic gift. Nor was that time on the cross, nor even yet in the Upper Room. Rather, it is as the Spirit hovers over the altar of Mary’s womb, in response to her having received the Word, that her flesh becomes, forever, his flesh. The Spirit, the womb of the Father, fructifies Mary’s created maternal potency and overshadows her, and from the moment that she says yes, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word and Lord Almighty, is Incarnate. It is not merely as man, nor even as child, that he is the Word become flesh. As the Spirit hovers over the Church of Mary’s flesh, the elements of her offering are changed, as the Old Testament Church makes its final sacrament. Others might be made, but no others would be needed. From this moment on, the flesh-sacraments of the Old Covenant would change their meaning; no longer marking out the boundary of the People of God, the fleshly offerings of circumcision would serve as the signs pointing to this one offering of flesh, after which everything is made new. But just here, at the meeting point of the covenants, the flesh of Israel is offered to the Lord one last time. Henceforth, their offerings of flesh will not be effective in the way they have been; nor will they need to be, as this one enfleshed Lamb will bring the dead to life forever and end the bloodletting that was the cost of this people’s knowledge of God.

The offering is total and complete, as every mother’s offering of herself is. From the moment of the Annunciation, what lives within Mary is hers but is not her. Equally, with every passing moment, he is less hers than before. At least by the time he is twelve, and perhaps long
before, both Child and Mother will know whose he is.\textsuperscript{391} He is on mission from the first moment; the reaction of the Forerunner \textit{in utero Elisabethae} makes this clear; his vocation, for which he was set apart even in his mother’s womb, is to recognize the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. Elizabeth, his mother, herself full of the Holy Spirit, gives voice to the frolicking child inside her, as he dances without shame and with all his might, just as his royal ancestor had, at the arrival of the Ark to his home.\textsuperscript{392} But just as the ark contained within it the covenant that Israel had broken, so within Mary is the child that already is the Lamb of God, whose face is already set towards Jerusalem, where he will be the temple they destroy. Thus, his mother’s trip from Nazareth to this home in the shadow of Zion and, already, of the cross. His mission and its costs are already his, already she joins him, as she will until he goes where she cannot follow.

In her gift of flesh to him, she accepts, irrevocably, the destiny to which God has ordained her Child. From the moment of her \textit{yes}, she gives what she could never receive back even if she wanted to. After the consecration of this altar’s offering, he is, and will be forever, \textit{ek}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{391} That is to say nothing of Joseph, without whose contributions to this departure the Mother might never have been able to bear it.
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\textsuperscript{392} Luke does not put us beyond doubt that John is a son of David, though a couple of reasonable inferences make it likely. First, that the genealogy in Luke may well be a genealogy that runs through Mary’s lines, starting with Heli (perhaps a shortened form of \textit{Eliakim}, which may be an Aramaicism for \textit{Yehoakim}). Many have argued that the genealogy was Marian, and it would seem to concord with her being the principal source for the early chapters of the Gospel. Second, Luke emphasizes in a couple of ways that Elizabeth and Mary are the source of the kinship relation between them. First, the Angel calls Elizabeth Mary’s kinswoman. Second, when Mary travels to visit her, she travels alone, which would seem odd if it were Joseph who were the relative of either Zechariah or Elizabeth. Third, when Mary remains in the house, Luke reports that she stays “with Elizabeth for about three months.” Thus, the likelihood, on balance, that Mary was Elizabeth’s kinswoman and that Elizabeth, like Mary, descends from David. If this is so, John’s vocation and authorization to recognize the Lamb of God on behalf of Israel makes a great deal of sense, as he sums up within himself the joint authorities of the people of Israel as prophet, son of Zechariah (priest), and descendant of David (king).
*Marias tēs parthenou.* When she brings him to the Lord at the Temple, and when she accepts the distance he puts between himself and her as the space of the Church and its Corpus Christi feasts, and when she suffers with him and without him on the cross and after his ascension, all of these are but the completions of the eucharist that had taken place long before in what Aquinas calls her generous womb. Every time the Words of institution are spoken where two or three are gathered, and the congregation receives the Word gladly in the company of angels and archangels, and the Spirit descends upon the womb of the Church and impregnates it with the Body of the Lord, the Church experiences what Mary has made possible. And the Lord is there, rejoicing in company of the assembly. And the Mother is there, who has knit this body together in her womb and made possible their fulfillment of the Covenant as they offer to the Lord exactly what she offers, which is exactly what the Lord offers them. In all of this, she is blessed, rejoicing to see her children walking in the Truth (3 John 4). But it must never be forgotten what she has given up in order to gather here with the Living Ones who are her family. After the Pentecost, she remained in the company of his Beloved children. And as his Body appeared, time and time again upon the altars of her world, she received him as others did – on the tongue and in the chalice. Like her kinswoman Elizabeth, she felt a thrill each time he walked in the room. But unlike Elizabeth, she noticed under the eucharistic species the absence of what had once, if only for the briefest moment, been hers alone. It was his *accidents,* not merely that he brought heaven to earth and God to man but the particular way he did it, the familiar turns of his phrase, the way he accented and stressed his *bets* when he recited the Shema’s command to love the Lord with all

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393 Although the language of the Council of Toledo literally concludes that the Son proceeds “*de Patris utero,”* I have adopted the semantically equivalent “*ex utero*” for the purpose of maintaining this parallel: *ex utero Patris* and *ek Marias tēs parthenou.*
one’s heart. The instinct for the absurd that filled his jokes with joy and would one day motivate him, in all seriousness, to envision a camel attempting to pass through a needle’s eye. These were hers, and they did not come down at the epiclesis.

There can be no question: Mary loves the Church. She loves it as no one besides her Son can love it, as her child, as the house built in the wilderness for the wandering children of Jacob. She is tied to it as she is to Israel, and for as long as the Eucharist is served, she will be present as the womb in which the members of Christ are continually knit together. She will appear to them and pour out her love upon them, as she did to the Juan Diego, to Bernadette, to Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia, to Pio and to Catherine. She will turn them to the Lord, to his ways and his words, as she did with the servants at Cana and with countless servants since. But just as the Eucharist is a continual participation in the once-for-all sacrifice of her Beloved Son, so it is a continued echo of the sorrow that has been hers ever since his yes joined her yes in the gift of him to others. From the day of his Ascension, she called his Name – just as she always had, but harder somehow. She called him to her, and he would come, but only as he comes to everyone, to each of his brothers and sisters and mothers. He is about his Father’s business. He is not hers. She saw visions, saw heaven opened, was given glimpses of the Son who loves her with an everlasting love. She saw him as so many others did – as Saul did when he became the least of the apostles, as Stephen had when his face shone like an angel (as Jesus’s had sometimes). He gave and gave to the Church, and so she did too – with an eager love and without hesitation, which is not to say without pain. Even in the resurrection she now shares with her Son, there is the pain he still suffers in his humanity and she with him: the pain of not yet being settled in the home they have been promised.
It would all be cruel, had not the Torah made promises we know will be fulfilled. To be sure, the Lord is a Jew; his flesh is Jewish flesh, and his bone is Jewish bone. His family becomes his family by being grafted into Abraham’s tree, and in this tree the promise of fruitfulness will, at last, be fulfilled. She is his mother, and she has rights. Although she can waive them, and she did, the Lord cannot allow his covenant to be broken. Not one jot or tittle will pass from the Torah, until heaven and earth pass away and all is fulfilled. In the previous chapter we pointed out grounds for our belief that Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven – indeed, why it must have been so if she was to bear the fate of her people. She is risen with her Son, vindicated, and she is with him as His Spouse and the Mother of the Church. She is whatever He needs her to be. But he will not prove false; until she is honored as Mother, she is not fulfilled. In each sacrifice of the Eucharist, she bears for love’s sake the marks of the Lord Jesus in her body; she empties herself for the sake of him who empties himself for us. And she loves this family; like Wisdom, she rejoices to see the earth full of the sons of men. Still, from Pentecost until the day she was raised, she ached. Of course, she had seen him rise from the grave; but scarcely was he with her before he was snatched to God. Her time with His Beloved disciple was, in its own way, sweet to her. She told all who would hear of the things she had treasured in her heart. She healed the sick and prophesied and raised the dead spoke in the tongues of angels, and she helped others to do the same. When the physician came with questions about the hidden times, she gave everything he would need from the treasures she had stored in her heart. She spoke about it that way – used those particular words: treasures stored up in my heart.\textsuperscript{394} She had given whatever was asked. What was left, she kept for herself, like the

\textsuperscript{394} See p. 393, n. 529, below, for my grounds for the claim that these may represent the particular words of the Lord’s mother.
little that was left of a great secret. And then, to preserve her from the rumor of war as it engulfed her homeland, she was raised to Heaven as Mother Zion, as paradigm of the Church Triumphant and the most faithful patron of her beloved children below. But the treasures she has poured, from heart and womb, remain kept from her, until the day when all is fulfilled and she is resettled in her country and her home, in the House her Son will build for her. At that time, there will be no more Eucharists, no more sacrifices, for all will be made new and there will be no death there. Even the wounds, once shown to Thomas, will close up as the severed members of the Totus Christus are reunited in their perfected common life. Then, her child will be at her side, and she will receive back the life she has lost for Jesus’s sake (Matt 16:25). Until that day, Our Lady of the Eucharist will be, just as (notwithstanding her desire for that consummation) she wills with all her heart to be, Mater Dolorosa, our Lady of Sorrows.

395 I am, of course, aware that this speculation is controversial, but I wonder if the difficulty some will have here reflects our too quickly seeing the resurrection of Christ as the end of His saving mission. Indeed, even if we are to say that the head suffers only in his members, it is only at the end of that suffering that the Lord, in his graced human nature, will be completely free. When the one new humanity rises in the garden of the earth, then and only then can we be confident that all will be very good. Then and only then will God and man rest. Heaven is, it seems to me, the anticipation of that rest, the place where it is available even now as a promise whose fulfillment is inaugurated. To be in heaven is to have sight of the Lord, it is to have the future not at one’s fingers but settled completely as to its uncertainty. It is to be connected to the world no longer by faith or hope but only by love. Still, can anyone say that the love the saints feel for those who have not yet arrived home is not itself a kind of suffering? To whom did Padre Pio refer, and under what aspect, when in a time of deep prayer, he said to the Lord in an ecstasy: “I want to help you…. Can’t you make me strong? … I have to tell you that it grieves me to see you in this way. Have they committed many offenses against you lately? They have burdened you still again! … I too can help you… Make it possible for me to help you with that heavy heavy cross…. Can’t they make it any smaller? … Ah, Jesus you’re right … I am weak … but, my Jesus, what can I do? … Can’t you help me? … I’m aware of the impossibility … but to support you if nothing else … May I help you this evening? … You don’t need me … Shall I keep myself ready … You are there … what is there to fear?” (From Pio’s Diario, pp. 40-41, quoted in C. Bernard Ruffin, Padre Pio: The True Story [Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2018 [1982]], p. 55). I have written above, citing Hart and the Fathers, of the grounds for my conviction that only an impassible God can save us. At the same time, the humanity that makes is possible for Jesus to suffer impassibly is a humanity that, as concerns the whole Christ, is still at labor in the heat of the day. Our view of Christ’s suffering is both too low and too high; we must envision the divine nature completely at peace and rest, and yet we must take with utter seriousness the doctrine of the Whole Christ, head and members, as it relates to Christ’s current capacity to suffer. For Mary and the other saints, we must likewise consider the impact on these lovers of the Church that the whole congregation is not gathered together in the House of the Lord just yet.
IV. The Israel of God: Mary's Womb as Old and New Israel

But if the Spirit’s image in the world is the renewed Israel of God, there are a couple of questions to ask about this reflection, one from each side of the mirror. First, the Church and bodily Israel are at odds. If the Spirit plays the role in the generation of the Word that I have claimed he does, then how is that reality seen in the image of the Church and Israel at odds with one another? Second, I have argued that the condition of possibility for the Church is Mary’s self-emptying in the offering of her Son to God and Israel. But if that reality creates the Church, and if that creation of the Church is the image of which the procession of the Spirit is the reality, one could be pardoned for thinking that I have actually committed the very error those who oppose the Filioque worry about, namely, the subordination of the Spirit as a second-class divinity. The answer to this worry is the relation between the New Israel and what Paul calls “Israel according to the flesh.” Fleshly Israel is the consequence of God choosing to have been born of a mother, as Thomas Aquinas rightly understood. A host of privileges are granted to Israel, on account of the child to be born from them. Chief among these are the Torah and the Temple, with the intent of creating a people, an identifiable family from which the Son of God could come. The family from which Mary comes makes of her flesh the flesh of a single people, the Jews. Hers is Jewish flesh, the flesh of the Israel of God. It is that flesh that she gives to her Son.

In a previous chapter, the dealings of God with Israel were described as a divine mission to introduce himself to a people in such a way that two of them – a new Eve and a new Adam – could one day be prepared to hear his Word completely and devote themselves to it without reservation. But in light of our discussion of the Covenant and its ground in the search of God for
a divine image, we can now add to that discussion that Israel as a people exists so that there is an identifiable character that can pass from Mary to her Son. Mary’s gift of Israelite flesh to her Son means that the people gathered at Sinai, constituted as a people by that gathering and by the presence with them of the God who gathered them there, are in a way themselves the bond between her and him. It is the presence of Israel in history, the legacies of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Moses, Zipporah, all those to whom YHWH was a bridegroom of blood, that form and give shape to the flesh Mary passes to her Son. In that they constitute her flesh as Jewish flesh, they constitute her gift to her son as the gift of Abraham’s seed. In her love for him, she gives him her flesh and her people’s flesh. In his love for her, he takes it. When she offers the fruit of her womb to Israel and to God, that offering opens her womb and makes it fruitful to give birth to the world as a new Israel. The New Eve reconstitutes the entire human race not only as the children of Eve but as the children of Israel. The miraculous fecundity that pulled dry ground out of the waters for Israel to walk on now pulls the entire human race from the water as the reborn children of Abraham. The gift that Mary gives to all of Jesus’s brothers is the gift that she gave to him – sonship in the people called by God, membership in the covenant by which God raises up partners in the redemption of the world. Insofar as the people of God are reborn into the new Israel, they are the beneficiaries of those who struggled with God in the pains of labor and barrenness. The divine love for Israel is that he makes their gift to the world of themselves the means of the world’s salvation. At the same time, the Church’s continued offering of the Body and Blood of Christ to the Lord becomes the salvation even of unfaithful Israel, as Paul understood so well. Mary does not replace Israel;\textsuperscript{396} she is the place where Jew and Gentile

\textsuperscript{396} Rom. 9-11.
meet and become partners with God in one another’s salvation. Her womb restores Cain and Esau to the line of the beloved sons. In that way, it is analogously proper to say of all those whom the Lord saves that they are co-redeemers in that they imitate the offering by which she becomes God’s partner in the redemption of the world.

*Excursus: Coredemption as Imitation of Mary in the Pauline Church*

The coredemption of others besides Mary owes to the Marian shape of the Church, which is evident in perhaps the most contentious scriptural texts for Mariology, the letters of Paul. Those who find Mariology implausible often turn to the writings of the Apostle Paul for ammunition. Paul, they say, is our earliest witness to Christian traditions, and he appears to know absolutely nothing about Mary – not even her name. Surely, they conclude, this is evidence that Mariology was a late development of (or deviation from) the core tenets of Christian faith, if one as central to developing those tenets as Paul knew nothing about the mother of the Lord he came to follow. But this argument may prove too much. For one thing, it has been pointed out by a number of scholars that Paul’s letters do not, at least not obviously, show great familiarity with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It’s no surprise, therefore, that in the last two centuries one often finds the same scholars making both arguments. For another, ever since Beker at least, it has become increasingly clear that Paul’s letters — a literature of crisis whose main problem is the Apostle’s absence — can and ought to be distinguished from his teaching. The latter may appear

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397 Bart Ehrman is the most recent scholar of this sort, though Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament*), Reimarus, Schweitzer, F.C. Baur, and many others anticipate him.

in the former but should not be simply identified with it. Still, the attempt to drive a wedge between Paul and Jesus has come under increasing scrutiny in several recent studies.399

Part of this may be intuitive; it just seems like there’s no there there. After all, only one time does Paul clearly mention Jesus’s mother, and the mention is embarrassingly brief: γενόμενον εκ γυναικὸς (Gal 4:4). But I think there are good reasons to suspect that a tale hangs thereby. Although Mary is not named in Paul, she plays a crucial role to the economy of salvation, where she mediates between Israel’s vocation and Paul’s recapitulation of that vocation in his ministry to the Gentiles. First, the phrase immediately following the one above, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον summarizes a dense network of theological concepts. How surprising would it be really if the prior phrase did the same? The work of James D.G. Dunn suggests as much when he breaks down the argument of these verses of chapter 4.

God sent his Son,
born of woman,
born under the law,
in order that he might redeem those under the law,
in order that we might receive the adoption.
And to show that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son.400

For Dunn, there is a threefold parallelism set up, whereby each of the first three lines is answered by one of the succeeding three in double chiasm. The construction runs


A B C / C’ B’ A’. He seems obviously correct when the parallels contain verbal echoes (“sent his son” / “sent the Spirit of his son”; “under the law” / “under the law”). An ambiguity arises, however, in the middle pair. Clearly, that Jesus is “born of woman” functions causally somehow in enabling us to receive “the adoption.” What is less clear is whether what is meant by the phrase is merely human birth (as Dunn thinks), or something about being born of a woman. If Dunn is right, a question arises: why, when Paul describes his labor towards bringing Gentiles into God’s family, why does he so often describe that work in terms of maternity?

Because Paul faced significant opposition throughout his ministry, we are privileged to get his thoughts in a number of places concerning the part he plays in the divine plan. He sees himself as God’s chosen emissary to the Gentiles, a role for which he was destined in the counsel of God from before he was born. At least in some places, he speaks of himself as something like a major prophet, an ambassador with a singular role to play in the history of God’s plan to save the world. The letter to the Galatians, for example, finds Paul contending both for his own legitimacy and that of his gospel against rather impressive opponents. Leaders, probably from Jerusalem, boasting a connection – real or just so-claimed – to James the brother of the Lord, arrived in Galatia bearing a Gospel that re-inscribed the very strictures that Paul had taught were destroyed in the crucified body of Christ: food laws, separation of the fellowship into two groups, and, emblematic of all of these things, the circumcision of all males. All of these had functioned as boundary markers between Jews and Gentile God-fearers. There may even

401 “It needs to be remembered that ‘born of woman’ was a typical Jewish circumlocution for the human person.” Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (London: Continuum, 1993), p. 215
be evidence that Paul himself initially taught a gospel that included Torah observance alongside faith in Christ. But whether it was from the beginning, or after he saw the Holy Spirit descending on uncircumcised Gentiles at Syrian Antioch, he came to see that these boundary markers were schisms in the body of Christ. He traveled the Mediterranean preaching about a changing of the tides and times, that God’s grace was now on offer to Gentiles as Gentiles. His apostleship was bound up in a message that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). And of this reconciliation, which God had effected through Christ, Paul was the predestined ambassador.

At the same time, Paul’s insistence on the Gentiles’ freedom to remain Gentiles and yet enjoy fellowship with Israel’s God did not entail any abrogation of the privileges of Israel. The Gentile churches were to remain in fellowship with their older brothers even where that fellowship imposed various kinds of uncomfortable bonds on them – bonds of charity, not of law. Christ’s Gentile flock was free to remain as Gentiles; for Paul, the Lord’s crucifixion had guaranteed God’s promises to them. But equally, Christ was a Jew, his first followers and all the apostles were Jews, and the God who now opened his arms to Gentiles was the God of the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, the Gentile Church was to live out a tension in which no obstacle could impede their approach to God as fully received sons, and yet they were to try to remove as many obstacles as possible from the path of fellowship with Jewish Christians. The compromise of Acts 15, and Paul’s defense of that compromise in letters like 1

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Corinthians,\(^{403}\) show the intensity of Paul’s desire that Jews and Gentiles remain one body with Christ and each other.

This tension incited opposition from both sides. Some apparently influential Jewish Christians lambasted Paul as one who didn’t even know Jesus of Nazareth,\(^{404}\) let alone could be an apostle of his. They called him an apostate and a heretic, and they journeyed to his churches to turn them back to the true Way of the Nazarene. At the same time, Gentile Christians, who received part of Paul’s testimony but could not stomach the burden of fellowship with the Jews, cast their own aspersions onto Paul’s apostleship. He not only suffered the harassment of official authorities for supposed insurrection and rebellion, he suffered the rejection of his own people, both Jew and Gentile. His words near the conclusion of the letter to the Romans betray a depth of pathos and sadness that one would scarcely imagine, given the buoyant tone of his affirmation of trust in Jesus throughout the rest. Nevertheless: “but now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while.”\(^{405}\)

In the heat of conflict on every side, Paul at times reflects on the nature of his mission and place in the wisdom and plan of God. Galatians finds him alluding to Jeremiah in description of a redemptive role that was larger even than that of the exiled

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\(^{404}\) 1 Cor. 9:1.

\(^{405}\) Rom. 15:23-24
prophet. “God, who had set me apart before I was born [ . . . ] so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.” Readers, especially since the Reformation, have been tempted to see in Paul’s language here a kind of specific application of a generic phenomenon. Paul relays a calling from the womb, so many claim, that all Christians experience. But regardless of the truth of this statement, Paul is clearly claiming selection for a mission, something unique to him. He is set apart to “proclaim [Christ] among the Gentiles.” Thus, his allusion to Jeremiah reflects the highness and holiness of his mission, just as it did for the weeping prophet.

In Paul’s attempts to communicate the plan of God, in which he and the whole world were caught up, a number of themes emerge around the issue of his partnership with God. Repeatedly, Paul ties his own behavior to convictions about God’s activity in the person of Christ. There is a kind of knowledge about God that is available, so Paul thinks, by observation of and reflection upon his ministry of ambassadorship. To hear him tell it, the decisions Paul made about how to conduct his ministry, his mentorship of the churches and their leaders, his letter-writing, and his ecumenical work, were icons of God’s ministry of reconciliation. Still, there are other points at which he seems to make an even stronger claim, to wit, that his ministry just is God’s ministry of reconciliation, that it brings about the world God is bringing about, that his partnership with God is a genuine cooperation in the same work. Partnership with God is a basic category to Paul’s understanding of his ministry. But the shape of that partnership, and the imagery in which

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406 Gal. 1:15-16.

407 2 Cor. 1
he describes it, show that even if Mary is not mentioned by name, her presence looms quite large in how Paul thinks of his own missionary role.

**i. Suffering with Christ**

One undeniably strange part of that vocation to partnership is the call to vicarious suffering. On numerous occasions, Paul speaks of the various troubles and trials of his apostleship not merely as consequences of telling an inconvenient truth but as somehow participating in and enacting the mission of God. “I am a prisoner,” he writes to the Laodiceans (probably),\(^{408}\) “of Christ Jesus, *for the sake of you Gentiles.*”\(^ {409}\) To be sure, Paul thinks of suffering as the lot of any Christian worth the name.\(^ {410}\) But an important difference is that in several places, Paul treats his suffering as on behalf of the church. Writing to the Corinthians about what he endures for the churches, he exclaims, “we are fools for Christ, but you are so wise! We are weak, but you are strong!” (4:9). In the context, it might be tempting to see this verse as written with tongue firmly in cheek. If that is so, it may undermine the idea that Paul sees his suffering for the Corinthians as meant to produce anything. In other words, “we are suffering, and if you were in your right minds, you would be too.” If that is what Paul means, the failure of the Corinthians is precisely in expecting that his suffering should bring them anything good rather than inspire them to join him in solidarity. But perhaps what Paul is critiquing is the attitude

\(^{408}\) Campbell 2014, 33-4, 254-339. The earliest manuscripts of Ephesians do not include the address to them. Additionally, the best evidence suggests that Paul was the founder of the Ephesian assembly, while this letter refers to his “hearing” of the faith of its recipients (1:15), gives Paul’s bio (3:2ff), and looks an awful lot like Colossians, another letter written to those who had not yet met him (Col. 2:1). In Colossians, Paul mentions a letter to the Laodiceans, and asks that the Laodicean letter be read at Colossae and vice-versa.

\(^{409}\) Eph. 3:1

\(^{410}\) Cf. Romans 8:16-17, Gal 6:12, Phil 1:29-30, i.a.
with which they have received these benefits. If that is the case, then Corinthian ingratitude does not negate the transfer of benefits to them on the basis of Paul’s suffering; it actually underlines it with the implication that it is something for which they should have been grateful.

In the absence of a clear determiner of which reading of 1 Cor 4:9 is correct, we are left to continue to think Paul’s thoughts after him and see what the exercise yields. 2 Corinthians 1:3-10 contains another self-narration of Pauline suffering. There, Paul proclaims that he shares “abundantly” in the sufferings of Christ only to rationalize it as an act of love: “if we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation.” Similarly, in Phil 1:14, Paul writes that his chains have made other Christians bold “all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.” Both of these texts are peculiar for the fact that the benefit Paul thinks comes from his suffering is counterintuitive to what one would expect. That is, one would expect that people who love the apostle (or even regard him slightly) to be distraught at hearing of his sufferings, even more so upon consideration of what he endures. Similarly, one would expect that for those who are trying to follow Christ as Paul is, the news that he had been taken in chains would cause fear rather than liberate them from it. Why would Paul’s chains inspire fearlessness? Acts 4 describes evangelistic boldness as an effect of the Spirit’s nearness. The believers gather after the release of Peter and John and pray for divine assistance and courage, because they see the clouds of persecution gathering. If the release of Peter and John motivates a call for help, how much more would the imprisonment and torture of Paul compel that. Still, the thing that does create boldness in the Jerusalem church is the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit. Is it possible, then, that somehow Paul’s imprisonment actually somehow
facilitates the manifest presence of the Spirit among the Philippian believers?

One might be forgiven for thinking so, in light of the description of Paul’s sufferings found in 2 Timothy 2:8-11. There, Paul (or someone reflecting on his life) describes another prolonged and humiliating imprisonment because of his proclamation of the Gospel. His chains, however, far from harming the Gospel effort, actually contribute to it. “God’s word is not chained,” Paul writes, “and therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain eternal salvation.” It is worth reading closely; Paul is not saying simply that his endurance allows him to preach the gospel. He is in prison. Rather, he endures everything precisely because the Word of God is not chained even if he is. Somehow, it seems, Paul’s endurance of sufferings speeds the Word along, and his willingness to remain in that position (if another were available to him) facilitates the salvation of the Gentiles. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 4, a litany of sufferings (“pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down”) precedes a statement about the purpose of it:

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.411

“Death in us, life in you” seems a very pithy summary not only of Paul’s theology of apostleship but also of his soteriology. parallel explains, as so few other ideas can, the lengths of suffering to which Paul exposes himself:

411 2 Cor. 4:10-12
Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.  

Or again:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?  

Paul’s description of this suffering suggests that it is for the churches. “If we are out of our minds,” he writes, “it is for God. But if we are in our right minds, it is for you.” To the Colossians, he writes “I rejoice in what I am suffering for you.” In the letter to the Laodiceans, he writes that he is a prisoner of the Lord for the sake of the Gentiles. Throughout his correspondence, Paul describes himself as one whose suffering is in some way tied to the salvation of the Gentiles.

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412 2 Cor. 6:4-10

413 2 Cor. 11:23-29
Perhaps nowhere is this description of partnership in suffering on behalf of the Gentiles more intense than in the letter to the Colossians. There, Paul writes that his suffering is not just meaningful but crucial to God’s completion of the work begun in Christ. “I rejoice in my sufferings for you,” he writes, “and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking of Christ’s sufferings, for the sake of his body, which is the church.” (Col. 1:24). This passage calls forth some nimble interpretive work from both Catholics and Protestants. The former, mostly following Augustine and Aquinas, have tended to interpret the verse as reflecting the mystical union of Christ and the Church, so that what is “lacking” is for Christ to suffer in Paul, as in each of the other members of the body, what he has suffered in his own body.”⁴¹⁴ But this way of construing the meaning of the passage goes against the plain meaning of the prefix “anti-” in the verb that begins the sentence: antanapleō. So, at least, argues no less a light than J.B. Lightfoot. He observes the verb’s prefix points to a clear distinction in the actors of the main verb. The second actor acts where the first might have done so but did not. Referring to the Augustinian/Thomist interpretation, Lightfoot continues: “The central idea in this interpretation is the identification of the suffering apostle with the suffering Christ, whereas antanapleō emphasizes the distinction between the two.”⁴¹⁵ For Lightfoot, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ is not “sacrificial efficacy” but “ministerial utility.”⁴¹⁶ In other words, it is Paul’s assumption of the burden of apostleship as an


⁴¹⁶ Ibid.
ambassador that brings about the effects in the world that Christ’s sufferings bring about in the divine economy: “it is a simple matter of fact that the afflictions of every saint and martyr do supplement the afflictions of Christ. The church is built up by repeated acts of self-denial in successive individuals and successive generations. They continue the work which Christ began.”

This explanation is both right and wrong, it seems to me. Right in that the verb *antanaplero* conveys not a continuation of something but a supplementation of it. Wrong in that Lightfoot denies what Paul elsewhere explicitly affirms: namely, that the category that sheds the proper light on Paul’s embrace of sufferings on the Colossians’ behalf is precisely that of sacrifice. Paul is not merely the priest pouring the drink on the altar or spreading the ashes out; he is what is contained within the chalice. This image is particularly striking, since the category of “drink offering” or libation is explicitly commanded as an *accompanying* offering with every burnt offering or sacrifice at the altar. The drink offering is not the sacrifice, and it does not do what the sacrifice does. At the same time, the sacrifice cannot be made without it. The sacrifices are commanded for their various reasons, gratitude, holiness, or forgiveness. It is the sacrifice that accomplishes that work; but that work does not happen without the accompanying offering of wine. This image does justice to the plain sense of *antanaplero*: something has to go with the offering in order for the offering to do what only it can do. This idea

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417 Ibid.

418 Rom. 12, i.a.

419 1 Tim. 4:8, Phil. 3:17
captures why Paul’s vicarious suffering can be *for* the world. It is an offering, which accompanies that of Christ and has a common object and purpose with that of Christ. That this conception causes theological problems of various kinds is evident from the friction the doctrine of coredemption has caused throughout the life of the Church. But those difficulties do not remove a very strange idea, which must be exceedingly strange for those who have drafted Paul into the swirl of reformed *solas*. Paul’s suffering with Christ accomplishes something necessary, in his view, to bring the Gentiles to salvation. He is a legitimate, partner in Christ’s suffering for the life of the world. How that’s so is yet to be determined.

*ii. The Pains of Labor*

Paul’s letters to the churches vary in tone in ways that he knows are going to shock them from time to time. Where he does this, he often excuses himself by pointing to the fact that he is a parent in pain. This dynamic is conspicuous especially in his later correspondence. In the matter of conflicting loyalties, Paul walks a delicate line between not asserting his prerogatives and rights to the Corinthians’ devotion while pointing out that it is absolutely right that they should give it. His litany of sufferings in order that they might live concludes: “I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” For Paul, the pains of suffering are related to the pains of being a parent eager for the children to grow up.

In another litany of his sufferings for the church, Paul concludes with an expectation of mutual affection conditioned by parental love: “I speak as to my
Near the conclusion of that same letter, Paul frames his practice of not being a burden to the Corinthians, a lesser but important source of suffering, as the thing rightly expected of parents: “children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.” He concludes, “I will gladly spend for you everything I have, and myself as well” (2 Cor 12:14-15). Over and over again, Paul speaks of the sufferings that attach to his call as the sufferings of child-rearing, the pains attendant to giving birth and maturity to the one Jew and Gentile Church.

This parental language is elsewhere explicitly refracted maternally. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes that he is in labor pains again for them, until Christ is fully formed in them. Paul experiences a kind of vicarious labor, feeling the pains that go with the Galatians’ fertility. It is in Paul’s womb that Christ is fully formed among the Galatians. But it is also in his womb that the Galatians fulfill their vocation to become the people among whom Christ is fully formed. To bear Christ on behalf of the Galatians is, thus, to bear them as well. To give birth to Christ in the Church is to give birth to the Church and vice versa. Paul does not mark much difference between them, as Christ and the Church in his mind are simply one thing – head and body. Paul sees himself as a mystical mother of the mystical body of Christ, enabling by his suffering of labor pains their own experience of a fruitful labor and delivery of Jesus. That Paul’s development of this typology takes place in the only book in which he notes Jesus’s birth of a woman is significant. That they are followed by a lengthy discussion of who, properly speaking, is our mother, is even more so. But when all of this is read against the backdrop of the letter

\[420\] 2 Cor. 6:13
itself, which is a defense of Paul’s ministry and apostleship against invaders bearing letters of recommendation from the Jerusalem church and Jesus’s own relatives, Paul’s reflections upon his own motherhood of the mystical body cast an important sidelight on the importance of the Marian shape of the church and its role in the search for a divine partner.

The book of Galatians finds Paul in a delicate rhetorical position. On the one hand, he wants the Galatians to have faith in Jesus, the one historical man who was crucified at Jerusalem and who rose from the dead. This concrete historical Referent is the object of the faith not only of Paul but of all the churches he planted. Because of that fact, the Churches of the Gentile world stand – and must stand – in a concrete line of continuity with the community that Jesus gathered around him. Of that community, Paul was not only not a member but was also an avid and eager persecutor. That people who have come out from that community have called his apostleship directly into question is an existential threat. So, Galatians finds him not only arguing for the legitimacy of the Gentile mission as a bona fide extension of the work of the original community in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but also for the fact that that legitimacy is conferred upon him by God and cannot be taken away simply because someone in Jerusalem changed their mind about him. Thus, Paul’s statement of his calling not only alludes to Jeremiah’s call,421 but also to Jesus’s commissioning of Peter in Matthew 16:17. Jesus tells Peter,

\[\text{μακάριος εὖ Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ ὃς σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἁπαλωθησεν σοι ἀλλ' ὁ πατὴρ μου ὡς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς...σὺ εὖ Πέτρος καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομῆσω μου τὴν}\]

\[\text{Jer. 1:5}\]
Galatians 1:15-6 finds Paul speaking along similar lines: “ἐκκλησίαιν ὁ θεὸς… ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν νῦν αὐτὸν ἐν ἑμοὶ ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἐθνεσιν εὐθῶς οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι.” Likewise, when Paul describes his trip to Jerusalem after his conversion, he narrates it as a response to divine revelation. His gospel, he insists, is not the fruit of teaching but of a direct encounter with the risen Lord Jesus himself (Gal 1:11-12). Though the apostles have known and approved of his ministry (Gal. 1:18-2:2), they have “added nothing” to him (Gal. 2:6). Paul takes pains to insist that while the “pillars” (Peter, James, and John) accepted him, that their status as “pillars” is of no consequence in comparison with an authorization by divine revelation. Indeed, Paul then tells the Galatians how he confronted Peter to his face, a tacit recognition, like Paul’s allusion to the Petrine commission narrative, of Peter’s authority. Of James, Paul has little to say in the same context, except that while he was reputed to be a pillar (Gal 2:9), he was still not one of the apostles (Gal. 1:19).

Paul’s entire letter insists that while the Jerusalem Church has authorized him, he is not dependent upon their authorization, and neither are his churches. Paul’s description of himself in terms used to describe Peter, and his confrontation of Peter, are meant to place him over the Gentile Church in the same way as Peter sits above the Church of the Jews. While the Jesus to whom he has led the Gentiles is the Jesus who died in Jerusalem, who rose from the dead and ascended to Israel’s God, and who authorized Peter as the rock upon which the Church would be built, his churches nevertheless are

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422 Giuseppe Barbaglio and David Wenham both argue that this story was very likely first attached to Peter, and that Paul made use of it in an attempt to equalize the ground between himself and Peter. See Barbaglio, Antipaulinismo: reazioni a Paolo tra il I e il II secolo (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1989), 21; Wenham, Paul and Jesus, 69.
founded upon divine revelation of the truth of Jesus to the Gentiles. It is crucial at this point to note that Galatians finds Paul embracing a particular rhetorical position under fire. At other places and times, he is keen to emphasize the absolute necessity of the Gentile churches retaining their bond of fellowship with the Jerusalem assembly and the original Twelve. The first letter to the Corinthians (as I have argued elsewhere, in support of John C. Hurd’s thesis), makes best sense as an attempt to convince the Corinthians to give up prerogatives and freedoms that might be theirs in Christ in order to maintain fellowship with the Jerusalem Church. In that letter, Paul insists to the Corinthians that their faith rests upon the fact that the risen Lord appeared first to Cephas. The use of Peter’s Aramaic name underlines the point – the Corinthians have entered into the blessings God promised the children of Abraham, and the Lord Jesus, in whose name the Spirit is so powerfully manifest among them, is the Spirit of Jesus and of Israel’s God. But when he thinks that Jerusalemite usurpers are attempting to pervert the gospel he has preached to the Churches, he adopts a different tack. And that tack has him putting himself in the place of Peter, James, and John as the one who has brought the Gospel of their salvation to the Gentiles. It is in that context that I think Paul’s meditations upon his own motherhood make sense, for they interact with the other pillar of the Jerusalem community – the Lord’s own mother.


424 1 Cor. 15:5, cf. Lk. 24:34.
The prominence of the Lord’s mother in the early Jewish Christian community has already been demonstrated on the basis of the early chapters of Luke and Matthew, as well as the rise and proliferation of the *Protogospel*, 4 Ezra, and Revelation. But a further witness to her importance is that in the letter where Paul describes himself as a Peter for the Gentiles, he also describes himself as their Mary. It is not merely that he mentions Jesus was born of a woman, and then describes himself as the one bearing Christ in them. He sets up the covenant the Judaizers are trying to place the Gentile believers back under as that represented by Hagar, the slave woman. But while he names Hagar as the “slave covenant,” he does not give the free woman a name, although the comparison makes clear that Sarah is who is meant. The son of the free woman is born not of the flesh (cf. Gal. 1:15) but of a divine promise. In Paul’s mind, the two women represent two divine covenants, Hagar the covenant of the Law, which enslaves, and the free woman of the covenant revealed in Paul’s Gospel. This free woman, Paul writes, is the Jerusalem above, and she is free. Strangely, Paul then cites Isaiah 54:1 as if it refers to the free woman. The relationship of the Isaiah passage to Paul’s juxtaposition is unclear, though it is certainly possible to see a connection to Sarah, as well as to any of the matriarchs we discussed in the chapter “Bridegroom of Blood.” The matriarchs of Israel, from Sarai to Elizabeth (who bore John the Baptist), all battle with barrenness. And yet God’s promise to them is the guarantee of more children than those who do not experience barrenness. God’s gift of his creative Spirit to Israel bestows upon them a miraculous fertility in the face of barrenness. It is Israel who is the barren woman in Isaiah, and she, Paul writes, is

425 Recall the Petrine allusion in 1:15, in which Paul positions himself as one who, like Peter, heard the gospel not by flesh and blood but through divine revelation.
“our mother.”

It is worth seeing here, as we have observed in several other texts, that Paul sees Israel’s role as the mother who suffers the agony of Eve’s punishments, of barrenness and labor pains, in anticipation of the promise that God has made – the promise of the coming Seed. Just as Genesis sees Sarah as another Eve, so Paul sees the “free woman” as a new Eve. This woman, this Jerusalem above, embraces barrenness with hope in the power and promise of God, and it is that promise that bears fruit not only in her many children but in Paul’s ability to bear Christ himself in the “womb” of the Galatian church. To be the children of that mother is to be the ones in whom Christ is formed (morphōthē – the language is that used to describe gestation). To be the children of the heavenly Jerusalem, Paul argues, is to be his children, and as his children to be themselves mothers of the Lord’s mystical, but still very real, Body.

Just as he did with Peter, Paul is positioning himself between the Galatians and whatever benefit the Judaizers might offer through any supposed “intimacy” with the Lord’s mother. Yes, he was born of a woman, but he has called together a Church whose mother is the free woman, the Jerusalem above. There is nothing that the Galatians could want from the Judaizers that is not given to them mystically in their relationship, through Paul, with the risen Christ, not even some greater closeness to the Mother of the Lord. Importantly, just as the pitch of Paul’s counter-petrine and counter-Jacobean rhetoric in Galatians shows just to what extent replacing Paul with them must have been presented to the Galatians as attractive, it seems quite possible that among the things offered to the Galatians if they would Judaize is membership in the family that contained the Lord’s own Mother.
But if this reading is correct, it would seem to suggest that what Paul is offering is an *anti*-mariology, if anything. So far from welcoming the Galatians to her veneration, Paul seems to be placing himself in front of her, saying that it is the Church and he himself that constitute the New Eve. But while this interpretation is certainly plausible, I think it important to remember two things already observed about the rhetoric of this letter: 1) in other contexts, Paul could be quite sanguine about his relationship with the Jerusalem apostles; so, mutatis mutandis, about the Lord’s Mother. 2) In the end, what Paul wants the Galatians to realize is that in maintaining their faithfulness to His Gospel, they are actually keeping hold of the very connection he has with the risen Lord. Similarly, it is in remaining steadfast to the teaching of Mother Paul that they will do most honor to “her” Son, to the Jerusalem above, which is Mother of all, and to the “woman” who is her Son.

Paul’s reflections on the meaning of his mystical maternity are important to take stock of, especially in light of the character of the Lord’s Mother sketched out in the last chapter and the current one. First, Paul’s motherhood is vicarious. He is taking the pain of bearing Christ, so that the Galatians can have the joy of it. He labors not to have Christ as his own child but so that the Galatians can have him. Thus, Paul takes upon himself not only the suffering of labor pains but barrenness as well. Out of love for the Galatian church, it becomes true of him what was true of Israel in the time of Isaiah: “we have labored and have given birth to wind.” Paul willingly embraces all the pain in order that the Galatians may bear, in their womb, the Son of God. This embrace of Israelite desolation results in life for the world, and it is that exchange that makes sense of the long catalogue of Pauline sufferings. He bears and offers Christ to the world, and in doing
so, like Israel’s mothers, receives double for his sins. That is, he suffers the pains of labor but instead of receiving the child he offers Him to heal the barrenness of the world. The parallel is quite striking; what Mary does for Israel, Paul does as a faithful Israelite for the world. But in the very act of doing what Mary does, he also completes her desolation, offering his own mystical motherhood to the Galatians as the means of their salvation and membership in the family of Christ. Nothing would have pleased Mary more than to see among the throng to whom she offered her Son at Candlemas and Calvary some who would offer Him to the world. Paul, despite the dearth of direct references to Mary, is in some ways the closest to her. But by the gift of his perfect resemblance to her, by building the Church after her pattern, he also perfects and completes her desolation. His imitation of her willingness to suffer to make others fruitful makes him the Lord’s brother and sister and, yes, mother. Paul’s Mariology, like those of the gospels, is one of loving generosity to give all to the world in Jesus and to keep nothing for oneself. In Paul, we see that Gospel Mariology lived out, learning just what it would cost a person to be worthy of mention in *imitatio Mariae*. But insofar as his imitation of her also perfects her completion of the act he imitates, she is also there, giving in his gift, suffering in his suffering, writhing in his labor, loving in his love. Giving completely of herself in this way, it is she who is the proper referent of the bit of Isaiah Paul cites, and therefore it is she who is the Jerusalem above, whose children we are. If it seems impossible that Paul might have thought such a thing, we need only to look at 4 Ezra and Revelation to see just how easy such a thing was to imagine that the mother of Israel’s Promised One should also be the renewed Jerusalem whose children cannot be counted.
This reading, then, operates as a kind of dense collapse of many different images into one another. Sarah, who is Mother Zion, is “the woman” of whom Christ is born, who is also both Paul and the Galatian churches. And Christ’s full formation is their full formation in Christ, in which they bring him fully to term and are fully brought to term and born themselves. That these tropes interweave in this way is no mark against them; Paul’s discussion of the members of the Church as the Body of Christ, who nevertheless receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist and hope for a transformation, at the day of Resurrection, into what his Body is that some of the members of His Body are not yet. This is simply how Paul talks. Christ is the new Adam, and those who descend from him are “in” him. When they come to Christ, they are “in” Christ, the new Adam. But what we learn from Galatians is that they are also, at the same time, the new Eve.426

iii. Eve’s Ecclesial Salvation

It is this Pauline ecclesial-Mariological connection that makes sense of one of Paul’s puzzling mentions of Eve: the matter of “the childbirth.”427 In a notoriously difficult passage in 1 Timothy 2, Paul writes that women are not to teach or to hold authority over men. As a warrant for this passage, he observes that Eve was the second

426 That this is so is not hard to conceive of in a letter that explicitly denies maleness and femaleness in Christ. (Gal. 3:28).

427 The dominant trend within Pauline studies today is to hold that 1 Timothy is not authentic. I find this contention unsatisfying for a number of reasons. First, stylistic arguments rest on far too small a sample size to be convincing to me. Subject matter divergences have been overstated. The burden of proof for an allegation of forgery, given the antiquity of the reception of 1 Timothy as Pauline, rests on those making the allegation. There is some prima facie evidence for the pseudonymity of the letter (and the pastoral epistles as a whole) in the fact that they seem not to have been part of P46, the oldest manuscript of Paul’s gathered letters. But the consensus around the missing letters has been challenged recently as well. See Jeremy Duff, “46 and the Pastorals: A Misleading Consensus?” NTS 44.4 (1998), pp. 578-590. If P46 cannot serve as evidence of a collection of Pauline letters that did not include the Pastorals, any argument attempting to overturn their authenticity would have to be nearly indefeasible.
formed, not the first, while she was the first to be deceived. Verse 15 is syntactically problematic, as Paul writes “σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἁγάπη καὶ ἁγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης.” The verb number of sothēsetai is singular, as is the discussion of Eve that follows before, while the conditional introduces a plural, rendering in effect “she will be saved through the Childbirth (note the arthrous tēs teknogonias), if they continue. That plural may resume the discussion of “women” from before. The passage has proven resistant to interpretation. Augustine thought the passage could only make sense if the children envisioned here were good deeds. Others have thought that the “she” who will be saved through the childbirth refers generically to women, who will be saved by tending their home, giving birth to children, etc. (thus, giving something like “childbearing and child-rearing, should children arrive” as the right rendering of teknogonias, cf. 1 Tim 5:14-15). The problems with that interpretation are both theological (what makes childbearing salvific) and syntactical: the singular verb sōthēsetai makes by far the best sense if it follows from the prior discussion of Eve, who was made second and sinned first – but she will be saved.

The problem, of course, is that it’s not obviously more understandable for Eve to be saved by childbirth than it is for any other woman to be saved that way, and in any case that salvation by childbirth is made conditional upon someone’s (actually, multiple people’s) remaining in faith, love, and holiness. Our examination of the Pauline mother texts in Galatians, however, allow this mess to be cleaned up nicely. In the densely collapsed mystical and apocalyptic vision of Galatians, the births of Isaac, of the woman

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428 Augustine, De Trinitate XII.11.
who bore the Lord, of the barren woman of Isaiah 54, of Paul, and of the Galatians are all one birth – a birth that is not complete until Christ is fully formed within the Galatians. And, as we have argued in the previous two chapters, that “birth” can be identified with the birth for which Israel anxiously awaits throughout the entire Old Testament. It is the birth behind all the births that promises to bring about the defeat of the serpent in Genesis. It is towards that birth that all Israel’s births tend. But in Paul’s mind, as we have seen in Galatians, that birth is a matter both of salvation and of ecclesiology. Paul sees the things that hold the church together as facilitating the Childbirth that saves everything.

There are two interpretive pressures interacting upon the passage. Universalizing explanations, contending that women’s “sphere” is the home and they are not to hold authority in the Church, stumble upon the obvious fact that not only did women speak and teach in the Church but they were told to do it by Paul himself. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that prophecy is the spiritual charism most to be desired and explicitly imagines that women would receive and use it. If women can prophesy, can they not teach? If women can speak the very words of God, are they then not to be held in authority? To ask these questions is to answer them. Also, the unvarying convention of naming Priscilla before her husband every time they are mentioned makes likely that Priscilla had the more dominant role in, say, explaining to Apollos the faith into which he had recently come.⁴²⁹ Paul’s greetings make it clear that women oversaw money, preached to pagans and converted them, did important works and took incredible risks for the life of the Church. So, the idea that in Timothy, Paul is silencing what he elsewhere

appears deeply invested in growing and increasing seems implausible. On the other hand, contextual interpretations, claiming that 1 Timothy addresses a particular contextual problem stumble against the way Paul warrants his command that women should be quiet. It is not a local, contextualized warrant but a universal one: whatever the women are being commanded to do, even if the occasion for the command is some localized problem, they are being commanded to do it because of Eve.

A satisfactory interpretation of the passage will balance the contextuality of the command with the universality of the warrant. The context is, apparently, the Ephesian situation, where the dominant religious discourse centered around popular devotion to the goddess Diana, or “Artemis of the Ephesians,” who was the older twin of Apollo. It is possible that this context sits behind Paul’s commandment. The Artemis cult in Ephesus was among the most popular in the entire ancient Mediterranean. Pliny’s *Natural History* reports that her shrine in Ephesus was more than twice as large as Athena’s great temple in Greece.⁴³⁰ Among the patronly roles attributed to Artemis was the protection of women in labor. Callimachus, in a hymn to the goddess, observes that she will only come “when women vexed by the sharp pang of childbirth” call to her. The paradox of Artemis, like that of many fertility goddesses, was that she was a Virgin. The men who served at her temple had to self-emasculate, and women were only eligible to serve her temple insofar as they were Virgins. The testimony of the virgin-born Jewish Savior must have gone off in that context like dynamite, for those who believed it, given the popular devotions that honored Artemis as the mother of the gods and older sister of Apollo. At least some of the

⁴³⁰ *Natural History* XXI (14).
women in the Ephesian assembly seem to have been instrumental in spreading around understandings of Christianity that blended it with popular devotions to Artemis. The primacy of Artemis seems to have translated to a usurpation of authority in the Church by women, who forbade marriage and used the pseudo-widow status as a means to live on the purse of the Church.

Paul’s response, that women are to learn in quiet (*hesuchia*) mirrors his desire for the whole church to worship God in quiet lives (*hesuchion bion*) in 1 Tim 2:2. The quietness in context appears to be a stillness and protection from disturbance. His description of the widows in question as speculators about vain myths and genealogies, as “busybodies,” and as those who “talk nonsense” corroborates that the issue in 1 Timothy is not whether women can speak the Word of God as they do in Corinth and (for as long as Priscilla was there) in Ephesus but a disturbance of that by a kind of speculation that places women without men at the top of the created order. Paul’s reminder of Eve’s frailty serves as an inspiration to humility. At the same time, though, Eve recalls the origin of the reality that drove women to Artemis in the first place – it is Eve’s mistake that brings about the cruelty of childbirth’s dangers.

Paul’s declaration of the means of Eve’s salvation, like the prophecy in Genesis that Paul echoes, is a means of hope that Eve’s failure does not disqualify her. In God’s mercy, Eve’s embrace of the terrors of generation become the means of the world’s salvation as each childbirth becomes a sign of the one by which all her pains will be healed. She will be saved from childbirth, that is, *by* childbirth. It is in the willing suffering of the consequences of sin for the sake of love for the world that Eve participates in God’s plan to redeem the world from the evil that overtakes it. Eve, sinful
as she is, receives from the Lord’s hand double for her sins, and as she does so, she becomes not merely the cause of sin’s domination but also, chronologically speaking, the first *causa salutis*. She takes her place not only in the dock but alongside God in the plan to redeem. Jesus is Mary’s seed, but he is also Eve’s seed – as is Mary. Thus, Eve is saved, as are all people, by her partnership with God in the execution of His wise plan. She partners with God in His love for the cosmos and becomes the mother of the Living by bearing those who would bear the Living One. Moreover, because her bearing of those who would bear the redeemer brings about the continuation of the human family who would give birth to untold numbers of others, she leaves them the complicated legacy not only of childbirth’s mortal threat but of its hopeful and love-wounded promise. Not only the women in Christ’s lineage but in all lineages are loving participants with God in the plan to bring the whole world to life. Each woman bears in her body the marks of the Lord Jesus, because she perpetuates the life of the human race by the very means that would bring Jesus to earth. That is why it is *as mother Paul* that the apostle to the Gentiles bears in his body the marks of Christ (Gal. 6:17). Women, men, and the entire cosmos are saved by that which saves Eve – the bearing of children who would bear the Son who is given to us.

The exhortation being given to the women in Ephesus is not merely to *ignore* the genealogies but to treasure them rightly by taking their place within them. It is clear that to the extent that the women in the Ephesian assembly are forbidding marriage and embracing a kind of virginity that gives them exception from the mundane burdens of the human life of the Church, Paul wants them to repent – to marry and have children. But this command can be misread; what Paul is commanding is the embrace of the conditions
of ordinary humanity, arguing that one becomes a child of God in the same way Jesus did – by embracing completely the humanity of God’s family, the labor and love by which Eve gave birth to children and Adam fed them. It is by the concrete, unglamorous, humble acceptance of the burdens of *agape* that we set ourselves apart for the purpose of God. But the surprising mystery is that in the embrace of just these obligations and bonds of affection for those in the Church from whom we might most wish to separate ourselves, that we not only imitate but participate in the motherhood of Eve, of Paul, and of the blessed *mater theou*. It is for that reason that Paul can make Eve’s salvation through childbirth *dependent* upon the repentance and perseverance in the true faith of the women and men in Christ’s church in Ephesus. In Paul’s mind, it is the success of the mission to establish Christ’s church that completes and fulfills the promise God made to Eve that her seed would overcome the serpent. Paul invites the women to join with their mother within the human family, yes marrying and yes bearing children, but, more importantly, bearing the fruit of humility and love. In that work of bearing Christ’s mystical body, there will be much to say. And when they join with God in his Word to the world, they will find God speaking to the Church what he said to Abraham about the voice of his New Eve: “listen to her voice.” The mercy of God, and the Wisdom by which he overcomes the evil one, is to turn the very means by which evil enters the world into the vehicle of its salvation.

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Mary is the one to whom the God of Israel keeps the promise he made to her ancestors, the promise that they would become a people who loved him as he loved them – that he would be their God just as they would be his people. The promise from God is that both God and Israel
would choose and devote themselves to one another, each according the possibilities of their
nature, displaying in every way a symmetry of love and knowledge that would expose the world
to the wisdom of God. Israel was not meant only to be a divine kingdom, a polis in which one
could glimpse the rule of God; it was to be the face in space and time of the triune Lord. The face
of Mary, with its resemblance to the faces of her ancestors, resembles no other face so much as
that of the Son whose only human genetics are hers. Jesus of Nazareth would have been a
spitting image, an exact mirror of the one whose facial features were themselves the result of his
choice to be born of one people in one place and one time. In that people and in its history, one
sees the generous God who gives life to all without restraint, who pours out an endless array of
beautiful things, from the sheer goodness of his heart and the generosity by which he makes
them be. It is this generosity, this perfection, this infinite power and complete lack of need, that
gives content to the idea of divine love. God wills things to be of which he has absolutely no
need – entirely for their own good. The glory he takes in the goodness of created things is a glory
that would be undiminished in their absence and yet fully relishes in their presence and their
being. The glory of a power and wisdom that are unbounded is the glory that is not and cannot be

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431 Dante, in Canto 32 of Paradiso, makes just this point:

Riguarda omai ne la faccia che a Cristo
più si somiglia, ché la sua chiarezza
sola ti può disporre a veder Cristo.
(Par. 32.85-87).

Dante’s observation is not that they look so alike; it’s that they are such a spitting image of one another that looking
upon Mary makes it easier to recognize (“disposes you to see”) the face of Christ as His own face. Because of the
metrical structure, Dante’s verse may conceal a stronger reading. It may be, that is, that “si somiglia, che la sua
chiarezza sola ti può disporre,” which I have understood as “simply to look at it makes it easier to recognize Christ”
actually means “only by looking upon it” are we enabled to recognize Christ. Against the reading is that the more
obvious way to create that meaning would be “sola per la sua chiarezza,” but metrical constraints may make that
impossible. In favor of the stronger reading is Dante’s use of “clarity” as the faculty that enables us to recognize
Christ.
threatened by anything else that is, that is so unthreatened that it glories in the presence of things God makes as if they were not made by Him. The divine intellect that never discovers anything nevertheless loves everything as if it had only discovered it and not made it. God is love, and it is for that reason that Israel must be established. It cannot fail, because there is nothing that can impede God’s purposes to establish it. Israel must be the people who discovers God and loves him as he loves them. They must be the people to whom the Word comes and does not return void. His offering of His Word to make them alive must find its echo in their offering of their own lives without restraint to him. Israel must become the people that offers its child willingly as a living sacrifice to the God who pours out everything he has and is on the Son he offers to Israel for his own joy. It is Moloch and not Israel’s God who takes children from unwilling mothers; this generous God of love raises up people whose glory redounds to him because it cannot in any way diminish him. It is his glory to make them glorious, and they are. It is his glory to raise up people who are to him as he is to them, who offer to him exactly what he offers to them, and for the same reason. It is his glory not to walk between the pieces alone, but in a pair, a partnership, a couple – the new Adam and the new Eve, and only at the arrival of these two can it be said that he has fulfilled his covenant to bring to birth the nation that gives birth to him.
I personally did not like being pregnant. But I liked when I could feel my baby move, and no one else could feel what I felt. It was mine, and no one else’s. It was my secret.

The previous chapter locates the motherhood of God the Father as the rationale for the shape of the Covenant with Israel. “Motherhood” there refers to God’s way of exhausting divine freedom in a single act of love. In the terms of Trinitarian analogy, “motherhood” is God’s election of the Truth that he is and knows himself to be. The purpose of the covenant is to raise up a people who will love the Truth as he himself loves it, who will discern the Word of God in the grain of the universe and receive it thankfully. Torah, it was pointed out, is God’s way of instructing a particular people to receive lovingly and as the ground of their own existence what is true of every creature – its contingency and frailty before God, its belovedness of him, and therefore its destiny in his purpose for all things. An analogy runs through that entire reality, as human beings choose and express gratitude for that which appears to be a brute fact in the non-rational creation, and as Israel chooses and loves that of which even other humans are unaware. The name this work gives to that knowledge ordered by love is Wisdom, and creaturely Wisdom itself is an analogy for the way God loves the truth he knows himself to be as if it were not himself. It is God’s love and choice that implants the Father’s image upon the face of the Son, and thus, in
the same way that the Trinitarian life is the eternal revelation of the Son, the creation is an everlasting generation imitating the Father’s fertility. Israel’s Wisdom is her God-given reverence for the divine source of all these things, her recognition that the trees, though appearing as brute and inanimate facts, are in reality “clapping their hands” as they sway in the breeze. What the creation does by nature is what Israel does by choice in response to what God has revealed to them about themselves and about the world. And this is so because creation is made in the image of the Father’s choice of the Son and the Son’s delight in his election. The “laws” that hold the creation together are a reflection of the necessity, given God’s impassible and indefectible knowledge and love of himself, of the Son, who just as rightly as the Father says, “I am.”

I also argue there that, for the same reasons, Israel has a promise of indefectibility. They cannot fail any more than the Church can fail, and for the very same reason: the Spirit who gives birth to Israel (and the Church) is the erat of God. He cannot fail to bring it to pass that the Son of God bears the character of His Father. Israel’s indefectibility is the substance of the promise God gives Eve in Genesis 3: “s/he will crush [the serpent’s] head.” The logic of covenant in Israel compels this reality, as the one who has the greatest ability to see the covenant done has the largest responsibility, and in the case of Israel’s God that ability is unlimited. What must and does come about is that Israel offers to God exactly what God offers to Israel, loving him as he

432 Jn 8:58

433 See Fr. Settimio M. Manelli, F.I., “Genesis 3:15 and The Immaculate Coredemptrix,” in Mary at the Foot of the Cross, vol. 5, Acts of the International Symposium on Marian Coredemption (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 2005), pp. 263-322, esp. pp. 304-319, where, as noted before, Fr. Manelli demonstrates the legitimacy of Jerome’s famous ipsa translation in Gen. 3:15 by referring to several instances in the Masoretic text where masculine pronouns refer to feminine nouns and subsequently marshalling several textual arguments for the intelligibility of a feminine reading of “seed.” Fr. Manelli does not argue that that is the only possible reading of the verse but merely for its possibility. Given a particular theology of Scripture and translation, then, what Manelli calls a “messianic-marian” sense emerges, in which the seed of the woman is either and/or both.
loves Israel. He makes this to be in spite of Israel’s recalcitrance by an act of gracious preservation. In the wake of divine grace, another analogical interval opens up in the relationship of the preserved remnant of Israel to the rest of their kinspeople. That interval will turn out to contain all the other dualities of wisdom and foolishness, because of the unique effect of the Torah of God on those who turn away from it. Wisdom, deserted, leaves those who abandon her in worse shape than they would have been had they never known her. Faithless Israel sins to the uttermost, so that the gap between the remnant and the rest turns out to be an even wider gap, say, than that between humans and the non-human creation. But just there is the glory and mercy of God revealed, for it is the existence of Mary in Israel that makes it possible for her faithless kin to fulfill their vocation in the offering of the Son to God. Israel fulfills the Covenant when it (unknowingly) offers the Incarnate Son of God back to the God who offers it to Israel, and at just that point the image of God finally stands in the earth – Wisdom is vindicated in her Child(ren).

All of this is described in the foregoing chapters as God’s fulfillment of a set of promises that appear, somewhat by historical haphazardness, in the Old Testament. In “Bridegroom of Blood,” we showed how the Scriptures apply pressure in the direction of a partner in redemption. Much of that pressure arises from the fact that Israel’s Scripture bears in its body the marks of a pagan past, from which God delivered them, but in whose terms God was compelled to operate in order to be effectively introduced to the children of Terah’s Chaldean son. This chapter completes the story by attempting to provide a theological rationale for that phenomenon. Why, that is, was Israel pagan? Contained within that question, thanks to the connection that the

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434 e.g., 1 Kings 19:18
Scriptures make between Eve and her Hebrew daughters all the way up to Mary, is the more general question of paganism. What was paganism in Israel? What is its relation to the Wisdom tradition also examined in that previous chapter? Who is the Wisdom to whom Israel’s pagans are so devoted? Here, we will suggest that paganism and Wisdom traditions are two sides of a single coin – the discernment of the motherhood of God in the motherhood of creation. That is, if Israel’s official religion was the embodied promise, spaced out in history, of YHWH’s deliverer, Israel’s paganism was the analogous promise of His Mother. It was fueled by the recognition in the world’s never-ending birth of the “begetting” that must be at the core of things. The “directedness” of what Gerard Manley Hopkins called nature’s motherhood seems to imply that there was a She who would give birth, and that until then, creation’s restless energy would continue to portend it. Paganism in Israel, that is, was not just a leftover from a pre-Scriptural past but a discernment of signs and vestiges that are left in the world and even in the strange new world of the Hebrew Bible. The immanent realization of the Childbirth at the heart of things was the hope of Israel’s paganism, even as it reenacted that expectation in its own symbolic performances. That hope remained, transmuted, into the post-Deuteronomic tradition. Israel’s prophetic writings, then, for all their monotheistic fury, still hint that the Childbirth was not some inner-cosmic process of creation’s self-realization but the image and analogy of the One God’s life. For just that reason, all creation is directed – as a question is to an answer – at the one who was to come, the seed of Eve who was to give birth to the one who would rise to rule the nations. And that directedness towards the image has important implications for how creation is what it is. The New Eve, that is, and her gift of her Son back to the Father, is not merely the cooperative act that redeems the world but also the intention that informs its creation in the first place, the final cause of the world’s worldliness. The gift of Mary, and its echo in Christ’s self-offering, are
not enacted in terms already set; they are the basis for the proleptic deployment of those terms in creation and in Scripture. The earth is what it is because of the intention to raise up in it the woman who would offer the Redeemer to God and to her neighbors. Paganism and Wisdom are two different but related intuitions of the directedness at the heart of things, of recognizing that the world, nature’s motherhood, is in the end a veiled mariophany. It points at the act that would finally bring creation to its end as that act’s constantly repeated analogy.

I. Saved by the Childbirth: The Redemption of Feminine Disempowerment

Mary’s gift of her Son is, for all the reasons outlined in chapters 4 and 5, a truly unique gift. It is her offering of this Son to Israel that allows Israel, by the grace of a kind of divine trickery,435 to be the partner in its own redemption and that of the world. It is Mary’s offering of this son that makes her (along with him) the fulfilled image of God upon the earth - who brings not merely the earth but God’s own work to completion and rest. And hers is the miraculous fertility that gives birth not only to Christ but to his church. And yet, as Christian thinkers from Irenaeus to Scotus took pains to clarify, while Mary of Nazareth was graced uniquely, and while the Son she bore was an utter nonpareil, Mary’s motherhood as motherhood was entirely normal.436 Whatever graces she possessed, whatever graces made it possible for Jesus be conceived, carried, and come to birth without a father, Mary’s side was according to the ordinary

435 This is Augustine’s argument throughout Book 13 of De Trinitate. See XIII.13: "And what could be clearer and more wonderful evidence of this than that the Son of God, unchangeably good, remaining in Himself what he was and receiving from us what he was not, electing to enter into partnership with our nature without detriment to his own; and then once we had been brought in this way to believe how much God loved us and to hope at last for what we had despaired of, should confer his gifts on us with a quite uncalled for generosity, without any good deserts of ours, indeed with our ill deserts our only preparation?" Augustine’s point is that in the Incarnation, our own idolatrous predilection for visible things is used against us; God sends his Son as a visible thing, and so our own perverse desires become an instrument through which we find ourselves on a path towards God. A similar divine trick is at play in the turning over of Jesus towards death; thanks to Mary’s wise offering of her Son to the Lord, the cry of the crowd on Palm Sunday is transmuted into the very vehicle of their election to be God’s people.

436 Ordinatio. III.4.38 “the whole of action that is due to the mother belonged to her.”
run of things. She is, Christians have overwhelmingly agreed, a human, and what she gives birth to is a human child. The ordinariness of her motherhood was an important part of the testimony of the Christian faith, in part because it armed Christians against those who tried to attribute to Christ something different from the humanity he appears to have in the Scriptural testimony about him. But her ordinariness as a mother, if she plays the role I have ascribed to her, has consequences for the way God is made visible in the creation and the ways the creation has responded.

In an important passage about the mother of the Lord, Irenaeus defends the ordinariness of Mary’s motherhood in order to refute those who deny that Christ took on true humanity. If Jesus had not received genuinely human flesh of his mother, Irenaeus argues, then his descent into her was fruitless, along with the entirety of his earthly course of life. For Irenaeus, importantly, it is not just a metaphysical reality — some anticipation of Gregory the Great’s assertion of the relationship between the assumed and the healed — but the substance of his mission and message that depends upon his genuine humanity:

Still further, if He had taken nothing of Mary, He would never have availed Himself of those kinds of food which are derived from the earth, by which that body which has been taken from the earth is nourished; nor would He have hungered, fasting those forty days, like Moses and Elias, unless His body was craving after its own proper nourishment; nor, again, would John His disciple have said, when writing of Him, But Jesus, being wearied with the journey, was sitting [to rest]; John 4:6 nor would David have proclaimed of Him beforehand, They have added to the grief of my wounds; nor would He have wept over Lazarus, nor have sweated great drops of blood; nor have declared, My soul is exceeding sorrowful; Matthew 26:38 nor, when His side was pierced, would there have come forth blood and water. For all these are tokens of the flesh which had been derived from the earth, which He had recapitulated in Himself, bearing salvation to His own handiwork.438

437 Adv Haer. III.22.1

438 Ibid., III.22.2.
Christ’s promise, that is, that the meek will inherit the earth is rooted in the knowledge that he himself will rule in the end — and the promise is a lie if he himself is not meek. Like the effectiveness of his saving work, his teaching is sensible because of the genuine humanity that comes to him by his mother. Every way in which his life serves as a model for ours depends upon the ordinariness of Mary’s gift to him of human flesh — of her flesh. It is in this context that Irenaeus states the conclusion of which Newman was so fond. She is the cause of salvation, both to herself and the human race, by consenting for the Savior to have of her that which all children receive of their mothers — indeed that which all descendants receive from progenitors in earthly generation: the nature of the ancestor. She consented to give him what any of her children, should she have them, would receive from her. And thus the life that he would live in the flesh and give for the life of the world would be the fully human life any of us could give. It is the ordinariness of Mary’s gift to him that makes him for us an example, in his fasting, his prayer, and his costly love. Although many things follow from the fact that it is this mother and this son in particular, the generalities of motherhood and sonship are what make the redemptive possibilities in their particular characters important for us.

A similar argument would be made over a millennium later by Scholastic theologians, who worked out Irenaeus’s logic with painstaking care. Thomas Aquinas, for example, insists that the supernatural character of Christ’s birth does not inhibit a natural conception and birth as to the role of Mary in it. Indeed, “the matter from which His body was conceived is similar to the matter which other women supply for the conception of their offspring.”439 In a later question, he further clarifies that Mary gives nothing except that which ordinary mothers give, which

439 ST 3.31.5

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(following Aristotle) he takes to be the matter of Christ’s Body. For John Duns Scotus, the main points here are in agreement, except that he takes Mary’s bodily contribution to the Son’s own organism to consist of an active principle (from which it takes its form) as well as a passive principle (matter).\footnote{I cannot prove this, but it is known that Scotus’s thoughts on the Blessed Virgin’s relationship to her Son are deeply informed by a vision he was granted to see of her and her Son, seen as an infant, and it is hard not to wonder if the visible resemblance between them would have challenged any thought about the pure passivity of the maternal material contribution.} Scotus follows the ancient philosopher Galen over Aristotle, concluding that not only Mary but all mothers are active contributors to the material and formal composition of their children. That is, although he sees it differently from Aristotle and Aquinas, Scotus agrees with the latter that Christ is born of a Virgin only as all children are born of their mothers.

This debate is an intriguing one, given that all parties involved agree that God is able to raise up genuinely human flesh, and presumably able to save it, without the necessity of a human mother (or even, really, any human ancestor at all). Irenaeus does not have the question in view of the possibility of genuine humanity without maternity but rather the question of maternity without humanity. On this, which is to say on the ordinary natural biology at play, medieval theologians would have agreed with the Bishop of Lyons – that Jesus was conceived and born by a human mother guarantees his humanity. It also guarantees that the circumstances of his human life are attended, except where grace intervenes, by the normal costs and gifts of maternity. For reasons of biology and culture, motherhood has been attended with a tremendous loss of freedom, of power, of the ability to do otherwise. In its main lines, the biology of pregnancy has been well known to humanity since ancient times, though there are elements of it that are still mysterious to us. In the time when children are forming in their body, women’s bones become less dense as the body prioritizes the child over the mother. Their immune systems function less
optimally, in part because at first they respond to the new child like an intruder or a pathogen. A mother’s brain chemistry changes, creating the mental fog known so often as “mom brain.” They become more vulnerable to illness, and less able to evade predation, less able to fend for themselves in agriculture or hunting. In the last trimester of a pregnancy, women are virtually always uncomfortable and unable to do almost anything about it. They sleep badly and lack energy. This gradual loss of freedom is a biological reality for the great majority of women who have undergone a pregnancy. It has been accompanied by cultural developments – some sensible and some not – that reinforce that loss of freedom. Protection of the childbearing process has been a huge organizing force in human culture, with human communities placing mothers, as much as possible, out of harm’s way. But arguably those efforts have created societal habits that take even more freedom away from women. Long before there were feminists, there was a kind of solidarity among women created by the shared experience of the communal loss of freedom.  

Israel’s formation narratives foreground the experiences and encounters of men with God. But those men struggle perennially to make sense of the paradox of love and freedom. The women who do appear in the narratives arrive with the shrewdness that comes from being under thumb. They possess an instinct for the preservation of life that makes them the co-conspirators of God’s purposes. What God declares, they bring to pass. From where does that instinct come? Historically, the stories that form these texts appear to arrive from pagan cultures in which

\[441\] See Jacqueline Lapsley’s discussion of Rachel’s theft of Laban’s gods in Ibid., Whispering the Word: Hearing Women’s Stories in the Old Testament (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 22: “[her] words bear truth in that they reveal something about the inequity of her own situation in the context of the story and that of women in ancient Israelite culture more generally.” Thus, “Rachel’s words also constitute a discourse of resistance, a subtle protest against the patriarchal discourse and social structures that attempt to silence her.”
women played crucial roles in mediating the people’s relationship with God. But the historical reality only presses the question in different keys: canonically, why does the text remain as it does? And anthropologically, why did the women play the role they did in the ancient religions that gave birth to Israel? Whatever the answers (and we shall consider many below), the fact is that the role women play in the formation narrative is more than window dressing. The favored son in the sibling rivalries, the one God chooses even where the firstborn would be expected, is always a son of the favored wife. And the cost of being the Beloved is always the involuntary loss of freedom, in the Akedah, in Laban’s trickery, in the forced enslavement of Joseph. Yet it is always in that loss of freedom that divine power creates conspicuous and miraculous fruitfulness. And what the foundation narrative is at pains to relate as a mystery in the covenantal design of God is also a crucial element in nature itself. Nature goes on, it generates, through just this loss of freedom. What the Christian story does uniquely is to provide that process, so often derided and lamented in the ancient world (not least by the opponents of Irenaeus!) with positive meaning for the story of the world and God.

This deep sympathy between the Christian portrait of the divine life and the ordinary experience of finitude that is crystallized in motherhood, likely explains why Christianity was so powerful among women and remains, by and large, more attractive to women than to men. That this is so has been powerfully illustrated by Rodney Stark in his studies of the early growth of

442 Susan Ackerman, Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 131-162: here, Ackerman discusses the crucial religious role that the Queen Mothers played as both religious authorities and mothers in the Canaanite Asherah cult. The entire book, however, points out that the various narrative roles women play in Judges (and throughout the OT) are types, with religious connotations throughout ancient Israel and the rest of the ANE>.

443 Levenson 1993, 28-29.
Christianity. But it is clear in any case from the critiques of Christianity that Celsus leveled and that Origen refuted in the third century. Origen quotes the criticisms of Celsus that Christianity was only attractive to women:

By which words, acknowledging that such individuals are worthy of their God, they manifestly show that they desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children.

[ . . . ]

but when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements, to the effect that they ought not to give heed to their father and to their teachers, but should obey them; that the former are foolish and stupid, and neither know nor can perform anything that is really good, being preoccupied with empty trifles; that they alone know how men ought to live, and that, if the children obey them, they will both be happy themselves, and will make their home happy also [. . .] they must leave their father and their instructors, and go with the women and their playfellows to the women's apartments

[ . . . ]

only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception, and slaves, and women, and children, of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts.

Celsus famously seems also to have disputed the testimonial foundations of the faith, arguing that no one could take seriously a faith whose foundations lay with the testimony of women. Celsus also mentions slaves, children, laborers, and other people whose agency was most limited in the ancient world and who were commonly depicted as feminine or womanly. And while it is not true that, as Celsus says, Christianity only appealed to such people, it is clear that they made

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444 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997). Stark estimates that 2/3 of Christians were women, an even more impressive fact considering that women made up approximately 1/3 of society.

445 *Contra Celsum*: II.59: “And he asks, who saw this? He attacks the story in the Bible that Mary Magdalene saw him, saying, A hysterical female, as you say.” Cf. I.28, where Celsus attacks Jesus’s mother, and his frequent derision of Christians throughout as those whose doctrines can appeal only to women (III.44, 55, 59, 63; IV. 14; V.25, 33; VI. 78, VIII. 21, 24, 28, 33, 55, 73, 75).
up a disproportionate share of its numbers.

This phenomenon has been explained in a number of ways. Nietzsche, himself a kind of modern Celsus, understood Christianity as a slave revolt in morals. Christianity may proclaim its core tenets to be rooted in love, but it is actually the re-sentiment of the lower classes dressed up in decorated language. There is no hatred as bitter, Nietzsche claimed, as the hatred of the oppressed for their oppressors, and the moral vision of Christianity was nothing but a sublimated revenge fantasy, with the powerful rounded up and put into the fiery prison they had built for those under their thumbs.\(^{446}\) Nietzsche’s vision is not without some explanatory power, it must be confessed. Early Christian literature (and indeed much early Jewish literature) does contain the hope that those who have been beaten down will be lifted up in a reversal of the verdict spoken by those who have oppressed them. One of the earliest sets of Christian art, the catacombs of Priscilla in the ancient city of Rome, does contain an image of the last judgment. But Nietzsche’s understanding of the character and meaning of that judgment is rooted in a profound misinterpretation, ignoring the majority of what Christians said both about themselves and about the world. On the same catacombs, one finds an image of the Madonna and her Child, one of the first such images known to us. The Christian view of the final end of humanity comes about not as a twisted revenge fantasy but as the careful working out of the consequences of the revelation to them that God’s relationship to the world is nothing like they had imagined – a relationship like that conceived in Isaiah 49:15:

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\text{Can a woman forget her nursing child,} \\
\text{that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?} \\
\text{Even these may forget,}
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\(^{446}\) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1, 10.
yet I will not forget you.

The relationship of the Christian imagination to earthly power arises from a deep consideration of the fact that the one act that is truly free is the mutual gift of self that the Father and Son perform in their love for one another by the Spirit. Its perfect creaturely analogue is the Virgin’s offering of her Son and his self-offering in echo of that gift, to the Father and the world. The moral centerpiece of the Christian life is that freedom is found in servitude, and so acts of self-assertion are less free. The lust for power, as Augustine saw, places those who have the most power in the most bondage, while those to whom power is denied are in greater touch with the grain of the universe, with the freedom God is and has as he loves the world.447

The freedom possessed by the dispossessed sets the horizon for both their knowledge and their love, and that horizon is the driver of the conflicts and resolutions that populate the New Testament. In the gospels, Jesus repeatedly points out that the truths of the kingdom are revealed to the lowly. It is the poor in spirit who are the heirs of the kingdom of God. Those who are pure in heart, whose loves are uncomplicated with the lusts of the world, are the ones who will see God. It is the meek who will inherit the earth, and those who are harangued and persecuted who will inherit the life to come.448 Later in the same Gospel, Jesus thanks God for having “hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.”449 One could multiply examples. A key element of the Gospel of John is that prior to the night of his betrayal, Jesus never spends a night in Jerusalem, opting instead for the small town of Bethany, where

447 “Therefore, I cannot refrain from speaking about the city of this world, a city which aims at dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination” (Augustine, City of God, Preface).


449 Matt. 11:25.
Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus live. The children come to Jesus spontaneously, and Jesus insists they be allowed to, for only such as they are may enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But perhaps the clearest example of this is the fact that throughout the gospels it is the women who understand Jesus with greater immediacy and insight. Routinely, the gospels draw distinctions between the slowness of the disciples to understand who Jesus is and what he is about and the quickness and intuitive facility with which the women grasp his mission and his identity. And coupled with the greater awareness is a love that outshines even the apostles in its loyalty. All four gospel writers note the conspicuous presence of women at the cross, along with the conspicuous absence of the Twelve. On Easter morning, the women seek out the body of Jesus to dress it and are greeted with the news of Jesus’s resurrection. The Twelve, who initially do not believe the women, are hiding. Why is this? Why do the women get it faster? Why are they more devoted? Why do they love Jesus more? Why, when those chosen as the leaders of the Church reveal their frailty again and again, are the women to be found doing the work of ministry and devotion to the Body of Christ?

We should be fair to the apostles, whose lives are in danger in a conspicuous and unique way. If the leaders who had executed Jesus had decided to stamp out every rumor and vestige of his influence, it is likely they would have gone after the Twelve in a way that they wouldn’t have gone after the women. Still, the activity of the women is remarkable. They are the ones who spy out Jesus’s burial place after he is killed, and they receive the news first on Easter morning because of their return to the Tomb explicitly to care for his dead body. It is equally devastating, but they endure the devastation better. We are told that the Romans, under pressure from the Jewish leaders, station soldiers at the Tomb precisely to prevent anyone from stealing the body. The women quite literally risk their lives to show his body devotion, at a time when it seemed he
may have disappointed all of the expectations of his followers. This phenomenon cries out for explanation. The expectations the ancient world had about women would have been resolutely defied by such behavior; women were understood to be unreliable, shifty, impulsive, emotionally shaky, and irrational. But in the episodes around the crucifixion and resurrection, when the thoughts of many hearts are revealed (as Simeon had prophesied they would be), it is the women who prove themselves possessed of loyalty, faithfulness, and courage, while the men, the very men whom Jesus chose, fail their test. It is hard to overstate the importance of this; Christian apologists, in their attempts to demonstrate the historical reliability of the testimony to Christ’s Resurrection, have pointed out that the role of the women creates no small embarrassment for the early Christian community. Certainly, Celsus provides evidence of this; no one attempting to tell a believable and appealing story would have inserted women into this role if they had not been there. The women were there, and the men were not.

The presence of women at the crucial moments of Jesus’s story did not escape notice of Christianity’s detractors. It could not have failed to be an important part of the rationale for the popularity of Christianity among its devotees. But there is more to the woman-friendliness of the faith than telling a good story. The women were there. This is the fact that explains why Christianity was and is a faith of women in spite of the fact that women have never been its leaders. In droves, the women of the ancient near East and Southern Europe abandoned religious practice that placed them at the center as practitioners and mediators and joined the faith in which they had no rule but were told that they were what they knew themselves to be: the ones who showed up and who were there. In the ministry of Jesus, and in the early Church, women repeatedly played the crucial roles that moved the story forward, imitating not only Jesus’s mother but the matriarchs of their people. The ministry of Paul is difficult to imagine without
Lydia and the wealthy women in northern Greece that supported him, without Priscilla’s kinship and relationship networks, without Lois and Eunice, who brought to him Timothy. The women are there, at every crucial juncture. Why are they there?

The call of Jesus was a summons to lay down one’s freedom in order to follow Jesus in his mission to bring the love of the Father to the world. It was an invitation to use one’s freedom for love’s sake, which is its proper use. It is worth considering whether women, who, throughout most of history have had much of their freedom taken from them, often by culture and always by nature, being less likely to develop impeding attachments to their own sovereignty and freedom, were less encumbered. There is no need to be romantic about childbearing. In the ancient world as in the modern one, there were women who were for one reason or another fail to form the requisite attachments that make child-rearing possible. Back alley abortions and child exposures were realities known to women of Jesus’s world. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the attachments that have done most to perpetuate the survival of human culture through time are those between women and the children they bear, and those attachments curb the freedom of women in a way men do not experience. The Scriptures are not silent about these matters, and it is crucial to point to them out, even if parts of the story they tell are unpopular in this moment. In Genesis 3, the biological consequences of sin for Eve and her daughters have already been spoken at some length. But the cultural consequences for Eve and her daughters are spoken of precisely in terms of forfeited freedom: “your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

Whatever the hermeneutical difficulties presented by this passage, and they are numerous, the passage makes clear that biologically there will be suffering in store for mothers, and a cultural

\[\text{450 Gen. 3:16}\]
sword will pierce their souls as well. Indeed, the story the Scriptures go on to tell is one in which women suffer for the failures of the men around them. Sarai, the first new Eve in the book of Genesis, is given to Pharaoh, so that “my life may be spared because of you.”\textsuperscript{451} God acts in judgment of Pharaoh for Sarai’s sake, as he would have to protect Abram. Leah is forced into marriage with a man who does not want her. Hagar is sent in to the desert to die with her child. Zipporah nearly watches her children die on account of her husband’s forgetfulness. The stories multiply as the Scriptures show the indignities women suffer on account of (and sometimes from) the husbands and sons they love. The baseline danger of being a woman and the threat and experience of violence and sexualized terror was then, as it is now, much more serious for women than for men. They have never been free, and, in spite of those conditions, they have loved the children who emerged from them, even when (as too often happens) the fathers of those children dismissed them and had nothing further to do with them. It is no wonder the message of Jesus resonated with them. It told a truth that the historical experience of women has made it much easier for them to see and to respond to even at great cost to themselves. The women who went to search for Jesus’s body on Easter morning were in danger, and they knew themselves to be. That did not stop their search, nor did the threat of violence drive them into hiding as it did their male confreres during the agonizing hours between Gethsemane and Golgotha. They are faithful, and it is hard not to see in their faithfulness a resolution made possible by the ongoing training of entire lives as victims for the sake of love. If this is so, it is hard to argue with the apostle (or whichever of his followers it was) who wrote in 1 Timothy 2 that “women will be saved through childbearing.” In the end, it matters little whether we follow

\textsuperscript{451} Gen. 12:13. He makes the same mistake again with Abimelech. This failure gets passed down, as Isaac makes the same mistake with Rebekah in Gen 26:1-33.
the interpretation I proposed above, reading *he teknogonia as the Childbirth*, i.e., the advent of Christ, or take the more mundane “childbearing,” i.e., in the process of it, or the Artemis-influenced “saved from childbearing.” The penitential suffering of women has brought about that there was such a Childbirth. The acceptance of that birth and the rest of its consequences by Mary has brought about the redemption of the world as Jesus’s echo of his mother’s waiving of rights. And the historical experience of women has created the conditions whereby they more readily accept the truth that Jesus is and more fully give themselves to it. In the end, the ordinariness of Mary’s motherhood and the common experience of women through history receive their positive valuation in the story of Christ, the Son who is eternally begotten out of the womb of his Father.

It may be worth taking up a final objection on this point, one that is itself foreseen in the Old Testament’s narrations of God’s judgment upon his people. It is undeniable that women have been the victims throughout history of unspeakable horrors at the hands of men. It is tempting to hear any attempt to see how a good could be brought out of that experience as providing legitimacy to the evil actions or motives that caused it. Just such a situation is envisioned in the Old Testament, where God threatens the very nations whose success was the result of his intention to send his people into exile. The prophet Zechariah records the following words of the Lord against those who inflicted suffering upon his people:

> Then the angel who was speaking to me said, “Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, and I am very angry with the

452 It is not that there are no exegetical reasons for preferring one reading over the other (about which enough has been said already) – but that they tend, theologically, toward the same complex of ideas.

453 This interpretation of Genesis 3:16 does not, of course, remove every difficulty it presents. We will treat some of them at greater length below, but there is a kind of surplus, an irreducible difficulty in passages that I suspect may be part of their point.
nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they went too far with the punishment.\textsuperscript{454}

In Zechariah’s view are the vicegerents by whose authority God brought judgment on the waywardness of his people. But the pagan instruments by whom he judged his people carried the job too far, followed their own devices rather than those of God, and brought suffering to Israel that the Lord did not intend. It is true that the Jews, forever chosen of God, had brought the name of God to shame among the Gentiles.\textsuperscript{455} But the Gentiles do not fare better. Humans, as a whole, fail to love God and neighbor, and rather than partnering with God for his purposes, they tend to enlist him in their own campaigns. This happens in the time of the exile, and it cannot be denied that it happens in the lived experience of women. There is no doubt that Genesis 3 foretells the loss of freedom for women, and, in light of the history that has emerged from it, it is hard not to imagine that what Genesis 3 envisions is all that has in fact happened. But the passage need not be read that way, any more than the fact that Psalm 137 relates the horrors perpetrated by the Babylonians implies that those horrors were willed by God. The life of Jesus, the way he treated women, and the attractiveness that he had to them, suggests otherwise. We do not have access to what the judgment of Genesis 3 might have meant in a history where men did not use their strength as occasions for violence and terror. Who knows whether that “rule” might have been the “rule” James counsels of the faithful mind over the tongue? Who knows whether what was intended in the passage is something more like a slowness to speak, given the evils that had originated in being too hasty? What is clear is that the women around Jesus were ruled by him and at the same time that none of them ever felt the fear, bitterness, or resentment so often

\textsuperscript{454} Zech. 1:14-15

\textsuperscript{455} Ezek. 36:20, Is. 52:5, Rom 2:24
caused by the oppression women have endured historically. There was even room in Jesus’s “rule” of women for them to prevail in some way over him, just as the very thing that brings Adam into misery (“because you have listened to the voice of your wife”) is at other times commanded by the Lord (“go listen to the voice of your wife”). And Paul’s forbidding that a woman should have authority over a man, whatever it means, is somehow concurrent with their being times when women speak with God’s own authority.\textsuperscript{456} What are we to make of these many tensions in the command of God? Has he given us commands that are not good? The difficulty is understandable; God appears to have spoken words that could justify a great evil, and God has brought forth great good out of that evil. Is it not clear that this is what he wanted?

The situation is not unlike that faced by those who reckoned with the apparent difficulties around child sacrifice in the decades before and after Judah’s exile. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are at pains to show how God has not commanded what it might have appeared that he did. But these passages appear in the Scriptures together for precisely this reason, it seems to me. God has dealt and continues to deal with our recalcitrance in understanding him because he has to, if he is going to deal with us. What is clear is that God intended the penitence given to Eve and her daughters to make them wise unto salvation, and the belief that it did so in no way entails belief that all of the things that have made them wise were the only things able or intended to do so. Indeed, it is possible to imagine a world in which the suffering that women undergo in pregnancy became an object of deep meditation and devotion for men. In such a world, men would develop a profound gratitude for what women undertake on their behalf and on behalf of their children, a gratitude that would issue forth in a keen desire to ensure that women were supported in as many

\textsuperscript{456} 1 Cor. 11:5
ways as possible, even as nature strips them of many of their freedoms during the efforts around childbirth and child-rearing. One can imagine men both applying themselves as supports to women, enabling them to keep as many of their freedoms as possible within the limits that nature imposes. In such a world, where men applied themselves studiously to the support and assistance of women, men would no doubt sense that some of their own freedoms were curtailed in the effort to preserve freedom for women. This voluntary gift of freedom for the sake of love for others would have made not only women but men wise unto salvation, and if the Son of God had been born of a woman into that world, it is completely conceivable that men as well as women would have followed the Savior with the same devotion the Gospel writers describe in the women who followed Jesus from Galilee all the way to the tomb.

At a crucial point in the escalating conflict between Jesus and the leaders who would eventually call for his crucifixion, Jesus weeps over the city whose destruction he foresees and says to it, “how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”457 The lament is chilling, in part because it comes on the lips of someone whose entire lifespan is contained within the gospels where the lament appears. A man in the prime of life speaks as if in the midst of an age-long struggle. He speaks of Jerusalem’s rejection of the prophets and stoning of the messengers as if they were rejections of him. Jesus is feeling the pain of a rejection we have seen parts of but only he knows its full measure. He gives vent to a suffering we know so little of, and we know he knows it. The passage alienates us, and in just that way shows us the alienation Jesus feels. So, we find our hearts going out to Jesus. We know that we do not understand him. But the image he uses, that of

457 Matt. 23:37 // Lk. 13:34.
a mother hen, is one with which we all, as children, have some familiarity. But women understand this passage, and mothers particularly, in their own way. They suffer for their children in a way their children scarcely understand. What Jesus expresses in his grief over the city, Jesus’s own mother experienced as he was scattered to the four winds on Calvary. As the host of Gabriel, the recipient of Simeon’s prophecy, the witness of Anna’s joy in the Temple Courts, she knew more than most of the cost of his mission upon him and upon her. She wished to gather him under her wings, to hide him with her own body as she had done from the moment the angel visited her until he began to make his way down the path his father had laid for him. Her heart went out to him, and yet, just as importantly, it went out with him. She knew the heart that beat in his chest, because it beat in hers as well. It was her own suffering, Eve’s suffering, that taught her what he felt for his lost sheep. Strangely, the pain in her heart drove her on as she drove him to the cross, accepting every bitter blow of the distance he was constantly opening up between her heart and himself. It was the pain in her own heart that revealed to her the heat in the unquenchable fire of God’s covenant desire to win his people’s heart. And what her suffering taught her, it teaches us, as it makes the fierceness of the divine intention clear. Our hearts go out to him because hers did first. If it hadn’t, ours never would.

The sympathy and pain we feel as we see Jesus weep over the city that has rejected him must have been the constant experience of the women who followed him with their own lives in their hands. They, who had known so little of freedom, saw in the purpose and drivenness of this man something of their own lived experience of the world, something they had never before seen in the eyes of a man—did not know could be in the eyes of a man. This was a man who was possessed by those who depended on him and who could not rest until he had given them everything he had. The vastness of his mercy to the prostitute and the exacting syntax of his
attention and care as he parsed the evasions in the answers of every Pharisee, all were
recognizable to them. They too had taught children to walk and speak. The willingness to lose
everything he had for the sake of his people’s devotion to God – how could one describe it? With
what words would one name the singleness of his purpose and the vulnerability in his openness
to their contempt? The women knew: “your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over
you.” And “in pain you will bring forth children.” How did they know this was the one? There
had never before been a man who felt for them all that they felt for him and more. I am my
beloved’s and he is mine. Suddenly, the ancient and dark parables flashed with new light. The
Creator had placed his own heart in the hands of creatures, and when they turned away from him,
there was nothing for it but to pursue them across the surface of the earth, into wastelands and
marshes and swamps, and even to suffer death at their hands if by doing so he could protect them
from what he knew lay in front of them. He would destroy that which had destroyed them, even
if it meant they would destroy him. The secret behind the judgment placed upon women there is
that in the long march of their suffering in history, they would become the images of God’s
relentless pursuit of the people called out of the sea to stand upright as risen images of His Son.

II. Mary Sees, Sympathizing

The feminine genius of Christianity arises from the fact that the ordinary motherhood of
Mary reveals something in Jesus and in his Father that might not have been clear otherwise. In
her gift of him to the world, she reveals something in the mysterious ways of God. That ordinary
motherhood, as all women experience it, was the vehicle of God’s decisive self-introduction to
the world, was a source of tremendous wonder to early Christians and a compelling influence
behind the peculiar devotion of women to the faith both then and now. But what Jesus’s own
lament before Jerusalem shows is what would have been clear in any case as Christian theology
began to clarify the utter ordinariness of Mary’s motherhood. If an act of ordinary human
maternity revealed to us the mystery of the divine knowledge and love, then ordinary maternity
as such was capable of revealing this to us. Not just Mary’s maternity but human maternity, and
not just human maternity but all maternity, reveals to us the paradox of love and freedom that is
the life of God. But put in that way, the world itself becomes a constant apocalypse; the world
teems with the life of generations as each generation of the world’s species labors and gives and
devotes itself to the life of the next. It is possible to approach all of this without wonder; to not
ask why it should be so or imagine just how easily it could be not so. But the glory of the
Logos’s advent to us is that in Christ’s descent into the intra-worldly and, frankly, animal
realities of generation, the entire animate world begins to teem with prophetic splendor as each
generation rushes to reveal the secret at the heart of its existence, which is the life of the
following generation, of the one to come.

A Jesuit priest named Gerard Manley Hopkins unearthed this insight powerfully in a

poem entitled The May Magnificat, in which he attempts to see the rationale behind the

traditional description of May as Mary’s month:

May is Mary’s month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why:
Her feasts follow reason,
Dated due to season—

Candlemas, Lady Day;
But the Lady Month, May,
Why fasten that upon her;
With a feasting in her honour?

Is it only its being brighter
Than the most are must delight her?
Is it opportunist
And flowers finds soonest?

Ask of her, the mighty mother:
Her reply puts this other
    Question: What is Spring?—
    Growth in every thing—

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
Grass and greenworld all together;
    Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
Throstle above her nested

Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
Forms and warms the life within;
    And bird and blossom swell
In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathizing
    With that world of good
    Nature’s motherhood.

Spring, he writes, is growth in everything. It is the season in which nature’s generations explode, and all of it reveals something of the eternal Spring by which God the Father gives his life to the one that emerges from his womb. The tiniest act of generation in the tiniest plant cell is a creaturely echo that, if we could hear it rightly, would pummel us with wonder and leave us lost in alleluias. Hopkins’s point is that Spring is Mary’s month because she does hear every echo with perfect pitch. The poet’s language is precise; she not only hears that echo, she feels it in her own womb because what she bears is not the echo of what the Father bears but the very One he bears. God, being love, knows himself as if he were discovering another. Perfected creaturely love does the opposite to similar effect; it discovers in every other thing the solidarity that thing has with itself. Mary loves each created thing as if she had given it birth herself, feels its birth in her own womb, celebrates its growth as if her own Son were growing in it. But she gives birth to the eternal Word incarnate, the Word whose eternal generation is the condition of possibility for all other births. Mary’s womb, then, while itself born in the eternal birth of the Word, is nevertheless the womb of the woman who gives birth to everything that lives, the mother of all
living things. God’s love is effusive and diffusive, his love for things as things creates the “space” in which things that are not God can exist. Mary’s love is unitive; her womb gathers the entirety of the world’s things and makes of them her children in the birth she gives to the ground of their existence. Thus, Mary’s motherhood is universal. It is what makes the multiplicity of things somehow one thing. As the Father grounds the unity of the divine Trinity, she is the unitive principle of all created things. Spring is her proper season because she grows in all that grows.

But this discussion of Mary’s motherhood and that of nature conceals important truths that need to be squared with Hopkins’s insight. We can put the point liturgically: while the Annunciation takes place at Spring’s beginning, and the Visitation just over two months later on the 31st of Mary’s month, she herself gives birth in the dead of winter. In a cruel reversal of “nature’s motherhood,” her child dies in the Spring. Everything comes alive at the time when Mary’s child breathes his last on the cross. And we can put the point biologically as well; in the actual world, Spring is accompanied just as surely by the languishing heat of summer, the creeping of aging during life’s autumn, and the deep death of winter. The world in which things grow and live is also, we could say bluntly, a field of blood. Creation is attended not only by birth but by death, sickness, and disease. And it is hard to imagine the world without those elements. They seem baked into generation. Mary’s rejoicing at the rebirth of the cosmos within her womb cannot be untouched by the fact that the world is both life and death. Hopkins does not follow his own insight in this direction, but we can: sympathizing has at its core the experience of pathos, of suffering, and in Mary’s case, it is suffering voluntarily chosen out of love for Her

458 This claim, discerned in the Wisdom literature, will be addressed in detail below.
Son and his brothers and sisters.

We can gain traction on that suffering by turning, as our question did, first to liturgy and then to biology, as they each express the other’s truth. In a previous chapter, we noted that Mary is the vine that is fruitful when all others are barren. Regardless of where the evidence may point for actually dating the birth of Christ, the early church was rightly captivated by the image of Mary as a kind of Springtime in the midst of winter. In Europe, as devotion to Mary and to Christmas grew, it was expressed in wonder at evergreen flora. The birth of Christ began to be figured in hollies, firs, pines, and spruces. Christmas, as a festival, is a kind of Spring in the midst of winter, a celebration of the growth in one thing that promises the growth in every thing. This was Lewis’s point when, in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, the end of winter’s stranglehold over Narnia coincides with the appearance of Father Christmas. The birth of Christ in the depth of winter’s darkness is the explosion of life that emerges where none looked for it, stubbornly pushing back the grip of death that winter is. And it is that life that gives winter its peculiar charm, the thrill of life in the midst of so much hostility to it, the absolute joy that comes with being alive in the deadest part of the year. Eve and Adam had introduced death into the midst of the permanent spring of the garden, but Mary breathes a warm rumor of life into the midst of the frost and begins to peel it back. It is her fruitfulness in such a harsh world that brings to winter its coziness, that makes of every lit hearth its own advent. God’s faithfulness dots the world with fireplaces and warm clothing; and it becomes possible even to love the winter. On the

459 If Josef Friedlieb is correct that the first priestly course of Jojarib was serving during the destruction of Jerusalem on the ninth day of the month of Av (Josef Heinrich Friedlieb’s Leben J. Christi des Erlösers. Münster, 1887, p. 312), then the course of Abijah would have taken place either the Fall or in the late winter. That the former is the correct course is attested to by the Protoevangelium of James, a second-century document whose provenance was discussed earlier. If the second course in September is the correct one, the birth of John the Baptist would likely have taken place at the end of June, near the current date for the celebration of his birth. That would result in a birthday for Jesus six months later.
other side of the season, the Annunciation takes place at the very beginning of Spring, but the moving feast of the Triduum hovers and haunts. At times (as at the initiation of Dante’s journey), Good Friday sits on March 25. Sometimes it is later. But the Christian celebration of Spring, at least until Easter, bears little resemblance to what is going on in nature. Having begun its Springtime in the bleak midwinter, the Church shivers in the cold Lenten winds and dark skies of Calvary, while the rest of the world dazzles with new life.

This liturgical difficulty can be expressed in terms of nature as well. Every life that begins does so within the realm of death and under its sway. The larger context of each new life is the unbroken reign of death, and each generation’s labor for the life of the next is haunted by the anxiety of its own limited time. Each Spring, then, rests against the backdrop of the world’s unbroken winter. Whether the world is seen as the womb of life or a graveyard tilting through the cosmic void has a great deal to do with perspective. What must be true for Hopkins’s insight to hold is not merely that Spring must be Mary’s season but that Spring must in some sense be the truer season, the season that runs more with the grain of the universe. Otherwise, her month is a kind of fiction dressed up in the sentiment one feels at seeing fresh flowers and new fruit. Does growth in every thing really conceal death in every thing? This is the final problem of Mariology – is life unavoidably parasitic on death? Does it depend upon death, such that nothing can live unless other things all die? That this is the ordinary course of things in the world is obvious to observation; the death of each generation of plants provides the organic nutrients necessary for successive plant generations to thrive and to bear fruit, which is then eaten by animals. If death is the only way that generation can take place, then either generation is not the analogy we have imagined it to be or there is a kind of “death” in the life of God and Mary is not a new Eve but an older one.
One could raise the objection that the analogies are never meant to work that way, that plant and animal death are not the problem for God that human and moral death are. This is probably the dominant position within the Christian tradition. Aquinas, for example, saw animal death as an entailed by the very natures of certain things; God could not create them without it being true that certain animals were chased, killed, and eaten by others. But the Scriptures do seem to envision animal death as something that was not part of the original design of things. For one thing, humans do not begin to eat animals until after the flood, which is narrated as a kind of undoing of the creation by the primordial chaos that God restrains in creating the world and the Garden of Eden in particular. Even after humans do begin to eat animals, they are forbidden (in the Noahic dispensation) from eating blood, because in blood is the life of creatures. Nor are animals to be held innocent for the shedding of human blood. Indeed, as Isaiah envisions the remade world, the endless deluge of animal bloodshed will stop, as the lion and lamb lie down together (Is. 11:6). The situation that comes to be after the flood is one that God hints that he will track and demand an account for. The hint that this endless bloodshed will eventually be undone is also picked up in the New Testament, where in Romans 8 Paul describes the entire creation as subjected to decay and death, not by something built-in but by an act of subjection that the work of Christ will undo. Until that work is finished, the creation groans “as in the pains of childbirth” right up until the present time. The power of sin over the world, in Paul’s view, has cosmic

\[\text{\footnotesize 460 ST I.96.1 ad 2: For the nature of animals was not changed by man's sin, as if those whose nature now it is to devour the flesh of others, would then have lived on herbs, as the lion and falcon. Nor does Bede's gloss on Genesis 1:30, say that trees and herbs were given as food to all animals and birds, but to some. Thus, there would have been a natural antipathy between some animals. They would not, however, on this account have been excepted from the mastership of man: as neither at present are they for that reason excepted from the mastership of God, Whose Providence has ordained all this. Of this Providence man would have been the executor, as appears even now in regard to domestic animals, since fowls are given by men as food to the trained falcon.} \]

\[\text{\footnotesize 461 Gen. 9:5} \]
consequences, including the subjection of the world to the tyranny of death. Certainly, the new creation is a place where death will not have any power. If death is exorcised from creation at the last, when the creation is perfectly transparent to God’s will, it is hard to know why we need to be resigned to its ubiquity except as a consequence of the power of sin over the world. For Aquinas, it was easy to imagine how death could hold no power in the new creation; the splendor and diversity of the present world would give way in the end for one that includes rational creatures alone, in whose rational souls exists a form that can remain incorrupt if joined to a new body. A creation without death is possible, that is, but only insofar as it is a creation without generation in the first place.

It seems to me that the main tradition has created a nasty problem here; death is the cost of generation, not merely under sin but per se. This is certainly not an impossible view, for everlasting life is not a potency within any creature in the earth. But such an observation proves too much; life for one moment is not within the power of the creature. All life arises from the will (and therefore from the womb) of the Father. It is in him that everything lives, moves, and has its being. Nothing owes its existence to anything other than the will of God, who calls it into being out of the abyss of his mercy. All life, all being that is not God, owes its existence to the will of God that it be. But the will of God that it be is a given; he has said “let it be.” The creature, given life by God’s love, ought to go right on for as long as that love for it endures. Thus, death of an animal, however insignificant it is in the scheme of human affairs, or however necessary an evil it seems, poses serious problems for the story of God and the world that

462 ST III., supplement, q. 91 a. 5, resp. Cf. Article 4 of the same question, where he argues that earthly bodies will be renewed according to the properties of spirits. But these bodily elements must have a form inhering in them that can itself be subject to incorruption, and with the exception of the rational soul in humans, animals do not possess this.
Hopkins appears to tell. Life that has as its precondition the death of others, not only as we see it but as it is and may be, cannot be called good in the same way we use the word when we describe the generation of the Son. Or if we do, then Mary simply cannot sympathize with the world; she must do the opposite. She must adopt a practiced indifference to the suffering of at least some creatures, in the knowledge that the world presents only so many options, and the one that is best must be chosen, warts and all. To call it good is to develop a kind of distance from the attendant evils of the good world that cannot rightly be described as sympathy. A famous observation from Darwin’s letters makes the point quite clearly. In several places, Darwin notes the existence of a kind of parasitic wasp. To provide for its young, the wasp lays its eggs in the heads of live caterpillars. The hatchlings, when they emerge, eat the caterpillar alive. Darwin objects that a good God, at least not as he himself understands the word “good,” would never will that to happen to the caterpillar. The world’s going on that way, he thought, makes better sense as the conclusion of a vast cacophony of random events. If that solution is metaphysically ugly, it at least has the strength of being consistent with what we observe. The ugliness of the parts sits in an understandable relationship to the whole. Nor is this objection removed by pointing out that in fact life has come out of death and death does make life possible. That could be true, without it implying that creaturely death is part of God’s plan for creation, just as God has relentlessly brought forth good out of the evils of child sacrifice or the crucifixion. In fact, it could be true (and probably is) that life in this world as it is currently organized requires death.

463 “Letter 2814 — Darwin, C. R. to Gray, Asa, 22 May, 1860 (Accessed from the Darwin Correspondence Project: https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-2814.xml): “I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.”
That could mean that it is built in, or it could be the sign of the reign of sin, part of that which is one day to be overcome. It may be necessary (as it certainly seems to be) that Winter is a necessary condition for Spring. But it may be that what is good in the conditions that the world presents to us now will actually be washed away with the evil when the perfect comes.

One argument against the latter proposal is not only that God allows animal death for food, as he does in Genesis 8, but that he allows and is pleased by Abel’s animal sacrifices in Genesis 4. Moreover, in Torah, God commands the sacrifice of animals and also commands the slaying of animals for consumption. Mary will no doubt have obeyed those commands and eaten the animals she was commanded to eat. But Mary’s consumption of animals need not imply any lack of sympathy. Her following of the Lord’s commands and permissions is consistent both with a recognition that the world is how it is now and with a longing for it to be as it should be. The reading of Genesis that began this work imagined just such a paradox of recognition and longing as the result of God’s genuine engagement in partnership with human vicegerents in fashioning the creation. That partnership always had as a possibility that the very partners God had established could go their own way. And since the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, it would no doubt appear that God was underwriting the rejection of his own commandment. The human turn away from the divine plan (and the turn of some of the angels prior to that) has genuine consequences for the creation that are undoable by either side of the partnership alone, and those consequences create the seeming schizophrenia discussed in the chapter on Mary and Israel. To keep his promise, it was argued there, God has to slay his word, the creative *fiat* behind the existence of the animal whose skin became the covering for the pair whose nakedness brought a newfound shame. Until the contradiction is healed, the advent of the Word of God into creation is bound to create apparent contradictions. *Fiat* will always seem to entail *fiat non*. 
Every word of God will create the conditions under which its opposite is heard.

III. Contradiction and Tradition: Paganism

The Old Testament thus preserved under the cover of the divine word the attempts of several groups within Israel to hear and respond to God. The tensions within the text reflect on-the-ground attempts to establish particular ways of answering to the word of God as each word somehow also appears to establish the contradictory word. Take, for example, the conflict between the priests and the Deuteronomists. These two traditions reflect two very different receptions of the proclamation that God is for Israel. For the priests, the emphasis on the tabernacle, the temple, the precise nature of the cultus, and the importance of the priestly class communicate to the people both God’s nearness and his distance. He is near in that he has an address. As long as his house stands in the midst of the people, he belongs to them. He is their God. At the same time, the necessity for priestly mediation and for the cultus implies that while God is among them, he is not one of them. His very closeness marks a boundary they dare not cross without participation in the drawn-out penitential acts that acknowledge this fact. The tension of nearness and distance unleashes powerful and contradictory energies within Israel’s life. God’s intimacy breeds presumption, especially in the age of the monarchy. Through his temple, God becomes another of the jewels in the crown of the king, legitimating his rule and separating the king from the people as the one who – above all – owns the relationship with God. The priests become royal functionaries as became common throughout the ANE, and God is mythologized into the story of the monarchy, a king of which the human king is a copy. God’s relationship with the people takes the form found among the peoples of the nations, and the

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Creator of all things becomes merely a tribal deity, with tribal loyalties and grudges. He can feud. God belongs to the people, but they do not necessarily belong to him. He becomes dependent upon their remembrance of him – needy, thirsty, angry, and vulnerable. Like a king, he may exert power, but that power sits in competitive relationship with the other powers. His rule is exercised as a kind of decree – there is no greater rationale for it than the will of the one who makes it. Its arbitrariness is part of the point, because to obey it is an act of personal faithfulness to the will of the god. If there are consequences to faithfulness or neglect, those consequences are meted out personally, as rewards and punishments. But if the people persist in refusal to obey, there is no vindication for the god unless he is powerful enough to assert his will over what is independent of him. Like the priests, and like the king, the priestly god is in one way ruler but in another way a prisoner of the powers of the world.

For understandable reasons, the deuteronomists react not only against paganism but against too cozy an account of the relationship of God to human beings. So, Josiah not only does away with the Asherah poles, but he discovers (or helps to create) the final form of Deuteronomy, which insists that God does not dwell in any house, including, especially, the Temple. The deuteronomists assert everywhere the complete dependence of the people upon God and reject any appearance to the contrary. The importance of the Temple and its rituals is the aid to prayer and the obedience to the divine commandment, but none of this is to be understood as placing even the slightest limitation upon God. He has no address, no place to lay his head (indeed, no head!). The people’s remembrance or forgetfulness, their obedience or rebellion, have consequences for them, but not at all for him. The way of the Lord then is a way of life, and those who follow it will live. But God remains free of all of it, alone in his uniqueness, independent of anything or anyone. This God is who is. He is not a thing that can come
alongside creation, as if there were one thing and then another. He is not vulnerable, containable, or comprehensible. Everything that exists depends upon him. Because everything that exists depends upon him, his rule is built into the nature of things. To walk in the way of God brings about life because that’s the way it is; to refuse him brings death for the very same reason. There is no urgency in the God of the deuteronomists; things simply are what he has made them to be. His rule is not decree but law, not will but nomos, and it is that element of the divine mind that shines through most clearly in the Deuteronomist’s reframing of Torah. Obedience to the God of Deuteronomy is not simply an act of love but of reason, discernment of paths and destinations and doing what is sensible. At the end of the day, Deuteronomy’s God is the creator of the world, and the grain of the universe simply is his will. In principle, then, one could learn to follow God, and to do right, merely by observing the ant, say, and comporting one’s life to its lessons. So, if the priestly way of life ends in paganism, the deuteronomist way ends in the wisdom tradition, with the world itself providing the necessary guidance to the ways of God. The God of wisdom is not far away, his word is near, because it speaks in the life of every living thing and the being of everything that exists.

The priestly and Deuteronomist poles within Israel correspond, it is worth observing, to varying approaches to divine wisdom found outside of Israel. Philosophy and paganism represent two different but overlapping moments in the history of the human attempt to know the divine, and as the Word of God emerges in their contexts, differing notes are emphasized to different effects. The tension between them created within Israel’s Scripture mirrors the tension in the ancient world between philosophy, which tended to turn paganism into allegory, and paganism, which mythologized philosophy, with each tradition claiming to lay hold of wisdom.
The difficulty created by these views of wisdom in conflict with one another is carefully investigated by C.S. Lewis’s final novel, *Till We Have Faces*, which juxtaposes paganism of the kind popular in the nations from which Israel emerged and philosophy as it gradually exerted its influence on those traditions. The novel’s main action situates Orual, the oldest daughter of the heirless King of Glose, between exactly the two poles of Philosophy and paganism. Her childhood tutor, a Greek slave deeply steeped in philosophy, stands in as a representative of the wisdom tradition. This tutor, nicknamed The Fox, interprets the things that happen in the world as the fruit of the world’s own inner logic, something implanted by the divine mind but given its own real existence. He is cosmopolitan (“no one can be in exile who remembers that all the world is one city”[465]), critical of custom,[466] and devoted to science and philosophy. The goal of life, he repeatedly observes, is to conform oneself “in accordance with nature.”[467] His anthropology is universalist[468] as is his theology. The divine essence, he repeatedly argues, is wholly transcendent of creaturely being. It does not envy, cannot feel jealousy, is not begrudging, demanding, or needy.[469] The Fox often uses the vocabulary of paganism but with irony. Taken literally, the tales of the pagan gods are “lies of poets, child.”[470] Although he himself has a

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[466] Ibid.: “everything is as good or as bad as our opinion makes it.”

[467] Ibid., 8. Cf. 14: “we must learn, child, not to fear anything that nature brings.” Cf., also, his defense of suicide on ibid., 17: “to depart from life of a man’s own will when there’s good reason is one of the things that are according to nature.”

[468] Ibid., 9: “Are not all men of one blood?”


[470] Ibid., 8.
weakness for poetry, he rebukes himself for it and sees it as a weakness. What he prizes is philosophy – clarity, coherence, light. His preferred image for the divine is the true sun. In the Fox, Lewis dramatizes divine transcendence and independence. The world has its own logic, ordered by the divine mind, but as God is free of it, so it is, asymmetrically but still really, free of God. All things are “part of the same web, which is called Nature, or the Whole.”

The pagans, in mockery of the Fox, exclaim, “holy places are dark places. It is life and strength, not knowledge and words, that we get in them. Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood.” In that darkness, one finds the priest of Ungit, Glome’s own adoption of Aphrodite – though “more like the Babylonian than the Greek.” Ungit is kind but jealous, powerful but needy. Orual knows her to be powerful but dangerous, potentially hostile and angry. She is close enough to do harm but alien enough to cause fear. What Orual calls holiness is the sense of being in immediate danger at the hands of something that seems to do all it can to evade her understanding and then punishes her for not understanding. That sense of capriciousness, of unpredictability, threatens to consume her at any moment. It is powerful enough to destroy the world and yet – somehow – curiously also dependent upon the world. The gods must have their food.

471 Ibid., 18.
472 Ibid., 73.
473 Ibid., 85.
474 Ibid., 50.
475 Ibid., 8. This fact will be crucial for the work this story does in unpacking the themes this chapter treats.
476 See ibid., 79, where Orual mocks the gods for their neediness: “food for the gods must always be found somehow, even while the land starves.”
477 Ibid., 79.
The Fox’s critiques of this world echo not only those found among the philosophers in Hellenism but also those in the later literature of Israel. But there also seems to be more in Heaven and Earth than is dreamt of in the Fox’s philosophy. For one thing, it at least seems as though there is a bit too much correspondence between the people’s devotion to Ungit and their good fortune to ascribe it all to coincidence. Orual comes to know that the Priest of Ungit, rival to the Fox, speaks of verities even if he speaks in mysteries. For one thing, the powers with which he is in touch actually do seem to empower him – particularly in a way that the Fox’s philosophy does not (yet) equal. After the Priest tells the King of Glome that a sacrifice must be offered to the gods in order to restore the land to health, the Fox attempts to intervene and to show that the Priest’s mysteries are in the end just contradictions. The priest remains undeterred and conquers the Fox’s objection with an argument from moral courage:

We are hearing much Greek wisdom this morning, King,” said the Priest. “And I have heard most of it before. I did not need a slave to teach it to me. It is very subtle. But it brings no rain and grows no corn; sacrifice does both. It does not even give them boldness to die. That Greek there is your slave because in some battle he threw down his arms and let them bind his hands and lead him away and sell him, rather than take a spear-thrust in his heart. Much less does it give them understanding of holy things.478

The argument silences the Fox, adding “iron to some old ulcer in his soul.”479 But when the priest relates that the sacrifice must be of a person within the royal house, the paranoid king suspects treachery and draws his blade against the priest: “‘you old fool,’ he said. ‘Where is your plot now? Eh? Can you feel my bodkin? Does it tickle you? As that? Or that? I can drive it into your heart as quickly or slowly as I please.’”480 What happens next is, in many ways, the crux of

478 Ibid., 50.
479 Ibid.
480 Ibid., 53.
Lewis’s story and a crucial part of mine:

I have never (to speak of things merely mortal) seen anything more wonderful than the Priest’s stillness. Hardly any man can be quite still when a finger, much less a dagger, is thrust into the place between two ribs. The Priest was. Even his hands did not tighten on the arms of the chair. Never moving his head, or changing his voice, he said, “Drive it in, king, fast or slow, if it pleases you. It will make no difference. Be sure the Great Offering will be made whether I am dead or living. I am here in the strength of Ungit. While I have breath, I am Ungit’s voice. Perhaps longer. A priest does not wholly die. I may visit your palace more often, both by day and night, if you kill me. The others will not see me. I think you will.”

This was the worst yet. The Fox had taught me to think – at any rate to speak – of the Priest as of a mere schemer and a politic man who put into the mout of Ungit whatever might most increase his own power and lands or most harm his enemies. I saw it was not so.

The problem with the Fox’s philosophy is that paganism, in the story, works. Later, in the novel’s second book, Orual sits (then as queen of Glome) in the temple of Ungit. While she is there, a peasant girl of Glome comes and prostrates herself before the idol of Ungit that sits in the temple’s deep recesses and weeps before it, in a kind of prayer. After the prayer, Orual asks, “Has Ungit comforted you, child?” The girl responds, “Ungit has given me great comfort. There is no goddess like Ungit.” The queen then participates in a pagan ritual called the Year’s Birth. The ceremony consists of the Priest (and the monarch) entering the the temple and then fighting their way out. The battle is mock, the swords are wooden, and the exit is easy. Instead of blood, there is wine. Orual initially sees the whole thing as a kind of farce. But after seeing the peasant come in and pray, she notices the effect of the entire event on the people. In a scene definitely meant to be reminiscent of a kind of Springtime Christmas:

481 Ibid., 53-54.
482 Ibid., 272.
483 Ibid.
the great mob, shouting [ . . . ] and whirling their rattles, and throwing wheat-seed into
the air, all sweaty and struggling and climbing on one another’s backs to get a sight of
Arnom and the rest of us. Today it struck me in a new way. It was the joy of the people
that amazed me. There they stood where they had waited for hours, so pressed together
they could hardly breathe, each doubtless with a dozen cares and sorrows upon him (who
has not?), yet every man and woman and the very children looking as if all the world was
well because a man dressed up as a bird had walked out of a door after striking a few
blows with a wooden sword. Even those who were knocked down in the press to see us
made light of it and indeed laughed louder than the others. I saw two farmers whom I
well knew for bitterest enemies (they’d wasted more of my time when I sat in judgment
than half the remainder of my people put together) clap hands and cry, ‘he’s born!’
brothers for the moment.484

For priest, for peasant, and for people, paganism brings them into touch with something they are
right to respond to, notwithstanding the obvious comedy of the moment Orual observes and the
difficulty of trying to speak about it in terms that would satisfy the Fox. The people celebrate;
they approach Ungit and are comforted, in large part because in Ungit they think they are in
touch with something elemental, something in the sinew of things. The gods, on this view, are
close, uncomfortably and unbearably close. Ungit, unlike the other gods, didn’t descend to earth
from the heavens; she comes from the earth. As Orual observes her face, a realization dawns
upon her: Ungit is like her nurse when she was a child – like Batta. The old nurse, “when we
were very small, had her loving moods, even to me. I have run out into the garden to get free –
and to get, as it were, freshened and cleansed – from her huge, hot, strong yet flabby soft
embraces, the smothering, engulfing tenacity of her.”485 This close intensity, for Orual, calls forth
associations of maternity. The face of Ungit is, she observes, “infinitely female.”486 She asks the
priest to describe Ungit. The priest replies that Ungit “signifies the earth, which is the womb and

484 Ibid., 273.
485 Ibid., 270.
486 Ibid.
mother of all living things.” The priest’s description (which has undergone a change under the influence of the Fox, the rival of his great predecessor) recalls Orual’s own observation of Ungit’s house, an “egg-shaped” thing made of huge stones:

“The roof is thatched with rushes and not level but somewhat domed, so that the whole thing is a roundish hump, most like a huge slug lying in a field. This is a holy shape, and the priests say it resembles, or (in a mystery) that it really is, the egg from which the whole world was hatched or the womb in which the whole world once lay.”

The God of the Fox is heaven, paternity, a mind generously salting all of being with its order but contained in none of them. But Ungit is an alternative order, of blood, devotion, darkness, earth, sacrifice – she, or at least her house, is the womb from which all things come. And in that order, the truth lives also – though it seems at odds with what the Fox teaches, what he learned from his Greek masters.

Glome’s cult is a fertility cult, something that Lewis – under the tutelage of J.G. Frazier – saw at the core of the world’s pagan religions. And the changes that the cult undergoes during the book mirror changes in the history of pagan religion as it migrated from the Near East through the pre-Christian west. Under the influence of the Fox, the Ungit cult evolves.

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487 Ibid.
488 Ibid., 94.
489 Citing J.G. Frazier is difficult, because his primary work, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, published in two volumes in 1890, swelled to no less than twelve in the earlier years of the 20th century. It is more a tradition than a single book. But its central contention, steady throughout, is that at the core of all religion is the mystery of fertility, a wonder and contemplation of the means by which creation survives and recreates itself. That contemplation yields, across all religions, a host of ceremonies and rites to celebrate fertility, the motifs of human sacrifice and the dying (sometimes rising) god, the scapegoat, and much else. Frazier’s work has been criticized, as any such work would be, for flattening out distinctions and oversimplifying the semantic universes in which ancient religious practices made the sense they did. But it seems to me that critics have, as they often do, overstated their case and ignored the central and basic soundness of Frazier’s observations and explanations. It is this basic soundness that makes paganism addressable under the guise of a work of fiction; the shoe Lewis cobbles together will not fit everyone equally or perfectly, but it will not to any paganism be wholly unfitting.
The priest that succeeds his old rival is friendly with him, and eager to see the cult change. They hire craftsmen who were themselves influenced by Hellenism to create a new, beautiful, lifelike statue of Ungit – something much more like Aphrodite as the Fox knows her. There is, then, the “old Ungit” and “new Ungit.” There is an old priest and a new priest. The new priest explains Ungit, as was noted above, as a kind of symbolic vocabulary, an allegorical reading of natural forces. In a similar way to what Hellenism accomplished in the near East, the Fox’s interrogations of pagan religion cause a new cult to emerge. In the House of Ungit, the old idol sits near to a new Ungit, a much closer image of Aphrodite as the Greeks knew her. She is made of lighter stone, beautiful, predictable, but useless. The people cling to the old ways, and “the new Ungit brings no comfort.” Like the peasants in Levenson’s *Death and Resurrection*, mocked by elites but still devoted in their way to the old traditions, the people of Glome cling to “old Ungit.”

The story ends with an apocalypse in which the truth of things turns out to be something that neither the Fox nor the priest could have anticipated. The Fox is right: the divine nature is benevolent, untroubled, abundant. It does not envy and therefore has no need to boast or seek its own glory. But he is also wrong: the gods are minutely interested in every detail of human life. They do not need us, but we need them in order to be what they have decided we are to be. Because they are divine, their presence wounds us – not in malice, but simply in being what they

490 Ibid., 234. The people call her “Greek Ungit” (p. 272).

491 Ibid., 272.

492 Levenson notes the work of archaeologists Lawrence E. Stager and Samuel R. Wolff in which they demonstrate the simultaneity of both child sacrifice and animal redemption in the years between 400 and 200 BC in Carthage. But during that period, they actually discern the phenomenon of redemption decreases during the time. Four hundred years after the close of the period Stager and Wolff address, Tertullian notes that there are still child sacrifices taking place, even as respectable attitudes towards the practice had changed. See Levenson 1993, 20-25.
are. But the wounds we receive at their hands, if we follow, result in our being made like them. In one of the last scenes of the book, Orual gazes upon the true form of her sister Psyche and finds that she cannot avoid the conclusion that Psyche is a goddess. It is the plan of the gods to make us like them, and that plan, emerging into full view, reveals to Orual that nothing is as she thought it was. As the Fox leads her into understanding what has become of everything, he points out that he has been wrong more than right. The gods will have sacrifice; they will have man.\textsuperscript{493} They are not like the cultus of them on earth would lead one to think, but what they are is, somehow, still rightly described by the vocabulary of paganism. Sacrifice, holiness, devotion, anger, wrath, and passion – these are right descriptors – after a fashion – of the God who is nevertheless completely free, benevolent, imperturbable. Wisdom and paganism each grasp something of the truth; each also fails to comprehend the whole.

Lewis’s novel explains the problem of paganism in a twofold way. First, there is the problem at the core of theology: the gods are real in a way that mortals are not, possessed of a life it is nearly impossible for us to understand, and so divine self-revelation is precarious. It is not guaranteed that we will see them for what they are, even if they show themselves. But that difficulty is compounded when mortals attempt to relate to one another what they have seen in divine self-revelation. Testimony, story, dramatization, all of these are second-order from our experience, yet one more remove from the quasi-infinite gap the gods must cross to reveal themselves to mortals. This problem is elsewhere described by Lewis as the problem of transposition.\textsuperscript{494} A three-dimensional object, conveyed by even the best two-dimensional image,
is much more unlike that image than like it. And yet, there is no other way to make someone see what the artist has seen. As a result, the closer the image resembles the original, the more its manifold differences appear. The truest words about the gods may be the silliest. At times, the Ungit cult appears to be pure foolishness. The mysterious providence that brings the new year out of the old, when described in the tools available to us, look like the bird-headed old man who pretends to fight his way out of one door to the House of Ungit when others remain totally open.\footnote{Till We Have Faces, 94, 268-74.} The struggle of life against death finds expression as the lampoonable wooden sword fight, with wooden blades and weak strikes. These rituals are easy to contradict; they contradict themselves, as the Fox points out in several places.\footnote{Ibid., 49-50, et passim.} But there may not be any better way for the higher reality to be described, given the terms of the lower.

The second difficulty is, in some ways, caused by the first. What is silly is easy to despise, and Orual, under the training of the Fox, learns to despise it. The foolishness of the Ungit cult conceals a truth that is perceptible only to a person who is themselves, in a way, childlike. Psyche, Orual’s sister, on the night before she is delivered up as the Great Offering, suggests that perhaps the gods are benevolent, and it is simply our difference from them that makes all of the stories of their intervention in our affairs appear as horrors. Orual views her as a child believing earnestly in fairy tales. But what Orual initially despises as childishness is actually humility. It is Orual’s pride that makes it impossible to perceive the truth in Psyche’s speculations and, later, testimony that things were better than anyone might have dared to hope. The gradual apocalypse that ends the story humbles Orual, and it is her new humility that allows
her to see the New Birth ritual in a way she had not seen it before. It is humility that wonders at the comfort the peasant girl finds in the old idol and takes her seriously enough to ask a question about it. The first problem, that of transposition, is caused by the humility of the gods in their taking an interest in us in the first place, but that humility offends the proud. Paganism’s foolish dramas give comfort to the people not because the people are foolish but because paganism bears its own witness, no more adulterated than that of philosophy, to the divine wisdom.

In several places, Lewis attests to the influence of the work of J.G. Frazier upon his own thought. Though it by no means is without critics, one of its main arguments is sound. Ancient paganism, by and large, emerged as celebrations and penitential observances around the mystery of fertility. The philosophers observed the ant and realized there was mind behind the universe. The pagans marveled at childbirth, at nature’s motherhood, and intuited something about the divine nature’s own fertility. They built elaborate liturgies, tales, hymns, and stories as exclamations of wonder at the mystery of generation. In that generation, as in their own generations, they discerned the operation of what the fourth Gospel calls a husband’s will. The earth is teeming with life because it is willed that it be so. The philosophers wondered at the mind behind the universe, but the pagans celebrated (and feared) the actions of the gods, their deliberate involvement with us. In Lewis’s tale, the pagans deride philosophy because its wisdom “brings no rain and grows no corn.” Sacrifice, the priest notes, does both. It responds to will with will. It presents the gods as involved with us and as desirous of our love.

Two rival accounts of Wisdom vie for primacy of Glome, just as they did in the world out of which God gradually calls Israel. Although Israel’s Scriptures reveal the evidence of both of

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497 Ibid., 50.
those views of wisdom, the key difference, of course, is the call. God’s voice, discernibly
different in both traditions, is nevertheless that which binds these differing cultures together.
Both pagan and sage amplify the voice of God in terms of their priors. The Hebrews were forced
to live under the thumb of Babylonian exile and were then exposed to the culture Alexander
imported to the entire Near East, discerned in God the transcendent Mind behind the universe,
while those in whom the ancient traditions of the Chaldeans remained visible heard in YHWH’s
declarations of love for them a voice like those of the ancient deities but greater than all of them.
But both of these traditions respond to an identifiable call in the voice of the Lord to Abraham. It
is this call, and the answer to it, that differentiates Deuteronomy from Aristotle and the ancient
cult from paganism. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom, true philosophy and true
myth. These traditions, which rival each other in the pages of the Hebrew Bible, nevertheless
constitute Israel. In the days of Jesus of Nazareth, the Temple scarcely resembled the smoke-
filled darkness of the place where lived the Ark near the home of Judah’s kings. But there
remained a Temple, and the children of Abraham, while claiming a God who transcended all
creation, nevertheless saw themselves as the highly favored children of the Creator of Heaven
and Earth. Before the cross, nothing could have seemed so foolish to the wisdom of the Greeks.

What became paganism in light of the Josian exorcism seems to have been, for a long
time, the way of loving and worshipping God that forms the priestly voice in the Old Testament.
The analogy between the king and God, between his mother and Shaddai, exercised a powerful
hold on the imaginations of people who could look around at nature and see motherhood as its
singular principle. The fecundity of nature, its closeness, and the darkness to our understanding
of its principles, all of this can be seen in the relationship of Israel to the tribal god who sheds
blessing upon Israel but demands the blood of its children. Meanwhile, the contradictory impulse
one finds in the Wisdom tradition, which delights in the children of men and has no need of their blood to sustain its own existence, struggles to account for the reality of death. Paganism presents a God who negotiates a cosmic armistice between life and death, whose ways are inscrutable but perfectly mirrored in the goods and evils in the creation. They have generation, and they have death. The god of pagan Israel loves them and is present with them, for good and evil. That his ways are inscrutable is part of the package. Wisdom presents a God altogether free and independent, but whose ways make our own experience a mystery. The Wisdom tradition’s portrait of God is the origin, that is, of the problem of evil. Pagan religion’s gods present no such problem, for they themselves are subject to it. Its problem is the problem of contingent, created being in infinite regression. The Old Testament’s core trauma, the experience of exile, motivates a pair of questions, each arising from one side of the great contradiction. The priests see the exile and its lingering effects and ask, why is God angry? The deuteronomists put the question back to earth – why do we follow the way that leads to death? Who will guide our feet into the way of peace? Both insist on divine intimacy and distance, and both await a reckoning only the future will provide. The priests await the Childbirth and the deuteronomists await the prophet who will speak for God without contradiction. Unbeknownst to each, they await the same thing.

It is tempting to impose a wooden chronology on this; but the priests are as confident in YHWH’s transcendence as Josiah was – it validated their symbolic universe as the one correct one, and their worship of God and His Mother proved surprisingly resilient throughout the exilic period, especially in Egypt. The Josian tradition wins out, but not entirely without remainder. The Book of Hebrews, after all, describes the site and practices not of the house of Hasmoneus but of the First Temple. The sequel to Margaret Barker’s first book will point out that the images and memories of the First Temple come very quickly in the Christian era to rest around the
Mother of Jesus, in whom many see clearly what lay in a distant mist when Judah’s Queen Mothers attended their sons in royal court. If Deuteronomy, then, foretells a “Prophet like Me” who will arise to lead the people, it is the mysterious depths of paganism’s shadow in the priestly cult that opens up the liminal imaginative space in which that prophet could somehow also be God, that God could have a Mother, and both of them could give birth to the reborn children of God. Israel’s priestly tradition, summed up in the Ark that held the Word of the Lord, is the redemption of the world’s paganism. And in the Virgin of Nazareth, Paganism delivers up its great secret, that the rationale and hope of the world is its rebirth as the miraculous fruit of a womb no husband had seeded.

But if Israel’s identity as one people offers hope to the world that the deposit of wisdom scattered throughout its traditions would one day be unified, its tribalisms nevertheless pose the problem afresh. The same God’s voice had inspired some to sacrifice their children to him and others to insist that the God who chose His people in Isaac could never have permitted such a thing, let alone commanded it. The Word alone will not suffice, because the louder the Word, the more fiercely are its contradictions heard. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than when the people whose whole religious life is formed by Josiah’s purge nevertheless sacrifices its Son to the gods of the nations. Similarly, in the last judgment of *Till We Have Faces*, Orual’s testimony against the gods reaches its peak precisely at the moment where she sees them most clearly:

“I know what you’ll say. You will say the real gods are not at all like Ungit, and that I was shown a real god and the house of a real god and ought to know it. Hypocrites! I do know it. As if that would heal my wounds! I could have endured it if you were things like Ungit and the Shadowbrute. You know well that I never really began to hate you until Psyche began talking of her palace and her lover and her husband. Why did you lie to me? You said a brute would devour her. Well, why didn’t it? I’d have wept for her and buried what was left and built her a tomb and . . . and . . . . But to steal her love from me! Can it be that you really don’t understand? Do you think we mortals will find you gods easier to bear if you’re beautiful? I tell you that if that’s true we’ll find you a thousand times worse. For then (I know what beauty does) you’ll lure and entice. You’ll leave us.
nothing; nothing that’s worth our keeping or your taking. Those we love best – whoever’s most worth loving – those are the very ones you’ll pick out. Oh, I can see it happening, age after age, and growing worse and worse the more you reveal your beauty: the son turning his back on the mother and the bride on her groom, stolen away by this everlasting calling, calling, calling of the gods. Taken where we can’t follow. It would be far better for us if you were foul and ravening. We’d rather you drank their blood than stole their hearts. We’d rather they were ours and dead than yours and made immortal. But to steal her love from me, to make her see things I couldn’t see . . . oh, you’ll say (you’ve been whispering it to me these forty years) that I’d signs enough her palace was real, could have known the truth if I wanted. But how could I want to know it? Tell me that. The girl was mine. What right had you to steal her away into your dreadful heights? You’ll say I was jealous. Jealous of Psyche? Not while she was mine. If you’d gone the other way to work – if it was my eyes you had opened – you’d soon have seen how I would have shown her and told her and taught her and led her up to my level. But to hear a chit of a girl who had (or ought to have had) no thought in her head that I’d not put there, setting up for a seer and a prophetess and next thing to a goddess . . . how could anyone endure it? That’s why I say it makes no difference whether you’re fair or foul. That there should be gods at all, there’s our misery and bitter wrong. There’s no room for you and us in the same world. You’re a tree in whose shadow we can’t thrive. We want to be our own. I was my own and Psyche was mine and no one else had any right to her. Oh, you’ll say you took her away into bliss and joy such as I could never have given her, and I ought to have been glad of it for her sake. Why? What should I care for some horrible, new happiness which I hadn’t given her and which separated her from me? Do you think I wanted her to be happy, that way? It would have been better if I’d seen the Brute tear her in pieces before my eyes.\footnote{Ibid., 290-292}

We do not love God, and until we do, the voice of God merely amplifies our torture. It is not enough for God to speak; God must make it so that in the end, the Word is heard. The sibling rivalry Orual feels with Psyche litters the pages of our Old Testament, as prophets blame pagans and pagans cling to their Patroness, each hearing the voice of Wisdom and each denying the Wisdom of the other. Since the rebellion of the first pair, the price of fruitfulness for God’s Word has been the equal establishment of its contradictions – wheat and tares growing up together. And if the One was to come who would be both Word and Hearer in one flesh, it would require full willingness to hear from earth and to speak from heaven. If the world was to be made fruitful,
fruitful without thorns and thistles, Nature’s Motherhood would have to be remade by its own abolition, and thus established as what had been intended from the time before the weeds entangled themselves in the life of God’s world.

Prior to that remaking, God’s Word causes its own contradictions to be heard. After it, even what were formerly contradictions find their place in and as creation’s response. Thus, the Josian purge secures the divine transcendence that makes the Incarnation possible. The humanity of God in Christ is preserved by the transcendence that allows God to act in and as Christ’s human agency. But it is the Advent of Christ, and the gift of his Mother, that unties the knots of Israel’s pagan past. The vestiges of Israel’s goddess become the very human Mother of the Lord, who transfigures and captures the world’s paganisms as the reality that they intuited and to which they pointed. The Lord’s commitment to this redemption expresses itself not merely in Israel but in the torches of the Ephesian women as they illuminated a song-filled procession after the end of the Council in 431. After the Ascension, tradition holds that Mary traveled with John the Apostle, with the pair of them eventually settling in Ephesus.\textsuperscript{499} A house exists in the present day, which is alleged to have been the house in which the Blessed Mother took her final rest before being assumed body and soul, so the tradition goes, into Heaven. Mary’s settlement in the Asian

\textsuperscript{499} This tradition arises from inferences about a mix of ancient traditions: firstly, that Mary spent her post-Pentecostal years with John the Evangelist, per John 19:27; secondly, the traditions found in Irenaeus that John was resident in Ephesus when he composed the 4\textsuperscript{th} Gospel (\textit{Adv. Haer.} 3.1.1) and that he remained there (Ibid., 3.3.4: “having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan”). Cf. Also, \textit{Adv. Haer.} 2.22.5. Eusebius, citing Irenaeus and also Clement of Alexandria in \textit{Hist. Eccl.} 3:23 confirms the long residence of John at Ephesus; third, there is the ancient Church of St. Mary at Ephesus and the ancient cult to her Dormition at Panaya Kapulu; fourth, there is the peculiar devotion to Mary that is reflected in the events surrounding the Council there in 431. There are, of course, a number of conflicting traditions, summed up in the \textit{Life of the Virgin} attributed to Maximus the Confessor. In that text, Mary is said to have initially traveled with John but returned by divine command to Jerusalem, where her Dormition takes place. The balance of evidence, to me, suggests that she might well have settled in Ephesus with the Beloved disciple. Although her dominant social networks would have been in Palestine, it is also clear that Mary’s safety – as the mother and a chief eyewitness of the events of his life – could not be ensured.
port city makes sense of the fierce devotion to her that arose there, which led to the 5th-century controversies. But the largest question to answer in weighing out the historical evidences, is why: why, given where her primary networks of association were, would the Blessed Mother settle in Ephesus? As it happens, she settled in a city in which Artemis was already being honored as meter theōn. Devotion to Mary might have arisen, and did arise, everywhere that the Christian faith took root. But the controversies of the 5th century show that even so, its terms differed. Mary’s final gift to the church – that is – was to settle in a place where the vocabulary existed to name her properly, even if the name had lacked a true referent throughout the history of Ephesian paganism. It is doubtful that Mariology would have grown the way it did if not for the influence of the Ephesian church’s devotion, and that devotion might well not have arisen in the form it actually took if not for Ephesian Artemis. But whereas paganism had to be exorcised, after the Word has been spoken and heard in Jesus, the terms of paganism are available to hand. Neither meter nor theou mean in Marian context what they meant in the pagan one. But they clearly and specifically name realities that must be named, not only for the sake of understanding Mary’s role in salvation but for grasping just what is the gift that she gives to the world. Before that gift, as Paul understood, even the Word of God could work death; after Christ, even paganism brings us to God. The knot that bound creation after the Fall has untied so completely that all roads lead, in the end, to the risen Christ. He is, just as he said, the Way.

IV. Contradiction and Tradition: Wisdom’s Call and Wisdom’s Children

In one of the few places in the New Testament where Wisdom is explicitly remembered, she appears on the lips of Jesus. In the life of Jesus, in his celebratory embrace of that which

\[500\] Rom. 7.
John the Baptist refuses, he comes into criticism by the very people who criticized the opposing
tendency in the Forerunner. What Jesus criticizes in his (and John’s) opponents is the inability to
discern the way his mission accords with the form of his life, while John’s task and his deeds
compose a pleasing, harmonious answer to his own call. Each of them makes sense in a particular way, and neither can be rightly interpreted apart from the mission to which God has called each one and both together: “wisdom is justified,” Luke records him saying, “by all her children” (Luke 7:35). In their zeal for Torah, the opponents have not been made wise as to its application. They have no awareness of the times and seasons that make one a sensitive user of Torah; they seek in it a single, universal law for all times and places. Jesus’s own applications of the Torah concern not merely what it is said but to whom, when, and for what purpose. These judgments arise from having become a certain kind of person – one who is able to discern in Torah the work of God in shaping an image of his own covenanted life. You shall be holy, for I am holy.501 The opponents of Jesus and John had grasped within their hands the scroll; they had the Torah, but it did not have them. As such, they could not wield it without destroying what God wished to mend, tend, and multiply.

I have observed above that the Judaism of the time of Jesus was as different from that of
the pre-Josian Temple and cult as a Friends’ gathering is from a Corpus Christi procession. There
is no point in trying to arbitrate between them; they both emerge from the congregation called
together by the Word of God in Torah, Temple, and Prophet. But it is nevertheless the case that Wisdom, the Lady Margaret Barker finds in the Temple, to whom Ephrem composed

breathtaking lyrics and about whom Salazar rhapsodized wish sheaves of pages,\textsuperscript{502} is a thoroughly metaphorical entity in the era of Pharisees and Saduccees. The manuscript tradition of the Matthean version of Jesus shows this clearly. By far, the majority of manuscripts we have of Matthew 11:19 echo the Lucan reading: “wisdom is justified by her children.” But the most authoritative and comprehensive manuscripts we have, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, as well as a few Byzantine manuscripts, contain the reading “apo tōn ergōn autēs: “wisdom is justified by her works.” We can recall that a number of patristic interpretations of 1 Tim. 2:15 understood “childbearing” as referring to good works. In the time of Jesus, Wisdom appears as an allegory, feminized (with her history, how could she not be?), but not feminine: not, technically, an entity at all but a trait, a characteristic, a predicate of people and, in a different way, of God.

On Jesus’s lips is preserved a sense for that canny discernment and passion-driven intelligence that we discerned in Israel’s matriarchs and that we see in his own mother at the wedding in Cana. The opponents had the Word, but it was not effective for them because they had not Wisdom. The Word, which erupts into the world and forms it in the Garden, is the foundation of Adam’s life, the ground of his existence; but it is Wisdom that allows him to intuit that something is missing that must not be if the world is to be an adequate reflection of the Creator. The Word, in order to not return void, must make someone wise unto salvation. In the first Temple, there had been Two: YHWH and Shaddai, the Lord and Lady g’birah, the Word and Wisdom. That figure, even after the Josian purge, remains within the Scriptural text, forsaken perhaps, but calling out still, and stubbornly resistant to demythologization, such that the words of Jesus say more than his hearers know, not only about hermeneutics and their inability to

\textsuperscript{502} See both volumes of Fernando Quirino de Salazar, Expositio in Proverbia Salomonis, which in the 1637 Drovart edition comprises just shy of 1600 pages.
discern the grain of the universe but about whose children they are and whose they might be if only they were willing. Jesus’s words show, as I argued in an earlier chapter, that after the Josian purge, Israel still bears in its body the marks of its pagan past. But there has not appeared at all a theological account of that to which the Wisdom literature points or its significance for the role of the Wisdom whose child Jesus is. We have looked at Wisdom’s children and spoken of her as children speak of their mother; but it is time to look her in the face.

In the prologue to the 230 questions, Pseudo-Albert says of Wisdom that she is easily seen by those that love her, for she comes finds those who seek for her and t goes before those that long for her that she may show herself to them before they even get started.503 Those who get up early to seek her need not labor overmuch, for she will be waiting at their gates.504 Wisdom goes before the search for wisdom and is the presupposition of the quest. That is why, as he notes (following Ben Sira in a passage we have already considered), “those who eat of her hunger still and those who drink of her remain thirsty.”505 It is not that she does not satisfy; it is that only those who have already encountered Wisdom thirst for it. She is the precondition of all intellectual appetite. At the same time, wisdom is a kind of handmaid to God in the creative work; as Proverbs 8 makes clear (and this is amplified in both Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sira), she is a kind of patterned reflection of creation, holding it together and offering its treasures to those who seek her.506 She is the fashioner of all things (Wis. 7:22), who “pervades and

503 Facile viedtur ab his qui diligunt eam, et invenitur ab his qui quarunt illam. Praeoccupat qui se concupiscunt, ut illis se prior ostendat.

504 Mariale, Prologue, Borgnet Editio, p. 1.


506 Wis. 1:7; Prov. 3:19, 20; Prov. 8:22ff, Sira 24:5-7.
penetrates all things” (v. 24). She is, the writer claims, “a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” (v. 25), a “reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (v. 26).

In light of the history of Wisdom in Israel and the loftiness of this language, we are all but forced into a problem. If Wisdom is a creature, how are we to account for the language of emanation, reflection, mirror, and image? This language recalls nothing quite so much as Hebrews 1:3: “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” When the Greek fathers received the Greek text of Proverbs 8:22, it was only natural that they would see in it an application to the Second Person of the Trinity and discern on that basis a problem for the Athanasian position. Sergei Bulgakov finds in the Logos reading of wisdom two problems: 1) it leads to subordinationism in the Trinity, and 2) it reduces creation to the work of merely one of the Trinitarian persons. In any case, Bulgakov points out that the Hebrew text corresponds not to the kítho found everywhere in the Greek Old Testament but to ktaomai, to have or possess. Bulgakov’s entire theological project is an effort to define the Wisdom of God, as a non-hypostatic, but somehow still personal principle in God, a way of speaking about the divinity in God, to provide content to the divine essence. That wisdom is the source of the creation’s order, and as such, he proposes, there is a kind of pan-creaturely Sophia to mirror the divine Sophia. At the same time, as a kind

507 Bulgakov, The Bride of the Lamb, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 15. The problem is that Wisdom, in Proverbs and especially in the other Wisdom texts, is a kind of demiurge. Identifying Wisdom with the Logos, he claims, is what drew Origen into subordinationism.


509 Bulgakov Sophia, 26.
of doctrinal reproduction of the tension between the Hebrew and Greek of Prov. 8:22, Bulgakov argues that Sophia is neither creator nor creature. Rather, it is the divinity of the divine and the creaturely of the creature, that in virtue of which they are each one thing. Bulgakov’s work inspired hasty condemnations, and, to be quite fair, is provocative enough to invite them. At the same time, he attributes those condemnations to the insinuation of Scholastic distortions into the dogmatic content of Christian faith. But in light of the work we have done on paganism and the “double collapse” of the Josian exorcism, we may be in a place to understand the ambiguities in his work and, if not interpret him, at least present a vision of Wisdom that attempts to rise to his call for a Christian theology of Sophia that does not merely rely on the pretense that there is nothing there.

We begin where wisdom literature begins, methodologically speaking. We consider the ant.510 We notice already that the ant is composite, made up of smaller forms, themselves made up of smaller forms, and on toward the infinitesimal. We see what we may take, at first glance, to be intelligence in its forms; they organize according to what appear to be intelligible principles, or even laws. The ant has not one leg but six. Each of them performs a function that is, in a certain way, unique to it, and in another sense, common to the six of them. But on some basis unknown to us, the forms gather as components of the larger whole (legs) and as what they are (this leg). They participate in the larger form and also, somehow, in their own. These forms are divisible to an incalculable degree, all the way down (perhaps) to an unformed material substrate, pure matter, tohu va-vohu. But that pure chaos is available to us only as an object of thought, not to observation. There are no formless things. The ant’s leg, in its divisions, however many

510 Prov. 6:6.
subsidiary layers we penetrate, are each informed. And that in-formation organizes itself (how can we say anything else?), gathers and divides according to its own immanent principles and potencies. It moves through infinities of subordination and ascent, into that most incredible of things, an ant’s back leg, one of six.

We consider the leg as it is, as its place in the order of what is, in its relationships to component forms and to those it helps to compose, and it occurs to us: we see this leg. We can name it and number it. We can identify it and pick it out from all other legs on all other creatures, all other legs on all other ants, all the legs on this ant. And yet, its relations to these things stretches to infinity in both directions in an abyss that we can never conquer. There is no first principle from which this leg could be derived, nor could this leg lead us by some hidden stair towards them. God help us, we cannot hope to consider the ant, for we do not even grasp what makes this leg what it is, the leg of this ant. Nor can we say how it should come to be that we know this leg. We do not know the hidden intercourse that makes this possible, makes this ant's leg appear, in a breathless Advent, to us. We know and we know that we do not know. We know that the things we know are known; we could not know them unless they were, and yet we know that we do not know them. There is, behind them and us and the totality that is “them and us,” that in virtue of which things are, we are, and they and we are. And whatever it is, it always is. The world in which we live and move and have our being goes on. It tends. Things appear to us and we to them. There is, fractally, in each part and as each part comprises the whole, the wondrous concursus that we can never penetrate, for we are penetrated by it as a precondition of our knowing the world at all.

We move, then, back and forth, between subject and object, between subject-as-object and object-as-subject. And in that movement, we discover what Erich Przywara called the
“universal rhythm.” Presumed by that rhythm, however, is something that grounds it – something that we cannot address as an object of thought, because in objectifying it, we simply take another step along the rhythmic course, grounded by that which we have tried to see and failed. This we-know-not-what grounds the rhythm, but we can only glimpse it by stepping back and forth upon it. This ground, which Przywara calls the “original structure,” is the presupposition of all of our intellection of the world. We “read between” things as we discern their connections, every time both presupposing that original structure and hidden from it. It is this structure as a presupposition that Przywara sees as the domain of metaphysics, that which is behind, under, over our awareness of the world as the precondition of our ability to make meaning of it at all. Metaphysics, strictly speaking, is not a discipline but the unitive ground of all discipline. It is the search for that in virtue of which each thing is what it is and yet cannot be what it is except by reference to all else that is. Metaphysics, that is, is the original structure that closes the intelligible whole. That structure, unknown to us, is the precondition of everything we know.

Thus, our ordinary perception of the world delivers it to us, but what it delivers cannot be grounded either in the world or in our perception of it. It rests rather on something else, something that changelessly grounds all change, or else we could not know it as change, that grounds all difference by being that in virtue of which they are the same – in their absolute difference from that which grounds their existence. As subjective and objective endlessly flow back and forth into one another, so infinity makes itself known in the totality of things as that


512 Ibid., 524.
which they are not and without which they could not be what they are. That infinity stands before us as complete darkness, absence: what Przywara calls the theological “meta.”\textsuperscript{513} Unlike the relations that obtain between levels of finite reality as they dance back and forth into one another, what grounds their existence is completely unknowable in terms of the things to which it gives intelligibility. The \textit{meta} that is behind all other \textit{metas} cannot be grasped as an object of thought; here, Przywara locates the natural knowledge of God, the paradox of knowing that we do not know (cf. Acts 17:23-28).\textsuperscript{514} Thus, the consideration of the ant leads us, in the end, to the richness of the original structure that gives us the world and the poverty of our inability to know what makes the ant an ant.

Our consideration of the ant, then, opens up in us the space of a kind of intellectual \textit{eros}, a longing to know that in virtue of which things are what they are. This is why, when God ordains that Adam should have a partner, he begins by asking Adam to name the animals. It is in the consideration of the order, of the unity and difference, that in virtue of which creation is paired, and that in virtue of which each member of the pair creates the unity of each species, that Adam first experiences the rhythm in virtue of which he finally arrives at the abyss of the Absolute. In his movement of intellection, he shows his likeness to that in virtue of which all things are what they are; he sees the whole and the intuits the structure beneath them, that which makes him not God. He is not simple; he is not necessary. He is finite, contingent, upheld on the steady ground of the divine \textit{meta}. Thus, he wishes to know not himself but God, the world as the unity of which he is part, a unity of differences that expands and grows and can multiply, that

\textsuperscript{513} Ibid., 526-7.

\textsuperscript{514} Ibid., 530.
reaches out to the future as the future impregnates the present with all that it does not yet know it is. He calls out for bone of his bone; that which can ground him firmly on the creaturely side of the abyss he has glimpsed, that which can show him to be an image of God and not God himself. When he looks upon Eve, he eats and drinks of Wisdom and hungers still. What Eve brings to adam is creaturely completion, the closure of a world that can move back and forth freely upon the sure ground of God’s transcendence.

At the same time, creation’s closure as creation, as not God, is the ground of its openness as divine image. Eve’s arrival joins the second creation narrative to the trajectory of the first: “male and female, he created them.” It is then that both God and world may rest in the security of creation’s integrity as one whole image of God. We do not know how heaven is bound to earth; what we know is that what is bound in heaven is bound on earth: “the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not work [ . . . ] For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day” (Exod. 20:8-11). On the seventh day, Israel commemorates its difference from God by its very imitation of His ways. In its labors, Israel imitates the Lord as stewards and viceroy of his earth. But on the seventh, Israel calls to mind that which is so easy to forget in the midst of its labors: it is a creature. It abandons its own work for the letting be of the things God has set into motion, the ceaseless dynamism by which creation as one whole imitates the eternal perichoresis of divine love. It is important that in Genesis, we are told God rests, while we are not told whether humanity rests. It is at the closure of creation’s incompleteness, and the removal of obstacles to the universal rhythm that the creation rests, even in its unceasing movement.

In creation’s unthinking imitation of the divine rest, something new occurs. There is Creator, and there is Creation, mirroring each other across an infinite existential gap. But there is
also the fact that they mirror one another. With Eve’s Advent and the closure of creation, the universal rhythm continues unobstructed, and all creation imitates the divine dynamism of movement and rest. Creation, pointing at that which it presupposes but cannot contain, nevertheless moves in perfect existent synchronicity with the divine love and knowledge. A state of affairs comes to be, which is hard to describe. It is a state of affairs that is created in virtue of what is created. Creation mirrors God, and this state of affairs, i.e., that there is a divine image, becomes true. This reflection is neither Creator nor, directly, a creature. It is what comes to be as the completion of creaturely potency.

This state of affairs can be considered in two aspects. First, it can be thought as the divine intention for creation, the goal that was implanted within it as the end of all its tendency. It is that toward which God aims his creative work, the completion of which is its end and the beginning of his rest. If the Logos is the divine fiat, and if the Spirit God’s erat, this state of affairs constitutes the valde bona. It is that which motivates (and is) God’s satisfaction, his bliss at the fulfillment of creaturely potency and creative act. Secondly, it can be thought under the aspect of creation’s own fulfillment of every potential latent in it by the powers that God has shut up in it as its own. In the fulfillment of creaturely potency, that is, creation reflects its Creator by being that of which the divine scientia approbationis is the presupposition. It is and is what it is because he wills it and because, in its own rhythm, it imitates his will in unconsciously “willing” itself. The human creature, gifted with the ability to discern this reflection, echoes the will of God by receiving His Word. But insofar as it does so, it does rationally just what the creation does unawares, and so it is the creaturely affirmation of God’s creative word that inaugurates the bliss of God in the fulfillment of creation. Receiving the Word, the human creature participates, responsively but really, in the bliss of God. That bliss redounds to the creature’s own happiness,
and God’s act finds “fulfillment” in the full flower of creaturely response.

If we return to the consideration of this idea from the divine aspect, it is the purpose for which God creates – the Idea behind the ideas. It is the Logos God had from the beginning (Prov. 8:22, Masoretic Text), and as such, it is the divine Sophia. Here, we part ways with Bulgakov; that Sophia is none other than the Logos, considered under the aspect of Creator, that is, considered as it basks in the glory of creaturely reflection. It is the Idea of creative fulfillment as the creaturely response, as the image of the face of God implanted in each creature by the Logos that is its reason for being. Wisdom, that is, is the Logos’s perfect and studied resemblance of the Father, as that resemblance leaves its mark in the creature and makes it, in a way we both know and do not know, an image of the Trinity. That studied, chosen meditation on the Father’s face that is the Son’s life is the ground for creaturely wisdom as knowledge ordered by love, whose beginning is, of course, the fear and love of the Lord (Prov. 9:10). Insofar as this Wisdom is the Idea behind every creaturely idea, it is found in the creation as the creaturely Sophia – the wisdom in the organization of creation’s forms and material, potency and act. Of this creaturely Sophia, it is rightly said, “The Lord created me the beginning of his ways” (Prov. 8:22 LXX). But the creaturely Sophia, and in this Bulgakov seems to me to be entirely correct, is the presupposition of the entire economy of grace. Its openness to reflection of God is the only reason that God could ever introduce himself to Abraham, give the Law to Moses, bring glad tidings to Mary and Elizabeth, or enter the world as the Incarnate Son of God. It is the creature’s unconscious imitation of God that is the presupposition of divine speech. Creaturely Sophia, that

515 Bulgakov’s systematic application of Wisdom as a predicate to all three divine hypostases (Bulgakov Sophia, 37-53) is surely correct, but Augustine’s doctrine of propriations does a far better job, in my view, with explaining how all the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge can be hidden in Christ without the ugly implication that without Christ, the Father and Spirit have no wisdom. See book VI of Augustine’s De Trinitate.
is, itself a product of the divine Logos, is the act of generating, via the act by which the Father speaks him, of a cosmos in which he is meaningful. And if that is so, then that cosmos will tend; if it is the cosmos where the Logos is meaningful, then it will appear meaningless until the Word comes to it. But it would be possible, for those who are wise, to follow where it tends and see its culmination in the joining of divine and creaturely wisdom in the divine humanity. Thus, if God’s offering of the Son to the world is the rationale behind the ant’s existence, then knowing the ant as God knows it and as the saints know it entails intuition of the Incarnation that would be the fulfillment of creaturely potency and creative power.

Creaturally Sophia is the creation’s hearing and affirmation of the divine creative Word, unconsciously in the ant’s pursuit of its own life, more consciously in the human dance over the abyss of the invisible ground of Being, more consciously still in Mary’s reception and echo of the divine Word, and perfected in the Son’s imitation of his Father and Mother in the theandric fiat voluntas tua. Mary’s offering of herself and her Son to God is the actualization of every creaturely potency, that final revelation of the creaturely Sophia, and the guarantee that in the obedient voice of her Son, it is the creature as creature that answers to the will of God. If we could separate the hypostatic union, per impossibile, so that the human nature in it were its own person, Mary is the revelation of how that person would approach the Word of God. Divine humanity is the Wisdom of God, and Mary is its human custodian, the one in whose act we see all creation gathered as one thing. That is the reason she can sympathize, as Hopkins says, with the growth in everything.

Mary, then, as the guarantor and fulfillment of the Creator-creature reflection presupposed in the Incarnation, represents a third movement in Przywara’s rhythm. For Przywara, the being of creatures and of God are separated by an infinite abyss, and every
similarity between them marks an “ever greater” difference. The relationship is dynamic, asymmetrical, non-reciprocal, and permanent. The formulation is not Przywara’s own but comes to him from the IV Lateran Council. Przywara’s constructive move was to see in the Council’s formulation not just a grammar for analogical predication but the structure of the whole of reality, from sense perception all the way to theology. For Przywara, the rhythm becomes a methodological meta governing all of divine speech. Rowan Williams gets him just right here:

we indicate the analogical relation of all things to God by this steady habit of denial that we have reached a conceptual answer or identified a scheme that would allow us to see either the finite deriving from the infinite in a kind of succession (first there was infinity, then there was finitude) or the particular deriving from the general (first there were forms, then there were particulars).

So, every positive statement must be qualified by a reflexive negation. In the background here is not just created finitude but sinful distortion as well. Humans are not just limited but they are sinful; they not only fail to know God, but they have a predilection, at least after Eden, for domesticating God to their own programs or confusing the Creator for his creatures. The result is not merely that God is unknowable but that we should be suspicious of what we think we know of God. Here below, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor. 8:1). But what if there should be a creature who only knows by love? Who asserts nothing of herself and wants nothing for herself? What if that creature’s predicates began with the acknowledgement of the ever-greater dissimilarity? What if she knew everything, even what was most dear and beloved to her, only as what belonged to God and was whatever he said it was? What if she said of herself never “I am” but “fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum?” If a rational creature waived every prerogative,

516 Lateran Council IV (DS 806).

517 Rowan Williams, Christ the Heart of Creation (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 231.
descended down through the component forms, almost to pure matter, embracing for love’s sake even her very dissolution into *tohu va-vohu* until the Spirit should overshadow her and create anew the conditions in which the Word would be fruitful, what new possibilities might arise from such a place?

And those possibilities must arise, for in the Incarnation, we plainly have God as an object in the very way Przywara would seem to deny we could. God is not the invisible ground beneath our dancing feet but the person who comes to us saying in human language, “I am he.” Mary’s Son does not bring us to God; he is God come to us. The Incarnation means that God’s creative act is fulfilled by a human reception of that act; they must say and mean, in the creative and receptive *fiat*, the very same thing. The Word of God must be completely utterable in and as a human word, and even if we know not how that is, we must affirm that it is so. John Duns Scotus, that great defender of Mary’s “ordinary” maternity, famously asserted that analogy as a method must, in the end, rest on a univocity of predication or be self-defeating.\(^{518}\) Scotus sees the connection, that is, between the ordinary creaturely integrity of Mary’s maternity and the metaphysical integrity of creation as a divine image, open to Incarnation because of the divine and creaturely Sophia already presupposed in creation’s very existence. We can hold to the mysteries presented to us by Lateran IV by allowing the grammar of the hypostatic union to lead us into the prior, hidden mystery on which it rests, and which is its presupposition: the divine

\(^{518}\) See *Reportatio*.1-A. d. 3, q. 1, art. 1.7, in which he states that a God who is *negatio in se*, as he relates to us, would be indistinguishable from a *chimera*. In a critique of Thomas Aquinas, Scotus simply points out that in the use of analogies, they only work if *something* is considered univocally. To say that God loves, for example, is to attribute to God an action that we know from the world of creatures. If there is nothing at all common to the two usages, there is no point in using one word rather than another. Scotus poses his discussion as a way to shore up a deficiency in Aquinas. But it would be fair to say that Scotus’s argument points out that there is a difference between affirming the analogy of God’s being the creaturely things we predicate of him and making of that analogy a methodological eraser, for even the human words of God would vanish if we did.
In the garden, the Lord rests because creation’s boundless dynamism is a clear reflection of the divine Sabbath of gift and receipt. But sin has disrupted the world, and the very creative word of God threatens the life of creatures. God speaks and both the Word and the opposite are heard; thus, the Word that holds the universe together also undergirds the death within it. The lives of creatures, held in the very love of God, are not protected by that Word from death and dissolution. If the beauty, wildness, and abundance of the world sometimes lead us to God, it is also the case that its destruction and chaos constitute the main historical objection to claims about divine Wisdom’s presence in the world. Like the priest in Till We Have Faces, paganism mocks philosophy for its vulnerability to contradictions. Wisdom, here below and in the devastation, is not yet justified.

It must be observed that Wisdom, wherever it appears in the Scriptures, always appears to us as wisdom already forsaken. Though she is the presupposition of creaturely order, that in virtue of which it makes sense, her children have taken leave of their senses, living not in consideration of the ant but in imitation of him. They live as the beasts do. Wisdom appears always as wisdom forsaken, as she who cries in the street but is not heard. And it is in that cry, in Wisdom’s call, that we can answer the question that must arise concerning Wisdom’s gender and the wisdom of gender. For, on the account offered here, divine Wisdom is the Logos as it basks in the glory of the reflected goodness of creatures, and creaturely wisdom is that reflection. But when that Wisdom becomes incarnate, it is as a man. Why, then, does Wisdom appear even on

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519 Lateran IV’s declaration, then, can be accepted as the inability to know how what we know to be true is true. God is good as is the source of goodness, and across that gap the human mind here below cannot leap. Still, the abyss of that mystery is only held in place as an abyss between two utterly solid truths: God is good and creatures are good.
the lips of her greatest Son, as a woman? In the early chapters of this work, we discussed the historical reasons for that figuration, but in our chapter on Covenant, we have robbed those historical reasons of their explanatory power. God fulfills the covenant by superintending the history in which its fulfillment comes about; historical explanations must resolve, then, into theological ones. We must discover why the history unfolded in which Israel’s mothers played the role they did, in which paganism was what it was.

We begin with the phenomenon of creaturely reflection of the Logos. Creation, by its own generation and internal dynamism, reflects the eternal bearing and being-born of the Logos. Nature’s motherhood, as we have already discovered, is imitative. In that creaturely imitation, certain potencies are actualized and others not. The creation’s imitation of the Logos is its freedom to be like him in careful imitation. It is the resolution of freedom in love, love as the motion behind the actualization of each creaturely potency, that organizes the total composition of the creature. But that reflection has as its basis the Son’s imitation of the Father, the Son who does nothing but what the Father does. The Son, every bit as much as the Father, is the one who loves in freedom. But the paradox of divine freedom is his absolute dependency upon the Father’s gift of complete freedom expressed in the love of that which he knows himself to be. The Son receives freedom and responds in love, and in that response opens up the “space” in which the Father’s creation would dwell. But the Son’s response, perfectly free, exhausts that freedom in the one act of love by which he receives and becomes the image of the Father. The Son, in his eternal generation, reveals freedom not as the ability to do “otherwise” (for there is no otherwise that could be done) but the gift and receipt of love without impediment.

Creaturely generation asymmetrically reduces the freedom of the partners in it. In humans, the biology of childbearing limits the freedom of mothers in a way it does not limit that
of fathers. This biological fact, on which human survival depends, is sex. The way cultures receive this fact and perform the preservation of it is gender. They are distinguishable as objects of thought, but they cannot finally, in practice, be severed, unless the technology arises to remove the biological asymmetries. But that asymmetry has been exacerbated, historically, as men, who are free in a way that women are not, have maximized their own freedom, leaving with women the responsibility to form the bonds of dependency and interdependency that make survival possible. The burden of love has been put, involuntarily and unavoidably, onto women. Genesis 3 emphasizes this facet of women’s historical experience by pointing out that women will desire and men will rule. That this has been so, historically, can hardly be denied. But that teaching, to be meaningful in the way it is meant, must be always held alongside the voice of Wisdom, crying in the streets, and the counsel of Solomon to “listen to her voice” and to desire her. Wisdom, forsaken by her children, is a woman because what Wisdom would teach us is a truth that has most often been found in the conservatory of women’s shared experience of the burdens of freedom’s willing embrace of love’s concrete demands, of no “otherwise” to be done. That she is a woman, then, is a historical contingency, and one could speculate (as we have above) on how it might be different. But in this world, women have been the custodians of the way love forges a path through alternatives and surfaces a concrete task, a mission even. That love, even if it is frightening (to both men and women), is the fruit of women’s exile from the masculine lands of the free.

The mystery of Christ, and of Christ’s manhood, is that his is a manhood in which (as we saw above) new capacities take root. And they do so because Mary, as a woman, is nevertheless granted by special grace a freedom not granted to other women, the freedom of conception (or not) independent of a husband’s will. But this very freedom, because it is the freedom of a
woman, results in an embrace of love’s demands that, even though it is not different from those of her mothers and sisters, is more complete. She conceives in the fruit of her own choice, and as a result, she is able to rear the child Jesus in the love that one assumes when one has no compulsion whatsoever to do it. The antitype of Solomon, Jesus desires wisdom with all his heart and wants to get nothing if not understanding (Proverbs 4:7). For the child Jesus, freedom and love sit not in hostile tension but in the fruitful embrace that imitates the peace of God’s love. This mystery explains the parallelism of the Eve/Mary typology found in patristic thought; as Eve led Adam into sin, Mary must lead Jesus into redeemed humanity. The reason that the New Eve must be born before the New Adam is that sin has severed the embrace of love and freedom, forcing women to bear the costs asymmetrically: “she has received from the Lord’s hand double for her sins.” But in this very fact, women have been the invisible stewards of the secret in the heart of God; not just that he is lovely but that he is love. And that love makes him dependent as it has made them so; Mary is not a “balancing femininity,” then; she is God’s revelation that the historical experience of women is his own experience at the hands of violent men.520

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520 One could imagine a world in which the burdens of love were shifted to men, say, where the biology of generation resembled that of Adam in the garden more than Eve ever since, and where culture grew up (both good and evil) around that opposite asymmetry. In that case, it is arguable that much of what we call “feminine” would be the province of men and much of what we call “masculine” the lived experience of women. In such a world, Wisdom forsaken might well be male and her incarnation female. In such a world, it may very well be that the “transcendent” God, the One who is not of any kind and therefore has no gender, might well have been known as a “she,” for it would be that aspect, that of freedom, under which she was first discovered. God has been discovered by the human race, that is, as freedom; but it is God’s self-revelation as freedom expressed and exhausted in the act of divine love that we truly come to know who God is. That is why it is those who have seen Jesus who have seen him (John 14:9). This fact, incidentally, is the rationale for describing God throughout this project as “he” in spite of my own admission that “he” in God names no gender at all. It is both an acknowledgment that the God who was discovered as Freedom, as the transcendent ground of all contingent things, has nevertheless made himself known in the face of the man Jesus Christ but as the Christ who bears in his body the marks and memories of the experience of women as they suffer with God the wounds of men. Continuing to name the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ as “he” is to affirm the freedom that is expressed in the love of Christ and to allow that use of freedom to challenge, even to trouble, the dominant accounts of freedom. In short, it is the God who as a “he”
Mary’s Son is the divine kiss of peace. His life, so attractive to women and repugnant to those who hate them (again, Celsus is a perfect example), cuts a sharp figure across the human historical stage as men’s learning from the experience of women how to love. It is that life that creates the conditions under which Paul can shout out in the pains of childbirth. That life is the promise of the mystery of maternity held out to everyone who will embrace the willing surrender of freedom for love’s sake. Paul gives birth to the Church at Galatia because Mary has given birth to its Head, and he has offered us his maternal flesh and blood to make us like him. And if Wisdom Incarnate makes new capacities available to men, it also (crucially) offers freedom to women – concrete freedoms whose grace-filled presupposition is the freedom of Mary to receive or not receive the Son of God. She is ruled by no husband. Her desire is for the one who loves her so much that his posture to the world perfectly reflects hers towards him: again, as Thomas makes clear, his generosity is the continuation, the fructus, of her eagerness to give. And in his imitation of the Mother, the ancient war afflicting the sexes is at last brought to an end: in Christ, there is no “male and female.” This abrogation of the essentialisms opens up new and creative ways of sharing the burdens of generation, offering men the redemption of their own feminization and women the opportunity to love in freedom.521

521 It must be admitted that alongside the bitter legacy of Christian misogyny is an undeniable improvement, considered against history, in the fortunes of women. Joseph Henrick, a Harvard evolutionary biologist, chronicles that gradual improvement in the book The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2020). There, he notes that two crucial tenets of the Christian household ethic, monogamy and childcare, placed upon fathers a historically unprecedented burden, closing off two major avenues of escape towards freedom. These developments predict, among other things, lowered testosterone levels in men: “across human societies, fathers with lower testosterone care more for their infants and are better attuned to their cries” (p. 270).
In this mystery is nestled the mystery of Mary’s debasement and embarrassment. She suffers the alienation from her Son and embraces it. She demonstrates her love for him by being, for a time, the one he casts out. There can be no mincing words on Luke’s prepositions: *exo*: the place of loneliness, of solitude, exile, formlessness, void. She goes there for love of him; indeed, his rejections become treasures to her. Why? Because she does not know who she is? It is not that she does not perceive the contradiction. She knows her rights, and she has refused to assert them. Torah lives in her with all its fierce brightness. But she understands its depths. She knows that the first Sabbath, the rest of the Lord on the 7th Day, had no corresponding command for the humans. As images, they did naturally as he did; they followed the ways of the Lord by nature. Thus, she also knows what happened after the expulsion. The commandment came: “remember the Sabbath” (Exod. 20:8). The day came when following the Lord was not natural. She has loved Torah from infancy, and she has absorbed it so deeply that she embodies it. She has become the person it commanded. For her ancestors, the Torah had been the divine imperative. For her, it is an indicative; each line a statement of who she is. She is who YHWH says she is. Wanting nothing for herself but to be where and what he wants her to be, she goes where no one else can go but He himself, for God is also beyond form, beyond comprehension. She belongs to him and is his; and in her we see that sin has not robbed the creature of the ability to be his helper. Indeed, she, most redeemed and most in need of redemption, restores to creatures their justification for believing that even if they have deserted Wisdom, she has not deserted them.

In Mary’s fiat, then, the creature is restored to its dignity as the *tohu va-vohu* raised up, given order, and made beautiful by the Word of God. In her, the Creation receives the Word and keeps it so close that its own natural acts are unconsciously ordered, as Mary’s desires consciously are, to the Word. Mary can act as she wills, and it will prove to be a display of God’s
Word and will. What she binds on earth is bound in heaven; thus, the origins of that mysterious power that would be given by her Son to the Church. That order is the rumor of God’s presence with creation even in its exile, stewarding, husbanding, bringing to new birth. How can this be? We do not know other than to say that the distance that sin opens between us and God, between the profane and the holy, between the excommunicated and the beatified, is somehow contained within the “distance” that divine mercy travels in the gift of love from the Father to his far-off Son. The Wisdom of God remains as the creation’s mysterious meta, and as the remnant that God has preserved for himself. That remnant, Mary blameless and without spot, enables God’s creative act as his creaturely Sophia. She was there in the beginning as his delight in laying the secret foundations, deep within the ur-structure, of the divine humanity. She was the first of all his works, the protected bliss of his divine purpose, and the pattern and plan of the world that would be divinized in the Word made flesh, when Wisdom’s child rose to justify her at last.

V. Untier of Knots: Redemption and Creation

Hopkins’s vision trades on intuitions common to paganism and philosophy. It is not inaccurate but incomplete. He draws on a synthesis of the priestly and Wisdom traditions like that found in Lewis but does not seriously reckon with the problem of sin and death as it is faced in different ways by each tradition. Death is the knot that has tightened around generation, and God, via the covenant, is both the victim and the tier of that knot. The covenant is the explanation of the difficulty found in the priestly and Deuteronomist traditions, because the covenant makes God to be by grace what he is not by nature: vulnerable. The covenant, which for humans is the source of invulnerability by grace, is the source of God’s vulnerability to history. The wisdom of God means that that vulnerability is not total; he can bring it about that his Word will finally be spoken without contradiction, but it cannot be done outside the
partnership, because to circumvent it would still place God against his own word. In the end, there must be human hearers of the divine word who conform themselves to it completely. God’s word cannot return to him void, which it must do unless it is fully and completely heard and obeyed. Moreover, the hearing of the divine word that can untie the knot must be an act of supererogation. It cannot be merely by the obedience of Torah, because the Torah is itself a condescension to the goods and evils that are part of the world under the tyranny of death. The Torah, a pedagogue, \(^{522}\) places God and God’s people both for and against his word. For the knot to be untied, the people of the Torah have to be formed by it in the way that was intended, shaped into those who love God and love neighbor so much that Torah describes the inclinations and desires of their heart. The person whom the Torah forms becomes wise unto salvation, loves God and everything that God makes in God. The mystery at the heart of Torah is the way it has placed God on the side of humanity against himself, and so the person who internalizes Torah becomes aware that while Torah commands many things, so many of them are condescensions to the hardness of our hearts. The person whose heart is fully shaped by Torah, then, will not only obey it but will discern within it what is the pleasure of God and will devote herself entirely to it. When Jesus disputes with the Pharisees over the question of divorce, he points out just this fact: the law of Moses was a concession to the sinfulness that had not yet been removed from Israel’s hearts. But there would come a day when Torah was written on the heart, and obedience alone would not adequately describe the posture of a person before God. Rather, she would discern the will of God hidden within the commandment and devote herself entirely to it. The Torah would

\(^{522}\) Gal. 3:24
be her delight.\textsuperscript{523}

For such a person, the Torah would allow things that she would refuse, not because Torah was evil but because it had made her good.\textsuperscript{524} She would not seek her own; she would discern the divine mercy in the condescension of God and would shape her entire character in the world after that mercy. She would recognize that love is not something added to the Torah but the fulfillment of the Torah. And when the time came when she could assert the rights the Torah gave her or waive them out of love for God and neighbor, she would do that which Torah did not require. In doing it, she would untie the knot that Eve’s disobedience had tied and would liberate the word of God from contradiction. In this is the mystery of Mary’s springtime sympathy. Her love for the creation, her desire to see growth in everything, is the motive behind her willing embrace of fruitlessness. She takes to herself all the barrenness of the creation in order to see “all things rising” in the world. In her embrace of the death she did not owe, she makes possible a world in which diversity may stretch as far as the fertility of the divine imagination allows. Gone are the elements of the world in which diversity creates a zero-sum calculus; the world becomes fruitful in the way it was intended. The tree of life bears a different fruit every month, and the river of life gets deeper as it flows farther.\textsuperscript{525} The waters of the Dead Sea are made sweet, because in Mary’s willing embrace of the death of the world, she unleashes the creative force of the boundless fertility of the Holy Spirit. In taking to herself the pathos of the creation, she becomes the source of the new creation’s growth in every (literally every) thing. Mary offers her Son to

\textsuperscript{523} Cf. Ps. 119.

\textsuperscript{524} Paul deploys an analogous principle in defense of his refusal to exploit and optimize all the freedoms that are given to him by the Spirit in order to maximize the bond of charity between himself and Torah-observant Christians in Rom. 14:1-18 and 1 Cor. 10:14-33.

\textsuperscript{525} Rev. 22:2, Ezek. 47:3-5.
the God of the Living, knowing that his love for God will take him, as it has taken her, into a confrontation with death. But she also knows that it is rising rather than falling that will be the end of his vocation. His power will be the power of God’s indestructible life, and so, like all of her mothers before her, she endures the cross for the joy set before her. And in her willingness to walk that path, she gives her flesh to the child whose body and blood will make the whole world come alive forever.

It is in Mary’s womb that the Body of Christ comes together by the activity of the Spirit fructifying her graced natural maternal potency. Christ’s Body, like all bodies, is material. Unlike other bodies, it is not bound over to the law of sin and death. Christ does not suffer concupiscence, which means his physical organism is entirely subservient to his graced will.\(^{526}\) When he takes his last breath on the cross, it is death that he undergoes, but it is utterly voluntary; “I lay my life down, and I take it up again.”\(^{527}\) Christ’s body, even in death, never lies

\(^{526}\) The substance of this claim, if not the particular terms of it, has been widely agreed upon. Cf. Augustine, *De Nuptiis et Concupiscientia*, I.24: “Wherefore the devil holds infants guilty who are born, not of the good by which marriage is good, but of the evil of concupiscence, which, indeed, marriage uses aright, but at which even marriage has occasion to feel shame. Marriage is itself “honourable in all” the goods which properly appertain to it; but even when it has its “bed undefiled” (not only by fornication and adultery, which are damnable disgraces, but also by any of those excesses of cohabitation such as do not arise from any prevailing desire of children, but from an overbearing lust of pleasure, which are venial sins in man and wife), yet, whenever it comes to the actual process of generation, the very embrace which is lawful and honourable cannot be effected without the ardour of lust, so as to be able to accomplish that which appertains to the use of reason and not of lust. Now, this ardour, whether following or preceding the will, does somehow, by a power of its own, move the members which cannot be moved simply by the will, and in this manner it shows itself not to be the servant of a will which commands it, but rather to be the punishment of a will which disobeys it. It shows, moreover, that it must be excited, not by a free choice, but by a certain seductive stimulus, and that on this very account it produces shame. This is the carnal concupiscence, which, while it is no longer accounted sin in the regenerate, yet in no case happens to nature except from sin. It is the daughter of sin, as it were; and whenever it yields assent to the commission of shameful deeds, it becomes also the mother of many sins. Now from this concupiscence whatever comes into being by natural birth is bound by original sin, unless, indeed, it be born again in Him whom the Virgin conceived without this concupiscence. Wherefore, when He vouchsafed to be born in the flesh, He alone was born without sin.” Although the west, under the tremendous influence of Augustine, debated the various agencies and potencies involved in the relation between virgin birth, Mary’s own sinfulness or lack of it, and that of her Son, all take it as a fixed point that Christ is free of the law of sin and death.

\(^{527}\) John 10:18
outside of his power. In undergoing a death that he does not owe, he, alongside his mother, performs the work of supererogation that is necessary to untie the knot that has bound humans and God to and against each other. In his death, he destroys death; this is the crucial moment of salvation’s economy. He does not merely defeat death but destroys it, for death is nothing more than the word of God spoken against the life of the creatures of God. Nothing less powerful could kill what God has spoken into life. Once death is destroyed, there is no longer any contradiction to the divine fiat that gives life to every creature. To give birth to the Body that overcomes death, then, is to give birth to everything that is made alive in virtue of its contact with that body. Mary, then, is the mother and therefore the material cause of the entire new creation. Because the child that is born of her is born not of a husband’s will, she is also the efficient cause of all things that come to life in the body of her Son. And because she and her son together give birth to the Church, of which she is the first and preeminent member, she is in some way also the final cause of it. Her motherhood of the new creation is total, and the new creation is the creature whose life is willed without contradiction by its Creator.

It is in her suffering the pains of the old creation for the sake of the new that she sympathizes and becomes, not just her Son’s but Our Lady of Sorrows. She is touched by every death and moment of decay, and she intercedes not just for us but for every creature at the hour of its death. It is in her, first and foremost, that the Spirit intercedes with groans that cannot be uttered. And her intercessions, along with those of the Spirit, are not in vain because what they offer to the dying world is the flesh of the Son who gives his life for the world. In Mary’s offering of her flesh, and of the Son who is flesh of her flesh, to the world, she brings the diversity of the world into a unity with the Spirit that animates the flesh of her Son. Through her offering of flesh, then, all flesh is made alive and all matter is made new. She is the New Eve,
then, not just because of her role in saving the human race but because she is the mother of all living things, for all of whose lives she feels their pathos and offers everything she has and is. In sympathizing with all things, and in her giving over of her will completely and utterly to God, she removes the contradiction between God and creation, unties the knot, and makes all things live through the offering to them and to God of Her Son. Thus, as the Father is the source of divinity, that in virtue of which all the divine persons are one God, Mary becomes by her donation of the only flesh over which death has no power, the unitive principle behind all created things made new; that in virtue of which they are one ever living organism, one world, one cosmos.

This intuition, that behind the multitude of things is something in virtue of which they are one, has fueled both Wisdom and Paganism. And in the mission she accomplishes alongside her Son, in the vocation she fulfills, she takes her place not only as the whole secondary cause of the new creation but also as the final cause of the old – that to which it pointed all along. It is more than pia expositio, then, to see in Mary’s corresponding fiat a hidden principle of the entire created order, for it is in her that we see what creation actually is – an affirmative answer to the divine will that it be. Her willingness to reflect the generative act at the core of the divine being is what makes creation an image of the Trinity. The contradiction of death is removed because at last, in Mary and in her Son, God finds the ones who will steward his creation to eternal life that is given to everything he creates. The Father’s fiat, which births the entire creation, finds in Mary an answering fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum, which makes of the entire creation all and only that the Father wills it to be. It is from that voice that her Son learns the answer he will give when it matters most: non mea voluntas sed tua fiat. And it is in the multi-personified love, the community that proceeds from them both, that the prayer Jesus’s mother taught him is uttered by
us to whom he taught it: *fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelis et in terrae*. In our utterance of that prayer and our Spirit-enabled formation into the image of Christ, our prayer is answered: the triune God of Heaven has his image, as Hopkins saw so clearly, “all through mothering earth.”
CHAPTER 7

DELIVER US: A CONCLUSION

You have depleted your body so completely in 9 months of pregnancy and breastfeeding, that you need time just to get iron back in your body again. I have only just begun to understand: “This is my body, given for you.”

The first Christian devotions to Mary are, of course, reflective of the unique dignity of her Son: Benedictus fructus ventris tui. But association with the merits of Christ does not exhaust even the earliest honors paid to her. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, Luke reports Elizabeth to have said. The early traditions attributing icons of Mary and Christ to St. Luke make sense on one level, even if the attribution does not withstand scrutiny. Luke gives us, in those precious first few chapters, some of the only glimpses we have in Scripture of the life of Jesus’s family as a family. The icons attributed to Luke display visually what the words of Elizabeth relate narratively. Mary and her child belong together, must be contemplated together and seen together if the things early Christians said about both of them are to make sense. The reciprocated human dynamism of the Theotokos of Vladimir resists any gaze that would separate them, including the gaze of much modern western theology – Catholic and Protestant. Many

528 I am committed to no judgment on the matter, save for the simple observation that the techniques used in the icon mirror those of a much later time.
critics of modern Mariology see in it, as Pusey did, an idolatrous slippage of predicates and prerogatives from the child to his mother. But the Vladimir corrects this tendency. We see in it the very human face of the divine Child, gazing as every child does at the face of its mother. He clings to her and she to him as her body’s strength supports his growing weight. Mary’s proportions are perfect, human, and lovely in every way. The shawl over her head and shoulders is the night sky, alight with stars and fringed with the milky way. But the infant Jesus is unsettling. His tiny head and face are not those of an infant; it is an adult head, shrunk to infant size. His neck is an adult neck, almost exactly the size of his mother’s. What could account for such a thing? The old shibboleth about ancient art not being able to produce children (or not valuing them enough to work at it) will certainly not do. The catacombs of Priscilla have iconography that dates from the third century, perhaps earlier, and while we can not see the face of the suckling child in the Madonna image found there, it is beyond doubt that its body is properly proportioned. The child in the Vladimir is almost comic by comparison! Another explanation must be sought, and if we keep in mind the Lucan tradition, it is not far to seek. This child has been claimed and destined already for a mission as large as the world. What could be the explanation of this distorted figure but the invisible crown of his forthcoming task, the actual weight of the world already laid upon him? It is not only the infant child that Mary holds but the full gravity of the path on which he is already setting his face. In a way that he is no one else’s, he is hers. And yet he is growing up too fast; he is already not hers. For this reason a man will

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529 E.B. Pusey, *Eirenicon* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866), p. 67: “in the offices in honour of her, passages of Scripture which relate to Divine Uncreated “Wisdom are recited; also [. . .] what has been said of her by the Fathers, as the chosen vessel of the Incarnation, was applied personally to her.” Cf. p. 69: “Whereas the Fathers speak of the Blessed Virgin as the instrument of our salvation, in that she gave birth to the Redeemer, the modern Marian writers expressly reject this.” It might seem strange to call Pusey an ecumenist, but it is worth realizing how much of his *Eirenicon* is devoted to the ecumenical problems created by Catholic Mariological development. See, esp., pp. 84ff.
leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

Still, as he leaves his mother’s side for the road on which he is summoned, the road of wilderness and waste and cross and grave, to whom does he cleave if not to her? She is the night sky, and her face the earth over which it keeps vigil, the earth on which the kingdom is destined to come as it is in Heaven. Her eyes look not to herself but to us, her brothers and sisters. It is to her as one of us that the infant cleaves even in the moment of his leaving; she lets him go, for to lose him is to gain all of us. But even as she regains him, as spouse, as Adam regained the rib he lost, she gains him under the aspect of the loss of what was once hers and hers alone. But it is the weight of the world, the weight of the Mother and all the orphans on whom she sets her world-gazing eyes that weighs heavy on this Child’s overgrown neck. In it, we know he knows that to be human is to suffer too much. He is truly one of us. But if it is our suffering, and the suffering above all of the mother who must lose him in order that he may claim us with her, that weighs down his tiny shoulders, where does that weight fall but upon her body as he clings to her for life and all that comes with life in its infancy. One arm supports him and all he carries; the other clings to his act of clinging to her. The entire mission is in view from the first moment of his life; it is what she consented to in the Angel’s proclamation: he will be a deliverer. That is, this child must go to war, as all of Israel’s deliverers do. But she had said yes; may it be to me according to your word. Like her son, she claims nothing for herself. It can only be because she has food to eat of which we know nothing. What is it? We do not know, but there are glimpses available to us in the face of this child whose flesh would be the life of the world – this flesh which is gift itself and this blood which is the New Covenant. It could only be so, only be gift, if the flesh was perfectly free flesh, unencumbered by any other claim. It could only be gift itself because it was freely given (Mt. 10:8). What was given to him, he passes to us (1 Cor. 11:23). What he gives is
gift, and what pairs with it is the renewed covenant, the ancient promise that binds God to us by God’s own sovereign choice. This is what the Mother has given in the gift of her flesh and blood to be his. This has been her food under the night sky; she has feasted on the Law of the Lord. Whatever its historicity, there is one sense in which the Vladimir is rightly attributed to Luke – a sense in which it could be attributed to no one else. For it crystallizes and re-presents only what is found in the Gospel that uniquely preserves for us, at least so Richard Bauckham implies, the reflections of the mother of God. Luke alone gives us what little we have of those precious early days in which Jesus clung to his mother for life and received from her the nourishment to sustain him on his journey. Luke’s is not the voice of cosmic Mariology; it is the voice of one who notices small things. But Luke’s narrative icon does suffice to show how confused Pusey’s approach is. There is no removing this woman from the One who clings to her and to whom she clings, the one who said himself “what God has joined together, let no one put asunder” (Matt. 19:6). Luke gives us the woman to whom Jesus clings, and in Newman’s reply to Pusey, the early Mariology emerges as one that will not release the contemplative grip on that act of clinging. What Christ gives to the world is given because she gave it first to him. She is an agent in his redemptive work, an origin of its energies, or, as Newman (following Irenaeus) would

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530 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 114-154. In the sixth chapter of that book, Bauckham describes a technique in ancient historiography whereby a given block of testimony is set between an *inclusio* to which witness was relied upon to write it. He shows how the inclusio identifies the primary witnesses in the gospels (Simon in Mk 1:16, 16:7 and in Luke 4:38, 24:34; and the Beloved Disciple in John 1:35; 21:24). He also shows this technique at work in Luke’s testimony of “the women” in Luke (8:3, 24:6-7), as well as in non-biblical historical works, such as Lucian’s *Alexander* and Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*. Given the impressive nature of his work, it is curious that he doesn’t identify one of the most powerful testimonial inclusions in Luke: that found at 2:19 and 2:51. The intended effect of these verses is a puzzle until one considers how an ancient historian might have used them, and that this ancient historian is already known to be one who takes the testimony of women seriously. Additionally, the phraseology of explicit naming in Luke 1:27 (*kai to onoma tes parthenou Mariam*) emphasizes that Luke is naming the person who appears in the later inclusio. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the infancy gospel material in Luke, nearly all of which is unique to him, is anything but the eyewitness testimony of the person who treasured these things in her heart.
Newman’s discomfort in the *Reply* is clear. He is doing that which he knows should never be done. Setting up the problem of Mariology in a competitive way may be necessary, but it should never be enjoyable. Mary can be considered, *per impossibile*, apart from her Son, and, in the wake of what history has done to the two of them, she may have to be. But that is only so that we may get a glimpse of the life and road that has led the woman to the point where she stands in the *Vladimir*, gazing upon us and drawing us into her Son’s grip. She is here because she is the woman who wants nothing more at all than to be here, now, with us and with him, giving us to each other. She is here and can only be here because she already was the woman who would do it, given the chance. That is why Augustine praises Mary’s faith more than her motherhood and why the early church’s Doctors from all the four winds agreed in identifying this woman as the New Eve. It is as the New Eve, the partner to her Son in his redemptive work, that Mary appears in full brightness, historically viable against the backdrop of her people and her world.

It is as the New Eve that she merits to bear the Son of God. We noted that Mariological thought that begins with the divine maternity can have, and has had, the effect of removing the historical acts of Mary from view and setting them, as it were, behind the icon. In that tradition, the graces and prerogatives that belong to her are hers in virtue of her nearness to the Incarnation. But the *Vladimir* challenges us on this front, as does the entire figure Mary cuts across the picture of the Church. In the *Vladimir*, she clings to her Son. She is the New Eve, and it is *as* the New Eve that she becomes the Mother of the Living (God-man). Setting these ideas in

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531 Augustine, *Sermon 72/A, 7.*
right order returns Mary to us as an actor in the history of salvation. The question of co-redemption is thus resituated. No longer are we preoccupied with prerogatives, graces, and implications. Rather, we focus our gaze upon particular actions, which will or will not give definitive content to the term “coredemption.”

Thus, as we stated at the outset, a theology of coredemption has to be about action. That action must be distinguished in two directions. First, it has to be distinguished from the actions of her Son. This consideration does not amount to ripping the icon apart. Here below, except by extraordinary graces, the creaturely intellect cannot gaze upon everything at the same time. It settles upon one thing and then another. Synthetically, then, it can appreciate the implications of each thing upon the other. So, we gaze upon the icon, and we distinguish the Son’s act of clinging to her from her act of clinging to him. His clinging to her is her salvation, her clinging to him is her cooperation with it. Her gaze upon us as she clings to him is her cooperation not just in her own salvation but in ours as well. Even if her actions find their explanation in those of her Son, even if they are not finally intelligible until they are considered alongside His (as the icon testifies), they are hers. If we are going to say she is a co-redeemer, we must identify for her a role her Son does not have. Secondly, and less importantly, her actions must be distinguished from those of the Church. Even if her actions are the presupposition of the Church’s actions, and even if they find their full rationale within the life the Church, if she is to bear the name co-redeemer, and if that is to be a predicate specifically of the Blessed Virgin, then we must show in what way she has done what the Church did not, or at least what it could not have done unless she did it first. To the extent that those actions have redemptive import for the world, they justify this way of speaking.
In light of the above, to ask this question is to answer it. We have applied every bit of speculative energy to just these two distinctions. As the New Eve, she merits to bear a child over whose life death has no claim. Possessed of extraordinary graces, which are nothing more than the graces given to Israel but gathered, as it were, compressed and granted to the one who will be the last member of the Old Testament Church and the first member of the New one, she lives a life of renunciation of every gift this Son could give her. She is an Israelite, as is her Son. He owes her the honor every Hebrew child owes to his mother’s old age. But she lays no claim at all to this right. If she had, his mission would have been impeded. She never, for a single instant, claimed him for herself. Rather, when he rejected her, she gathered it as a treasure and kept it in her heart. She followed at a distance as he undertook his Mission. During his ministry of the Kingdom, her actions are easily distinguishable from his; but they are also distinguishable from those of the Church. She follows at distance, while the Twelve, the other women, and the crowds come always between them. As the crowd grows, so does her distance from Him, larger than she ever expected it to grow. Each inch away from him causes pain. It is the pain of a womb expanding, more and more, to accommodate the gestating Church that will cost both her and him the full gift of all they are and love.

The suggestion sometimes made in the history of the Church that her distance is evidence of her lack of faith in him can receive no quarter from careful interpretation. An angel had told her what he would be, and an elder of Israel had prophesied what it would cost. She knew his destiny, and she had willingly joined him in it. When she brought him to the Temple for his presentation to the Lord, she did not redeem him as her kinswomen did. Rather, she offered him without reservation as a living sacrifice to her God, just as Hannah had done. She gave him to God and to Israel and took to herself the ancient barrenness that had afflicted Israel from the
days of Abraham. The Presentation was the first public act of renunciation, but not the first act. Before the meeting with the Angel of the Lord, she had already taken to herself that ancient curse, pledging to remain a Virgin even in marriage to the widower Joseph. Her renunciation of Her Son is, from one perspective, but the echo of that pledge. She had given him to the Lord and would not take him back. She would remain where he needed her, at that distance and not a step further. Like her mothers before her, she had a talent for being there when God’s story needed moving on. It had been she who pressed him at Cana and shoved him onto the path God had set for him. When he set his face to Jerusalem, and expectancy around him grew, she stood even farther back. It was as if the entire nation, its past and its future, stood between her and the beloved child. Yet she rejoiced in the smiles on the faces of her people; she saw the Spirit setting them free, and it moved something deep within her. When he went for the last time to Zion, she followed him a bit more closely. There was a foul wind in the air, and she knew what it portended; the Angel had said this child was here for war.

The betrayal had surprised the men. They fled desperately into the night. The prince of his disciples, the fisherman who had never disappeared from between them even for a moment, since the day he was summoned from his nets, denied ever knowing him. Why had they not asked her? It is clear what she would say: “he is not mine.” Having given him over to God with all her heart, she would not turn back even one step now. “He is not mine; he is the Lord’s,” she would say. “But I am his.” It was a trap, and she knew it. But she would walk into it willingly, quickly even, for it would mean she could escape the fate she knew lay before her, the fate of too many Israelite mothers before her, the fate of Eve bearing her children unto death. Mary knew her mission, and she would not turn back. But the voice that rang out of her son’s anguish in Gethsemane echoed in her own soul as well; it is not supposed to be this way. The cup of the
Lord is supposed to bring life and not death. By God it would; but not for him and not for her. Not yet. Not until they would drink it new in the Kingdom of God come fully to earth.

The day of the Lord had come, and it was darkness, not light. She embraced its one and only comfort; that finally the crowds between them had vanished. Thus, it is no surprise where she would be found. At his side, at his feet, she wept for him, for her people, for the Temple and the violence it suffered today and would soon suffer to the uttermost, for the world in the pains of stillbirth. The Son of man would die in Israel, the womb of the world would fail again. She wept and wept, for six hours she wept, with a flood of grief and tears no one could reckon. If God had not promised Noah never again to destroy the world with a flood, her tears would have swallowed the world. Then, a moment before the end, the worst had happened. She was dismissed. He sent her away, her service ended, as if she were a common attendant. “This is your son now,” he said. Of course, he wanted to see her provided for. Eve had also been given a son to replace the one who was taken from her. She could not walk Eve’s road without walking it to the end. She accepted the Beloved disciple as her own, and her heart and body swelled with the weight of all her Son’s beloved. The pain layered on top of what she already felt. She wept and sighed. And then, he said it: “it is finished.” He gave up the ghost, and she held her tears. He had died. Everything she loved in the world had gone with him. There was nothing left to lose or to mourn. She took him down and bathed his body in the all the affection of her own.

This is what she did. Coredemption begins with her actions. In the foregoing, we have attempted to follow, as closely as possible, the trail of implications and presuppositions. But this is the act whose implications and presuppositions they are. She is Our Lady of Sorrows, who paid a price of infinite value she did not owe. She embraced a poverty that was not hers, out of love for God and neighbor. We have been at pains to note, throughout, that Mary’s role is
indispensable. She has to present him at the Temple because if she does not, she would be entitled to the tribute of his honor to lengthen her days. His power to lengthen her days is infinite, and so it is an infinite gift she gives to God and neighbor in waiving those rights at the Temple. That she offers him there, at the very place she appears in her own figurative resurrection, shows that she knows something of the value of what she is relinquishing to the Lord. It is not as if she stumbled upon a painting of great value and parted with it for too low a price out of ignorance of its true worth; she knows the value of this Child, and even that is too bloodless a way to express the point, because her graced will loves him to the full extent possible for a creature, commensurate with his value. That is to say that everything he is, he is to her.

So, when she relinquishes him to the Lord and to Israel, she knows what she gives. She so loves the world that she gives her only Son. The irony of Pusey’s reply to John Keble is that in his mockery he is dead on the mark: “She, then, is to be said to have given of her own; and of Mary it may be said, ‘So’ Mary ‘loved the world, that she gave her only begotten Son.’”

Although Pusey rejects what he calls the “Marian system” he understands its implications almost perfectly. In his Eirenicon, it is actually he rather than Newman who seems to have the better understanding of how Mariology hangs together. What both men seem to have in common is that neither think the system flows from the doctrine of the New Eve. Newman presents as an obvious least common ecumenical denominator, something everyone can and should agree to. He presents it as an ecumenical olive branch, something minimal enough to be unobjectionable.


533 Recall Newman’s nervousness about the language of coredemption.
And in a sense, he’s right. Certainly, it is the friendliest of the Marian dogmas to Scriptural exegesis or the reflections of the Church fathers. But here, at the conclusion of our work, we can point out that this fact offers cold comfort for Newman’s attempt to minimize ecumenical difference. Newman’s approach has the same problem as that of Vatican II; the ax is laid to the root of the tree in this doctrine. The same chain of inferences that leads him correctly to the infer the Immaculate Conception has as its presupposition the objective coredemption that caused him anxiety. Marian maximalism just is what follows from seeing her as the New Eve.

The other irony at play here is that Pusey also, apparently, does not see the system’s connection to the Mariological reflections that would be found in Newman’s reply. In his rather thorough tracing out of “the system,” a system whose completeness he cannot avoid noticing, he mentions the New Eve typology not once. Nor does it occur to him to explore whether the errors perpetuated by the system might be explained that way. He does not even think to protect the early teachings from misunderstanding along the maximalist lines found in the system. This is a truly incredible lacuna. Pusey and Newman are both convinced that Marian maximalism is a strange appendage affixed to the Church from some alien quarter. The present work, I hope, will disabuse us of that notion. Still, to bring our work to something of a systematic conclusion, it seems fitting to join Pusey and Newman at one table and connect the dots. Pusey begins where we have ended, in the observation that “a studied identification of [The Blessed Virgin] in everything but what follows from the hypostatic union, with her divine Son.” We have shown the origins of this maximalism of identity, and the twin pressures to which it is ever-responsive,

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534 Ibid., 67.
535 Ibid., 67.
in the agnosticism of Augustine, the studied meditations of Anselm, and the ecstatic lyricism of Ephrem, as these were assumed into the life of the early Church and bequeathed to the Middle Ages. Indeed, idolatry alone was seen as the unapproachable limit, and in the decree of the covenant that the creation should mirror the Creator in such a way as to be the presupposition of the Hypostatic Union, with all of its graces gathered in the summit of creaturely Sophia, we think we have demonstrated the theological rationale behind the nearly unanimous conviction of the Fathers.

Pusey then proceeds to discuss coredemption specifically, pointing out that since this teaching is not the isolated speculation of overweening devotees but appears in the writings of Bishops and Popes, the Catholic Church cannot rightly disavow it. Indeed, as he observes, the language of coredemption was used by no fewer than seven bishops (one of whom was an Archbishop) in arguments supporting the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception. Pusey sees in their arguments the Immaculate Conception presented as a presupposition to coredemption, such that Marian coredemption virtually necessitates the 1854 dogma. In this, he is correct, at least as we have understood coredemption. I have argued for a robust sense of the word; to be a term of theology (and not just private devotion) it needs to name actions that Mary performs alone, which cannot help but be seen as participating in the redemption. Thus, I have focused my attention Marian deeds that are *sine qua non* for what writers in the early 20th century called “objective redemption” and that are clearly performed by Mary alone. I focused where I did because such actions would satisfy a concept of action that defines actions by their intended objects and agent. These actions demonstrate immediate, proximate partnership in the

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536 Ibid., 67-8.
objective redemption. To these could be applied, perhaps, dozens of other instances showing Mary’s mediate or distant partnership in the objective or subjective redemption. I have added some, where they seemed to be an entailment of or completion of actions of the first type. We might locate there, for example, the discussions of the Assumption and the apparitions or her participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice. But I do argue that the redemptive action that has been primarily in view for me, the relinquishing of all rights to her Son and offering of him up to God and to the world would not be possible without the Immaculate Conception. Too much is asked of her by her Son’s mission, so much more than was asked of Israel when the Law was entrusted to them. It might be objected that she had no real power to disrupt the mission; but this objection fails to contemplate the way mothers, especially for young children, create the universe in which that child’s discernment of the Divine Wisdom will take place. Parents make God easier or harder to see for their children, and if Mary had been subject to the Law of Sin and Death, she would almost certainly have sinned gravely in such a way that Jesus could not have seen in creation a world in which God could become incarnate. It is possible that someone locating Mary’s coredemption in a different space could imagine a coredemption that did not presuppose the Immaculate Conception; I cannot. Pusey sees the joints and ligaments well.

In what does the coredemption actually consist? Pusey cites Salazar’s tract on the Immaculate Conception:

She merited by congruity the salvation of the whole world; not only because she bare Christ, but because she gave to us Him Whom she had borne and Who was truly hers, and for us she offered Him to death. For each will of the Mother and the Son, throughout concordant and conspiring, sacrificed to God one and the same holocaust for the salvation of the world.\

For Salazar, it is in the relinquishing of what is truly hers (and only hers) that Mary plays her irreducible role as the partner in our salvation. Salazar goes on to specify in what ways she does this: 1) by willing to die with Christ and like him, she effectively sacrificed herself; 2) she gives her Son over to death for the salvation of the world; and 3) she mediated to him what seemed good to her concerning our salvation, and he, “deferring to the Mother, received these.”

Here, I have diverged from Salazar but in a way that the influence will be clear. That the Virgin sacrificed herself, after a fashion, is indisputable, but it was mostly in willing nothing to herself and everything to him whom nevertheless she offered to the Father, remaining present as the *ancilla Domini Iesu*. Second, I have denied that she willed his death or, in any sense, gave him over to death. The Temple, where she presents him, although at its boundary it confronts the death of the world, is actually a sign of resurrection, of restoration, of return from exile to its own holy garden. For Mary to will her own death or that of her son, or for him to will his own death, would have been to commit sin. Rather, she willed his gift of life to the Father and to the world. That she mediated to him the vision of salvation on which he would later embark is not only exegetically indisputable (John 2) but fitting if we remember that he was a human child of this graced but human mother.

Pusey then states Salazar’s conclusion as an obvious consequence of her participation with her Son. Thus:

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\text{Christ the Lord obtained nothing by His merits, either for us or for the Virgin herself, which the Virgin Mother of God did not also gain out of congruity (excepting always the original and first grace wherewith the Virgin was gifted; for this the Virgin could not obtain by any way of congruence). Thence it follows that the Virgin Mother of God, from the aforesaid congruence, so obtained of God the common salvation of the human race,}
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538 Salazar *Immac. Conc.* C. 21 n. 3-7.
that even the extinction of original sin is also to be referred to her.\textsuperscript{539}

I remain of two minds about the question of merit. At the very least, on any sensible theory of action, that which is intended by the action is merited by it, if the completion of the act should make it possible that the intention come to pass. If the action functions causally, and both cause and effect were known and intended, surely it is proper to say that the effect was merited. In that sense, Salazar is at least correct that Mary merits the salvation of the world \textit{de congruo}. What I am unsure of is whether the distinction proposed by Juniper Carol makes a difference or not. \textit{De congruo} merit denotes a relationship of fittingness. If a soldier jumps on a grenade to protect her friends, she merits a medal and a display of honors \textit{de congruo}, it seems to me, while she merits the saved lives of her fellow soldiers condignly. When Jesus claims that laying down his life for his friends is a display of the greatest love (Jn. 15:13), it seems that the salvation of his friends is equivalent in dignity to the act. Mary’s offering, then, insofar as it has as its object the salvation of the world, and insofar as (so Salazar reasons, and I with him) she intends by it what he intends by it, and insofar as her action makes possible his action to that effect, it would seem that her act merits salvation \textit{de condigno}. If that is so, merit is not a quasi-substance then traded in for an outcome, it is the name for the rightness of the effect of an act given the act that is its cause. Merit does not, crucially, say anything about the dignity of the one who performs an action except as that dignity informs the action. Because obviously Christ’s saving act and Mary’s partnering act respond to two vastly different moral situations, I wonder whether two acts, each condignly meriting a result, can be themselves of significantly different moral values.

\textsuperscript{539} Pusey \textit{Eirenicon}, 69, cf. Salazar \textit{Immac. Conc.} c. 21 n. 3-7.
Like the rest of the tradition, Pusey spends more time clarifying the question of merit than anything else. Pusey sees in Salazar an equivalence in the discussions of merit and satisfaction, which seems fair enough, given that the language of satisfaction refers exactly to the possibility of the saving act’s meriting the salvation of others. It is in Christ’s restoration of the human creature to its dominion over the devil and friendship with God that Christ gives to God what is owed to him. But all of this is accomplished in the course of his earthly life; to then offer his life in a death he did not owe is to merit eternal life and beatitude, two things which Christ already has in infinity. In the case of Mary, we have pointed out how her gift of the Son’s life to God was supererogatory to a life that already consists of intimate friendship with God and dominion over the world, the flesh, and the devil. But in the case of her offering, what she receives back is her Son, under the aspect of Spouse and Head of the Church. Under this aspect she generously shares him with the world. Under the aspect of her Son, who honors her as His mother, she has not yet received him back. Indeed, her continued sharing of him with the Church is a continuing refusal to receive him back under the aspect by which she gave him. But he intends to keep the covenant, even as she has waived her right to it. What she will one day receive, as the return to her of what she has offered to the Lord, will not be (as it is for Christ) something she shares with the world. It will be hers alone, although she will also have him as Spouse and head of the Church of which he is the gatherer of the Body. But she is a creature, not the Creator; she is finite. When she receives the Lord back under the sign of Son come to honor his mother, that is not an honor she will share. She cannot.

Because we have located the Trinitarian aspect of coredemption in the chapter on Covenant, we come to this conclusion before the conclusion about the order of creation and redemption. Pusey takes them the other way, but he discovers them both in “the system.” In the
title “complement of the Trinity,” Pusey sees a blasphemy. Taken as he understands it, his worry is reasonable enough: “It was (and I suppose is) the basis of speculations as to the way in which a creature, however exalted, could be said to fill up the eternal and infinite God.” But we have located our discussion of Mary’s partnership with the Trinity with the covenantal ordination that human beings, male and female, must be created in God’s image. So considered, Mary’s partnership with the Trinity has nothing whatever to do with a divine lack but with the potentia ordinata, and with the God who in creation and covenant has bound himself to our futures and made himself, wondrously, the object of human action. Mary joins the human being Jesus and the complex multi-personal womb of the Church as the final and fulfilled image of the Triune God and completion of God’s promise to Israel that they would be His people, that they would (“you shall”) one day love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. In that love, they would offer him exactly what he offered them, the very same thing: the Son of God. In that moment of their perfect analogical resemblance, it is not just that God would have an image: it is that in the human act of jointly being the image and likeness of God, we would know something of what it is for the Father to beget the Son in the womb that is their Spirit. Mary’s faithfulness, that is, connects us to the Divine Motherhood of Our Father.

As guarantor of the humanity of Jesus (and therefore of the divine humanity of the Church), Mary thus becomes the Mother of the Living. Thus, it is proper to call her the unitive force of the New Creation. But she cannot be the Mother of the New Creation unless she is the mother of the Living One, the Son of God. Following Bulgakov, we conclude that the

540 Pusey notes that this title rests upon a mistaken translation of an unknown author but points out that many still think Mary merits the title. Pusey, Eirenicon, 74-5.

541 Ibid.
Incarnation is, as it were, a “derivative doctrine” from another doctrine, which might have remained hidden if not for the Incarnation revealing it to us. But that doctrine is the openness of the creatures to God by virtue of the Wisdom that makes of the dynamism of creaturely life an image of God. Wisdom, that is, names the state of affairs in which the Logos is so woven into the heart of created things that they cannot help but be his images. Mary, that is, has to join her Son and the Church as the covenanted Trinitarian image, because all creation tends this way. She can be the guarantor of the flesh that unites Christ and his Church because she is the embodiment and fulfillment of creation’s potency to be images of God. In all creatures, from rocks to rattlesnakes and from ants to archangels, she is the fulfillment of the potencies they have to be images of God, the gathering of their created differences in one whole. Creation points at her, and so human searches for Wisdom – in both philosophy and paganism, have envisioned her as a her. In the maternity of the world, in which each generation embraces limits on its freedom for the sake of the next, we see that which we know to have been the story of women through history. It is thus that in her fiat mihi, the second creation account is joined to the first and creatures enter the rest of God. Her complete obedience gathers and fully enacts the creation’s potential obedientialis. There is nothing left to do or that can be done. That action connects her to creation as the one in virtue of which the universe is one whole. That is why she can sympathize, as Hopkins writes, with growth in every thing. But it also reveals the secret of creation’s destiny to be the place in which the Word of God is made meaningful as it is meaningful to her. Mary’s gift of her perfect obedience to God, fulfilled in offering to him the very Son he offers to her, perfects the divine creative act in the Advent of divine humanity. In that way, then, it is perfectly sensible to call Mary “the heart of creation,” since in her wholehearted receipt of the divine Word, late in time but presupposed in the Word’s first entry into the void, she makes possible the
wild abundance and painstaking order we observe and inhabit. This woman’s love is thus a metaphysical principle; small wonder the love of her sisters feels like a force of nature. Mary is the heart of creation because creation just is the heart, where, unlike Eve, she treasured up the Word that had come to her.

We return, then, to the Vladimir, to the contemplation of this Child’s mother and to the treasures of her heart. She looks at us, at the world, because she knows, although he is too young to look at anything but her, that his eyes are also pointed that way. He is tiny, dependent, completely in the power of this woman to whom he clings and on whom rests his massive weight. One wishes for someone like Pusey the opportunity to gaze upon this icon for uninterrupted hours. God willing, he is gazing upon it now. In it, we learn what we need to know. It is not simply that she cares for him; she looks out at the fields heavy with grain (John 4:35). The harvest is plentiful, plentiful, far too plentiful (Matt. 9:37). In its parody of Edenic fruitfulness, the vine of the world has yielded a desperation and need whose size no one but he (and she) can reckon. It is this view, the icon they see in looking back at us, that she stewards for him. Here, now, in his moment of complete dependence, he looks only upon her. The world is what she says it is; hers is the voice of God to him. So, it could not be more important that her eyes are on us. This gaze is the gaze she will give to him; he will look upon us too, because she has. Long before this moment in which we meet her and her infant Son, she had prayed in the recesses of the night for the Lord to send laborers into his fields (Matt. 9:38). Laborers. In this moment where her eyes are fixed on us and ours on her, she holds the infant God that is her treasure and her trial, her crown and her cross. He is hers, and she is ours, and we are hers, and she is his.
There are other icons; in the Pantokrator, for example, we are summoned to the divine human who is immediate to us. But he is so because having given him to us, she backs away, to the edge of the crowd, exō. In his singularity and uniqueness, she is there in the perfect resemblance of his face to hers; she is not there, because she has honored and treasured only him. In the Vladimir we see truly; in the Pantokrator, we see more truly still, for the gazes that meet in it are, in both directions, the gazes she has given. We see only him, and he governs and rules everything by seeing us. In the Pantokrator, we are the Virgin of Vladimir if she slightly turned her head to mark the face fixed upon hers without any change or shadow of turning.

The Pantokrator looks on us with all the intensity of the face of the Vladimir, in the gaze she held for him and willed to him and, when the time is right, gave to him. That is what mothers do, what they must do if our lives are to be long in the land God has given us. But the wounds of the world are a testimony to the fact that our mothers, though they have done as they ought, could not give us what they did not have. Themselves victims of sin’s cruel grip, they could not give us the gift of the gaze of the Virgin as she loves her neighbor, this world, as herself. About this, Newman was entirely correct, even if he did not rightly see all that follows from it. She stands here at the commerce of the Vladimir as Theotokos. But that is only possible because the unique road she took to get to here – the road through the lonely places where her Son would one day go to pray and be with his Father. He follows where she has gone; she leads as her singular act of following in the steps his Father lays out for him. This is what Pusey (and, to a lesser degree, Newman himself) overlooked. She was his mother. She bore this child. And as her child, he was briefly, but for that brief moment entirely, in her power.542 The gaze she had he would

542 Here appears the cruel irony of Pusey’s position: he insists that Mary is a mother like every other woman. She is an “instrument” of salvation, the “material” cause of the Incarnation. But he stumbles at precisely
receive. It would set the terms of the meaningfulness of the world and therefore (when he was old enough to distinguish it) the voice of God. In the gift to him of this worldward perspective, she not only gives him to us (though she certainly does that); she points and offers us to him as the one solution to our thirst: do whatever he tells you. In that deliverance is our deliverance. We are set free from sin only as she births him in us and us in him. She is his laborer in the fields that are heavy with promise. She will go where he sends and do what he asks. She makes no presumption at all concerning what that whatever will be; she never has. According to your Word (whatever it is) may it be unto me. It is as much as to say, “whatever happens to him must happen to me. Whatever the road down which he must make his solitary way, I must go down it as well.” What vast depths and unknowable heights are included in that “whatever.” He is the Pantokrator, and she is the panta. It will be to her as he says it is. Thus, and only thus, can she meet us here in this icon, with God himself dependent upon her, his covenant in her hands, the perfection of his creative will waiting upon the creature. The mystery and scandal of divine dependence is the great problem that God has set himself; de potentia ordinata, he simply cannot do without us. He is vulnerable, and this vulnerability rings out in the questions Scripture puts to him and to us. “Is the Lord’s arm too short to save?” The mystery of divine partnership is that it is humanity that will answer this question. If God proves faithful (as Christian faith holds he has and Christian hope holds that he will), it will only be by strengthening our arms as well, to join him in that great work.

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dthis point, failing to consider how it is her very ordinariness as a mother that entails the prerogatives that must be hers in order to mother this particular child. Pusey’s failure to contemplate adequately the motherhood of nature blinds him to its consequences for the motherhood of grace. He is most in error precisely where he is closest to the Truth.
EPILOGUE: MIRIAM OF NAZARETH

So we return, as we must, to the Jewish girl, Miriam: to her humble service of God and neighbor, her daily recitation of the Shema and her treasuring of the words of Moses. Meditations upon Mary’s role in the economy of salvation, upon her position as the New Eve, as secondary cause (God’s partner) of the new creation and final cause of the first creation, can all tend to mythologize her. Mythologizing, while it has the effect of making God less divine, has the opposite effect of making humans into quasi-divine beings. And in the end, what may be lost is the one historical referent, Miriam of Nazareth, cousin of Elizabeth, betrothed of Joseph. So, what of the Jewish woman, Mary, who grew up with two Jewish parents? Is there anything left? Have we evacuated her humanity and presented a docetic Mary? Rather, I think, we have presented a humanity that, precisely in its otherness, is kept so very close to God that his light is able to shine into the midst of ordinary human nature and culture. God is able to come so much closer than most of us are comfortable with, and in Mary and her Son he has come closer than we would have ever dared dream possible. God has made himself the recipient of human flesh in the gift of Mary’s whole life and self to him. Her ordinary motherhood, graced by the Spirit no doubt but still possessed of the fundamental integrity of human (and animal) maternity, is the vehicle by which God’s Son enters the world. For that reason, it is right and proper to call her, as Christians have at least since the Council of Ephesus, the Theotokos – the God-mother. But even that title threatens to remove her from earth, from her people and her town, from her labor and
rest, from her play and her sorrows. This is the one thing I think we must not do, for if she ceases
to be a human, then the economy of salvation that condenses in and explodes from her cannot
finally undo the contradiction that afflicts the relationship of God with his creation.

Human life is not merely the possession of human flesh, though it is certainly not less
than that. It is the possession of the particular things, the characteristics that make of each human
being the particular human being she or he is. I am human not merely because I have my
mother’s flesh but because I have her relations. Her parents are my grandparents, her brothers
and sisters my uncles and aunts, her other children my siblings. To have these things is to have
the particular human life of my mother’s only son. Mary’s role in redemption depends upon her
humanity; her universal motherhood depends, in ways I think we have already shown, upon her
ordinary human maternal life. If that is so, the last word to say about Mary cannot be that she is
the unitive principle behind the new creation. She is that, but she can only be that by being the
daughter of Joachim and Anna, the one whose child is brought, in virtue of her relationships to
them, into the people of Israel, their hopes and dreams, their covenant, and their vocation before
their God. It is just here, however, that we must delve into the crucial implications of a claim
made in the last chapter, that Mary is the final cause of the old creation. In Aristotle’s doctrine of
causality, what that means is that she is that in virtue of which God began the work of creation.
The classic illustration of causality, in Aristotle, is the work of sculpting. The formal cause is the
design in the sculptor’s head when he begins the work, the material cause is the clay that is
sculpted, the efficient cause is the art of sculpting, and the final cause is that for which the
sculpture exists, e.g., the joy of those who look at it, or the purpose for which it is used. Final
causes always presuppose the form; they are the reason for the form’s being in the first place. A
chair has its form, that is, because it is meant to be sat upon. So to clarify what is meant by that
claim in the previous chapter, we need to state what is meant in saying that Mary is the final cause of the old creation and then to specify how that cause relates to its formal cause. This may seem an odd way to get at the particular humanity of our subject, but as the implications get clarified, I think what will emerge is the brilliant image, even the personality, of one particular human as God envisioned her when he called her to her unique task in the redemption of the world.

As we stated in the previous chapter, Mary is the final cause of the creation because she is the one who brings it to its intended end. In the reading of the creation narratives that began this entire exploration, it was pointed out that the apex of creation, the reason both that God made it and that he made it how he made it was partnership. The glory of God’s own life, his profound love of his own perfections as if they were the perfections of another, mean that he cannot begrudge existence to anything that is. God’s way of taking delight in Himself entails his delight in others, and whatever God delights in, he grants existence to – eternally and necessarily in the Son of God, temporally and contingently in creation. God’s Son shares in the divine act of Being necessarily, which is to say he shares in the divine nature by nature, i.e., that he is God. But the very love with which God loves the Son opens up the “space” in which what is not God can participate in God’s act of Being contingently. But for that reason, the creation will bear the image of the divine act of loving paternity and filiation. The creation, that is, is not complete until the creature responds and corresponds to the God who gives it being. Not only the love of God but the love of neighbor is required, both of which presuppose love in the first place. Creation must be able to answer for itself in order to answer to God who loves it with a corresponding and responding love. Thus, in the first creation narrative, God cannot rest until the divine image appears in the earth, in a pair whose love for one another can itself be a person.
Until the man and the woman find each other and are enabled to be fruitful and to multiply, the image of the triune God is not complete, and the purpose of creation, which is the responsive fiat to God’s creative fiat, cannot take place. In the same way that God the Son’s full reception of the Father’s gift of divine life is also his act of resemblance, the return of the Father’s delight in creatures with their delight in him just is the act of receiving creaturely life as the gift that it is.

As the creation narratives hint, the creation project goes awry, and humans actually have to be reconstituted by an act of divine descent. It is by putting his hands into the soil of earth, indeed it is by having hands, by taking human nature to himself, that God is able to rebuild the human creature and complete the project that began in creation. Redemption, then, is the restoration of vocation to the creation, from the God whose gifts and calling cannot be revoked without contradicting his own covenantal word. God must see the covenant through to its end in the establishment of the divine image over all creation.

Mary and her Son are the ones who finally accomplish the purpose of creation, answering with their corresponding fiat the creative will of God. They accomplish the purpose of creation, which also means that they are the reason for the form creation takes. Their love for one another is the drama of creation, and the entire stage on which everything takes place is built for the purpose of staging that drama. What this means is that every detail of the creation as it currently is finds its meaning as the drama in which Jesus and Mary love one another in an echo of the love for Father and Son. Their love for one another in God entails a faithfulness to what God has made of each in spite of anything that may come. The failure of the first parents to complete their mission caused a distortion in the form of creation as the creative word was brought into confusion and contradiction. Thus, the springtime of earth’s explosion to life in answer to God’s creative call was marred by the winter in which, it seemed, so many of God’s words would return
void. But Mary and her Son share the love that eternally unites the Father and the Son, a love that is stronger than death and therefore accepts death without fear – with a kind of anticipated joy. That love not only restores the human vocation and fulfills the human mission, but it also restores the proper form of the old creation in its bearing of the new creation, the child that will live forever. Mary’s gift of life to her Son, then, is the cause of the old creation’s form, a form that is distorted by the failure of Eve and Adam but not so much as to be beyond repair. Nature’s motherhood still speaks, even if paganism and wisdom fail to account totally for its meaning. Rather, Mary repairs the form by mercifully loving it even in its distortions – by her sympathy. In her sympathy, she loves the creation without any shame in its distortions. She loves the good on each side of every one of creation’s contradictions, even as she looks forward to the day when those contradictions will disappear in her gift of all she possesses to the Lord and to the world. This means that creation takes the form it does, in spite of its contradictions, in order to be the theater in which she comes to love God, neighbor, and the whole world. Mary loves the wasp that lays its eggs in the caterpillar’s head. She rejoices in its existence and in the fruitfulness of its children coming to life. She also rejoices in the caterpillar’s life, loves it as if it were her own life. She mourns, laments, and feels the enmity between them as if it were her own, as if she were an enemy on their behalf of the God whom she loves more than all things. She is merciful, and all creation is organized around the gift her mercy will bring about, a gift to God of what God gives to her, in perfect resemblance of the act of generation in love that is God’s own life.

Creation exists, then, to be the place in which that gift happens, and the goods within it exist as signposts for knowledge and occasions for her love. Mary sympathizes with the entire world of good and takes all of its evils to herself in order that it might be set free to continue its growth in every good thing. In a way. Though she births the eternal Spring, she does it by her
peculiar love of winter as the field in which God’s springtime shows in its most extreme relief.

All of space and time are the objects of her sympathy, not because she is a goddess but because she is a human completely given over to the love and power of the Spirit of God. In willing nothing for herself except what God wills for her, her capacity grows until she can love each thing. But as space and time approach her, that love intensifies in an elective mystery. How are we to comprehend it? If God is to partner with creation, he has to own in a way for himself the limitations of creatures, which is to say that Mary, who by the Spirit can sympathize with every thing, cannot sympathize with everything everywhere and all at once. She must sympathize with all things via a particular sympathy with some particular thing. Whatever arrangement of space, time, and matter will bring about that she can do that the best will be the arrangement in which she finds herself. Two consequences will follow: 1) that she will love the things closest to her with love as large as creation, and 2) the things that are closest to her will be the things she loves the most. What is closest to her is most suitable as a recipient of her sympathy in loco mundi. All of creation is the recipient of her love, but she gives that love to the whole creation by coming from a particular family, in a particular time, and in a particular place. The characteristic that she is meant to display to the whole creation has to be displayed in God’s choice of that place.

Mary’s sympathy cannot arise in a vacuum; it must be the concrete answer to God’s own display of compassion, that is, of mercy. God chooses the Israelites because they were the smallest of nations. God is able to elect the smallest because the conditions that impose themselves upon creatures, the scarcities that make impressive things of the powerful, are of no consequence or significance to the God who loves himself as if he were another, who is utterly secure, stable, and sure. His act of mercy in creation and election is what creates the reciprocal act of Mary’s sympathy, a compassion so deep that she gives her own Son in order to liberate the lost and least
from their solitude and exile.

Her sympathy requires that Mary be born in humility, of the smallest of peoples, in a place that has no particular charm, in a time when that people are at their most contradicted by the world’s powers. Thus, she arises in Israel as the apple of God’s eye. From all of this, we are able to gain a picture, strange as it may seem, of the personality of the woman through whom God chose to give his Son to the world. It is well that she is born in Palestine, for its vast and lonely expanses admit of the deep solitude we know her Son loved so much and learned to love from her. Its lonely hills, deserted wastes, and the boundary waters of river and sea were a comfort to a loneliness her soul shared with every creature until it finds its fulfillment in the divine embrace. She felt pulls in the opposite direction as well, a joy in the presence of her people. Her heart jumped at the sight of Jerusalem each time she made her way up the slopes of Zion, her people’s history a song on her lips. She ached with the hope for Israel to be all that it had been called to be. Her favorite sights were the tents of Kedar, the sight of vineyards, the evergreen cedars of Lebanon, the gatherings of sheep on hillsides, the pomegranates as they exploded into refrains of red blossom from mid-spring to fall of the year. She reveled in flowers of every color, and she laughed and smiled as she ran foxes and other small creatures out of the flowerbeds. She imitated birdsong and tried to vocalize the psalms in the melodies the birds created. Her favorite sounds were those of the distant countryside or of the packed Temple courts. She stopped to look at bees in the hive, small furry things, and insects. She reveled in the variegated splendor of the world that she lived in, and she took a particularly acute pleasure in the fact that so much life bursted forth in a place that could be so inhospitable. For that very reason, she loved the Winter. She loved livestock in their lives, mourned their deaths, and gratefully accepted the gift of their flesh, seasoned and thrown on the fire as a memory of God’s redemption of her people from
hunger, from sin, and from death. Still, she ate meat rarely, preferring the fruits of the garden 
given joyfully by the plants that bore them. She loved the smoke that arose from the Temple 
courts and envied it in its trip to heaven. She loved the psalms and the Torah, and relished the 
feeling of their words as they rolled off of her reciting tongue. She loved the smell of new bread 
and the lightheaded feeling that accompanied wine. Her family was a source of constant delight, 
and she marveled at the uniqueness, the frailty, and the resilience, of the people who raised her. 
She had an endless appetite for the tales of her people and their encounters with God. She felt 
pangs of compassion and pride as she saw the men of her family about their work. She delighted 
in their productivity and was surprised at the depths of sadness in her soul that accompanied 
every splinter she saw pierce their hands. She loved her people’s features, their hair and their 
faces, the darkening of their skin in the sun, the smell of their sweat mixed with the spices and 
oils that were their constant companions. Her favorite hours were those of Sabbath, when from 
the meanest to the wealthiest, all those called Israel abandoned their work for the hearing of the 
Lord’s words and the delight in his faithful preservation of them as a people. She often felt 
conflicting drives, towards the solidarity and fellowship of gathered throngs, in which she was a 
charming but ancillary presence, and at the same time, to lonely places where she could know 
and love the embrace of the Lord as her ancestors had. She often felt that she saw people better 
than they saw themselves – she saw what they meant by the things they did, and she understood. 
In the days after Gabriel’s visit, she delighted in the Son that grew in her body. She spoke to him, 
prayed for him and spoke the blessings of God over him. As his tiny ears began to take shape, the 
sound of psalms became as familiar his mother’s blood surrounding him. He heard her voice 
welcoming him into the earth, prodding him even then towards his mission. For him, that voice 
built a world he would come to inhabit. Everything was exactly what she said it was, as if she
had spoken it all into being herself. Before he saw anything in the world, he had been introduced to it by her gift of the world to him. And although it was not clear to him in the way it would be, when he finally did discern the voice of his God and Father, it was shocking in only one respect: though it echoed it perfectly, it was not the voice of his mother. Her voice, in fact, had been the echo; that too he had to learn. And when he did, and when he saw himself as one addressed, he heard her differently than he had before. Like himself, she was called. He would study to ensure his answers were just like hers. And they were, even when his answers hurt her, as they eventually did.

After the child arrived, her love for him burned. She found her every thought drift to him and devoted her entire life to being what and where he needed her to be. She was his mother, his Teacher, his Comforter, and his Advocate. But if that love burned, it did not consume. She found that in the love she had for him, in some ways the smallest of creatures, she loved everything more. Her love for him increased her love for all that she had loved before – or, if it did not increase it, it focused it somehow. Her sympathy became a weight she could only bear because she knew he bore it too. The lostness, the smallness, the loneliness of the world as it went astray, all of these burdened her. But they also became the locus of her solidarity with him. She wanted nothing so much as his nearness, feared nothing except that something could happen to him. At the same time, his mission became the place of their fellowship. The Word of God that drove him drove her to drive him, and his absence, which alienated her from the world, was also the only thing that would salve the pain she felt as she saw with such clear eyes the burdens it bore. His absence from her made the thorns in the flowers hurt less, relieved both the suffering of all creatures and her suffering in it, made the world seem friendlier to the people she loved, and even took the sting out of the work Joseph’s sons had to do to provide for their common life.
When Joseph passed, he had expressed no regrets and felt no fear. It was as if he had slipped into the next room, shortly to return. As long as the Child was near, Joseph was near, Joachim was near, Anna was near, Elizabeth was near, Zechariah was near. Even Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Elijah, Moses, and Noah were near. When the Child was nearby, it was almost as if she could overhear them talking to him. She lived her life with the sense that at any moment, Jacob, Rachel, Benjamin, or Jeremiah or even Hannah might simply walk into the room as though it were the most normal thing in the world. There was simply no way to communicate it; as much as she had loved her people, their sights, their smells, their sounds and songs, their forms and shapes, and as much as through them she had loved the entire world and its vast explosion of diversity – when he was near, it was as if she had never known or loved any of it before.

It may be hard to take words like these seriously. I mean them in complete earnest; they amount to nothing more than a reading of the Song of Solomon with its gaps filled in by the rest of the Old Testament. What justifies this reading is not merely the tradition of the Church in reading the Song as a Marian text but the conclusion reached earlier that Mary is the final cause of the old creation and the election of Israel, the rationale for the form that they take. The color they provide to the story, the insight into her personality, then, shine a light upon the depth of her solidarity with Israel and the world and the agony in the sacrifice she makes for the sake of the creation gone off course. The Blessed Virgin, beloved of God, lover of her Son and his sisters and brothers, gave him up for us all. The echo of the New Testament’s language of the Father is both intentional and justified. She is the image of the divine lover, who offers his Son to the world in order that the world might know him as their lover and might follow the path back


543 Romans 8:32
home blazed and opened by the Son’s imitation of his Father and mother. Can two walk together, unless they be in agreement? asks the prophet Amos. He takes a negative answer to be obvious. How much less could they drive their child down the same path? Mary echoes the Father at every step, from seeing the creation as good to longing for its restoration. And in doing so, she plays the role of his partner in the redemption story that centers on the life, death, and resurrection of the Son they bear and give to the world.

544 Amos 3:3


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