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**The Making of the Virgin: Mary in the *Protevangelium of James***

by

Sherry Angela Smith

Bachelor of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2001

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Religion & Culture/Faculty of Arts

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Arts

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## Abstract

The *Protevangelium of James* is an important early Christian text narrating the birth, childhood and adolescence of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This thesis explores Mary's transformation from a secondary New Testament figure into the embodiment of sacred purity. The image of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* is different than other early Christian representations, emphasizing both purity and a recapitulation with Eve.

As a means to better understand Mary's purity in the narrative, I explore the theories of three scholars: Jacob Neusner, Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Mary Douglas. I conclude that Douglas's theories make the most sense for comprehending Mary's purity in the *Protevangelium of James*. Applying Douglas's view of purity to the narrative, I establish that it is the author's religious construction of reality that creates an entirely new perspective of Mary.

These conclusions are not only important for the study of Mary in early Christianity, but also for contemporary perceptions of Mary. This new representation of Mary promotes both equality for women and a brighter picture of humanity.

## Acknowledgments

Without the guidance, encouragement and dedication of several important individuals, this thesis would not be possible. I would like to take a moment to offer my gratitude to those who have helped me along the way.

A special thank you to Michel Desjardins, my thesis supervisor, for his patience and support. You instigated my interest for early Christian literature, inspiring my fascination for languages. As always, thank you for the numerous hours you have dedicated toward me, offering me constructive feedback for my writing, research and presentation skills, and especially for teaching me to be critical, yet considerate of what I read and write.

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My thanks to Tony Chartrand-Burke, my thesis advisor, for assisting me with the initial compilation of this bibliography. Your extensive, constructive and thoughtful feedback on my draft is greatly appreciated. Your efforts assisted in developing this thesis into a coherent whole.

Last, but certainly not least, a special thank you to my family. To my parents, for offering me love and support, particularly when I have needed it most. I hope that I will continue to make you proud. To my sons Andrew and Joshua, you are my inspiration. For your ceaseless love, patience and understanding, while I have spent endless hours working, instead of spending that time with you, I will always be grateful.

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The "Miraculous Statue" at St. Anne de Beaupré, Québec, was created by Mathias Zens in 1927. This image of Mary and her mother emerges from the Protevangelium of James. It depicts Anne holding the infant Mary, who is wearing a robe decorated with gold lilies—the lilies being a symbol of purity. See Jean-Marie Lebel and Brigitte Ostiguy eds., *Sainte Anne de Beaupré: An Inspiration* (Québec: Les Éditions du Chien Rouge, 1999).

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**Chapter 1**  
**Introduction: The Making of the Virgin**

---

*Around her feet were the stubs of candles, and all over her black dress were pinned what I thought at first were stars, but which were instead little brass or tin arms, legs, hands, sheep, donkeys, chickens and hearts. She was the Virgin of Lost Things, the one who restored them to their owners. She was the only one of these wood or marble or plaster Virgins who had ever seemed at all real to me. There could be some point in praying to her, kneeling down, lighting a candle.<sup>1</sup>*

—Margaret Atwood

Through the last two millennia the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been multifaceted, being transformed from a simple “Handmaiden of the Lord” to a prestigious “Queen of Heaven.” In the twenty-first century, Mary continues to serve as an important figure in the Christian tradition, particularly in Catholicism. She occupies a central place in devotional life for many Christians—in rosary meditation, prayer and music. Reports of Marian apparitions have occurred all over the world, particularly since the nineteenth century. Images of Mary adorn candles, silk scarves, posters and even T-shirts sold at various tourist sites. Her presence is not only found in churches, but also in museums, historical sites, art, literature, film, music and even postage stamps. Evidence of Mary’s importance is indicated by the sheer magnitude of material written about her. For example, the Marian library at the University of Dayton holds over 100,000 books and pamphlets in fifty languages; 63,000 clippings from newspapers and magazines, and nearly 100,000 cards portraying various images of Mary.

Today the Roman Catholic world is split over the meaning and status of Mary in the Church. Since Vatican II Mary’s image has been radically reduced in the Church, both visually and theologically. Consequently, an intense polarization has developed over Mary. Charlene Spretnak states:

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Atwood, *Cat’s Eye* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1988), 222-223.

The Catholic right claims the virgin, especially in her traditional forms, as its own, while most of the Catholic left defend the radical shrinkage of Mary to strictly biblical delineations as a rational, modern step that was long overdue. Most “progressive” intellectuals in the Church, in fact, tend to consider any glorification of the Nazarene village woman as “Queen of Heaven” to be theologically regressive and even dangerously revolutionary—or, at very least in poor taste.<sup>2</sup>

This study proposes a fresh look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the first two centuries of the Christian tradition. I take as my central text the *Protevangelium of James* (PJ). This narrative is a key primary source for the traditions about Mary and the birth of Jesus. Outside of scholarly circles, this text is not well known. Most Catholics do not know it even exists. However, it is an essential source for understanding both the development of Mariology and later representations of Mary in the Christian tradition. Rooting myself in this source, I explore the variety of Christian representations of Mary in the first two centuries. The result is a view of Mary that emphasizes purity and a recapitulation with Eve.

This analysis is not without its limitations. One point in particular needs to be mentioned: the scholarship that I have used tends to be Western. I have not included Eastern perspectives, particularly theological views, which present very different portrayals of Mary than those we find in the West.

Chapter 2, “The *Protevangelium of James*: Introduction and Survey of Scholarship” (6-32), begins by providing a brief narrative summary of the PJ. It describes that text’s outline of Mary’s life up until the birth of Jesus: her conception, birth, infancy, and adolescence. Some aspects of the narrative are reminiscent of the New Testament stories about Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Other aspects are distinct, providing many new details about Mary’s life.

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<sup>2</sup>Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 1.

I examine the scholarship on this text to place it into context, surveying key issues such as transmission, prominence, authorship, structure and authorial intention. In comparison to other early Christian narratives, there has not been much scholarship completed on the PJ. There are several possible reasons for this lack of consideration. It was relatively unknown in the West until the middle of the sixteenth century, there are several different titles for this text, and the PJ was condemned in the West by the Decretum Gelasianum, so the PJ stories were not incorporated into the liturgical year of the Western Church. Nevertheless, the enormous popularity of this text is attested by the number of manuscripts that have been discovered, including translations into several languages.

This analysis situates the PJ in the late second century, pointing to Jewish Christian authorship. Its original language was Greek, plausibly emerging out of the Palestinian-Syrian region. The author constructed the PJ employing both Septuagint and New Testament materials. Scholars have proposed three explanations for the composition of the PJ: biographical explanations, apologetic reasons, and/or the glorification of Mary. The author's main motivation seems to have been to praise Mary by means of underscoring her extraordinary character.

Chapter 3, "Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* and Other Early Christian Texts" (33-94), is an examination of Mary in the first two centuries of the Christian tradition. I explore canonical, non-canonical and patristic texts to determine what images of Mary emerge from early Christianity. Mary is mentioned only infrequently in these narratives, primarily in relation to her son. For the majority of these writers, Mary's role appears to be insignificant. In the canonical sources two themes emerge: motherhood and virginity. The second century apologetic and apostolic writers developed these canonical themes and added two others: Mary as the second Eve and Mary as a

symbol of the Church. Non-canonical texts also continue the canonical themes, but extend Mary's virginity to include virginity after birth.

I return to the PJ to see how this narrative might portray Mary differently. In some ways this narrative follows the above traditions, but in other ways it remains independent, developing its own motifs. The PJ provides missing biographical details about Mary's life, including her familial wealth and royal lineage. Mary's unusual conception follows biblical and other religious/cultural traditions, signifying that she was to play an important historical role. To be sure, Mary is allotted the status of heroine in this text. She is portrayed as no ordinary child, displaying extraordinary qualities at a young age. She even deviates from cultural norms, such as living in the Temple among the priests. Mary's virginity is a multifaceted theme in this narrative. She is characterized as a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception, during pregnancy and even after the birth of her child. What makes this theme distinctive from other narratives is the repeated examination and certification of Mary's status as a virgin.

Chapter 4, "Embodiment of Sacred Purity: The Making of the Virgin Mary" (95-126), examines a key theme present in the PJ: Mary's purity. It explores her transformation from a secondary New Testament figure into the embodiment of sacred purity. I examine three scholars: Jacob Neusner, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, and Mary Douglas. Their theories are examined to distinguish the ways in which each author utilizes and redefines traditional Jewish/Christian notions of purity. I conclude that Douglas's theories about purity are the most helpful for understanding Mary's purity in this narrative. Douglas's notions about purity in the narrative lead to the conclusion that the PJ's author perceived Mary as a new creation, i.e., the second Eve.

The result is particularly suggestive given what others in that period say about Mary. Taking this document's insight about Mary as the new Eve, I turn first to the writings of Justin Martyr,

Irenaeus, and Tertullian. I note that they established their parallels primarily on the traits of disobedience and obedience, characteristics which seem to be inconsequential to the author of the PJ. Lastly, I conclude that the patristic writers tend to base their understanding of Eve on the second Genesis creation story, focusing on the “fall” of humanity. In contrast, the author of the PJ links Mary to the Eve figure in Genesis 1 through their purity, which was established in the creation of humanity.

Chapter 5, “Conclusion: Rethinking the Relevance of the *Protevangelium of James*” (127-136), begins by offering a review of some key issues in this study. I establish that there are three primary reasons for the PJ’s distinct image of Mary. First, I point to the Jewish Christian authorship. Second, I posit that the author’s overall emphasis on purity constructs a different image of Mary than other early Christian narratives. Third, the author’s religious construction of the cosmos facilitates this new portrayal of Mary. To close this section, I return to the issue of authorial intention, positing that the author’s primary motivation for writing the PJ was to glorify Mary.

I conclude by rethinking the relevance of the PJ, exploring its implications for contemporary understandings of Mary. This section begins with the doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception as a means to distinguish the ways the PJ’s representation differs from orthodox views. I then examine the differing perspectives of original sin and Mary as the second Eve. Lastly, I explore the “what ifs,” concluding that some of the insights of the PJ might lead to a different view of Mary—one that is much more positive and meaningful.

---

Chapter 2  
*The Protevangelium of James: Introduction and Survey of Scholarship*

---

*Myth is the history of its authors, not of its subjects;  
it records the lives, not of superhuman heroes,  
but of poetic nations.<sup>1</sup>*

—E. B. Tylor

The *Protevangelium of James* (PJ) is a key primary source for the traditions about Mary and the birth of Jesus. It likely does not contribute any relevant information about the “historical” Mary; rather, it elucidates the prominence of Mary in some early Christian communities and sets the groundwork for later stories about her. In addition, it may exemplify primitive forms of Marian piety in the ancient Church. Émile Amann advances that “c’est le premier de tous les ouvrages qu’a inspirés à la foi catholique la dévotion à la vierge Marie.”<sup>2</sup> The PJ’s influence on the development of mariological tradition and dogma should not be underestimated. It is significant for the formation of several theological points, including the immaculate conception of Mary, her perfect chastity, the virgin birth of Jesus, and Mary’s perpetual virginity. Its importance is confirmed by Catholic piety in art, literature and also in historical developments within Roman Catholicism beginning in the Early Church, through the Middle Ages, and into the Renaissance.<sup>3</sup> Elements of the PJ, one might argue, also support broader positive portrayals of Mary. Anne Carr proposes:

A glance at the history of Marian art and devotion suggests the power of her symbol in its many transformations in different times and places: she is black, brown, yellow and white, depending on the ethnic context. She is peasant and queen, simple Jewish girl, stately figure of wisdom, happy young mother, anguished and grieving

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 416.

<sup>2</sup>Émile Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910), 10.

<sup>3</sup>Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, vol. 1 (Westminster: Newman Press, 1950), 121-122.



widow, or liberated leader and woman of courage, depending on the popular or national situation.<sup>4</sup>

This aim of this chapter is to place the text in context. First, I summarize the narrative, providing a basic outline of the PJ. Readers who are familiar with the New Testament accounts about Mary and Jesus will notice that in many ways the PJ is dependent on the canonical stories. However, in other ways it is distinctive. The PJ's image of Mary in particular is quite different than what we are used to. Readers are likely to be drawn immediately into foreign territory with the introduction of Mary's parents. Second, I survey major themes in scholarship: transmission, title, authorship, provenance, date, textual unity, and authorial intention. My intention is to facilitate an appreciation for some of the attitudes, controversies and complexities that have surrounded this text.

## 2.1 Narrative Summary

The PJ extends the canonical Matthean and Lucan birth stories about Jesus back to the events surrounding the birth of Mary and her childhood, concluding shortly after the birth of Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

Edouard Cothenet characterizes the narrative as "un premier midrash chrétien."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Anne Carr, "Mary: Model of Faith," in *Mary, Woman of Nazareth: Biblical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. Doris Donnelly (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 10.

<sup>5</sup>References made to *Protevangelium of James* use the reconstruction and translation provided in Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1995), 32-77. A definitive critical edition of the PJ has not yet been published. The edition prepared by Hock is based on the de Strycker edition. See Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 33 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961).

<sup>6</sup>Edouard Cothenet, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: Origine, genre et signification d'un premier midrash chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.25.6 (1988), 4252. So also H. R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary*, *Apocrypha Novi Testamenti* 1 (Assen: van Gorcum, 1965), 8.

The first section (1:1-8:2) begins with the events surrounding Mary's conception and birth. The narrative opens with the plight of Joachim, Mary's father, who is a prominent, wealthy and righteous Jewish man (1:1-3). He was publically reproached for his childlessness and was not permitted to offer his gifts for the approaching festival (1:4-5). Joachim searched the records of the twelve tribes of Israel and discovered that he alone did not have an offspring (1:6-7). Recalling the story about Abraham, a distraught Joachim banished himself to the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days and forty nights (1:8-11).

The second chapter introduces Mary's mother, Anna, who was mourning and lamenting both her childlessness and the absence of her husband Joachim (2:1). She was privately reproached by her slave Juthine for her despair at the time of the festival (2:2-6). In response, Anna removed her mourning clothes, washed her face and put on her wedding dress (2:7). She went down to her garden and sat under a laurel tree, expressing her woes to God (2:8-9). Anna lamented or magnified her distress, identifying herself as the only thing in all creation that was not fruitful (3:1-8). A heavenly messenger appeared advising her that her prayer had been heard and she would conceive and give birth to a child who would be known throughout the world (4:1). In response, Anna vowed to dedicate her child to the service of God (4:2). Joachim was informed by two heavenly messengers that the Lord had heard his prayer and returned home to Anna to celebrate their blessing (4:3-9).

The narrative then changes focus from the plight of Anna and Joachim to the birth of Mary. After a duration of nine months, Anna gave birth to a daughter and named her Mary (5:1-9). Mary grew stronger, taking her first steps at six months, and Anna transformed her nursery into a sanctuary where nothing profane or unclean could touch her (6:1-4). Anna and Joachim were exonerated by the people of Israel during the celebration of Mary's first birthday (1:6-14). At the age of three, Mary's parents fulfilled their promise to the Lord by taking her to the Temple, and the whole house

of Israel, we are told, loved her (7:1-10). Joachim and Anna returned home and Mary continued to live at the Temple, being fed by the hand of a heavenly messenger (8:1-2).

The second section (8:3-16:8) begins with another crisis. Mary, who is now twelve years of age, had become an imminent threat to the purity of the Temple because of her impending menstruation. The priests gathered to discuss the situation and the high priest Zechariah entered the Holy of Holies to pray for a solution (8:3-6). A messenger of the Lord appeared, instructing him to summon together all the widowers of Israel, each man bringing his staff, and the Lord would reveal a sign to designate Mary's future husband (8:7-9). Among the assembly of the widowers was Joseph (9:1-4). He was appointed as Mary's guardian when a dove came out of his staff and perched itself upon his head (9:6-7). Joseph objected, claiming that he was an old man who already had grown sons, and he did not wish to become the butt of jokes among the people of Israel (9:8). He finally accepted his lot when he was reminded of the consequences of defying the will of God (9:9-10). Out of fear, Joseph took Mary under his care and protection (9:11).

They returned to Joseph's home and he departed to build houses, leaving Mary under the protection of the Lord (9:12). While Joseph was away working, Mary remained occupied by assisting with the creation of a new veil for the Temple (10:1-10). During this time, Mary encountered a heavenly messenger who announced that she would conceive a son of the Most High whom she was to name Jesus (11:1-9). After completing the veil, Mary took it to the high priest and was praised for her work (12:1-2). Rejoicing, Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth and stayed with her (12:3). Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth blessed her, acknowledging Mary as the mother of her Lord, and Elizabeth's child jumped for joy in her womb (12:4-5). Mary was baffled by Elizabeth's greeting, since she had forgotten about the mysteries that the heavenly messenger had told her (12:6). After

three months Mary became frightened because of her swelling womb and returned home, hiding from the people of Israel (12:7-9).

Joseph returned from his work and discovered Mary six months pregnant (13:1). Suspecting the worst he reproached himself, and then confronted Mary, who explicitly pleaded her innocence (13:2-10). Joseph was uncertain about what he should do about Mary's pregnancy and pondered divorcing her (14:1-4). A messenger of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, informing him about the special nature of Mary's pregnancy, thereby resolving his previous doubts (14:5-6). He awakened, recommitted to protect Mary (14:7-8).

Joseph's renewed commitment was soon challenged when a visitor to their home observed Mary's condition and reported it to the high priest (15:1-8). They were summoned to the high priest and both subjected to a thorough interrogation (15:9-12). Although both Mary and Joseph continued to plead their innocence, the high priest was dissatisfied and he ordered a test as a means to verify culpability (15:13-16:3). This test consisted of taking a drink and then going off into the wilderness. When they both returned unscathed, they were publically vindicated, and they returned home together (16:4-7).

The third section (17:1-24:14) recounts and elaborates upon a mix of the Matthean and Lucan canonical stories concerning Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, the astrologers' visit, and Herod's slaughter of the infants. It begins with Joseph's journey to Bethlehem for the census, accompanied by Mary and his sons (17:1). Halfway through their excursion Mary informed Joseph that she was going to give birth to the infant (17:10). After he helped her get down from her donkey, he found shelter in a nearby cave to give her some privacy (17:11-18:1). Joseph's sons stood outside the cave, while he went in search of a midwife to assist Mary (18:2).

While on his search, Joseph had a vision in which he saw everything around him temporarily suspended in time (18:3-10). After this phenomenon, he found a midwife coming down from the hill country and he brought her to the cave (18:11-19:12). They arrived too late as Mary had since given birth to Jesus, who was already feeding at her breast (19:13-17). The midwife left the cave, since there was nothing for her to do, and met Salome, who did not believe the midwife's story about a virgin giving birth (19:18-19). Both women returned to the cave and ordered Mary to position herself for an examination (20:1). Salome performed a physical examination and her disbelief brought disaster upon herself as her hand was consumed by flames (20:2-4). The Lord heard Salome's plea for help and a messenger appeared, telling her to pick up the child (20:5-9). She picked up the infant and was instantly healed (20:10-11).

The story returns to the familiar canonical accounts with the arrival of the astrologers (21:1-12). It elaborates on the story of Herod's command to kill all the infants (22:1-9). When Mary heard that Herod had ordered the slaughter of all infants under the age of two, she wrapped her child in strips of cloth and hid him in a feeding trough used by cattle, to conceal him from the soldiers (22:3-4). Elizabeth escaped with her son John up into the mountains. When she became weary, the mountain opened up, protecting them from the soldiers (22:5-9). Herod was outraged and he sent soldiers to Zechariah to find the infant John (23:1-6). Zechariah was murdered at daybreak because he refused to divulge the whereabouts of his son (23:7-9). The people and priests discovered that he had been murdered, responded with three days of mourning, then appointed Simeon to Zechariah's position (24:1-14). The narrative concludes with a brief epilogue about the author (25:1-3).

On the one hand, as this summary illustrates, the PJ is an expansion of the canonical infancy stories about Mary and Jesus. Some of the narrative is reminiscent of the New Testament accounts. For instance, many details about Mary's annunciation, unusual pregnancy, and relationship with

Joseph are largely borrowed from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. On the other hand, the PJ is distinctive. It provides many new details about Mary's ancestry, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Turning now to themes in scholarship, we discover that this text was very popular among Christians, though apparently not as popular among scholars.

## 2.2 Themes in Scholarship

In comparison to other early Christian narratives, the PJ has not received a lot of attention in scholarship. Surprisingly, even representations of Mary in this narrative are rarely explored. Female scholars and theologians hardly ever refer to the PJ, tending to dismiss it or reject it altogether. Consequently, the majority of scholarship is written by men. Pertinent themes that have concerned scholars revolve around the text itself: transmission, title, authorship, provenance, date, textual unity, and authorial attention. The following outlines these major issues.

### 2.2.1 *Transmission*

George Zervos claims that the PJ's popularity in the Eastern Mediterranean is attested by the sheer number of manuscripts that have been encountered there. In 1876, C. Tischendorf believed that there were only fifty manuscripts in existence, but since that time approximately one hundred and forty have been discovered, most in the Christian East. The Bodmer Papyrus V is the earliest and most crucial manuscript discovered for the study of the original Greek text; it is dated to the third century by M. Testuz.<sup>7</sup> Later manuscripts are dated from the fifth through to the sixteenth centuries.

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<sup>7</sup>See M. Testuz, ed. and tr., *Papyrus Bodmer V: Nativité de Marie* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1958).

There are many variations among these documents. Hans-Josef Klauck notes that the textual form is not wholly fixed, as there are numerous abbreviations, expansions and paraphrases.<sup>8</sup>

It is generally accepted that the PJ was composed in Greek. In the late nineteenth century two German scholars, Ludwig Conrady and Alfred Resch, challenged this consensus, proposing that it was initially written in Hebrew. Resch implausibly suggested that an original Hebrew text was used by both the canonical evangelists and the author of the PJ.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the original source language, we know that the text was later transmitted in various languages, including Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Slavonic and Latin. Scholars speculate that an early Latin translation existed, but only a ninth century manuscript has been discovered to date. The Latin *Pseudo-Matthew*, a later infancy gospel, incorporates many of the PJ stories about Mary.<sup>10</sup> Its incorporation into Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (ca. 1260) brought PJ stories to the Western world.

Boyd Lee Daniels posits that the PJ was more popular than most of the apocrypha, suggesting that "it stands head and shoulders above the others in quality of writing and reverence of attitude."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Fulbert Cayré describes this narrative as "le plus remarquable de tous les apocryphes," suggesting that "la forme litteraire de cet écrit, le ton sérieux et simple du récit, la

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<sup>8</sup>Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), 65.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred Resch, *Das Kindheitsevangelium nach Lucas und Matthaëus*, Texte und Untersuchungen X. Band, Heft 5 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897).

<sup>10</sup>There are approximately 250 MSS of *Pseudo-Matthew* in Latin.

<sup>11</sup>Boyd Lee Daniels, *The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protevangelium Jacobi*, vol. 1 (Ph. D. Diss., Duke University, 1956), 13.

tendance pieuse qui le caractérise lui ont valu une exceptionnelle diffusion et une grande influence.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly, both Daniels and Cayré allow their positive impressions to guide their remarks.

Opinions about the PJ have not always been so positive. During the fourth and fifth centuries, Jerome assailed it with such zeal that it was condemned by Pope Damasus and Pope Innocent I. In the West, the *Decretum Gelasianum*<sup>13</sup> evaluated the PJ as an apocryphon which the “Catholic and apostolic Roman Church does not in any way receive.”<sup>14</sup> Oscar Cullmann notes that in the sixteenth century, under Pius V, the office of St. Joachim was removed from the Roman breviary, and the text of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple was suppressed, although both were later restored.<sup>15</sup> However, in the Eastern Church the PJ remained in use and the stories were well known throughout Christian communities. The narrative was also adopted into the liturgical year in the Eastern Churches. The Feast of the Nativity of Mary was celebrated on December 8, and the PJ was widely incorporated as a reading for that feast probably by the fifth century; by the eighth century it was universally observed.

The PJ was re-introduced to the Western world during the middle of the sixteenth century. While on a journey to the East (1549-1551), the French humanist Guillaume Postel heard the narrative being read in a church. Fascinated by his “discovery,” he acquired a copy of the manuscript and named it the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, convinced that it was the authentic prologue, or “pre-

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<sup>12</sup>Fulbert Cayré, *Patrologie et histoire de la théologie* (Paris: Desclée, 1947), 154.

<sup>13</sup>In the sixth century, the *Decretum Gelasianum* lists a number of infancy gospels by name which are to be rejected.

<sup>14</sup>Raymond E. Brown et al., *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 248.

<sup>15</sup>Oscar Cullmann, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. 1: *Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, 421-438 (Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1991), 418.



gospel,” to the Gospel of Mark, authored by a certain James. Postel’s Latin translation of the text was published in 1552 by Theodore Bibliander of Basil.<sup>16</sup> Although both Postel and Bibliander postulated the authenticity of this narrative, many individuals doubted its authenticity, including a well known printer in Paris named Henri Estienne. He claimed that it was a forgery composed by Postel himself and was reported to have said that “le diable s’est moqué évidemment de la Chrétienté en faisant publier ce livre.”<sup>17</sup>

The PJ has not received the same amount of scholarly attention as some other early apocryphal Christian documents. George Zervos, an American scholar, envisions himself as an advocate for this text: α φωνή βοώντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ. He posits that it has suffered from decades of neglect by scholars, which has resulted in the “entrenchment and perpetuation of an older scholarly consensus of opinion with regards to its date and compositional character,” negating the importance of this narrative for the study of early Christian thought.<sup>18</sup> Zervos asserts that this text is the primary source document of the Mariology of the ancient Church and is consequently important for the study of early Christianity.

### 2.2.2 Title

Daniels characterizes the PJ as an “elusive” document because it has historically appeared under numerous titles. The Greek manuscripts generally assign very extensive titles. For instance,

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<sup>16</sup>Guillaume Postel, *Proteuangelion sive de natalibus Iesu Christi, et ipsius matris Virginis Mariae, sermo historicus diui Iacobi minoris, consobrini et gratris Domini Iesu, apostoli primarii, et episcopi Christianorum primi Hierosolymis. Evangelica historia, quam scripsit beatus Marcus, Petri apostolorum principis discipulus et filius, primus episcopus Alexandriae. Vita Ioannis Marci euangelistae, collecta ex probatoribus autoribus, per Theodorum Bibliandrum* (Basil: ex officina Ioannis Oporini, 1552).

<sup>17</sup>Cited from Daniels, 1.3.

<sup>18</sup>George T. Zervos, “Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth: Have We Found the Missing Link?” in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. F. Stanley Jones (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 107.

one popular title, though with many variants, is: "An Account of James Regarding the Birth of the Exceedingly Pure Mother of God."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, some manuscripts are cited in indexes as "*anonymi narratio*," which perhaps reflects the text's condemnation during the Decretum Gelasianum. Furthermore, a variety of titles are utilized by contemporary scholars, a practice which only continues to create confusion. For instance, bibliographical references include: Book of James, Protevangelium Jacobi, Protevangelium of James, Infancy Gospel of James, Genesis Marias, and The Birth of Mary.

Since the narrative's re-discovery by Postel in the sixteenth century, it has been customarily known in scholarly circles as the Protevangelium of James or Protevangelium Jacobi meaning "prior gospel of James." Postel imparted that particular name because the text relates to the events that precede the birth of Jesus narrated in the canonical Gospels, and the author identifies himself as James in the final chapter (25:1). P. A. van Stempvoort implies that the term Protevangelium is both misleading and incorrect.<sup>20</sup> He claims that the most accurate title is the one employed by Origen in his commentary on Matthew: The Book of James.

In the Eastern tradition the text is commonly known as the Birth of Mary, a title partially reflected in the Bodmer Papyrus V. In this document the narrative is referred to as the Γένεσις Μαρίας Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰακώβ or The Birth of Mary: The Revelation of James (Jacob). This title is not entirely accurate either, since the contents of the manuscript are concerned with more than Mary's birth, and the narrative is only incidentally apocalyptic or revelatory. In a similar fashion,

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<sup>19</sup>Hock, 4. For other titles, see Daniels, 2.2-6.

<sup>20</sup>P. A. van Stempvoort, "The Protevangelium Jacobi, the Sources of Its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on Its Date," in *Studia Evangelica III*, ed. F. L. Cross, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 88 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 410.

Zervos refers to the narrative simply as the Genesis Marias, a name he also uses for what he considers to be an earlier version of this text. He posits:

And the Genesis Marias, in my opinion, will prove to be the primary source document of the Mariology of the ancient Christian world whose ideas were reflected in such later writings as the Protevangelium of James.<sup>21</sup>

Some scholars have referred to the narrative as the Infancy Gospel of James, which is a loose rendering of Postel's Latin title. This designation reflects a particular genre of apocryphal writings, which "tell of events in the life of Jesus prior to his public ministry and of his parentage."<sup>22</sup> W. S. Vorster suggests that the PJ is a retelling of the birth story of Jesus from the perspective of his mother, positing that the primary theme of the PJ is the birth of Jesus. Vorster perceives the PJ as a Christocentric text, postulating that this is the reason "why it is rightfully called an infancy gospel."<sup>23</sup> In contrast, John L. Allen claims that placing the PJ into such a category is not tenable because it does not fit the criteria of an infancy gospel, based on two crucial characteristics. First, the primary editorial interest of such narratives are "christological," i.e., Jesus is the main character making up the "gospel" element. Second, the narrative is primarily concerned with the birth and childhood of the divine child, constituting the "infancy" component. Allen's insight makes for a valuable argument. In the PJ, Mary is the main character and the narrative is concerned with Mary's

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<sup>21</sup>Zervos, 120.

<sup>22</sup>J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 46.

<sup>23</sup>W. S. Vorster, "The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus in the Protevangelium of James," in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament*, eds. J. Petzer and P. Hartin, 33-55 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 52.

birth and childhood. Allen concludes that “it is therefore manifest that PJ is neither a ‘gospel,’ in the sense that Jesus is not the central focus, nor is it primarily an ‘infancy’ narrative.”<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2.3 *Authorship*

It was not uncommon in antiquity for individuals to write under a pseudonym, as a means to establish the author as an eyewitness. This practice validates the authenticity of the events the author is reporting. The concluding chapter of the PJ is explicit about its origins, situating itself ca. 4-3 BCE by our reckoning:

Now I, James, am the one who wrote this account at the time when an uproar in Jerusalem at the death of Herod. I took myself off to the wilderness until the uproar in Jerusalem died down. There I praised the Lord God, who gave me the wisdom to write this account. Grace will be with all those who fear the Lord. Amen (25:1-3).

What is said about the date in the text, of course, need not be true. The same can be said about authorship. In this case, the authorship points to James, thought by some to be the brother of Jesus, Joseph’s son from a former marriage (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19). Alternatively, the Decretum Gelasianum acknowledged him as James the younger, identifying him as one of the twelve in the apostolic lists, and the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:13; Mark 3:18, 15:40; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). The Herod indicated is undoubtedly King Herod who died in 4 BCE, making the claim that the author was an eyewitness to the events; the composition of this narrative in the wilderness of Jerusalem situates the writer in the area of the event he is recounting.

Ronald F. Hock notes that, regardless of who actually wrote the PJ, the author had a wide cultural awareness. He points out that other scholars have noted various contacts with the broader Greco-Roman world, such as the birth of Dionysos and Mithras, as well as popular Greek novels.

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<sup>24</sup>John L. Allen, “The Protevangelium of James as an ‘Historia’: The Insufficiency of the ‘Infancy Gospel’ Category,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, ed. E. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 509.

In addition, a study completed by Zacharias P. Thundy has pointed out numerous connections between the Indian traditions about Buddha and the Christian traditions about Jesus.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Hock suggests that the writer obviously had some literary talent and training. He deduces:

In other words, the author of the Infancy Gospel of James emerges as a figure of some literary ability and training who possesses a bookish acquaintance with Judaism but also an awareness of many cultural customs.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, a major point of debate among scholars has been this text's possible links to Judaism. Michael Mach notes that scholarly discussion is divided between those who view the author as a Jewish-Christian or connected to Judaism in some other way, and those who deny the author's connection with any form of Judaism. Mach does not perceive any authorial connection with Judaism. He states:

There are no linguistic or halachic proofs for any connection between PJ and Jewish traditions. Moreover, PJ lacks any evidence for characteristic Jewish-Christian beliefs—as far as such are known today. Only in two instances PJ comes close to Jewish tradition: in the Adam and in the Zechariah traditions. Both are due to redactional work of the last author.<sup>27</sup>

Cullmann advances that Jewish-Christian authorship is implausible because of the writer's ignorance of Jewish customs. He indicates that Mary's upbringing in the Temple and Joachim's expulsion for his childlessness are feasible arguments for a non-Jewish writer.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Daniels

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<sup>25</sup>Zacharias P. Thundy, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993).

<sup>26</sup>Hock, 11.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Mach, "Are there Jewish Elements in the Protovangelium Jacobi?" in *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 220.

<sup>28</sup>Cullmann, 423-424.

postulates that the author “demonstrates a considerable lack of understanding of first century Judaism.”<sup>29</sup>

Other scholars think that the author was of Jewish descent, based on his familiarity with and extensive use of the Septuagint. For example, van Stempvoort posits that the Septuagint is the author’s primary source for writing the narrative, noting the parallels in thought and wording from the stories of Susanna, Judith, and Tobit, as well as from the lives of the patriarchs, particularly Abraham and Sarah.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Cothenet argues that the text is rooted in Judaism, advancing that “la détermination de ces motifs haggadiques et l’étude de leur transformation revêt la plus grande importance pour fixer l’origine du Protévangile et préciser ses intentions.”<sup>31</sup>

The author’s connections to Judaism may also be evident in his positive attitude toward Jews. Vorster notes that the Jewish religious leaders are portrayed in a positive manner in the PJ. He suggests that they perform various religious rituals, bless, pray, take care of the Temple and determine the norms. The Temple priests are supporters of Mary, not opponents. Vorster states:

Their characterization is such that one gets the impression that the story is told on their behalf. Since the child is born *from Israel for Israel* they are presented as co-operators in his coming. From a narrative point of view this is very interesting because there is a reason to believe that the story polemises against views held by Jews who were contemporaries of the author. In order to convince his readers he presents the Jews who were “involved” in the coming of the child positively.<sup>32</sup>

Additional support for Jewish-Christian authorship may be marked also by the author’s emphasis on purity in the PJ. The overall theme of this text, as we will see later, is Mary’s purity,

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<sup>29</sup>Daniels, 1.7.

<sup>30</sup>Van Stempvoort, 415-420.

<sup>31</sup>Cothenet, 4262.

<sup>32</sup>Vorster, 41.

and it is defined in a Jewish context. The author is not only concerned about characterizing Mary as the epitome of purity, but he is also attentive to Temple purity, mentioning various purification rites and cultic rituals.

#### *2.2.4 Provenance*

Another major point of debate among scholars is the text's provenance. Hock acknowledges that the question of provenance for the PJ remains difficult to answer. It is argued by the majority of scholars that the author did not originate from a Jewish milieu, due to inherent problems with Palestinian geography in the text. Although the author seems to have been influenced by the Septuagint, Quasten proposes that he demonstrates an "astonishing ignorance of the geography of Palestine."<sup>33</sup> Some scholars exclude the Greek mainland, the Greek islands, and the Greek cities of western Asia Minor altogether, based on the criterion that the Greek of the PJ is too impoverished in vocabulary and syntax to have originated in such locales of Greek language and culture.<sup>34</sup>

The geographical questions are dealt with extensively by Émile de Strycker.<sup>35</sup> In summary, he dismisses the possibility of authorship in Palestine or Syria based on the following points: (1) the desert is found to be too close to Jerusalem, (2) the desert and mountains are identical, (3) although Joseph and Mary live in Jerusalem, the decree of the emperor Augustus concerns residents of Bethlehem, and (4) Jerusalem, Judea and Bethlehem merely are geographical indications, i.e., the author is confused about their relationship. Instead, de Strycker designates Egypt as a place of origin due to the indicated problems with Palestinian geography, the simple Greek of the text, the fact that

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<sup>33</sup>Quasten, 1.121.

<sup>34</sup>De Strycker, 419-421. See Daniels, note 13 above, for a contrary position on the text's literary sophistication.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 421-423.

the mountains and desert are identical in Egypt, and finally because there are some Coptic elements found in the language of the narrative. In contrast, Smid proposes that the author may have come from Syria in Antioch because of the reference made to a laurel tree in Anna's garden (2:8).<sup>36</sup> He suggests that the laurel was a significant feature at the sanctuary of Apollo at Daphnè. For instance, laurel leaves were wound together and placed on Apollo. In addition, P. K. Hitti advances that this sanctuary was "one of the beauty spots in the Roman world."<sup>37</sup> Smid postulates that the author was thinking about this place while he composed the scene of Anna in the garden. Perhaps adding support to Smid's point, Hans von Campenhausen proposes that the virgin birth story emerged from the Palestinian-Syrian territory, positing: "it therefore looks as if the legend were born and bred in that district."<sup>38</sup> He notes that not all New Testament writers support the virgin birth story in their narratives. For instance, the Gospels of Mark and John and the Pauline letters do not seem to have an awareness of any traditions associated with the virgin birth. Von Campenhausen posits that the infancy narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke originate from the Palestinian-Syrian area. In addition, he asserts that the early apostolic fathers do not know of the virgin birth. The exception, he claims, is Bishop Ignatius of Antioch who put a great deal of theological emphasis on it. Yet,

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<sup>36</sup>Smid, 175-176.

<sup>37</sup>Cited from Smid, 175.

<sup>38</sup>Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, Studies in Historical Theology 2 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1964), 20. In addition, P. Fidelis Buck argues for a Syrian origin, postulating that both the *Odes of Solomon* and *Ascension of Isaiah* emerged from this area, which also make mention of the virgin birth. See P. Fidelis Buck, "Are the Ascension of Isaiah and the Odes of Solomon Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary?" in *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani*, vol. IV (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1970).



unlike Smid, von Campenhausen does not suggest that the PJ originated in Syria, claiming: “Unfortunately, it cannot be determined more precisely where this writing comes from.”<sup>39</sup>

### 2.2.5 Date

Although Postel believed that the PJ was written around the time of the New Testament Gospels, scholarly opinions have varied over the years, usually ranging from the mid-second century to as late as the fifth. Contemporary scholarship tends to assign an earlier date than initial investigations primarily because of recent papyrus discoveries. For instance, Cullmann dates Papyrus Bodmer V to the fourth century.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, scholars have demonstrated that the PJ was known to Christian writers of the third century. Both Origen and Clement of Alexandria seem to have been familiar with this narrative. Origen’s commentary on Matthew refers to the narrative as the Book of James, and he also alludes to the brothers of Jesus as the sons of Joseph by another marriage, which is consistent with the PJ (*Comm. in Matt.* 10:17). Likewise, Clement makes mention of the midwife who attended Mary, declaring her to be a virgin (*Stromata* 7.16.93). Hock proposes that by allowing time for this narrative to become known to Christians, scholars prefer the late second century as the most tentative dating for the PJ.<sup>41</sup>

A more precise date of composition has been postulated by van Stempvoort.<sup>42</sup> He claims that the *terminus a quo* must be set at 178 CE based on Origen’s polemic with Celsus. In his *Logos Alèthès*, Celsus attacked Mary on several fronts, including her perceived poverty, social status and

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>40</sup>Cullmann, 421.

<sup>41</sup>Hock, 11.

<sup>42</sup>Van Stempvoort, 413–423.

purity. The author of the PJ, van Stempvoort asserts, directly counters these attacks. The *terminus ad quem* is determined by Hippolytus's commentary on Daniel, dated between 202 and 204 CE. This commentary suggests the obvious parallels between Susanna and the depictions of Anna and Mary.

Some scholars have advocated an even earlier date of composition, based on connections between the PJ and Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, written around the year 155 CE. For example, Zervos notes that Justin has an awareness of the traditions associated with the birth of Jesus in a cave (*Dial.* 78.5). Further, he recognizes Mary's Davidic descent, which corresponds with her ancestry presented in the PJ (45.5). An even earlier date of 150 CE is plausible, therefore, if Zervos is correct in establishing Justin Martyr's dependence on the narrative.<sup>43</sup> He suggests that there is convincing evidence of a literary dependence between the documents by demonstrating numerous parallels and linguistic affinities. In his analysis, Zervos concludes that the PJ was already redacted before it was read by Justin Martyr around the middle of the second century.

### 2.2.6 Textual Unity

Issues pertaining to the unity of the PJ have emerged throughout the study of the narrative. As early as 1850 Adolf Hilgenfeld questioned the document's sources.<sup>44</sup> In his critique he noted an abrupt shift in narrative style from the third to the first person, beginning with Joseph's vision and ending after his conversation with the midwife (18:3-19:9). Hilgenfeld explained this shift by positing the author's incorporation of a separate source. The most comprehensive source theory and literary history was provided by Adolf von Harnack in 1897. He distinguished three sources that

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<sup>43</sup>George T. Zervos, "Dating the Protevangelium of James: The Justin Martyr Connection," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, ed. E. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994): 432-434.

<sup>44</sup>Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die Evangelien Justins, der clementinischen Homilien und Marcions* (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1850), 153-161.

were integrated into the narrative before the mid-fourth century: one about Mary (chapters 1-17), a second about Joseph (18-20), and a third about Zechariah (22-24).<sup>45</sup>

It is generally accepted that the author of the PJ based his narrative primarily on biblical materials, but also included other traditions. In the high days of source criticism, it was argued by Resch, as indicated above, that the infancy narratives of Matthew, Luke and the PJ emerged from a Hebrew source, and by Conrady that the PJ should be understood as the source of the canonical stories in Matthew and Luke.<sup>46</sup> These positions have been replaced by the idea that the author constructed his story employing the Septuagint and New Testament materials. In other words, he most likely, given cultural practices, was a man who utilized biblical sources to compose a legend: an “exceedingly beautiful fiction.”<sup>47</sup> Several innovative traditions about Mary are apparent in the narrative: her childless parents, who are given the names Joachim and Anna, their plea for a child, and Mary’s childhood purity. Determining the origin of these traditions is problematic. Brown claims that the author does not seem to use any significant independent sources for constructing Mary’s background, other than the canonical Gospels.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Daniels acknowledges that it is difficult to determine whether these traditions emerged from oral tradition or from an unknown written source.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897-1904), 600-603.

<sup>46</sup> Smid, 193.

<sup>47</sup> Van Stempvoort, 426.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, 260.

<sup>49</sup> Daniels, 1.8-9.

The PJ's dependency on biblical materials has triggered numerous studies. Edouard Massaux has exhaustively examined the relationship between the canonical narratives and the PJ. He posits that the author utilized Matthew, Luke, and perhaps John and Paul. Massaux notes that the writer was particularly influenced by the Lucan account, using it in various ways.<sup>50</sup> He suggests that in numerous instances the author literally cites Luke, while in others he borrows an idea and adapts it. For example, the author literally transposes Simeon's words in Luke, "for my eyes have seen your salvation" (2:30), onto the midwife in the PJ: "my eyes have seen wonderful things for salvation is born to Israel" (19:2).<sup>51</sup> Massaux also suggests that Anna's words, "My soul is magnified this day" (5:8), echo the opening lines of Mary's Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46).<sup>52</sup> In contrast to Postel's position, Massaux does not find any evidence for literary influence from the Gospel of Mark in the narrative. He concludes:

I have pointed out that the author of the Protevangelium of James, whose intention is clearly to give a detailed and marvelous account of the birth of the Virgin and of Christ, is inspired by the infancy gospels in Matthew and in Luke. He cites literally specific passages and is simply inspired by others. The influence of Luke is greater than that of Matthew, the reason probably being that the third gospel has a longer infancy narrative in which the author found more material to work.<sup>53</sup>

Many commentaries about the PJ indicate parallels between it and the Septuagint. Extensive analyses have been prepared by Amann, de Strycker and Cullmann. As early as 1890, Theodore Zhan

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<sup>50</sup>Edouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, vol. 2, trs. N. Belval and S. Hecht, *New Gospel Studies* 5 (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1990), 231-236.

<sup>51</sup>Massaux's translation of the PJ better reflects the Greek similarities, so I have utilized his translation, rather than Hock's translation for this quotation and the one following.

<sup>52</sup>English biblical references here and throughout are from the New Revised Standard Version, taken from Bruce M. Metzger and Ronald E. Murphy eds., *The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>53</sup>Massaux, 237.

noted that “every page of the text witnesses to the familiarity of the author with the language of the Septuagint.”<sup>54</sup> Smid agrees with a number of scholars who suggest that the Septuagint is another source of the narrative with regard to language usage and motives:

The matriarchs of the Old Testament provided the model for Mary, together with the heroines of younger tales such as Judith and Tobit. In this matter again, it is difficult to decide what is intentional and what is involuntary.<sup>55</sup>

Vorster points out that the author used a variety of themes, expressions and words similar to those found in the Jewish Bible and the New Testament.<sup>56</sup> Nicolae Roddy posits that the author’s usage of parallelism does not portray a lack of creativity or originality; rather, it was a long-standing vehicle for the expression of sacred truths.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Smid postulates that the author is writing sacred, intimate history and his objective is to strengthen the authenticity of his *historia* by relating it in familiar biblical language.<sup>58</sup>

### 2.2.7 *Authorial Intention*

Scholars have proposed three plausible explanations for the composition of the PJ. They suggest that the narrative was written for biographical explanations, apologetic reasons, and/or the glorification of Mary. One of the central motivations for this type of literature typically is biographical, i.e., to satisfy early Christian curiosity. Cullmann suggests that “whenever biographical

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<sup>54</sup>Cited from Smid, 9.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>56</sup>For examples see W. S. Vorster, “The Protevangelium of James and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, ed. T. Baarda et al. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988), 266 note 15.

<sup>57</sup>Nicolae Roddy, “The Form and Function of the Protevangelium of James,” *Coptic Church Review* 14 (1993): 39.

<sup>58</sup>Smid, 11.

literature shows gaps, legend generally springs up, in the absence of reliable information, to supply the deficiency."<sup>59</sup> The canonical gospels do not provide all the necessary details about Jesus' life; this narrative fills some of the missing gaps. It explains such details as the origin of Jesus' brothers, gives names to Jesus' grandparents, and accounts for his exceptional conception. In addition, Daniels suggests that "as hagiolatry developed, it was only natural that the mother of the Lord should be among the most revered saints."<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, biographical aspects in this narrative focus primarily on Mary, her miraculous birth, youth, marriage, and her perpetual virginity.

Several scholars view the PJ as apologetic—an *apologia pro Maria*. Smid proposes that the narrative demonstrates a strong tendency to contribute to Christian apologetic activity against Jewish and pagan slander.<sup>61</sup> The most significant example of this slander in the second century is Celsus's *Logos Alèthès*, a writing partially preserved in Origen's *Contra Celsum*:<sup>62</sup>

He accuses him of having "invented his birth from a virgin," and upbraids him with being "born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God" (1:28).

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<sup>59</sup>Cullmann, 415.

<sup>60</sup>Daniels, 1.12.

<sup>61</sup>Smid, 15-17.

<sup>62</sup>This translation and all subsequent references to the patristic writings, unless otherwise indicated, are from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325*, 10 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926).

Smid notes that there are several points of contact where a connection between the PJ and *Logos Alèthès* must be assumed.<sup>63</sup> For instance, the author stresses the wealth of Joachim and Anna, while clarifying that Mary spins exclusively as a holy work, rather than to earn a living. Moreover, the author goes to great lengths to authenticate Mary's virginity, possibly rebutting Celsus's allegations.

Overall, the primary intent of the writer was to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the virgin birth of Jesus. Amann characterizes the virginity *post partum* as "l'idée capitale" of the narrative.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the author seeks to establish that Mary's pregnancy was not the consequence of adultery. A common slander of that time was that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a soldier named Panthera. The narrative counters this attack by describing Jesus' conception. Cullmann suggests that the infancy stories of Matthew and Luke no longer sufficed to counter the charge, and "the virgin birth through Mary had to be demonstrated more palpably by means of a special narrative."<sup>65</sup>

Smid extends the apologetic argument, postulating that the overall authorial motivation for writing the PJ was the glorification of the Virgin Mary, and the biographical and apologetic aspects are secondary considerations.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Cullmann proposes that the narrative as a "whole was written for the glorification of Mary."<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, neither Smid nor Cullmann develop this important aspect. However, Hock successfully addresses this issue in his work, suggesting that an

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<sup>63</sup>Smid, 15.

<sup>64</sup>Amann, 31.

<sup>65</sup>Cullmann, 417.

<sup>66</sup>Smid, 14.

<sup>67</sup>Cullmann, 425.

encomiastic intention is worth considering. He indicates that “when the narrative is viewed from this perspective, defending Mary becomes a secondary, even incidental, purpose; rather, the author’s primary purpose was to praise Mary.”<sup>68</sup> Hock compares the PJ’s literary genre to a style of writing instructed in the educational curriculum of the Greco-Roman world. He demonstrates similarities between the literary structures of a praise or ἐγκώμιον that was taught to students, and the author of the PJ.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.3 Concluding Remarks**

Scholars, therefore, have addressed several issues concerning the PJ. The text represents one of the primary sources for later traditions about Mary, and it is significant for its influence on the development of mariological tradition and dogma throughout the Christian tradition. Although the narrative describes the birth, childhood and adolescence of Mary, it likely does not contribute any relevant historical information about her. The enormous popularity of this text is attested by the number of manuscripts that have been discovered, including translations into several languages. The text remained widely used in the East, but was unknown for centuries in the West after its condemnation in the sixth century. It was reintroduced to the West during the sixteenth century, generating numerous scholarly inquiries.

In its transmission the narrative has appeared under a variety of titles. Contemporary scholars continue to assign various titles to this document, which is problematic for several reasons, including a lack of consistency in scholarship. There is an undeniable need to select one generic title

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<sup>68</sup>Hock, 16.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 15-20.



in Western scholarship as a means to reference this narrative. The customary abbreviated title imparted by Postel, *Protevangelium of James*, is perhaps the best choice, not because it better represents the text's content, but since the majority of scholars have utilized it in the past.

The scholarly consensus suggests that the PJ was originally composed in Greek during the late second century. The arguments posed by Conrady and Resch for an original Hebrew text are not supported by other scholars. Recent papyrus discoveries have assigned an earlier compositional date for this text than some scholars have suggested in the past. Van Stempvoort's proposed date of composition between 178-202 CE seems the most tenable.

The text is best understood as a pseudonymous writing. Several scholars have concluded that the author appears not to be of Jewish-Christian descent, given his ignorance of several important Jewish cultural practices. In contrast, other scholars have argued for Jewish-Christian authorship based on the author's awareness of Jewish traditions, particularly his extensive incorporation of the Septuagint, emphasis on purity and positive attitude toward Jews in the narrative. Where this author might have lived and written the narrative cannot be conclusively determined—Asia Minor, Syria or Egypt are all plausible places of provenance. A Palestinian-Syrian origin seems attractive, especially if von Campenhausen is correct in advancing that the "virgin birth" story emerged from this district.

What might have inspired the author to compose the PJ? All three explanations proposed by scholars are conceivable. To be sure, the narrative provides biographical details about the origins of Mary—it is the earliest source in Christian tradition to mention her parents. In addition, the author may have been responding to specific allegations of the time—especially the slanders pertaining to the illegitimacy of Jesus. Unequivocally, however, the author's main motivation seems to have been to provide a story which endeavored to praise Mary by means of underscoring her extraordinary

character. This third explanation is one that I intend to develop in what follows—particularly in Chapter 4. Before turning to that issue, Chapter 3 will explore stories about Mary in early Christian literature.

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Chapter 3  
*Mary in the Protevangelium of James and Other Early Christian Texts*

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διὰ τοῦτο δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον ·  
ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν,  
καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ ·

—Isaiah 7:14 LXX

The author of the *Protevangelium of James* (PJ) portrays Mary as an extraordinary individual throughout his narrative, while striving at every opportunity to emphasize God's direct intervention in her life. An "unsullied image" is depicted through her miraculous origins, saintly childhood, and perpetual virginity.<sup>1</sup> Images presented in the PJ diverge significantly from those depicted in the New Testament. Sally Cunneen postulates that early Christians and the author of the PJ "imagined her life to be almost angelic, but at the same time they made her humanly accessible and provided her with an extended family not mentioned in the New Testament."<sup>2</sup> In addition, Vorster perceives the PJ as a "retelling of the birth story of Jesus from the perspective of his mother."<sup>3</sup> To be sure, almost all New Testament references characterize Mary relative to the divine mission of her son. These few references provide nothing more than a negligible characterization of Mary. However, the New Testament's "humble, obedient maid of Nazareth who silently pondered her son's mission" was eventually transformed into an independent heroine in the PJ.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Von Campenhausen, 54.

<sup>2</sup>Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 67.

<sup>3</sup>Vorster, "The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus in the Protevangelium of James," 52.

<sup>4</sup>E. Ann Matter, "The Virgin Mary: A Goddess?" in *The Book of the Goddess Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion*, ed. Carl Olson (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 92.

This chapter explores various Marian representations in first and second century writings. Before turning to the PJ, I first examine Mary in the New Testament, concluding that these texts do not tell us very much about her. Moreover, many of the details about Mary are conflicting, and only two portrayals emerge: mother and virgin. Second, I explore second century patristic texts. The canonical images reappear in these writings, but more emphasis is placed on Mary's virginity. In addition, two new representations of Mary materialize: Mary as the second Eve and Mary as the Church. Third, non-canonical texts are examined to see if they add anything new to early views about Mary. The above-mentioned images continue, but new details emerge about Jesus' birth and Mary's virginity is now defined in a different way—*post partum*. Lastly, I explore the portrayal of Mary in the PJ, establishing that it presents a quite different understanding of Mary. To be sure, it does incorporate and develop the images I have noted thus far in other texts. What makes the PJ's view of Mary distinctive is its emphasis on biblical tradition and her extraordinary purity, which perhaps reflects its Jewish-Christian authorship, as I mentioned in Chapter 2.

### 3.1 Mary in the New Testament

Scholars have had much to say about Mary in the New Testament, despite the fact that she appears as an enigmatic figure in these texts. As I mentioned earlier, the New Testament does not tell us much about her. Rosemary Radford Ruether acknowledges that these writings “do not include much on the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, either as a historical figure or as a theological symbol.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, what the New Testament does tell us is often conflicting. In the first century, Mary's role would appear inconsequential to early Christian writers. The intention for canonical

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<sup>5</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 31.

writings was to preserve, authenticate and legitimize traditions about Jesus—not Mary. The New Testament writings are Christocentric, while the PJ is Mariocentric.

### 3.1.1 Paul

The earliest New Testament writer to mention Mary was Paul around 50 CE. He mentions her only once, in his letter to the Galatians: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman [γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός], born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (4:4-5).<sup>6</sup> Paul neither introduces Mary by name, nor does he imply anything extraordinary about her character. Moreover, he certainly does not conceive of a virgin birth. The only thing Paul tells us about Mary is that Jesus had a mother, who was likely an observant Jew. Her marital status is not clearly established as there is no mention of Joseph.

### 3.1.2 Mark

The Gospel of Mark also provides very little information about Mary. This gospel alludes to Mary in relation to Jesus simply as “his mother” (3:31), “your mother” (3:32), and “my mother” (3:33, 34). In harmony with Paul’s letter, Mark confirms that Jesus had a mother, giving her name in only one reference: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? (6:3).<sup>7</sup> Issues pertaining to Jesus’ paternity emerge, since Mary’s spouse is not mentioned. Mark also indicates that Jesus had other brothers and

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<sup>6</sup> For Greek see Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983). Paul also mentions the birth of Jesus in Romans 1:3-4, and makes a general reference to the mode of birth in Galatians 4:28-29. Mary is not mentioned in either of these passages.

<sup>7</sup> Various other manuscripts including P45 (the earliest Greek text) and MS 565 offer an alternative reading: “the son of the carpenter and of Mary,” which suggests that the author recognized Jesus’ father. However, the construction utilized above is supported by the majority of Greek texts and has been adopted by most scholars.

sisters.<sup>8</sup> Questions concerning Jesus' relationship with his family also materialize in this gospel. Mark's Jesus seems to reject his family: "And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'" (3:34-35).<sup>9</sup>

The author does not situate Mary at the crucifixion or resurrection of Jesus, suggesting that Mark did not think that she participated in Jesus' adult career. At the crucifixion there are three individuals named who followed and provided for Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome (15:40).<sup>10</sup> Mark also reports that there were many other women near the place of the crucifixion, who had come up with him to Jerusalem (15:41). The women who went to anoint Jesus' body were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (16:1).<sup>11</sup> The longer version of Mark indicates that Mary Magdalene was the first individual to see the risen Jesus (16:9). Therefore, despite this plethora of Marys here, most likely Mark does not place Mary, the mother of Jesus, at her son's death, burial anointing or resurrection.

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<sup>8</sup>Overall, the canonical texts strongly suggest that Mary had additional children, but there are some delicious ambiguities that have allowed for differing perspectives over the centuries. The Western Church adopted Jerome's interpretation, who suggested that these were Jesus' cousins. In contrast, the Eastern Church accepted the view presented in the PJ, i.e., Jesus' brothers and sisters were Joseph's children from a previous marriage.

<sup>9</sup>Brown posits that Jesus neither rejects his family nor does he appear hostile toward them. He suggests that "the point of this passage is to define the eschatological family, not exclude the physical family." See Brown, 54.

<sup>10</sup>The description of Mary the mother in this passage is different than the one in Mark 6:3, which described Mary as the mother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon.

<sup>11</sup>Mark, once again, describes this Mary differently.

**3.1.3 Matthew**

The Gospel of Matthew provides a little more information about Mary than Paul or Mark. In the author's genealogy of Jesus, Mary is described as the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, a descendant of David, is identified as her husband, Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας (1:16).<sup>12</sup> The question of illegitimacy is raised: Mary discovered that she was pregnant while engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together (1:18). The extraordinary nature of Mary's pregnancy was disclosed to Joseph, when he was advised in a dream by an angel of the Lord that the child conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit (1:20). In Joseph's dream, Matthew links Isaiah's revelatory statement to Mary, juxtaposing her with the παρθένος in the Septuagint: "All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel'" (1:22-23).<sup>13</sup>

The issue of illegitimacy is accentuated by the reference to four women in Matthew's genealogy: Tamar, Rehab, Ruth and Bathsheba (1:1-17).<sup>14</sup> All four of these were women whose questionable sexual conduct nevertheless led to the continuation of the chosen lineage. It was unusual in first-century Judaism, as Brown notes, to mention a woman's name in a genealogy.<sup>15</sup> Brown outlines four important theories for the inclusion of these women in Matthew's genealogy: (1) the women were gentiles or foreigners; (2) they were subjects of controversy in the Jewish debate about the Davidic messiahship; (3) these women were sinners, and (4) they were used as vehicles

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<sup>12</sup>Joseph is also depicted as Mary's husband in 1:19-20.

<sup>13</sup>Isaiah 7:14.

<sup>14</sup>Matthew does not mention Bathsheba by name in the genealogy, but refers to her as the wife of Uriah.

<sup>15</sup>Brown, 78.

of God's messianic plan, despite being marked by irregular sexual unions.<sup>16</sup> Brown concludes that the fourth theory is the most tenable, suggesting that Mary was an instrument of God's providence in the messianic plan. Could Matthew, therefore, be suggesting that, even if Mary's conception of Jesus had emerged through an improper sexual act, it should be considered the fifth in this illustrious lineage? The evidence for this tantalizes more than it supports.

Matthew conveys that Joseph married Mary, but asserts that they did not have sexual relations until after Jesus was born (1:24-25). The text narrates that Mary gave birth in Bethlehem of Judea, presumably in a house, τὴν οἰκίαν (2:11). After the birth of Jesus the entire family fled to Egypt to avoid Herod's wrath. Then, after Herod's death, they moved to Nazareth (2:13-24). Like the Gospel of Mark, Matthew also indicates that Jesus had brothers and sisters (12:46-50). The brothers mentioned are James, Joseph, Simon and Joseph, while the sisters are unnamed (13:55-56).

Matthew's Mary does not seem to have a close relationship with her son. On one occasion Jesus disclaimed his family, while speaking to the crowds: "And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'" (12:49-50). This evidence suggests that Mary did not actively participate in her son's adult career. Moreover, the narrative later implies that she was not present during the crucifixion or resurrection. Matthew situates Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and many other women near the crucifixion (27:55-56). He also narrates that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία) went to the tomb, where they saw the resurrected Jesus (28:1-10). The tantalizing presence of multiple Marys in these

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 77-83.



accounts suggests that Jesus' mother was not among them, but nevertheless makes it impossible to exclude Jesus' mother.

### 3.1.4 *Luke/Acts*

The Gospel of Luke and Acts ameliorates representations of Mary. The Lucan material on Mary, as Brown notes, is much more abundant than other New Testament texts.<sup>17</sup> Luke's Mary is engaged to Joseph, who is of the house of David (1:27). Unlike Matthew, there is no indication that Mary and Joseph were ever married. Luke implies that, during their journey to Bethlehem for the census, Mary was not Joseph's spouse: "He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child" (2:5).

Brown suggests that "the role of the virginal conception in the Lucan annunciation is much more complicated and debated than its role in the Matthean annunciation."<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the Matthean account, instead of Joseph it is Mary who is visited by the angel Gabriel, who advised her that she would conceive and bear a son (1:31).<sup>19</sup> Mary is clearly identified as a physical *παρθένος* in this narrative, meaning that she had not yet engaged in sexual relations (1:27). Luke reports that an angel informs Mary that she would not conceive through usual means: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you [*ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ*], and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [*καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι*]; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (1:35). Moreover, Mary confirms that she had never had sex with a man: *ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα*

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>19</sup>Gabriel's annunciation to Mary is similar to Gabriel's annunciation to Zechariah mentioned earlier in Luke (1:11-20). For a detailed discussion of the annunciation parallels see Brown, 107-115.

οὐ γινώσκω (1:34). In the Lucan account there is a transformation from the symbolic prophetic virgin in Matthew to a biological virgin, and Mary's encounter with the divine is more direct.<sup>20</sup>

Luke narrates that Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable (ἀνέκλιεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ) while in Bethlehem because there was no room for them in the lodging place, ἐν τῷ καταλύματι (2:7). This passage also reports that Jesus was her firstborn son (τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον), which implies subsequent children, supporting the notion presented in both Mark and Matthew that Jesus had other brothers and sisters. Further, Luke indicates that Mary is present with Jesus' brothers during one of Jesus' discussions with the crowds (8:19-21). However, these siblings are never mentioned by name. In addition, this is the only New Testament source to indicate that Mary underwent the prescribed purification ritual for childbearing, which perhaps, as in Paul, emphasizes that she was an observant Jew (2:22-24).<sup>21</sup>

Jesus' relationship with his mother also appears ambivalent in the Lucan account. He confronts both his worried parents at the age of twelve after he has gone off on his own: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49). Like Matthew, Luke also portrays Jesus as rejecting his family: "My mother and my brothers are those

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<sup>20</sup>Not all scholars think that Luke intended a virginal conception. Mary is advised that "she will conceive," taking place at some point in the future (1:31). J. A. Fitzmyer posits that the conception of Jesus in Luke takes place "in the usual human way, of a child endowed with God's special favour, born at the intervention of the Spirit of God, and destined to be acknowledged as the heir to David's throne as God's Messiah and Son." Cited from Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 120. In contrast, Brown posits that Luke intended to describe a virginal conception. For a detailed discussion see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 298-303. Additionally, Fitzmyer's understanding of Jesus' conception is similar to my critique of Anna's conception of Mary in the PJ, arguing against the idea of an immaculate conception.

<sup>21</sup>Mary also traveled to Jerusalem with Joseph for the festival of the Passover even though she was not legally obligated (2:41). This may further indicate that she was thought to be a pious individual.

who hear the word of God and do it" (8:21). Despite Jesus' attitude toward Mary, she is depicted in this gospel as the dutiful loving mother who "treasured all these things in her heart" (2:51).

There is no evidence in the Gospel of Luke that suggests Mary actively participated in her son's career. In agreement with the Markan and Matthean narratives, Mary is most likely not present at the crucifixion or at Jesus' tomb. The Lucan account mentions that only the women who had followed Jesus were present at the crucifixion (23:49). There is no explicit indication that Mary was among these women who followed him from Galilee. In addition, after Jesus' death Luke reports that these women went to the tomb, and saw the body of Jesus (23:55). Later, the women returned to anoint Jesus' body, finding an empty tomb (24:1-3). Luke identifies these women as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women (24:10). However, the Book of Acts does indicate that Mary remained part of the post resurrection community: "All of these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (1:14).

### 3.1.5 *John*

Mary appears in the Gospel of John on only two occasions. The author never mentions her by name, preferring to identify her in relationship to Jesus: ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. John acknowledges her as the mother of Jesus four times during the wedding at Cana account (2:1-12). Jesus addresses Mary simply as woman (γύναι), rather than mother (2:4;19:26). There seems to be no precedent for a son to address his mother in this manner in antiquity,<sup>22</sup> but John's Jesus is an

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<sup>22</sup>Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 188.

extra-normal individual for whom such extravagances would not be impossible. In addition, the address need not be understood as impolite given the respectful context of the narratives.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the other canonical accounts, this gospel portrays Mary's relationship with Jesus in a much more engaged and positive manner. John's Mary is depicted as traveling with Jesus, his brothers, and his disciples (2:12). Jesus even performs a miracle, changing water into wine, at his mother's request (2:3-11). Moreover, John explicitly situates Mary at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion: "Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (19:25). Jesus' concern for his mother's welfare after his death is also indicated when he placed her under the care and protection of his dearest disciple:

When he saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (19:26-27).

### 3.1.6 Summary

In sum, there is no clear portrayal of Mary in the New Testament. The only consistent fact that permeates all the New Testament narratives is that Mary was a Jewish woman who gave birth to Jesus. Issues pertaining to her marital status are inconclusive. Joseph is not mentioned in either Paul's letters or the gospels of Mark and John. The Matthean narrative has her eventually marrying Joseph, while Luke never confirms that their relationship moved beyond engagement. Moreover, neither Paul, Mark nor John imply that there was anything unusual about Jesus' conception, suggesting that Jesus was conceived and born under normal circumstances. Only Matthew and Luke

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<sup>23</sup>In addition, Brown posits that the address of "woman" in John signifies that Mary is "truly 'mother'—she met the criterion of discipleship." See Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 189.

characterize Mary as a παρθένος, while emphasizing the extraordinary conception of Jesus. Evidence that Mary gave birth to any children other than Jesus is strong but ambiguous, since there is inconsistent information regarding the names of these children. Moreover, in the biblical corpus the terms ἀδελφοί and ἀδελφαί, meaning brothers and sisters, can be defined in a much broader sense than siblings.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Paul freely uses these terms to characterize relationships with Christian communities.<sup>25</sup> Overall, the New Testament evidence implies that Mary did not participate in Jesus' career. Only John's account suggests that Mary may have traveled with Jesus, but this could be an anomaly, since the wedding may have been a familial event. However, John is the only writer explicitly to situate Mary at the crucifixion. Therefore, most likely John perceived that Mary was part of Jesus' adult career. In sum, the New Testament provides divergent details about Mary. Consequently, these texts do not make it easy to construct any coherent representation of Mary in the first century. The important themes emerging from the New Testament are Mary's motherhood and virginity.

### 3.2 Mary in Patristic Texts

Like the first-century canonical narratives, Mary also appears infrequently in the apologetic and apostolic writings of the second century. The majority of writers during this period of time do not even mention her in their texts. For example, there are no references to Mary in *1 Clement*, the

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<sup>24</sup>For the variety of uses for ἀδελφός in a Christian context see Frederick W. Danker ed., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 18-19. In the Hebrew Bible the word אָח refers to a brother, near relation, cousin or even friend.

<sup>25</sup>For example see Rom 16:23 or 1 Cor 1:1.

*Didache*, *Papias*, *Barnabas*, *Hermas*, the *Epistle of Polycarp*, or the *Epistle to Diognetus*. The writers who do mention Mary continue to develop her canonical images.

### 3.2.1. *Ignatius*

Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch (ca. 110-115 CE), is the earliest patristic writer to mention Mary. He refers to her on five occasions in his correspondence, but only in relation to Jesus.<sup>26</sup> These few references support the Matthean and Lucan virginal conception, affirming that this was an early Christian belief at the beginning of the second century, while pointing to the “mystery” of Jesus’ birth. Ignatius’s references to Mary are as follows:

He was truly the seed of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God according to the will and power of God; that he was truly born of a virgin [γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου] (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans* 1:1).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Only seven of Ignatius’s letters are regarded as authentic. See Milton Perry Brown, *The Authentic Writings of Ignatius: A Study of Linguistic Criteria*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963). There are other letters attributed to Ignatius, indicating correspondence between Mary and Ignatius, but these are dated to the twelfth century. Although these letters obviously fall outside the scope of this study, since, even if they were authentic, Mary would be well over 100 years old, they are worth mentioning. They claim that Ignatius sought affirmation from Mary about John’s teachings. This connotes that Mary was an important figure in the early Church. Moreover, it indicates, like the Book of Acts, that Mary was part of the post resurrection community. Her response appears in the *Epistle of Ignatius to the Virgin Mary—Reply of the Blessed Virgin to this Letter*:

The things which thou has heard and learned from John concerning Jesus are true. Believe them, cling to them, and hold fast the profession of that Christianity which thou has embraced, and conform thy habits and life to thy profession. Now I will come in company with John to visit thee, and those that are with thee. Stand fast in the faith, and show thyself a man; nor let the fierceness of persecution move thee, but let thy spirit be strong and rejoice in God thy Saviour.

There are two other noteworthy letters attributed to Ignatius that mention Mary: *Epistle of Ignatius to St. John the Apostle* and a *Second Epistle of Ignatius to St. John*. These letters also affirm that Mary remained part of John’s community. In addition, they suggest that Mary, like other early Christians, suffered from persecution and affliction. In the first letter she is depicted as: “the lady of our new religion,” “faithful to all works of piety”; in addition “there is in Mary the mother of Jesus an angelic purity of nature allied with the nature of humanity.”

<sup>27</sup>For Greek see P. Th. Camelot ed., *Ignace D’Antioche Polycarpe de Smyrne: Lettres Martyre de Polycarpe*, Sources Chrétiennes 10 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1969).

Stop your ears, therefore, when anyone speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who descended from David, and was also of Mary [τοῦ ἐκ Μαρίας]; who was truly begotten of God and of the Virgin,<sup>28</sup> but not after the same manner (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians* 9:1).

There is one physician, who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God [καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ] (*Epistle to the Ephesians* 7:2).

For our God, Jesus Christ, was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb of Mary [ἐκνοφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας], of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost [πνεύματος δὲ ἁγίου] (*Epistle to the Ephesians* 18:2).

Now the virginity of Mary [ἡ παρθενία Μαρίας] was hidden from the prince of this world, as was also her offspring [ὁ τοκετὸς αὐτῆς], and the death of the Lord; three mysteries of renown, which were wrought in silence by God (*Epistle to the Ephesians* 19:1).

### 3.2.2 *Aristides*

The apologist Aristides of Athens (ca. 145 CE) alludes to Mary, though he does not mention her by name. He refers to her simply as a “virgin.” Like Ignatius, Aristides discusses Mary in relation to her son:

He is confessed as the Son of God of the highest God, descending from heaven [on the account of the salvation of men] through the Holy Spirit; and [born] of a [holy] virgin [without seed and in purity], he took flesh (*First Apology* 15:1).<sup>29</sup>

### 3.2.3 *Justin*

The apologist Justin Martyr (died ca. 165 CE) is the first writer to begin developing Marian themes, particularly Jesus’ virginal conception. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is possible that Justin

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<sup>28</sup>The Greek text does not support the English translation: “of God and of the Virgin.” It simply states: ὃς ἀληθῶς ἐγεννήθη. See Roberts and Donaldson, vol. 1.

<sup>29</sup>English translation from Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 254. For Greek see Bernard Pouderon and Marie-Joseph Pierre, *Aristide: Apologie*, Sources Chrétiennes 470 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2003). The words in brackets are regarded as later interpolations. For the textual problems see von Campenhausen, 19-20, note 4. Aristides confirms only that Jesus was thought to be ἐκ παρθένου.

knew the PJ and incorporated it into his writings. His interest in Mary, as Brown notes, facilitates a Christological and soteriological purpose.<sup>30</sup> Justin understands the virgin birth not only as evidence of Jesus' messiahship, but also as a sign of a new age. He asserts numerous times throughout his writings that Jesus was born of a virgin: διὰ παρθένου γεγεννήσθαι (*1 Apology* 22:5).<sup>31</sup> Justin, like Matthew, juxtaposes Mary with Isaiah's prophetic virgin: "And hear again how Isaiah in express words foretold that he should be born of a virgin" (33:1). Moreover, like Luke's Mary, Justin characterizes her as a biological virgin. Describing the nature of the conception, Justin defines the spirit and power of God as the procreative λόγος:

This, then, "Behold a virgin shall conceive," signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse [οὐ συνουσιασθεῖσαν]. For if she had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive [καὶ κυοφορήσαι παρθένον οὐσαν πεποιήκε]. And the angel of God who was sent to the same virgin at that time brought her good news, saying, "Behold, thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins...it is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and power of God as anything else than the Word [οὐδὲν ἄλλο νοῆσαι θέμις ἢ τὸν λόγον], who is also the first-born of God, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power (*1 Apology* 33:4-6).

Further, in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* there is a detailed discussion about the virgin birth, especially with regard to the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 (43; 67). The debate between Justin and Trypho focused on the translation of אַלְמָה ('*almah*). Justin argued that παρθένος was the correct

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<sup>30</sup>Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 254-255.

<sup>31</sup>Other references include *1 Apology* 31:7; 32:14; 46:5 or *Dialogue with Trypho* 113:4. For Greek see Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984 [1914]).



translation, while Trypho upheld νεᾶνις, meaning “young girl.”<sup>32</sup> Recalling Greek mythology as a means to support his argument, Trypho criticized Justin’s position, stating:

And you ought to feel ashamed when you make assertions similar to theirs, and rather should say that this Jesus was born man of men. And if you prove from the Scriptures that he is the Christ, and that on account of having led a life conformed to the law, and perfect, he deserved the honour of being elected to be Christ, it is well; but do not venture to tell monstrous phenomena, lest you be convicted of talking foolishly like the Greeks (47:1).

Though Justin’s argumentation depends largely on the canonical infancy stories about Mary and Jesus, he does depart from them on three significant points in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. First, as mentioned in Chapter 2, he attributes the Davidic lineage to Mary (45:5). Both Matthew and Luke trace Jesus’ genealogy through Joseph, while Justin suggests that Joseph was from the tribe of Judah (78:1). Second, he situates the birth of Jesus in a cave outside of Bethlehem, positing that it was the burial place of the matriarch Rachel (8:8). Third, Justin juxtaposes the two virgins: Mary and Eve (100).<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2.4 Irenaeus

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, discusses Mary in *Against Heresies* (ca. 177-178 CE), emphasizing both her virginity and obedience. His depiction of Mary’s obedience is particularly significant for later Marian representations. Like Justin, Irenaeus noted the parallel between Mary and Eve, but instead links it to the Pauline notion of recapitulation, weaving Mary into salvation

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<sup>32</sup>Traditionally, there have been numerous debates about how to translate Isaiah’s “young woman.” In the Hebrew texts the word utilized is עלמָה (*‘almah*), simply connoting images of a young woman. When the Hebrew Bible was initially translated into Greek, παρθένος was incorporated, implying a female who has never engaged in sexual intercourse. However, later Greek versions of the Septuagint use the word νεᾶνις, meaning young woman, including one in her teens. John McHugh suggests that if Isaiah wished to speak of a virgin giving birth he would have used the very common and unequivocal Hebrew term for virgin—בתולה (*bethulah*), which connotes virgin or chaste maiden. See John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 282.

<sup>33</sup>The early Christian Mary/Eve parallels are developed in Chapter 4.

history. Focusing on Mary's response to the angel Gabriel in the Lucan annunciation, he interprets γένοιτό μοι, let it be to me (1:38), to mean obedience: the Lucan *fiat*. Through Mary's obedience, Irenaeus postulates, she became "the cause of salvation," not only for herself but for all humanity (22.4.4). He allocated Mary a significant and active role in redemption, suggesting that she became a "pure womb which regenerates men unto God" (4.33.11).

### 3.2.5 *Clement*

In Clement of Alexandria's *Christ the Educator* (ca. 190) a new image of Mary emerges. After discussing how blood is transformed into milk in a lactating woman's breast, giving infants the purest food, Clement makes the analogy with Jesus, saying that Jesus' blood has fed us all with the purest of food. He then states:

The Father of all is one, the Word who belongs to all is one, the Holy Spirit is one and the same for all. And one alone, too, is the virgin Mother. I like to call her the Church. She alone, although a mother, had no milk because she alone never became a wife. She is at once virgin and mother: a virgin, undefiled; as a mother, full of love. Calling her children about her, she nourishes them with milk that is holy; the Infant Word. That is why she has no milk, because this son of hers, beautiful and all hers: the body of Christ, is milk (1.42).<sup>34</sup>

This passage makes Mary a symbol for the Church. It also seems to give a reason for why she did not have breast milk. Why? Mary "never became a wife," i.e., she never had sex. This passage suggests that there were stories circulating through early Christian communities that suggested Mary never had milk. Clement gives two reasons for this: Mary never had sex, and her absence of milk is a pointer to the fact that she is really the Church; her "milk" is Jesus.

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<sup>34</sup>Simon P. Wood tr., *Christ the Educator*, The Fathers of the Church Series (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1954).

### 3.2.6 Summary

In sum, Ignatius and Aristides did not devote a significant amount of attention to Mary during the first half of the second century. The important thing that these few references tell us is that some early Christians continued to accept the notion of a virginal conception. Justin Martyr was the first writer to elaborate on Marian images, alluding to a new characterization of Mary as the second Eve. What is also interesting about Justin's writings is that he introduced some new details about Mary, which suggests that there were other stories about Mary circulating throughout Christian communities in the first two centuries. Whether or not these stories emerged from oral traditions, other written sources such as the PJ, or even Justin himself remains unknown. We do know that Irenaeus did not incorporate them into his work. However, Irenaeus did develop Justin's portrayal of Mary as the new Eve, focusing on her obedience, and situated Mary beside her son at the centre of human redemption. Clement, like Justin, developed a new image—Mary as a symbol of the Church.

### 3.3 Mary in Non-Canonical Texts

In the non-canonical literature of the first two centuries, like the canonical and patristic sources, Mary only appears occasionally. Some of these traditions, like Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, preserve traditions independent of the canonical narratives. Unfortunately, there are several texts that fall outside the chronological scope of this study which contain important Marian images: the Latin *Pseudo-Matthew*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, and the *Acts of Pilate* or *Gospel of Nicodemus*. What follows is a survey of texts that fall into the relevant time frame, although dating remains contested.

### 3.3.1 Jewish Christian Gospels

Mary is mentioned briefly among the Jewish Christian gospels.<sup>35</sup> In the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, Jesus refers to his mother as the Holy Spirit: “Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away onto the great mountain Tabor.”<sup>36</sup> In this same text, Mary is further referred to as a power: “And the power came into the world, and it was called Mary; and Christ was in her womb seven months.”<sup>37</sup> In the *Gospel of the Nazaraeans*, a dialogue is reported between Jesus and Mary, and his brothers, which is not mentioned in the canonical texts: “Behold, the mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him: ‘John the Baptist baptizes unto the remission of sins, let us go and be baptized by him.’”<sup>38</sup> Like the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, the *Gospel of the Ebionites* reports an incident where Jesus seemed to discredit his family:

Moreover, they deny that he was a man, evidently on the ground of the word which the Savior spoke when it was reported to him: “Behold, your mother and your brethren stand outside,” namely: “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said: “These are my brothers and mother and sisters, who do the will of God.”<sup>39</sup>

### 3.3.2 Nag Hammadi Texts

Two gospels in the Nag Hammadi collection contain important Marian images. First, the *Gospel of Thomas* refers to Mary in three passages. Similar to the synoptic gospels and the *Gospel*

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<sup>35</sup>For narrative distinctions see Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 244. References to non-canonical texts, unless otherwise indicated, are from Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Company, 1991).

<sup>36</sup>Schneemelcher, 1.177, fragment 3.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, fragment 1.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 160, fragment 2.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 170, fragment 5.

of the Ebionites, this text also implies that Jesus had an ambivalent relationship with his family. The relevant sayings are as follows:<sup>40</sup>

The disciples said to him, "Your brothers and your mother are standing outside." He said to them, "Those here who do the will of my Father are my brothers and mother. They are the ones who will enter the kingdom of my Father" (99).

"Whoever does not hate father and mother as I do cannot be a disciple of me, and whoever does not love father and mother as I do cannot be a disciple of me. For my mother [...], but my true mother gave me life" (101).

Jesus said, "Whoever knows the father and the mother will be called the child of a whore" (105).

Second, the *Gospel of Philip* contains several interesting images of Mary. One passage, reminiscent of the Gospel of John, suggests that Mary accompanied Jesus during his travels: "There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion" (59:6).<sup>41</sup> The *Gospel of Philip* also contains several distinctive variations of the Matthean and Lucan virginal conception. Although these passages refer to Mary and Joseph as Jesus' parents, the Virgin Mother is interpreted as a heavenly power, and the Father in heaven is interpreted as Jesus' true father:

Some said: "Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit." They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. She is a great anathema to the Hebrews, who are the apostles and the apostolic men. This virgin whom no power defiled (...) the powers defile themselves. And the Lord would not have said, "My Father who is in heaven," unless he had another father; but he would have said simply, "My Father" (55:23).

Philip, the apostle said, "Joseph the carpenter planted a garden because he needed wood for his trade. It was he who made the cross from the trees which he planted.

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<sup>40</sup>English translations from John S. Kloppenborg et al., *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990).

<sup>41</sup>English translations from Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 246.

His own offspring hung on that which he planted. His offspring was Jesus, and the planting was the cross (73:8).

### 3.3.3 *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*

Important images of Mary also appear in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. Strikingly, the *Acts of Paul* does not characterize Mary as a virgin, but it does support an unusual conception: “For in these last times God, for our sake, has sent down a spirit of power into the flesh, that is, into Mary the Galilean, according to the prophetic word, who was conceived and born of her” (10).<sup>42</sup> Another passage, like Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, may imply that Mary was of Davidic ancestry: “Our Lord Jesus Christ was born of Mary of the seed of David, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven by the Father into her” (3:5).

The *Acts of Peter*, like the Gospel of Luke, portrays Mary as a biological virgin, though she remains nameless: “In the last times a boy is born of the Holy Spirit; his mother knows not a man, nor does anyone claim to be his father” (24:3). This text also introduces two independent traditions. First, it alludes to the notion of *virginity post partum*: “She has given birth and has not given birth” (23:4). Second, the narrative suggests that Mary was alone for the childbirth: “We have neither heard her voice, nor is a midwife come in” (24:7).

### 3.3.4 *Jewish Christian Apocalyptic Texts*

Mary also appears in Christian revisions of two Jewish apocalyptic writings. Marian images in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, on the one hand, largely depend on the Gospel of Matthew. It suggests that Mary found herself pregnant, while betrothed to Joseph (11:2).<sup>43</sup> The text tells us that Joseph considered dismissing her, but changed his mind after an angel of the Spirit appeared to him (11:3-

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<sup>42</sup>This section of the *Acts of Paul* is divided into chapters only. See Schneemelcher, 2.382.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 661.

4). In addition, like Matthew, the author suggests that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary: "And he did not approach Mary but kept her as a holy virgin, although she was with child" (11:5). On the other hand, the text includes four other traditions. First, the author assigns Davidic lineage to both Mary and Joseph (1:1-2). Second, it suggests that Joseph was with Mary when the infant miraculously appeared: "It came to pass, while they were alone, that Mary suddenly beheld with her eyes and saw a small child; and she was amazed" (11:8). Third, like the *Acts of Peter*, the text implies virginity *post partum*: "When her amazement wore off, her womb was found as it was before she was with child" (11:9). Fourth, the author tells us that no midwife assisted Mary with the birth and no cries of pain were heard by others (11:14).

The *Odes of Solomon* presents images of Mary that are largely independent of canonical sources. In this text, Mary is referred to as an unnamed virgin, who conceived under unusual circumstances. Like the *Acts of Peter* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, this narrative suggests that Mary was not assisted by a midwife, indicating that the childbirth was painless. The reference to Mary is as follows:

The womb of the virgin caught it and she received conception and gave birth. So the virgin became a mother with great mercies. And labored and bore the Son but without pain, because it did not occur without purpose. And she did not seek a midwife, because he caused her to give life. She bore as a strong man with desire, and she bore according to the manifestation, and possessed with great power. And she loved with salvation, and guarded with kindness, and declared with greatness. Hallelujah (19:6-11).<sup>44</sup>

### 3.35 Summary

In sum, the non-canonical literature of the first two centuries continued to preserve some canonical traditions about Mary. The Matthean and Lucan characterization of Mary as a virgin is

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<sup>44</sup>English Translation from James H. Charlesworth ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 2.752-753.

emphasized throughout these writings. The *Acts of Peter*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and the *Odes of Solomon* continue Luke's notion of Mary as a biological virgin, but extend it further to include her virginity after birth. Additionally, these texts introduce a new theme about the birth of Jesus: the absence of a midwife and the painless childbirth. The *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, like the synoptic gospels, depict Jesus' ambivalent relationship with his mother. In contrast, the *Gospel of Philip*, like the Gospel of John, suggests that Mary traveled with Jesus. Some of the non-canonical narratives follow traditions like Justin Martyr. Mary's Davidic lineage was picked up by the authors of the *Acts of Paul* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, while the *Gospel of Philip* allude to the Eve/Mary juxtaposition.

### 3.4 Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*

A much more vivid and fuller representation of Mary emerges in the PJ. As devotion to Mary was finding a place in Christian communities, speculation about her life necessitated stories that essentially filled in some of the blanks in the canonical accounts. The historicity of these stories is suspect, to be sure, but they should be given as much legitimacy as those we find in the New Testament. Roddy postulates that "a leading factor to the production of this and other apocryphal gospels is the enhancement of characters in order to ease certain literary and theological tensions."<sup>45</sup> In addition, Cunneen suggests that the PJ "obviously represents an attempt to meet the desires of a wide public that craved more details about the lives of Mary and Joseph."<sup>46</sup> The following explores areas in which the PJ expands on the New Testament accounts. Many of the themes presented

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<sup>45</sup>Roddy, 36.

<sup>46</sup>Cunneen, 74.



previously in sections 1 through 3 of this chapter are also inherent in the PJ. However, the author explores and develops them through a different lens than previous writers: Mary's extraordinary role in biblical history.

### *3.4.1 Ancestry and Conception*

The author of the PJ constructs a miraculous origin for Mary, utilizing Septuagint materials as a frame for his composition. The New Testament provides no information about Mary's parentage or birth. This text is the first instance in the Christian tradition where the parents are named: Joachim and Anna. The circumstances surrounding the birth of Mary revolve around the childlessness of her parents. The emphasis on infertility or unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of a child in biblical texts generally designates divine intervention and signifies the important destiny of the child. For instance, Sarah the mother of Isaac (Gen 17:16-19), Rebekah the mother of Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:21-26), and Rachel the mother of Joseph (Gen 29:31; 30:22-24) all gave birth to significant individuals in Israel's history. The PJ follows in this biblical tradition.

Joachim is characterized as a rich and pious individual in the narrative: "According to the records of the twelve tribes of Israel, there was once a very rich man named Joachim. He always doubled the gifts he offered to the Lord" (1:1-2). W. Bauer states that the author "strives to erect triumphal arches for the Savior entering into the world"; therefore, Mary's parents are depicted as being wealthy and devout individuals.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Joachim's characterization leads to his piety and servitude to God, another parallel to biblical patriarch stories. For example, Abraham was a wealthy and pious individual who was given Isaac, a gift from God, in his old age (Gen 21:2-3).

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<sup>47</sup>Cited from Smid, 26.

Joachim's name is clearly derived from the Septuagint. The author would have been aware of the high priest Joakim (Jud 4:6), and Joiakim son of Jeshua (Neh 12:26). The most tenable parallel for Joachim is depicted in Susanna: "Joakim was a very rich, and had a fine garden adjoining his house; the Jews used to come to him because he was the most honoured of them all" (1:4). Like the Joakim in Susanna, Mary's father also owns a garden, which indicates wealth (2:8). Smid notes that, in antiquity, possession of a garden was a sign of luxury.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Joachim's wealth and high social status is indicated by the number of guests he invites to Mary's first birthday: "Now the child had her first birthday, and Joachim gave a great banquet and invited the high priests, priests, scholars, council of elders, and all the people of Israel" (6:6). Moreover, the sheer number of animals Joachim offers for sacrifice after learning about Anna's pregnancy further establishes his wealth:

And Joachim went down right away and summoned his shepherds with these instructions: "Bring me ten lambs without spot or blemish, and ten lambs will be for the Lord God. Also, bring me twelve tender calves, and the twelve calves will be for the priests and the council of elders. Also, one hundred goats, and one hundred goats will be for the whole people" (4:5-7).

Despite this hospitality, he is reproached because of his childlessness: "And Reubel confronted Joachim and said, 'You're not allowed to offer your gifts first because you have not produced an Israelite child'" (1:5). In ancient Judaism childlessness was a circumstance of disgrace for individuals, since it was understood to be a sign of divine displeasure or punishment. For instance, Sarai thought that God was displeased with her and suggested to Abram that God prevented her from bearing children (Gen 16:2). Moreover, it was perceived that infertility was due to divine punishment: "Give them, O Lord—what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts" (Hos 9:14).

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<sup>48</sup>Smid, 34.

The name Anna is also rooted in the Septuagint. For instance, Tobit's wife is named Anna (Tob 1:20). Like Joachim, Tobit is also characterized as a pious Jew. However, the most likely parallel for Anna's name derives from the character Anna in 1 Samuel, since both women are portrayed as being distraught by their infertility: "Her husband said to her, 'Anna, why do weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?'" (1:8). In the PJ, Anna also laments her barren womb: "Now his wife Anna was mourning and lamenting on two counts: 'I lament my widowhood and I lament my childlessness'" (2:1). She further poetically compares her own sense of isolation and infertility to the fruitfulness surrounding her in nature:

Poor me! Who gave birth to me? What sort of womb bore me? For I was born under a curse in the eyes of the people of Israel. And I've been reviled and mocked and banished from the temple of my God. Poor me! What am I like? I am not like the birds of the sky, because even the birds of the sky reproduce in your presence, O Lord. Poor me! What am I like? I am not like the domestic animals, because even the animals of the earth reproduce in your presence, O Lord. Poor me! Who am I like? I am not like these waters, because even these waters are productive in your presence, O Lord. Poor me! What am I like? I am not like this earth, because even the earth produces its crop in season and blesses you, O Lord (3:2-8).

Mary's Magnificat, though some ancient sources attribute it to Elizabeth (Luke 46-55), is basically taken from Anna's song glorifying Samuel (1 Sam 2:1-10). The connection between Mary or Elizabeth and Samuel's Anna is drawn by Luke. In the PJ, Anna reappears, but in a different guise. Both Annas are ridiculed by other women because of their sterility. In the PJ, Anna's slave Juthine says to her: "The Lord God has made your womb sterile so you will not bear any children for Israel" (2:6). Likewise, Samuel's Anna is also ridiculed: "Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her because the Lord had closed her womb" (1 Sam 1:6).

Anna's lamentation was heard by God and a messenger of the Lord appeared to her, assuring her that the Lord had heard her prayers: "Suddenly a messenger of the Lord appeared to her and said: 'Anna, Anna, the Lord God has heard your prayer. You will conceive [συλλάψει] and give birth

[γεννήσεις], and your child will be talked about all over the world” (4:1). Janice Capel Anderson posits that there is a general pattern of conventional annunciation type-scenes in biblical narratives, i.e., they employ a literary convention found in Hebrew scriptures.<sup>49</sup> Anderson utilizes the ideas presented by Robert Alter describing typical annunciation scene characteristics: (1) the crisis of barrenness of the future mother, (2) the annunciation to the barren woman enacted through an angel, and (3) the conception and birth of a son. Anderson states:

In general, this convention indicates to the implied reader that there is something supernatural or extraordinary about the birth of a hero, foreshadowing his future role. The barrenness of the mother means that he can only be born with divine intervention and a divine message that indicates something of what lies ahead.<sup>50</sup>

Strikingly, the author of the PJ implements this literary convention, which was frequently adopted in biblical narratives to characterize the birth of male heroes, but in this instance a female child is the result of divine intervention.<sup>51</sup> The annunciation not only implies God’s direct intervention in the conception of Mary, but it also signifies that Mary is going to be an important historical figure. The notion of a miraculous or divine conception was not unusual in antiquity; it

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<sup>49</sup> Janice Capel Anderson, “Mary’s Difference: Gender and Patriarchy in the Birth Narratives,” *Journal of Religion* 67 (1987): 193.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> In Anderson’s analysis of the conventional annunciation type-scene she outlined the annunciations to Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament, while Alter discussed the annunciations to such women as Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel in the Hebrew Bible. In both examinations the result was a male hero. Neither Anderson nor Alter discuss the PJ in their analyses. For Alter’s discussion see Anderson, 193, note 20. Vorster offers a different perspective of conventional biblical annunciations. He examines Mary’s annunciation in Luke and the PJ, suggesting that there are five common motifs: (1) appearance of an angel; (2) fear of the visionary; (3) the divine message which includes a qualifying description of the visionary; the visionary is addressed by name and urged not to fear; a woman is to conceive and bear a child; the name to be given to the child, and the future accomplishments of this child; (4) objection by the visionary as to how this can be done, and (5) an answer to the visionary’s objection. Overall, Vorster suggests that the author of the PJ utilized the New Testament material to propagate the virginal conception of Jesus. See Vorster, “The Annunciation in the Protevangelium of James,” 43.

was frequently utilized for famous individuals.<sup>52</sup> Alexander the Great was thought to be conceived when Zeus took the form of a snake and coupled with Olympias. Likewise, Augustus the emperor of Rome was believed to be conceived by a god when his mother fell asleep in the temple of Apollo. This concept was also applied to famous women as well. For instance, the mother of Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut was thought to be impregnated by the god Amon.

After hearing that she would give birth, Anna vowed to dedicate her unborn child's life to the service of God: "And Anna said, 'As the Lord God lives, whether I give birth to a boy or a girl, I will offer it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it will serve him its whole life'" (4:2). Anna's vow, given its cultural context and the literary expectations, ensures that Mary will never marry but will remain a virgin her entire life. Smid suggests:

Anna's vow cuts off the possibility of a real marriage for Mary, for she dedicates Mary to the service of God for all the days of her life. Thus Mary belongs to the temple to some extent all her life long. Anna has already pledged Mary to be *aei-parthenos*.<sup>53</sup>

Anna's conception of Mary, although there is clearly a suggestion of divine intervention, does not appear to occur in any extraordinary way. There is no hint of an immaculate conception at this point of the narrative. The story assumes that Anna and Joachim for years had been trying to have children in the normal manner. The Greek verbs *συλλήψει* (you will conceive) and *γεννήσεις* (you will give birth) do not point toward anything unusual; the story assumes a biological conception (4:1). However, the text leaves open the possibility that Anna was divinely inseminated, that Joachim played no part in the conception:

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<sup>52</sup>The following three examples are from Lesley Hazelton, *Mary: A Flesh and Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 128.

<sup>53</sup>Smid, 49-50.

You see, a messenger of the Lord had come down to Joachim and said, “Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Get down from there. Look your wife Anna is/will be pregnant” (4:4).

A major issue in this debate revolves around a verb tense. Manuscripts and scholars differ over the form of the verb λαμβάνω, a difference that has theological implications. The problem involves ascertaining whether Anna will become pregnant in the future or is already pregnant at the time of Joachim’s return. If she is already pregnant, and if the pregnancy occurred after Joachim left, and if Anna did not have sex with anyone else, then the conception did not occur by male impregnation. The verb tense in the passage in question plays a part in the argument. The perfect form of λαμβάνω (εἴληφεν) suggests that the conception has already taken place, while the future form (λήψεται) implies that the conception will take place at some time in the future. Both forms occur in manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> This is a peculiar verb to use for pregnancy, but when used in conjunction with ἐν γαστρὶ (in the womb) the “receive” angle comes to mean “conceive.” Later in the text, the author does not use this verb to describe Mary’s conception of Jesus or her pregnancy, but instead chooses forms of συλλαμβάνω (conceive) and ὀγκώ (swell through pregnancy). In addition, the author clearly distinguishes the two conceptions, making it quite clear that Mary conceived Jesus by means of divine insemination: συλλήψει ἐκ λόγου αὐτοῦ (11:5).

De Strycker postulates that the conception has taken place and chooses εἴληφεν in his reconstruction, stating “l’auteur a donc certainement eu en vue une conception miraculeuse.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, M. Jugie prefers the perfect tense suggesting, “si la leçon eilèpha est la leçon primitive, le Protévangile paraît enseigner la conception virginale de Marie, et, du coup, écarte d’elle toute idée

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<sup>54</sup>For manuscript variations see Daniels, 2.151-152.

<sup>55</sup>De Strycker, 81.

de péché original.”<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Hock uses εἴληφεν, arguing that, “given the author’s stress on Mary’s purity throughout the document, it is probable that he understands Mary to have also been the product of a miraculous conception.”<sup>57</sup> L.M. Peretto agrees with these scholars, but offers an alternative interpretation, suggesting that Anna was already pregnant prior to Joachim’s departure.<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, Amann endorses the future tense λήψεται as an original reading, suggesting:

Si l’auteur du Protévangile a cru à la conception virginale de sainte Anne, si en la rapportant il s’est fait sur ce point l’écho de la tradition et de la piété populaire, il faut le ranger parmi les tout premiers défenseurs de l’Immaculée Conception; il faut reconnaître de plus que cette idée a dans la tradition catholique des racines beaucoup plus profondes qu’on ne le suppose ordinairement.<sup>59</sup>

What does the narrative tell us about Anna and Joachim’s relationship and Mary’s conception to offer support to any of these views? The text implies that Anna and Joachim had a loving and active sexual relationship, trying in vain for years to have a child. Anna’s lamentations about her barrenness (3:1-8) and Joachim’s departure to the wilderness to pray and fast (1:9-11) signify the magnitude of their joint despair. The notion that they had a loving marriage is indicated in the narrative by Anna’s actions. She not only mourns her infertile womb, but also her husband’s absence (2:1). In addition, when Joachim returns from the wilderness, Anna waits for him at the gate and throws her arms around his neck, welcoming him home (4:9).

Anna’s conception of Mary is first mentioned in the narrative while Anna was in the garden lamenting. A messenger of the Lord appears to her telling her that she will conceive and give birth

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<sup>56</sup>Cited from Smid, 41. Jugie’s “La conception virginale” seems to overstate a situation where Anna and Joachim have apparently enjoyed a long, active sexual life together.

<sup>57</sup>Hock, 39.

<sup>58</sup>Cited from Smid, 41.

<sup>59</sup>Amann, 17.

(4:1). The text immediately indicates that she is then told by two messengers that Joachim was returning home from the wilderness, since a messenger had previously come to him, telling him that Anna will conceive/has conceived (4:3-4). When Joachim returns, Anna meets him and says, "Now I know the Lord has blessed me greatly. This widow is no longer a widow, and I, once childless, will conceive/ have conceived" (4:9).<sup>60</sup> Joachim then rests on his first day home (4:10).<sup>61</sup> The following day he offers his gifts to the Temple, perceiving that the Lord had acquitted him from his sins (5:1-3). Lastly, the narrative says that after a completed period of time, Anna gives birth in the ninth month (5:5).

The most likely explanation for Anna's conception, according to the PJ narrative, is that she conceived some time after Joachim returned home. To be sure, she did not conceive before Joachim departed for the wilderness, since the text overwhelmingly suggests that Anna was informed that she would conceive at some time in the future (4:1).<sup>62</sup> In addition, chronologically, as the author narrates the story, it makes sense that Anna conceived after his return: prior to Anna's own annunciation, Joachim is told that Anna would conceive in the future (4:4). Anna is informed only after Joachim that she will conceive. Therefore, Mary was not divinely conceived as many scholars have proposed, but conceived through a sexual relationship. Overall, the PJ does not provide the textual or manuscript support for an unusual conception.

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<sup>60</sup>The verb tense also varies among the manuscripts in this verse. It is inconclusive whether or not the author intended εἴληφα or λήψομαι.

<sup>61</sup>Hock notes that some scholars base their decision for a future tense (will conceive) as an original reading, based on the idea that ἀνεπαύσατο (rested) has sexual connotations. This is unlikely support, since it is also used in 15:1 where it has no such meaning. In both instances it most likely means that Joachim or Joseph came home and rested from their weariness. See Hock, 39.

<sup>62</sup>There are few variations of the verb form in the manuscripts for συλλήψει and γεννήσεις in 4:1. It makes the most sense to conclude that the author also intended future forms for the subsequent verbs in 4:4 and 4:9. For manuscript variations see Daniels, 2.134-136.



**3.4.2 Birth, Infancy and Childhood**

In addition to Mary's ancestry and conception, the narrative describes her birth. After a gestation of nine months, Anna gives birth to Mary (5:5). Anna is elated with the birth of her daughter saying, "I have been greatly honoured this day" (5:8). Anna fulfills the required Jewish prescriptions for purification after the birth of Mary: "When, however, the prescribed days were completed, Anna cleansed herself of the flow of blood. And she offered her breast to the infant and gave her the name Mary" (5:9-10).<sup>63</sup> Rites of purification, outlined in Leviticus, suggest that women are in a state of uncleanness because of their bodily discharge after birth. After the days of purification were completed, women were required to offer a sacrifice, to complete the purification process:

If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are complete. If she bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days. When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. He shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement on her behalf; then she shall be clean from her flow of blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, male or female. If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for the burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf and she shall be clean (12:2-8).

The author of the PJ does not include all the purification rites since there is no mention of a sin offering. This likely demonstrates his unfamiliarity with first-century Jewish Temple practices. This could reflect his non-Jewish background, or the fact that the text was written after the Temple

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<sup>63</sup>Only 17 manuscripts specify the nature of Anna's cleansing: τῆς ἀφέδρου [of childbirth] αὐτῆς. See Daniels, 1.206.

had been destroyed. It could also reflect literary dependency, since Luke also condenses and misrepresents the ritual practices undergone by Mary (Luke 2:22-24). In addition, the biblical purification laws might have been interpreted differently in the first and second centuries.

The PJ provides a brief account of Mary at the age of six months. The special nature and upbringing of the child is emphasized in this account. Mary is depicted as no ordinary child. Her extraordinary character is accentuated throughout the narrative. At six months, Anna stood her on the ground and Mary walked seven steps (6:2). The fact that she could stand and walk at this age is no ordinary feat, all the more so the significant “sacred” seven steps. Smid characterizes Mary as a “wonder child.”<sup>64</sup> Anna then picked up Mary and said, “As the Lord my God lives, you will never walk on this ground again until I take you into the Temple of the Lord” (6:3).

Anna transformed her own bedroom into a sanctuary (ἁγίασμα) for Mary, and she did not permit anything profane (κοινόν) or unclean (ἀκάθαρτον) to be eaten by Mary (6:4). The author does not describe what this room looked like. Rather, his interest was to create an environment of holy seclusion for Mary’s early years. Smid notes that “the holy, special, wonderful quality of Mary is made safe in every possible way.”<sup>65</sup> Further, Anna sent for the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews to amuse Mary (6:5). There is no evidence to suggest that a group of undefiled Hebrew women existed as the author suggests. The crucial aspect that the author is trying establish is that Mary was far removed from the ordinary, polluted world.

All members of society were invited to the celebration of Mary’s first birthday (6:6). The author wants to demonstrate that spiritual leaders, elders and the entire community all participated

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<sup>64</sup>Smid, 49.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 50-51.

in this celebration. The great banquet given by Joachim was not a birthday celebration like our notion of contemporary birthdays. In fact, Jews likely did not celebrate *πρῶτος ἐνιαυτός*, or first year, as the author implies. However, the text notes that there was a feast signifying the weaning of a child: “The child grew and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned” (Gen 21:8). Smid suggests that the author connects this feast with the celebration of Mary’s birthday.<sup>66</sup> Mary received an unsurpassable blessing (*ἑσχάτην εὐλογίαν*), which anticipates her significant future role and symbolizes her prominence within the community:

Joachim presented the child to the priests, and they blessed her: “God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name which will be on the lips of future generations forever.” And everyone said, “So be it. Amen.” He presented her to the high priests, and they blessed her: “Most high God, look on this child and bless her with the ultimate blessing, one that cannot be surpassed” (6:7-9).

When Mary was two years of age Joachim suggested to Anna that Mary should be taken to the Temple in fulfillment of Anna’s vow (7:1). Anna was reluctant because Mary was so young: “Let’s wait until she is three, so she won’t miss her father or mother” (7:2). They both agreed to wait until she was three (7:2). Anna’s maternal hesitation parallels that of Samuel’s Anna, who also delayed handing over her child to the Temple:

But Anna did not go up, for she said to her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him up, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as one consecrated for all time” (1 Sam 1:22).

Subsequently, at the age of three Mary is taken to the Temple. Joachim sent for the undefiled Hebrew daughters to escort Mary to the Temple saying, “Let them each take a lamp and light it, so the child won’t turn back and have her heart captivated by things outside the Lord’s Temple” (7:5).

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 52.

Smid proposes that the daughters of the Hebrews serve a dual function in this scenario.<sup>67</sup> First, their torches distract Mary's attention while traveling to the Temple. Second, they form an honour guard through which she proceeds to the Temple, perhaps underscoring Mary's extraordinary character.

After Mary arrived at the Temple she was welcomed by the priest; he kissed her and blessed her, saying: "The Lord God has exalted your name among all generations" (7:7). This blessing anticipates her future important role and it conveys her elevated status with God. The priest further states: "In you the Lord will disclose his redemption to the people of Israel during the last days" (7:8). Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes that "if Mary is not herself declared to be Israel's salvation, she here receives a role that is simply astonishing."<sup>68</sup> Pondering the significance of the phrase ἐπί σοί, she postulates: "'Because of' Mary, God will reveal the redemption of Israel. What exactly the 'because of' (*epi*) means is unclear, but at the very least it assumes some substantive role for Mary."<sup>69</sup> Gaventa seems to be extrapolating that primarily because of Mary's surpassing purity, God chose to reveal the redemption to Israel. It is possible, though rare, that the preposition ἐπί used in conjunction with the dative personal pronoun σοί could be translated as "because of," but the majority of scholars do not utilize this translation. Hock translates ἐπί σοί as "in you"<sup>70</sup> and de

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>68</sup>Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 113.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Hock, 45.

Strycker uses “en toi,”<sup>71</sup> while Amann utilizes “par toi.”<sup>72</sup> Gaventa’s indication that Mary plays a decisive role in Israel’s redemption is tantalizing, though not convincing.

The narrative reports that the priest sat Mary on the third step of the altar, the Lord showered favour on her, and Mary danced (7:9-10). Ordinarily, only priests were able to approach the altar. The author’s depiction of the altar plausibly arises out of the description in Ezekiel 43:13-17, where the three levels are mentioned. Hock suggests that the notion that Mary danced may indicate a literary attempt to say that she eagerly accepted her new home.<sup>73</sup>

Joachim and Anna departed from the Temple pleased that Mary did not become upset: “Her parents left for home marveling and praising and glorifying the Lord God because the child did not look back at them” (8:1). The narrative no longer mentions Mary’s parents. Their function in the story was completed after delivering Mary to the Temple.

The author narrates that Mary spent the following nine years living at the Temple. Brown postulates that “Mary was pictured as having been raised in the Temple to become the most favoured maiden in the country.”<sup>74</sup> Her residency in the Temple is not recorded in any other early Christian or Jewish narratives. However, the image does reappear in the *Qu’ran*, a later non-Christian tradition:

When the wife of Imran said, “Lord, I have vowed to Thee, in dedication, what is within my womb. Receive Thou this from me; Thou hearest, and knowest.” And when she gave birth to her she said, “Lord, I have given birth to her, a female...And I have named her Mary, and commend her to Thee with her seed, to protect them

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<sup>71</sup>De Strycker, 101.

<sup>72</sup>Amann, 207.

<sup>73</sup>Hock, 45.

<sup>74</sup>Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 361, note 64.

from the accursed Satan.” Her Lord received the child with gracious favour, and by His goodness she grew up comely, Zachariah taking charge of her. Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the Sanctuary, he found her provisioned...And when the angels said, “Mary, God has chosen thee, and purified thee; He has chosen thee above all women” (3:31-37).<sup>75</sup>

There is no record of Temple wards in Jerusalem, but whatever might have existed was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The practice of temple wards was an integral part of organized religious life in Babylon, Greece and Rome. Families gave their daughters to the temple either as payment of financial debts or in fulfillment of religious vows. These girls were not temple virgins like the esteemed Vestals in Rome.<sup>76</sup> The position of temple wards was menial: they cleaned, hauled, sewed, fetched, cooked, swept and performed a host of everyday tasks. Their reality, suggests Hazelton, “was nothing at all like the fairy-tale one of the Book of James...far from being adored playthings, they were at best ignored, at worst abused.”<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Marina Warner posits that the custom of virgin priestesses was not Jewish but pagan, widespread throughout Syria.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, she suggests:

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<sup>75</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 49-51.

<sup>76</sup> For a description of vestal virgins see Mary Beard, “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 12-27.

<sup>77</sup> Hazelton also offers a possible “seed” to explain Mary’s pregnancy. She postulates that if Mary was indeed a Temple ward, the property of the Temple, it is not implausible to think that a member of the high priesthood sexually abused her, and that is how she found herself with child. See Hazelton, 142-143. Schaberg proposes a similar view as an explanation for Jesus’ illegitimacy. She suggests that Mary’s pregnancy was likely the result of a rape, during the period she was engaged to Joseph. See Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>78</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Vintage, 2000), 32.

The idea that a young girl, or a woman, could be dedicated to God's service and live in contact with the Holy of Holies in the care of the high priest would have been utterly abhorrent and sacrilegious to the Jews.<sup>79</sup>

Where, then, might the author have found the depiction of women living in the Temple? He may have built on images from the Septuagint. For instance, 1 Samuel 2:22 implies that women served at the entrance of the tent of the meeting. Also, Exodus 38:8 suggests that women assisted: "He made the basin of bronze with its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting." In addition, there is another possibility characterized in the New Testament which suggests that Anna, who was an elderly widow, stayed at the Temple day and night: "She never left the Temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer day and night" (Luke 2:37).

Very few scholars accept that Mary ever lived within the Temple. L. L. Lagrange, wanting to keep the idea but troubled by the historical details, proposed that Mary had a sleeping mat in a corner of the Temple court of the women.<sup>80</sup> However, Brown notes that the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan specifies that the women who prayed at the sanctuary returned home at night.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, women were not allowed in the inner court of the Temple in Jerusalem, but only the outer. Michael Jordan asserts that the author's depiction of Mary living in the Temple is not credible:

The account is implausible because, in Jewish law, women were not permitted to live in the Temple, and significantly, the matter is not reported by the canonical writers. The mere suggestion of a virgin female child raised by male priests would have been socially abhorrent to Jews. Mary should properly have been kept closeted

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Cited in Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 467, note 66.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

with her mother and the other women of her family, well away from public attention and, particularly, from the eyes of men.”<sup>82</sup>

Despite the improbability of Mary serving in the Temple as this text reports, it must be remembered that many canonical stories about Mary and Jesus also stretch the bounds of credibility. One might question why scholars who accept Mary’s virginal conception in Matthew or Luke, and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead in all the gospels—narratives that are not supported by external sources—are so quick to point the finger at the PJ’s Mary. Could the non-canonical status of this text give them the liberty to do so? To be sure, such stories are more mythical than historical in nature, but to criticize one is to criticize them all.

While living in the Temple, the author states that Mary “was fed there like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of a heavenly messenger” (8:2). Smid posits that the important issue for the author is the image of Mary being fed ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλου, since the aim was to portray Mary in complete isolation from the world.<sup>83</sup> Amann suggests that “ce n’est pas une femme en chair et en os, c’est déjà une créature spiritualisée hiératisée. Sa place n’est pas dans la vie ordinaire.”<sup>84</sup> In contrast, Hazelton responds adversely to the author’s images of Mary in this passage: “Never mind for now the disturbing image of a three year old dancing for her supper, or the idea of her as a caged dove, being fed and fattened.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Michael Jordan, *Mary: An Unauthorised Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001), 103-104.

<sup>83</sup>Smid, 65.

<sup>84</sup>Amann, 209.

<sup>85</sup>Hazelton, 142.



Mary's life in the Temple came to an end, the author tells us, when she turned twelve. The priests gathered together for a meeting and stated: "Mary has turned twelve in the Temple of the Lord. What should we do with her so she won't pollute the sanctuary of the Lord our God?" (8:3-4). At the onset of puberty Mary posed a threat to the Temple's purity, since menstruation would render the entire Temple unclean.

### 3.4.3 *Adolescence*

The problem posed by Mary's menses, we are told, was resolved by divine intervention. The PJ reports that Zechariah entered the Holy of Holies and prayed for a solution (8:8). A messenger of the Lord appeared to him, saying: "Zechariah, Zechariah, go out and assemble the widowers of the people and have them each bring a staff. She will become the wife of the one whom the Lord God shows a sign" (8:7-8).<sup>86</sup> It is tempting to interpret staff in a Freudian sense, but the meaning here is simpler. The image of a staff in this passage parallels numerous stories in the Septuagint, depicting instruments of divine will. For instance:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites, and get twelve staffs from them, one for each ancestral house, from all the leaders of their ancestral homes. Write each man's name on his staff, and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each ancestral house. Place them in the tent of meeting before the covenant, where I meet with you. And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout; thus I will put a stop to the complaints of the Israelites that they continually make against you. Moses spoke to the Israelites; and all their leaders gave him staffs; and the staff of Aaron was among theirs. So Moses placed the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the covenant. When Moses went into the tent of the covenant on the next day, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted. It put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds. Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the Lord to all the Israelites; and they looked, and each man took his staff (Num 17:1-9).

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<sup>86</sup>The majority of manuscripts state that Mary was to become the wife of the one chosen by a divine sign. In contrast, twelve manuscripts report that she was given to Joseph "for guarding," implying that Mary was not to become Joseph's wife. See Daniels, 1.199.

The widowers assembled and each individual handed over his staff to the high priest (9:1-3). Joseph is introduced into the narrative at this point of the story. A dove came out of his staff and landed on his head (9:6). Joseph is characterized as follows: “I already have sons and I am an old man” (9:8). This is the first time in the narrative that Mary is characterized as the virgin of the Lord, παρθένον κυρίου. In contrast to Zachariah’s previous conversation with a messenger of the Lord, who said that Mary was to become someone’s γυνή (8:8), we are now told that Joseph is chosen by lot to become Mary’s guardian, εἰς τήρησιν σεαυτῶ (9:7,11). The juxtaposition of Mary as νεάνις and Joseph as πρεσβύτης seems intended to lessen any possible notions of a sexual relationship. The marked age difference is also realized by Joseph, who claimed that he was afraid that he would become a laughing stock (περιγέλως) among the people of Israel (9:8). It is rather peculiar that Joseph would have any objections about Mary, based on their marked age difference, if he was indeed thinking about her in terms of guardianship. Perhaps his reaction adds support to the idea that Mary was to become his wife. Clearly, like the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the author wanted to establish that a sexual relationship did not exist between Mary and Joseph prior to Jesus’ conception.

To further ensure that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary, the author narrates that Joseph left Mary to build houses: “He said to her, ‘Mary, I have gotten you from the Temple of the Lord, but now I am leaving you at home. I am going away to build houses, but I will come back to you. The Lord will protect you’” (9:12). This absence, as Hock suggests, functions to avoid any indication that Joseph could have been intimate with Mary.<sup>87</sup> In addition, it suggests that Mary continued to live under divine protection.

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<sup>87</sup>Hock, 49.

During Joseph's absence, Mary continued to occupy her time with holy work, assisting with the making of a new veil for the Temple. Presumably, this is the veil that protected the Holy of Holies. Hock, referring to other sources, notes that there may have been some sort of convention in practice of having virgin weavers make the Temple veil.<sup>88</sup> A council of priests decided to make a veil for the Temple of the Lord, and the Temple assistants were sent out to search for true virgins (παρθένους τὰς ἀμιάντους) from the tribe of David to fulfill this task (10:1-3).<sup>89</sup> Seven weavers (eight including Mary) is not consistent with historical evidence. Hock suggests that the documentation implies that eighty and not eight women would have constructed the veil.<sup>90</sup>

After the Temple assistants completed their search, they returned with seven women (10:3). Surprisingly, since the author has previously suggested that all the community was aware of Mary's special status, she is not included among these women. The high priest sent out the Temple assistants to collect Mary after he recollected her: "And the high priest then remembered the girl (παιδός) Mary, that she, too, was from the tribe of David and was pure in God's eyes" (10:4). Interestingly, Mary is characterized in this passage as a child (παιδός), rather than a virgin of the Lord (παρθένον κυρίου), as designated in the previous section (9:7). Hock proposes that this inconsistency simply functions to contradict portrayals of Mary as Joseph's wife or γυνή (8:8).<sup>91</sup>

The high priest gathered the women together into the Temple of the Lord and ordered them to cast lots to determine which women would spin the different threads for the veil: "Cast lots for

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>89</sup>There is no historical record of a Tribe of David as the author implies.

<sup>90</sup>Hock, 51.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

me to decide who will spin which threads for the veil: the gold, the white, the linen, the silk, the violet, the scarlet, and the true purple" (10:7). The true purple and scarlet threads fell upon Mary (10:8). These threads are significant as Mary weaves the royal segments of the veil. This signifies Mary's connection to the Davidic lineage and demonstrates the Lord's intervention once again in Mary's life.

Mary's Davidic ancestry in the PJ, like the *Dialogue with Trypho*, the *Acts of Paul*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, diverges significantly from the genealogies illustrated in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, the author emphasizes that it was Joseph who was a direct descendant of the royal Davidic family, tracing the birth of Jesus from Joseph even further back to Abraham (1:1-17). Similarly, the Gospel of Luke depicts Joseph as originating from the house of David (1:26). Further, in the lineage of Jesus, Luke traces his birth from Joseph to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). Both these genealogies allow for an adoptive view of the paternity of Joseph, and consequently of the Davidic sonship of Jesus. Cullmann suggests that this view did not satisfy all early Christians. The solution was therefore to trace the lineage through Mary.<sup>92</sup> Roddy notes that Mary's Davidic ancestry fulfills Hebrew prophecy without depending on Joseph's descent.<sup>93</sup> The PJ solves a crucial problem. If Joseph had no part in Jesus' conception, then it was necessary to work Mary into the royal lineage, since the messiah, according to tradition, could only arise out of the house of David.<sup>94</sup>

So far, then, we have seen that the PJ has added the following information to the New Testament accounts about Mary: (1) Joachim and Anna were Mary's parents; (2) Anna's pregnancy

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<sup>92</sup>Cullmann, 417.

<sup>93</sup>Roddy, 36.

<sup>94</sup>For a description of the anticipated messianic figure of Davidic descent see Isaiah 9:2-7; 11:1-9.

resulted from divine intervention; (3) Mary was an extraordinary child; (4) she was raised in an environment of holy seclusion, being sheltered from worldly things; and (5) Mary lived in the Temple among the priesthood. Our text has also altered some information. We learn that Joseph was chosen by a divine sign to become either Mary's guardian or husband. In addition, the Davidic lineage is traced through Mary, not Joseph. The PJ has also reinforced a New Testament perspective: Joseph was not the father of Mary's child.

Returning to the narrative, we see that the purpose for Mary's extraordinary life comes to fruition during the annunciation scene.<sup>95</sup> While Mary was filling up her water jar, she heard a voice saying, "Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women" (11:1-2). Mary could not determine the origins of the voice and became terrified and returned home to spin (11:3-4). As she was spinning, a heavenly messenger appeared suddenly again, advising her not to be afraid (11:5). It is interesting that the author chose to portray Mary as frightened of the celestial being, considering that earlier on in the narrative she was fed by the hand of a heavenly messenger in the Temple of the Lord (8:2). Regardless, Mary is advised that she has found favour in the sight of the Lord and she is informed that she will "conceive [συλλάψει] by means of his word [ἐκ λόγου αὐτοῦ]" (11:5). Mary became doubtful as she listened to the messenger and questioned him, saying: "If I actually conceive by the Lord, the living God, will I also give birth the way women usually do?" (11:6). The messenger responds: "No, Mary, because the power of God will overshadow you [δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐπισκιάσει σοι]" (11:7). This annunciation account is basically a reiteration of the Lucan narrative. However, the question posed by Mary is different than the one described in the Gospel of Luke. In the canonical account, Mary asks only how the

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<sup>95</sup>See note 51 above for Vorster's discussion of this annunciation.

conception might take place, since she had no sexual relations with a man: “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’” (Luke 1:34).

Mary is further informed that she will give birth to a son who will be called “holy, son of the Most High” (11:7). At this point in the narrative we are introduced to Jesus. Mary is instructed to name her son: “And you will name him Jesus—the name means ‘he will save his people from their sins’” (11:9). She consented without further question and said to the messenger: “Here I am, the Lord’s slave before him. I pray that all you have told me comes true” (11:9). Mary’s response closely follows that of Luke: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (1:38). Both passages describe her as God’s δούλη.

Mary completed her task for the Temple veil and delivered it to the high priest who again praised her, saying: “Mary, the Lord God has extolled your name and so you will be blessed by all the generations of the earth” (12:2). Shortly afterwards, she went to visit her relative Elizabeth. When Mary arrived Elizabeth also appeared to be working on a portion of the Temple veil: “Elizabeth heard her, tossed aside the scarlet thread, ran to the door, and opened it for her” (12:4). This is a peculiar depiction of Elizabeth, since she was married to Zachariah, and the author previously indicated that only virgins were assigned the task of preparing threads for the Temple veil (10:13). Placing Elizabeth among the virgins is problematic. Hock proposes that the author wanted to portray Elizabeth as also preoccupied with virtuous works like Mary.<sup>96</sup> When Elizabeth saw Mary she blessed her, saying: “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should visit me? You see, the baby inside of me has jumped for joy and blessed you” (12:5). Elizabeth’s words are a loose paraphrase of what she says in Luke: “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord

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<sup>96</sup>Hock, 55.

comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy" (Luke 1:43-44). The author of the PJ does not mention the name or significance of Elizabeth's child, plausibly assuming that the audience is aware of John the Baptist's importance in the canonical accounts. However, Mary questions Elizabeth's greeting, looking up to the sky and saying, "Who am I, Lord, that every generation on earth will congratulate me?" (12:6). Again, Mary's response is a reconstruction of the Lucan narrative: "For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (1:48).

The narrative reports that Mary had already forgotten the mysteries which the heavenly messenger, who is now identified as Gabriel, had previously told her during the annunciation. We find this same lapse of memory in Luke's Gospel. The author indicates that Mary was sixteen years old when these mysterious things began to happen to her (12:9). The text does not account for the elapsed time between when Mary left the Temple at the age of twelve (8:3) to the conception. If Mary is sixteen years old, this implies that Joseph was away working for nearly three to four years, which is improbable. Manuscripts differ considerably regarding the age of Mary, indicating she was either twelve, fourteen, fifteen or seventeen.<sup>97</sup> Hock posits that if the accusations against Joseph of impregnating Mary are to be plausible, then Mary must be closer to twelve than sixteen.<sup>98</sup> De Strycker speculates, somewhat unconvincingly, that the author simply forgot what he had previously said about Mary's age: "En écrivant la phrase sur les seize ans, l'auteur n'a probablement plus songé à l'âge qu'il avait donné à Marie au moment de ses épousailles."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>See Daniels, 1.197-198.

<sup>98</sup>Hock, 55.

<sup>99</sup>De Strycker, 411.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for a period of three months (12:7). During this time her womb kept swelling day by day (12:8). The narrative suggests that Mary became frightened, returned home, and hid from the people of Israel (12:8). The notion that Mary hid herself from others may suggest that the community had perceived her as a dedicated Temple virgin, and Mary subsequently could not account for her pregnancy. However, it is tenable that the author just wanted to account for the lapse in time between her visit with Elizabeth and Joseph's return. In this way, Mary's pregnancy continues to go unnoticed. Moreover, the same storyline occurs in Luke, where secrecy leads to narrative tension and climax.

Joseph returned from his work when Mary was in her sixth month and discovered that she was pregnant (13:1). Joseph suspects the worst case scenario and reproaches himself, imagining that Mary was seduced, and compares his crisis to the Adam and Eve allegory:

He struck himself in the face, threw himself to the ground on sackcloth, and began to cry bitterly, "What sort of face should I present to the Lord God? What prayer can I say on her behalf since I received her as a virgin from the Temple of the Lord God and did not protect her? Who has set this trap for me? Who has done this evil deed in my house? Who has lured this virgin away from me and violated her? The story of Adam has been repeated in my case, hasn't it? For just as Adam was praying when the serpent came and found Eve alone, deceived her, and corrupted her, so the same thing has happened to me" (13:2-5).

Joseph summoned Mary and confronted her, reminding her about her special status as a Temple virgin: "God has taken a special interest in you—how could you have done this?" (13:6-7). Joseph further reminded Mary about her extraordinary childhood: "Why have you brought shame upon yourself, you who were raised in the Holy of Holies and fed by a heavenly messenger?" (13:7). Mary defended her chastity, stating: "I am innocent. I have not had sex with any man" (13:8). Her response is similar to the Lucan version: "How can this be since I do not know a man?" (1:34). Joseph asked her to explain how her pregnancy occurred (13:9), and Mary replied that she had no



idea how she became pregnant: “As the Lord my God lives, I do not know where it came from” (13:10). Her answer corresponds with her “forgetfulness of the mysteries,” which the heavenly messenger Gabriel had told her earlier in the narrative (12:6).

Joseph became frightened and did not speak to Mary (14:1). He pondered what to do about his situation, saying to himself:

If I try to cover up her sin, I will end up going against the law of the Lord. And if I disclose her condition to the people of Israel, I am afraid that the child inside her might be heaven sent and I will end up handing innocent blood over to a death sentence. So, what should I do with her? I know, I will divorce her quietly (14:2-4).

This passage seems to be a loose rendering of the Matthean account: “Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly” (1:19). However, the integration of the Matthean material is problematic in the PJ, if indeed Mary is Joseph’s guardian. The reference to divorce is inappropriate in this context, since the author has reinforced numerous times that Mary was Joseph’s ward, not his wife. Hock suggests that the word translated “divorce” should be rendered more generally as “release” or “dismiss,” meaning simply “I will get rid of her.”<sup>100</sup> To be sure, the Greek verb ἀπολύω can be defined as a dissolving of a marital relationship, but it can also be translated simply as dismissing or sending someone away.

Joseph resolves to protect Mary after a messenger of the Lord appears to him in a dream advising him to “not be afraid of this girl, because the child in her is the holy spirit’s doing. She will have a son and you will name him Jesus—the name means ‘he will save his people from their sins’” (14:5-6). These verses correspond to Matthew 1:20-21, which are also addressed directly to Joseph. In Luke, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, rather than Joseph (1:26-38).

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<sup>100</sup>Hock, 57.

Regardless, Joseph commits himself to protect Mary (14:8). The narrative suggested previously that Mary was placed under the care and protection of Joseph by the priests (9:7). However, Joseph disregarded his guardianship obligations and handed over this responsibility to the Lord (9:12). Now, only after Joseph has confronted Mary's pregnancy and his apparent failure to protect her does Joseph fully accept his role as her guardian. Alternatively, in Luke's account, Joseph awoke and took Mary as his wife (1:24).

Jane Schaberg advances that there are motifs in the PJ that parallel another early first century narrative: *2 Enoch*.<sup>101</sup> She suggests that these similarities indicate that "the two works have a similar milieu, and their authors were in some sense in dialogue with each other."<sup>102</sup> The birth of the super human figure of Melchizedek in *2 Enoch* contains striking similarities to Mary's circumstances. Both stories suggest an extraordinary conception in the absence of the husband. Joseph was away working when Mary conceived Jesus (13:1). Similarly, in *2 Enoch* Sopanim conceived Melchizedek, while her husband Nir was away working: "She conceived in her womb, but Nir the priest had not slept with her, nor had he touched her, from the day that the Lord had appointed him to conduct the liturgy in front of the people" (71:2). Both women concealed their pregnancy from others. Mary hid herself from the people of Israel because she was frightened (12:8). Likewise, Sopanim concealed her pregnancy: "And when Sopanim saw her pregnancy, she was ashamed and embarrassed, and she hid herself during all the days of her pregnancy" (71:3). In both stories the direct accusation by the husband of his wife's impurity and the woman's insistence of innocence are modeled. In the PJ, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant and confronted her (13:2-4). In

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<sup>101</sup>English translations of *2 Enoch* are from Charlesworth, 1:204-213.

<sup>102</sup>Schaberg, 190.

response, Mary pleaded her innocence, claiming that she did not know how her pregnancy occurred (12:6; 13:9-10). In 2 *Enoch*, Nir and Sopanim's situation is similar, though Sopanim is characterized as an older woman beyond the age of bearing children:<sup>103</sup>

And Nir saw her, and he became very ashamed. And he said to her, "What is this you have done, O wife? And why have you disgraced me in front of the face of these people? And now, depart from me, and go where you began the disgrace of your womb, so that I might not defile my hand on account of you, and sin in front of the face of the Lord." And Sopanim answered Nir, her husband, saying, "O my Lord! Behold, it is the time of my old age, and there was not in me any ardor of youth and I do not know how the indecency of my womb has been conceived" (71:6-7).

Unlike the canonical infancy narratives, the author of the PJ inserts an event as a means to confirm Mary's virginal conception of Jesus. Her pregnancy was disclosed to the community after the scholar Annas went to visit Joseph to find out why Joseph had not attended the assembly (15:1). He departed quickly to inform the high priest about Joseph's actions: "You remember Joseph, don't you—the man you yourself vouched for? Well, he has committed a serious offence" (15:4). Annas told the high priest that Joseph had violated the virgin, having his way with her, without disclosing his action to the people of Israel (15:6). Explicitly, Annas accuses Joseph of having a sexual relationship with Mary. This accusation assumes that Joseph could have treated Mary as his wife, if he had informed the community prior to having sex with her. This assumption is rather bizarre, since the high priest confined Joseph's role to that of a guardian (9:7). However, there are several instances in this narrative which have implied that Mary was Joseph's wife.

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<sup>103</sup>The depiction of Sopanim as an older barren woman is more reminiscent of Luke's Elizabeth and the PJ's Anna than Mary's depiction as a young virgin.

The Temple assistants were sent out to investigate Annas' accusation and both Joseph and Mary were brought to the high priest. They are interrogated by the high priest—each proclaiming their innocence.

“Mary, why have you done this?” the high priest asked her. “Why have you humiliated yourself? Have you forgotten the Lord your God, you who were raised in the Holy of the Holies and were fed by heavenly messengers. You of all people, who heard their hymns and danced for them—why have you done this?” And she wept bitterly: “As the Lord God lives, I stand innocent before him. Believe me, I have not had sex with any man.” And the high priest said, “Joseph, why have you done this?” And Joseph said, “As the Lord lives, I am innocent where she is concerned” (15:10-15).

The high priest decided to give them the “Lord’s drink test” as a means to disclose their sin (16:3). Both Joseph and Mary were required to partake in this curious trial also known as “Drinking the Bitter Waters” or the *me hammarim ham’ar rim*, since the religious authorities were not convinced of their innocence. This ritual was designed to establish guilt or innocence of a woman accused of sexual misconduct. The entire ordeal is outlined in Numbers 5:16-31:

Then the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord; the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. The priest shall set the woman before the Lord, dishevel the woman’s hair, and place in her hands the grain offering of remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy. In his own hand the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse. Then the priest shall make her take an oath, saying, “If no man has lain with you, if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while under your husband’s authority, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings the curse. But if you have gone astray while under your husband’s authority, if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has had intercourse with you,”—let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse and say to the woman—“the Lord make you an execration and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your uterus drop, your womb discharge; now may this water that brings the curse enter your bowels and make your womb discharge, your uterus drop!” And the woman shall say, “Amen, Amen” (5:16-22).

The mentioning of this trial is important for two reasons. First, the outcome supports the notion that Joseph played no part in fathering Mary’s child. Second, it counters Jewish slander at that

time, which suggested that Mary's pregnancy was the result of an adulterous relationship. This test, as far as we know, was not administered to men. To be sure, the narrative implies that the trial was for women only. In antiquity, it was understood that if a woman was guilty, this potion would have effects which would signify the Lord's verdict of judgement—meaning if she began to menstruate (the curse) during this trial, she was deemed guilty of sexual misconduct. Moreover, Mach suggests that “according to the Bible and Jewish tradition the bitter water is given to the wife only to find out whether she has betrayed her husband or not.”<sup>104</sup> Warner posits that the author adapted the trial to fit the context of Mary's consecrated virginity rather than her infidelity—the priests try her and Joseph because they might have sinned together.<sup>105</sup>

Mary and Joseph pass this test. The text reports that they were given the potion and sent off to the wilderness (16:4-5). When they returned unharmed people were astounded: “And everyone was surprised because their sin had not been revealed” (16:6). In response, the priest said: “If the Lord God has not exposed your sin, then neither do I condemn you” (16:7). What is interesting here is that the priest still seems to believe that Mary and Joseph slept together. His statement implies that since God chose not to punish them for it, he also will not. Hock suggests that this public exoneration implicitly sanctions the idea that Mary's unborn child is of the Holy Spirit.<sup>106</sup>

Like the Lucan account (2:1), the author begins his narrative of the birth of Jesus with a reference to the enrollment order of Augustus: “Now an order came from the Emperor Augustus that

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<sup>104</sup>Mach, 217.

<sup>105</sup>Warner, 32.

<sup>106</sup>Hock, 61.

everybody in Bethlehem of Judea be enrolled in the census" (17:1). Unlike Luke, the PJ's author inserts another scene where Joseph ponders how to register Mary:

And Joseph wondered, "I will enroll my sons, but what am I going to do with the girl? How will I enroll her? As my wife? I am ashamed to do that. As my daughter? The people of Israel know she is not my daughter. How this is to be decided depends on the Lord" (17:2-4).

As they were traveling toward Bethlehem, Joseph noticed that Mary was behaving strangely. He said to her: "Mary, what is going on with you? One minute I see you laughing and the next minute you are sulking" (17:8). Mary responded saying, "Joseph, it is because I imagine two peoples in front of me, one weeping and mourning and the other celebrating and jumping for joy" (17:9). Her prophetic visions seem to anticipate the divisions that would be caused by Jesus between Christianity and Judaism. The image of two peoples parallels the story in Genesis of Rebekah's sons Esau and Jacob: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23). The contrasting images of weeping and celebrating most likely were borrowed from Luke, where Simeon said to Mary: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel" (2:34). In reference to Mary's prophetic visions, Cunneen postulates:

The popularity of the Book of James again shows the instinctive tendency of early Christians to see the birth of Jesus as the turning point of religious history; it also reveals how they read Scripture backwards, searching the Hebrew Bible for prefigurations of Christian meaning.<sup>107</sup>

Halfway through their journey to Bethlehem, Mary went into labour. Smid notes that the author remains silent about her labour pains—seemingly, Mary does not experience the throes of

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<sup>107</sup>Cunneen, 73.

childbirth.<sup>108</sup> Mary asked Joseph to help her down from the donkey saying that “the child inside me is about to be born” (17:10). Joseph helped her down, asking her: “Where will I take you to give you some privacy, since this place is out in the open?” (17:11). The author narrates that Joseph found a nearby cave and took her inside (18:1). He stationed his sons outside to guard her and went in search of a Hebrew midwife in the country around Bethlehem (18:2).

This is a significant departure from the canonical accounts which situate Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4-6). In addition, the birth in a cave (σπήλαιον) diverges from the canonical narratives. In Matthew, Jesus was born in a house, τὴν οἰκίαν (2:11), while Luke placed his birth in the stable of an inn, ἀνέκλιεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ (2:7). However, both the location and cave imagery would appear to be significant to the author. The author possibly was thinking about the matriarch Rachel while writing this section. According to the Genesis story, Rachel gave birth to Benjamin while en route to Bethlehem, then died after his birth and was buried in this general area (35:16-20). C. Kopp suggests:

This spot lay half-way between the place of the vision and Bethlehem. That brings us around the tomb of Rachel, at 7.5 kilometers along the road. This James was certainly thinking of Rachel in his account. As she bore Benjamin by the way in painful labour, a midwife assisting her, so a similar lot fell to the matriarch of the new Israel. The writer knew from his sources that Rachel’s tomb lay in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, but also that the place where Jesus was born was worshiped near Bethlehem.<sup>109</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the ancient tradition of the birth of Jesus in a cave is found in the writings of Justin Martyr. The original source of this story cannot be ascertained, but most likely it emerged very early from oral tradition. In the Eastern Church, the nativity does not take place in a

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<sup>108</sup>Smid, 122.

<sup>109</sup>Cited from Smid, 123-124.

house or stable, but in a grotto. Smid notes that in liturgy and iconography, the birth in a cave is so prevalent that it was never superseded by the idea of a house.<sup>110</sup> In addition, Benz regards it as

an ancient tradition acknowledged by the church, which maintained itself against the statements in the canonical gospels, and remained unimpaired, at any rate in the Byzantine state church and in the ancient schismatic churches of the East.<sup>111</sup>

The PJ tells us that Joseph returned to the cave with a midwife to assist Mary with the birth. He discovered a woman coming down from the hill country and told her that he was looking for a midwife (19:1-2). She asked who was having the baby in the cave, and Joseph responded that it was Mary who was his “intended” or fiancé, ἡ μεμνηστευμένη μοι (19:6). Again, the author confirms that Mary is not Joseph’s wife. In response to the woman, Joseph asserts: “She is Mary, who was raised in the Temple of the Lord; I obtained her by lot as my wife. But she is not really my wife; she is pregnant by the holy spirit” (19:8-9).

The PJ reports that the birth of Mary’s child was extraordinary. Clearly, as previously foretold to Mary during the annunciation, the divine facilitates the birth (11:7). As Joseph, his sons, and the midwife stood at the entrance of the cave, a dark cloud overshadowed it (19:13). In this instance, the theophany is depicted as νεφέλη σκοτεινή, covering (ἐπισκιάζουσα) the cave. This manifestation of the divine is similar to the Exodus story when God appeared in the imagery of a thunder and lightening storm on Mount Sinai:

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightening, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently (Exod 19:16-18).

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.



After witnessing this phenomenon the midwife stated: “I have really been privileged, because today my eyes have seen a miracle in that salvation has come to Israel” (19:14). Her response parallels Simeon’s praise to God while holding the infant Jesus at the Temple: “For my eyes have seen your salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32). The dark cloud was replaced by an intense light (φῶς μέγα), radiating from the entrance of the cave (19:15). This light is depicted as being so bright that it blinded them from viewing the actual birth of Jesus. After a while the light receded, revealing an infant at Mary’s breast (19:16). The author implies that Mary gave birth without any assistance from a midwife—as in the annunciation account, Mary is alone for the birth. This theme is also echoed in the *Acts of Peter*: “And another prophet says in the Father’s honour, ‘We have neither heard her voice, nor is a midwife come in’” (24:7).<sup>112</sup>

In addition, unlike Anna, Mary feeds her child immediately without performing the prescribed purification ritual for women after childbirth, perhaps emphasizing Mary’s extraordinary character. Moreover, the PJ implies that Mary gave birth without experiencing pain. This image is also depicted in the *Odes of Solomon*:<sup>113</sup>

The womb of the Virgin took it, and she received conception and brought forth; and the Virgin became a Mother with great mercy; and she travailed and brought forth a Son without incurring pain. And it did not happen without purpose, and she had not sought a midwife, for He brought her to bear. She brought forth, as a man, of her own will, and she brought Him forth as a sign, and acquired Him in great power. And she loved Him in salvation, and guarded him in kindness, and showed Him in majesty (19:6-11).

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<sup>112</sup>This theme is also found in the *Odes of Solomon* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

<sup>113</sup>The notion of a painless birth is also found in the *Acts of Peter* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

In the PJ, there is no indication that the midwife assisted Mary after the birth of Jesus.<sup>114</sup> What happened to the blood, afterbirth or cutting of the umbilical cord? These things are associated with the birth of almost every living creature. Does Jesus just miraculously appear? Does Mary remain intact? The *Gospel of Peter* poses these same issues: “She has given birth and has not given birth” (23:4). The PJ leaves open the possibility that Jesus was not physically born. However, this notion is immediately restrained after a physical examination is performed on Mary.

The midwife left the cave and met another woman named Salome, exclaiming to her: “Salome, Salome, let me tell you about a new marvel: a virgin has given birth, and you know that is impossible!” (19:18). The author’s notions about a virgin birth are rooted in Matthew and Luke, which use Isaiah’s prophetic statement: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall call him Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). The author of the PJ transforms the canonical notions of παρθένος to mean that Mary retains her virginity *in partu*, or physically intact while giving birth to Jesus—an expansion of Matthew’s juxtaposition of the prophetic virgin and Luke’s biological virgin.

In addition, the author moves much further in his perception of παρθένος, extending it to mean that Mary preserved her virginity even after the birth of Jesus. This characterization is confirmed by Salome who did not believe the midwife’s story: “As the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and examine her, I will never believe that a virgin has given birth” (19:19).<sup>115</sup> The midwife entered the cave and told Mary to position herself for an examination since she was facing

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<sup>114</sup>E. Cothenet suggests that the absence of a midwife may be due to the influence of the Jewish Haggadah. The *Midrash Rabbah* reports that the mother of Moses did not experience pain during her pregnancy or while giving birth. See Buck, 394.

<sup>115</sup>The phrase “unless I insert my finger” recalls the doubting Thomas story in John 20:24-29. Like Thomas, Salome is initially skeptical, but eventually comes to “believe.”

a serious test (20:1). Just as the high priest tested Mary to verify that her pregnancy was not caused by sexual relations (15:10-13; 16:5), Salome confirmed that Mary continued to be a virgin after the birth of her son. After Mary positioned herself, Salome performed a physical examination on her, presumably discovering an intact hymen—*virginitas post partum* (20:2). This idea is also reported by the authors of the *Acts of Peter* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

As a consequence of Salome's doubt and her presumption in touching Mary, her hand was consumed by fire: "I will be damned because of my transgression and my disbelief; I have put the living God on trial. Look my hand is disappearing! It is being consumed by flames!" (20:3-4). This image is reminiscent of the story of Uzzah from 2 Samuel when God turned his wrath toward him:

When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzziah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God (2 Sam 6:6-7).

Salome's punishment is also reminiscent of the penalty inflicted on Luke's Zechariah, who was made speechless after questioning God's messenger Gabriel: "But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur" (1:20). Only after John the Baptist was born and Zechariah wrote his son's name on a tablet did he regain his speech (1:64).

Unlike Uzzah but like Zechariah, Salome does not die for her violation. She fell on her knees and pleaded for the Lord's mercy (20:5-7). A messenger of the Lord appeared, instructing her: "Hold out your hand to the child and pick him up, and then you will have salvation and joy" (20:9). She approached the infant, picking him up, saying: "I will worship him because he has been born to be king of Israel" (20:10). For the author, Jesus' abilities to heal occur immediately after birth—Mary

does not facilitate this miracle. Salome is instantly healed and she leaves the cave vindicated (20:11).

Graef posits that the Salome story “together with the less popular Ascension of Isaiah, is the literary source for the ‘virginity *in partu*.’”<sup>116</sup> The *Ascension of Isaiah* narrates that “Mary straightaway looked with her eyes and saw a small babe. And after she had been astonished, her womb was found as formerly before she had conceived” (11:8). In other words, she remained intact after having given birth. P. Fidelis Buck, in his analysis of the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Odes of Solomon*, affirms that the notion of Mary’s perpetual virginity was evident very early in the Christian tradition:

There can be no doubt, therefore, that at about 110 A.D. the belief in the Virgin birth was no new thing; it was not a thing that had to be established by argument, but had its roots deep in the life of the Church.”<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, stories about virginity during and after childbirth were not distinctive to Christianity. Zacharias Thundy notes that in both the Christian and Buddhist traditions the virgin mother is understood to be “morally and spiritually perfect or untouched by sin *ante partum*, *in partu*, and *post partum*.”<sup>118</sup> In his analysis, he posits that “maybe it is time that Christian scholars looked into the Buddhist tradition for the source of the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary.”<sup>119</sup> He further suggests that there are numerous parallels between the Christian infancy narratives and the Buddhist and Hindu texts, proposing that “the core tradition of the various Indian birth stories

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<sup>116</sup>Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 37.

<sup>117</sup>Buck, 397-398. He sets the *terminus ad quem* at 110 CE based on his conclusions that the *Odes of Solomon* and *Ascension of Isaiah* were written around the year 100 CE, before Ignatius in 110 CE.

<sup>118</sup>Thundy, 86.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

permeate the entire infancy narratives.”<sup>120</sup> For instance, in the *Buddhacarita* the birth of the Buddha is also characterized as virginal and painless, though not necessarily vaginal as was portrayed in Mary’s birth of Jesus:

Then as soon as Pushya became propitious, from the side of the queen, who was hallowed by her vows, a son was born for the weal of the world, without her suffering either pain or illness. As was the birth of Aurva from the thigh, of Prthu from the hand, of Mandhatr, the peer of Indra, from the head, of Kakshivat from the armpit, one such wise was his birth.<sup>121</sup>

The Buddhist and Hindu connection is not the only one. There are numerous other stories about virgin births. Many of these myths emerged much earlier than the Buddhist, Hindu or Christian stories—for example, the Sumerian goddess Inanna, who was given the title “Queen of Heaven and Earth.”<sup>122</sup> How do we explain these parallels? There could be some historical links, and they could be simply rooted in “male fantasies,” since these stories were often written by men. More conceivably, the concept of a virgin birth may be rooted in human nature, emerging from individuals’ imaginations throughout various cultures and religious traditions, as an attempt to grasp and validate the birth of a divine or significant figure.

The PJ only refers to Mary on two more occasions in the remaining chapters of the narrative. First, like the Gospel of Matthew (2:1-11), Mary is mentioned during the visit of the astrologers at the house, but she does not play any significant role other than being the mother of Jesus: “After the astrologers saw him with his mother Mary, they took gifts out of their pouches—gold, pure incense,

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>122</sup>For other examples see Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (New York: Penguin, 1991).

and myrrh" (21:11). In the Lucan account, it was shepherds who visited Mary, Joseph and the infant lying in a manger (2:8-20).

The second instance occurs during the narration of the slaughter of the infants by Herod. This account seems to be dependent on the Gospel of Matthew, but with a different twist. In Matthew, Joseph was solely responsible for protecting Mary and Jesus. In a dream, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, advising him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt as a means to avoid the slaughter (2:13-15). In the PJ, we are told, Mary protected her son from the imminent threat of Herod's soldiers: "When Mary heard that the infants were being killed, she was frightened and took her child, wrapped him in strips of cloth, and put him in a feeding trough used by cattle" (22:3-4).

### **3.5 Concluding Remarks**

So, having reviewed the PJ narrative about Mary, with accompanying Christian and Jewish texts, the following can be discerned about Mary. During the first two centuries, as I have outlined, Mary was mentioned only infrequently in early Christian narratives, primarily in relation to her son. For the majority of early Christian writers, Mary's role appears to be insignificant. The PJ, however, assigns Mary an instrumental role in the Christian tradition. Moreover, this narrative is the only early Christian source that we know of to date which portrays Mary as a main character.

Before turning to the PJ's Mary, let us recapitulate some of the major themes about Mary in other early Christian texts. In the first century, the canonical sources did not tell us much about her. Two major themes emerged: motherhood and virginity. The second century apologetic and apostolic writers developed the canonical themes and added two others: Mary as the second Eve and Mary as a symbol of the Church. Non-canonical texts continued canonical themes, but extended

Mary's virginity to include virginity after birth. In some ways the PJ follows these traditions, but in other ways it remains independent, developing its own motifs.

The PJ provides missing biographical details about Mary's life. To be sure, these details should not necessarily be understood as historically accurate, but they are important because they represent how some early Christians perceived Mary. The author began his story by constructing a wondrous origin and childhood for Mary, revolving around the childlessness of her parents Joachim and Anna. Mary is allotted both familial wealth and royal lineage.

Throughout the narrative, she is portrayed as no ordinary female child, displaying extraordinary qualities at a very young age. Mary even deviates from cultural norms, such as living in the Temple among the priests. In this text, Mary is conceived by means of divine intervention. Following biblical and other religious/cultural traditions, Mary's extraordinary conception signified that she was to play an important historical role. To be sure, the PJ's Mary is allotted the status of a heroine.

Mary's character is rarely defined in terms of familial roles. For instance, she is never referred to as the daughter of Joachim and Anna. Like John's Jesus, Mary is an extra-normal individual for whom such restrictive roles would not be possible. Instead, the author generally mentions her by name. Occasionally, she is defined as a wife or mother. The images of Mary as Joseph's wife in this narrative are often contradictory, and it is not always clear whether or not the author perceived Mary to be Joseph's wife, fiancé, or ward. Although the birth of Jesus is an important consequence of this narrative, Mary's motherhood receives little attention from the author. When Mary's role is defined in terms of motherhood, she is an exceptional mother, saving her son from certain death.

Mary's extraordinary virginity is a significant multifaceted theme in this narrative. She is characterized as a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception, during pregnancy, and even after the birth of her child. This characterization is not unique to the PJ, since it is mentioned in other non-canonical texts. What is distinctive in this text is the repeated examination and certification of Mary's status as a virgin.

What might have been some of the underlying motivations for the author's characterization of Mary as an extraordinary individual, heroine, and perpetual virgin? These images are utilized primarily as a means to underscore Mary's extraordinary purity. In this narrative, Mary is portrayed as purer than any other woman who ever existed, except perhaps the primordial woman: Eve. This purity links Mary to God's original creation in the Genesis stories. Turning now to Chapter 4, I would like to develop this central theme of Mary's purity, exploring its implications.



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**Chapter 4**  
**Embodiment of Sacred Purity: The Making of the Virgin Mary**

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*That angel who greets you with 'Ave'*  
*Reverses sinful Eva's name.*  
*Lead us back, O holy Virgin,*  
*Whence the falling sinner came.<sup>1</sup>*

—Peter Damian

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, a much more detailed representation of Mary emerges in the *Protevangelium of James* (PJ) than in other early Christian narratives. In this text Mary is the primary character—not Jesus. In fact, if a reader of this story was unfamiliar with the canonical stories about Jesus, they might reasonably conclude that Mary was the holy figure and that Jesus' holiness arises out of his mother, since very little is said about him in the PJ.

Central to the author's elevated depiction of Mary is her purity—a theme which permeates the entire narrative. Scholars have not failed to notice this theme, although it is not always clear that they understand “purity” in exactly the same way. Gaventa posits that the narrative itself “abounds with the language of purity.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout the PJ, Mary's place of living, her companions and even her daily nutrition establish the notion that she is to live a pure and undefiled existence. Hock even suggests that the theme of Mary's purity unifies the narrative as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Mary F. Foskett postulates that “she embodies a purity that is absolute, untouchable, and unique.”<sup>4</sup> The unfolding

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<sup>1</sup>Cited from Pamela Norris, *Eve: A Biography* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 236.

<sup>2</sup>Gaventa, 109.

<sup>3</sup>Hock, 15.

<sup>4</sup>Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 164.

drama of the text, suggests Gaventa, is the “drama of maintaining and defending Mary’s sacred purity.”<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have said much about Mary’s “purity” in this narrative, but it is not always clear what is meant by the term—or, better still, what understanding of purity does the most justice to this text. In this chapter, I examine the author’s depiction of Mary’s purity, ascertaining that this theme is a key concept which helps us make sense of this text. In order to make sense of Mary’s purity, I then turn to scholarship, examining the theories of Jacob Neusner, Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Mary Douglas. I establish that Douglas’s insights bring us closer to better understanding Mary’s characterization in the PJ. Moreover, I argue that Douglas’s theories link Mary’s purity to God’s original creation in the Genesis stories, juxtaposing Mary with Eve. Next, I turn to the writings of Paul, Justin, Ignatius and Tertullian and examine early Adam/Jesus and Mary/Eve parallels. I conclude that the author of the PJ not only links Mary to Eve, but does so very differently than other early Christian writers.

#### 4.1 Mary’s Purity in the *Protevangelium of James*

Dictionary definitions of “purity” point to “pureness, cleanness, freedom from physical or moral pollution.” Moreover, “pure” is defined as “unmixed, unadulterated...or unmixed descent.”<sup>6</sup> Scholarly appreciations of purity in religion, as we will see in the following section, address the wide

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<sup>5</sup>Gaventa, 119.

<sup>6</sup>*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, eds. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, revised by E. McIntosh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). For a similar definition see also *The New Penguin English Dictionary*, ed. Robert Allen (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

range of issues raised by the dictionary definitions. As a way to introduce the topic, this section examines the “unmixed” nature of purity that emerges in the PJ.

In the narrative Mary’s purity is carefully protected through an environment of “holy seclusion” during her early years.<sup>7</sup> This is primarily established under her mother’s care, and later preserved by the Temple priesthood. Mary’s purity is initially ensured even before her birth when Anna sets her apart as one who belongs to God: “As the Lord God lives, whether I give birth to a boy or a girl, I will offer it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it will serve him its whole life” (4:2). The author indicates that Anna initiated an atmosphere of seclusion after Mary took her first steps at six months. The narrative states that Anna picked her up and pronounced: “You will never walk on this ground again until I take you into the Temple of the Lord” (6:3). Ensuring that even Mary’s feet never touch anything profane or contact anything unclean, the author affirms Mary’s purity during infancy until she arrives in the sacred sphere of the Temple.

This seclusion extends to living space. The narrative reports that Anna transformed her bedroom into a sanctuary for Mary: καὶ ἐποίησεν ἅγιον ἐν τῷ κοιτῶνι αὐτῆς (6:4). The author does not describe what this sanctuary might have looked like, but he does indicate that Mary ate and rested in this place (6:10, 14). Why might the author have constructed these surroundings for Mary’s infancy? Likely, he wanted to project the image that even from Mary’s infancy she remained in an absolute sacred environment. Similarly, Foskett postulates that in the PJ the sanctuary of Anna’s

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<sup>7</sup>I adopt the phrase “holy seclusion” to characterize Mary’s environment from birth to the age of twelve. In the PJ, Mary lives in holy places: the sanctuary created by her mother and the ritually pure Temple. She is secluded from the outside world, being surrounded only by pure individuals such as Anna, the undefiled Hebrew daughters, and the priesthood. In addition, the reasons for choosing this particular phrase over another is made much clearer after applying Mary Douglas’s theories to Mary’s purity.

bedroom became an extension of the Temple, suggesting that Mary simply moved from one sacred space to another.<sup>8</sup>

Mary's purity during her infancy is further protected through those who had associations with her. Hock notes that Mary's purity is assured through her human contacts.<sup>9</sup> The narrative suggests that Anna sent for the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews as companions for Mary: καὶ ἐκάλεσε τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν Ἑβραίων τὰς ἀμιάντους, καὶ διεπλάνω αὐτήν (6:5). Though there are no historical records indicating that such a group of women existed, the incorporation of this image is significant for enhancing Mary's purity. Hock postulates that the author's point was "to underscore that Mary's first years were spent in the purest seclusion of her mother's bedroom."<sup>10</sup>

When Mary turned three, she was taken to the Temple to live in fulfillment of Anna's vow. Her childhood within the confines of the Temple protects her from the impurity of the outside world, enveloping her within the sacred sphere.<sup>11</sup> Her journey between the sacred spheres of her mother's bedroom and the Temple was sanctified by the entourage of the undefiled Hebrew daughters.<sup>12</sup> The narrative reports that Joachim sent for these women to provide an escort for Mary to the Temple so that "the child would not have her heart captivated by things outside the Lord's Temple" (7:5). In addition, it appears that this journey was undertaken during the evening or night, rather than during the day, since the author notes that each of the Hebrew daughters lit a lamp (7:5). Clearly, the author

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<sup>8</sup>Foskett, 144.

<sup>9</sup>Hock, 43.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Gaventa, 120.

<sup>12</sup>I suggest that Mary's journey was sanctified by the pure Hebrew daughters, since their presence affirms that Mary continues to remain in an environment of holy seclusion.

wanted to demonstrate that Mary did not contact anything impure or “worldly”—further safeguarding her purity. The image of the women provides a provisional sanctified passage or sacred space between the two points of travel. Foskett postulates that in the narrative “Mary clearly continues to live and move within carefully circumscribed boundaries.”<sup>13</sup>

After Mary arrived at the Temple she was welcomed, kissed and blessed by the priest (7:7). Foskett notes that Mary, who was promised to God, was received “in the manner of a pure and unblemished temple offering” by the priest.<sup>14</sup> The author narrates that after arriving at the Temple, Mary danced on the third step of the altar (7:9-10). The representation of her sitting on the third step of the altar connotes images of her extraordinary purity, since only priests were allowed in this area; women certainly were not permitted. Moreover, this representation embodies the degree of purity the author assigns to Mary in this narrative. Gaventa connects the image of Mary dancing to her sacred purity, positing that “this vivid and enchanting picture of a child dancing in the temple epitomizes Mary’s sacred purity.”<sup>15</sup> Most strikingly, the author also reports that Mary had access to the most sacred area of the Temple—the Holy of Holies. In the narrative, she is depicted as being cared for in this sacred place: ἡ ἀνατραφείσα εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων (13:7). Although Mary’s residence in the Temple may characterize her as a priestess such as the Vestals in Rome, this is not likely what the author intends in his depiction of Mary, since she performs no priestly duties. Foskett correctly notes

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<sup>13</sup>Foskett, 146.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Gaventa, 113.

that “the narrative clearly establishes Mary as the embodiment of purity, but refrains from ascribing to her the privileges and obligations of the priesthood.”<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the text Mary’s bodily purity, during her infancy and childhood, is carefully monitored through her daily nutrition. The narrative specifies that Anna paid particular attention to the purification rites after the birth of Mary: “When, however, the prescribed days were completed, Anna cleansed herself of the flow of blood. And she offered her breast to the infant and gave her the name Mary” (5:9-10). Anna’s strict adherence to purity seems a bit strange. How was Mary nourished? The author does not indicate how Mary was fed prior to the completion of the prescribed days. Anna was considered ritually unclean for a period of two weeks and Mary would have died without subsistence. Does the author think that Mary is so extraordinary that she could have survived for two weeks without nutrition? He is not concerned about this discrepancy; rather, most likely the author simply wanted to note that Anna performed all the purification rites prior to offering her breast to Mary. Gaventa postulates that “even from her mother’s breast, Mary lived a life of purity.”<sup>17</sup>

After Mary was weaned from her mother’s breast, the author indicates that Anna continued to insist on raising Mary on a ritually pure diet. The narrative states that Anna “did not permit anything profane or unclean to pass the child’s lips” (6:4). In this instance, the author directly utilizes the language of purity and impurity: *καὶ πᾶν κοινὸν καὶ ἀκάθαρτον οὐκ εἶα διέρχεσθαι δι’ αὐτῆς.*

After Mary left her mother’s care to reside in the Temple at the age of three, her nourishment, we are told, continued to be monitored by a heavenly messenger: *τροφήν λαμβάνουσα ἐκ χειρὸς*

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<sup>16</sup>Foskett, 148.

<sup>17</sup>Gaventa, 112.

ἀγγέλου (13:7). To be sure, the image of Mary being fed by an angel epitomizes her unusual degree of purity. The author also characterizes Mary as a dove or pigeon (περιστερά): “And Mary lived in the Temple of the Lord. She was fed there like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of a heavenly messenger” (8:2). This juxtaposition is significant for two reasons. First, in the Septuagint, the dove is commonly perceived as a gift or offering to God. An example of this image is depicted in Leviticus 1:14: “If your offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, you shall choose your offering from turtledoves or pigeons” (καὶ προσοίσει ἀπὸ τῶν τρυγόνων ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν περιστερῶν τὸ δῶρον αὐτοῦ). Second, in the New Testament the dove is sometimes depicted as a symbol of purity. For instance, Matthew 10:16 states: “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστεραὶ). In the PJ the image of a dove functions as confirmation of Joseph’s election, and as Joachim and Anna’s offering of Mary to the Lord; it also facilitates Mary’s depiction as a symbol of purity.

Purity, however, is threatened as Mary grows up. The author indicates that when Mary turned twelve she had to leave the Temple because of her impending menstruation—a natural phenomenon that would render both Mary and the Temple unclean. The priests pondered what to do with her: “‘Look,’ they said, ‘Mary has turned twelve in the Temple of the Lord. What should we do with her so she will not pollute the sanctuary of the Lord?’” (8:3-4). Gaventa insightfully advances that “some action must be taken not only to protect the temple’s purity but also to protect the purity of Mary.”<sup>18</sup> Both Mary and the Temple’s purity, as Gaventa notes, appear to be equally important to the author.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 113.

Mary cannot stay at the Temple because she would pollute it during menstruation. However, at the same time Mary's purity must not be jeopardized. Gaventa states:

What happens to Mary outside the temple is equally important, however, as this young woman who was promised to God before birth and has lived in the temple itself cannot be divorced from the sacred realm she has inhabited. Divine intervention directs the response to this crisis.<sup>19</sup>

Mary's menstruation in this story is surprising. Given the extraordinary purity the author has attributed to Mary, one would expect that she would not menstruate like other women. We have seen that Mary's purity and character is extraordinary. Mary is not treated like other women in this narrative. For instance, she is given access to the most sacred area of the Temple. This unexpected representation of Mary as potentially polluting or defiling in the narrative is rather bizarre: τί οὐν αὐτήν ποιήσωμεν μήπως μιάνη (8:4). Moreover, the author's positive attitude toward Mary's gender, established throughout the narrative, is compromised in this instance, reverting to cultural gender assumptions of his time. Foskett suggests that "the very narrative that praises Mary perpetuates an androcentric assessment of its heroine."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Foskett posits that "it is precisely Mary's identity as a female that prevents the narrative from asserting without equivocation the protagonist's purity."<sup>21</sup> Though Mary's menses recall the "stain of original sin," the narrative never confirms that Mary does in fact menstruate. Is it possible, as a means to protect both Mary and Jesus' purity in the PJ, that the author thought Mary conceived prior to menstruation? In the biblical tradition, as noted in Chapter 3, post-fertile women conceived through divine intervention. Likewise, in the PJ, an infertile Anna conceived after Mary's parents' prayers was answered. Therefore, is it not equally

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Foskett, 149.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



plausible that Mary could be thought to conceive while pre-fertile? The suggestion is tantalizing, yet entirely possible.

Up to this point in the narrative, then, Mary's connection to purity has emerged in several ways. She has remained far removed from the ordinary polluted world. Mary's purity is protected through an environment of holy seclusion: the sanctuary of her mother's bedroom and the sacred sphere of the Temple. Her purity is safeguarded through her human contacts: her mother, the undefiled Hebrew daughters and the Temple priests. Mary's bodily purity is monitored through her daily nutrition: her mother's ritually pure breast milk, ritually pure foods, and food fed to her by a heavenly messenger.

After the age of twelve and the (possible) onset of puberty, Mary's purity is primarily defined in terms of her sexual status in the narrative—specifically, her extraordinary virginity. Just as menstruation is thought to defile, so too does sexuality. The text removes this defilement from Mary. Her purity is characterized in the author's claims that she was a virgin before, during and after the birth of her child (10:2-4; 16:7; 19:18). Moreover, in the narrative she is characterized only after her expulsion from the Temple as τὴν παρθένον κυρίου (9:7) or a παρθένον ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ (13:3). Her sexual status ensures her purity while outside the sacred realm of the Temple.

Mary's sexual purity is protected through her relationship with Joseph. The author makes several changes to Joseph's characterization from the canonical narratives as a means to ensure Mary's purity. He selectively portrays Joseph as an elderly man not interested in sexual relations with Mary, agreeing only to serve as her guardian (9:8). In addition, the author advises that immediately after Joseph assumed his guardianship responsibilities, he left to build houses (9:12). This affirms that the conception of Mary's child occurred without sexual relations. Hock notes that the characterization

of Joseph as an older man is “necessitated by the author’s emphasis on Mary’s purity.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Joseph himself asserts that he did not have sex with Mary. When Joseph discovered Mary’s pregnancy, he asked her who was the father of her child (13:9). He also advised the religious authorities that he did not have sex with her: “As the Lord lives, I am innocent where she is concerned” (15:15). In the narrative, Joseph eventually comes to understand that Mary’s pregnancy was caused by the “holy spirit,” exonerating Mary from any notion of sexual misconduct (14:5; 19:8).

Mary’s sexual purity is further confirmed during the annunciation narrative. The author carefully illustrates two important aspects during this scenario to assure Mary’s sexual purity, while establishing that there were no sexual relations between the deity and Mary. First, he narrates that Mary will conceive by means of the divine word (11:5). The conception of Mary’s child occurs through God’s procreative *λόγος*, rather than through sexual means. Just as God created the world in the Genesis stories, he also generates Mary’s child. Second, the author predicts that the power of God will overshadow her to facilitate the delivery of her child—not the conception itself (11:7). The author guardedly curtails any sexual imagery during the annunciation narrative. Foskett postulates:

Although Mary’s body will serve as the locus of divine activity, PJ minimizes any potential sexual overtones in the relationship between the virgin and the deity. Mary’s purity, primarily a phenomenon of her body, is as carefully guarded in and by the narrative as ever.<sup>23</sup>

Mary’s sexual purity is also certified through two examinations in this narrative. The first test, administered by the religious authorities, verified her purity during pregnancy in a public and explicit way. After her pregnancy Mary’s sexual purity is reaffirmed when she and Joseph drink the bitter waters (16:3-8).

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>23</sup>Foskett, 153.

The second test, performed by a woman named Salome, confirmed Mary's sexual purity after the birth of her child by very physical and explicit means. She did not believe that it was possible for a virgin to give birth. The author strongly suggests that Salome discovered an intact hymen—certifying Mary's ongoing virginity (20:3).

The pinnacle of Mary's purity, though, is revealed by three features during the birth of her child. First, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, God facilitated the birth. The divine presence in the narrative is conveyed by dark clouds overshadowing the cave (19:13), an intense light radiating from the entrance of the cave (19:15), and flames emerging out from Mary's womb during Salome's examination (20:4). Second, unlike other women, Mary gave birth painlessly. The narrative implies that the power of God overshadowed her (11:7; 19:16). Third, Mary does not complete the required purification rites before offering her breast to her son—in the author's view she remains pure (19:16).

In sum, as demonstrated throughout this analysis, the author endeavored to epitomize Mary within a construct of extraordinary purity. Through numerous instances in this narrative, he has identified Mary as the embodiment of purity. The author establishes this purity from the moment of Anna's vow through to the birth of Mary's child—the exception, of course, being her anticipated (but never explicitly realized) menses. Her purity is protected and secured through an atmosphere of "holy seclusion." The places in which she lived were considered sacred environments: the sanctuary of Anna's bedroom and the Temple. Her human contact with the outside world was minimized. Her playmates during infancy were the undefiled Hebrew daughters, while her childhood companions were the priests. Mary does not play with other children while living in the Temple; therefore, she really is not associated with childhood in the PJ. Further, the author characterized her bodily purity primarily through the consumption of ritually pure foods during her childhood—from Anna's breast milk through to being fed by an angelic being in the Holy of Holies.

After Mary left the Temple, her purity is depicted in the narrative by her sexual status. Her unnatural virginity is defined before, during and after the birth of her son. In addition, various characters in this story affirm Mary's sexual purity. The religious authorities include her in the category of pure virgins for the construction of the Temple veil (13:8). The high priest verifies her sexual purity: "If the Lord God does not expose your sin, then neither do I condemn you" (16:7). Joseph attested to her sexual purity (19:9). Salome and the midwife certifies her virginity *post partum* (19:17-18; 20:3-4). Moreover, Mary herself proclaims her purity to Joseph: καθαρά εἰμι (13:8). She further asserts her sexual purity to the high priest: "As the Lord God lives, I stand pure (καθαρά εἰμι) before him. Believe me, I have not had sex with any man" (15:13). Finally, Mary is considered pure by God: τῆς παιδὸς Μαρίας...ἀμίαντος τῷ θεῷ (10:4).

#### 4.2 Purity in Scholarship

The author's notions about Mary's purity in the PJ bring to question some of the cultural assumptions about purity. For example: Why is sex considered defiling? Why are certain foods impure? Why are women thought to be defiling during menstruation or after childbirth? One thing is certain: this text certainly links these issues to purity, then underscores Mary's extraordinary purity.

How, then, might one begin to understand Mary's purity in the PJ? To be sure, the author's notions about purity emerge out of a Jewish Christian context. The important thing to note is that biblical ideas about purity and impurity should not be understood as the equivalents of clean and dirty—they are not hygienic categories. For example, touching a corpse makes one impure, but it does not necessarily make one dirty. Likewise, a ritual immersion may not free one of dirt, but it makes one pure. A contemporary analogy comes to mind: many Indians consider the Ganges pure, along with

its many tributaries, regardless of the increased degree of pollution, including corpses floating in the river. Like ancient Judaism, purity and cleanliness are not necessarily associated.

The idea of purity, therefore, is a fascinating site to explore Mary's purity in the PJ. I now turn to three scholars: Jacob Neusner, Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Mary Douglas. Each evaluates purity in a different way. Neusner considers the idea of purity in ancient Judaism. Gaventa explores Mary's purity as it is depicted in the PJ. Douglas examines purity notions within a much broader anthropological context, incorporating various cultural and textual aspects.

#### 4.2.1 *Jacob Neusner*

Jacob Neusner suggests that the words clean and unclean "refer to a status in respect to contact with a source of impurity and the completion of acts of purification from that impurity."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, he posits that "purity is the prerequisite of the grace of God; the rejection by God, or of God, is the concomitant of impurity."<sup>25</sup> In an examination into the applications of these words he posits that they occur primarily with reference to cultic acts—what is impure is rejected for the cult, what is pure is accepted. He suggests that "purity is essential to the religious system of Israel."<sup>26</sup> For instance, if an individual is impure he or she cannot enter the appropriate Temple or participate in certain cultic acts. However, if one is pure, access to the Temple and cultic activities is permitted. Neusner states:

The Temple supplied to purity its importance in the religious life. As the Temple signified divine favor, and as the cult supplied the nexus between Israel and God, so purity, associated so closely with both, could readily serve as an image either of

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<sup>24</sup>Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 1.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

divine favor or of man's loyalty to God. From that fact followed the assignment of impurity to all that stood against the Temple, the cult, and God.<sup>27</sup>

Neusner divides the biblical corpus of ideas about purity into two distinctive parts. The first part includes the specific laws about purity and impurity in connection with the Temple cult. He posits that the "priestly laws make tediously explicit the connection between purity and the cult."<sup>28</sup> Neusner outlines seven sources of impurity in the biblical corpus which affect an individual's participation in cultic activities.<sup>29</sup> The first source of impurity is contact with an unclean animal. All living creatures are divided into categories of pure and impure. Contact with an impure source leads to one's uncleanness. For example, dietary laws assert that one must not eat unclean animals, birds, creeping things, and must not touch their remains (Lev 11:1-47). The second source of impurity is a woman after childbirth (Lev 12:1-8). The third source of impurity refers to skin ailments—swellings, eruptions, or spots on the skin (Lev 13:1-14). The fourth source of impurity is mildew or "disease" on the walls of a house (Lev 14:33-53). The fifth source of impurity is bodily discharges, relating generally to seminal emissions and menstrual blood (Lev 15:1-33). The sixth source of impurity is specific sexual practices such as acts of bestiality, homosexuality, incest or adultery (Lev 18:1-30). Lastly, the seventh source of impurity is contact with a corpse (Lev 21:1-24).

Neusner's second section features an interpretation of purity and impurity as a metaphor of reality. He notes that purity is regularly treated as an ethical category in the biblical corpus. This aspect is the interpretation of purity as a metaphor for moral and religious behavior. An individual who does the right thing is pure, while doing the wrong thing is impure. Purity is an expression of

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 18-22.

approval or disapproval. He thinks especially of sex, idolatry, and unethical actions. Neusner states that the “employment of purity and impurity as value-judgements asserts that the one represents the equivalent of good or morally right, the other, of the evil or of immorality.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, purity laws in ancient Israelite communities were a measure of societal fitness not necessarily associated with morality or ethics:

Treatment of purity as a symbol, metaphor, or allegory involves the assignment to purity of a value extrinsic to the cult. To be impure is to be guilty of something, normally, though not always, having to do with ethics. A woman impure on account of birth, however, also has to bring a guilt-offering. A leper brings a “sin offering.” The water that purifies one who has touched a dead body is known as “sin-water.” It is possible that the notion of “an ethical offence, a sin” evolved from the general class of “acts that make you unfit for the holy community.”<sup>31</sup>

Neusner’s model is valuable, but does it explain the PJ’s depiction of Mary’s purity? Not entirely. Certainly, there are several aspects of Jewish ritual purity associated with Mary in this story—for instance, Anna’s purification after the birth of Mary, Joachim’s offering at the Temple after Mary’s conception, the supervision of Mary’s diet, and Mary’s departure from the Temple when she approached puberty. Mary’s moral purity, though, is of little concern to the author. Perhaps the author’s inclusion of an environment of “holy seclusion” to characterize Mary’s upbringing was intended as a means to protect her moral integrity in the narrative, but the link is left ambiguous. Regardless, Mary only speaks on six occasions in this narrative, so we really cannot determine what moral or ethical values she may have possessed. The significant exceptions, of course, are the allegations stemming from sexual relations related to her pregnancy. In these instances, she adamantly proclaims her purity.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 25.

**4.2.2 Beverly Roberts Gaventa**

Gaventa suggests that the term purity, as a means to characterize Mary, is misleading because of its associations with the biblical ideas about purity that Neusner outlined in his analysis. She posits that Mary's purity highly exceeds any ritual, moral or ethical requirements. For instance, Jewish expectations do not explain her childhood seclusion, her life in the Temple or her ongoing virginity.

Gaventa ponders the function of Mary's purity—its nature and how it is to be understood by the reader. Is Mary's purity to serve as a model for others? Is sexual renunciation normative for early Christians? Gaventa concludes that Mary's purity is neither totally embodied in her extraordinary virginity or chastity (though her virginity exists as part of her all-encompassing purity), nor is it to be modeled by other Christians. She states:

The Protevangelium makes no such movement to establish Mary as a pattern for others. Indeed, the movement in the Protevangelium seems to be toward enclosing Mary in sacred purity, and that movement sets her apart from others rather than identifying her as a model to emulate.<sup>32</sup>

Gaventa posits that "Mary's purity so dominates this story that she herself is almost a function of that purity rather than the purity being characteristic of Mary."<sup>33</sup> She suggests that the prominence given to Mary arises from her role as the "embodiment of sacred purity."<sup>34</sup> Gaventa adopts the phrase "sacred purity" to characterize Mary's purity in the narrative. She intends it as an adaptation of Peter Brown's depiction of Mary as a "human creature totally enclosed in sacred

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<sup>32</sup>Gaventa, 121-122.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 119.



space.”<sup>35</sup> Gaventa’s comments are certainly apt; unfortunately, however, she does not further develop this important aspect of purity in her work.

#### 4.2.3 *Mary Douglas*

Mary Douglas can take us further, I believe. As a means to try to make some more sense of Mary’s unusual degree of purity, I would like to develop Gaventa’s important insight by applying Douglas’s theories to this early Christian text. As an anthropologist, Douglas finds “the totality of the biblical purity rules a symbolic system.”<sup>36</sup> In a critique of Neusner’s interpretation of biblical purity rules, she suggests:

Jacob Neusner has dealt with its symbolism when he finds in each one rule or in a bunch of rules a metaphor of goodness. But this is practically tautologous when pure means fit for access to temple ritual, and such fitness means deserving of God’s blessing and prosperity. The equation purity = goodness is not merely too trivial a meaning to have been worth the search. It was posited in the initial problem concerning the meaning of purity rules. Why the Bible accounted the weasel or pig an unclean animal is not answered by citing the various explanatory metaphors used in post-biblical times.<sup>37</sup>

Douglas makes three significant points about biblical interpretations of purity.<sup>38</sup> First, she posits that a collection of metaphors does not automatically constitute a symbolic system. A symbolic system is not an articulation of goodness; rather, it consists of rules of behaviour, actions and expectations which constitute society itself. The purity rules of the Bible, she argues, set up inclusive categories in which the whole universe is ranked and structured. Access to their meaning comes by

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<sup>35</sup>Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273.

<sup>36</sup>Mary Douglas, “Critique and Commentary,” in *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 138.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 138-140.

mapping the same basic set of rules from one context to another. For instance, the classification of animals as clean or unclean creates in the Bible an entirely consistent set of criteria and values. Second, there is nothing self-evidently defiling in the biblical system of classification. For instance, menstrual blood and semen are natural bodily fluids. She asserts that “to fail to see this difficulty is to shirk the analysis of what is specific to the biblical systems of classification.”<sup>39</sup> In order to comprehend ancient purity rules one must understand how their world was constituted with the creation story in Genesis—the separation of the firmament, land, waters, and all living creatures. Third, Douglas suggests that not all symbols and meanings in biblical societies converge on the Temple. She argues that the Temple stands for the pure consecrated body of the worshipper, and that the rules which protect the Temple from defilement repeat by analogy the rules which protect the purity of the human body from wrong food and sex, and the Israelites from false gods. She posits:

It is clear that the temple rules and sex rules and food rules are a single system of analogies, they do not converge on any one point but sustain the whole moral and physical universe together in their systematic interrelatedness.<sup>40</sup>

Douglas suggests that sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement—holiness and purity are at the opposite pole.<sup>41</sup> The Hebrew word *קדש* is generally translated as holy. It has connotations of “being separated,” “belonging to” or “designated for.” Douglas claims that holiness

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>41</sup>Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Arc Paperbacks, 1966), 7.

is the attribute of God, meaning “set apart”: “You shall be holy for I am holy,” קדשים כי קדוש אני (Lev 11:45).<sup>42</sup> She renders this as: “I am set apart and you must be set apart like me.”<sup>43</sup>

Douglas observes that the Hebrew word טמא, meaning impurity, is frequently employed in Leviticus, but used sparingly elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>44</sup> Questioning its relationship to holiness, she points to the Exodus story about the sanctity of Mount Sinai (19:10-24). In this account God instructed Moses to build a fence around the mountain, to prevent individuals from approaching it until they had purified themselves for his presence: “Go down and warn the people not to break through to the Lord to look; otherwise many of them will perish” (19:21). God also told Moses that this warning applied to the priests: “Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves or the Lord will break out against them” (19:22). Douglas suggests that the danger is double-edged: the Lord breaks out or the people might break through—in either situation, people will die.<sup>45</sup> She suggests that this is the effect of holiness, positing that “the holy thing that is not correctly guarded and fenced, will break out, and the impure person not correctly prepared for contact with the holy will be killed.”<sup>46</sup> Or, better put, she proposes that “ritual purity is a kind of two-way protection, a holy thing is protected from profanation, the profane thing is protected from holiness.”<sup>47</sup> Purity and

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>44</sup>The word טמא appears 89 times in the Bible: 47 of these occur in Leviticus.

<sup>45</sup>Mary Douglas, “Impurity of Land Animals,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, eds. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 43.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

impurity, therefore, are the dominant contrastive categories. Both are involved in holiness, completeness, and perfection.

Douglas defines purity as a relationship between things which are required to be kept apart—to be pure means to be adequately segregated.<sup>48</sup> Impurity, she posits, is “a relation between things that have come together in spite of some requirement that they be kept apart.”<sup>49</sup> Douglas suggests that purity does not have a meaning in itself: its meaning is part of the general structure of the cosmos—between God, humans and animals. She advances that “when it moves between different contexts, the things that have to be kept apart are different, and the reasons differ accordingly.”<sup>50</sup>

In an analysis of Leviticus’s Mosaic dietary rules, Douglas examines the impurity of land animals. At first glance, Leviticus seems to teach that unclean animals are deplorable and are to be detested. Questioning why God would create something he loathed, she notes that this instruction is contrary to the biblical reference in the Wisdom of Solomon: “For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you hated it” (11:24).<sup>51</sup> She suggests that land animals are not forbidden because they are objectionable; rather, they are forbidden because of various covenants or promises established between God and his creation. For instance, in Genesis God establishes a covenant with the land and all living things with Noah: “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals and every animal of the earth

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<sup>48</sup>Douglas, “Impurity of Land Animals,” 35.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>51</sup>Mary Douglas, “The Compassionate God of Leviticus and his Animal Creation,” in *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible*, ed. Martin O’Kane (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 61.

with you” (9:9-10). Douglas suggests that God is concerned for the fertility of both humans and animals.<sup>52</sup> She postulates that just as God blessed Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 9:1,7), he also offered these words of blessing on the creatures of the water after they had been created (1:22).<sup>53</sup>

Douglas suggests that animals are divided into two categories: pure animals are covered under the covenant and their treatment is strictly regulated, while impure animals are strictly forbidden. In this instance, classification of impure means to be protected.<sup>54</sup> This interpretation fits the definition of pure: to be pure means to be adequately separated. Douglas asserts that “what is adequate is laid down: only pure animals can be brought to the altar, slaughtered, some of their meat sacrificed and the rest eaten.”<sup>55</sup> She posits that there are serious problems with interpretations of the Mosaic dietary laws insofar as they do not consider God’s compassion toward his creatures. Douglas suggests that elsewhere gods may impose a restriction simply as a means to protect their creatures:

In other religions, gods often impose dietary rules upon their worshipers. The thing to notice is that if an animal is forbidden as food, it is usually not because there is anything wrong with the animal, or anything abhorrent or disgusting about it. Rather the other way, the animal often turns out to have featured in the mythology as a strong and kindly being which has rendered a service to the god, or in some prehistoric exchange a human ancestor incurred a debt of great magnitude towards the ancestor of an animal species. They formed a pact of everlasting friendship, in

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<sup>52</sup>Douglas, “Impurity of Land Animals,” 37.

<sup>53</sup>Douglas employs these particular passages to establish her argument, but in Genesis 1:24-25 God does not offer the same blessing of fertility and multiplicity to creatures of the earth (cattle, creeping things, and wild animals). Subsequently, according to the first creation story, God is not as concerned for the animals of the earth as Douglas argues throughout her work.

<sup>54</sup>Like impure animals, in the PJ Mary became potentially defiling after menses, and is protected by God: κύριός σε διαφυλάξει (9:12).

<sup>55</sup>Douglas, “Impurity of Land Animals,” 41.

consequence of which the human descendant of the first beneficiary is forbidden to eat the animal descendants of the ancestor's benefactor.<sup>56</sup>

How does this all relate to Jesus' mother? Douglas' model works well for portraying Mary's purity if we understand purity to mean "set apart" and "segregated." Throughout the narrative, the author has characterized Mary as "set apart" for God. This is initially established by Anna's infertility—the extraordinary conception conveys that Mary is "set apart" for some greater purpose. In addition, Anna's vow to dedicate her unborn child to the Temple signifies that this purpose will be determined by God. We have seen that Mary lived a life of "holy seclusion"—segregated from others in the community. The image of Mary living in the Temple certainly sets her apart from all other women. Just as only pure animals can be brought to the altar for sacrifice, so also can only the purest of women be offered to God. In addition, the author's representation of Mary's procession and reception to the Temple connotes images of Mary as an offering:

When the child turned three years of age, Joachim said, "Let's send for the undefiled Hebrew daughters. Let them each take a lamp and light it, so the child will not turn back and have her heart captivated by things outside the Lord's Temple. And this is what they did until the time they ascended to the Lord's Temple. The priest welcomed her, kissed her, and blessed her: "The Lord God has exalted your name among all generations. In you the Lord will disclose the redemption to the people of Israel during the last days." And he sat her down on the third step of the altar, and the Lord showered favor on her. And she danced, and the whole house of Israel loved her (7:4-10).

Applying Douglas's view, Mary's extraordinary purity means that she can be sacrificed. Or, better put, her son can be sacrificed. In other words, this text implies that Jesus' sacrifice is grounded firmly in his mother's purity: he can offer himself as a sacrifice for all humanity because his mother is purer than any other woman who existed, except perhaps Eve. Douglas suggests that in Leviticus sacrifice is "one of the main figural motifs with which it presents the principles of God's creation,

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<sup>56</sup>Douglas, "The Compassionate God of Leviticus and his Animal Creation," 63.

and the divine order of existence.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, she posits that it “invokes the whole cosmos, life and death,” expressing “its doctrine of blood, of atonement, of covenant between God and his people.”<sup>58</sup>

Douglas’s inquiry links purity with the attributes of God: holiness, completion and perfection. Mary surely embodies these same qualities. In this text she is the epitome of all three. Likewise, Foskett suggests that the author’s concern for Mary’s purity “is a means of locating Mary in the context of holiness,” positing that in his “portrayal of Mary, purity signals nothing less than holiness.”<sup>59</sup>

In the text, Mary epitomizes the purity established in God’s initial creation of humanity: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them” (1:27), and “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Certainly, the reader of the PJ, very early in the narrative, is reminded of this story when the author reports that Mary took seven steps at six months—seven, of course, symbolizing the perfection of creation (6:2). To be sure, the author’s notions about Mary’s purity are embedded in his religious construction of the cosmos—Mary embodies the original purity established in the primeval creation of humanity.

#### 4.3 Mary as the Second Eve in the *Protevangelium of James*

In short, Mary’s purity represents God’s original creation—the pinnacle of holiness, perfection and completion: she is the second Eve. The painless birth of Mary’s child recollects this primordial woman in the Genesis creation stories. Moreover, Mary does not suffer the same curse that

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<sup>57</sup>Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 66.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>59</sup>Foskett, 148-149.

God placed on Eve and all subsequent women: “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children’” (Gen 2:16). The PJ recalls this story when Joseph confronts Mary about her pregnancy: “The story of Adam has been repeated in my case, hasn’t it? For just as Adam was praying when the serpent came and found Eve alone, deceived her, and corrupted her, so the same thing has happened to me” (13:5). Joseph asks Mary why she has done this thing: τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; (13:6). Notably, the question that Joseph posed to Mary is the very same question God put to Eve: καὶ εἶπεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῇ γυναικί Τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; (Gen 2:13).<sup>60</sup>

There are no direct Eve and Mary parallels in the New Testament. In the Christian tradition, biblical exegesis of Mary as the second Eve was juxtaposed between the depiction of Eve as the “mother of all living” (Gen 2; 3:15-20), and Jesus’ address to his mother as “woman” (John 2:1-12; 19:25-27).<sup>61</sup> More peripherally, the image of the woman in Revelation 12:5-17 led to a connection with Mary.

Where did the image of Mary as the second Eve emerge from in the Christian tradition? The parallel of Adam and Jesus in the Pauline corpus undoubtedly led to an association of Mary with Eve. Just as Paul in the New Testament paralleled Jesus with Adam, so too does the author of the PJ juxtapose Mary with Eve, thereby creating a different sort of transformative couple: mother and son rather than wife and husband. The PJ’s Mary/Eve parallel I have just proposed is not explored by other scholars. For example, Gaventa states: “The New Testament does not identify Mary as the

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<sup>60</sup>This same question is also posed to both Mary and Joseph by the high priest (15:10, 14).

<sup>61</sup>See Bertrand Buby, *Mary of Galilee: The Marian Heritage of the Early Church*, vol. 3 (New York: Alba House, 1997), 18-19.



second Eve, nor is she so characterized in the Protevangelium of James.”<sup>62</sup> The following outlines the development of the Mary/Eve parallel in the first two centuries, beginning with Paul.

#### 4.3.1 *The Adam/Jesus Juxtaposition in Paul*

In the first century when Paul wrote his correspondence, the belief that the original pure state of the world would be restored at the end of the age was widespread in rabbinic and apocalyptic thought.<sup>63</sup> Paul shared this view of the cosmos, believing that Jesus was the agent of this restoration. Central to Paul’s understanding of salvation history is the idea of recapitulation or ἀνακεφαλαιωσίς: “as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him [ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10).<sup>64</sup> According to Paul, God sent his son into the world to bring salvation to humanity: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal 4:4-5).<sup>65</sup> Jesus’ obedience to God brought him to crucifixion: “he humbled himself [ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν] and became obedient [γενόμενος ὑπήκοος] to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Paul suggests that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, he triumphed over the principalities and powers (Col 2:12-15). Through his blood, Jesus expiated human sin: “whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood”

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<sup>62</sup>Gaventa, 104.

<sup>63</sup>Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press), 127.

<sup>64</sup>In the PJ the author also uses the word recapitulation to describe Joseph’s reaction to Mary’s pregnancy: μήτι ἀκεφαλαιώθη ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ Ἀδάμ; (13:5). Ephesians (and Colossians below) might have been written by followers of Paul, not Paul himself.

<sup>65</sup>See also Rom 8:1-4.

(Rom 3:25), establishing a new covenant with humanity: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25).

In the Pauline corpus there are two significant references to the Adam and Jesus typology. First, in Romans 5:12-21 Paul discusses the Adam and Christ antithesis in the context of justification by faith. He suggests that both Adams were alike insofar as their actions affected the destiny of humanity. Paul argues that sin and death were brought into the world via the first Adam’s disobedience (5:12-14).<sup>66</sup> Through the second Adam’s perfect obedience, grace and eternal life were reestablished: “Therefore just as one man’s trespass [δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος] led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness [δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιώματος] leads to justification and life for all” (5:18). Second, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul responds to others’ skepticism about the resurrection of the dead. He repeats the Adam and Christ typology, suggesting that the resurrection of Jesus restores life to humanity: “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (15:21-22). Calvin Roetzel suggests that Paul thought “to be ‘in Adam’ meant to participate in the destiny of the old Adamic humanity, whereas to be ‘in Christ’ meant to share in the power and glory of the new creation.”<sup>67</sup> Commenting on the nature of the resurrection, and still in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul postulates that the resurrected body will be spiritual, rather than physical:

Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living spirit”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven (15:45-47).

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<sup>66</sup>Paul clearly suggested that it was Eve who was initially deceived—not Adam (2 Cor 11:3; see also 1 Tim 2:14).

<sup>67</sup>Roetzel, 128.

While Paul saw Jesus as the new Adam, the author of the PJ saw Mary as the new Eve. Although the author never explicitly parallels Mary with Eve in the text, it is implied. Both authors perceive that Jesus came into the world to bring salvation. In the PJ it is understood that Jesus was born to bring salvation to Israel (11:8; 14:6; 19:14). Mary is the nexus for God's divine plan for human redemption. She is able to give birth to the "Son of the Most High" because of her surpassing purity (11:7). Paul may have understood that through Jesus' perfect obedience, a new creation and covenant was established, but the PJ suggests that this new creation started with Mary.

#### 4.3.2 *Mary/Eve Juxtaposition in Patristic Texts*

Picking up on the Pauline typology of Adam and Jesus, as mentioned in Chapter 3, early Christian writers also developed the parallel between Mary and Eve. Gail Corrington Streete postulates that these early juxtapositions of Mary/Eve may have also been inspired by the PJ. She suggests that Mary's characterization as a "redemptive virgin" in the early church may have been influenced by the depiction of Mary's life in the PJ.<sup>68</sup>

The first writer to allude to this juxtaposition was Justin Martyr in *Dialogue with Trypho* 100. He touched on the Mary and Eve antithesis in the context of exploring why Jesus was called Jacob, Israel and the Son of Man. Like Paul, Justin postulated that Jesus was born to destroy the primordial disobedience, proceeding from the serpent: "He became man by the Virgin [διὰ τῆς παρθένου], in order that the disobedience which preceded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin" (100:4). Justin characterizes Eve, prior to her reception of the serpent's word, as an immortal virgin. Eve's mortality, implied Justin, was precipitated by her

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<sup>68</sup>Streete does not advance that the image of Mary as the second Eve emerged from the PJ. She implies only that the writers were influenced by the story of Mary in the PJ. See Gail Corrington Streete, "Women as Sources of Redemption and Knowledge in Early Christian Traditions," in *Women & Christian Origins*, eds. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 348.

disobedience: “For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled [ἄφθορος],<sup>69</sup> having conceived [συλλαβοῦσα] the word of the serpent, brought forth [ἔτεκε] disobedience and death” (100:5). In contrast, incorporating the Lucan annunciation, Justin states that Mary received Gabriel’s word with faith and joy, giving birth to the son of God (Luke 1:38, 46-55):

But the Virgin Mary received with faith [πίστιν] and joy [χαράν], when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her [ἐξ αὐτῆς] is the son of God; and she replied, “Be it unto me according to your word.” And by her [διὰ] he has been born, to whom we have proved so many Scriptures refer, and by whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him; but works deliverance from death to those who repent of their wickedness and believe upon him (100:5-7).

Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies* 22, elaborates on Justin’s parallel within the context of discussing Jesus’ physical nature. Unlike Justin, he does not focus on Mary’s reception of the word with faith and joy. Instead, Irenaeus emphasizes Mary’s obedience, focusing on her response to the angel in the Lucan account: γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου (1:38). Mary’s obedience, he suggests, is the rationale for Jesus’ conception: “In accordance with this design, Mary the virgin is found obedient [ὑπήκοος εὐρίσκεται], saying, ‘Behold the handmaiden [δούλη] of the Lord; be it unto me [γένου] according to thy word’” (22.4.1). Like Justin, Irenaeus also portrayed Mary and Eve as virgins—biological virgins. In both situations, each virgin was certainly non-sexual, despite the fact that they each had a husband or a fiancé. In addition, Irenaeus implies that it was Eve’s disobedience that brought death to humanity:

But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey [παρήκουσε] when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but nevertheless a virgin (for in Paradise “they were both naked, and were not ashamed,” inasmuch as they,

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<sup>69</sup>At first glance the English translation seems to indicate that Justin characterized Eve as a pure or undefiled virgin—like Mary in the PJ. However, the Greek word used in the text is ἄφθορος, meaning imperishable, immortal or incorruptible.

having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward), having become disobedient [παρακούσασα] was made the cause of death [αίτια ἐγένετο θανάτου], both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race (22.4.2-4).

Irenaeus connects the image of Mary as the second Eve with the Pauline notion of recapitulation, placing both Jesus and Mary at the center of human redemption—each having an equally significant role. He posits that Adam brought death, while Jesus generated life.

For the Lord, having been born “the First-begotten of the dead,” and receiving into his bosom the ancient fathers, has regenerated them into the life of God, he having been made himself the beginning of those that live, as Adam became the beginning of those who died. Wherefore also Luke, commencing the genealogy with the Lord, carried it back to Adam, indicating that it was he who regenerated them into the Gospel of life, and not they him (22.4.8-10).

Similarly, the bond of Eve’s disobedience was released by Mary’s obedience. Irenaeus, like Justin, associated Mary’s response with faith: “And thus also it was that the knot [δεσμός]<sup>70</sup> of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief [ἀπειθείας],<sup>71</sup> did the virgin Mary set free [ἔλυσε] through faith [πίστεως]” (22.4.10).

Lastly, in Tertullian’s *On the Flesh of Christ* 17, the Mary and Eve juxtaposition was discussed within the context of comparing the similarities between the first and second Adams. Tertullian states that death crept into the world via Eve’s incorrect belief—not her disobedience: “For it was while Eve was yet a virgin [*in uirginem enim*], that the ensnaring word had crept into her ear [*irreperat uerbum*] which was to build the edifice of death [*aedificatorium mortis*]” (17:8). Eve’s wrong belief, posits Tertullian, was annulled by Mary’s correct belief: “As Eve had believed the

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<sup>70</sup>A better translation for δεσμός is bond or fetter.

<sup>71</sup>The word ἀπειθείας is mistranslated as belief. It should be translated as Eve’s disobedience.

serpent, so Mary believed the Angel [*Gabriele*]. The delinquency which the one occasioned by believing [*credendo deliquit*], the other by believing effaced [*credendo correxit*]" (17:8-9). Just as the ensnaring word generated death by one female, so also does the word of God produce life through the same gender: "Into a virgin's soul [*in uirginem*],<sup>72</sup> in like manner, must be introduced that Word of God which was to raise the fabric of life; so that what had been reduced to ruin by this sex, might by the selfsame sex be recovered to salvation" (17:8). Comparing their children, Tertullian states that Eve gave birth to a child who became a murderer, while Mary gave birth to a child who would secure salvation to Israel:

But (it will be said) Eve did not at the devil's word conceive in her womb. Well, she at all events conceived; for the devil's word afterwards became as seed to her that she should conceive as an outcast, and bring forth in sorrow. Indeed she gave birth to a fratricidal devil; whilst Mary, on the contrary, bare one who was one day to secure salvation to Israel (17:9).

In sum, the early patristic writers Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian, complementing Paul's juxtaposition of Adam and Jesus, developed Mary and Eve along the same lines. Utilizing Paul's recapitulation notions, they incorporated Mary into Israel's salvation history. She is allotted an equally important role in human redemption. The primary characteristic assigned to Mary by these writers was her obedience, contrasting sharply with Eve's disobedience—though Tertullian works with the idea of belief. Just as Jesus was obedient, so was Mary obedient to God. The Lucan *fiat* and Paul's juxtaposition of Adam and Jesus seem to be the prevailing rationale for assigning this particular characteristic to Mary.

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<sup>72</sup>The Latin text does not support the notion of a "virgin's soul," since there is no mention of an *anima*. It should simply state: "into a virgin."

#### 4.4 Concluding Remarks

So, having closely examined Mary's purity in the PJ, we are able to see that it is a key concept for understanding this text. In the narrative the author clearly strived to epitomize Mary within a construct of extraordinary purity. She is portrayed as living a pure and undefiled existence throughout her infancy, childhood and adolescence. Mary's purity is characterized through her living environments, companions, nutrition, and sexual status.

Douglas's theories made the most sense for understanding Mary's purity in the PJ. Her analysis of Leviticus's dietary laws, based on the idea of separation, is particularly useful for characterizing Mary's unusual degree of purity. We have seen that the author has depicted Mary as being "set apart" for God. Just as only pure animals can be brought to the altar for sacrifice, so also can only the purest of women be offered to God.

Douglas's theories also linked purity with the attributes of God: holiness, perfection and completion. Mary embodies these same three qualities in the PJ. Moreover, Mary epitomizes the purity established in God's original creation of humanity. Douglas's insights suggest that the author's notions about Mary's purity are embedded in his religious construction of the cosmos. Subsequently, Douglas's view of purity leads to the conclusion that the author of the PJ understood Mary as the second Eve; a connection not noted by other scholars.

The juxtaposition of Mary and Eve is not found in the New Testament. Moreover, the author of the PJ never directly refers to Mary as the second Eve. It is implicit only in his perception of Mary's purity. However, the Mary/Eve parallel was mentioned in the second century patristic writings. The parallel of Adam and Jesus in the Pauline corpus undoubtedly led to an association of Mary with Eve.

Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian were the earliest writers to develop the Mary/Eve parallels. Utilizing both Paul's recapitulation notions and the Lucan *fiat*, these early Christian writers incorporated Mary into salvation history, juxtaposing her with Eve. The primary characteristics assigned to Mary by these writers were faith, belief and obedience. These qualities contrast sharply with Eve's disobedience and incorrect belief. Just as Eve brought death into the world, Mary was able to bring salvation to Israel.

The PJ characterized Mary quite differently. To be sure, the author also incorporated the Lucan *fiat* into his annunciation, but he did not emphasize Mary's obedience, faith or belief. In fact, these traits are inconsequential in the narrative. Mary gave birth to Jesus simply because of her extraordinary purity. Unlike other early Christian writers, the author of the PJ connected Mary to Eve through their purity: a characteristic originally assigned to both Adam and Eve in the creation stories. The depiction of Mary in this narrative represents an entirely independent image of her in early Christian writings.

How do we account for this difference? The solution may lie in dependence on different Genesis creation stories. The distinguishing feature in the PJ is in the author's religious construction of the cosmos. Mary's purity symbolizes God's original perfect, holy and complete creation, described at length in Genesis 1. Taking on these characteristics, Mary becomes the second Eve. Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian's writings emphasized the second creation story in Genesis, focusing on Adam and Eve's disobedience in their portrayals of Mary as the second Eve. In contrast, the author of the PJ centered his narrative on the first creation story, juxtaposing Mary's characteristics with the primordial Eve—in the image of God he created her...then Mary.



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**Chapter 5**  
**Conclusions: Re-thinking the Relevance of the *Protevangelium of James***

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*Mors per Evam, vita per Mariam.*<sup>1</sup>

—St. Jerome

### 5.1 Review

This study has demonstrated that there were several differing views of Mary during the first two centuries of the Christian tradition. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the majority of narratives are Christological, so they do not tell us much about what early Christians thought about Mary. The New Testament writers did not place much emphasis on Mary's role and character. Moreover, many of the canonical images conflict, providing divergent views. The two significant images that did emerge were Mary's motherhood and virginity. The second century patristic writers picked up and developed the canonical themes. In addition, they allotted Mary a significant role in salvation history, and some new Marian characterizations materialized: Mary as the second Eve and Mary as a symbol of the Church. Non-canonical narratives did not add much to Marian images, but they did extend the image of Mary as a virgin to include virginity after birth. Some of these narratives suggest that there were additional traditions about Mary circulating throughout Christian communities.

As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, a new image of Mary emerged in the *Protevangelium of James* (PJ). This narrative is important because it is the only known early Christian source that is Mariological. It provides much more information about Mary, indicating what some early Christians thought about her. The PJ's image of Mary is quite different than other early Christian narratives. There are three primary reasons for the PJ's distinction: (1) authorship, (2) emphasis on purity, and (3) religious construction of the cosmos.

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<sup>1</sup>T. E. Page et al., "The Virgin's Profession," in *Selected Letters of Jerome*, tr. F. A. Wright, The Loeb Classical Library (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933), 98.

The first reason for the PJ's distinctive image of Mary, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is that the author was most likely a Jewish Christian. Although some scholars have argued against this view, based on the writer's ignorance of Temple practices and Jewish traditions, I think that there is a strong connection to Judaism. The PJ was written well after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, so a few discrepancies should be expected before completely dismissing any connection to Judaism.

The extensive utilization of Septuagint parallels to define Mary's character in this narrative point to a familiarity with the Hebrew Bible. For example, in Chapter 3 I described Mary's ancestry at length, positing that the characters Anna and Joachim were modeled after biblical patriarchs and matriarchs. These parallels are demonstrated from the allocation of their names through to Anna's barrenness. Moreover, Mary is conceived in the same manner as other important figures in Israel's history—through divine intervention. Mary's conception follows the biblical tradition for the birth of heroes or heroines.

The author's positive attitude toward Jews and the Temple also points toward Jewish Christian authorship. Unlike some other early Christian narratives, the Jewish characters in the PJ are portrayed as supporters of Mary and Jesus rather than as opponents. For instance, the priesthood is assigned various roles that support Mary. They are actively involved in Mary's childhood, raising her in the Temple. The narrative depicts the religious leaders as kissing, blessing and praying for Mary. Moreover, the high priest Zechariah is portrayed as assisting in the selection of Joseph as Mary's guardian—praying to the Lord to solve the crisis posed by Mary's menses. The author of the PJ also pays particular attention to ritual and Temple purity. For instance, we have seen that although Mary's menses posed a problem for the Temple purity, the author appears equally concerned for both Mary's purity and the Temple's purity.

The second reason for the PJ's distinctive image of Mary, as mentioned in Chapter 4, is that the author constructed Mary as the embodiment of sacred purity. Purity is Mary's primary characteristic in the PJ and it dominates the entire narrative. The canonical, non-canonical and patristic writers are not concerned with the status of Mary's purity or impurity. They characterized Mary in terms of her motherhood and virginity. Although both these images are depicted in the PJ, they are secondary characteristics.

Mary's purity in the PJ is established from the moment of Anna's conception. The image of Mary being conceived through divine intervention symbolizes that Mary was to be "set apart" for some greater purpose. In addition, Anna also vowed in the narrative, immediately after she learned that she would conceive a child, that she would dedicate Mary to the Temple. Throughout the narrative, Mary is depicted as living in an environment of holy seclusion—being separated from all worldly and profane things. The narrative even reports that Mary's food was carefully monitored through her mother's ritually pure breast milk, ritually pure foods, and nutrition supplied to Mary by a heavenly messenger in the Temple. As Douglas pointed out in her analysis of land animals, the author's designation of Mary as being "set apart" or "segregated" from other people and anything potentially defiling connotes images of purity itself. Moreover, just as only pure animals can be brought to the altar for sacrifice, so also can only the purest of women be offered to God. To be sure, Mary's procession and reception at the Temple characterizes her as an offering.

The author is also concerned with the status of Mary's sexual purity in the narrative. Mary's purity is protected through her extraordinary virginity after the onset of puberty. Since menstruation would render Mary defiled, she is removed from the realm of the Temple, protecting both the purity of Mary and the Temple. The author maintains Mary's purity outside of the Temple by characterizing

it in terms of her extraordinary virginity. Throughout the narrative, there are several occurrences where the author verifies, reaffirms and certifies Mary's virginity. This is distinct from the canonical and patristic sources. Mary's status as a virgin in the PJ is guaranteed before conception, during pregnancy and even after the birth of her child.

The third reason for the PJ's distinctive image of Mary, as mentioned in Chapter 4, is the author's religious construction of the cosmos. Douglas's theory suggests that Mary epitomizes the purity established in God's original creation of humanity. Moreover, it implies that Mary embodies the same attributes of God: holiness, completion and perfection.

This understanding is quite different from other early Christian narratives, and the juxtaposition of Mary as the second Eve points to this difference. As we have seen the only writers to mention this parallel were the Church fathers. They based their Mary/Eve parallels on Paul's recapitulation theory, his Adam/Jesus typology, and the Lucan *fiat*. In the patristic sources, Mary becomes the second Eve based on her faith, correct belief or obedience to God. This contrasts sharply with Eve's disobedience or incorrect belief. The author of the PJ based his parallels on Mary and Eve's joint purity. Unlike the patristic writers, the author of the PJ is not concerned with the "fall" of humanity, but with God's original pure creation of the cosmos.

To conclude this review, I would like to return to the issue of authorial intention mentioned in Chapter 2. After examining images of Mary in early Christian narratives and the PJ, the author's motivation for writing a story about Mary's life becomes much clearer. During the first century, very little was written about Mary. By the second century, we are able to see that some early Christians began to take an interest in Jesus' mother—her role becomes much more significant in salvation history. The author of the PJ, in turn, wrote a story about Mary describing what other writers did not:

her ancestry, infancy, childhood and adolescence. Some scholars have suggested that the PJ was written primarily for biographical and apologetic purposes. To be sure, both these elements are evident in the narrative, but they are secondary issues, perhaps even incidental. Other scholars have proposed that the narrative was composed to praise or glorify Mary. I think that the PJ was written primarily for the glorification of Mary, a view which is supported by the author's overall emphasis on Mary's extraordinary purity in the narrative.

## 5.2 Reflections

The doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception is an excellent starting point for examining the differences between the PJ's representation of Mary and what becomes orthodoxy. It deals with issues such as purity, sex, and blame—and also original sin and Mary as the new Eve. I would like to reflect on these issues, exploring some of the implications.

### 5.2.1 *Immaculate Conception*

What do we mean by "Immaculate Conception"? Simply put, it means a conception without spot or blemish. The idea of Mary's immaculate conception began to circulate very early in the Church. For instance, Nestorius (ca. 381-451) and Pelagius (d. ca. 418) mentioned it. The full development of this thought emerged during the Middle Ages, but only after much debated discussion. In 1438 Basil proclaimed this dogma, but it was condemned by Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447). The issue was finally settled in 1854 by Pope Pius IX in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, authorizing the doctrine/dogma of Mary's immaculate conception: "In the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the savior

of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin.”<sup>1</sup> This dogma was unanimously rejected by the Protestant churches and it continues to be a subject of scholarly criticism, including feminist discussions.

In Chapter 3, I argued that the PJ does not support the idea of an immaculate conception. Instead, the author parallels Mary’s birth with other Septuagint stories. Mary is conceived in the same manner as other important figures in Israel’s history—through divine intervention. Mary’s conception follows the biblical tradition for the birth of heroes or heroines. I think this is likely what the author intended in his depiction of Mary. Moreover, Mary’s conception is distinct from Jesus’ conception. In the PJ, Jesus is the one who is immaculately conceived, being created by God’s λόγος. It is simple enough to understand why it was later thought by some that the PJ supported an immaculate conception of Mary—manuscript variations alone attest to this. Obviously, some early Christians thought that the PJ’s Mary was immaculately conceived, all the more so given that the text is not absolutely clear on how Anna conceived.

### 5.2.2 *Original Sin*

In Catholic dogma, Mary’s immaculate conception frees her from original sin. *Ineffabilis Deus* connects original sin to sexuality—primarily, it refers to a sexual act. How did this thought emerge? The greatest proponent of the doctrine was Augustine of Hippo (354–430). He taught that original sin was transmitted through sexual intercourse, in addition linking sex to lust.<sup>2</sup> For Augustine, human passions are the irrational and uncontrollable nature of sexual desire, which is its sinful aspect. His intention does not seem to be to denigrate the human condition, but to stress that

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<sup>1</sup>Piux IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854.

<sup>2</sup>See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 299–301.

humans are completely dependent on God's grace. Not everyone accepted Augustine's theory. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109), advanced a different view teaching that original sin was the absence of the original justice with which the world was created.<sup>3</sup> It is a lack of justice brought about by Adam's disobedience. The effect of original sin is that it impedes free will, giving the will a predisposition toward evil. The potential for original sin is in everyone from the moment of conception.

How does this relate to Mary's representation in the PJ? Neither theory works well for understanding Mary. If Mary had been immaculately conceived, then Augustine's thought would fit well. Anselm's theory of free will does not really relate to Mary at all, since it is associated with sin and immorality. As we have seen, Mary's moral purity is of little interest to the PJ author. The narrative is more concerned about the states of purity/impurity than good/evil.

If we applied the notion of original sin to the PJ, how might we explain Mary's freedom from original sin? Mary is freed from original sin based on two notions: (1) she does not menstruate, and (2) she does not experience a painful childbirth. Both these concepts link Mary to a Christian understanding of original sin. The curse God placed on Eve is removed from Mary. This is what frees Mary from original sin—not an immaculate conception.

### 5.2.3 *Mary as the Second Eve*

As we have seen original sin links Mary to Genesis creation stories, particularly with Eve. In Chapter 4, I outlined early Mary/Eve juxtapositions, noting that the patristic writers centered their

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<sup>3</sup>Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On the Nature and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Cassell, 2000), 125-126.

parallels on the traits of obedience/disobedience. This same image of Mary continues in the encyclical

*Lumen Gentium*:<sup>4</sup>

The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by the acceptance of her who was predestined to be the mother of His Son, so that just as a woman contributed to death, so also a woman should contribute to life....Rightfully therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she “being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.” Hence not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert in their preaching, “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed by her faith.” Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her the “mother of the living,” and still more often they say: “death through Eve, life through Mary” (8:56).

By her belief and obedience, not knowing man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, as the new Eve she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the ancient serpent, but in that of God’s messenger (8:63).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the PJ’s juxtaposition of Mary as the second Eve is distinctive. It is based on Mary and Eve’s purity, symbolizing God’s original holy, perfect and complete creation. This understanding is a very positive image. Although Mary’s painless birth and (possibly) unrealized menses recollects the primordial fall from grace, the PJ’s end result seems to have less negative connotations than the patristic writings or Augustine; it also has almost nothing to do with obedience. The author of the PJ emphasizes Eve’s purity, rather than focusing on her “sinful” nature—thus, making the PJ distinctive.

### 5.3 Concluding Remarks

What if the PJ’s representation of Mary had played a significant part in shaping the Western image of Mary? What would be different? More specifically, if the early patristic writers had adopted

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<sup>4</sup>Second Vatican Council, 1964.



the PJ's view of Mary as the second Eve, rather than juxtaposing Mary's obedience with Eve's disobedience, how might this have affected women in the Christian tradition?

Within the Christian tradition, particularly in Catholicism, Mary has served as an example for women. For many women around the world, over the centuries, Mary has played an enormously positive role in women's lives. In *Redemptoris Mater*, women in particular are called to find the "secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement."<sup>5</sup> One only need to count the number of candles lit in the front of the statues in churches or see the number of pilgrims converge at her shrines to appreciate her importance. Theologians and feminists may notice the negative elements attached to Mary, but I suspect that for the majority of people the image of Mary is entirely positive.

Many feminist theologians and scholars, particularly since the middle of the twentieth century, have recognized that the image of Mary is not necessarily positive. Mary Hines suggests that Mary's image "has often functioned to legitimate the powerlessness of women."<sup>6</sup> However, Mary as a symbolic figure in the Church is not really the issue—it is the Western interpretation of Mary. Jane Schaberg suggests:

The charge of contemporary feminists, then, is not that the image of the Virgin Mary is unimportant or irrelevant, but that it contributes to and is integral to the oppression of women. As the most fully realized and generally venerated image of woman regenerated and consecrated to the good, Mary represents a central theme in the history of Western attitudes to women.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1987.

<sup>6</sup>Mary Hines, "New Perspectives on Mary: Voices of Women," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 16/1 (2000): 91.

<sup>7</sup>Schaberg, 13.

Moreover, the representation of Mary as immaculately conceived in Catholic dogma is not really an issue either. I do not think that this idea is represented in the original text of the PJ, but it is nevertheless deeply rooted in tradition. This dogma is not going to simply disappear. How then might we look at it differently? Can the PJ offer any new insights? The problem with the notion of an immaculate conception is its connections to original sin and Eve. The PJ differs by putting the emphasis on purity—particularly one based on separation—and Mary as the co-regenerator of human possibilities. It also differs by emphasizing Mary's positive, distinguishing features rather than the "weakness of her sex." If the PJ's understanding of Mary, particularly as the second Eve, had been incorporated into the Western Christian tradition, then an entirely different image of Mary could have emerged: an image which promotes both equality for women and a much more favourable picture of humanity. To be sure, more scholarship needs to be completed on the PJ, particularly on Marian images and its connections to early Judaism. Feminist scholars and theologians could turn to the PJ and explore its central theme, Mary's extraordinary purity, making new or reclaiming traditional images of Mary. Unfortunately, the tendency has been to focus on the themes of virginity and chastity, images that have negative connotations and are secondary in the PJ. Reclaiming some of the insights of this text might lead to a different view of Mary—one that is much more positive and meaningful.

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