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# MARY THE SERVANT OF GOD AND THE NEW CREATION

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The creation story in any religion is its fundamental belief. The story of the origin of the world is at the same time the statement of the meaning of the present and the purpose of all existence. God is the absolute beginning and end, the giver of meaning, for everything.<sup>1</sup>

A religious story of creation is not a scientific account but a proclamation of meaning and purpose. The stories of creation in the Hebrew Scriptures have long been discussed in relation to scientific analyses of the origins of the cosmos or of life. Technically, they should not even be compared to show differences. Creation is a religious idea, as are creator and creature. The natural sciences cannot speak of creation, creator, or creature. Only a religion can. And religious language about creation is a proclamation of faith in the absolute, the beyond-science, and its presence at each moment for an absolute end or purpose. Creation tells of the meaning of time.<sup>2</sup>

The Adam and Eve story is not the Christian creation story, nor are the other creation stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. They are part of the Hebrew background of the New Testament, of course. But the New Testament has a new creation story

<sup>1</sup> This is the conclusion of studies in the History of Religions. See R. Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions*, tr. by H. Rose (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967); M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, tr. by W. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) and *A History of Religious Ideas, 2: From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity* (University of Chicago, 1982); G. van der Leeuw, "Primordial Time and Final Time," in *Man and Time*, ed. by J. Campbell (New York: Bollingen, 1957); C. Long, "Archaisms and Hermeneutics," in *The History of Religions*, ed. by J. Kitigawa (University of Chicago, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> More information on this and related topics can be found in M. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, tr. by W. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) and in J. Waardenburg, "Symbolic Aspects of Myth," in *Myth, Symbol and Reality*, ed. by A. M. Olson (University of Notre Dame, 1980), pp. 41-68.

which it calls the "new creation."<sup>3</sup> Briefly, this story tells us that from eternity God planned time on the model of, or for, the Incarnation, Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of God the Son, so that all things were created by Him, for Him, and in Him. Creation gets its meaning from this story of Jesus. The Son of God became human and died for all to show all the meaning of life: love of God and of others as oneself. All creation – all nature – is Christocentric and gets meaningfulness through participation in the resurrection of the Lord.

As a creation story, the story of the new creation is a proclamation, a narrative, a ritually oriented community expression of faith. As a proclamation it is a creed, and it can take on various forms, pithy or lengthy, depending upon liturgical or narrative circumstances. Creeds – such as, "Jesus is Lord"; or "Christ died for all so that all might live"; or "There is one God and one mediator between God and humans, Christ Jesus, who was Himself human and gave Himself for ransom for all"; and other creeds in the New Testament – are taken from liturgical expressions of Christian communities and used in letters as reminders. In community liturgies of Baptism or Eucharist there were further symbolic words and deeds that gave extensive context to these expressions to communicate meaning. "We who died with Christ also rose with Him to new life" or "We put on new clothes in the New Adam to become new men or women" tell the story better in connection with rituals of baptism in a pool, with submersion and emergence from the pool. "This is my body which is given for you" or "Drink this all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" are eucharistic memories of Jesus' salvation and renovation of the whole of creation.<sup>4</sup>

Just as liturgical creeds proclaim the new creation in various ways, so does the narration of the story of Jesus, the Good News, proclaim the new creation in stories of which the four canonical ones are different from each other. The Gospels are narrative expressions of the new creation through the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus, adding details of Jesus' explanation of the meaning of life and, at times, stories of the origin of Jesus or of the aftermath of the Resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

If the New Testament statements about the New Creation are examined in detail, it is interesting to note how much they presume something that every detail of the

<sup>3</sup> See Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1: Creation*, tr. by W. Jurgens (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1971) (hereafter cited as *Creation*) and W. Brennan, O.S.M., *Mary: Servant, Mother, Woman* (Chicago: Servants of Mary, 1986), pp. 66 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See Schelkle, *Creation*; W. Brennan, O.S.M., *The Sacred Memory of Mary* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988); the interesting Note E-II (p. 432) in F. Prat, S. J., *The Theology of St. Paul*, vol. 1, tr. by J. Stoddard (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952).

<sup>5</sup> See Brennan, *Mary: Servant, Mother, Woman*, n. 13, p. 97, and "Mary the Servant of God: An Ancient Christian Concrete Principle for Spiritual Growth," in *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University), 10, 1 (Feb., 1989): 67-82.

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four Gospels presumes: the Christology of Jesus the Servant of God. The Gospels presume this ancient Hebrew understanding of Jesus, as do the Pauline letters. All good people, especially leaders, are called "Servant of God" in the Hebrew Scriptures. But the Isaian Suffering Servant was the culminating model of the Hebrew Scriptures for that which the earliest Christians saw in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

It is not only the quotation of earlier liturgical hymns by Paul and Luke that indicates this. In the four Gospels, the whole Suffering Servant theology of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection is presumed as a kind of "worked-out" reflection. Jesus is described as calling Himself the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah. He describes His mission as a "ransom for many." His accomplishment of salvation is "for others." The Passover Supper is described in terms of the vicarious suffering of the Suffering Servant ("for you"). In the predictions of the Passion, the Son of Man is identified as "suffering" in terms of the Suffering Servant. Jesus' call to His disciples, and His example to them, is that they be servants, just as He came not to be served but to serve. There is a constant reference to servant/child, servant/son, servants/children, since the Septuagint translation of *Ebed* was often *pais* (rather than *doulos*), so that child (or son) and servant become intertwined. Hence, there is a servant background in references to "children," "little ones," "humble ones." Also, "lamb of God" not only recalls the idea of sacrificial blood but also the idea of "servant" in Aramaic. The theophanies of the Baptism of Christ and the Transfiguration recall the Suffering Servant Song verse: "Behold my Servant, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased," granted the Septuagint "Son/Servant - *pais*." Jesus is said to fulfill the Servant's mission of bringing light and salvation to the Gentiles.

The image of the Suffering Servant is so prevalent that it is no surprise to read in *Acts* that Philip begins his catechesis of the Ethiopian by explaining one of the Suffering Servant songs. This is a recollection of early Christian catechesis. It seems that the earliest Christian community, very Jewish in mentality, pictured Jesus as the Suffering Servant. This was previous to later Christologies of Sonship, even though it was contemporaneous with images of Jesus as prophet and Messiah. As H. Wheeler Robinson wrote:

The new fact for Christianity was not a Book, but a Person. Jesus came as the Jewish Prophet-Messiah, but completely transformed the title by preferring the

<sup>6</sup> See K. H. Rengstorf, "DOULOS," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by G. Kittel, tr. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:261-279; W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God*, tr. by H. Knight, Studies in Biblical Theology No. 20 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1957); G. Bourbonnais, S.S.S., *Behold My Servant - A Study in Reading the Bible Thematically*, tr. by J. Otto (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1974).

transcendent and apocalyptic to the political and nationalistic idea, and blending with it the conception of the Suffering Servant of the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

The Gospels continue the tradition shown in Paul that discipleship is seen as service, so that the Church is made up of good servants and is a servant Church. Jesus is the Servant of God who demonstrated that true love is service of others in loving response to the Servant-love of God. For a Christian, this is the meaning of life in the new creation. This is what God planned to be and to reveal from all eternity. As the hymn which Paul quotes in *Philippians* says: God became one of us as a servant, obedient to death on the cross, and was glorified as Lord. This "obedience" is to say "yes" to God's plan and will by intention and action. This obedience is to follow the new law of love exemplified by Jesus. To do this is to receive the forgiveness of sins willingly and to live in the freedom of the children of God. It is the gift of the Spirit to the Church that makes this new life possible.<sup>8</sup>

The "new creation" should not be confused with apocalyptic symbols of revelation nor with eschatological symbols of judgment. Nor should it be confused with the *parousia*.<sup>9</sup> It has begun. It is realized eschatology, on the way to the fulfillment of the Plan of God, the fulfillment of loving service. It is expressed this way by St. Paul:

The love of Christ impels us who have received the conviction that since one died for all, all died. He died for all so that those who live might live not for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and was raised up.

Because of this we no longer look on anyone in terms of mere human judgment. If at one time we so regarded Christ, we no longer know him by this standard. This means that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away: now all is new! (2 Cor. 5:14-17)

Just as Jesus, the Suffering Servant, died for all (see *Isa.* 53:5, the fourth Servant Song), He also rose from the dead for all, so that with new life and new faith, all might live for Him and for others (cf. *Rom.* 8:28-32; 11:25-36).<sup>10</sup>

As time went on and the Church began to think more in conformity with Greco-Roman culture rather than Jewish, metaphysical controversies about Sonship overshadowed the Servant Christology, and metaphysical questions about the origins of

<sup>7</sup> H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 32 (see p. 27 also).

<sup>8</sup> The hymn in *Philippians* can be understood in the sense of the pre-existence of Christ or of his condition as the New Adam. See S. B. Morrow, S. J., "Obedience and Lordship," *The Bible Today*, 23 (1985): 377-382.

<sup>9</sup> The way Prat, in his work cited above (*Theology of St. Paul*, I), treats grace and glorification exemplifies this confusion.

<sup>10</sup> This is what Schelkle calls the "Christology of creation" and "creation as reconciliation."

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the cosmos overshadowed the New Creation theology.<sup>11</sup> These beliefs remained, especially in liturgy, which itself began to be separated from Greek reflective theological concepts. Christian writers often carried on a rabbinic view of creation (Adam and Eve, sin of Eve) in the context of non-Jewish philosophic theology of Jesus and of creation.<sup>12</sup> Until recently, with renewed emphasis on Scripture, these two theologies – of Christ the Servant and the New Creation – were almost forgotten. The Spirit, through the problems of our times, has led us to recuperate them.<sup>13</sup>

In this contemporary recovery of the Christology and ecclesiology of “Servant of God and others” and of the theology of the New Creation, the connection between the two is often unnoticed. The earliest Christian faith proclaimed a new creation within the framework of the Suffering Servant of God.

This connection is especially important today for Marian theology. In the New Testament, Mary is presented as the model Servant of God for others and as the woman of the New Creation. That these two theologies are connected can help us to see that these are not merely Lukan and Johannine views, which seem separate from the rest of the New Testament. Mary’s “Yes” in the Lukan Gospel shows Christians how to say “Yes” to the new covenant planned from all eternity, but her “Yes” enabled Jesus’ “Yes” to the Father’s will in sending His Son as Servant. John’s “Woman” of Cana and the Cross/Glorification of Jesus, the loving Servant, prays that true servants will have the new wine of the Spirit, Who is given at the New Creation, planned “in the Beginning,” for the “hour,” so that Beloved Disciples can claim her as their mother. And the whole framework of Servant and New Creation can show relations to other writings in the New Testament (e.g., *Gal. 4*).

The connection between the two notions – that our basic belief is a story of a New Creation, and that this is in the framework of Servant theology – can also help us to reflect theologically on the theme of Woman of the New Covenant, on the comparison of the *Magnificat* to the *Benedictus* as servant hymns that indicate personal commitment (Mary’s “for me” and Zachary’s “for us” – Servant language), and on the whole approach to the Church as those “in Christ” who live with new Spirit – life for Christ and for others, exemplified by Mary.

<sup>11</sup> See R. Butterworth, S. J., *The Theology of Creation* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1969), pp. 71 ff.

<sup>12</sup> The combination of the two themes is evident in the eucharist of the *Didache*. See Schelkle, *Creation*, p. 48, on *Didache* 10:3, and R. Cabie, *The Eucharist*, tr. by M. J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), pp. 23-35. On Adam and Eve in intertestamental tradition that influenced some New Testament writings and later Christian writers, see A. Serra, O.S.M., “Aspetti del femminile nella Bibbia,” summarized in *Marianum* 138 (1988): 569.

<sup>13</sup> This is true of the prayers in the renewed liturgical books and in the ecclesiologies of the Servant Church since Bonhoeffer.

The importance of reflection upon the connection of New Creation and Servant theology in the New Testament is evident for Marian theology. New insights can be gained. And these will follow along the lines called for in *Marialis cultus*: Mary in the context of the Church, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and contemporary problems.<sup>14</sup>

Reflection on this connection will have a special importance for the relationship of the New Testament presentation of Mary – as model Servant and as Mother in the New Creation – to Christian spirituality, in face of: poverty, the prejudices that exist in society against women's rights and role, those practiced against minorities' rights and dignity in systemic racism, and in face of the demand for radical faith commitment from all Christians.

Of course, this reflection will also benefit all aspects of Christian theology: liturgical, systematic, moral and poetic. It has already begun to influence liturgical prayers. Much more will have to be done to emphasize its significance for the theology of creation, grace, and sacraments. More of its influence will have to be seen, heard, and felt in Christian art, literature and music.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the best approach for each individual Christian would be the re-catechizing of one's own self in the way that the New Testament presents the very first catechesis. We could, or should – as Philip did in reaching out to the Ethiopian man ready for faith – turn to the Suffering Servant Songs of Isaiah to understand the meaning of Jesus as the Lord of all in the New Creation. The role of Mary in our lives as exemplary Servant of God and as the Mother of all, the Woman in the New Creation, can then speak to our hearts by the grace of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Marialis cultus* (Feb. 2, 1974), nos. 25-37.

<sup>15</sup> See *Do Whatever He Tells You: Reflections and Proposals for Promoting Marian Devotion*, Statement of the 208th General Chapter of the Order of Servants of Mary (Rome: General Curia O.S.M., 1983).