

2-13-1952

# The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity

Eric May

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

May, Eric (1952) "The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 3, Article 7.  
Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol3/iss1/7](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol3/iss1/7)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu).

## THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR MARY'S SPIRITUAL MATERNITY

In 1943 Pope Pius XII, now gloriously reigning, issued his far-reaching encyclical letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu* on the promotion of biblical studies. A few of his penetrating remarks may well serve as an introduction to this paper. True, His Holiness seems to have had primarily in mind those biblical questions which touch on the natural sciences; but what he says is surely applicable to Sacred Scripture in its relation to Mariology.

Pointing out that our age with its modern sources of information can contribute something toward the deeper and more accurate interpretation of Sacred Scripture, especially in historical matters, the Holy Father continues:

Quite wrongly, therefore, do some pretend, not rightly understanding the conditions of biblical study, that nothing remains to be added by the Catholic exegete of our time to what Christian antiquity has produced; since, on the contrary, these our times have brought to light so many things, which call for a fresh investigation and a new examination, and which stimulate not a little the practical zeal of the present-day interpreter (n. 32).

Later, commenting on scientific difficulties and obscurities in connection with the Bible, Pope Pius remarks:

Nevertheless no one will be surprised if all difficulties are not yet solved and overcome; but that even today serious problems greatly exercise the minds of Catholic exegetes. . . . And if the wished-for solution be slow in coming or does not satisfy us, since perhaps a successful conclusion may be reserved to posterity, let us not wax impatient thereat, seeing that in us also is rightly verified what the Fathers, and especially Augustine, observed in their time, viz.: God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we



112 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

might be urged to read and scrutinize them more intently, and, experiencing in a salutary manner our own limitations, we might be exercised in due submission of mind. . . . But this state of things is no reason why the Catholic commentator, inspired by an active and ardent love of his subject and sincerely devoted to Holy Mother Church, should in any way be deterred from grappling again and again with these difficult problems . . . (n. 44-46).<sup>1</sup>

“Grappling again and again with difficult problems.” How well those words sum up the vital exegetical activity in the Church today regarding questions dealing with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Hundreds of books and articles have appeared in recent years, examining over and over again the scriptural and traditional arguments adduced in support of Mary's various prerogatives. The astonishing thing is the wide divergence of views regarding identical matter. Astonishing, but also heartening. Not only is it proof of a vast Mariological interest in our own day and age, but there is well-founded hope that in the literary winnowing process the chaff will be blown away, leaving exposed the hard grain of truth.

We Catholics believe that Mary is the spiritual Mother of all mankind, and most particularly of the Mystical Body of Christ. We address her confidently as “Our Heavenly Mother.” We believe that this is not merely a pious title, but that it expresses a reality; that Mary is in fact our Mother, not indeed physically (as Mary was the physical Mother of the personal Christ) but spiritually, in that she has brought us all forth into the supernatural life of grace which unites us in one Mystical Body together with the Head of that Body and Source of grace, Jesus Christ. The present paper poses the question: does Sacred Scripture provide a reliable basis for devotion to Mary under her title of Spiritual Mother?

<sup>1</sup> *Divino afflante Spiritu*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 35, 1943, pp. 313, 318; [English translation, NCWC, Washington D. C., 1943].

*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 113

Marian texts in Holy Writ are comparatively few. This fact has been accounted for in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but ultimately we must recognize in it the plan of Divine Providence. Since the texts are so few, two extremes and a double danger are to be avoided in their interpretation. One would be to let devotion to Mary run away with reason so as to read into the texts something which is not really there. The other is, to leave the hidden depths of some texts unplumbed because of preconceived notions of what may or may not be expected from a particular passage, especially Old Testament passages. It is possible to be more Catholic than the Church. But it is also possible to be less Catholic than the Church.

The burden of our investigation in this paper turns upon four major texts of the Bible which have been linked quite commonly with the spiritual maternity of Mary. Each of the four texts speaks of a mother. In two of them Mary is expressly mentioned by name; in the other two the mother is simply referred to as "the woman." The four major texts are: the Protogospel (*Gen.* 3: 15), the Annunciation pericope (*Luke* 1: 26-38), Christ's third word from the Cross (*John* 19: 25-27), and the vision of the woman clothed with the sun (*Apoc.* 12). There are also some minor texts or groups of texts which will bear consideration. We may refer to them popularly as the Johannine sonship texts and the Pauline Mystical Body texts. Lesser Marian passages must likewise be investigated, such as those which refer to Jesus as Mary's "firstborn son" (*Matt.* 1: 25; *Luke* 2: 7), the sanctification

<sup>2</sup> Some authors think that Mary was still living at the time that most of the New Testament was being written; that it was from reverence that the evangelists did not say more. St. Lawrence of Brindisi represents a long line of spiritual writers in saying that the Holy Spirit wished to honor the Virgin by a certain silence in Scripture. "Many things," he says, "are praised more by silent admiration than by speaking about them; because of their dignity they can never be praised sufficiently in words." *Sermo II, In Assumptione*, in the *Mariale*, [*Opera Omnia*, I], Padua, 1928, pp. 590-591.

114 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

of John the Baptist at the Visitation (*Luke* 1: 44), Mary's part in the miracle at Cana (*John* 2: 1-11), and her presence in the Upper Room at Pentecost (*Acts* 1: 14). We shall consider each text in its bearing on the doctrine of the spiritual maternity. In a survey article of this kind, our treatment of each passage must necessarily be rather summary.

I. *The Four Major Texts*

*Gen.* 3: 15—"I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
between your seed and her seed;  
He shall crush your head,  
and you shall lie in wait for his heel."

Those were the meaningful words addressed by God to Satan, after the devil had seduced Eve and Adam into committing the original sin in paradise.

*Is this a Marian text?* When we ask whether the verse concerns the Blessed Virgin Mary we mean: is she indicated here in a real scriptural sense, and not merely associated with the words by pious accommodation? Anyone who has followed at least some of the recent Marian articles in theological reviews will realize that the question is not asked lightly. What are the views that have been expressed? Indeed, a few Catholic authors would hold that the woman in *Gen.* 3: 15 is Eve alone; that Mary is not concerned here except by mere accommodation.<sup>3</sup> By far the majority of modern writers, how-

<sup>3</sup> Father Léon Leloir cannot see how the text could ever be applied literally to Mary. He concedes a degree of possibility to her typical presence, but prefers to see only an accommodation of the text to Mary. "The woman" for him means "race of women"; *La Médiation Mariale dans la théologie contemporaine*, Bruges, 1933, pp. 87-90. H. Lesêtre, too, thinks that the text concerns neither Eve nor Mary, but women collectively; art. *Marie, Mère de Dieu* in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Paris, 1928, IV, 1, col. 779. Other authors of like mind include W. Goossens, *De cooperatione immediata Matris Redemptoris ad redemptionem obiectivam*, Paris, 1939, p. 96; Heinisch-Heidt, *The*



*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 115

ever, see in the text some kind of scriptural reference to Mary. Many simply refer the text to the Blessed Virgin without attempting to specify the particular biblical sense.<sup>4</sup> Others again believe that the verse has in mind first Eve, then Mary, with Eve particularly as a type of Mary—although authors do not always agree on terminology.<sup>5</sup> Still others see Mary in the

*Theology of the Old Testament*, Collegeville, Minn., 1950, pp. 304, 318-319, 328. Still others are referred to by V. G. Bertelli, *L'interpretazione mariologica del Protoevangelo (Gen. 3: 15) negli esegeti e teologi dopo la Bolla "Ineffabilis Deus" di Pio IX (1854-1948)*, in *Marianum*, vol. 13, 1951, pp. 258-269.—Very recently another view has been advocated by G. Calandra, O.F.M., *Nova Protoevangelii mariologica interpretatio*, in *Antonianum*, vol. 26, 1951, pp. 343-366. For him the woman of *Gen. 3: 15* is Eve alone, and her seed is both Christ and Mary (both of whom won perfect and absolute victory over Satan, Christ by His own power, Mary by singular grace), as well as the redeemed human race. The view is open to serious difficulties.

<sup>4</sup> For example, F. H. Schüth, S.J., *Mediatrix, eine mariologische Frage*, Innsbruck, 1925, p. 96; A. Schaefer, *Die Gottesmutter in der Heiligen Schrift*, Münster, 1887, p. 109; J. E. Steinmueller, *Some Problems of the Old Testament*, Milwaukee, 1936, p. 67; J. Gföllner, *Die theologischen Gründe der Definierbarkeit von Maria Himmelfahrt*, in *Internationaler Marianischer Kongress in Freiburg*, Freiburg i/B, 1903, pp. 39-40; D. Palmarini, *Notulae in Gen. 3: 15, Verbum Domini*, vol. 20, 1940, p. 143; E. Gallagher, S.J., *Evaluation of the Arguments in Favor of Mary's Co-redemption*, in *Marian Studies*, vol. 2, 1951, p. 109; E. Wuenchel, C.S.S.R., *The Definability of the Assumption*, in *The Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings*, vol. 2, 1947, p. 94—Further bibliography in Bertelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-291.

<sup>5</sup> B. H. Merkelback, O.P., *Mariologia*, Parisiis, 1939, p. 82, thinks the woman is Eve in the immediate, explicit, formal sense, Mary in the mediate, implicit, virtual (or fuller) sense. For J. Bittremieux, *De Mediatione universalis B. M. Virginis quoad gratias*, Bruges, 1926, p. 184, the text refers possibly to Eve in the literal sense, certainly to Mary in at least the typical sense. E. F. Sutcliffe, S.J., *Protoevangelium*, in the *Clergy Review*, vol. 2, 1931, pp. 155-159 sees Eve in the primary literal sense, Mary in the typical sense. So too, authors like G. Repetti, *La tipologia mariana nel Protoevangelio*, in *Divus Thomas*, vol. 14, 1937, p. 289; J. J. Dougherty, *The Fall and its Consequences*, in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 3, 1941, pp. 230-231. Cf. likewise J. E. Coleran, S.J., *Current Theology*, in *Theological Studies*, vol. 3, 1942, pp. 138-139. Looking at the text from another angle, E. Nacar thinks that the woman is literally Eve; at most he will admit Mary's presence in the text as typified by Eve; *El Protoevangelio*, in *Estudios Bíblicos*, vol. 1, 1942, pp. 477-516.

116 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

verse in the fuller sense.<sup>6</sup> Finally, there are an increasing number of contemporary writers who see in the woman of *Gen. 3: 15* a reference to Mary and to Mary alone, and that in the strict literal sense.<sup>7</sup>

Having pondered the many-sided arguments advanced for the various opinions and having checked with the text itself, it is our view that *Gen. 3: 15* is a strictly Marian text.<sup>8</sup> Mary

<sup>6</sup> Thus Teófilo de Orbiso, O.F.M.Cap., *La Mujer del Protoevangelio*, in *Estudios Bíblicos*, vol. 1, 1941, pp. 187-207; A. Rivera, C.M.F., *Inimicitias ponam . . . (Gen. 3: 15)*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 21, 1941, pp. 116-117; J. Trinidad, S.J., *Quomodo praenuntietur Maria in Gen. 3: 15?* in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 19, 1939, p. 357. Msgr. E. Florit seems to hold the same view: *Maria nell'esegesi biblica contemporanea*, in *Studi Mariani*, I, 1942-43, pp. 87-90. Cf. also A. Miller, O.S.B., *Zur Typologie des Alten Testaments*, in *Antonianum*, vol. 25, 1950, pp. 428-429.

<sup>7</sup> L. Kösters, S.J., art. *Maria*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg i/B, 1934, VI, col. 887; D. Unger, O.F.M.Cap., *The Use of Sacred Scripture in Mariology*, in *Marian Studies*, vol. 1, 1950, p. 94; B. Mariani, O.F.M., *L'Assunzione di Maria SS. nella Sacra Scrittura*, in *Atti del Congresso Nazionale Mariano dei Frati Minori d'Italia*, Roma, 1948, pp. 468-483; G. Roschini, O.S.M., *Mariologia*, Roma, 1947, I, p. 60; Michael von Neukirch, O.F.M.Cap., *Kleine theologisch-praktische Mariologie*, Leipzig, 1925, pp. 19-20; F. S. Mueller, S.J., *Origo divino-apostolica doctrinae evectionis B. Virginis ad gloriam coelestem quoad corpus*, Oeniponte, 1930, pp. 60-63; E. Garesché, S.J., *The Most Beloved Woman*, New York, 1919, pp. 101-103; L. G. Da Fonseca, S.J., *L'Assunzione di Maria nella Sacra Scrittura*, in *Biblica*, vol. 28, 1947, pp. 339-340; J. McCarthy, *The Universal Mediation of the Bl. Virgin*, in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 52, 1938, pp. 143-144; Francis X. Peirce, S.J., *Mary Alone Is the Woman of Genesis 3: 15*, in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 2, 1940, pp. 245-252; *idem*, *The Woman of Genesis*, in the *Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 103, 1940, p. 94 ff.; *idem*, *The Protoevangelium*, in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 13, 1951, pp. 239-252; E. Siegman, C.P.P.S., *Gen. 1: 11 in the Seminary Scripture Course*, in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 5, 1943, p. 328. For M. Peinador, C.M.F., "vocabulum 'issah' intelligi debeat vel litteraliter et unice de Maria Virgine vel plene"; *De argumento scripturistico in Mariologia*, in *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, vol. 1, 1951, p. 337. Father Juniper Carol, O.F.M., in his *De Corredemptione B. V. Mariae*, Civitas Vaticana, 1950, pp. 86-91, capably champions the view that Mary is the woman of *Gen. 3: 15* in the literal sense, and provides an exhaustive list of those who hold the same.

<sup>8</sup> So far as we can see, this represents the mind of recent Popes in their encyclicals and letters on Mary. We think that Father Maximus Peinador,



*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 117

alone is the woman spoken of by God, and no other. The text foretells the perfect enmity which will exist between Satan and this definite woman (Mary); between Satan's seed—sin and damnation, and Mary's seed, Christ the Redeemer. In crushing Satan's power Christ was to be put to death in His human nature.

Just a few remarks in justification of this view.<sup>9</sup> Eve is not necessarily the woman of *Gen.* 3: 15. The Hebrew article in *ha'issha* (the woman), besides a possible anaphoric meaning can also signify "a certain woman" according to the rules of grammar. Further, although one of the primary principles of exegesis demands that a text be examined in its context, *Gen.* 3: 15 happens to be a special kind of text, a messianic prophecy, and such passages are apt to have a material content independent of its immediate surroundings. This seems to be the case in *Is.* 7: 14 and *Num.* 24: 17-19. It seems to be the case in *Gen.* 3: 15. As for the principle that in one and the same context a word must everywhere have the identical meaning (and the argument based on it: that since *ha'issha* in the rest of the context refers to Eve, why not in v. 15?) one may answer with Father Peirce that it is God who uses the term in v. 15, the inspired author in the remaining verses, and that difference of speaker would permit difference of signification. Or, one could point out with Father Da Fonseca that elsewhere in Sacred Scripture a word is used in the same context in different meanings, as the word "father" in *Luke* 2: 48-49 (cf. also the reference to death in *Matt.* 8: 21-22; *pneuma*

C.M.F., has a point when he writes, "Notamus sensum mariologicum Proto-evangelii post Bullam Conceptionis certum, post Bullam Assumptionis esse certissimum et pro omni catholico indubium; insuper utramque Bullam de Virginis cum Redemptore intima associatione in pugna contra daemonem loqui et de plenissimo triumpho"; *De argumento scripturistico, loc. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup>These remarks are based on the works mentioned in footnote 9, especially those of Father Peirce, S.J., one of the most capable defenders of the view on exegetical grounds.

118 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

in *Rom.* 8). In fact, Eve cannot be the woman of *Gen.* 3: 15. For the verse prophesies perfect enmity between this woman and Satan, her seed and his. This perfect enmity which Pope Pius IX had in mind when defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception,<sup>10</sup> could not have been verified in Eve who played so big a part in original sin. Everywhere in Holy Writ and Tradition Eve appears as the cause of ruin, never as one who opposed Satan; cf. *Eccl.* 25: 33; *2 Cor.* 11: 3; *1 Tim.* 2: 14. We conclude that Mary alone is the woman of *Gen.* 3: 15. After all, wherever else in the Old Testament a woman appears in a messianic text, the woman is Mary alone (cf. *Is.* 7: 14; *Mich.* 5: 3; possibly *Jer.* 31: 22). Mary alone, as a matter of fact, was all pure and never for a moment under Satan's power. And her seed? Christ, evidently, who crushed Satan's head in the objective Redemption.

Sometimes the following argument is used against our thesis: Adam and Eve could not have known the meaning of the prophecy, had it referred to Mary. This does not seem to be a valid objection, and has already been answered satisfactorily. According to Da Fonseca,<sup>11</sup> even we of the twentieth century do not always know with certainty the meaning of messianic passages; why expect more from Adam and Eve? Father Garesché suggests that our first parents probably caught only the literal import of the words, namely, that their evil-doing was to be atoned for and that one of their progeny (a certain woman) would give birth to a Savior who would

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Dominic Unger, O.F.M.Cap., *Mary Immaculate, The Bull Ineffabilis Deus of Pope Pius IX*, Paterson, N. J., 1946, pp. 10-11 and note p. 30. Authors like Goossens and Lennerz maintain that the Pope's reference to Mary as "designated" in *Gen.* 3: 15 is open to an accommodative meaning. Others have argued successfully against such an opinion; cf. Da Fonseca's review of Ceupens, O.P., *De Mariologia Biblica*, in *Biblica*, vol. 30, 1949, pp. 119-122. Cf. further J. Carol, O.F.M., *The Apostolic Constitution "Munificentissimus Deus" and Our Lady's Co-redemption*, in *Marianum*, vol. 13, 1951, p. 248 ff.

<sup>11</sup> *L'Assunzione*, in *Biblica*, vol. 28, 1947, p. 351.



*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 119

crush the head of the one who had deceived them.<sup>12</sup> And Father Mueller would remind us that God addressed the words to Satan in the first place, Adam and Eve being spectators, and that it was Satan alone who really had to understand.<sup>13</sup>

*What is the relation of Gen. 3: 15 to Mary's spiritual maternity?* There are not wanting some very capable authors who see in this text a definite scriptural proof for Mary's spiritual motherhood. Among others, Father Roschini<sup>14</sup> and Bover, S.J.<sup>15</sup> This view does not please everyone and some writers reject or at least question the inclusion of the Mystical Body in the "seed of the woman."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Most Beloved Woman*, New York, 1919, p. 101-103.

<sup>13</sup> *Origo divino-apostolica*, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Roschini, O.S.M., *Mariologia*, I, p. 61. He argues that the seed of the woman "primo modo est Christus, secundo modo vero omnes fideles, seu collectio eorum qui ad Redemptorem tamquam corpus morale et plenitudo eius pertinent. . . . Semen serpentis sumitur collective; ergo etiam semen mulieris, ut perfecta sit oppositio, collective sumi debet."

<sup>15</sup> Joseph M. Bover, S.J., *Universalis B. Virginis mediatio ex Protoevangelio (Gen. 3: 15) demonstrata*, in *Gregorianum*, vol. 5, 1924, pp. 571-572. He argues that Christ is clearly the seed of the woman; but all the faithful, secondarily, pertain to the woman's seed (*Apoc.* 12: 9-11; 1 *John* 2: 13-14; *Rom.* 16: 20). Therefore the faithful, too, will crush the serpent's head. And on pp. 582-583 of the above article he argues to Mary's spiritual maternity from the fact that the woman's seed includes all the faithful, secondarily or extensively. Teófilo de Orbiso, O.F.M. Cap., quotes Bover with approbation; *La Mujer del Protoevangelio*, in *Estudios Bíblicos*, vol. 1, 1942, p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> N. García Garcés, C.M.F., says he does not dare sustain such a view solely from the letter of the text; *Mater Corredemptrix*, Romae, 1940, p. 33. F. S. Mueller, S.J., rejects it because "semen mulieris est solus Messias. Ipse solus dejicit et debellat inimicum; corpus eius mysticum, ceteri justi, solummodo sibi appropriat fructus victoriae jam reportatae"; *Origo divino-apostolica*, pp. 62-63. According to W. Arendt, S.J., some Catholics see in *Gen.* 3: 15 primarily a reference to mankind's fight against the devil, secondarily and implicitly [some: typically] the Redemptive death; still others refer the text immediately to the Redeemer and His Mother and the Redemptive work, and only secondarily (but included in this view and *intended by God*) the individual's battle for supernatural salvation. Arendt then proposes a third view by modifying the second. His view "cum secunda convenit in obiecto primario significationis, ab ea tamen dissentit relate ad obiectum secundarium, quod

120 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

For our part, we believe that *Gen. 3: 15* does provide a firm scriptural foundation for the doctrine of Mary's spiritual maternity. If the interpretation be true that Mary alone is the woman and Christ her seed, then surely Mary is prophesied as sharing most intimately with her Divine Son in the work of the objective Redemption, the crushing of Satan's head. The enmity of sinlessness versus evil culminates according to the Protogospel in total victory over Satan and his seed. Mary's claim to spiritual motherhood of men, therefore, would lie in her co-redemptive role on Calvary in which she had a real but secondary share in the bringing forth of mankind to a new supernatural life. This argument is based on the text taken in itself, and remains a valid argument quite independently of the following remarks.

Taking *Gen. 3: 15* in relation to the New Testament, may we not be justified in seeing still further foundation for Mary's spiritual motherhood somewhat along the lines suggested by Fathers Roschini and Bover? In God's economy of salvation it is difficult to separate personal Christ and mystical Christ. Head and Body go together. Do they belong together in the *semen mulieris* of *Gen. 3: 15*? Some of those who reject any inclusion of the Mystical Body in the "seed of the woman" do so because they seek jealously to safeguard the individuality of that seed (Christ) who alone decisively crushed Satan's head. We agree with such authors that the *semen serpentis* can be an individual thing—sin and damnation—spawned figuratively by the devil.<sup>17</sup> But need this individual-

diffitetur fuisse a Deo intentum uti in *significatione inclusum*, sed intentum a Deo tantummodo uti *connexum*." *De protoevangelii habitudine ad Immaculatam Deiparae Conceptionem*, Romae, 1904, pp. 10-11. Father Peirce, S.J., explicitly rejects the idea of including the Mystical Body in the Seed of the Woman since, he says, no other O.T. text implies this doctrine. Cf. also Peinador, *De argumento scripturistico*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the alternatives in Garcia Garcés, *Mater Corredemptrix*, pp. 32-33. Father Mueller points out in his *Origo divino-apostolica*, pp. 58-59, 63, how

ity have a bearing on the strict individuality of the woman's seed? Or may Mary's seed include not only her physical Son but His Mystical Body as well? Not that the members of the Mystical Body cooperated in the objective Redemption on Calvary. But as we know, they do cooperate in the subjective Redemption, i. e. the application of Calvary's fruits to souls. If we were to admit such a view, for instance that the Mystical Christ was included in the woman's seed in the fuller sense, would this militate against the argument drawn from *Gen. 3: 15* for Mary's Immaculate Conception? Not necessarily. There would seem to be still a strict parallelism of perfect sinlessness and total victory between Woman and Seed, Mother and Son, Mary and the physical Christ, in the literal sense. Whether or not such reasoning be defensible, it still remains true that *Gen. 3: 15* provides a sure foundation for Mary's spiritual maternity as noted above.

*Luke 1: 26-38*—" . . . And when the angel had come to her, he said, 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women. . . .'

"And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will

Sacred Scripture damns the devil as author of original sin and death; but he does not draw out the argument so as to make Satan's seduction the "*semen tuum*." Instead, to the objection that is frequently raised: "Satan's seed is a collectivity (the demons, the unjust), therefore by parallelism the woman's seed must also be a collectivity," he answers that there is no need here for strict parallelism. For Satan, generation is only improperly so called, whereas in the Woman's case the reference is to strict generation.—So far as we can see, there is only one real difficulty with this view concerning the individuality of the Woman's seed, and that is, that in *Apoc. 12: 9* other devils are associated together with Satan, in a passage which evidently bears an allusion to *Gen. 3: 15*.



122 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.'

"But Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this happen since I do not know man?'

"And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God. . . .'

"But Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her."

*What was the status of Mary's knowledge at the time of the Annunciation?* It will not be out of place to ask how much the Blessed Virgin knew at the time of Gabriel's visit. The recent controversy concerning Mary's knowledge or ignorance of her Son's divinity at the Incarnation is a matter of record. It has ever been the common view of the Church that Mary was aware of that divinity from the very beginning. In recent magazine articles, however, there has been an exchange of opinions by priests on either side of the Atlantic. Father Sutcliffe, S.J., began the series of articles. He proposed the possibility that Mary was ignorant of Christ's divinity at the Annunciation and that only gradually did she come to realize the fact. Other priests broke into print as a result of that article; with one voice they disagreed with Father Sutcliffe's suggestion, but apparently without convincing him.<sup>18</sup> We men-

<sup>18</sup> For the sake of those who may be interested, the chronological exchange of articles ran as follows: E. F. Sutcliffe, S.J., *Our Lady and the Divinity of Christ*, in *The Month*, vol. 180, 1944, pp. 347-350; F. X. Peirce, S.J., *Recent Scripture Study*, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 112, 1945, p. 441-445; Hugh Pope, O.P., *Our Lady and the Divinity of Christ*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 66, 1945, p. 100-105; Sutcliffe, *Our Lady's Knowledge of the Divinity of Christ*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 66, 1945, pp. 427-434; J. A. Kleist, S.J., *The Annunciation*, in *The American Ecclesiastical*

*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 123

tion the controversy because it bears on the degree of Mary's knowledge at the Incarnation, which in turn has a bearing on her spiritual maternity. Personally, we could never understand the wisdom of questioning Mary's awareness of her Son's divinity, even as a possibility; and we concur heartily with the recent writer who said, "Mary was not a primitive pagan or even a Pharisee that she had to have the divine character of her Son revealed to her gradually; she was to be God's Mother."<sup>19</sup>

*The Annunciation and Mary's spiritual maternity.* The whole wonderful account of the Annunciation preserved in St. Luke's Gospel tells us certainly about the Incarnation of the physical Christ at Mary's "fiat." In recent years, prompted by an increased interest in Mariology, authors have seriously asked themselves: does Mary's *fiat* make her doubly a Mother—Christ's and ours? Long ago St. Thomas Aquinas, demonstrating why the Annunciation to Mary was something reasonable, gave as his fourth reason, "in order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was sought in lieu of that of the entire human nature."<sup>20</sup> And not

*Review*, vol. 114, 1946, pp. 161-169; Father Peter, O.F.M.Cap., *When Did Our Lady Know She Was Mother of God?* in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 67, 1946, pp. 145-163; D. Unger, O.F.M.Cap., *When Did Mary First Know of Her Divine Maternity?* in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 114, 1946, pp. 360-366; Sutcliffe, *Again Our Lady's Knowledge of Christ's Divinity*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 68, 1946, pp. 123-128; Father Peter, *Mariology and Exegesis*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 69, 1947, pp. 113-124; Sutcliffe, *Scripture, Tradition and Mariology*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 69, 1947, pp. 807-814. And there the matter rested.

<sup>19</sup> Dominic Unger, O.F.M. Cap., *The Use of Sacred Scripture in Mariology*, in *Marian Studies*, vol 1, 1950, p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 30, art. 1. Cf. also Urban Mullaney, O.P., *The Mariology of St. Thomas*, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 123, 1950, p. 200.



124 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

many years ago Pope Pius X gave added impetus to the question by writing in his encyclical *Ad diem illum*:

But the Virgin did not conceive the Son of God solely in order that, by receiving human nature from her, He should become man, but also that, through the nature that He received from her, He might become the Savior of men. . . . Consequently in the same womb of this most pure Mother, Christ assumed not only mortal flesh but a spiritual body as well, consisting of all those who were to believe in Him.<sup>21</sup>

More and more writers are expressing the opinion that in consenting to the Incarnation—a consent at once necessary according to the economy of God's salvation as it was free on Mary's part—the Virgin knowingly consented likewise to the moral regeneration of all mankind and to her part in it, and hence to her position as our spiritual Mother.<sup>22</sup> What is to be said of such a view?

It would seem that the Annunciation pericope does find a place in the valid scriptural evidence for Mary's spiritual motherhood, but implicitly, and only when taken together with other New Testament passages. If Mary knew what her "fiat" involved soteriologically—and we believe that she did substantially, partly at least through her knowledge of Old Testament prophecies, partly through her unique position in relation to God—then she also included consent to her spiritual

<sup>21</sup> Encyclical *Ad diem illum*, February 2, 1904, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 36, 1904, pp. 452-453.

<sup>22</sup> A partial list would include: S. Tromp, S.J., *Corpus Christi quod est ecclesia*, Romae, 1946, I, p. 13; J. S. Northcote, *Mary in the Gospels*, London, 1906, pp. 220-221; R. V. O'Connell, S.J., *Our Lady, Mediatrix of All Graces*, Baltimore, 1926, pp. 46-50; E. Dublanchy, art. *Marie*, in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Paris, 1927, IX, 2, col. 2389; C. Dreisoerner, S.M., *Why We Call Her Mother*, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 90, 1934, p. 511; A. Rivera, C.M.F., *La maternidad espiritual de María en San Lucas 1: 26-38 y en el Apocalipsis XII*, in *Estudios Marianos*, vol. 7, 1948, pp. 51-83; A. Ferland, S.S., *The Marian Character of the Redemption*, in *The American Ec-*

*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 125

maternity in her "fiat."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, there is the Eve-Mary antithesis to be considered here, as brought out so often by the Fathers in discussing the Annunciation. Mary, then, is a real source of our spiritual birth through her cooperation in the Redemption on Calvary, foreseen *aliquo modo* at Gabriel's unexpected visit, and freely consented to then.

*John* 19: 26-27—"Jesus therefore, seeing His Mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, said to His Mother, 'Woman, behold thy son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold thy Mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own care."

*What is the relation of these words to Mary's spiritual maternity?* A number of exegetes continue to maintain that the words of Christ are only applicable to Mary's spiritual motherhood by accommodation, and they explicitly deny that the text is a scriptural proof for the doctrine.<sup>24</sup> However, the

*clesiastical Review*, vol. 123, 1950, pp. 175-177; J. McCarthy, *The Headship of Christ*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 51, 1938, pp. 351-372; *idem*, *The Blessed Virgin in the Mystical Body*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 51, 1938, p. 562; A. Agius, O.S.B., *The Universal Mediation of Our Lady*, in *Downside Review*, vol. 61, 1938, pp. 326-327, 332-335; T. B. Finan, C.S.Sp., *Reflections on Mary's Spiritual Motherhood*, in *Clergy Review*, vol. 25, 1945, pp. 194-195.

<sup>23</sup> Father Eugene Gallagher, S.J. considers it "demonstrated" that Mary's consent was a consent to the Incarnation precisely as Redemptive; *Evaluation of the Arguments for Mary's Co-redemption*, in *Marian Studies*, vol. 2, 1951, pp. 109-111, 127. J. A. Cleary, C.S.S.R. gives the Annunciation as his first argument for Mary's universal mediation, and supports the view with quotations from the Fathers; *Can Our Lady's Universal Mediation Be Defined?* in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 33, 1929, p. 469. A. Ferland, S.S. argues explicitly from the Annunciation to show that Mary knew her part in the Redemption as Mother of men when giving her "fiat"; *The Marian Character of the Redemption*, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 175-177.

<sup>24</sup> E. g. William Newton, in *A Commentary on the New Testament*, Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1942, p. 357; A. J. Maas, *The Life of*

126 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

number of Mariologists and exegetes who see in the text a valid biblical proof for the spiritual maternity is ever growing.<sup>25</sup> Generally speaking, the latter see in the words of Christ a literal reference to John and Mary, a typical reference to the spiritual motherhood of Mary (e. g. Keuppens, Garcés, Unger, Bover, Landucci). A few give other designations, such

*Jesus Christ*, St. Louis, 1909, 5th ed., p. 541; Alfred Durand, S.J., *Evangile selon Saint Jean*, Paris, 1938, p. 493; A. E. Breen, *A Harmonized Exposition of the Four Gospels*, Milwaukee, 1930, 3rd rev. ed., IV, p. 130; J. Knabenbauer, S.J., *Evangelium secundum Ioannem*, [Cursus S.S.], Parisiis, 1898, pp. 546-547; A. Brassac, S.S., *The Student's Handbook to the Study of the New Testament*, St. Louis, 1913, pp. 386-387.

<sup>25</sup> Among others, we might mention J. Bittremieux, *De Mediatione universali B. M. Virginis quoad gratias*, Bruges, 1926, pp. 188-191; J. Keuppens, *Mariologiae Compendium*, 1947, p. 139; Gregorio Alastruey, *Tratado de la Virgen Santisima*, Madrid, 1947, 2nd ed., pp. 750-753; F. H. Schüth, S.J., *Die mariologische Bedeutung von "mulier,"* in *Pastor Bonus*, vol. 35, 1923, pp. 197 ff; Merkelbach, O.P., *Mariologia*, pp. 302-304; Paul Gächter, S.J., *Die geistliche Mutterschaft Marias*, in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, vol. 47, 1923, pp. 391-429; García Garcés, C.M.F., *Mater Corredemptrix*, pp. 40-45; Dominic Unger, O.F.M.Cap., in his review of *Katholische Marienkunde*, I, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, vol. 125, 1951, pp. 239-240; J. Leal, S.J., *Beata Virgo omnium spiritualis Mater ex John 19: 26-27*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 27, 1949, pp. 65-73 (in which article he has a more extended bibliography); Joseph Bover, S.J., *Mulier ecce filius tuus*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 4, 1924, p. 230; *idem*, *La maternidad de Maria expresada por el Redentor en la Cruz*, in *Estudios Bíblicos*, vol. 1, 1942, pp. 627-646; P. C. Landucci, *Maria SS. nel Vangelo*, Roma, 1945, p. 415-428; Ricardo Rábanos, C.M., *La maternidad espiritual de María en el Protoevangelio y San Juan*, in *Estudios Marianos*, vol. 7, 1948, pp. 39-50. M. J. Scheeben is ultra-cautious in his approach to the text. "Literally," he says, "they [Christ's words] do not exclusively contain a recommendation of the mother to the loving care of the son, or an admonition to that son to honor the mother; but they do undoubtedly hold a recommendation of the son to the loving care of the mother which in a higher, more universal sense refers to Mary's spiritual motherhood of the redeemed. . . . It would be difficult to draw a real proof for this explanation from these words themselves and from the historical circumstances. . . . But once this [universal] aspect of her motherhood is premised, it gives a presumptive proof of Christ's will, that Mary should care for and nourish the children she received. To that extent it is altogether right for us to conclude from these words, in their aesthetical meaning, that Mary should take the redeemed into her care. . . ." *Mariology*, St. Louis, 1947, pp. 247-248.



*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 127

as the symbolic sense (Merkelbach), the mystic sense (Arendt), the Mystic-messianic sense (Gächter). Roschini sees in the text a direct literal reference to the spiritual maternity, while others (Bittremieux, Leal, Rábanos) see the spiritual motherhood verified in the fuller sense.

There are various reasons given for seeing in the words of Christ a reference to Mary's spiritual maternity:<sup>26</sup> (1) the significance of the term "woman" instead of "Mother"; (2) the fact of the double recommendation, when "son, behold your mother" would have sufficed; (3) the difficulty in understanding why Jesus should have worried about mere temporalities at such a moment, especially since John was not necessary for Mary's well-being (he had left all; the other women were there to care for Mary, etc.); (4) the difficulty in believing that Christ would be anxious about temporalities at the very climax of the Redemptive act (should He not have provided for her before the Passion?); (5) the more extensive sense of other words from the Cross (e.g., "Father forgive them" [cf. *Heb.* 6: 6]; "I thirst"); (6) the fulfillment here of other texts, especially *Gen.* 3: 15.

But did not St. John understand Jesus in a temporal sense, in that he took Mary under his own care? To this objection Father Gallus answers that what Christ intended by the words and what St. John understood at the time are two different things.<sup>27</sup> There is another objection, based on authority. It is said repeatedly that the fathers are silent on such an interpretation of the text, and that in modern times there are many weighty authors who are against the view. This is an argument that has often been exaggerated. What are the facts in the matter? True, Origen seems to have been the only early writer to have considered Mary's motherhood of all the faith-

<sup>26</sup> These reasons are best summed up by Roschini, Gächter, Garcés, Rábanos, and T. Gallus; sources *ut supra*.

<sup>27</sup> T. Gallus, *Mulier, ecce filius tuus*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 21, 1941, p. 291.

128 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

ful in connection with our text.<sup>28</sup> However, as Father Roschini points out (and, we think, correctly) this silence on the part of the fathers should not be overstressed. It is at best a negative argument; and so far as we know, none of the Fathers ever expressly denies that the spiritual maternity was intended in *John* 19: 26-27. May we not respectfully suggest that the comparatively few Fathers who did comment on the passage in St. John were correct so far as they went, but that they may not have gone far enough?

Something similar is the case with more modern authors. A study of some representative Lives of Christ, treatises on the Passion, and commentaries on the fourth Gospel reveals the following facts. (1) Comparatively few of the works consulted expressly limit the meaning of *John* 19: 26-27 to a material care of John for Mary by denying here a biblical basis for the spiritual maternity.<sup>29</sup> Their arguments, when they give them, are all of a pattern and represent no individual initiative. The main argument: tradition does not support the spiritual

<sup>28</sup> Origen, *Praef. in John* 6; *PG*, 14, 32. The force of this text as an argument in support of the spiritual maternity has been impugned by J. Ernst, *Origenes und die geistige Mutterschaft Marias*, in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, vol. 47, 1923, pp. 617-621, and defended by C. A. Kneller, S.J., *ibid.*, pp. 621-632. More recently, the text has been questioned by D. Cipriano Vagaggini, O.S.B., cf. the review of Vagaggini's book, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, in *Gregorianum*, vol. 25, 1944, pp. 375-376. After Origen, the next writer to favor the view seems to have been George of Nicomedia in the ninth century, followed by Rupert of Deutz in the twelfth century. From that time on this interpretation of the text has become more and more common. Cf. Lesêtre, art. *Marie, Mère de Dieu*, in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, IV, 1, col. 798. Roschini, *Mariologia*, II, pp. 210-211 notes that only seven or eight Fathers have commented on *John* 19: 26-27 in passing.

<sup>29</sup> In addition to the works mentioned in footnote 24: M. Hetzenauer, O.F.M.Cap., *Interpretatio Evangelii Quadriformis*, Romae, pro MS, 1920, pp. 148-149; M. Seisenberger, *Erklärung des Johannesevangeliums*, Regensburg, 1910, p. 270. It seems that M.-J. Lagrange, O.P. must be added to their number; *Evangile selon Saint Jean*, Paris, 1927, p. 494, even though in another work, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, Westminster, Md., 1938, II, p. 268 he makes a dubious allusion to the spiritual maternity in connection with our text.



*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 129

maternity interpretation. (2) Many of the sources, explaining the text, simply mention that Jesus confided the temporal care of Mary to St. John. Like the Fathers upon whom they rely, they make no mention of the spiritual motherhood either pro or con.<sup>30</sup> (3) Some authors first indicate that Jesus was providing for Mary's temporal welfare. Then they also mention Mary's spiritual motherhood of men in this connection, but without further comment.<sup>31</sup> (4) Many other works state clearly that Mary's spiritual maternity as well as her own temporal welfare were intended in the words of Christ from the Cross, but few give detailed arguments, and they do not specify in which scriptural sense the spiritual maternity is included.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In previous centuries, authors like Nicholas of Lyra, Hugh of S. Caro, De Sacy, Dom Calmet, Tirinus, M. Pole; more recently, Fritz Tillmann, *Das Johannesevangelium*, Bonn, 1921, pp. 259-260; M. Heiss, *The Four Gospels*, Milwaukee, 1863, p. 173; Charles Callan, O.P., *The Four Gospels*, New York, 1918, 2nd rev. ed., p. 524; I. H. Kistemaker, *Die hl. Evangelien übersetzt und erklärt*, Felsen, 1823, VII, p. 187; J. E. Belsler, *Das Evangelium des hl. Johannes*, Freiburg i/B, 1905, pp. 507-509; Jules Lebreton, S.J., *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ Our Lord*, Milwaukee, 1935, II, pp. 392-394; W. H. Russell, *Christ the Leader*, Milwaukee, 1937, pp. 413-414; Giovanni Papini, *Storia di Cristo*, Firenze, 1923, p. 481; Isidore O'Brien, O.F.M., *The Life of Christ*, Paterson, N. J., 1939, p. 496; G. Ricciotti, *The Life of Christ*, Milwaukee, 1947, p. 638.

<sup>31</sup> For example, J. N. Sepp, *Das Leben Jesu Christi*, Regensburg, 1862, VI, p. 374; Abbé Dehaut, *L'Évangile expliqué, défendu, médité*, Paris, 1884, IV, pp. 358-359; M. M. Sales, O.P., *Il Nuovo Testamento Commentato*, Torino, 1911, I, pp. 439-440; J. F. Allioli, *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, New York, 1891, III, p. 374; Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Jesu Christi*, Parisiis, 1878, IV, pp. 117-118; Peter Schegg, *Evangelium nach Johannes*, München, 1880, II, pp. 476-478.

<sup>32</sup> Among exegetical works, we may include F. X. Maszl, *Erklärung der hl. Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, Wien, 1841, V, pp. 433-435; A. H. Lépicier, *Diatessaron*, Roma, 1927, IV, pp. 173-174, 177 [he claims that after Pope Leo XIII's *Adiutricem* it is proximate to faith that Christ's words constituted Mary the spiritual Mother of men!]; Georg M. Wittmann, *Erklärung der hl. Evangelien*, Regensburg, 1844, p. 433; F. S. Gutjahr, *Die Vier Heiligen Evangelien*, Graz, 1903, pp. 334-335; Lusseau-Collomb, *Manuel d'études bibliques*, IV, *Les Évangiles*, Paris, 1932, p. 851; Loch-Reischl, *Die Heiligen Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, Regensburg, 1899, I, p. 387. Add also the Lives of Christ

130 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

(5) Lastly, as already indicated, there is a growing class of authors who argue to the inclusion of the spiritual maternity in *John* 19: 26-27 on exegetical grounds, and who specify the true biblical sense in which the doctrine is referred to.<sup>33</sup> In view of this data, would one be justified in aligning the weight of authority against inclusion of Mary's spiritual motherhood in *John* 19: 26-27? Hardly.

Weighing all the evidence we conclude that the text refers to Mary's spiritual motherhood at least in the fuller sense, if not in the exclusive literal sense. Indeed, in the light of recent and frequent papal pronouncements intended for the world, which apparently link our text with Mary's spiritual motherhood, it is a bit difficult to see why some still insist that Mary's motherhood of men can be linked with the text only by accommodation.<sup>34</sup> We are not satisfied to believe that Christ's mind at such a moment would have rested content with mere material provision of loved one for loved one, without leaping ahead to the wider meaning so closely connected with the Redemptive act—if indeed the spiritual maternity is not the only thing He had in mind at that time.

by Père Didon, O.P., W. Elliott, C.P., Joseph Grimm, A. Goodier, S.J., Otto Hophan, O.F.M.Cap., Card. Gaetano de Lai, E. Le Camus, F. Mauriac, Luis de la Palma, S.J., Bernard Schmitz, Louis Veulliot, etc.

<sup>33</sup> To the list of authors mentioned in footnote 25, add Simon-Dorado, *Praelectiones Biblicae, Novum Testamentum*, I, pp. 986-987. Their conclusion: "Nequit tamen sensus marianus loci litteralis primarius dici, aut aequae principalis; neque typicus; at nec pure accommodatus, aut consequens, sed potius plenior aut adaptatus."

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dominic Unger, O.F.M.Cap., *The Use of Sacred Scripture in Mariology*, in *Marian Studies*, vol. 1, 1950, p. 106; *idem*, *A Note on John* 19: 25-27, in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 9, 1947, p. 112. Among the papal pronouncements might be mentioned that of Pope Leo XIII, *Adiutricem populi* (Sept. 5, 1895): "In Joanne autem, quod perpetuo sensit Ecclesia, designavit Christus personam humani generis, eorum imprimis, qui sibi fide adhaeserunt." Other similar references are by Pope Benedict XV in *Inter sodalicia*, (March 22, 1918); by Pope Pius XI in *Explorata res est*, (Feb. 2, 1923). These and similar texts will be found in Roschini, *Mariologia*, II, pp. 204-206.

*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 131

*Apoc.* 12—[The following is a brief synopsis of the chapter]: The inspired author, St. John, saw a vision, a miraculous and marvelous sign in heaven. It was a woman all-glorious, a woman with child and about to give birth to the child, which caused her great pains. On the scene appeared a great dragon. He stood before the woman in the hope of devouring the child as soon as he was born. The woman gave birth to the child, a male child who would rule the entire world invincibly. The dragon did not get the child because he was immediately caught up to God's throne. The woman herself fled into the wilderness where God had prepared a place for her, and where she would be cared for.

Next in the vision (though not necessarily next in chronological order) a war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting the dragon and his followers. The former won, and the dragon, who is the ancient Serpent and Satan, was hurled with his followers from heaven to earth.

Then St. John heard a song of triumph in heaven to honor Christ the Lamb through Whose Blood the saints were able to conquer. That was followed by a vision of how the dragon, after he had been hurled down, pursued the woman, and how she, with divine aid, fled to her place in the wilderness. When his attempt to kill her proved in vain, he set out to persecute the rest of the offspring of the woman, who kept the commandments of and held fast to the testimony of Jesus.

*Is this a Marian text?* Again we ask the question, as with *Gen.* 3: 15, since the mother involved is designated merely as a "woman." There are those who deny that the Blessed Virgin is the woman of *Apoc.* 12, and who say that one can refer the text to Mary only by accommodation or by allusion.<sup>35</sup> But

<sup>35</sup> F. Hünermann, art. *Apokalyptisches Weib*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg i/B, 1930, I, col. 542; J. Bonsirven, S.J., *L'Apocalypse de*



132 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

there are many others who insist that the text does concern Mary in a scriptural sense, in some way. Most of these writers see a simultaneous reference in a literal sense to both Mary and the Church.<sup>36</sup> There are even a few authors who seem to refer the text to Mary alone.<sup>37</sup>

*Apoc. 12* is a Marian text and does provide a basis for the spiritual maternity. Our opinion in this matter follows closely the line of reasoning developed by Father Dominic Unger, O.F.M.Cap. *Apoc. 12* is definitely Marian, but not exclusively. The woman spoken of in the pericope is both Mary and the Church in the literal sense: of Mary everything is true literally, primarily and eminently, intended so by the Holy Spirit and St. John, either inasmuch as she is the physical Mother of

*Saint Jean*, [Verbum Salutis], Paris, 1951; J. S. Considine, O.P., in *A Commentary on the New Testament*, Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1942, p. 669; B. Mariani, O.F.M., *L'Assunzione di Maria nella Sacra Scrittura*, in *Atti del Congresso Nazionale Mariano dei Frati Minori d'Italia*, Roma, 1948, pp. 460-466; C. Rösch, O.F.M.Cap., *Mulier, draco et bestiae in Apoc. 12*; 13, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 8, 1928, p. 271; Roland Murphy, O.Carm., *An Allusion to Mary in the Apocalypse*, in *Theological Studies*, vol. 10, 1949, p. 571. Further bibliography in D. Unger's article, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 12, 1950, pp. 299-300.

<sup>36</sup> Especially Father Dominic Unger, O.F.M.Cap., who has written one of the most thorough and satisfying treatises on this difficult passage in recent years: *Did St. John See the Virgin Mary in Glory?* in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 11, 1949, pp. 248-262, 392-405; vol. 12, 1950, pp. 75-83, 155-161, 292-300, 405-415; A. J. Maas, art. *Virgin Mary*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1912, XV, p. 469; H. Lesêtre, art. *Marie, Mère de Dieu*, in *Dict. de la Bible*, IV, 1, col. 805-806; A. Schaefer, *Die Gottesmutter in der Heiligen Schrift*, Münster, 1887, p. 248; Cardinal Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt By Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, New York, 1914, II, p. 58; P. G. M. Perrella, *Senso mariologico dell'Apocalisse XII*, in *Divus Thomas*, vol. 17, 1940, pp. 215-222; *idem*, *Sulla terminologia circa il senso mariologico dell'Apocalisse XII*, in *Divus Thomas*, vol. 19, 1942, pp. 96-103; Da Fonseca, S.J., *L'Assunzione di Maria nella Sacra Scrittura*, in *Biblica*, vol. 28, 1947, p. 336; A. Rivera, *Inimicitias ponam . . . Signum magnum*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 21, 1941, p. 185; on pp. 188-189 Rivera maintains that there is solid foundation for considering Mary in the text in the fuller sense. Further extensive bibliography in the articles by Father D. Unger.

<sup>37</sup> E. g., J. H. Schütz, *Summa Mariana*, Paderborn, 1903, I, p. 91.

Christ and/or inasmuch as she is the spiritual Mother of Christians or the Mystic Christ. Of the Church these same things are true precisely because Mary is the Mother and exemplar of the Church; and so Mary and the Church are in a sense one. Both the Blessed Mother of Christ and the Church are intended in the literal sense in the same wording, even though the Blessed Mother is primarily intended. This is possible because of the close relation between the Blessed Mother and our Mother the Church.

Briefly, the scriptural arguments for the view are as follows. In analyzing the twelfth chapter of Apocalypse we notice four points. (1) *The things predicated of the woman are true of Mary, who is the Virgin Mother of the whole Christ.* Thus the woman clothed with the sun is Mary who, "full of grace" is metaphorically pictured as clothed with the Sun of Justice (Christ). Beneath her feet the moon, symbol of the changeableness of time. As Mediatrix, Mary is rightly represented as wearing a crown of twelve stars (the twelve Apostles, and in them the entire Church). St. John, introducing the Woman as a great "sign," links her inescapably with the Virgin Mother sign of *Is. 7: 14*. Both he and his initial readers knew that Mary had fulfilled the Isaian prophecy.

Being in travail Mary cries out in pain, a probable reference to Mary's spiritual childbirth of Christians (and all mankind) beneath the Cross. Then the great red dragon appears: Satan. The Woman, having brought forth her son who was then caught up to God, fled from Satan into a wilderness prepared for her by God, where she was taken care of for 1,265 days—possibly a reference to the flight into Egypt, otherwise a generic reference to God's protection during Mary's whole life. However, since Mary and the Church are practically one (Mary being Mother and exemplar of the Church), this flight might be ascribed to Mary although still experienced only by the Church.



134 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

(2) *The male Child born of the Woman identifies her principally as Christ's Mother.* The Child is obviously the personal Christ (*Psalm 2*) but includes the Mystical Body by participation. The Child was taken up to Heaven through the Resurrection and Ascension, and is utterly untouchable by Satan.

(3) *The sin of Satan against the Woman and her Child betrays them as Mary and Jesus.* Satan's preparedness to devour the Child took place (according to the Fathers and theologians) when the Angels were placed on probation after their creation, and they refused to acknowledge the future Son of God made Man. As a result Satan and his followers were cast out of Heaven. Preparedness to devour the Child was also verified in paradise, when Satan, trying to frustrate the Incarnation in the race of Adam, deprived him of sanctifying grace (an allusion to *Gen. 3: 15*). Satan continually tries to devour Christians when they are born into Christ, but through it all the devil really wants Christ and attempts to devour Christians ultimately only because of his attempt to devour Christ.

(4) *St. John describes here the fulfillment of Gen. 3: 15,* as many authors admit.<sup>38</sup> In Genesis, God promised a Woman and her Seed who would be completely victorious over the Serpent. We notice that both Genesis and Apocalypse speak of "the Woman"; and St. Lawrence of Brindisi is perfectly correct in saying that St. John used the title deliberately to call attention to the Protogospel.<sup>39</sup> St. John is careful to note that he speaks about "the ancient Serpent." Where Genesis foretold a perpetual war between the Woman and her Seed and the devil and his seed, Apocalypse describes the war as being

<sup>38</sup> Father Unger quotes Terrien and Cardinal Newman. Other authors of like mind are Bissonette, Florit and Rivera (sources *ut supra*). Scheeben, too, sees in Apoc. 12 "a clear allusion to the protoevangelium." *Mariology*, St. Louis, 1946, I, pp. 15-16.

<sup>39</sup> *Sermo in Visionem Joannis*, n. 6, in *Mariale*, [*Opera Omnia*, II], Padua, 1928, pp. 20 ff.



*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 135

waged (12, 4, 6, 13-16). In Genesis the Woman and her Seed are promised victory; Apocalypse clearly shows that she is victorious over Satan (12, 11). Mary is the woman of both Genesis and Apocalypse.

A final scriptural argument for indicating Mary as the Woman in *Apoc.* 12 is based on our previous text, *John* 19: 26-27. We have seen, and the Church as a whole believes, that Christ entrusted Mary to John as her spiritual child on Calvary, and he to her as his spiritual Mother. This doctrine was bruited about by St. Irenaeus c. 150 A.D. Where did Irenaeus get the doctrine from? From St. John's oral catechesis at least, if not from the scriptural passage. But if St. John was aware of Mary's spiritual maternity, and if in Apocalypse he described the spiritual motherhood of the Church in terms that so evidently fit the Blessed Mother, it would seem a psychological necessity for the beloved disciple to have thought of Mary while writing this passage.

We pass over patristic and liturgical arguments in support of this view; they will be found adequately portrayed in Father Unger's articles. We merely point out that one does well to keep in mind the words of Pope Pius X in his Encyclical *Ad diem illum*: "Nullus autem ignorat, mulierem illam [Apocalypse] B. Virginem significare, quae caput nostrum integra peperit."

## II. *Other Texts*

### 1. *Johannine "Sonship" Texts*

St. John the Evangelist had a predilection for phrases which bring to the fore our spiritual relationship with Christ. Time and again he employs phrases such as "birth of God," "sons of God," "begotten of God" and the like (cf. *John* 1: 12; 1: 13; 3: 5; 8: 47; 1 *John* 3: 9; 4: 7; 5: 1; 5: 18). One of his favorite themes was our rebirth in God, of which Jesus made us capable in His Incarnation. Basing themselves on such texts authors argue that if we are really adopted sons of God

136 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

by reason of the life of grace, then Christ is our Brother, "the firstborn among many brethren" (*Rom.* 8: 29). If He is really our spiritual Brother, then Mary is our spiritual Mother, since she is Christ's Mother—just as truly our Mother as the bond between us and Christ is real. In this same connection one should recall those Pauline texts which teach that we become brethren of Christ (through Baptism); e.g., *Heb.* 2: 11.

Recently another attempt has been made to see in *John* 1: 13 the evangelist's monument to the spiritual maternity of Mary.<sup>40</sup> As yet this particular series of articles is incomplete, but the author, Father Le Frois, has already striven to show that in v. 13 St. John deliberately described the supernatural birth of the children of God in the very terms of the Virginal Birth of the Incarnate Word. Hence, a most intimate relation exists between Christ's birth from Mary and our spiritual re-birth.

2. *Pauline "Mystical Body" Texts*

St. Paul frequently points out how the faithful are members of Christ's Mystical Body of which He is the Head (*Eph.* 4: 15), and that both together form one Body (*Rom.* 12: 5). But—so the argument runs—Mary in giving birth to Christ the Head and Author of supernatural life, gave spiritual birth likewise to the members of the Body inseparably united to that Head. Thus she is our spiritual Mother according to the life of supernatural grace. This truth is then developed in a number of ways, chiefly by showing our immanence in Christ Jesus: "One died for all, therefore all died" (*2 Cor.* 5: 14); "when the fulness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"

<sup>40</sup> Bernard Le Frois, S.V.D., *The Spiritual Motherhood of Mary in John* 1: 13, in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 13, 1951, pp. 422-431. Cf. also Ricardo Rábano, C.M., *La maternidad espiritual de María en el Protoevangelio y San Juan*, in *Estudios Marianos*, vol. 7, 1948, pp. 36-37



(*Gal.* 4: 4); “[God], by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin-offering, has condemned sin in the flesh . . .” (*Rom.* 8: 3).

A further argument based on Pauline texts seeks to bring out Mary's spiritual maternity by eminence, and by contrast with St. Paul's own “fatherhood” of those whom he had brought to the faith. In so far as it bases itself on Mary's positive cooperation in the Redemption on Calvary's heights, it is valid as an argument for Mary's spiritual motherhood in the strict sense. It has been worded thus:

If St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians [*1 Cor.* 4: 15], could justly claim the title of a parent in their regard, because he had preached the Gospel to them and converted them from Heathenism, saying, “In Christ Jesus by the Gospel I have begotten you”; how much more justly may not *she* claim to be our Mother, from whom we have received not the mere oral preaching of the Gospel, but the Author of the Gospel Himself. If the manifold labors of the Apostolate give a right to the name and authority of a Father, and may even be justly compared to the pains of maternity: “My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you,” [*Gal.* 4: 19]—certainly the Dolors or Compassion (as it is sometimes called) of Our Lady on Mount Calvary, give more than a sufficient right to the name and affections of a Mother. She has borne us, as it were, in the womb of her affections from the moment of the Annunciation, when she knew that the Holy which should be born of her was to save His people from their sins, and knew also the cost at which He must do it.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. *Lesser Marian Texts*

(a) *Luke* 2: 8; *Matt.* 1: 25—“She brought forth her first-born Son.”

Some spiritual writers have sought to argue that the statement “firstborn” may indeed, albeit implicitly, signify that

<sup>41</sup> J. Spencer Northcote, *Mary in the Gospels*, London, 1906, pp. 221-222.



138 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

Mary was to have other (spiritual) children, not of the flesh but of the spirit. Fulton Sheen, for instance, has argued thus:

The statement "first-born" may indeed mean that Mary was to have other children, not by the flesh but by the Spirit. It suggests that she was to have a spiritual progeny which would make up the Mystical Body of her Divine Son, just as Eve is called the "mother of all living" or the mother of men in the natural order. Sara gave only one son to the father of believers, Abraham, and yet she is called the mother of all Israel [Is. 51: 21]. There is a clear suggestion in the words "first-born" that she who begot corporally the Head of the Church, was also to beget spiritually the members of the Church. Since the Head and the Body are inseparable, it is therefore true to say that as Mary bore Christ in her womb she was virtually carrying the whole Mystical Body. The mother earth that bears the vine also bears the branches.<sup>42</sup>

The argument is weak, unconvincing, in fact misleading unless carefully worded so as to preserve Mary's perpetual virginity. The word "first-born" has no necessary reference to subsequent progeny.

(b) *Luke* 1: 44—The sanctification of John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb.

When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth in order to be with her during her pregnancy, the mere sound of her voice in greeting caused the unborn Baptist to leap within his mother's womb. Elizabeth attributed something special to that movement. So have theologians, who maintain that the extraordinary sign marked the sanctification of the Baptist even before his birth. And, Mariologists point out, Mary was the instrument of that sanctification. In this, then, they see added confirmation of the role she has ever played in the sanctification of souls, as spiritual Mother.

<sup>42</sup> F. J. Sheen, *The Mystical Body of Christ*, New York, 1935, p. 318.

*The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity* 139(c) *John* 2: 1-11—The miracle at Cana.

It is true that the references to the Blessed Virgin in the New Testament are all too few. But in the few there are, Mary is depicted in one way or another in her role as Mother of men. The present text is such an instance; and the argument for Mary's spiritual maternity based on it runs as follows, in the words of J. Spencer Northcote:

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him." So, then, the disciples owed their belief—that faith without which they could not have been saved, without which "it is impossible to please God"; they owed it, under God, to Mary. God gave it to them . . . through Mary's intervention. It was the immediate fruit of a certain miracle wrought in their presence, which miracle was directly caused by the thoughtful, amiable "charity" of Mary. Thus are we again reminded of the saying of St. Augustine, that Mary brought forth Jesus our Head in the flesh, but that she also co-operates *by her charity* to the bringing forth of us His members in the Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

As for the validity of this argumentation, the fact of Mary's intercession is clear, and the text certainly finds place in the accumulative scriptural argument for the spiritual maternity. Small wonder, as Bittremieux remarks,<sup>44</sup> that St. Thomas Aquinas should have seen in Mary's part in the miracle at

<sup>43</sup> Northcote, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

<sup>44</sup> J. Bittremieux, *De Mediatione universalis*, p. 182. It may be of interest to add here another approach to the text in its bearing on Maryology. Long ago Father Ernst Commer linked Christ's manner of addressing Mary ["Woman"] with the Woman of *Gen.* 3: 15, and *Apoc.* 12: 1. For him the entire incident at Cana was a symbol of something higher. He concludes: "Aus dem Bericht über die Hochzeit zu Cana ergibt sich daher die Stellung Marias als *figura Ecclesiae*, wonach die Mutter Gottes nicht blos vorbildliches Zeichen der Kirche, sondern als solches zugleich persönlich die wahre und autoritative Repräsentantin der Kirche ist." *Die Bedeutung der Hochzeit von Cana für die marianische Theologie*, in *Internationaler Marianischer Kongress in Einsiedeln*, Freiburg i/B, Part II, pp. 14-20.

140 *The Scriptural Basis for Mary's Spiritual Maternity*

Cana an indication of her office in the sanctification of souls.

(d) *Acts* 1: 14—Mary's presence in the Upper Room at Pentecost.

Many authors seek confirmation of the fact of Mary's spiritual motherhood in her [most probable] presence in the Upper Room at Pentecost. Father Mersch worded the argument thus:

Thus was born the Church, the Mystical Body [on Pentecost]. By a special disposition of Providence, Mary was present. Is it an exaggeration to see, in this simple remark of the inspired book, an allusion to the part taken by the Mother of God in every expansion of the divine life? As the Head was born physically *de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine*, so the "Body" is born mystically by the operation of the Spirit and by the mediation of Mary.<sup>45</sup>

*Summary and Conclusion*

It remains but to sum up the results of our investigation. We find that Holy Writ, from first book to last, contains a series of passages which, when taken accumulatively and in their interrelation, lend solid probative value to the doctrine of Mary's spiritual maternity. *Gen.* 3: 15 promises complete enmity between Mary and Satan, and between their respective offspring. It promises total victory to Mary's seed, Christ, over Satan. In that victory, as in the enmity, Mary has a share; and it is in her real but secondary association with Christ in the objective Redemption that her claim to spiritual motherhood of men is vindicated. Perhaps also in another way, if the

<sup>45</sup> Mersch-Kelly, *The Whole Christ*, Milwaukee, 1938, pp. 77-78. The same view is shared by other authors, among them Fulton Sheen, A. Shaefer, H. Lesêtre, J. A. Cleary, C.S.S.R. In the words of Thomas B. Finan, C.S.Sp., "The motherhood of men, accepted at the Annunciation, implicit in the birth of her Son at Bethlehem, merited on Calvary, was finally bestowed upon her at Pentecost." *Reflections Upon Mary's Spiritual Motherhood*, in the *Clergy Review*, vol. 25, 1945, p. 197. With this view, very many other authors disagree, insisting that the Church was born on Calvary.



term "Seed" in *Gen. 3: 15* includes the Mystical Christ in a fuller sense, as well as the physical Christ. The Annunciation pericope in *Luke 1: 26-38* gives us implicitly to understand that Mary, realizing that the Son promised to her would be the Savior of mankind and in some measure what that would mean both for Him and for her in terms of suffering, nevertheless freely and willingly uttered her "fiat." She bore within her womb not only the physical Christ but in a real sense the Mystical Christ. During Christ's life the Mother of God seems already to have been active in her maternal role as instrument of grace. This may be gathered from her part in the sanctification of John the Baptist (*Luke 1: 44*), and the working of Christ's first public miracle at Cana by which the faith of the disciples was increased (*John 2: 1-11*). On Calvary's height, at the climax of Christ's redemptive and Mary's co-redemptive act, Jesus committed John and through him all mankind into Mary's motherly care. This was at least the fuller meaning of the words (if not the only meaning) (*John 19: 26-27*). It was Christ's public proclamation of Mary's spiritual and universal maternity. A little later we find the Blessed Virgin in the Upper Chamber at Pentecost (*Acts 1: 14*), co-operating once more with the Holy Spirit in bringing life to the Mystical Body. Her maternal activity in the spiritual rebirth of mankind is implicit in every text which links the faithful with Christ as members with their Head, or as His brothers in the supernatural life. Finally the Apocalypse (chap. 12) shows us Mary once more as the Woman in a special way, and again her Seed comprises the complete Christ, including the Mystical Body. Thus does Sacred Scripture give accumulative support to the doctrine that Mary is really and truly our spiritual Mother.

REV. ERIC MAY, O.F.M.CAP., S.T.D., S.S.L.  
 St. Anthony Friary,  
 Marathon, Wisconsin.