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Peter J. Kearney

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GEN. 3:15 AND JOHANNINE THEOLOGY

A fruitful development in recent studies of Gen 2-3 has been a clarifying of the royal background to these chapters.¹ For example, the formation of "the Man" (itself a designation for royalty) from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7) reflects a formula of coronation which spoke of the king as one lifted up from the dust (1 Kgs 16:1);² the breath of life given him by God (Gen 2:7) likewise denotes a divine gift to the king (cf. Isa 11:2) known also from Egyptian royal theology.³ The offspring of the woman in Gen 3:15 will strike at the head of the serpent's offspring, as kings do against their enemies (Num 25:17; cf. Ps 110:6); this imagery is also Egyptian in origin, expressing the victory of Pharaoh over the serpent of darkness.⁴ I would add that the childlike quality of Adam, experiencing no shame in his nakedness (Gen 2:25) may reflect the theme of the king as a new-born child on the day of his coronation (Ps 2:7; 110:3; Isa 9:5); thus the little child who leads the calf and young lion (Isa 11:6) is probably the king under his guise of Adam in paradise, establishing order among all the animals (Gen 2:19-29). The sin of Adam, his reaching for a wisdom that was forbidden to him (Gen 3:6), was a falling from the royal ideal expressed in Pss. 131:1 and 139:1-6, a willingness to acknowledge that the king is merely human and a contentment to remain so, in marvel at the superior wisdom of God.

In the first of these two psalms, the king affirms that he is

¹ Cf. W. Wilfall, *Gen 3:15—A Protoevangelium?* in *CBQ* 36 (1974) 361-365, esp. bibliography.

² Cf. W. Brueggemann, *From Dust to Kingship* in *ZAW* 84 (1972) 1-18.

³ Cf. W. Wilfall, *The Breath of His Nostrils*, in *CBQ* 36 (1974) 237-240.

⁴ Wilfall, *Protoevangelium*, 363-364.

tranquil, like a weaned child on his mother's lap (131:2); in the second, he refers to his wondrous formation in his mother's womb (139:2), a process he can also describe as "being fashioned in the depths of the earth" (vs. 15), alluding to his identity with Adam, who was formed from the dust of the earth. Thus the king's mother is symbolically given a share in the "divine birth" of the king, which in this psalm is associated not merely with the coronation of the king but even with his natural birth. These two psalms express poetically what can be found in several historical texts, the importance of the queen-mother in affairs of state. For example, we can note a striking change in the status of Bathsheba after the death of David. As queen, she paid David homage (1 Kgs 1:16); as queen-mother, she received homage from her son Solomon (1 Kgs 2:19-20), whose fondness for pagan culture no doubt led him to bestow this Canaanite royal honor on his mother. The role of the queen-mother remains obscure to us, but she certainly was an important counselor to the king (2 Chr 22:3) and probably also exercised some supervisory role regarding cultic practice. Her renown was sufficient to have her deposition from office merit special mention (1 Kgs. 15:13).⁵ No doubt she has her place in Gen 2-3. The "woman" in these two chapters is queen as the wife of the royal figure Adam; she is counsellor as the one who offers him the fruit which gives wisdom; she is most clearly queen-mother as the one whose royal offspring strike at the serpent's head.

⁵ All the above statements about the role of the queen-mother in historical texts are drawn from G. Molin, *Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda in TZ 10* (1954) 161-175. Molin shows clearly the Canaanite usage; his emphasis on the origin of the queen-mother institution among the Hurrians and their influence on Juda should probably not be understood to preclude direct Canaanite influence on the Solomonic practice; cf. the brief evaluation of W. Plautz, *Zur Frage des Mutterrechts im Alten Testament*, in *ZAW* 74 (1962) 30, n. 95. For the queen-mother as counsellor, cf. also P. de Boer, *The Counsellor*, in M. Noth and D. Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East (VTSup 3)*; Leiden: Brill, 1969) 53-54, 60-61, 65, 69-70.

The queen-mother retained her political importance down to the end of the Davidic monarchy, as is evident in Ezekiel's allegories of the lioness and the vine (Ez 19), referring to royal matriarchs from the last years before the Babylonian Exile.⁶ After the collapse of the monarchy, the old themes of kingship were revived in new ways. For example, motifs of Canaanite origin were preserved in schools of wisdom thinkers and eventually refashioned in a democratized apocalyptic form, referring now to the people as a whole and describing a definitive fulfillment radically discontinuous with previous history.⁷ Thus, Daniel's vision of the "Son of Man," (Dn 7) deriving from the coronation of the Canaanite god Baal⁸ and originally associated with an individual king ruling as "the Man" in Israel, expresses an allegory of the people of God, triumphant in their heavenly communion with the angels (Dn 7:18, 21, 22, 27). In the apocalyptic community of Qumran, the theme of the queen-mother giving birth to her first-born son was reshaped into a symbol of the community itself giving birth to a messianic figure, the "Wonder-Counselor" of Isa 9:5 (IQH 3). The interpretation of this "woman in childbirth" as a symbol of the community is strengthened through her being contrasted with another feminine figure who, as the one about to give birth to "the Serpent," is most likely an image for the community of sinners.⁹

This development within apocalyptic thought illuminates our understanding of "the Woman" in Apoc 12. From the outset she is a symbol of God's Israel, for the sun, moon and stars (Apoc 12:1) stand for the chosen people as a whole (cf. Joseph's dream in Gen 37:9). The seven-headed dragon who op-

⁶ Cf. K. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Cambridge Bible Commentary, 1974) 123, 125.

⁷ Cf. F. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973), 343-346.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹ A. Dupont-Sommer, *La mère du Messie et la mère de l'Aspic dans un hymne de Qoumrân* in *RHR* 147 (1955) 174-188, esp. 177.

poses her (Apoc 12:3) recalls the serpent imagery of Gen 3 but now in the more obviously Canaanite form of the seven-headed monster Lotan.¹⁰ It is clear that we are confronting ancient royal imagery in its Canaanite form, now used to express God's protection for His chosen community. The woman's giving birth to a Son who is at once taken up to God (Apoc 12:5) probably expresses the travail of God's people in the final age of this world, a period of suffering which the Christ has already passed through by His resurrection,¹¹ and in which the community, symbolized by both the "Woman" and her "other offspring," hopes to share when the "ancient serpent" is finally defeated (cf. 12:9, 17; 20:2-3, 7-10).

Moving into the thought of John's gospel (surely related to the theology of Apocalypse, despite a difference in authorship),¹² we may note the common-place that it expresses the fullness of life which the community now shares with the risen Jesus and gives little expression to apocalyptic hopes for a future yet to be achieved. This tendency receives dramatic emphasis in the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11). The apocalyptic saying that the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God (Jn 5:25) finds fulfillment in this life in that Lazarus is raised even before the final day, symbolizing Jesus, teaching that resurrection is a present reality: "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (Jn 11:25).¹³ This refashioning of apocalyptic motifs in order to express realized eschatology can be noted in two other events early in John's gospel: the call of Nathanael and the wedding at Cana (1:43-2:12). These two passages should be read as a diptych. They are linked geographically in that they are both associated with Jesus' brief

¹⁰ Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 119.

¹¹ E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (SBT 32; London: SCM, 1961) 132, n. 485.

¹² Cf. R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966) XXXV, CII.

¹³ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge University, 1965) 365-366.

journey to Galilee (1:43; 2:1, 12), and also with Cana, inasmuch as that was the home town of Nathanael (21:2). An apocalyptic pattern can be detected in the prior event by a comparison with ch. 55 in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch.¹⁴ Here Baruch is sitting under a tree contemplating a fearful vision of judgment he had just experienced. In response to his prayer for enlightenment, an interpreting angel comes to explain the vision, first admonishing Baruch that if the vision itself was so troubling, he would find the future reality much more so. In the Nathanael episode, on the other hand, the interpretation of Scripture is the principal concern, rather than the meaning of a vision. Nathanael finally sees that Jesus had been communing with him through the biblical prophecy about the "Branch" (Hebrew *neser*) from the root of Jesse (Isa 11:1) and that, by a play on words, something good can come from "Nazareth" after all.¹⁵ Nathanael, like Baruch, is also directed to greater revelation in the future, probably, according to the earliest sequence in the text, the miracle at the Cana episode, which began only three days later (2:1).¹⁶ However, the evangelist has modified the older sequence by inserting 1:51,¹⁷ thus reintroducing an apocalyptic element into the sequence. This verse borrows from the story of Jacob in Gen 28:12, much as the preceding verses had done in contrasting Nathanael with Jacob, the man of guile. However, even this verse is only apparently apocalyptic, for it points toward a royal exaltation that has already taken place. The presence of the angels is a sign of exaltation (cf. 1 Tim 3:16). In this verse they have no real function to perform, like the angels at the tomb (cf. Jn 20:12-

¹⁴ R. Charles (ed.), *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament 2* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 512.

¹⁵ O. Betz, *Kann denn aus Nazareth etwas Gutes kommen?* (Zur Verwendung von Jesaja Kap. II in Johannes Kap. I), in H. Gese and H. Rieger (eds.), *Wort und Geschichte* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 18; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973) 9-16.

¹⁶ Brown, *John I-XII*, 88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88-91.

15), but their starting point from below ("ascending and descending") is a sign that the exaltation will occur here on earth, in the lifting up of Jesus on the cross (Jn 12:32-33). In his attempt to orient his gospel material more obviously toward the cross,¹⁸ the evangelist works analogously to Mark's use of the "Messianic secret." Just as Mark introduced Jesus' commands for silence into several miracle stories in order to re-orient their Christology toward the revelation of Jesus' messiahship on the cross (Mk 15:39),¹⁹ so in the gospel of John the fullness expressed in Nathanael's confession of faith as well as in the abundance of wine at Cana is muted through the evangelist's adding an allusion to the crucifixion (1:51).

The story of the wedding feast at Cana can be clarified through what we have already seen in the Nathanael passage. Apocalyptic themes are present in the Cana story too, notably the image of a wedding feast (cf. Apoc 19:9) and the mother of the Messiah as a symbol for the community of God's chosen ones. Here once again apocalyptic themes are presented as already fulfilled in that a great abundance of wine, symbolizing a messianic fullness of wisdom,²⁰ is already granted at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and the mother is no longer an expression of unfulfilled messianic expectation but is rather an historical individual. She is thus an image of fulness achieved, as Lazarus exemplified eternal life already present. The mother of Jesus retains her symbolic character, speaking to Jesus in the name of the community assembled at the wedding (vs. 3)²¹ and offering them wise instruction as a queen-mother should (vs. 5; cf. the instructions of Pharaoh in Gen

¹⁸ John is described as a "Passion Gospel" by C. Smith, *Tabernacles in the Fourth Gospel and Mark* in *NTS* 9 (1963) 133.

¹⁹ R. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (New York: Scribner's, 1962) 81-82.

²⁰ R. Dillon, *Wisdom Tradition and Sacramental Retrospect in the Cana Account*, in *CBQ* 24 (1962) 268-296.

²¹ H. Schürmann, *Jesu letzte Weisung Jo 19, 26-27a*, in *Ursprung und Gestalt* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970) 21.

41:55). She seems to take no note of the apparent rebuke from Jesus in vs. 4. As with 1:51, we should regard 2:4 as an addition of the evangelist to an older version of the story which told of Jesus' unhesitating compliance with His mother's request.²² As in 1:51, he has reintroduced an apocalyptic theme, the "Woman" as the symbol of the community (IQH 3 and Apoc 20) but it is only apparently apocalyptic, for it refers to Jesus' exaltation on the cross, His "hour" (Jn 13:1). The evangelist thus plays down the fullness of the Cana episode by directing the story to the Cross. It is through the death of Jesus that the union with His mother, brothers and disciples is achieved, a truth at which the author hints still further by remarking that after Cana they all remained together "only for a few days" (2:12).²³

As we approach the crucifixion scene in John's gospel, after Jesus has already announced that His hour has come (12:23), we find the image of a woman in childbirth used to describe the suffering and joy of the disciples (16:21-22). The wisdom roots of apocalyptic thought are seen in the use of this brief proverb (vs. 21) to allegorize the messianic age.²⁴ We are close to the thought of Apoc 12, for here in 16:21 the experience of the woman symbolizes that of a group (the disciples) and we are prepared for the crucifixion scene at which the woman and the "beloved disciple" share a new life. The woman of 16:21 also resembles the queen-mother figure of Apoc 12, for the "man" born into the world surely alludes to the royal "man" of Gen 2-3, soon to be realized in Jesus, when in royal robes He is presented by Pilate to the crowd with the words "Behold, the Man" (Jn 19:5).

Soon after expressing this brief allegory, Jesus begins His

²² For 2:4 as an addition, cf. R. Brown, *Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel* in *TS* 36 (1975) 695-697.

²³ Schürmann, *Weisung*, 23, n. 58.

²⁴ R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI* (AB 29a; New York: Doubleday, 1970) 732.

extended prayer to the Father (Jn 17); a remarkable event in that Jesus had previously discounted His own need for petition, so close is their union,²⁵ saying rather that it was just for the benefit of those nearby that He prayed (11:41-42; 12:27-30). Thus Jesus' words in Jn 17 are not so much a prayer as a promise and reassurance for His disciples; they are a "verbal ascension"²⁶ to the Father, which clarifies the union among the faithful which Jesus' "ascension" upon the cross would achieve. He prays for the disciples (vs. 9) and for those who would believe through their word (vs. 20) "that all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us" (vs. 21). The prayer of Jesus means that they are in fact "one" and it is to the union of the two groups, the disciples and the future believers, that the evangelist gives symbolic expression in the scene involving the beloved disciple and the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross.²⁷

Since the evangelist regards the crucifixion of Jesus as a coronation scene (cf. Jn 12:32, 19:19-20), he fittingly places the queen-mother by the "throne" of Jesus. Her presence with three other women at the cross, as a community of faithful ones contrasted to the four soldiers who divide His garments,²⁸ preserves the image of the "woman" as a figure of God's people, as she was in the Cana episode. The words of Jesus to her at that time bespoke a separation from Him which made her also a figure of expectation, like the woman in Apoc 12. Now at the cross the expectation is fulfilled. She is taken into the home of the beloved disciple (Jn 19:27), who is presented at

²⁵ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (tr. G. Beasley-Murray et al.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 408-409.

²⁶ Cf. Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, 419.

²⁷ Schürmann, *Weisung*, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24; Schürmann too readily disapproves of using Gen 3:15 and Apoc 12 to interpret this scene, however (22, n. 51). Perhaps it is the evangelist himself who introduced Jn 19:25-27 into its present position, since vs. 29 (Greek) seems to presuppose that the last group previously mentioned was the soldiers in vs. 24 and not the women in v. 25 (compare Lk 23:36).

the crucifixion scene as the truthful witness to the word of the gospel (19:35).²⁹ This union of the mother and the disciple represents the full union of God's people, comprising those who await the word of the gospel (symbolized by the mother)³⁰ and the truthful witnesses of the word (symbolized by the beloved disciple). In this home of the mother and the disciple, the Father and His only Son will also dwell, in fulfillment of the promise that "anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him" (14:23). Jesus' prayer is thus fulfilled, "that all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us" (17:21).³¹

In fulfillment of Jn 16:21, this messianic completion is phrased in terms suggesting a symbolic childbirth. The woman becomes the mother of a new son (19:26-27). Further, the sacramental provision for sharing in that sonship is made, for Jesus delivers over "His spirit" (19:30) and water comes forth from His pierced side (19:34), two events which express the need to be born again of water and spirit if one is to enter God's kingdom (3:5). The link between Baptism and the death of Christ is made firm,³² for the spirit is given over in Jesus' death and with the water comes forth also the blood of victimhood.

²⁹ Schürmann, *Weisung*, 25.

³⁰ In John's gospel, "woman" as a form of address does not always suggest communitarian symbolism (cf. Jn 8:10; 20:13, 15), but it does in the case of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21), who stands for the Samaritan people as a whole (compare the five husbands of Jn 4:18 and the five foreign peoples in Samaria, 2 Kgs 17:24, 30-31). The "woman" of Mt 15:28 may symbolize the gentiles; that the healing should come because of her own words of wisdom rather than the intention of Jesus may express the experience of the Church that the gentiles should now be received because of the evidence that the Holy Spirit is among them (Acts 10:44-48), even though Jesus Himself had not given specific directions to this effect during His earthly life.

³¹ Schürmann, *Weisung*, 18, n. 26.

³² Perhaps this association accounts for the emphasis in 1 Jn 5:6, "not in water only, but in water and in blood," that is, baptism by water must not be dissociated from Jesus' death (symbolized by "blood").

Thus the author has achieved his desire to associate the fullness of our life with the cross of Christ,³³ showing that the wisdom (symbolized in the miracle of Cana) and baptism have meaning only in relation to the death of Christ. We are very close to the thought of Paul, who affirmed "we preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24) and admonished "Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom 6:3). The fulness which Luke associated with Pentecost, when the mother of Jesus, His brothers and His disciples were together and received the Spirit as a baptism (Acts 1:5, 14; 2:4) is placed by the fourth evangelist at the Cross so that he might more profoundly express, like Paul and Mark before him, the bond between sacrament and self-giving service (cf. Mk 10:35-45; 1 Cor 11:26, 33; note also John's emphasis on the washing of the feet at the Last Supper, 13:13-17).

The starting point of our investigation, the "woman" of Gen 3:15, led us to an examination of the queen-mother in monarchic Israel. When the kingship no longer functioned, royal themes became democratized in apocalyptic literature; she thus became a symbol for the community as in Apoc 12, but was re-historicized in the person of Jesus' mother in the fourth gospel. At the cross she became mother of the beloved disciple; it would not be untrue to the thought of the evangelist to affirm that Mary at that time became the mother of all Christian believers, though not in the sense that each of us was committed to her care, for the gospel emphasizes the reverse, that the mother was taken into the care of the disciple.³⁴ Rather, merely within the purview of the gospel itself, Mary can be termed our mother insofar as she expresses in her own historical person

³³ If one may regard Jn 2:4 and 19:25-27 as additions to the narratives in which they stand, then we may conclude that the evangelist has presented Jesus' mother as "Woman" precisely to affirm this importance of the cross.

³⁴ Schürmann, *Weisung*, 14-15.

the truth that the eschatological community which she symbolizes has become historical reality, that despite all the imperfection of our present human existence, we have already been reborn.

REV. PETER J. KEARNEY
Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.