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JESUS' MOTHER AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

A Narrative Reading of John 19:25–27

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Considered to be dramatic and enigmatic,[1] John 19:25–27 is one of the high points of the Fourth Gospel.[2] In this particular scene at the foot of the cross, Jesus gives his parting message, first to his Mother and then to "the disciple whom he loved."[3] We find in this narrative the triangular conversation[4] in which two messages are carefully presented:

> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!"And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. — John 19:26–27[5]

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[1]Paul S. Minear, *John: The Martyr's Gospel* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), 143.

[2]Ignace de la Potterié, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus According to John: Text and Spirit* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1989), 133.

[3]Minear, *John,* 143.

[4]Minear, *John*, 143. Minear points out that the scene may be seen as a simple, straightforward account of what took place at that moment, which defines the personal relationships of three individuals.

[5]All Bible verses and their translations are taken from the Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament, 8th Edition, and the New Revised Standard Version (1998).

While we definitely do not consider the Gospel of John as a treatise on Mariology,[6] it does offer a rich theology with regard to the role of the mother of Jesus. A biblical scholar, Ignace de la Potterié,[7] proposes that "the Johannine teaching on Mary may well be much richer than that of the Infancy Gospels of Matthew and Luke." It is then challenging to explore further the role of the mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. Her explicit appearance is chiefly expressed in two pericopes: the Cana narrative (John 2:1–12) and the narrative at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27). Jesus' address of his mother as "Woman" in both scenes suggests that the reader is to connect 2:1–11 and 19:26–27.[8]

Noticeably, the Fourth evangelist never identified the mother of Jesus by her proper name, unlike in the synoptic evangelists, Acts of the Apostles, and some of Paul's letters.[9] In the Gospel of John, she is identified only as "the mother of Jesus" and as "Woman."

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[6]It is reiterated that it is important to interpret vv. 26–27 in the light of the roles of Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple within the Fourth Gospel narrative, and not through the lens of later mariological and ecclesial teachings. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 832.

[7]Ignace de la Potterié, "Mary and the Mystery of Cana," *Theology Digest* 29 (1981): 40.

[8]*The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 832.

[9]She is identified as Mariva in the following verses from the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 1:16, 18, 20; 2:11; 13:55; 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mark 6:3; 15:40, 47; 16:1, 9; Luke 1:27, 30, 34, 38, 39, 41, 46, 56; 2:5, 16, 19; 2:34; 8:2; 10:39, 42; 24:10; also in Acts 1:14; 12:12 and in Romans 16:6 (*Analytical Concordance to the NRSV New Testament*, 403–404). In addition, references to the "mother of Jesus" (John 2:1, 3) or to "his mother" (Matthew 2:13f, 20f,; 12:46; Mark 3:31; Luke 2:33, 48, 51; 8:19; John 2:5, 12; 19:25; cf. John 6:42; 19:26, "the mother"), without mentioning her name (cf. "your mother," Mark 3:32 par. Matt 12:47/Luke 8:20; "the mother of my Lord," Luke 1:43), are frequent. Cf. Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdsmans Publishing Co., 1991); R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and the Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 232. Also refer to BibleWorks Edition 6 (BibleWorks, LLC, http://www.bibleworks.com/).

For Edward Schillebeeckx, the mother of Jesus can only be understood when she is seen in the perspective of Christ.[10] Hence, if the mother of Jesus is viewed in the light of Christ instead of seeing her in her own light, we can have a deeper view and understanding of her role in Jesus' life.

Within this perspective, the present study aims to identify the role of the mother of Jesus in John 19:25–27. It specifically hopes to explore the following questions: What is the significance of the address "mother of Jesus"? Of the women standing at the foot of the cross, why does Jesus address only his mother? What is the significance of "Woman, behold your son! … Behold your mother!"? How does the Christological dimension of John 19:25–27 affect the understanding of the Mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel?

To be able to arrive at the most plausible interpretation of the narrative at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27), the methodology that will be used in this study is narrative criticism. This particular method focuses on the "what" of a text (its content) and the "how" of a text (its structure).[11] In other words, the text is understood through a careful study of how an implied author communicates a message to an implied reader.[12]

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[10]Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 180.

[11]James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 18–19. This method also focuses on the literary shape of the text. As defined, narrative criticism is a text-centered approach that reads the story of the text in its present, final form. Cf. Robert E. Van Voorst, *Reading the New Testament Today* (Wadsworth: Thomson, 2005), 135 (http://www-relg-studies.scu.edu/facstaff/murphy/courses/exegesis/narrative.htm [accessed February 10, 2011]).

[12]For Chatman, the implied author is not the actual author but the speaker of the literary work, whereas the implied reader pertains to the audience addressed in the narrative. Cf. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 147–150. The process suggests that the narrative critics first read the Gospel text/s as a narrative whole, and what arises from this reading is an encounter with its implied

To have a better panoramic montage of the text under study (John 19:25–27), an overlapping portrait of the Cana narrative (John 2:1–12) will also have to be looked into. Hence, we will also employ a literary technique of linking together by framing,[13] in this case, the two appearances of the mother of Jesus at Cana and at the cross, first foreshadowing, then witnessing the fulfilment of his hour of glorification.[14]

It is our hope that with the aid of narrative criticism, we will be able to draw out the potential plausible frames of meaning inherent in the narrative event under study (John 19:25– 27) and make it more intelligible and relevant for us readers of today.[15]

I. A Background Reading of John 19:25–27 in relation to the Synoptics

As to the location of the narrative at the foot of the cross, John 19:25–27 is part of the second division of the "Book of Glory" (John 13:1–20:31). The second division describes the "hour" of the passion, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension as one event in which Jesus

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author. This implied author in turn communicates to the implied reader. Cf. Van Voorst, *Reading,* 135. For further discussion on this methodology, refer to Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 19–21; also see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, II: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 154.

[13]"Framing" is a literary technique where an event, appearance of a character, or a geographical detail reminds the reader of an earlier appearance of the same event, person, or detail. It may also be that the similarity of his appearances frames the material which comes between for the reader. Cf. David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Brill, 1997), 51–52. For further discussions on framing narratives, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism,* 55–56.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Udo Schnelle, "Cross and Resurrection in the Gospel of John," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John,* eds. Craig R. Koester & Reimund Bieringer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 129–130.

is lifted up to the Father. Brown has divided the Book of Glory into three parts with a conclusion:[16]

- Part I—The Last Supper (John 13–17)
- Part II—The Passion Narrative (John 18–19)
- Part III—The Risen Christ (John 20:1–29)

In this structure, John 19:25–27 is located in part two, namely the Passion Narrative, which is itself partitioned into three divisions:

- Division I—The Arrest and Interrogation of Jesus (John 18:1–27)
- Division II—The Trial of Jesus Before Pilate (John 18:28–19:16a)
- Division III—The Execution of Jesus on the Cross and His Burial (John 19:16b–42)

Our text, John 19:25–27, is also strategically placed in Division III, which comprises an introduction and five episodes.[17] Furthermore, the Johannine narrative of the crucifixion (John 19:16–42) provides us with short episodes of symbolic and theological significance. Right in the middle of the narrative, we find a scene picturing the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27).[18]

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[16]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* XIII–XXI (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1970), 545–547.

[17]Brown, *John*, 910–911. Unlike other scholars who would introduce a pattern of seven episodes, Brown's exposition of five episodes is the most preferred in this study. In his structure, he did not add the introduction and the conclusion for the basic reason that the episodes are centered on theological symbolism (the Introduction and the Conclusion part do not have such—they serve more to set the scene). In this structure that Brown proposes, and as used in the text of our study, 19:25–27 is placed at the center. See the diagram which has given highlights to the parallels of the chiastic structure. Moloney also supports the scenes that have been arranged in a chiastic literary structure, with the gift of mother to son and son to mother at its center. Cf. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John,* Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 4 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 502.

[18]Raymond E. Brown & Karl P. Donfried, et. al., *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 206.

From the Johannine account it is clear that John agrees with the Synoptics about the presence of Galilean women at Calvary. But only John places the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross. Perhaps John is only interested in Jesus' words to his mother and the beloved disciple, neither of whom is mentioned in the Synoptic gospels.

Even if neither the mother of Jesus nor the beloved disciple appeared in the Johannine pre-Gospel tradition,[19] Brown would like to assume that this would not preclude historicity, for one could suppose that the evangelist supplemented the pre-Gospel written material with information about the beloved disciple. Perhaps this information is so well-known in the community that there was no need to put it into writing.[20]

Brown, on the one hand, thinks that John drew some basic facts from the synoptic tradition and then expanded these by adding details that lent themselves to his own theological interest.[21] Barrett, on the

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[19]From the observation, it is agreed that John, leaving aside the mother of Jesus, most probably refers to four women. John 19:15 names three women who may be compared to the three named women of Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:56 with the following results: Mary Magdalene is clearly the same in the three lists; possibly John's "Mary the wife of Clopas" may be the same as the Marcan/Matthean "Mary the mother of James (the younger) and Joses/Joseph"; it would be a sheer guess, however, to identify John's "his mother's sister" with Mark's "Salome" and Matthew's "mother of the sons of Zebedee." Brown added that the very differences make it unlikely that John borrowed the names of the three named women (besides the mother of Jesus) in John as well as in the Synoptics, making it possible that a tradition of three women was fixed early in Christian tradition. Cf. Brown, et. al., *Mary*, 207. Bultmann reiterated that Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:56 tell of the three women, recognizing that the only agreement with John is in the naming of Mary of Magdala. He further argues that the Evangelist is not interested in them as witnesses of the crucifixion, that John's interest centers on only one of them, and that is the mother of Jesus. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasey-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 672.

[20]Ibid, 209.

[21]We note here that in episode 1, John agrees with the Synoptics about the fact and substantial content of the title on the cross, but his interest is in the

other hand, maintains that John may have been probably dependent on Mark, but either he, or intermediate tradition, has modified the source markedly.[22] Brown, however, thinks otherwise on the grounds that, first, when John has material in common with the Synoptics, the parallel descriptions often show notable differences in vocabulary, and, second, in this common material, the sequence is not the same.[23]

Dodd posits the existence of an independent Johannine tradition, leaving the possibility that the evangelist has supplemented that tradition by creative imagination.[24] In other words, that John drew some details of John 19:25 from an existing tradition and reworked John 19:26–27 to fit his theology seems tenable as gleaned from the structure of the text.

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international character of the proclamation and in Pilate's role in making and keeping the proclamation—points on which the Synoptics are silent. Secondly, in episode 2 John agrees with the Synoptics on the detail of the soldier's dividing Jesus' clothes by gambling, but the symbolism of the Johannine episode seems to be centered on the seamless tunic, a garment not mentioned by the Synoptics. Likewise in episode 4, John agrees with the Synoptics that wine was offered to the crucified Jesus, but he stresses that Jesus' thirst fulfilled the Scriptures and brought his work to completion. This element is totally missing from the Synoptic descriptions of the incident. Brown concludes that John and the Synoptics may have elements in common, but the differences are still quite substantial. Cf. Brown, *John,* 915.

[22]Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 455.

[23]The Markan order is as follows: 1) the crucifixion, 2) the division of garments, 3) the inscription, 4) the mention of the two bandits. The Lucan order of the same events is: 1) crucifixion, 2) the mention of the two bandits, 3) the division of garments, 4) the inscription. The Johannine order is: 1) the crucifixion, 2) mention of the two bandits, 3) the inscription, 4) the division of garments. It is noted that these Johannine details give just as plausible a picture as do the contradictory or variant details of the Synoptic tradition. Cf. Brown, *John,* 915.

[24]Charles H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 124–139.

The different scholarly opinions as to what was in the pre-Gospel tradition and what the evangelist added would mean that the evangelist heightened the dramatic importance of the scene and gave the mother of Jesus (Mary) a significant role.[25]

II. The Interrelation Between the Mother of Jesus at the Wedding at Cana in John 2:1–12 and at the Foot of the Cross in John 19:25–27

The framing of two narratives which identifies the distinctive location of these two scenes in which the Mother of Jesus appears (in Cana, 2:1–12 and Calvary, 19:25–27) is best illustrated through a chiastic structure,[26] as suggested by Grassi. The structure, which includes the seven signs in the Book of Glory, serves its purpose in our exploration regarding the role of the Mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.

1 The Wedding at Cana (2:1–12)

2 The Restoration of the Official's Dying Son (4:46–54)

3 Jesus' healing at Bethsaida on a Sabbath (5:1–16)

4 The Multiplication of Loaves (6:1–71)

5 Jesus' healing of the Blind Man on a Sabbath (9:1–41)

6 The Restoration of Lazarus to Life (11:1–44)

7 The great hour of Jesus: his mother, the cross, and the issue of blood and water from Jesus' side (19:25–37)

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[25]Brown, et. al., *Mary,* 208. In fact, by listing the mother of Jesus first, the implied author gave the mother of Jesus prominence in the scene and set the stage for her important role in the pericope. Cf. Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 133.

[26]Joseph A. Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel: A Reappraisal," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48/1, 2 (January 1986): 69.

The utilization of the seven-sign series reflects the mother of Jesus having to play a significant role in inaugurating the public ministry of Jesus.[27] As presented in the structure, we could at once identify themes that link together: (3) and (5) speak of Sabbath-healing signs, (2) and (6) presented death-to-life themes, whereas (1) and (7) complement well with each other as beginning and end.[28] In this regard, the mother of Jesus is tied with similar themes: Jesus' hour (2:4; 19:27), the Cana wine and the bitter wine on the cross (19:29, 30).[29] For the purpose of this study, we shall explore how the unity of the Cana and the Calvary scenes becomes a continuous telling of one single story.

The centrality of the mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel finds its place at Cana (2:1–11) which has a connection with the hour of Jesus' glorification (6:62; 2:4; 19:27).[30] Once again, she is introduced not by name[31] but by the title "the Mother of Jesus." According to Brown, "Mary" occurs fifteen times in the Gospel of John but never for Jesus' mother.[32] The fact is that at the foot of the cross she appears beside the

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[27]Jean Kim, *Woman and Nation: An Intercontextual Reading of the Gospel of John from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2004), 169.

[28]Grassi, "The Role," 69.

[29]Grassi, "The Role," 69.

[30]Ritva H. Williams, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1–12," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59:4 (October 1997): 679; Grassi, "The Role," 69.

[31]The personal name in identifying the mother of Jesus is never used by the Fourth Gospel evangelist. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (Manila: St. Paul's, 1979).

[32]Ibid. Furthermore, Brown also says that the Fourth Gospel evangelist's insistence on the title "the mother of Jesus" or "his mother" is due to a fact that John is interpreting a tradition about what constituted her true motherhood.

other great unnamed figure, "[t]he disciple whom Jesus loved,"[33] and is put into direct relationship with the present text of our study.[34]

The connection of the two narratives regarding the role of the mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is evident, as some scholars[35] suggest that the passage concerning the mother of Jesus at Cana forms an *inclusio* with the mother of Jesus at the cross because of two significant words, γύναι (2:4; 19:26) and ὥρα (2:4; 19:27).[36] The son's use of γύναι (2:4; 19:26) for his mother signifies a distinction and a mark of respect.[37] Brown posits that it is a polite way to address a

[33]"The disciple whom Jesus loved" is considered to be a central witness to the key events moving from the supper table (John 13:21–26), to the court of the high priest (John 18:15–16), to the cross (John 19:26–27), empty tomb (John 20:2, 3–10), fishing expedition (John 21: 1–8), to the final verses in which he was recognized as the source of the traditions on which this Gospel was based. He typifies the disciple of Jesus *par excellence*. He is the paradigm of discipleship, one who embodies the faithfulness of all believers even unto death. He is a real individual who has been transformed from a merely historical personage to the model of authentic disciple of Jesus. As an individual, he dies; as type, he endures. Cf. Minear, *John,* 148; Raymond F. Collins, "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel-II," *The Downside Review* 94 (1976): 118–132; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 240; Max Thurian, *Mary, Mother of All Christians* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 163; Franz Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of St. John* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), 56.

[34]Brown, et. al., *Mary*, 101–102.

[35]John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 370; Collins, "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel-II," 120; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 133–134. Hence, most scholars use the crucifixion scene to interpret the significance of the Mother of Jesus at Cana and thus to establish a unified meaning for her character in the Fourth Gospel. Cf. Fehribach, *The Women*, 23.

[36]Kim, *Woman*, 64.

[37]Sean P. Kealy, *That You May Believe* (Middlegree: St. Paul Publications, 1978), 149.

woman, as well as a way for a son to address his mother.[38] Moreover, the designation "mother" and the form of address "woman" recalls the much-liked Old Testament picture of Israel as woman and mother. "Woman" also makes a connection with Eve in Gen. 3:15.[39] Mary may be viewed as the New Eve in comparison to the old Eve in Gen. 3:15. This too has a certain resemblance to that of Revelation 12:5, 17 where a woman gives birth to the Messiah in the presence of the Satanic dragon or ancient serpent of Genesis, and yet also has other offspring who are the targets of Satan's wrath after the Messiah has been taken to heaven.[40] The offspring of the woman in Revelation is described as "those who keep the commandments of God"; that has

[38]Brown, *John,* 99; Mt. 15:28; Lk. 13:12; Jn. 4:21; 8:10; 20:13. As cited from Kim, *Woman,* 76. Also refer to Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004), 549.

[39]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 3, Commentary on Chapters 13–21 (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 280. This is the only text in the Old Testament in which a salvific role is attributed to "woman." Gen. 3:15 is considered to be the protoevangelium. It is Eve who is the woman, yet it is only through her progeny that Eve is victorious over the serpent. In other words, Eve is the conquering woman of the protoevangelium by means of Mary, and Mary in the victory of her Son becomes the new Eve. Cf. Raymond F. Collins, "Mary in the Fourth Gospel: A Decade of Johannine Studies," *Louvain Studies* 3, 2 (1970): 130. There are also several opinions as to the usage of the word "guvnai." Brown, Hoskyns, Braun and Thurian maintain that there is a connection between the mother of Jesus and the Church through the portrayal of Eve in Genesis 3, just as the mother of Jesus at Cana and at the Cross. Zerwick followed the point of connecting Eve and the woman of Revelation 12, yet André Feuillet rejects the connection with Gen. 3:15; instead, he sees the mother of Jesus as representing the eschatological Zion/the mother of the Church. Thus, he rather connects the "woman" at the cross in connection with the "woman" of Revelation 12 and views this woman in the context of Isa. 26:17 and 66:7–9. Cf. Fehribach, *The Women*, 24.

[40]Brown, *John,* 926. In Rev. 12, the mother of the Messiah is also presented as the mother of "the rest of her children, that is, all who obey God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus." Cf. Collins, "Mary," 132. Also see Collen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine*

a semblance with John 14:21–23, which states that those who keep the commandments are loved by the Father and Son.[41]

Another Johannine term which is pregnant with meaning in our exploration of the role of the Mother of Jesus is ὥρα (2:4; 19:27). This term closely resembles those passages in John 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 13:1, and 17:1, where the word is clearly linked with Jesus. ὥρα here serves as a reference to Jesus' final hour—to the time for Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.[42] It is clear that all the events of Jesus' life are oriented toward the "hour" as a point of consummation.[43] During his public ministry, it is repeatedly said of him that his hour has not yet come (cf. 4:2, 23, 25, 28; 7:30; 8:20), yet the passion narrative suddenly begins with the statement, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when

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Characterization (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 81; Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 348; de la Potterié, *The Hour,* 141; Kim, *Woman,* 189.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Conway, *Men and Women,* 73. A person's hour is the time which he does the work to which he has been specifically assigned. The hour of the woman is that of her childbirth (John 16:21); the hour of the unbelieving Jews is the time in which God allows them to commit their crime (John 16:22); the hour of Jesus is the moment in which the work for which he was sent into this world by the Father is definitely fulfilled (John 12:23–24, 27, 31–32). Cf. André Feuillet, *Johannine Studies,* trans. Thomas E. Crane (New York: Alba House, 1965), 19. Collins affirms that when ὥρα is viewed in its fullest theological sense, there is only one hour of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel—the hour of Jesus' Passion and Glorification. He added that whenever the term is qualified by a possessive pronoun (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 8:31), a demonstrative adjective (12:27–2x; 19:27) or the article (12:23; 17:1), the ὥρα is pregnant with theological meaning. Cf. Collins, "Mary," 121. Furthermore, Collins cited commentators (C.M. Henze, M.N. Eyquem, and H. Leroy) who argue that in the case of 2:4, ὥρα refers to the hour of Jesus to work a miracle, which I suppose is far from a possibility, taking into account the use of the hour in the rest of the Gospel. Cf. Collins, "Mary," 120. Conway also thinks that there is no sense for Jesus to claim that the hour in which he is to work a miracle is not yet here in a story in which he does, in fact, perform a miracle. Cf. Conway, *Men and Women,* 74.

[43]Feuillet, *Johannine*, 20.

Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father" (John 13:1). The "hour" then, on the peak and center of saving history, is Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the precise moment which the Fourth Gospel calls the exaltation of Christ (John 3:4; 8:28; 12:32, 34) on the cross as well as his exaltation and return to the Father. It is the hour of Jesus' supreme manifestation and self-revelation. It is the moment of crucifixion-glorification, the significance of which is central to the believer's faith.[44] Hence, the Cana incident points to this hour of crucifixion, and thus the evangelist can say that Jesus manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him (John 2:1–11).[45]

By mentioning Jesus' ὥρα and the presence of his mother, John ties Cana (2:1–12) to Calvary (John 19:25–27). This is a deliberate *inclusio* on the part of the evangelist where he unifies the public ministry and passion into one continuous manifestation of the glory of Jesus.[46] Moreover, the negative response of Jesus in John 2:4 prepares the reader to understand that if Jesus does act, he will act in accordance with his own conscious purpose, not on the basis of human concern or human need.[47]

Symbolic Characterization of the Mother of Jesus

Although the mother of Jesus appears to be unintroduced in both the Cana (2:1–12) and Calvary (19:25–27) scenes,[48] her role in Jesus' life is significant. The tying of the two narratives portrays the mother of Jesus as being present at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry,

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[44]Raymond F. Collins, "Cana (Jn. 2:1–12)—The First of His Signs or the Key to His Signs?" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 47 (1980): 91–92; Perkins, *John,* 21; Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 73.

[45]Ibid, 91.

[46]Forestell, *The Word*, 73.

[47]Ch. H Giblin, "Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in John's Portrayal of Jesus," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979–1980): 203.

[48]Culpepper, *Anatomy,* 133.

when he performs his first sign and where she acts as mediator for this sign, and at the end of his ministry, when "his hour" has finally come (16:32; 2:4).[49] Her representations in a variety of symbolic interpretations are recognized.[50] For Brown, the fact that John never addresses the mother of Jesus as Mary is significant. His interest lies in her motherhood, and that her physical motherhood is reinterpreted in relation to discipleship.[51] Biblical scholars agree that these two Johannine pericopes are pre-eminently Christological.[52]

The narrative is told in the context of a wedding where nothing is said about the spouses themselves. The Cana event (John 2:1–12) tells of a marriage attended by Jesus, his mother and his disciples. It recounts the lack of wine at the feast, where Jesus, who, contrary to the usual usage, addresses his own mother as "woman."

The remark of Jesus' mother, "They have no wine" (John 2:3), can be fully grasped only when it is situated within the context of its own world of Jewish expectations. Wine is a principal Old Testament symbol of blessing (Gen. 27:28, 37; 49:10–12; Deut. 7:13) and an image of the messianic times (Is. 25:6; Jer. 31:12; 49:11–12; Amos 9:13–14; Joel 4:18). The wine of the story clearly symbolizes messianic blessings, and the abundance of the wine symbolizes the copiousness of the messianic goods.[53] The "wine" the mother of Jesus speaks about is the "messianic times and fulfilment." The mother of Jesus is the representative faithful one who is in a situation of expectation

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[49]Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, *Transformative Encounter: Jesus and Women Re-viewed* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 103.

[50]Kitzberger, *Transformative Encounter*, 103. Bultmann (*John*, 673) sees the Mother of Jesus as representative of Jewish Christianity; Brown (*John*, 109), Thurian (*Mary*, 144–166), and Brodie (*John*, 549) view her as a new Eve.

[51]Brown, et. al., *Mary*, 212–214.

[52]Cf. Conway, *Men and Women,* 73; Collins, "Mary," 125; de la Potterié, "Mary," 41–42.

[53]Collins, "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel-II," 121.

in relation to the Messiah and the awaited messianic times.[54] She is indeed a representative figure symbolizing the people who faithfully await the messianic times. Hence, "They have no wine" means "they have no messianic goods!" It can also be an expression of the craving of faithful Israel for the riches of the final age. In retrospect of the messianic times, the mother of Jesus becomes the representative of the faithful remnant of Israel, expressing the anguish of captivity of sin which could not be removed under the old law.[55] The unmet thirst of the messianic people is also viewed as being linked, through her words, to the power of the messiah to quench it.[56] The evangelist also says that, in the Cana event (John 2:1–12), the biological relationship between Jesus and his mother is not as important as the attitude of faithful expectation of the messianic gifts.[57]

Another remark of Jesus' mother, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), invites the servants to hear the word of Jesus and to act on Jesus' orders. Here, Jesus' mother directs the community to obey Jesus. She becomes the "spiritual mother" who gives birth to a community of faith and obedience to the Son of the Father in heaven.[58]

In both remarks of Jesus' mother in the Cana event, we see her significance in her relationship with Jesus. She becomes now a symbol of the "woman" of the messianic times.[59] She no longer stands in the simple relationship of mother to Him, but has become His spouse in the work of the new creation.[60]

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[54]Collins, "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel-II," 121–122.

[55]Richard J. Dillon, "Wisdom Tradition and Sacramental Retrospect in the Cana Account (Jn. 2:1–11)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24 (1962): 291–192.

[56]Minear, *John*, 146.

[57]Collins, "Cana," 91.

[58]Thurian, *Mary*, 143.

[59]Collins, "Cana," 91.

[60]Dillon, "Wisdom," 291–292.

What is curious though after the Cana event is that she disappeared from the scene as soon as she has issued her command to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Minear argues that in this command she becomes instrumental in calling for this first "sign" of the Son's glory. Hence, the unmet thirst of the messianic people is linked through her words to the power of this messiah to quench it.[61] Consequently, it seems that the narrator is more concerned with her representative and symbolic role rather than with her individual story.[62]

In the narrative at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27), we encounter Jesus entrusting the Beloved Disciple to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" In Jesus' passion, death and glorification, he gives his mother a new role: to be the mother of the "disciple whom he loves," that is, those who show fidelity to the Lord and every believer who knows him intimately. Hence, a new relationship is established in the hour of his exaltation. It should be noted here that Jesus does not first of all entrust his mother to the beloved disciple; rather, Jesus first confides him to her care.[63] Jesus gives his mother a significant role as the mother of the disciple *par excellence* and the disciple is given a role as the son. The role is preceded by a revelatory formula which is used in John when something about God's plan is being communicated.[64]

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[61]Minear, *John*, 146.

[62]Minear, *John*, 146. Kitzberger maintains that the absence of the mother of Jesus from John's story in the long intervening period after the Cana event is perplexing. It is viewed that the narrative is open-ended, and that she is not depicted as accompanying Jesus during his ministry in Galilee and his journeys to Jerusalem; neither was there any clue as to where she remained and lived during that period. Hence, for Kitzberger it is surprising to encounter her again standing at the foot of the cross, together with three other women, that is, her sister and Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Cf. Kitzberger, *Transformative Encounter*, 103. On the contrary, Lieu argues that Jesus' mother is at the head of those who go with him to Capernaum (John 2:12). Cf. Judith M. Lieu, "The Mother of the Son in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 117/1 (1998): 64.

[63]Kealy, *That You May Believe*, 149.

[64]Buby, *Mary*, 106.

The revelatory formula found in it introduces a special new role for the mother of Jesus.[65]

By the cross, Jesus' relationship with his mother is transformed. His death puts an end to her physical motherhood, but instead she became the mother of the Beloved Disciple. It is a role she receives in the "hour" of Jesus (John 13:1). Accordingly, the crucified Jesus leaves behind him at the foot of the cross a small community of believing disciples.[66]

"Behold, your mother" (John 19:27)! This revelatory formula, indicating a new role bestowed on the mother of Jesus, is important as it establishes an authentic line of succession through which the community can make a connection with Jesus.[67] As John the evangelist is implicitly linking the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, this new role given to the mother of Jesus is established.[68] Hence, there emerges a familial relationship in terms of discipleship. Just as in Luke, the mother meets the criterion of the eschatological family. Luke dramatizes that Jesus' mother and brothers are the true family of Jesus by bringing them back on the scene as disciples after the Ascension

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[65]Grassi, "The Role," 72. This is a role she will exercise especially with regard to the Beloved Disciple.

[66]Brown, et. al., *Mary,* 212.

[67]Kim, *Woman*, 190. The role of Jesus' mother is two-fold: 1) She is an important bearer of the tradition of the reality of Jesus' death, how he died, and in a connected way, who he was. 2) She embodies this tradition in a living way by her maternal continuation of Jesus' love for his disciples. Cf. Grassi, "The Role," 73, 77. That Jesus employs a revelatory formula ("Behold") and performative language suggests the accomplishment of a new relationship—Jesus constitutes a new family, and the formation of this new family at the cross provides a nucleus for the community of believers. Cf. Culpepper, *The Gospel*, 234.

[68]Ibid. Also refer to Brown, *The Community*, 197. Jesus' act of mutually giving the Beloved Disciple and his mother to each other symbolizes what he is accomplishing on a "higher," spiritual level from the cross—that those whom the Beloved Disciple represents do become brothers of Jesus, not by matrilineal descent, but by a patrilineal kinship which Jesus' blood sacrifice will establish. Cf. Fehribach, *The Women*, 139.

(Acts 1:14). In Mark 3:33–35, Jesus rejected any family claim on him stemming from blood relations. He substituted for the physical family, a family based on discipleship (doing the will of God). In John, the brothers of Jesus are replaced by the beloved disciple—no natural relative, but someone especially loved.[69]

Jesus' mother is also seen as the new Eve, the "mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20). At the foot of the cross, she becomes the mother of the beloved disciple who represents all believers.[70] Here a new relationship is born as Jesus establishes a relationship which does not take its origin from his mother's maternity.[71] Now she assumes a new role—she becomes the "spiritual mother" of the beloved disciple. The mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple are symbols of the call to perfect discipleship which reaches its highest demands in the context of community, where intimacy, love, care and concern for one another converge at the foot of the cross.[72] Hence, reciprocal love within the community defines the disciples of Jesus: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Moreover, the dynamic interaction "of Jesus' remaining in us" and "our remaining in Jesus" (John 15:7–8) is what constitutes the true essence of discipleship.[73]

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[69]Cited from Troy W. Martin, "Assessing the Johannine Epithet 'The Mother of Jesus,'" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60:1 (January 1998): 65. See further discussions on this point in Brown, et. al., *Mary*, 213.

[70]James McPolin, *John* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 207.

[71]Max Zerwick, "The Hour of the Mother: John 19:25–27)," *The Bible Today* 18 (April, 1965): 1191.

[72]Buby, *Mary*, 108–109.

[73]Matthew Vellanical, "Discipleship According to the Gospel of John," *Jeevadhara* 10 (1980): 141.

In the Fourth Gospel, the Beloved Disciple is nameless. All we receive is a description that he is "the disciple whom Jesus loved,"[74] and yet he plays a distinctive role in John's gospel.[75] He is believed to be the one and the same beloved disciple who is described as a witness and the author of the Gospel in 21:24.[76] Collins suggests, however, that it is best to leave to him the anonymity which was intended by the final author of the gospel.[77]

The mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross attest to their love and commitment to Jesus. They witness the beginning of the community, the Church which is brought forth from the cross and the life-giving water which flows from the side of Jesus (John 19:34). On the part of Jesus, he realized that his journey to the Father had been completed, for after entrusting the "Beloved Disciple" to the "Woman" and the "Woman" to the "Beloved Disciple," the evangelist concludes: "After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished … and bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:28, 30). Here, the moment of the Church's birth at the cross (John 19:25–27) reveals a new union between the Mother of Jesus, who is the mother of the faithful, and the gift of the Spirit.[78]

There is no doubt that, like the mother of Jesus, the beloved disciple is considered to be a historical character.[79] To this end, Culpepper states,

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[74]He is mentioned in the following Johannine texts: 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20. As to the rest of the Gospel, Jesus loves his disciples (e.g., 13:34; 15:2) as the Father loves Jesus (e.g., 3:16, 35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:21). "The disciple whom Jesus loved" exemplifies this perspective. Cf. Margaret Davies, "Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel," *Supplement Series* 69 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992): 340.

[75]Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 121.

[76]Conway, *Men and Women*, 179–180.

[77]Collins, "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel-II," 30.

[78]Ignace de la Potterié, "Maria y a Santisima Trinidad en San Juan," *Estudios Trinitarious* 19:2 (1985), as abstracted in *New Testament Abstracts* 31 (1987): 31.

[79]Demetrius R. Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John's Gospel* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 28.

"It is now generally agreed that the beloved disciple was a real historical person who has representative, paradigmatic, or symbolic significance in John."[80] He exemplifies as an ideal disciple, and even if he appears to be an idealized figure, the conclusion of the Gospel indicates that he was an actual person who was the mediator of the tradition on which the Gospel was based (John 21:24).[81] He is described as being loved by Jesus and one who reclines on Jesus' chest at the last supper.[82] The designation "close to the breast" is significant, for it signifies not only personal affection in an intimacy, but also knowledge of the mind and will of God, along with the obligation to share that knowledge with the community, and so as Jesus was God's beloved spokesman, so this man is Jesus' beloved spokesman.[83] He arrives first with Peter to go to the tomb, and though both are presented with the same evidence, it is he who sees and believes (John 20:8). Unlike Thomas, whose faith was dependent on a "physical" vision of the risen Jesus, the beloved disciple comes to faith without seeing the risen Christ. In Chapter 21 of the Fourth Gospel, it is he who stays close to Jesus, believes and recognizes him.[84] In addition, the anonymous "disciple whom Jesus loved" also has a representative function to play.[85] Thus, he is

[80]Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 121. But it is with clarity that the beloved disciple is presented here in a symbolic sense that transcends his historical significance. See also Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus*, 28. Brown also supports the general agreement that the Beloved Disciple is a historical person. Brown, *The Community*, 31.

[81]Koester, *Symbolism*, 242.

[82]Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 21.

[83]Minear, *John*, 148–149.

[84]Neal Flanagan, "Mary in the Theology of John's Gospel," *Marianum* 40:1–2 (1978): 116.

[85]Koester, *Symbolism*, 242. He identifies the following primary tasks of the Beloved Disciple: 1) As a recipient of Jesus' love and a model of fidelity, he provides a model for all disciples. 2) Bear witness to what Jesus said and did (21:24), for the testimony of the Beloved Disciples also sets a direction for the testimony of other disciples. 3) As the Beloved Disciple was entrusted with the care of Jesus' mother, he became a brother of Jesus (in the post-resurrection,

not just one of the representative figures in the Fourth Gospel; he is the representative figure in the Johannine tradition. He is entrusted a leadership role in the beginning of the community of disciples along with the mother of Jesus—as its first members.[86]

By the cross, Jesus' relationship with his mother is transformed. His death puts an end to her physical motherhood, but instead she became the mother of the Beloved Disciple. It is a role she receives in the "hour" of Jesus (John 13:1). Accordingly the crucified Jesus leaves behind him at the foot of the cross a small community of believing disciples.[87]

Moreover, the presence of other women at the foot of the cross cannot be ignored. The reader is informed that she is accompanied by other women.[88] The Johannine group of women (the mother of Jesus, his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene) who stand by the cross contrasts with the four soldiers (John 19:23).[89] However, A. Köstenberger argues that there is no agreement on the way in which the soldiers and bystanders are related with the evangelist.[90] Nevertheless, Fehribach argues that the way in which the implied

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brother was used in a way for those who were related to Jesus by faith but not necessarily by kinship). Cf. Koester, *Symbolism*, 242–243.

[86]Niceta M. Vargas, "Word and Witness: An Introduction to the Gospel of John," Unpublished manuscript (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology-Ateneo de Manila University, 2004), 321.

[87]Brown, et. al., *Mary*, 212.

[88]The identification of the three women varies from gospel to gospel.

[89]McPolin, *John*, 206.

[90]Köstenberger, *John*, 547. See also Brown who thinks that there is no implied contrast between these two groups. However, other commentators (e.g., D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991], 615; Barrett, *John*, 551; Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 348; Schnackenburg, *John*, 273, 276) believe that the construction does imply such a contrast. Köstenberger posits that if a contrast is intended, it is hardly a sharp one, and that it is more likely that the two groups are distinguished as the narrative moves from one to the other.

author of the Fourth Gospel listed and identified these women at the cross has added literary significance.[91] These women are believers who "stand by" Jesus, who are close and loyal faithful followers, whereas the unbelievers are those who "go away from" Jesus (John 6:66–67). This group of women further represent all those who confess faith in their crucified Lord, who, through faith, overcome the scandal of the cross.[92] In John's account, Jesus is not totally abandoned during the hour of his death.

III. Synthesis

We have explored how the mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, who is never named, featured prominently in two pericopes. First, at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, she appears at the wedding at Cana (2:1–12), and again, at the end of his public ministry, she is found at the foot of the cross, together with the other women and the beloved disciple (19:25–27). In both narratives, it is Christological in structure and content. Feuillet affirms the fact that both passages cannot be understood apart from their essentially Christological meaning and the Johannine use of symbolism.[93] The primary focus is Jesus, the Messiah, who fulfils the Jewish messianic expectation, the one who brings the messianic blessings and salvation to the people. Thus, the reader is led to the fact that the hour of Jesus is the hour of his passion and glorification, when he finally exercises his messianic role.[94]

The mother of Jesus is introduced to a new role as mother for the Beloved Disciple, who is the representative of all believers. In this new role, the Messiah discloses the identity of her new son,[95] and the

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[91]Fehribach, *The Women*, 133.

[92]McPolin, *John*, 206.

[93]Feuillet, *Johannine*, 28. Also see Collins, "Cana," 141.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Minear, *John*, 147.

prophetic revelation of God's will for the messianic people conveys a mandate for her to respond positively to the continuing mission of the community of disciples.[96] This is evident even in the earlier part of the gospel, in the Cana event (John 2:1–12), that she now becomes the woman of the messianic times.

In our study of the text of John 19:25–27 side by side with John 2:1–12, the evangelist clearly implies that he is not interested in the individual history of the Beloved Disciple and of the mother of Jesus, but in their symbolic function in relation to the Church and its relationship with Christ and his messianic work.[97] The two significant figures are symbols of the call to perfect discipleship which reaches its highest demands in the context of community and in the care and concern for one another.[98]

IV. Conclusion

In our exposition of the text under study, John 19:25–27 conveys an important message that the mother of Jesus undoubtedly plays a central role in the Fourth Gospel. Evidently, she is present at the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly ministry as mother and as "woman." In John 2:1–12, she is presented as one who actively contributes to accomplishing the will of the Father. While at the foot of the cross in John 19:25–27, her presence, together with the Beloved Disciple, enables the establishment of a new family of God.[99]

She epitomizes what fidelity and love mean by standing at the foot of the cross (John 19:25). She willingly participated in Jesus' sufferings which will eventually become her birth pangs as she assumes her ultimate role of spiritual motherhood for Christians. The mother of

[96]Minear, *John*, 147.

[97]Thurian, *Mary*, 163.

[98]Buby, *Mary*, 108–109.

[99]Conway, *Men and Women*, 84–85.

Jesus and the Beloved Disciple's symbolic functions transcend their historical significance.[100] They are authentic models of what discipleship of Jesus means.

Finally, the Fourth Gospel does not place so much importance on the mother of Jesus as his biological mother, a maternal relationship between mother and son. While the image of "mother" is strong in the Filipino context—she is one who stands as a figure of security, a symbol of strength and wisdom, one who nurtures and fosters a sense of family interrelatedness, one who is compassionate and always ready to help her afflicted children—the Gospel of John stresses a familial relationship based on discipleship. Those who constitute God's family are those who obey God's word. This only underlines that discipleship goes beyond the confinement of our homes. Every Christian is called to embrace the commandment, to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 15:12).

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