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TOWARDS A SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION FOR A THEOLOGY OF MARY:
A Lukan Perspective

Kathleen Coyle, S.S.C.

This presentation centers on a scriptural foundation for a theology of Mary. It is offered as an initial response to a concern of Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (MC) in 1974, published ten years after the conclusion of Vatican II. The Pope says that "certain aspects of the image of Mary found in popular writings ... are not connected with the Gospel image of Mary" (MC 36). This work is divided into three parts: first, the invitation of Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus* to develop a biblical foundation for Marian devotion and to reflect on the harmony between that devotion and the sacred liturgy; second, a scriptural foundation for a theology of Mary, limited to the Gospel of Luke, focusing on Mary's cooperation in the Incarnation and paying special attention to the Annunciation and Magnificat narratives; third, a caution that a selective reading of Luke's Annunciation narrative may moralistically present Mary as a model of passive obedience, someone to be imitated. How can the message of the Magnificat be heard in the Christian community that tries to redefine itself in the face of today's depressing realities? Christians are called to explore the treasured tradition of the Lukan narratives from the perspective of the marginalized poor who live in degrading poverty and in situations of violence and fractured peace.

Paul VI and *Marialis Cultus*

Both the Second Vatican Council and Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus* challenged mariology to enter into a creative dialogue with the cultural changes; from being a system turned in on itself, the Christian community should break out of its isolation and establish links with the great theological themes.

By moving along this road it was hoped that mariology would change from being an over-systematized, over-speculative, devotionally-propelled, inward-turned and isolated segment of theology into what it had once been, a crossover point for the great themes of Christian theology—creation, sin, redemption, eschatology.[1]

Marialis Cultus stressed that devotion to Mary must find "its origin and effectiveness from Christ, find its complete expression in Christ and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father" (MC Introduction). Paul VI began by saying that devotion to Mary was problematic for many because it reflected outdated ideas from the Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation period of the Church, and also because Mary was presented as timidly submissive, an image that is repugnant to women today. The exhortation recognized that while there is strong evidence that Mary is still important in the imagination of Christians and that she is a religious symbol of enduring power in the Catholic tradition, she remains an ambiguous symbol especially for women, for the passive virtues of submission, humility, and docility have been projected onto her.

However, *Marialis Cultus* did not make the hoped-for impact; it failed to overcome the apathy consequent to the Council. The focus of John Paul II's *Redemptoris Mater* (RMa) in 1987, thirteen years later, took up other issues still left open by the Council. It stressed the "singularity and uniqueness of her [Mary's] place in the mystery of Christ," (RMa 9) and her "active and exemplary presence in the life of

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[1]Donal Flanagan, "The Sign of the Virgin," *Doctrine & Life* 44 (1994), 271.

the Church" (RMa 1). By comparison, it was the liberation theologians of the seventies and eighties who found in Mary of the Magnificat a powerful symbol of the liberating intent of God who stands on the side of the poor and powerless of society.

Very little is known about Miriam of Nazareth, the first-century Jewish woman, the mother of Jesus, as an actual historical person. History has no record of her life except through the documents of faith, the Gospels of the New Testament. And the account in the New Testament is tantalizingly brief. Paul doesn't mention her name. Luke and Matthew mention her, but it is mostly in the Infancy Narratives, and these are meditations on Old Testament themes rather than historical accounts of the early life of Jesus. The fourth Gospel gives prominence to Mary. However, this gospel is a theological reflection rather than a narrative of historical events. The *Didache*, the so-called teaching of the twelve apostles, does not mention her either. Contemporary theologians like Elizabeth Johnson[2] and Charlene Spretnak[3] are searching for a more meaningful theology for today and that theology needs a scriptural foundation. This essay hopes to offer the beginnings of such a scriptural foundation. While it focuses in particular on the Lukan story of the Incarnation, it pays special attention to the commitment of Mary in the Annunciation and Magnificat narratives (Lk. 1:26-38; 39-56).

Scriptural Foundations

The third Gospel, whose author is popularly known as Luke, is usually dated around 85 AD. This would indicate that his message is addressed to third generation Christians. Luke himself, though not

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[2]Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

[3]Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Reemergence of the Queen of Heaven* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

necessarily a Greek, is most probably a Gentile convert who came to know about Jesus at Antioch in Syria where he notes that the term "Christian" was first used (Acts 11:26). His Gospel is studied together with its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles, which shows how Jesus' followers continued his message and mission in the Churches which were first formed in Judea, then Samaria and throughout the Mediterranean world. The foundation of Luke's portrayal of Mary as mother and disciple is laid in his Gospel's infancy narrative. His Annunciation story is a message of revelation phrased in post-resurrection language. He gives enough information about Mary to form a definite portrait and allows her to speak for herself. To grasp her importance, she must be placed in a first-century context. She has no social standing because of her youth, her poor family background and female gender. In Luke's presentation "Mary who seemed to measure low in any ranking ... turns out to be the one favored by God, the one who finds her status and identity in her obedience to God and participation in his salvific will."[4]

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke places Mary with Jesus' followers in the upper room in Jerusalem praying and awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit with the rest of the post-Easter community: "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (Lk. 1:14). Before the risen Christ "withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven" (Lk. 24:51), he said to his disciples: "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay in the city, until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). In Acts 1:14 Mary is found with the members of the Jerusalem community, gathered together and awaiting this *power from on high*, the gift of the promised Spirit at Pentecost. For Luke, this last appearance of Mary in the New Testament after the death of Jesus is important. It was at Pentecost

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[4]Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 92.

that the Spirit descended upon them, inspiring boldness to preach the Gospel, thus initiating a movement that would witness to Jesus' message of unselfish love. A commitment to this Jesus movement meant centering one's life in Christ and his mysteries, and choosing the values of God's kingdom for which he lived and died. Mary is the figure standing between the two testaments, sharing and savoring the new liberating experience of her Son's movement which offers equal discipleship to men and women. Gebara and Bingemer note:

> Together with the other women at the church's beginnings, she is the bearer of a new hope ... she is the legitimate representative of the people of Israel, the symbol of faithful Sion. Equally she is the bearer of the new Israel, the new people, the new covenant God makes with humanity.[5]

Mary's Cooperation in the Mystery of the Incarnation (Lk. 1: 26-38). The Annunciation story is a prophetic vocation story modelled on the call of Moses at the burning bush.[6] The pattern of the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus has clear antecedents in the births of Isaac and Samson. It is probable that this tradition was already in the community before Luke wrote the birth narrative. The angelic message in Lk. 1:26-35 is a rephrasing of the Old Testament promise of Nathan to the House of David (2 Sam. 7:8-16). The angel's words to Mary re-echo what the early Church has said about Jesus after his resurrection. Raymond Brown points out that the angel's message, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy, he will be called Son of God" (Lk. 1:35), is an application to Jesus' conception of statements that Christians had already applied to his

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[5]Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, "Mary," in *Mysterium Liberationis,* eds. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 168.

[6]Elizabeth Johnson, "Mary of Nazareth: Friend of God and Prophet," *America* 182 (June 17-24, 2000), 13.

resurrection: "*Designated Son of God* in *power* according to a *Holy Spirit* [Spirit of Holiness] by resurrection from [of] the dead (Rom 1:4)."[7]

Mary responds to the news of Jesus' conception with the words "Here I am, the servant of the Lord, be it done with me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). To appreciate Luke's message, one has to see it in the context of another Lukan passage, Lk. 8:19-21. This passage is a positive interpretation by Luke of the Markan account in Mk. 3: 31-35 where Jesus' mother and brothers are calling for him. "Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it'" (Lk. 8:19-21). Raymond Brown proposes that these words are a careful Lukan composition from earlier material. In the Annunciation story Luke simply transposes these words to the first person and affirms that Jesus' mother heard the word of God and gave her faithful response to that word during her life. Luke is suggesting that before Jesus was born, Mary had her own relationship with God that was not focused on Jesus. What was unique in Mary was her hearing the word of God and keeping it. In the words "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21), Luke shows that what Mary does at this moment is consistent with her lifelong courageous faith and strength of commitment. She walks by faith through a difficult life.

A Message of Empowerment. "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). Mary refers to herself as God's slave girl (*doules autou*). She is chosen as God's partner because of her low status in society. Luke in 1:26 says that God's word came to a virgin (as yet an unproductive woman), in Nazareth (an insignificant city) in Galilee (a despised province). The qualification for divine election was lowliness (*tapeinosis*). This lowly

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[7]Raymond Brown, *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 92. Emphasis and brackets found in original text.

social status is so internalized as to generate humility. In the Magnificat this lowly one will be called blessed because God has done great things for her precisely because of her lowliness.

However, Mary's response often has been unfortunately interpreted as an unreflective reaction to the message of the angel, a passive submission to the will of God, or a childish dependence on God's initiative. Mary, sweet, submissive, silent and subordinate, has been praised for living at less than full capacity: "I will do whatever you say"! Her reply often has been understood as a passive dependence on God's initiative and has been held up as a model of holiness especially for women. Mariology with a liberation perspective takes a fresh look at Mary from the viewpoint of today's time and needs. Mary is remembered prophetically and a rereading of the Marian texts focuses not on the chronicle of events but on their significance for today. The rereading is fresh with new meanings.[8] It challenges women to become conscious of their oppression and of their conniving submission over the centuries to oppressive religious and social structures. By contrast, Joan Chittister remarks that the Church needs, not the ecclesiastically docile or the morally flawless, but models of people who fire the soul of their culture, swim against it and offer resistance where it is needed. The problem noted by Chittister is that "the bland, the safe and the compliant [have become], in large part, the stuff of sanctity."[9] Traditional images of Mary as docile and flawless, timid and taking directions from others, have become "the stuff of sanctity" and have often been used as tools to legitimate rather than challenge women's subordination and to keep them oppressed. The Mary of the Annunciation, however, is not paralyzed by timidity. Anne Carr challenges this androcentric bias: "Thus her theological portrayal as one who is completely passive, obedient ... is unacceptable today. Rather

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[8]J. Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), 14.

[9]Joan Chittister, 'Saints for Today," *The Tablet* (November 1, 1997), 1397-1398.

we must say that Mary, like the other disciples, received faith in the *active* obedience that is the *receptivity* of Christian faith."[10]

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lk. 1:35). God's Spirit comes on Mary as it did upon the community in Acts as an "overshadowing" cloud, an image that points to the *Shekinah*, God's presence, recalling the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Gen. 1:2, suggesting a new creation. According to Luke, what was experienced as the Spirit's overpowering in the upper room in Jerusalem had already begun thirty years earlier in Nazareth. Gubler notes: "As long as 'the power of the Most High' is not 'enfleshed' in the frailty, transitoriness and concreteness of human history, it is 'in exile'."[11] Mary allows herself to be moved by the "power of the Most High" that wants to be the living breath in all flesh (cf. Num. 27:16). And it was "the power of the Most High," the Spirit, that preserved her radically from sin down to the roots of her existence.

The Annunciation story therefore is not about acquiescence but about empowerment. It is all about a young woman in a patriarchal society carrying and bringing her child into the world: "The Lord is with you ... you have found favor with God, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son ... the Son of the Most High ... and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:28-33). It is not a story about a passively perfect woman overwhelmed by divine duty, but about a "self-possessed, self-focused and self-conscious"[12] poor woman who finds favor with God and is willing to co-operate with a wild plan of salvation. It is about a woman strong enough to risk believing something incredible about herself: "the Lord is with you." An exegesis of the Lukan texts leaves no room for an escape into immature piety. It gives Mary back her concrete history. She accompanies him and

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[10]Anne Carr, "Mary, Model of Faith," in *Mary, Woman of Nazareth: Biblical and Theological Perspectives,* ed. Doris Donnelly (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 16.

[11]Marie-Louise Gubler, "Luke's Portrait of Mary," *Theology Digest* 36 (1989), 21.

[12]Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 123.

his father Joseph to the feasts in Jerusalem. Again, she follows him to Capernaum when his opponents and some of his relatives believed he was out of his mind (Mk. 3:31; Lk. 8:19) and she must have been also aware of the conflict between him and his relatives and neighbors long before it climaxed in the confrontation in Nazareth (Lk. 4:28-30). In his early writings, Edward Schillebeeckx emphasized Mary's role in rearing and educating Jesus:

> His human qualities and character were formed and influenced by his mother's virtues.... Mary's function in the Incarnation was not completed when Jesus was born. It was a continuous task, involving the human formation of the young man, as he grew up from infancy to childhood and from childhood to adulthood.[13]

She must be envisioned then as an autonomous person, responsive and receptive, courageous and creative, intelligent and apostolic. She cannot be separated from those women and men who placed their hope in Jesus and whose journey ended at the foot of the cross.

The story of the Annunciation is often told as if Mary was suddenly surprised by the angel's visit. The overshadowing of God's presence, the *Shekinah* and God's Spirit on this occasion, is more likely the culmination of Mary's constant fidelity to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the Spirit leads her to freely give her consent to the Incarnation, which came to fruition in her giving birth to Jesus. This is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and Sarah. God is no longer to be sought in the clouds as the men of Galilee thought (Acts 1:10), but here in the flesh, in a birth, in a grave, in the daily encounters of women and men. In Mary's co-operation with God's plan of salvation, God's compassion becomes flesh in the world. She has made possible this union of God in Christ with all of humankind in the Incarnation. Therefore, no area of human existence, whether physiological or psychological, is left untouched or unaffected by God's grace.

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[13]Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 144-145.

Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer state that the Incarnation "is the beginning, of a new state of things in which God takes human flesh and a human face within history, in the midst of a people, of which the woman Mary is the faithful figure."[14] Jesus' birth in history is the salvific event which enables all, both Jew and Gentile, to become heirs of that inheritance promised to Abraham. From the moment God's word took flesh in Mary, human beings have become God's dwelling place on earth. The figure of a Jewish woman giving birth to the Messiah under the law of Judaism is the sign that God's kingdom has arrived. Because the word has become a human person, all of reality is touched by Christ's presence and Mary by her consent at the Incarnation has made this mystery possible. Although she did not always understand Jesus' mission, like the wise scribe she ponders (cf. Sir. 39:1-3) and treasures all these things in her heart (Lk. 2:51), in the core and depth of her being (Lk. 2:19).

Excursus: Incarnation, Central Axis of History. The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God is the central axis of history and it is Mary who forms of her own flesh and blood "the flesh and blood that will be recognized as the person of God's very self walking on the paths of history."[15] Sally Cuneen sees her as the woman at the center of the mystery linking God to life on the planet.[16] Mary collaborated decisively, and her choice not only changed the whole of her life, but that of humanity as well, because the Incarnation celebrates the union of the divine and the human in Jesus. The significance of the Incarnation extends beyond human salvation and human history. It extends back to the origin of time, to the origins of the universe which has been weaving itself into a world of beauty for 13.5 billion years. Scientific knowledge asserts that the evolutionary journey of the

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[14]Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 55.

[15]Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God,* 56.

[16]Sally Cuneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 337-338.

cosmos that began with that initial burst of energy has culminated in a human person. And, God in Jesus Christ has become a human person. This Jesus, the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being (Heb. 1:3) is the meeting place of heaven and earth.

Jesus did not enter a vacuum. Millions of years before he entered history, God's divine indwelling was already present in the universe. Gradually, as he came to realize that he and the divine indwelling are one, he opened up a whole new understanding of human destiny. This was an extraordinary breakthrough for the universe and for all of us. The mystical inter-relatedness of all creatures and all matter has no boundaries. Human nature has been raised to heaven itself because God chose to breathe in Jesus through Mary. It is as if heaven and earth are united together by an umbilical cord. The liturgy of Christmas Day remembers that she gave birth to Jesus, "the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature, sustaining the universe by his powerful command" (Heb. 1:1-6). In the words of Eamonn Duffy:

> She was the intimate source of the human identity of God, giving to God incarnate all that a mother gives to her children—blood, bone, nerve and personality. In her conceiving and childbearing heaven and earth were wedded beyond any possibility of divorce: a stupendous miracle has occurred which raised human nature to heaven itself.[17]

Such contemplative realization of God's presence helps humans appreciate that all are living in the mystery of God. An experience of mystery does not lead to a withdrawal from the world but rather challenges all as it did Mary towards participation in the work of bringing about the kingdom of God and making the union of God in Christ with all of humankind a reality in the world. Belief in the mystery of the Incarnation challenges all to give an energized response to the Gospel and to give birth to God by allowing all to be fully alive. People are not "poor banished children of Eve." Rather, they have been made divine and are bound together in both origin and in destiny,

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[17] Eamonn Duffy, "True and False Madonnas," *The Tablet* (February 6, 1991), 171.

for what happened to Jesus of Nazareth has happened to all. Mary is profoundly and reflectively involved in the interpretation of the Incarnation event. She speaks of divinity present in humanity, of the Word that continually becomes flesh in human flesh, the flesh of men and women. She calls all to be strong and creative in responding to the sacred potentialities of life. She is open to salvation and responds to it, committed to the saving work of God made manifest in Jesus.

Mary of the Magnificat: Lk. 1:46-55. Luke found it fitting to attribute the Magnificat to Mary because she provided a compelling model of discipleship for his community. He portrays her as a woman of action, leaving at once to visit her cousin Elizabeth. This pericope is commonly called the "'Visitation" for it describes the meeting of two women who share the grace of being pregnant with children who will have special missions in God's plan of salvation. This is probably one of the most exciting meetings in all of salvation history. Donald Senior writes: "It is the only scene in the entire gospel where two women meet and hold center stage."[18] A little imagination will help to fill out the details of Luke's summary of events. Obviously, Mary did not compose this prayer in a spontaneous burst of inspiration, so one need not imagine Mary bursting forth in prophetic praise as she finally arrived breathless and weary on Elizabeth's doorstep. It is more probable that after an animated welcome and the initial excitement of meeting, Elizabeth would sensibly have offered her pregnant and road-weary cousin a meal and a bed. Mary's haste and Elizabeth's loud cry of praise show the exuberant joy of these two expectant mothers. Both women must have been very conscious of the part they were playing in the history of salvation: Mary preparing to give birth to the Messiah, Elizabeth to the prophet who would prepare the way for that same Messiah. In the ensuing weeks both women would have shared their pregnancy experiences and supported each other's journeys in faith as well as their concerns for Israel. The tradition of Luke's community

[18]Donald Senior, "Gospel Portrait of Mary: Images and Symbols from the Synoptic Tradition," in Donnelly, *Mary Woman of Nazareth,* 104.

recalled the meeting of these two women who had heard the word of God and continued to keep it.

As Mary and Elizabeth grew together in intimacy with their God and in inexhaustible compassion for their people, one can imagine that at a heightened moment of prayer, Mary would have made her own the sentiments and concerns of Hannah after the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1-10), and sang of these in grateful song. Luke captures these sentiments in the Magnificat which he places as a prelude to Jesus' announcement of his own mission to liberate the poor and marginalized (Lk. 4:18-19). Like the prophet Miriam (Ex. 15:20-21), Mary sang a victory song in praise of God's awesome accomplishments. Unfortunately, centuries of rote recitation have obscured the boldness of its affirmations and its social implications. The prophetic message of the Magnificat characterizes God's coming as compassion, the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and Sarah. It demands faith and Luke says that Mary believed "that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk. 1:45). Speaking for the *anawim*, Mary sings a song of the oppressed in which she and Elizabeth express their concerns for the Israel of their day. They offer a perspective for perseverance and set a definite agenda of what has to change: the world must be turned upside down. In prayer Mary and Elizabeth expressed their hope of changing the unjust structures of their society. This could only be achieved by putting down the powerful, raising up the lowly, the poor and the marginalized of their world, and filling the hungry with good things (Lk. 1:52-53). Mary lived in solidarity with God's plan to bring about the reign of God, whose intent was to heal, redeem and liberate. Herman Hendrickx suggests that keeping Luke's audience in mind, he was most likely referring to the urban poor of the city where his community was situated.[19] *They* now become the recipients of Jesus' good news.

Scholars agree that the Magnificat is a pre-Lukan hymn into which Luke inserts verse 48: "for he has looked with favor on the lowliness

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[19]Herman Hendrickx, *A Key to the Gospel of Luke* (Quezon City, Philippines: Maryhill School of Theology/Claretian Publications, 1992), 35.

(*tapeinosin*) of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed." In addition to the brief discussion of *tapeinosis* above, Helen Graham adds that the *tapeinoi* are those without hope, without a foreseeable future.[20] She adds that J.T. Forestell pointed out over thirty-five years ago that *tapeinosis* is central to an understanding of the Magnificat.[21] The *tapeinoi* are the lowly, the sick, the poor, the down trodden, the widows and orphans, but God looked upon their distress and misery and "lifted them up." The word appears again in verse 52b (NRSV translation): "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the *lowly*." Raymond Brown adds:

> Luke's peculiar and emphatic castigation of wealth (6:24-26; 12:19-20; 16:25; 21:1-4) points to the existence of many poor in the communities to be served by Luke's gospel. And so vv. 51-53 of the Magnificat would resonate among such groups; for them the Christian good news meant that the ultimately blessed were not the mighty and the rich who tyrannized them.[22]

Verse 48 of the Magnificat, "for he has looked with favor on the lowliness (*tapeinosin*) of his servant," clearly harks back to 2 Sam. 1-10. This verse evokes the image of Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:11 praying for a son where *tapeinosis* translates the Hebrew *'oni* (which carries the meaning of poor, humble, afflicted) and also alludes to Leah (Gen. 29-30), who also experienced harassment from a second wife (her maid Zilpah who bore Jacob a son), and who now celebrates the occasion of the birth of her own son (Gen. 30:13). Lk. 1:52 re-echoes 2 Sam. 2:8: "He raises up the lowly from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor."

Hannah the barren and oppressed woman gives birth to Samuel. When Luke wants to offer the poor, the sick, the widows and orphans,

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[20]Helen Graham, "Mary of Nazareth: Spokesperson of the Anawim in the Gospel of Luke" (Manila: Unpublished paper, 1993), 1.

[21]J.T. Forestell, "Old Testament Background of the Magnificat," *Marian Studies* 12 (1961), 211. Cited in Graham, *Mary of Nazareth*, 1.

[22]Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, (New York: Image Books, 1979), 351.

the oppressed of his community a message of hope, he chooses the song of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 as a model. This song is in the long tradition of Miriam, Deborah and Judith who sang dangerous songs of liberation.

The Magnificat: "A Text that Lingers, a Word that Explodes." Walter Brueggemann, in a very creative and imaginative article entitled "Texts that Linger, Words that Explode,"[23] explains that in the moment a scriptural text is spoken by the speaker (reader) and received by the listener in different times and communities, that text lingers on through time and erupts into new usage. The text is "recharged" with fresh meanings by successive readings. When it is reflected upon and spoken again it becomes a moment of revelation. It is in the intimate relationship between the text and the reader where the timeless word appears, bearing with it revelation for the day.[24] Its meaning is explored from the perspective of new situations and it discloses, Brueggemann says, "something about that moment that would, without this utterance, not be known, seen, heard, or made available"; he emphasizes that when the scriptural message is re-uttered and the community comes to know or receive it afresh, "the present is freshly illuminated, reality is irreversibly transformed."[25] The Magnificat is an excellent illustration of the lingering of a treasured tradition which is reflected upon and "recharged" with fresh meanings,[26] and explodes into new usage in different historical contexts. The song of praise that was spoken by Hannah erupted with new usage and remarkable imagination as it was spoken again to the poor and afflicted, the *anawim* of Luke's community.

Mary's Magnificat: A Text that Lingers, a Word that Explodes Again. Today the message of liberation lingers on in the words of the

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[23]Walter Brueggemann, "Texts that Linger, Words that Explode," *Theology Today* 54 (1997), 180-199.

[24]Bill Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), xv.

[25]Brueggemann, "Texts that Linger, Words that Explode," 180.

[26]Croatto, *Exodus,* 14.

Magnificat which has become a symbol of liberation for the peoples of Latin America. It erupts with new meaning to offer hope to the marginalized poor who live in degrading poverty. The 1979 Puebla Conference (No. 297) notes that Mary is a model for all those "who refuse passively to accept the adverse circumstances of their personal and social life, who refuse to be victims of 'alienation'."

In this context Gustavo Gutierrez advises that a spirituality of liberation will have as its basis the spirituality of the *anawim*.[27] When read amid such suffering, the song of the Magnificat explodes with fresh meaning, lingers on and explodes anew with a challenging message for all who are caught in the web of the present economic system.[28] It explodes amid the efforts of communities and movements to redefine themselves in the face of globalization, amid the horrors of constantly reopened wounds in such places as Palestine, the Sudan, and Iraq. It explodes amid the uprootedness of twenty million political refugees, a churning of peoples and cultures unprecedented in world history. Rosemary Haughton notes that everyone is "enmeshed in and dependent on the evil systems that feed us, educate us, and even subsidize our efforts to mitigate their destructive effects."[29] The historical figure of Mary must always enter into dialogue with the time, space, culture, problems, and actual people who relate to her. Gebara and Bingemer note: "It is life today that gives life to Mary's life yesterday."[30] She speaks to all of God and the kingdom in words that explode with new meaning.

Incarnational spirituality requires that everyone ask what embodied holiness might consist of in the specific, concrete circumstances of

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[27]Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 208.

[28]Cf. Robert Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a Model of Mission," *New Theology Review* 10 (1997), 7.

[29]Rosemary Haughton, in a lecture given at the Liturgy and Social Justice Forum (St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota: July, 1991).

[30]Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God,* 166.

life and how one, like Hannah, Mary and Elizabeth, might re-embody in particular times and places the love and justice of God. It is in the midst of today's present, depressing realities that Mary's prophetic voice needs to be heard in the world. If one wants to set people free from the power of sin and death, then like Mary, one must work to bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly (Lk. 1:52). To do this one needs to understand the present structures of the "mammon economy"[31] that dominate people's lives.

The Mammon Economy

How can Christians love God in a world dominated by mammon is *the* life and death question for most people on this planet and the planet itself. Franz Hinkelammert argues that since the downfall of socialism in 1989/1990, capitalism has become a one-world system.[32] In this system the first world needs the resources of the so-called third world, but not its people. There is a world-wide split between a more or less small upper class profiting from the world market, a vast majority of impoverished and excluded people, and a middle class, most of whom are losing out more and more. A homogeneous culture of consumerism and love of money is created by which people define themselves and choose their life styles. Hinkelammert argues that within the structures of globalized capital markets growth is killing jobs. There is a need therefore to analyze the globalized market system.

When Mary consented to the Incarnation she was willing to co-operate with God's wild plan of salvation. She collaborated decisively and her choice not only changed the whole of her life but that of humanity as well. In the midst of today's "mammon economy" with its

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[31]Ulrich Duchrow, "God or Mammon: Economics in Conflict," *Mission Studies* 13 (1996), 33.

[32]Franz Hinkelammert, "Changes in the Relationships between Third World Countries and First World Countries," *Mission Studies* 12 (1995), 133ff.

global structures of oppression, Christians need to be responsive and receptive, courageous and creative. Like the handmaid or servant of the Lord (Lk. 1:38) and like the servant of Isaiah 42 whom she would have pondered in prayer, all are called to establish justice on earth. And one's life, having been spent in bringing justice to the nations, may one day culminate like that of the servant of Yahweh in suffering and death. The invitation to hear the Word of God and live out that Word in compassionate action is as urgent today as it was in first century Galilee (Lk. 1:38). The call to bring down the powerful and lift up the lowly lingers on and explodes with new meaning amid the unjust structures of the world. This can only be achieved by raising up the lowly and the marginalized, the "surplus people" of the world.

Conclusion. The treasured Marian tradition of Luke's infancy narratives lingers on. The angel's message, intended for all the lowly and the miserable and first proclaimed to Mary at the Annunciation, as well as her prophetic Magnificat song, anticipating the Gospel proclamation of the reversal of all values, explode with ever greater urgency today as all try to form a community that pours itself out for justice, peace and for an appreciation of creation. Jewish spirituality's insightful inspiration is that everyone leaves some energy in this world and that what is done on earth is reflected in heaven. To leave some personal energy, all need the inspiration of Miriam of Nazareth who is "so full of God, yet so much ours."