

Gen. 3,15 in the light of recent discussions

Gen. 3, 15 is generally translated thus: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he (or it) shall crush thy head, and thou shalt aim at his (or its) heel" The passage and its liturgical application are quite familiar to the reader. But some will be painfully shocked to learn that some interpreters have turned the Virgin Mary out of this text, while others do not agree on the nature of Her claim for admission, that is to say, whether she has a right to the place of honour in this oracle or is entitled only to an inferior position. It is the purpose of this paper to give a survey of modern opinions on this subject and thus to set the Mariological import of Gen. 3, 15 in its proper perspective.

Before discussing the exegetical value of Gen. 3, 15 it is necessary to make some preliminary remarks. The textual problem, whether we should read 'he' or 'she', *ipse* or *ipsa*, has long been settled in favour of the M.T. and need not be reopened here. But we cannot pass over other philological problems. The two verbs 'crush' and 'aim at', Vlg. *conteret* and *insidiaberis*, are represented in Hebrew by the same verb *shuf*. Now to translate the same verb in the same context and in the same verse in two different ways is simply illogical. If we translate 'he shall crush your head', we must also translate 'thou shalt crush his heel' or another equivalent verb. For the same reason if we prefer 'thou shalt aim at his heel', we must necessarily translate 'he shall aim at your head'. The LXX have translated the Hebrew verb by the same verb *teresei*..... *tereseis*. Likewise Jerome in his *Quaestiones in Genesim* writes: "Ipse servabit caput tuum, et tu servabis calcaneum eius" which is the LXX reading; and he goes on: "Melius habet in Hebraeo: Ipse conteret caput tuum, et tu conteres eius calcaneum" (PL, 24, 309). Later, however, Jerome changed his translation into *conteret*.....*insidiaberis*. Modern translators and interpreters waver between 'crush.....aim at' and 'aim at'.....aim at'.

Of all the various renderings proposed by interpreters 'crush.....crush' is altogether unsuitable, because the serpent does not crush man's heel. 'Aim at' may be retained in the second case but not in the first. The two enemies are not simply aiming at attacking one another, but one of them has

actually attacked and completely overcome his opponent. The idea of biting or causing a slight wound is inadmissible, as the serpent is poisonous, and a bite is as mortal as the crushing of the head. It is not expressly said that the serpent is poisonous, but since the serpent and the woman's seed are engaged in a mortal duel and the serpent has no other means of overcoming its adversary unless it is poisonous, we must necessarily assume that the serpent is poisonous, and therefore a slight harmless wound is absolutely inconceivable. As the context represents the same hostile action, it requires the same meaning. But in order to avoid the incongruity of such renderings as 'crush and crush' or 'aim at and aim at', we prefer to give to the second verb the meaning of a conative action instead of that of a complete action. Hence we propose this translation: "He will crush your head while you will endeavour to attack him in his heel", or, paraphrastically: "He will overcome you by crushing your head, and you will endeavour to overcome him by trying to bite his heel." (1) Obviously the two actions of crushing the head and biting the heel are two figures implying the same idea of destruction expressed in different ways according to the nature of the two antagonists.

Another important problem is that regarding the value of the article prefixed to the noun *ishshah* 'the woman'. The article in Hebrew is used: 1. when a person or thing already spoken of is mentioned again; 2. with a title understood and recognized by everyone; 3. with appellatives to denote persons or things that are unique; 4. when terms applying to whole classes are restricted to particular individuals; 5. with words denoting classes; 6. when a person or thing, unknown to the reader, is considered as being present to the mind of the writer. (2) Of these uses 2 and 3 are obviously excluded from Gen. 3, 15. No. 4 is likewise excluded because the name *ishshah* 'woman', though it may denote the whole female sex, as in Ecc. 7, 26, has never been restricted to any particular woman. But opinions differ as regards uses no. 1, 5, and 6. The majority of interpreters stand for no. 1 identifying the woman with Eve,

(1) This translation is given also by J. Coppens: '*Celle-ci t'écrasera la tête, et tu t'efforceras (mais en vain) de la mordre au talon*' (*Analecta Lovaniensia Biblica et Orientalia*, Ser. II, fasc. 16, 1950, p. 55).

(2) Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Hebr. Gram.*, §126d-t.

the only woman known from the context. Others, the Mariologists, prefer no. 6 identifying the woman with the Virgin Mary who, though unknown from the context, is considered to be known to the writer. Others argue for no. 5 on the grounds of the collective sense which the word *ishshah* has in ch. 2. If 'the woman' in Gen. 2, 23, 24 denotes the whole female sex, there is no reason why we should necessarily refer the same word, 'the woman', in 3, 15 to the only woman known from the immediate context.

The identification of 'the woman' with the Virgin Mary or with the whole female sex, though in strict conformity with Grammar, is against the context. The whole story of the fall forms such a homogeneous and compact unity that any interpretation introducing different elements in the narrative must absolutely be ruled out. The serpent converses with the woman, not with any woman nor with women in general, but with the particular one that has just been given as a companion to Adam. This woman eats of the prohibited fruit and gives her husband to eat. Then she, the woman, and her husband, conscious of their sin, try to hide themselves from God. But God summons the guilty couple before his tribunal; first he interrogates the man who casts the blame upon the woman whom God had given him as a companion. Then God interrogates this woman who tries to exculpate herself pleading that she had been deceived by the serpent. So ultimately we have a woman, that is, the woman formed out of Adam's rib, deceived by the serpent, and a serpent deceiving the woman. It is between the deceiver and the deceived woman that God is about to set an implacable hostility that will end with the complete defeat of the serpent-devil. Such is the consistency and homogeneity of the whole narrative that it is impossible to recognize in 'the woman' any other one but that already known from the context. Even in v. 16, where 'the woman' represents the whole female sex, it is against the first woman that the sentence of doom is directly pronounced. In support of the collective meaning of 'the woman' it has been urged that v. 15 has a well-defined theological character which marks it off from the whole narrative. The theological import of 3, 15 has never been contested, but this does not justify the introduction of a different meaning of 'the woman' into the narrative. Therefore viewed from a purely philological standpoint

Gen. 3, 15 sets before us two armies drawn out for battle. On one side there is the first woman and all her posterity, on the other the devil with all the infernal host. Both armies are engaged in a death and life battle. But at a certain moment one of the woman's posterity will overcome the devil and bring victory to all the children of Eve.

There is another point which deserves consideration. The word 'seed' or posterity is said to denote mainly the male descendants, and this sense is said to be required in 3, 15. (3) If this is true, the Virgin Mary is necessarily excluded from the woman's posterity. But this restricted use of the word 'seed' may perhaps be explained by the constitutional laws or customs of the Israelites. In the Israelite community woman had a secondary place. She had no independent social rights. Although she was not her husband's slave, she together with her husband and their children formed one psychic unity of which man was the head. The Israelitic community was a community of men; women were not counted (Numb. 1, 2; 26, 2; 2Sam. 24, 1-9). This also explains the reason why the word '*am*' 'people' denotes always the male population of Israel (4). If, therefore, the word 'seed' has assumed a restricted meaning on account of the particular psychological conceptions of the Israelites, it follows quite logically that the word must retain its original universal and unrestricted meaning including both males and females, when these Israelitic conceptions had not yet begun to develop. And this is the reason why in Gen. 9, 9, when the Israelitic community had not yet come into existence, the word 'your seed' denotes all the posterity of Noah and his sons irrespective of their sex. Therefore while fully agreeing that 'seed' has, in the Patriarchal families and the Israelitic community, a masculine meaning, we see no reason for restricting the use of the 'seed' in pre-Patriarchal and pre-Israelitic times.

This is the literal exposition of Gen. 3, 15. But the historico-literal sense does not exhaust the full meaning intended by the sacred writer. Both theologians and interpreters agree that the passage has a profound theological significance. It is the first announcement of redemption which will be brought about by

(3) Coppens, *op. cit.*, pp. 56f.

(4) J. Pedersen, *Israel, its life and culture*, I—II, Copenhagen-London, 1926; p. 56.

one of the woman's posterity who will vanquish the devil and take from him the possibility of ever regaining his power. What is therefore the theological meaning of this prophecy?

The theological interpretation of this prophecy, which has been aptly called the *Protoevangelium* or the first announcement of salvation, has to some extent, been influenced by two factors — Tradition and the Bull *Ineffabilis*. Although many of the early Fathers of the Church, such as Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrosius, and others, explained the prophecy either in a Christological or in a natural or allegorico-moral sense, the mariological interpretation, which goes back to Irenaeus, though almost unknown in the West during the Middle Ages, began gradually to gain ground especially through the works of Rupert of Deutz, Bernard, Bonaventure and later theologians, until it became almost a common doctrine in the Church and formally recognized by H. H. Pope Pius IX in his Bull *Ineffabilis*. (5) Now the question of the dogmatic authority of the patristic tradition does not concern us here. We are rather concerned with the authority of the Bull as regards the mariological interpretation of Gen. 3,15. The question is: Has the Pope authentically defined the mariological sense of Gen. 3,15? Or: Is the mariological interpretation still an open question which Catholics are free to discuss?

The history of the Bull will give the right answer. We know from official documents that a great deal of preparatory work was done before the promulgation of the Bull *Ineffabilis*. Commissions were appointed, discussions were held, schemata were proposed, rejected, emended. The main difficulty was exactly the value of the scriptural argument. It was universally agreed that Scripture did not provide sufficient proofs for the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The scriptural

(5) See on the whole question Fr. Drewniak, *Die mariologische Deutung von Gen. 3,15 in der Väterzeit*, Breslau, 1934. Tib. Gallus S.J., *Interpretatio mariologica Protoevangelii (Gen. 3,15) tempore post-patristico usque ad Concilium Tridentinum*, Rome, 1949. See also V. G. Bertelli, *L'interpretazione mariologica del Protovangelo (Gen. 3,15) negli esegeti e teologi dopo la Bolla 'Ineffabilis Deus' di Pio IX (1854-1943)* in "Marianum" 1951, pp. 257-91. Tib. Gallus S.J., *Interpretatio mariologica Protoevangelii Posttridentina usque ad definitionem dogmaticam Immaculatae Conceptionis. Pars prior: Aetas aurea Exegesis Catholicae a Concilio Tridentino (1545) usque ad annum 1660*; Rome, 1953.

argument needed the support of tradition in order to be truly demonstrative. In other words the probative force of the scriptural argument was derived from the patristic interpretation thereof rather than from its exegetical value. It may be said that all the discussions centred not so much on the revelation of the dogma as on the value of the scriptural and patristic evidence. Scripture alone was considered to be insufficient and, as an argument, had to be subordinated to Tradition. This is the reason why the Bull has placed the argument from Scripture after the argument from Tradition, thus giving to Tradition such an amplitude as to include the scriptural argument.

A remarkable feature of the Bull is the total absence of any appreciation of the exegetical value of the scriptural argument. This is easily explained in the light of the preliminary discussions. Some theologians had hoped that a dogmatic definition would give to the scriptural texts the value of positive proofs which they had not. This however has not been done. The Bull has placed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception on the basis of Tradition leaving to the biblical texts the exegetical value which they had before. Consequently both theologians and exegetes are still free to discuss the real meaning of the first messianic prophecy and its relation to Our Lady. (6) And so we pass to the main part of our theme.

Gen. 3, 15 contains two parts closely related to each other. The first part describes a struggle, a mortal struggle between all mankind and the devil. The other part describes the issue of the struggle which is the triumph of one of the woman's posterity over the devil. Not only are the two actions — struggle and victory — distinct, but the actors are also, to some extent, different. In the first it is the woman with all her posterity that is in war with the devil; in the other the woman disappears and her posterity is represented by a single individual who comes to single combat with his antagonist. These two parts or actions must be kept distinct if we want to get a clear idea of the full meaning of the prophecy.

Some interpreters, while retaining the messianic meaning of the prophecy, reject its mariological sense altogether. Thus Ceuppens in his *Mariologia biblica* (Rome, 1948) expresses his

(6) See P., Bonnetain, art. *Immaculée Conception in Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, 1943, 233-239.

opinion in these terms: "The woman of Gen. 3,15 in the literal sense is Eve and Eve alone; it cannot be proved that she is also Mary at least in a typical sense", and concludes his demonstration thus: "There is no convincing argument that the writer of Gen. 3,15 has intended the Virgin Mary either in a strictly literal sense or in a typical sense. The woman is Eve, and it is her posterity that will gain a complete victory over the devil" (pp. 19—23). His main argument is the context. If Eve, he says, meets all the requirements of the context, there is no need for introducing another woman. (7) P. Heinisch in his commentary on *Genesis* (Bonn, 1930) excludes too the Virgin Mary from 3,15. The woman is Eve, and her seed are all her descendants. From the New Testament we learn that the victorious seed is Christ who vanquished the devil by his death and resurrection. De Vaux in the notes to his translation of *Genesis* (1951) in the *Bible de Jerusalem* remarks that the woman is Eve, and her seed are all her descendants. The victor of the devil is the Messiah. The application of the text to the Virgin Mary is based partly on the Vulgate reading *ipsa* for *ipse* and partly on the parallelism Eve-Mary which recurs so often in the writings of the Fathers. I may also mention with the non-mariologists W. Goosens *De cooperatione immediata matris Redemptoris ad redemptionem obiectivam. Quaestionis controversae perpenditio*; Paris-Bruges, 1939.

Considered from a purely historico-literal point of view the non-mariological interpretation of Gen. 3,15 is unquestionably right. Eve is the only woman known from the context; she had a posterity, and one of her descendants has crushed the devil's power. But this is not all that the text has to tell. Gen. 3,15 is a prophecy, and prophecies cannot be explained by the exclusive help of grammar and philology. Ceuppens himself recognizes the messianic character of Gen. 3,15 and admits the hermeneutical principle that prophecies cannot be understood except in the light of their fulfilment or of subsequent revelations. (8) Consequently all interpretation of prophecies by means of grammatical and philological subsidies is absolutely untenable. It follows that the non-mariological interpretation of Gen. 3,15 is philologically right, but theologically wrong.

(7) *De Mariologia biblica*, Rome, 1948, 19-23.

(8) *De Prophetiis Messianicis in Antiquo Testamento*, Rome, 1935, pp. 41f.

Others, mostly theologians, apply the whole prophecy to the Virgin Mary. She is 'the woman' and Christ is the 'seed'. If the woman is associated with her seed in the struggle, she cannot be dissociated from him in the final victory. But the seed as Christ, therefore the woman is necessarily the Virgin Mary, who shares with her son the honour of the victory over the devil. Gen. 3,15 is a prediction of the Incarnation, writes G. Hoberg, but the Incarnation is inconceivable without Mary (9). Card. Billot is more explicit. In his Introduction to *Marie, mere de grace* by R. de La Broise and I. Bainvel he writes: "The woman predicted in this prophecy is Mary, she alone and only she, in the proper, immediate, historical and literal sense (Paris, 1921). Pesch is more moderate: "That woman, he says, is principally the Virgin Mary and her seed is Christ. Eve only jointly with her daughter" (De Deo Creante, n. 302). Among the mariologists we may mention C. van Crombrugge *Tractatus de B. M. Virginè*; Ghent, 1913, p. 113; Roschini *Mariologia*, II, p. I, 1942, p. 103; I. Filograssi *De definibilitate Assumptionis B. M. V.* in *Greg.*, 1948, p. 30; etc.

These theologians ignore one fundamental principle of hermeneutics, which is the consideration of the context, both the near and the remote context. If man speaks and writes as he thinks, and if he thinks logically coordinating his ideas, developing new ones, subordinating and interrelating them according to a definite plan, we have the right to say that a writer is moving within the same range of ideas unless he makes it clear that he has passed into a different sphere with a different set of ideas. This is an elementary hermeneutical principle based on sound reason, and the ignorance of it leads to desperate confusion. Card. Billot tries to support his mariological interpretation of Gen. 3,15 by distinguishing between meaning and sense or the application of the meaning to different objects or persons. The meaning or idea of the word 'woman' is unchangeable, but the word may be applied to more than one person. No one will deny the principle. Every writer has the right to apply the word 'woman' to as many different women as he likes. But the reader has also the right to know which woman the writer is speaking about. If 'the woman' is Eve in chapters 2 and 3, she is Eve also in 3,15 unless there are clear indications to the contrary.

(9) *Die Genesis*, Freiburg i. B., 1908, p. 50.

The identification of 'the woman' with the Virgin Mary is the natural consequence of wrong, or at least unproven, premises. The victorious seed is said to be Christ and Christ alone, but the seed must have the same meaning in both parts of the verse, therefore the seed of the woman in the first part of the verse is Christ too. But the Virgin Mary is the Mother of Christ therefore the Virgin Mary is the woman predicted in v. 15.

The fallacy of the argument is apparent. The seed is not necessarily the immediate offspring of the woman, therefore whether it is Christ or not, the woman is not necessarily Mary. Moreover the identity of the woman's seed and the victorious seed, which is demanded at least by the literary context, is not absolutely required by the logical context. Interpreters generally insist on the identity of meaning of the word 'seed' in both parts of the verse, but they seem to overlook certain psychological facts which recent investigation has established beyond all doubt. We know that Hebrew mentality does not always distinguish between universal and individual notions. An individual is considered as a member of a group, hence the Hebrew mind passes imperceptibly from the idea of the group to that of its component members, without any difference in the external form of expression (10). Thus in the second part of the book of Isaiah the word 'Servant' or 'Servant of the Lord' sometimes has a collective meaning denoting all the people of Israel; sometimes, especially in the Servant Songs, it has an individual meaning denoting one individual of the people of Israel. Another example of the word 'seed' occurring in the same context with a collective and an individual meaning is Gen. 21,12,13. Before complying with Sarah's demand to expel Hagar and her son Abraham is assured by God that it is through Isaac that he will have descendants (seed) who will be called by his name, but Ishmael will become a great nation because he is Abraham's offspring (seed). There is, therefore, no contradiction in giving the word 'seed' a collec-

(10) This fact is recognized by many modern interpreters; see H. W. Robinson, *The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality in Wesen und Werden des Alten Testaments* (Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für die Alt. Wissen.) Berlin, 1936, pp. 49-62. O. Eissfeldt, *Der Gottesknecht bei Deuterojesaja (Jes. 40-55) im Lichte der israelitischen Anschauung von Gemeinschaft und Individuum*, Halle (Saale), 1933. A. R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, Cardiff, 1942.

tive meaning in the first part of v. 15 and an individual meaning in the second. If we admit the collective meaning in the first part of v. 15, the identification of the woman with the Virgin Mary becomes impossible. We are now in a position to answer to the theologians' argument in a scholastic form thus: The victorious seed is Christ, *conc.*; the seed must have the same meaning in both parts of the verse, *nego*; therefore the seed of the woman in the first part of the verse is Christ, *nego consequentiam*. But the Virgin Mary is the Mother of Christ, *conc. ant.*; therefore the woman predicted in v. 15 is the Virgin Mary, *nego cons.*

The argument is sometimes proposed in a different form: The woman is associated with her seed in the struggle, therefore she must be associated with it in the victory too. But the victorious seed is Christ, and there is no woman more closely associated with him than his own mother, therefore the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, has together with her Son completely vanquished the devil.

The argument, though theologically sound, is exegetically unacceptable. It introduces new elements into the text. Even if it is granted that a mother may have a share in her son's victories, we still do not know who the mother of the victorious seed is before the New Testament Revelation. Moreover the struggle is not necessarily a single action of a short duration, a battle which is fought and won by the same belligerents; it may take a longer time, the fighting forces may be renewed, and the woman may not outlive her seed's victory.

Theologians try to corroborate their views by arguments of convenience. But as these afford ample matter for subjective speculations and are not based on sound exegesis, we pass them over altogether.

Some theologians try to find some sort of compromise between the literal and the mariological interpretation. One of the latest, and unfortunately unsuccessful attempts, is that by J. F. Bonnefoy (11). Fr. Bonnefoy bases his dualistic interpretation on the theory of the plurality of senses, a theory which he, following in the steps of his confrere N. Assouad, vigorously defends against the attacks of the large majority of biblical inter-

(11) *Le mystère de Marie selon le Protévangile et l'Apocalypse*; Paris, 1949.

preters. According to Fr. Bonnefoy there is in Gen. 3,15 a dual literal sense, a primary and a secondary sense, both intended by the sacred writer and both describing a separate aspect of the drama which will soon be enacted in the history of mankind. A decisive argument for this duality of meaning is the word 'serpent' which in ch. 3 means a natural serpent (vv. 1, 14) and the infernal serpent (vv. 4, 15). This dual sense, writes Fr. Bonnefoy, runs through the whole chapter and is the basis of a dual interpretation of the Protoevangelium (p. 23). Consequently the serpent's seed is both the serpent's natural offspring and the devil's moral progeny (p. 23). Likewise the woman is primarily the Virgin Mary, secondarily she is Eve (p. 50); Christ is the woman's seed in a proper sense (pp. 37—40), but the seed of the woman — Eve is all mankind (pp. 44—47). We have, therefore, in v. 15 two different senses, both literal, running parallel to each other, the one crawling on the earth below and the other moving in a high spiritual sphere. According to the one, Eve and all mankind feel a natural aversion for serpents; they strike them on the head whenever they can, but sometimes they are bitten by them. According to the other, God has set up an inexorable hostility, a permanent moral opposition between Christ and his Mother on one side and the devil on the other. Christ overthrew the devil's domination in the world, but the devil retaliated by setting the Jews against him and trying to thwart his work. The victory of the Virgin Mary over the devil consists mainly in her preservation from original sin and in her bodily assumption. By the help of Christ, with whom all Christians form one mystical body, Christians can defeat the devil, although they too can suffer persecutions and death.

We need not discuss here the problem of the plurality of senses. We limit ourselves to an examination of the author's theory of the plurality of senses and of the way in which the plurality of senses is applied to Gen. 3,15.

It appears that by plurality of senses the author means only or mainly the existence of a proper and a metaphorical meaning of the same word. Thus he writes: "The plurality of meanings, especially that which arises from the double acceptance, proper and metaphorical, of the same word, is a phenomenon common to all languages" (p. 11). This definition of what the author calls *polysémie* is explained in a note: "Even the elementary grammars distinguish between proper and metaphorical sense". And

he illustrates his definition by this example: 'If I say: St. Monica is Augustine's mother in a twofold sense, because she brought him forth to the world and to heaven, I am using the word 'brought forth' in a proper or natural sense and in a metaphorical or spiritual sense'. And he concludes: "This is the most common form of *polysémie*" (ibid.). I am sure nobody will quarrel with Fr. Bonnefoy about the existence of his particular form of *polysémie*; we all use the same words in a proper and in a metaphorical sense. But this is not the *polysémie* which Bonnefoy thinks to have discovered in Gen. 3,15. St. Monica's dual motherhood is expressly stated *Monica sancti Augustini dupliciter mater*, a statement which is further explained by the words *quia eum et mundo et caelo peperit*. But there is nothing in Gen. 3,15 indicating that the word 'woman' has a dual meaning, a proper and a metaphorical one. The dual sense of the word 'serpent', which according to Bonnefoy is the basis of the dual interpretation of Gen. 3,15, does not justify in any way the application of this duality of meaning to the 'woman'. The proper and the metaphorical meanings of the 'serpent' occur in different contexts or, at least, in different passages, and the diversity of meanings is apparent. But there is not the least indication in the context that the word 'woman' has more than one sense, be it proper or metaphorical. Bonnefoy appeals to the context as the decisive factor of the true sense of the word 'woman' (p. 35). Now if the grammatical context requires the meaning, 'Eve', the logical context demands absolutely the meaning, 'Mary'. But this is exactly the heart of the problem. Does the logical context necessarily require this meaning of the word 'woman'? Fr. Bonnefoy states his opinion in unequivocal terms: The Virgin Mary is the woman personally and literally meant in the Protoevangelium. His arguments are those with which we have been long familiar, the authority of the Bull *Ineffabilis*, the authority of theologians, the liturgical application of Gen. 3,15 to Mary by the Church, and the Vulgate reading *ipsa* which, though a mistaken translation, contains an element of truth. But the main argument for the identification of the woman with the Virgin Mary is, according to Fr. Bonnefoy, the historico-literal context which may be summarized in these words: The devil made use of a woman to induce man to sin and so lead all mankind to perdition. The devil thought his victory was final. But it was not so. God will make use of another

woman and of another man in order to restore humanity and overthrow the devil (pp. 25—33). This is clear enough to us in the light of Revelation, but it is doubtful whether and in what manner it can be deduced from God's words. Theologians are bent on reading into the biblical text more than it contains, or, as Fr. Bonnefoy himself puts it, they try to discover in a biblical text what they themselves have put (p. 86).

Simultaneously with, and independently of, Bonnefoy's work there appeared an article by T. Gallus in *Verbum Domini*, 1949, 33—43, proposing a similar interpretation. The title *Sensus allegorico-dogmaticus, sensus litteralis Protoevangelii* clearly defines the author's position. Fr. Gallus distinguishes in Gen. 3,15 a literal proper sense and a literal improper or metaphorical sense. According to the literal proper sense the woman is Eve, her posterity is all mankind, the hostility is man's natural aversion for serpents, the crushing of the head and the biting of the heel are facts of everyday's experience. This is exactly Bonnefoy's explanation. But in a higher sense, which Gallus calls improper, the woman is the Virgin Mary, and she alone, her seed is Christ, the hostility is to be understood in a supernatural order, the crushing of the head of the serpent is the complete overthrow of the devil's domination over the world, the crushing or biting of the heel is Christ's death and resurrection. This sense is called allegorico-dogmatic because it expresses metaphorically or allegorically the dogma of the triumph of Christ and his Holy Mother over the devil. In another article (12) Fr. Gallus defends himself against criticism to his theory and especially against the charge of introducing a duality of literal senses into the biblical text by distinguishing between the human writer's words and God's words as related by the human writer. The writer's words express the sense intended by him, but God's words may express a different sense not comprehended by the human writer. In Gen. 3,15 the human writer is simply referring God's words not expressing his own mind or his opinion on God's words. The writer's sense is man's natural aversion for serpents, but God's sense is the victory of Christ and his Mother over the devil.

I wonder whether Fr. Gallus has succeeded in convincing

(12) *Scholion ad Protoevangelium (Gen. 3,15) in Verbum Domini*, 1950, pp. 51-4.

any of his readers. His theory is a complete misrepresentation of the notion both of inspiration and of the metaphorical sense. All will agree that God may express through the writer's words a sense deeper and wider than what the writer actually perceives, but in this case God's sense is only an extension of the writer's sense, not a different sense. There can be no conflict between God's sense and man's sense. If man's sense is not intended by God, it is not a scriptural sense; and if God's sense is in no way perceived by the writer, man would be only mechanically instrumental in the expression of that sense. Nor can the application of the word 'woman' to the Virgin Mary be called a metaphor; it is a wider, but still a proper, application of that word. The literal sense has recently been defended from a purely exegetical standpoint by Fr. B. Rigaux O.F.M. (12a). Fr. Rigaux insists on the prophetic, messianic and eschatological character of Gen. 3,15. The writer, whom Fr. Rigaux together with others identifies with the Yahwist, is not concerned with mere history. He is not simply narrating past events nor simply relating God's words; he is mainly teaching a lofty doctrine, the doctrine of universal redemption by foretelling the defeat of the devil by the Messiah and its complete elimination from the kingdom of God. Consequently 'the woman' cannot be Eve except in a very limited sense as the starting-point or the commencement of that unrelenting struggle culminating in the complete triumph of the woman's seed over the devil. 'The woman' therefore is neither Eve nor the whole female sex, but the conqueror's mother, that is the Virgin Mary. A vulnerable point in Fr. Rigaux' exposition of Gen. 3,15 is the lack of sufficient consideration of the fact recognized by many modern interpreters that the Hebrew mind very often passes imperceptibly from the general to the particular without any change in the verbal expression. He refers, it is true, to Th. Boman, *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen*, Göttingen, 1952, but he seems to ignore the works of many modern interpreters who have so clearly illustrated this characteristic fluidity of the Hebrew thought. Nor does he take into account Gen. 21,12.13 where the word 'seed' occurs in a collective sense (v. 12) and in an individual sense (v. 13). It follows that even if

(12a) *La femme et son lignage dans Genèse III, 41-15, in Revue biblique*, 1954, pp. 321-48.

we admit that the victorious seed is Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary, we are in no way justified in applying the same individual sense to 'the woman' and 'her posterity' in the first part of v. 15. 'The woman' and 'her posterity' may have a more or less general sense in the first part of the verse, but they become individualized in Mary and Christ in the other part of verse 15.

Another attempt to combine the literal sense with a higher sense is the typical interpretation. Eve is the type of Mary, as Adam is the type of Christ, therefore the woman is Eve in the literal sense and the Virgin Mary in a typical sense. Let us hear one of the chief exponents of the typico-mariological interpretation: "The Holy Ghost, inspiring this oracle, has intended to foretell, in a higher sense and under the type of the first woman, another and a blessed woman and her implacable hostility against the Devil and her complete victory over it. As the divine Wisdom foresaw from the beginning all the fulness of this hostility in Mary, one may think that this divine Wisdom has typically foretold in this oracle the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. For in her conception, unstained by any spot of sin, the mother of God has completely triumphed over the devil through whose jealousy sin has infected all the human race. Eve and her hostility against the devil signify typically the Virgin Mary and her unlimited hostility against the devil. But this hostility would have never been complete if the Virgin Mary had not been conceived without the original sin. And it is this spotless conception of Mary that the Holy Ghost has intended to reveal to us in this oracle" (13). This interpretation has found little favour with modern interpreters. Among its latest supporters one may mention Fr. Sutcliffe in his commentary on Genesis. After having said that Christ is the seed and that the Woman is his Blessed Mother, he goes on: "This follows also from the typical relation existing between Eve and Mary, a relationship on which the Fathers loved to dwell and which is summed up in her title of the Second Eve. As Eve was the mother of all the living in the physical order, so Mary is the Mother of all the living in the spiritual order just as Christ for an analogous reason is the Second Adam having in the first Adam 'a figure of him who was to come', (Rom. 5.14)." (14).

(13) Corluy, *Spicilegium dogmatico-biblicum*, I, p. 371.

(14) *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, London, 1953

It is universally agreed that the typical sense cannot be admitted unless it is based upon Holy Scripture or Tradition. Now there is absolutely no scriptural evidence that Eve is the type of Mary. True it is that the woman of the Apocalypse (12,1—17) has many resemblances with the woman of Gen. 3,15, but the woman of the Apocalypse is the personification of the Church, and, although John may have borrowed some elements of his description from Gen. 3,15, it cannot be said with certainty that he intended to represent Mary as the fulfilment of the prophecy contained in Gen. 3,15. Some of the Fathers have seen a close parallelism between Eve and Mary. But again it is not clear whether they intended anything more than a mere contrast between Eve and Mary.

The majority of interpreters prefer to base the mariological interpretation on the plenary sense or *sensus plenior*, a scriptural sense more extensive and more comprehensive than the literal obvious sense to which it is related as the perfect to the imperfect, the complete to the incomplete, the total to the partial. Accordingly God's words taken in their strictly literal sense cannot be applied but to Eve and her posterity; but if they are viewed in the light of their theological context and subsequent revelation they acquire a much higher sense which makes them inapplicable to any other one except Christ and his Mother. But as the existence and nature of the *sensus plenior* has been in recent years, and is still, the object of many lively controversies, it is absolutely necessary to give a clear idea of it in order to estimate its value as a hermeneutical principle and so to lay a solid foundation for the mariological interpretation which is based upon it.

The *sensus plenior* may be briefly described as a homogeneous and organic development of the literal sense. It is therefore a literal sense more profound than the obvious literal sense and manifested to us by God himself, the author of Scripture. These two senses, the obvious and the plenary, are complementary to each other, not two different and independent senses. Indeed their greater or lesser comprehensiveness is altogether subjective, not objective; it is not the meaning which acquires a wider range of applications or is elevated to a higher sphere, but it is our knowledge of it that becomes deeper and deeper by means of successive revelations. The development of the literal obvious sense is, therefore, the gradual unfolding of

that recondite sense which is intended by God and is contained in the human writer's words, though not fully perceived by him. The literal obvious sense and its gradual developing may be compared to the development of a painting. The first brush-strokes do not as yet reveal the picture; the figure is still unrecognizable, but as the painting goes on, the figure begins to take shape until the complete picture with all its details becomes visible. There is unity of plan and work between the first sketch and the last finishing touches. It is on this organic unity of revelation that the plenary sense is based. Another fact justifying the existence of the plenary sense and illustrating its nature is the range of meaning which a word can have. Thus the word 'woman', occurring in a definite context, cannot mean but one determinate woman, although it can be applied to other women when it occurs in different contexts. But the application of the same word to two different women in one and the same context would introduce that duality of literal senses which is so dreaded by biblical interpreters. On the contrary, the word 'hostility' may denote any degree of intensity from mere opposition to mortal hatred, or even an opposition between two born enemies and between two estranged friends, and the writer can express any degree and any sort of hostility without any change in the form of his expression. As it is God, the principal author of Scripture, who determines the exact meaning or shade of meaning of the words used by the inspired writer, it is divine revelation which ultimately determines the existence as well as the extent of the plenary sense in any particular passage.

After these preliminary considerations let us see whether and to what extent can the theory of the *sensus plenior* be applied to Gen. 3,15. Earlier commentators, writing at a time when the notion of the plenary sense was still vague and undeveloped, simply maintained that the oracle has been fulfilled in a perfect manner only in Christ and his Mother, in Eve and her posterity in an imperfect manner. Therefore the 'woman' in a perfect, complete and adequate sense is the Virgin Mary, while in an imperfect, incomplete and inadequate sense is Eve (15).

(15) Hetzenauer, *Commentarius in Librum Genesis*; Graz; 1910, pp. 78-82. A. Bea, *Institutiones biblicae: De Pentateucho*; Rome, 1933, pp. 202f. Simon-Prado, *Praelectiones biblicae; Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. I; Turin, 1934, pp. 53f.

At the same time another form of the explanation of Gen. 3,15 by the principle of the *sensus plenior* was being developed. Fr. Murillo in his commentary on *Genesis* (1914) writes: "In v. 15 God is addressing not Eve personally, but the whole class of women or the whole female sex, concentrating, however, his thought on a particular woman as the representative of her class, an extraordinary woman that cannot be other than the Virgin Mary who, through her union with Christ and by his help, crushed victoriously the head of the infernal serpent". And he goes on: "Eve was only the occasion for God's promise; as she was the only woman, God seeing in her the representative of the whole female sex, raised his thought, without changing the verbal expression, to the consideration of the whole class of women attributing to 'the woman' actions and qualities that are proper to the whole class" (pp. 306f). This explanation was later taken up by P. De Ambroggi in an article *Il senso pieno del Protoevangelo* (Gen. 3,15) published in *Scuola Catt.* (1932, 3—26). In other words, the word 'woman' which apparently refers to Eve, in reality denotes the female sex in general. This is the literal sense which acquires a higher significance when it is restricted to one particular woman, the best representative of her class, a woman whom we in the light of later revelation identify with the Virgin Mary. On the collective meaning of the word 'woman' we have spoken already.

A similar view has been recently propounded by Ch. Hauret (*Origines, Genèse, I—III*; Paris, 1950). He begins by emphasizing the identity of the victorious seed and Christ the Redeemer. It is in the light of this indisputable fact that the whole oracle must be interpreted (p.p. 191f). But who is the woman? In a strictly literal sense the woman is Eve and no other but Eve, the only woman known from the context (pp. 183f). But although Eve repented of her sin, was restored to God's friendship (Wisd. 10,2) and so became the devil's enemy, the manner in which the hostility between the woman and the devil is declared by far surpasses Eve's hostility against the devil. We know from New Testament revelation that God has united Christ with the Virgin Mary in the work of redemption. If therefore Mary is closely associated with Christ in the struggle against and in the victory over the devil, it is she who realizes in herself the inexorable hostility excited by God between the woman and the serpent (pp. 193—195). Therefore the woman

of Gen. 3,15 is both Eve and Mary; she is Eve in the strictly literal sense, but she is described with features that are appropriate only to Mary. Thus in the woman's posterity two personages stand out conspicuously, Christ the Redeemer and along with him the Virgin Mary, who is designated at the beginning of the oracle. The dual meaning — Eve and Mary — of the word 'woman' does not imply a duality of literal senses, because it does not refer directly and personally to Eve, but to all women in general, Eve and Mary being included by connotation (pp. 196f).

All these interpreters agree in their generalizing and then individualizing the meaning of the word 'woman'. The woman, they say, is not Eve, but the whole class of women. But as neither Eve nor any woman, except the Virgin Mary, has realized the full meaning of the hostility and victory predicted by God, the word 'woman' must absolutely connote some extraordinary woman that will share both in the struggle and in the final triumph with her victorious seed. The woman is Eve in a lower, incipient, germinal sense, it denotes the whole female sex in a higher, real, literal sense, and the Virgin Mary in its fullest literal sense.

The best exposition of this theory is that proposed by J. Coppens of Louvain in an article *Le Protévangile. Un nouvel essai d'exégèse* published in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 1950, 5—36, and separately in *Analecta Lavaniensia*, 1950, II, 16, 45—77. A year before in a work *Les Harmonies des deux Testaments*, J. Coppens had very briefly outlined his view of the *sensus plenior* of Gen. 3,15 in this way: The Protoevangelium, viewed in the light of philology, represents a struggle between mankind and the devil and the final victory of man over the devil. But between this humano-Satanic drama and the identification of the conqueror with Christ and the association of the Virgin Mary with Christ there exists a gulf which no theological speculation will ever succeed in bridging over. It is the *sensus plenior* that helps us to recognize the true conqueror of the devil. Although in the mind of the sacred writer the personality of the conqueror and his mother are still shrouded in the literal and historico-critical sense, they were from the very beginning definitely determined in the mind of God. The conqueror of the devil in the mind of God is Christ, and the woman associated with him in the struggle and in the victory is Mary,

his blessed mother. Philology is unable to discover this sense in the oracle. God has purposely given us this vague prophecy of a hostility between man and Satan in order to foreshadow, to suggest and, later, to reveal the real nature of this hostility and the true personality of the conqueror and his associate mother. And this is the fuller sense of the prophecy, intended by God, contained in the words of the human writer, though not fully comprehended by him and by his contemporaries. (pp. 37f).

The following year Prof. Coppens took up the problem again discussing it in all its aspects with an overwhelming exuberance of arguments couched in his usual attractive and persuasive style. Coppens argues forcibly for the general meaning of 'the woman' basing his contention not only on the grammatical possibility, but also and especially on the context which extends far beyond the narrow limits of the first woman and her husband. V. 15 does not belong to the strictly narrative parts of chapters 2 and 3. The writer's outlook grows broader and broader so as to include all mankind. And this broad and universal outlook demands absolutely an universal meaning for the word 'woman'.

J. Coppens recognizes the same universal meaning in the expression 'the woman's posterity', in spite of its prevalent individual meaning. And he makes the important remark that the word 'posterity' is always used to denote the male descendants and never the female descendants. Therefore the first part of v. 15 describes a struggle between all mankind divided into two armies, a women's army (*the woman*) and a men's army (*her posterity*) and the devil. Naturally each army has its own leader, who not only leads his army to battle, but also tends to individualize the meaning of the word or expression representing his respective army.

But all of a sudden, in the second part of the verse, the outlook is narrowed down, and the struggle between mankind and the devil is reduced to a single combat between the woman's seed, or one among her male descendants, and the devil. This individual meaning of the woman's seed naturally postulates an individual meaning of the correlative term 'the woman'. And so the two fighting armies become individualized and represented by their respective leaders. This transition from the universal to the particular, which is strongly contested by most interpreters, has its justification in the fluidity of Hebrew thought, which does not always distinguish between the idea of a group and that of

its constituent members and consequently passes imperceptibly from the one to the other without any difference in the literary expression. Having thus established the individual meaning of 'the woman', who is not Eve, and of 'the woman's seed', their identification with Christ and his Mother, the Virgin Mary, becomes easily comprehensible.

Therefore Mary is not represented nor in any way connoted by Eve; she is included in the universal appellation 'the woman' as a member of the female class and as the mother of Christ, the conqueror of the devil.

Coppens concludes his article by asserting once more the mariological sense of Gen. 3,15 but expressly dissociating himself from those who think they can derive all mariological theology from this text.

A different interpretation has been proposed by Fr. P. Bonnetain in the article *Immaculée Conception* in the *Supplément to Vigouroux Dictionnaire de la Bible* (1943, 240—254). The woman is Eve, and her seed is Christ with his mystical body, the Church. Christ is included in the woman's posterity as the most prominent of her descendants, as the conqueror of the serpent-devil and the source of the help whereby the other descendants can resist and repel all further attacks by the devil. But Christ's mother, owing to her inseparable union with him, is necessarily associated with her son not only in the struggle against the devil but also in the final victory over it. It is only in this way that the Virgin Mary comes in. Therefore the reference of this oracle to the Virgin Mary is the consequence of her intimate union with Christ.

Another consequence of Mary's association with Christ is her immunity from any stain of original sin. Since both mother and son are associated together in their struggle against their common enemy, they must be likewise associated in the victory. But Christ's victory over the devil was undoubtedly complete, absolute, unlimited and perpetual, therefore Mary's victory too was complete, absolute, unlimited and perpetual. But Mary could have never gained such a victory over the devil, if she were for one instant subject to the devil through original sin. Eve, after repenting of her sin, did not let herself be deceived again by the devil, she resisted his temptations, she fought and won. But hers was a limited victory and by no means perpetual. Therefore the Virgin Mary through her inseparable union with

Christ was not only the devil's most formidable enemy, but also his most conspicuous victor being preserved from sin from the first instant of her conception.

So there are two lines of mariological interpretation, two different ways of finding Mary in Gen. 3,15. Theologians and the majority of interpreters see Mary signified or foreshadowed or connoted in 'the woman'; others think she is included in the woman's posterity. But the important question is: Is the mariological meaning of Gen. 3,15 based upon the literal interpretation of the text, or is it only a theological conclusion? And if it is a theological conclusion, what is its value?

The strictly literal and the typical mariological interpretations have already been considered as inadequate. The value of the interpretation based on the literal fuller sense depends on the notion of the *sensus plenior* and on its right application. Now none will deny that the general meaning of Gen. 3,15, that is, the victory over the common enemy of man by one of the woman's descendants has been fully revealed in the N. T. and realized in the person of Christ. God foretold a victory that was achieved by Christ. There is, therefore, not only a relation of similarity, but also a continuity and homogeneity of revelation. We are therefore fully justified in recognizing a literal fuller sense in Gen. 3,15 which identifies the victorious seed with Christ, and his victory with redemption. The Christological meaning of Gen. 3,15 cannot be contested and has never been contested. But are we justified in extending the fuller sense to every single detail of the prophecy? In particular, can the word 'woman' be made to apply not only to Eve, but also, and in a higher sense, to the Virgin Mary? Those who maintain that the woman is Eve in an imperfect sense, and Mary in a perfect sense are in reality introducing into the text a duality of meanings which they themselves do not admit. In order to avoid the inconvenience of a dual meaning, Coppens gives the word 'woman', as we have seen, a general meaning, the female class. This meaning is grammatically possible, but the arguments advanced by the Professor of Louvain to prove its existence in Gen. 3,15 are not convincing. It is true that the writer's outlook becomes broader and even universal in v. 15, but it is equally true that this universal view of humanity arises from one particular event in primeval history. The drama of man's struggle with the powers of evil embraces all ages and all places, but it

originated with Eve, the first woman, in the garden of Eden. At the beginning it was a personal strife between Eve and the devil, but as the human race increased, the strife involved all the woman's posterity and will endure till the end of the world. V. 15 has indeed a universal character, but its roots lie in the personal history of the first woman, without whom that universality would have never been attained.

Therefore if 'the woman' cannot denote but one particular woman, and if this particular woman is none but Eve, the Virgin Mary can in no way be included in it unless we are prepared to admit a plurality of literal meanings. Although the Virgin Mary has realized in herself in the fullest sense and highest degree the hostility set by God between the woman and the devil, this alone does not give her an absolute right to be included in the general appellation 'woman' as the worthiest representative of the whole class. Beside 'the woman' there are others engaged in a mortal strife with the devil, there is the woman's posterity, which, in its general meaning, may include also the Virgin Mary. In fact some interpreters, as we have seen, include the Virgin Mary in the woman's posterity. Mary, as one of Eve's descendants, will be the devil's enemy, but, being also united with Christ, the conqueror of the devil, at least by the bonds of common membership of the same posterity, she will also share in the final victory. In other words, Mary, as well as many other men and women, all included in the first woman's posterity, will by the help of Christ resist and defeat the devil. So far the literal interpretation of the text, which describes a mortal struggle between the serpent and the woman's posterity which includes Christ, Mary and all the pious men and women who have during their lives victoriously resisted the devil. But the text tells us nothing about the nature and extent of these hostilities nor about the condition of the devil's opponents, whether they will be born enemies or simply friends that will become estranged and inimical in consequence of a quarrel. We need absolutely further revelation in order to know whether anyone amongst the woman's descendants has triumphed over the devil to the same extent as Christ himself. Such a revelation would certainly include the Virgin Mary not merely in the woman's posterity, which is the literal sense, but also in the victorious seed with which she will completely overthrow the devil's power on earth, and this is the fuller meaning of the text. But the

N. T. revelation shows to us the Virgin Mary not as the victor of the devil, but as the Mother of Christ, who through his death on the cross has dethroned the devil and driven him for ever out of the world. It is on the grounds of this inseparable union of the Virgin Mary with Christ that we associate her with her son not only in the intensity of the hostilities but also in the fullest extent of the victory. This is not the literal exposition of the text but rather a theological conclusion which, drawn as it is from two revealed premises, must be considered as a revealed doctrine and consequently the object of a dogmatic definition.

Looking back on this brief survey of recent discussions of Gen. 3,15 we notice that the mariological sense is almost universally recognized by theologians and interpreters. The non-mariologists are very few, and it is not always clear whether they reject all forms of mariological interpretation or only the literal interpretation. The mariologists at all costs base their **conclusions on theological speculations** and reasons of convenience rather than on sound exegesis. The majority of interpreters prefer a literal fuller mariological interpretation. But as both the existence and nature of the fuller or plenary sense is still a matter of dispute, its application to Gen. 3,15 may appear somewhat precarious. In fact sometimes the *sensus plenior* is nothing else but a typical sense or an additional literal sense, both of which are excluded from Gen. 3,15 by the supporters of the *sensus plenior*. The interpretation which derives the mariological doctrine by way of theological conclusion is based on a literal exposition of the text and on N. T. revelation, on the consideration of the literary and theological contexts and on the words of the Bull *Ineffabilis*, and as such it affords an incontrovertible scriptural evidence for the revelation of this most singular privilege of the Virgin Mary, Her Immaculate Conception.

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