

## **The Blessed Virgin Mary & God the Father**

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### **Introduction**

The Blessed Virgin Mary is often said to have a particular relationship with each member of the Holy Trinity: she is the mother of the Son, the spouse of the Spirit, and the daughter of the Father.<sup>1</sup> However, it would be inappropriate to call her either the Mother of the Son or the Spouse of the Spirit before the Incarnation, even though she was chosen for those roles beforehand. She was not yet mother, but would be; not yet overshadowed by the Spirit, but would be; but since her conception she was the Daughter of the Father. It is her oldest role, in a sense. As a daughter prepares for her wedding day, she is not yet spouse or mother, but she is daughter. It would be inappropriate (aberrant, really) were either of these true before the latter. Mary as Daughter of the Father has a certain primacy, then, that is not often noted. While the first two have received much laudable attention and study, little has been said of the third. It therefore begs the question - what is Mary's relationship with God the Father? That of a father to His daughter seems most immediately appropriate, naturally, though it could hardly be all. In fact, much has been left utterly undeveloped in this regard. Oftentimes it almost seems as if Mary is chalked up to being the daughter of the Father as an afterthought. I will therefore be attempting to fill this gap inasmuch as I am able; may God grant me the grace to do so well.

Before getting into these musings proper, however, two notes. Firstly, when speaking of anything Trinitarian, it is very easy to speak of things that also apply, properly or secondarily (or tertiarily, for that matter), to other persons of the Holy Trinity. There is, due to the nature of the Trinity, a necessary overlap that will take place, and this is as it should

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Carrie Gress, *The Marian Option* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2017), divides her book in this way.

be - nor is it surprising. Regardless, it ought to be noted. Secondly, while I of course seek to remain within the bounds of truth, I ask that the reader remember that this is very much an exploratory exercise. With that being said, I would like to put forward my preliminary assessment of the relationship between the Father and His masterpiece. It seems that the Father gives the Blessed Virgin most of her special and very unique roles in salvation history. At minimum, it would seem that He is the ‘role-giver’ of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### *Scripture*

It is appropriate to begin with Scripture, which gives a critical insight into how Mary identifies herself in relation to the Father. Mary, in her beautiful *Fiat* in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:38)<sup>2</sup>, uses the word ‘*doula*,’ or in Latin, ‘*ancilla*.’ Thus the Angelus prayer says: “*ecce ancilla domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*” This word is usually translated as ‘handmaid,’ however the Greek ‘*doula*’ translates as “female servant or slave.”<sup>3</sup> Mary is saying that she is ‘the slave girl’ of the Lord. Of course, she says this to signify her total and perfect obedience to the will of the Father, as that of a slave to her master. This obedience is certainly the hallmark of her relationship with the Father. Would it be appropriate, then, to define their relationship as that of a Master and a slave? It does not seem right to do so considering the fact that this seems to indicate a passivity and lack of free will. Yet it is not impossible to willingly and actively be a slave, and Mary herself uses the term. The Virgin was showing her total and obedient submission to the Father - not because she was pressured or forced, but out of love for Him. So in that sense, she could be called His slave. One thing that can clearly be said - and indeed, requires little defense - is that their relationship is characterized by Mary’s obedience. Saint Irenaeus famously said that “the knot of Eve’s obedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through

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<sup>2</sup> This and all other Scriptural references utilize the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Pablo Gadenz, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 45.

unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.”<sup>4</sup> This also fits nicely with the ‘role-giver’ relation with the Father, showing Mary’s reception and carrying out of the roles she is given. Therefore, one might appropriately narrow ‘role-giver’ further by saying that God the Father is the Master and Mary His willing and free slave.

Moving from the Fiat to the *Magnificat*, it can be seen that Mary gives further insight into the matter. The prayer itself is to the Father — this can be seen in the terminology the Blessed Virgin uses, such as he who is mighty, (Luke 1:49) as well as in the myriad Old Testament references she makes. Among the latter, the promise to Abraham (Luke 1:55) stands out as the most overt, but the way it parallels the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) is also clear. This incredibly rich prayer is full of Marian truths; I wish only to consider a few sections here.

“*My soul magnifies the Lord*” (Luke 1:46) - what does it mean to magnify the Lord? To be such that the Lord can be easily seen in her? This would follow from her total obedience. A similar phenomenon can be commonly seen when someone acts as their parent would - their parent can be seen in them. This is only possible because Mary is so aligned with the will of the Father. “*My spirit rejoices in God my savior*” (v. 47) - While it seems that to be called ‘savior’ is proper to God the Son, and certainly Mary’s spirit would rejoice in Him, it is interesting to note that she did not specify her Son within her womb. She seems to be referring to the Father. In fact, the next line seems to confirm this: “*For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden,*” (v. 48) - It is no coincidence that Mary refers to herself as His handmaid once again. Already she has referenced her own words - she is the lowly ‘*doula*’ of the Father.

Here she clearly intended to show her subordinate obedience to the Lord, in giving her assent to His will and accepting the role He gave her through the Holy Spirit - to be the Mother of God. “*For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name*” (v. 50) - The roles that the Father has given the Holy Mother are ‘great things,’ and could

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<sup>4</sup> *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus, Trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.)  
<<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103322.htm>>.

even be said to have a gift character. It is the great things that He has done for her in giving her the role of Mother of God, and all else that flows from that - including Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate - that cause her to praise God the Father. Saint Thomas Aquinas says that it is Mary's role as Mother of God that forms the foundation of all other Marian prerogatives.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it can be said that the Father gave the Blessed Virgin all of her roles and privileges.

*'Daughter of the Father'*

We look now to the phrase 'daughter of the Father.' While true, this assessment of her relationship with the Father has always seemed lackluster to me. She has a very particular and unique relationship with the Son and the Spirit, ought not she have such a relationship with the Father? Certainly it is not arguable that 'daughter of the Father' applies to Mary, especially when to be a child of God is understood simply as a human being and thus created by God. More still, she is the crown jewel of all of creation, so it would seem appropriate not only to refer to her as 'daughter of the Father,' but *'the Daughter of the Father.'*

Yet another way of understanding the concept of being the son or daughter of the Father is that we all become children of God upon our baptism (cf. Ephesians 1:5 - 14). One might question, however, if Mary were baptized at all - given her Immaculate Conception, it would seem unnecessary. It is a simple matter, however, to see that it is entirely possible that she would have done so. For one thing, she followed her Son in all things; certainly it was not necessary for the forgiveness of sins for Christ to be baptized by John in the Jordan, but Aquinas tells us that He did this so that we would imitate Him, and so that He would do everything that He commanded us to do: "He wished to be baptized, as Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany (cxxxvi), *because He wished to do what He had commanded all to do.* And this is what He means by saying: *So it becometh us to fulfill all justice* (Matt 3:15)."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Ia, Q. 25, a.6.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 39, a. 1.

Mary always follows her Son's example. One of her few spoken lines in Scripture is "Do whatever He tells you," (John 2:5). Always she is the first to do exactly that - and always she leads us to do the same. If she is asking it of others, she doubtless has done so herself. Again, it simply seems a fitting thing that she was baptized into the Church that she and her Son brought forth on Calvary.

One could perhaps argue that the grace of the Immaculate Conception was baptismal, or that Mary was, in a way, baptized at the moment of her conception. However, this does not seem to be so - it would imply that original sin stained her, even if it were healed as it took root. To call the grace of the Immaculate Conception baptismal would seem to indicate, given the fundamental regenerative grace of baptism, that there was some lack or damage that needed to be restored. Perhaps it is possible that the sacramental graces could be applied absent this need, but it does not seem fitting to me at the time of conception.

Perhaps in adulthood, for then it could serve as an example to follow, but such a thing at the moment of conception does not give such a sign. Rather, it seems that she received a particular grace of protection from original sin, not that it was baptismal. In other words, it would seem to me that the graces of the Cross applied to Mary at her conception were not baptismal graces, but particular graces that protected her from any stain of original sin. This is relevant because it is one of Mary's particular graces - a Marian prerogative. Thus, it is rooted (in this case, not chronologically) in her role as the Mother of God. She was protected by the Father from original sin in order that she may be able to fulfill her roles that He gives her, or that she be most fitting for these roles. Due to her meriting thus, it might be said that Mary is "The *Favored* Daughter of the Father," however we will examine her merit later.

A further point on this matter is that Mary is already a daughter of the Father in a most profound way even if she were not baptized by water into the Church. By her Immaculate Conception and thus protection from the stain of original sin, she did not have to be adopted as the

rest of us were. This is so because before the Fall, Adam was clearly treated as a Son of God, which means his children would be children of God (cf. Luke 3:38). Yet the Fall fractured this, and all of us sinned through Adam, and needed to be redeemed since the stain of original sin clung to us (cf. Romans 5:12). This is why it is said that we are adopted sons and daughters of God. Mary, however, through an application of the graces of the Cross at the moment of her conception, was protected from this stain. Therefore it follows that she would not be an adopted daughter, but a legitimate daughter, in the same way that Eve was before the Fall. This, too, points to her being a particular daughter of the Father, distinct from the rest. Her preeminent role among men and her freedom from sin would accord her this dignity.

### *Spouse of the Father*

This is an opportune time to note that there are some who have written about Mary's relationship with the Father, and one of these few is Rupert of Deutz. His assessment is not the relationship of a daughter and father, but as a bride and bridegroom. It isn't hard to see how this is true in a sense: Mary is the Mother of the Father's only-begotten Son, therefore she is the Spouse of the Father. However, he shows this in a more particular, nuanced, and beautiful way. He says this based on how God so often referred to the Israelites as His spouse in the Old Testament:

The Blessed Virgin Mary was the Bride of God the Father, and before all ages he had decided to bring about in her the reason why, in the Scriptures, he called the Church of the [Jewish] people his wife. That is, he had decided that his Word...should take flesh in the womb of this Blessed Virgin.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 128.

In other words, Mary, as the “best part of the first [Israelite] Church,” is the spouse of the Father because all of Israel was His spouse.<sup>8</sup> The best of Israel thus merited to receive the promised savior, the Son of God and God Himself. Mary therefore was spouse to the Father in a very particular way, such that no other can claim. Put in even simpler terms, Israel, the oft-unfaithful spouse of God the Father, gave birth (through the faithfulness and merit of their crown jewel, Mary) to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mary, representing Israel, is the Mother of God the Son, whose Father is God the Father. Therefore, Mary is spouse to God the Father. More than just representing all of Israel, however, Rupert of Deutz takes it a step further, saying that Mary is “the reason why” God called the Israelites His spouse - because from them would be incarnated His only Son *in the womb of Mary*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Rupert is claiming that Mary, set aside from “before all ages,” is what all of the nuptial imagery of the Old Testament between the people of Israel and God the Father is pointing towards.<sup>10</sup> This is not an absolute — certainly one cannot attribute the infidelity of Israel to Our Lady. Yet that is exactly why she, the most faithful and greatest of Israel, is the one who is most aptly called the Spouse of the Father.

This is not contrary to the original and classic assessment of Mary as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Rupert goes on: “the same Holy Spirit who accomplished the Incarnation of the only begotten Son of God in her womb...would accomplish the rebirth of many sons of God from the womb of the Church.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly, he does not intend to deny that Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit insofar as it was by the Holy Spirit that she conceived the Son, rather he is showing how God gave Mary a particular role set apart from all of the chosen people, namely to be His Spouse and so bring His Son into the world. He also notes that her task attached to this role is to “be the image of the younger [Christian] Church,” which is the Bride of her Son. She is the model of the Church, because she brought Christ into the world - what the Church is called to do. Note, too, how well this fits with Mary as the

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<sup>8</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 129.

<sup>9</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 129.

Mother of the Church and Mother of the faithful - as the Church is the Bride of Christ, so Mary, as the Mother of Christ, is Mother of her Son's bride. She serves as a motherly example for her daughter. Again, God the Father gave the Blessed Virgin this role.

*Through the Role of Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate*

Another aspect to look at Mary's relation to the Father is through her relation to the Son. Jesus Christ is "the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). This clearly does not exclude subordinate mediators (as Saint Thomas Aquinas shows)<sup>12</sup>, of which the Blessed Virgin is greatest. Thus, she holds the title 'Mediatrix.' What does this have to do with the Father, specifically between Mary and the Father? It is another role given to her by the Father. "The Father elected Mary from among all women to be the Coredeptrix with the Redeemer."<sup>13</sup> In giving Mary the role of *Mater Dei*, the Father also tasked her with other things, if not specifically than at least secondarily. In this case, Mary takes the role of the Mother of the King of Heaven and Earth, Christ. The mother of the king, in the history of Israel, is known as the *Gebirah*, who was held in great esteem, and had great political sway.<sup>14</sup> This can be seen in the case of Bathsheba, the Queen Mother of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 2:13 - 25). As seen at the Wedding at Cana, the Mother of Christ mediated a miracle on behalf of the newlyweds, His first public miracle. Thus, she also mediated the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. She mediates our needs to the Son in accordance with the will of the Father - for it is He who gave her this task when He chose her to be the Mother of God.

Saint Louis de Montfort, in his great work *True Devotion to Mary*, describes the Blessed Mother's relation to God the Father in these terms:

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, Q. 26, a.1.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Miravalle, *Mary: Coredeptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1993), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Miravalle, *Mary: Coredeptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate*, 58.



[The womb of Mary] is the throne of His glory for His Father, because it is in Mary that Jesus Christ has calmed His Father, irritated against men, and that...He has given Him more glory than ever the sacrifices of the Ancient Law could do, and He gives Him now an infinite glory, which He never could have received from man.<sup>15</sup>

He describes her as the mediatrix of God's glory, specifically God's glory in the Son. There is a further facet of this notion that relates to Calvary, where our Redemption took place. Mary, having mediated God's glory in the Son at the Incarnation, went on to play her unique role in the Redemption as Co-redemptrix. Arnold of Bonneval says that she "immolates herself to Christ in her spirit and begs God for the salvation of the world; the Son obtains the salvation of the world, and the Father refrains from punishment."<sup>16</sup> This notion is reminiscent of how Michaelangelo sculpted the *Pieta*: the Blessed Virgin holds the Body of her Son as an offering. "It is as if there were two altars on Calvary; one in Mary's heart and the other in Christ's body."<sup>17</sup> Mary offered Christ to the Father, in a way analogous to how priests today offer the oblation of Christ's Body and Blood every day in the mass. It is a distinctly priestly act. She offered up Christ on the Cross at Calvary along with Him, and she died in her heart alongside Him. An incredible and beautiful truth; worthy of many treatises. Yet let us here focus on how Mary offered Jesus, with Jesus, *to the Father*. Let us recall that Saint Thomas said that all of Mary's prerogatives have as their foundation her role as Mother of God - God, then, has also given her the role of Co-redemptrix, for what else can her offering be? God, when He 'chose her from before all ages' as Rupert of Deutz says, chose her not only to be His Spouse and to be the Mother of God - but in choosing her for these things, God the Father chose also for her to be Co-redemptrix with and subordinate to the Second Person of the Trinity, to which Mary willingly agreed at the Annunciation.

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<sup>15</sup> Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, trans. Fr. Frederick Faber, D.D. (Spring Grove PA: The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, 2019), 108.

<sup>16</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 150.

<sup>17</sup> Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, 150.

*Through Her Merits*

Heretofore, that Mary merits her roles has been mentioned, but not explained. Considering the nature of merit, however, it is worth examining in order to glean some insight into another aspect of her relation with God the Father. Merit is not earning one's way into God's good graces or somehow buying heaven by one's acts. Merit, rather, increases our reward in heaven. God reached out to us first, we did nothing to earn it.<sup>18</sup> This is true of the Blessed Mother, even with her Immaculate Conception. It has already been mentioned above that she was protected from original sin by the grace of the Cross applied to her conception. Salvation, then, still applies to her, though she has never been stained by sin in any way. "Merit is God giving an action a supernatural value."<sup>19</sup> The Church can in some ways do this, as God gave her the power to do, such as with indulgences. Now Mary's merit was such that it was fitting that she receive her roles and privileges, and it was God the Father who gave these to her, but was it not also God who made her actions — especially her Fiat — meritorious? Some may object that this would impugn on Our Lady's free will, implying that her assent was somehow forced, but it is not so - even if God makes an act meritorious, He does not force it upon us. Even so with the Blessed Mother - her free will suffers no violence from her Fiat. One may also object that it would seem impossible for Mary to both be chosen from 'before all ages' and to merit her roles through her actions. I have a twofold response to this objection. First, if the graces of the Cross can be applied outside of the time of their happening, as they are all the time, but notably at Our Lady's conception, could not the same be done with merit, though in reverse? Could not Our Lady's merit have been applied from all time? Further, God did not force these roles and offices upon her; she was chosen, but she still had to accept. Therefore, Mary was shown great favor by the Father in that He chose her, but also in that, in the performance of her roles, she merited greatly in His eyes.

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<sup>18</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (1997), n. 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Miravalle, THE 755, Mariology II, November 3, 2022.

*As the Father's Masterpiece*

This leads to the final aspect of Marian relation to the Father I wish to examine: Mary as the greatest creation of the Father. Mary is God the Father's masterpiece.<sup>20</sup> The only greater creation is Christ's Sacred Humanity. "In practical terms, this means that Mary experienced no internal conflict over her own will and God's will - they both are the same."<sup>21</sup> The simple fact is that God the Father chose to work His will in the world through Mary, and He prepared her for this purpose not because He had to, but He desired to. "It is out of a superabundance of love that Mary was created."<sup>22</sup> Salvation could have been done without her. It is a measure of God's love that He created her and gave her the many roles she has to the world in addition to His only begotten Son. God gave Himself *and* His greatest creation. The vessel of God's saving grace was filled with Jesus; it brimmed over with Mary.

Saint Albert the Great shows how "in strict justice, only Christ the Redeemer could pay the general debt that all humanity contracted in Adam. The saints, for their part, are able to offer only a particular collaboration on behalf of individual persons, because of their merits that are considered acceptable by God (*ex congruo*)."<sup>23</sup> However, Mary's merits - while being on the same level as the saints in that they are subordinate to those of Jesus - extend to "the whole process of human redemption."<sup>24</sup> This reflects Mary's role as Co-redemptrix, of course (Albert also notes that this is rooted in Mary's role as Mother of God), but it also expresses how she stands above the rest of creation.<sup>25</sup> God created her to be above the rest of humanity, then gave her to humanity to show His absolute abundance of love for man. Thus, God, out of love for man, masterfully prepared Mary to fulfill the roles that He

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<sup>20</sup> Gress, *The Marian Option*, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Gress, *The Marian Option*, 117.

<sup>22</sup> Gress, *The Marian Option*, 118.

<sup>23</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 228.

<sup>24</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 229.

<sup>25</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 229.

masterfully desired to give to her, and she - to the joy of all mankind - accepted these roles as only she could.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, then, Mary's relation with the Father has many facets. Some of them, if taken too far or too literally, can easily be misconstrued by others, but each is true in such a way as to do no violence to any other. Therefore, it is possible to sum it up thusly: Mary, the most favored daughter of the Father, was prepared by the Father as His masterpiece to be His Spouse and the Mother of the Son — and so receive all of the roles, offices, and prerogatives that follow from these, including Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate — to which she gave her free and full consent as His “slave-girl” or humble servant. These are but a few of the many aspects of Mary's relation to the Father, and of each, the surface was merely scratched. The brevity of each treatment is a result of my own limitations, and certainly not due to any shallowness of the topic. It is my hope this will shed some small light on Mary's relation to the Father, as it can bring a whole new dimension to Marian understanding, one that can be very beneficial in understanding and knowing the Mother and her role in salvation.