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# Doing Theology with an Eye on Mary

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Changing with age is not very easy. It gets harder and harder, since ageing is not only a process of growing consistent, it's also a process of growing hard, hardness of thought, of behaviour and of habits. So, I am a kind of a person theologically used to a one-chord song, a theologian of few texts. Texts that I can't let go,

and texts that won't let go of me: this character, Jonah; the disciples on their way to Emmaus; the sending of the seventy disciples; Jesus' program presented at Nazareth's synagogue. These are some of the notes of my *samba*. Just an instant of distraction, and there I am, 'playing' again one of these passages...

Actually, that's what I am doing right now. The character I've invited today is one of these persons that have talked to me and challenged me a lot. Especially when it comes to being available and being simple. I set her in front of us so that we can be ministered to by her. So that she can tell us about the theological nature and process. About doing theology. About this hermeneutics of life that can't get rid of God. About this indispensable invasion of God in our life which will determine our steps forever... although not always in the direction we would choose.

In this text I bring Mary to your mind and mine. Mary, this theologian that, as a woman, opens her womb to God. Her womb, *the deepest place where life is born*. A woman

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who struggles intensively in her search to understand her son and not to experience her faith in despair. A woman who cries in rebellious confusion, but still goes to the foot of her son's cross. A woman who does theology as life goes on. A woman who can't help thinking her faith based on her vocation, and whose vocation determines her theology. A woman whose options in life form the best chapter of a vital theology.

Mary, the woman theologian, sees her life from the perspective of God's history with his people. That's why she sings, and that's why she dances. And this is the subject of her beautiful *Magnificat* (Lk. 2:46-56). Let's go back to what happened with her. Hear what she says, try to understand the frame in which her life happens. Let's simply go back to the Bible texts that speak of this woman called Mary.

### A Listening Exercise

*And so it all began... (Lk. 1:26-38)*

*In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'*

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will*

*be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'*

*'How will this be', Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'*

*The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.'*

*'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her.*

*Elizabeth became a pregnancy partner (Lk. 1:39-45)*

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!'*

*And Mary did theology... (Lk. 1:46-56)*

*And Mary said:*

*'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.'*

*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

*But then she got confused... (Lk. 2:41-52)*

*Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to*

*them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and nature, and in favor with God and men.*

*It wasn't always easy (Jn. 2:1-8)*

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My time has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from seventy-five to one hundred and fifteen litres. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so.*

*Things got worse (Mk. 3:31-35)*

*Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and*

*they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'*

At the cross Mary felt embraced (Jn. 19:25-27)

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son.' And to the disciple, 'here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

*Life goes on, and discipleship begins (Acts 1:14)*

*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

## **Theology Comes at the Second Hour**

To do theology is our business. It reflects our effort in knowing God. Our eagerness in talking about God. Theology systematizes our knowledge about God: his person in the Trinity, his creating and redeeming action, his unmeasurable love, and his insistence on being present and communicating with us through his Word. Theology tries to grasp God's action in history—past, present and future—and points out the way this very story goes on towards God's

'eschaton', the end of all things.

Theology is a church thing. It belongs to this people of God who, being aware of their mess and confusion, recognize as well that they are loved and involved by God all the same. It belongs to this church that has experienced the love of God in its life, throughout history, and that has the consciousness of being a privileged channel of experimentation and announcement of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

The *Magnificat* shows us what theology is all about, through its contents and the way it is articulated, through its historical characteristic and messianic dimension. But it still is a second-hour matter, for what comes at the first hour is God's revelation, God's irruption, God's visit, God's incarnation in Jesus Christ.

Theology comes at the second hour so that we don't start thinking we are too smart. So that we don't start thinking that we can discover something new about God's nature. In order for us not to deceive ourselves by wrapping ourselves with science's clothes, thinking that God is an object of our knowledge.

For theology to have the taste of God's things, and the smell of transcendency, it has to be born in the unexpected encounter that happens in the messy kitchen. Wasn't that so with Mary?

It was there, in the smoky kitchen, wearing a worn-out apron and holding a damaged handle pan, that she was visited by God. It was in the kitchen that the angel greeted her in an unforgettable fashion: 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The

Lord is with you.' (Lk 1:28)

Theology's seed is God's revelation. Theology is born in the guts, twisted by the shock of God's visit. The cradle of theology is stupefaction, when we find ourselves absolutely lost and completely thankful for God's visit.

***'And don't start telling me stories about a theology objectively impartial', Mary would complain, as she gets rid off her old apron and washes her face, in an attempt to get over this angelical shock. 'That's the kind of thing said by people who have never seen Gabriel, people who want to keep their wombs for their own things', she still mumbles before tossing some cold water on her face.***

## **Do You Want to Understand Theology?**

### **Offer your Womb!**

Asking for someone's womb is asking a lot. Offering your womb is a great thing indeed. As this humble apron-woman Mary says: 'I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said' (Lk. 1:38). And so the woman Mary gives out the most precious thing in her: her virgin womb. I can only guess the meaning of such an offer! And sighing is what Mary does. Sighing at the craziness of the gesture, the cost of this to her image, sighing as she considers confused Joseph. But she doesn't give up her surrender, and soon the results of

this start to gradually appear in form of a pregnancy. Vocation always manifests itself in the growing pregnancy of obedience.

Theology is done in a *disposition condition*. The answer to God's revelation is a life surrender. A womb surrender. A virginity surrender. The theological word about God's nature, action and vocation is born as pregnancy becomes evident. Discipleship pregnancy. For theology belongs to the disciple that is waiting and obedient.

Theology cannot be impartial. The more life's options and ways are compromised with God, the more it is theology. Impartial theology is an arrogant contradiction of people who haven't still woken up, people who think they can understand God in a simply cognitive fashion. No Gabriel will obey a 'god' of neutral theology, and no Mary will offer her womb to such a god. Such theology will show only a god with a little 'g'. A god of our vain philosophies, a god as big as our inflated egos.

The theologian Mary walks around showing off her pregnant womb to help us understand that theology becomes mature in the active expectancy of the fulfillment of God's actions. It's theology with the gesture of vocation, pointing towards an obedient discipleship.

Recovered from the initial shock, Mary hides in her room. Throwing herself on her bed, she weeps and laughs at the same time. The laughter of choice mixed with the cry of despair. She cries in thankfulness and nervously laughs, not knowing what to do, not wanting to do any-

thing else than whispering again to the Lord: 'May it be to me...' (Lk 1:38).

***'Only those who have never seen Gabriel could talk about "mere knowledge theology"... People that seem not to have a womb. Those temple-people, who don't even see Gabriel arrive', Mary mumbles as she goes back to the kitchen. After all, there's more to do there. 'Where did I put my apron? Looks like I am going crazy!', she still says to herself.***

## **Do You Want to Understand Theology?**

### **Learn to Pay a Visit**

It's hard to understand why Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Was she trying to hide? Was she curious about old Elizabeth's pregnancy? Maybe this odd story of two pregnant women in such different ways was taking away her sleep? Did she go to dance at the sound of this fantastic melody of God's revelation? Or, did she go for all of these reasons, a little bit of each? What an intense and beautiful event was the encounter of these two women! It was divine. It was a 'womb mover', as the text states: 'When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.' (Lk 1:41)

Who has already been involved in a pregnancy experience knows what that means. A kind of a perception transmission. I remember: my wife

would suddenly hold my curious hand over her swollen womb so that I could feel the baby kicking (in our case, it was always a boy!). But here, in Elizabeth's womb, the kick is stronger: it's a kick of divine emotion, it's the kick of incarnation.

And so Mary and Elizabeth stayed together during three months, growing strong in each other's understanding of this strange way in which God writes his story. And speechless Zechariah was testimony to these two women, who couldn't stop talking and telling their story, making enigmatic questions. The whole situation makes you laugh and it makes you cry, it makes you dance and it makes you wonder in awe.

That's how theology is done. In the communion of the chosen ones and in the agony of vocation experience. In the sharing of stories and in the anguish of trying to understand and discern everything well. Theology is done in community, and experienced in community as well.

It's a shame that we have reduced theology to an individualistic speech, expressed in words accumulated in books and dissertations. Theology must rescue its place in the gathering of the called ones. Theology needs existential space, so that it can give advice. Space to breathe. Theology hates feeling suffocated. It kicks about in protest against every attempt to make it fit into any of those hand-over volumes.

When the last night comes, Mary packs up her bags, while Elizabeth watches in silence. A tear here, another there, serve as witnesses of how they already begin to miss each

other. The burden of a vocation is too heavy to carry alone. But the memories of the time together will help these two women carry on; and soon there will come other road companions. Remember Zechariah, who will soon start talking and singing again, and Joseph, who will return to Mary, offering her a long embrace of acceptance.

***While trying to fall asleep that night, Mary goes through the whole movie in her mind. This movie shows her how tough this time would have been without this heart-and-womb communion with Elizabeth. 'And there's still people who think we can understand God's matters alone!', Mary reflects, half asleep. 'As if theology were an office occupation! Theology is done with wombs in communion,' she still mumbles before falling asleep. The troubled sleep of good-bye.***

### **Surrounding God's Action with Poetry**

Mary's song—the so-called *Magnificat*—has fascinated many people throughout history. How much of this song was Mary's invention and how much was part of the faith family oral tradition, doesn't really matter. What matters is the way the *Magnificat* puts past, present and future together. How it speaks of God's memory that becomes reality throughout history, how it describes the geography of God's action, and

how Mary feels included in this story. And so she sees herself highly blessed. Notice the smile in her face, and the conclusion is obvious:

My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble  
state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me  
blessed (Lk 1:46-48)

Theology is done by people who feel and know that they are pulled into God's history. True theology is born with commitment. With the disposition of laying oneself on the altar of God's action.

That is how Mary does theology. With a historical sense. With the perception of God's fidelity. Laying all her life in this project of God, and discerning the saving construction of his plan. And Mary does theology with gratitude and in the rhythm of dance. Inviting us to join her with grace and rhythm. With a desire of rhyming.

It's a pity that poetry has been removed from theology. It's a pity we have turned theology into a semi-object owned discursively. A cerebral verb of white men. And so it ended up heavy and tiresome, expressed in long sentences and articulated in a lofty philosophical language. Let's confess: we have imprisoned theology in the academy and in the library. Even Mary was left out, because she couldn't write in German, and she lacked that intellectual look, with thin frame glasses. After all, she was always the apron-woman, the well-woman, who never had any problem using an apron...

This is no apology, neither for the apron or for intellectual laziness. No



invitation to being poor readers. No honours are being granted to ignorance. It is, rather, an invitation for us to throw ourselves into God's hands. To read our life story from the perspective of God's vocational visit. To notice God's fidelity throughout history, and to sing it in verses and prose.

Many years have gone by. Miles and miles away, Mary decides to do some research about herself. She gets a friend's computer and, confused, surfs through the Internet. Trying to overcome her mouse, she gets scared with so many 'Marys'! Endless information about this Mary, that Mary, so many guesses and interpretations about her! She never thought of saying all of that! Actually, she didn't like what people have done to her. Unable to move, she finds herself raised in a pedestal. Analysed by theology academics, with their arrogant scalpels in hand, she feels like a corpse in advanced dissection!

***Not standing it all anymore, she stomped her foot and left in protest. And there flew the apron, once again thrown to the corner: 'Don't these people understand anything?!', she rages. 'Mary is just a woman, a woman in an apron. Besides, these people have to understand that theology is done with poetry. It has to be something born from the tight beating heart and from the womb, pregnant of God's things. Theology is a soul issue. It has the smell of***

***compromise and the taste of obedience.' And Mary knew what she was talking about. I can tell you that.***

### **Doing Theology in a State of Embarrassment**

There were some lessons that Mary had already learned. One of them was never closing the doors too early. Not to give up too easily. To prepare space for possibility. And this is what she does once more, once she sees herself involved in this lack-of-wine story in that Cana, Galilee, marriage. The details of this marriage are unknown. But the feast must have lasted several days, as was the tradition at the time. It must have been some party. Not just Mary was there, but also Jesus, and his whole group of disciples (Jn. 2:1-12).

We do not know if it was some relative's marriage, or a daughter of one of Mary's friends, but the fact is that she was close to what was going on. Near the kitchen and near the hosts' hearts. So, when she saw they were running out of wine, she quickly went to Jesus, to try to find a way out. You know, she had lived enough with him to know that there would be something he could do about the situation, and that something new could happen. Living with Jesus, she had learned to leave the doors of possibilities open. She knew there could be wine on the table again.

That is how theology is done. In living together, and with open doors. In living, because theology is done by following Jesus, knowing him and learning with him. Hearing what he

has to say, trying to understand his parables, trying to understand his geographic, social and cultural misplacements, and watching how he reacts when faced with different situations in life; be it the controverted Pharisees, the lonesome Zacchaeus, or astonished Jairus. Comprehension and observation, establishing priorities and building relationships. Relationships that need to be dealt with and included in the theological process. And that's not something easy to do. It is, actually, a life-long agenda.

We must recognize that we are children of a tradition that gave priority to the 'academic knowledge', and despised being together; that searched for content, and didn't prioritize emotion; that thought theology was a mind issue, giving no importance to the feet, with their ways and options in life. The heart, with its thousand and one feelings, and relations, with their thousand and two bifurcations, were not just overlooked, but solemnly put aside.

The issue is that it is much easier to transform theology into a brain issue. For when we do that the library and the computer will be enough. But this 'ivory tower' theology does not understand nor does it reflect what is in God's heart, and it is unable to come near to the questions, problems and agonies of people yesterday and today. Theology needs to know, and wants to see, the empty jars, and take them to Jesus' heart, along with all that it means, in terms of embarrassment, partying, and the building of solid human relationships. Here Mary also teaches us

the way. She saw the situation and came to Jesus: 'They have no more wine' (Jn. 2:3). Theology does not just give answers. It also asks questions. It brings life's needs close to God's heart.

But being aware of the situation does not mean controlling it. Did Mary want to do that? Would she be one of those bossy women who want to control everyone and everything? One of those 'definitive women', trying to take care of everything around her?

It's not hard to imagine Mary as a strong woman. But Jesus also knows who he is and what he wants. He doesn't go for the 'bossy' game, and the answer he gives her leaves us quite embarrassed: 'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Interestingly, why does he call her 'woman' and not 'mother'? So, you'd better not be around when this conversation happens! It could have been a quick whispering between Mary and Jesus. Maybe the tone he uses and the way he looks into her eyes kept her from blushing and feeling embarrassed. The fact is that Mary has to learn she can't control Jesus. In the same way, theology can't control God.

Many have been, and many are, the times and occasions in which people tried to do theology from the perspective of power and control. That could be dogmatic or charismatic theology. It's theology that tries to sound final, and to be unconditionally accepted. The strict doctrine theology, in which one is not allowed to talk about God or see Jesus in any other way. The theology in which people are not allowed

to know God and meet Jesus in such an unexpected and uncontrolled fashion: in a wedding, and through an empty jar of wine.

However, theology in charismatic hands, expressed in eager speeches, can also be really dangerous. Who, after all, would go against the inspired leader? Who would risk contradicting a beautiful and lively preaching that is supposed to give direction to paths and interpretations? Theology needs to learn to say that the wine is over, and then be silent. Theology must learn to say 'I don't know'. It must learn to hear God saying that he owns the time.

Mary's slight smile is clear. By the way, her path is intriguing as well. Embarrassed and reduced, she could hide in any dark corner. Head high, however, she walks back into the house where the wine is missing. She will prepare everything. As if the party was hers, she talks to the servants: 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn. 2:5).

What an impossible woman this Mary is! She surprises us by not giving up. The issue is, she knows Jesus. In her heart, she knows he will also go that way, and will talk with the servants. Besides, she knows his word will be quite different. While her word only prepared the way, his would be a new word. Her word can just put jars in order and servers waiting. But Jesus's words will fill the jars, will get the servants busy, and the *maitre* astonished while the wine slides down his throat. As to the hosts, it's even harder to say. Their face changed from water to wine. The bride couldn't hold so much emotion and just kissed Jesus.

Theology serves. It prepares. Only that, and all of that. It can't avoid it, but it always tries to. Every time theology tries to frame God, it becomes poor. Every time theology tries to be final, it leaves the party without wine. Theology needs to learn with Mary, learn to prepare the jars, because God's time always comes.

It is important to state, thus, what theology cannot do. It cannot try to get rid of the jars just because it does not know what to do with them. It cannot look for any cheap explanation for the wine-full jars, in a definitive demonstration that it is the child of an Enlightenment party. As well as it cannot try to schedule the time for the jars, transforming their being filled into a public event, in order to awaken to faith or win followers. What it can do is prepare Jesus' coming. What it can do is testify, stupefied, the jars being filled with water that becomes wine. What it can do is to open wide eyes together with the *maitre*, who had never drunk such an excellent wine. What it can do is to line-up after the bride and kiss Jesus. What it can do is, timidly, smile with Mary and bring the wine-full jars to its heart.

***And there goes Mary with her enigmatic smile once again. 'I knew it, but I didn't know it', she mumbles again, 'The more I spend time with him and learn to wait for the unexpected, the more he still surprises me. But there was no need for him to talk to me the way he did... Are those manners? But this wine is good!' That***

***is how theology is done, on the way from the empty jar to the full one. In a state of embarrassed expectancy.***

### **The Upside-down Kingdom**

It's time to go back a bit, and recognize that things were never easy for Mary. One doesn't even need to enumerate the challenges and recall the difficulties to reach this conclusion. The boy was born and grew. The initial years' problems had passed, and Mary was glad the normal Nazareth routine was back. Even her apron could be used with some quietness. Then came that temple experience, where the boy said some things that were hard to understand; but when they came back to Nazareth, family routine was back to normal. I mean, if one can talk about routine when it comes to this boy.

Many years later, he left home and hit the road. Sometimes it seemed as if he wanted to win the world. He became a preacher, a miracle man, and a healer. There was that experience in Cana, in Galilee, that was a mixture of embarrassment and joy. But there were times and moments in which things got a bit more confused. The Gospels themselves register some of these stories and their places.

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him (...)

'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked (Mk. 3:31,33).

In fact, Mary lived in a confusion of feelings, perceptions, and opinions. She never forgot how it all began. But understanding Jesus' steps

seemed just too much for her. Even tougher than accepting the angel's visit. After all, she knew who Jesus was, but she didn't always understand what he said or did. That is, she had a tough time understanding and accepting his way of fulfilling his divine vocation. The things he said, the people he lived with and the actions he allowed himself were hard to accept. And so she lived out her vocation in ambiguity. But she never stopped following her son's steps. More than that, she was always treasuring all things in her heart.

Theology is lived in ambiguity. In fact, the theologian is the one who says, 'I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief!' (Mk. 9:24). He never understands everything, but is always willing to accept the essential. He lives from the memory of his vocation, and runs after the comprehension of God's actions. Until, at the end of his ambiguity journey, he finds himself besides Mary, at the foot of the cross.

***Sometimes Mary had crisis over her doubts. She would blame herself for not understanding some of Jesus' steps. But then there was that day when Jesus laid his hand on her head, gave her a hug, thanked her for the way she had answered God, and he told her he understood her troubles. Then he looked deep into her eyes and told her never to give up following him, and that was very important. Fundamental. It was important because his search was not***

***for the wrong certainties of the Pharisees. That was the certainty of rejection. What he wanted was following, and consecration of the womb. And so Mary slept a peaceful sleep.***

### **The Path that Leads to the Foot of the Cross**

And that is what Mary did. Challenging everyone and everything, and overcoming herself, she walked the path to the foot of the cross. Crying and stumbling, it was there that she found her true place. Tough place. Unacceptable and strange place. An absurd place of peace. There, at the foot of the cross she, unexpectedly, felt at home.

The cross is the place in which all good theology begins and ends. That's why all our theology has to be *theologia crucis*. Theology that can walk towards the foot of the cross and, confused, whisper the need of forgiveness, spell its inadequacy and celebrate the encounter with God's grace.

The cross is the best place to be. It's the most necessary place to be. But it is also the toughest place to be. Also for theology. For it is there that one can notice that salvation is not self-salvation—one of the toughest things to realize in life. Salvation is through grace, that's all theology needs, and that's all theology should, in the first place, be busy with. To inflect the verb of grace is theology's main occupation. To call to regret and to proclaim the possibility of forgiveness is the job that gives theolo-

gy meaning and dignity. To be a messenger of reconciliation in its deeply transcendent sense, and in the inclusively human dimension, is a beautiful task to be performed in a context of loss and loneliness. It's a good thing to serve the good news. So, it is good to do theology. The cross is, thus, a place of grace. A place to meet with God's unconditional love. It is, in essence, a place of life. It is the place of death that creates life, in the greatest expression of God's redeeming craziness.

Theology also needs to decide, to make an choice—it follows Mary to the foot of the cross, or it follows the disciples that, at first, took the runaway road. Theology done in the runaway road is only whispers thrown to the wind. It's a religious masturbation proposal. It's no good to make us pregnant of life's meaning and the clear perception of our historical call. It's good for nothing. The disciples knew that, that's why they went to meet Mary at the foot of the cross.

We will meet Mary again in the community of the Risen One. There she is, as a disciple among those who await the Holy Spirit's coming, as Jesus had ordered them to do. And so, she is among those who are waiting, and who are available to follow Jesus: 'They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers' (Acts 1:14). So she teaches us, with her life, that doing theology happens in discipleship. In prayer and in communion. In the expectancy of God's anointment and in the disposition to

serve him.

There is a last scene I want to bring to our memory. It's probable that Mary's life was surrounded with great certainties and great doubts. But it's the same with us, and things happen in the same way, and they happen in the same way with our theology. There are scenes Mary does not understand, but in her wisdom she respects. There are moments in which she doesn't have words, but she always has a heart.

Jesus' birth scene is marked with characters and words that Mary doesn't know how to face and how

to understand. But Mary treasured up all these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19). The boy is still a boy but, in the temple, he behaves as an adult, and the things he says aren't easy to understand, but she treasured all these things in her heart (Lk. 2:51). And that is how a good theology is. It can say some things and manage some words. But there are many things it does not know and does not understand. That, however, is not a problem, because its heart has to be much bigger than its mouth. Good theology is, therefore, the theology of the great heart.

## NEW FROM PATERNOSTER

### Fundamentalisms

Editor: Christopher H. Partridge

The most conspicuous form of religion to emerge during the 20th century is 'fundamentalism'. Any account of the modern world that ignores the impact of the forces of fundamentalism will be significantly deficient. Whether one considers debates within faith communities concerning the correct interpretation of sacred writings, or religiously inspired political activism, or indeed some forms of international terrorism, fundamentalism seems to be a perennial religious tendency. Written from sociological, ethnographical, anthropological, missiological, and theological perspectives, together these essays provide a source of reliable information and thoughtful reflection on contemporary manifestations of fundamentalism and fundamentalist-like trends.

Contributors include David Burnett, Colin Chapman, Harriet Harris, David Lyon, Chris Partridge, Peter Riddell and Peter Smith.

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