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HISTORY, THEOLOGY, AND SYMBOL

THE MOTHER OF JESUS IN

THE CANA NARRATIVE (JOHN 2:1-12), 1950-2005

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INTRODUCTION

Strong winds of change have been sweeping across the Johannine landscape since 1950, shaping its surface now according to one intellectual current, now another, and making it one of the most dynamic periods in modern history for the understanding of Jesus’ mother in the New Testament.¹ No less imposing have been the currents shaping the Marian landscape, which -- according to a tradition both ancient and venerable -- is thought to cross Johannine soil at several key points.² Since the mother of Jesus appears only twice in the Fourth Gospel -- in 2:1-12 and 19:25-27 -- most Marian scholars have focused their investigations on these two texts, extending outward toward the larger context of the Gospel and the entire Johannine corpus as necessary.³ Such specifically Mariological literature is to be read in light of the “well-nigh boundless” literature devoted to the Fourth Gospel as such, most of which treats the mother of Jesus as a minor character in the narrative, although the years following the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965) saw interest in her nearly vanish in many circles.⁴

We may speak, then, of two general orientations within the literature we are about to examine: one focusing primarily on the portrait of Jesus’ mother in the Fourth Gospel, and the other focusing primarily on the interpretation of the Gospel itself. While these two orientations are not mutually-exclusive -- a relatively small number of authors cross over, at least thematically -- they point to an expanding dichotomy within the literature relevant to the study of Jesus’ mother in the Fourth Gospel. One purpose of this study is to examine these diverging orientations and to expose the contours of this expanding dichotomy. The first and second chapters are devoted to the exposition and analysis of these respective orientations.

In the course of this investigation, it will be seen that this “well-nigh boundless literature” may be grouped around three interrelated themes: history, theology, and symbol, according
to their authors' specific concerns in pursuing their research. Each of these authors will be seen to take at least an implicit position concerning the relationship of history, theology, and symbol in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel and, a fortiori, in the portrait of Jesus’ mother found therein. A second purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the interpretation of both the Gospel and the portrait of Jesus’ mother hinges on one’s understanding of the relationship between these three levels of meaning. Thus the title, “History, Theology, and Symbol: The Mother of Jesus in the Cana Narrative.”

It will also be seen that these two aforementioned orientations yield very different portraits of Jesus’ mother in the Fourth Gospel, according to the methodological approach one brings to the task. The effort here will be to suggest a tertium quid, i.e., to examine the evangelist’s apparently-deliberate association of Jesus’ mother with certain specific symbols that have positive value in the narrative, and thereby to reveal his intention in painting an abiding portrait of her. In the third chapter, it will be seen that the Johannine portrayals of women/men, Galileans/Jews and stone/death/life suggest that the evangelist’s intention must be understood to have been positive unless compelling evidence to the contrary can be provided. The fourth chapter presents an evaluation of exegetical approaches and theological orientations, as well as suggested areas for further development, and proposes the appropriate hermeneutical context for interpreting the role of Jesus’ mother in the first Cana narrative.

This study was originally presented to the Pontifical Faculty of the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton, Ohio, in partial completion of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Sacred Theology.
CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS ON JESUS’ MOTHER

JOHN 2: 1-12 GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (NESTLE-ALAND)

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. 9 And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." 11 Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him. 12 After this, he and his mother, (his) brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days. (New American Bible)
The Text in Context

In the Gospel as we have it, the Cana narrative is bracketed by the prior account of Jesus’ call of his first disciples, which ends with the words “you shall see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man (1:51), and the following account of the temple cleansing (2:13-22). There are no textual variants, save in v. 12, where Bodmer, Sinaiticus, et al. read ἔκκλησια (a reading Aland & Black categorize as near-certain), while other manuscripts read ἔκκλησια or simply εὐαγγέλιον, which does not significantly affect the interpretation of the text. There are, nevertheless, a relatively large number of textual ambiguities.

First, vv.1-2 do not make clear whether Jesus and his mother arrived at the wedding together, or whether he and his disciples arrived later, when the wine had already run out, which would help explain why the mother addresses him about the lack of wine. Second, ὥσπερ ἔχει εὐαγγέλιον in v. 3 is sometimes translated as “they have no wine,” which is the literal sense, and sometimes as “they have no more wine,” which attempts to capture the meaning of ὅπως ὁ οἶνος ἔχει τὸν οἶνος (“the wine having run out”). Third, the expression ἵνα τῷ σῷ ἐμὶ is inherently problematic. The Vulgate had translated the phrase as “Quid mihi et tibi est,” thereby associating Jesus with his mother, while later translators have tended to rely on Old and New Testament parallels of ἵνα τῷ σῷ ἐμὶ, which appear to have a negative connotation (cf. Mk. 1:24). Fourth, the use of γυναῖκα (“Woman”) as a form of address for one’s mother, while clearly part of a Johannine pattern (cf. 4:21, 8:10, 19:26, 20:15), requires an explanation. Fifth, the expression ὅπως ἔχει ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἡμέρα μου may be translated either as “my hour has not yet come” or as “has not my hour come?” Sixth, the mother’s words ὅπως ἔχει ἡμέρα ἡ ἡμέρα μου εὐαγγέλιον (“Do whatever he tells you”) apparently have an Old Testament parallel (cf. Gn. 41:55) that leads many commentators to see the narrative in general,
and the water/wine motif in particular, as intrinsically symbolic, although there is no agreement among scholars concerning the referents of such symbols. Seventh, there is the reference to Jesus’ *semeia* that reveal his glory (*epómenov t'v doxavn au'twv*), although we are never told what “signs” are or what Jesus’ “glory” means. Eighth, we are told that Jesus’ disciples came to believe in him (*oiv ekklesian eis au'ton ol mozhwiv au'twv*), but it is not clear whether his mother and brothers already believed to some extent (cf. 7:5). Ninth, we are told that Jesus went down to Capernaum, along with his mother and brothers (and disciples), and that they stayed there only a few days, but it is not clear whether “they” refers to Jesus and his disciples alone (*oiv ekklesian ou polllacv au'twv*), or to all those who have been mentioned – which leaves open the question whether the Gospel sees Jesus’ family members as having accompanied him during the course of his ministry.

There are also a number of linguistic idiosyncracies to be considered. The Fourth Gospel contains the word *smeia* (sign) 17 times, but appears to avoid the word *dounamis* (mighty deed), which appears 10 times in Mark, 12 times in Matthew, 15 times in Luke, 10 times in Acts, but not at all in John. Similarly, the Fourth Gospel avoids the word *tevazo* (wonder), but uses the word *'epγwv* (work) 27 times, more often than Mark (2), Matthew (6), Luke (2) and Acts (10) combined. There is, then, a distinctively Johannine vocabulary to be considered, but the logic of its distinctiveness is lost in ambiguity.

This ambiguity is grounded in the vocabulary and grammar of the narrative itself. The word *' enep* (v.1, fem., dat., sing.) *may* refer to a 24-day period from midnight to midnight, or to a shorter period between dawn and dusk. In Jewish thought, several “days” may occur within the same 24-hour period. *'elnth* (v.2, 3rd person, aorist, sing., indic.) may mean “invited” or “called sumonned,” raising the question whether Jesus was one of the invited guests or had been
summoned in response to some crisis, e.g., the lack of wine. υπερηφανίζοντας (v.2, participle) with the genitive οἶνος typically means “lacking” or “running out,” but also has the sense of “being inferior,” and may be intended to set up the headwaiter’s comments in v.10. The word ὁρα (v.4, nom., sing., fem.) literally means “hour,” but also has the sense of “time” or “moment,” and may be the Johannine equivalent of the Synoptic καιρός (cf. Mk.1:15). ἤκα (v.4, 3rd person sing., pres., act., ind.), from the verb ἤκομο, “to have come,” “to arrive,” has the minority sense of “to concern,” which would allow the translation “it does not concern my hour.” ἀπείθησαν (v.11, acc., sing., fem.) is notoriously difficult to translate. Because 4:46-54 speaks of the “second” sign at Cana, most translators prefer “the first,” although it may also have the sense of “the beginning” or even “the cause,” in which case this would refer to “the beginning of Jesus’ signs at Cana in Galilee,” and not necessarily refer to other signs in the Gospel. ἔλεγκα (v.11, 3rd person, aor., act., indicative, plural) from the verb πιστέω, typically means “to believe” in the sense of “to put one’s trust in,” and does not necessarily preclude a greater quality of faith, as in 7:5.

As a result of these and other difficulties, translators have differed widely in their renditions of the Cana narrative, especially 2:4. The first edition of the New American Bible translated 2:4 as “How does this concern of yours involve me?” The 1991 editions reads: “How does your concern affect me?” The Revised Standard Version translates 2:4 as “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” – a translation that, unlike NAB, associates mother and son. The Jerusalem Bible, on the other hand, reads: “Woman, what do you want from me?” Several modern Italian bibles translate 2:4 as “Che ho da fare con te, o donna? Non è ancora giunta la mia ora” (distance), while many Spanish bibles read: “¿Qué tiene que ver eso conmigo y contigo, mujer?” and several French bibles read: “Qu'y a-t-il entre moi et toi, femme?” (association). Perhaps the difficulty in providing a faithful translation is best demonstrated in German. Luther
had translated 2:4 as “Jesus spricht zu ihr: Weib, was habe ich mit dir zu schaffen? Meine Stunde ist noch nicht gekommen,” while the International Bible Society now translates the same phrase as “Schreib mir nicht vor, was ich zu tun habe! Meine Zeit ist noch nicht gekommen!” All these translations claim to be both correct and faithful to the original Greek.

The aforementioned textual difficulties are further complicated by the suspicion that the Gospel itself may not have come down to us in original form, but may constitute a composite of originally-independent stories – even phrases within stories – that had very different meanings in their original contexts. Surprisingly, few of these textual difficulties concerned Catholic scholars prior to 1950, and their import appears to have dawned on exegetes and Marian scholars alike only gradually.

The years prior to the 1943 publication of Divino Afflante Spiritu were characterized by a conservative approach to the interpretation of scripture in Catholic circles. In that view, not only was everything contained in scripture assumed to be true, but everything affirmed by tradition was assumed to be somehow contained or foreshadowed in scripture. Thus the pro-active, post-biblical portrait of Mary proclaimed by the Church was routinely assumed to be consistent with the biblical portrait, with various theories put forth to explain any apparent discrepancies. With the promulgation of the aforementioned encyclical, however, historical-critical method took root in Catholic soil, and the truth-value of both scripture and tradition were called into question. In consequence, many Catholic scholars found themselves caught between two worlds: that of pro-active faith and that of historical-critical method.

Although the mother of Jesus is never named in the Fourth Gospel, the authors whose works are about to be studied have not the slightest doubt that the woman being discussed is, in fact, the Mary of Synoptic and later ecclesial tradition. Not only do they feel free to call her by name
(“Mary”), but some of them attribute to her titles used only in tradition, e.g., “our Lady.” This conviction will be seen to have certain consequences for their methodology, e.g., a tendency to appeal to parallel New Testament portraits of Mary for confirmation of their positions, as well as a discernible tendency to defend traditional Marian titles and privileges. The distinguishing characteristic of their approaches, however, is their focus on the mother herself as the point of departure for their reflections, rather than focusing on the Gospel, or on the Cana narrative as a pericope that should be studied within a larger context. In this chapter, we will be examining the writings of authors whose works contribute to the evolution of the discussion at hand. Although the presentation of these works will be largely chronological, the treatment of certain major works will be postponed until the appropriate moment.

By 1950, certain questions had already begun to be asked about the Fourth Gospel in general, and the Cana narrative in particular. The revisionist work of Rudolf Bultmann had gained a foothold on the Continent, and European scholars were suddenly inclined to question many taken-for-granted assumptions about the Gospel, including its authorship, literary integrity, and its portrayal of Jesus and his mother (Christology and Mariology). In this way, the Cana narrative, which had traditionally been considered an account of Jesus’ first miracle, came to be viewed as a highly theologized pre-ministry tale that was more symbolic than historical. By extension, the mother of Jesus, who had traditionally been understood as prompting him to perform the first of his miracles, now came to be viewed as someone who neither understood Jesus nor accompanied him during his ministry, and who therefore merited a “rebuke” (2:4) that effectively distanced her from Jesus, at least until Calvary.

The question turned on the translation and interpretation of 2:4 (οὗτος καὶ κοίμησεν Ἰησοῦν ὧν δὲ ὤρα ἤμων), which the Vulgate had rendered “Quid mihi et tibi est, mulier? Nondum venit hora
mea,” thereby associating Jesus and his mother in the question. Scholars dependent on the Vulgate typically translated the phrase into modern languages as “What is that to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come?” (Wycliffe, following the Vulgate, had translated the phrase as: “What to me and to thee, Woman?”) Once exegetes began to translate from the original sources, however, they discovered several problems. First, the expression ἐγὼ καὶ ὦμι as used in both Old and New Testaments apparently has a negative connotation, and is even placed on the lips of demons, so that its use in John 2:4 must be considered in light of those precedents. Second, the use of “Woman” as a form of address appears problematic both in itself and in relation to the other women so addressed in the Fourth Gospel. The woman at the well of Samaria is a known sinner, as is the woman caught in adultery. Mary Magdalene is described in Mark as a former demoniac. Thus, the use of “Woman” instead of a proper name is not something that can be passed over lightly. Third, the phrase οὐκ ἔχει ἡ ὡρα μου may be translated as either “my hour has not yet come” or as “has my hour already come?” In the first instance, which is supported by 7:30, 8:20, 12:23 and 13:1, Jesus would be saying he should not be expected to work miracles because it was not yet time for him to do so; that moment would arrive when the time came for him to be glorified (12:23). In the second instance, supported by the fact that Jesus actually performs the sign/miracle, he would be asking her if he should now work a miracle because – apparently unbeknownst to him – his hour had already arrived. The question of Jesus’ attitude toward his mother depends on how one translates and interprets these phrases. Erasmus’ translation from the original Greek was the first to imply a separation between mother and son: “Quid mihi tecu est, mulier?” Since Erasmus, many scholars not dependent on the Vulgate have concluded that ἐγὼ καὶ ὦμι implies at least psychological distance between Jesus and his mother.
Framing the Question

The Work of F.-M. Braun (1950)

The French theologian, F.-M. Braun, contributed a number of works that have influenced the evolution of both Marian and Johannine studies. In *La mere des fideles*, Braun departs from the traditional interpretation of John 2:4 – Jesus’ response to his mother, which the New American Bible translates as “How does this concern of yours involve me?” arguing that the reply actually emphasizes, not their relationship, but the distance that will exist between them until the arrival of Jesus’ hour. This distance is real, entailing a “shocking” refusal of the mother’s at-least-implicit request for a miracle, though it does not entail a rejection of her personally; neither is the distance permanent, since Jesus’ reference to an “hour to come” is implicitly an acknowledgment that at some yet unspecified point in the future such a request will be appropriate and, presumably, appropriately honored. Braun bases his argument on the notion that the whole of Jn. 19:17 through 19:42 is a deliberate effort to demonstrate that prophecies are being fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus. If, Braun argues, every incident described in 19:17 - 19:42 is a fulfillment of prophecy, must we not suspect that 19:25-27 is also intended as such? This leads Braun to conclude that the renewal of Jesus’ relationship with his mother in 19:25-27 has been prefigured in 2:1-11.

Braun’s effort, therefore, is to resolve the tension implicit in the Cana narrative by relating it to the encounter between mother and son at Calvary. This tactic seems appropriate because: 1) these are the only two pericopes in which the mother appears; 2) they occur at the beginning and end of Jesus’ public ministry, respectively; 3) the terminology (“Woman”, “mother”) is the same in each pericope; and 4) the mother is intentionally related to the community of disciples --
at Cana, because the disciples are said to believe in Jesus through her initiative, and at Calvary, through her new association with the disciple Jesus loved.

Braun’s study has the effect of articulating a number of questions to be taken up repeatedly by later commentators: 1) are Jesus’ words in 2:4 to be taken as a negative declaration, i.e., “my hour has not yet come,” or as a question, e.g., “has not my hour come?” 2) to what does the “hour” of Jesus refer: to the hour of his signs/miracles, or to the hour of his suffering and death? 3) what is the relationship of the Cana narrative to the rest of the Gospel, especially to 19:25-27? 4) do the use of “Woman” as a form of address, and the expression “to me and to you” imply a distance between mother and son? 5) If a distance is, in fact, implied by these usages, is this distance resolved at any point in the narrative, e.g., at Calvary, or are we to understand that a permanent rift always existed, or developed early on, between Jesus and his mother?

Braun’s approach is founded on certain premises, which would include: 1) the unity and integrity of the Fourth Gospel, 2) the apostolic or eyewitness authorship of the text, 3) a less-than-positive understanding of the encounter of mother and son at Cana, and 4) a positive interpretation of the encounter between Jesus and his mother at Calvary. Taken together, these premises permit Braun to conclude that according to an apostolic eyewitness, the temporary distancing begun at Cana was successfully resolved at Calvary, so that there is no Fourth Gospel basis for a less-than-positive understanding of the relationship between Jesus and his mother. Much of later scholarship was developed in response to, if not Braun per se, the issues he articulated.

A Reply to Braun by Christian Ceroke (1956)

Although Braun’s analysis of the Cana narrative was careful and respectful, his work did not sit well with many Catholic commentators, who struggled to reconcile the obviously awkward
reply – some would say “rebuke” -- in 2:4 with the more positive understanding of the relationship between Jesus and his mother found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, as well as in Catholic-Orthodox tradition. In brief, the very notion of a distance between Jesus and his mother seemed antithetical to everything Catholic scholars took for granted, and called into question both their understanding of Mary and, a fortiori, their understanding of the Church: if Jesus was capable of distancing himself from his mother, scholars understood, he was also capable of distancing himself from the Church that, at least theoretically, mirrored her perfection.

Among those exegetes who took up the debate was the Carmelite, Christian Ceroke, for whom the pivotal question was “Are Jesus’ words to his mother at Cana meant to separate her from his public ministry, or to associate her with that ministry in some way?”

In response to Braun’s seminal questions, Ceroke replies that: 1) the word “hora” refers, not to the hour of Jesus’ suffering and glorification, but primarily to the hour of his signs, i.e., the hour of his self-disclosure; 2) the Cana and Calvary pericopes are intimately linked with one another, so that one may best understand the meaning of Cana in reference to Calvary; 3) neither the use of “Woman” as a form of address nor the expression “δει Εσώ και ολόθρησκόν” (even with its biblical antecedents) constitutes a sufficient argument for any separation between Jesus and his mother, which therefore eliminates the necessity of any resolution at Calvary.

In Ceroke’s view, it is significant that the mother speaks to the waiters immediately following what appears to be a negative response from her son, noting that wherever the evangelist employs the construction ὅ τι ἐδει (cf. 14:13, 15:16), there is no question of uncertainty, but rather non-specificity, as in 14:13: “Whatever you ask in my name I will do, so as to glorify the Father in the Son.” Again in 15:16 we find the same construction and non-specific
connotation: “It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure, so that all you ask the Father in my name he will give you.”

Therefore, the fact that the mother acts immediately in a way that apparently anticipates positive action by her son leads to the conclusion that what is implied by “dict eiōi kai oai?” was something that, in fact, warranted such a positive reaction. Ceroke links mother and son in his rendering of 2:4, “Of what concern is this distress and anxiety to me and to thee, Lady?” and explains the mother’s immediate action in terms of the use of “not yet” -- which he understands to imply a short delay, as in “not yet for me the suitable moment,” i.e., there will be a short delay before the right time arrives. And that right moment arrives precisely because the mother precipitates it with her request; by acting as catalyst, she induces her son to perform a messianic act that discloses his identity to the disciples and evokes a faith-response from them.

In his attempt to reply to Braun’s conclusions, Ceroke shows that he shares most of the same premises: 1) the unity and integrity of the Gospel; 2) the apostolic/eyewitness authorship of the Gospel; 3) a positive interpretation of the encounter between mother and son at Calvary. The major difference between their positions is that since Ceroke does not see a distancing, but rather an association between mother and son at Cana, he sees no need to resolve any alleged tension in terms of the Calvary scene. Ceroke arrives at this position through his creative translation of “dict eiōi kai oai.”

History, Theology, and Symbol in Braun and Ceroke

Both Braun and Ceroke write with an appreciation for critical method and the freedom provided them as Catholic scholars in Divino Afflante Spiritu. In this way, they recognize that history comes to us in scripture only through the medium of theology -- indeed, Braun entitles one of his works Jean le theologien. Yet, even with the proviso that this has traditionally been
considered a "spiritual gospel"\textsuperscript{16}, both authors reflect a tendency to maximize history and minimize theology, at least by contemporary standards. Ceroke writes confidently of what Jesus was \textit{actually} saying and doing (\textit{and even thinking}) at Cana, based on his reading of the Gospel and related New Testament witnesses. John's theologizing is limited to the way he tells the tale, without any recognition of literary creativity by the evangelist. Braun is apparently more concerned with theological creativity, especially when he points to allegedly Johannine patterns \textit{in 19:17-42}. Yet he too appears convinced that theology is the evangelist's way of reworking events that are primarily historical. To the extent that the evangelist employs symbols, he does so to communicate the historical truth according to his particular theological perspective. History, theology, and symbol are thought to be intertwined in a divinely inspired narrative that requires little more than faith to understand and appreciate.

To the extent that Ceroke and Braun may be taken to represent the status of Catholic scholarship at the time (1950s) concerning the role of Jesus' mother in the Fourth Gospel, we may say that: 1) such authors are concerned with the actual relationship between mother and son, as this relationship is apparently disclosed through the historical events related in 2:1-12 and 19:25-27; 2) there is a difference of opinion concerning whether or not a temporary distancing between mother and son is signaled by the apparently awkward exchange found in 2:3-5; 3) nowhere does it enter into their reflections that either the awkward exchange or the alleged distancing could be the original creation of the evangelist; 4) they identify certain problem points on which the evolution of this debate will likely turn: the meaning of "Woman," of Jesus' "hour," of the expression "

\textit{tē ἑμών καὶ σοῦ?}" and of the mother's instruction to the servants, "οὐ νῦν λέγει ὑμῖν ποιήσας." These are the questions taken up by scholars in the years after Braun and Ceroke.
The Cana Narrative Before the Vatican Council: Stephen Hartdegen (1960)

As the Second Vatican Council was about to convene, Stephen Hartdegen summarized the status quaestionis in Catholic Cana interpretation, employing the faith terms “Our Lord” and “Our Lady” for Jesus and his mother, respectively, as if unaware of the increasingly-vocal challenges to their traditional portrayals. Like Braun and Ceroke before him, Hartdegen approaches the question from the perspective of the “problematic expressions,” beginning with the words “they have no more wine.”

For Boismard, Brunet, Maeso, and Van den Busche, Mary’s words to her Son merely imply common concern or anxiety over the embarrassment of lack of sufficient wine. For Braun, Gächter and Deiss, Mary does not ask for a miracle explicitly but for relief from embarrassment for the bridal pair by some natural means; for Migliorini, Mary’s words are an observation which Jesus accepts as a command from His Mother. For Galot, Ceroke and many others, Mary’s words in the light of the context imply a request for a miracle. 17

Hartdegen suggests that the mother’s words are not a request, much less a demand, for a miracle, but an expression of sympathetic concern for the bride and bridegroom, and should not be construed as putting Jesus’ identity at risk. His reply is also a simple statement of fact: it is not yet time for him to reveal his messianic identity. The mother’s instructions to the servants nevertheless reveal a supernatural faith that will soon be expected of all who see Jesus’ signs.

In this view, Jesus’ reply, which NAB translates as “How does your concern affect me?” should be translated as “What is that to me and to thee?” because Jesus is about to begin his public ministry and is inviting his mother to move from their prior, familiar relationship to a new
one based on supernatural faith in him as Messiah. The use of “Woman” is meant to mark the transition from a faith based on human relationships to one based on spiritual relationship. The reference to Jesus’ “hour” therefore alerts the reader to the messianic nature of what is to come, culminating in his self-sacrifice at Calvary.

Cullmann considers it to be a reference to the time or hour for changing wine into the blood of Christ at the Last Supper. Brunet considers "the hour" to mean the time of Christ's death when His power to work miracles will cease. At present He possesses that power. Braun, Gächter and Van den Busche understand "my hour" to refer to Christ’s death. When it comes, Mary will again find Jesus submissive to her. In this way Jesus draws Mary’s attention to spiritual rather than temporal realities to be concerned about. Boismard regards "the hour" as that of Christ’s glorification, exaltation, the hour of returning to the Father. The hour of miracles whereby Jesus manifests His glory is the beginning, or complement of the full manifestation of His glory through His resurrection. Ceroke understands it to be the hour of miracles which Jesus is awaiting as soon to take place.¹⁸

Hartdegen suggests that Jesus’ first sign revealed his glory, meaning the glory that will be his when he is fully revealed as Messiah, and his disciples, who had believed in him as the mother had – on the basis of their former relationship – come to believe in him as Messiah.

In almost every respect, Hartdegen follows the path cleared by Braun and Ceroke. Yet his work is significant in at least two ways. First, immediately prior to the convening of the Council, he unapologetically interprets the Cana narrative with an eye on Catholic tradition, conspicuously careful to arrive at conclusions consistent with faith. Second, and perhaps more
importantly, he relates the Cana narrative to the faith statement found in 20:30: Christ's purpose in performing His miracles is no different from the evangelist's purpose in recording them: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing, you may have life in his name." This is at least implicit recognition that the evangelist writes with a theological end in mind, namely, that of leading readers to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, and marks a kind of transition between the works of Braun and Ceroke, on the one hand, and those of later scholars.

AN ATTEMPT AT SYNTHESIS: J.-P. Michaud (1963)

The Second Vatican Council was now in session, and the direction of Catholic theology was under debate. Would the Church insist on traditional approaches to theology, or would a new openness to the world require asking new questions, including whether the pro-active, post-biblical role of Jesus' mother was as well-grounded in scripture as in tradition?

Braun had written from a macrocosmic perspective, examining the Fourth Gospel and the figure of Jesus' mother in general. Ceroke, on the other hand, wrote from a microcosmic perspective, focusing on the interpersonal dynamics of the Cana narrative. J.-P. Michaud attempts a synthesis of these two approaches, studying the sign performed at Cana within its Johannine context.19 He begins by identifying the problematic phrases in the text.

"How Does This Concern of Yours Involve Me?"

Jesus' reply to his mother in 2:4 is manifestly of Semitic origin, Michaud argues.20 In Judges 11:12, Jephthah sends a message to the Ammonites, saying in effect, "What do you have against me?"

11. So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their leader and commander. In Mizpah, Jephthah settled all his affairs before the Lord. 12. Then he sent
messengers to the king of the Ammonites to say, “What have you against me (תִּפְלִית קָדִי אָאוֹי) that you come to fight with me in my land?”

If the Septuagint correctly translates this text as תִּפְלִית קָדִי אָאוֹי, and if the original (mah-li walaκ) implied an opposition between Jephthah and the king, the NAB rendering of the latter as “What have you against me?” would appear to preclude any positive interpretation of the exchange between mother and son at Cana. Michaud, however, prefers the translation, “What is that to me and to you?” as in the Vulgate rendering, “quid mihi et tibi, mulier?” and considers the question rhetorical, anticipating a negative reply, i.e., there is nothing (wrong) between us. The fact that the king of the Ammonites is threatening war in order to retrieve land the Israelites had allegedly confiscated might lead one to conclude that there was, in fact, some issue dividing the two principals, but Michaud contends the words actually indicate the speaker is unaware of any issue between them. The implication would therefore be that in employing this same expression in 2:4, the evangelist is portraying Jesus as being unaware of any issue separating him from his mother.

Again in II Chronicles 35:21, the Aramaic expression is translated as תִּפְלִית קָדִי אָאוֹי which NAB translates as: “What quarrel is there between us….?”

After Josiah had done all this to restore the temple, Neco, king of Egypt, came up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to intercept him. 21. Neco sent messengers to him, saying: “What quarrel is between us, king of Judah? (תִּפְלִית קָדִי אָאוֹי) I have not come against you this day, for my war is with another kingdom, and God has told me to hasten.

Thus the assumption on the part of the speaker is that there is, or should be, no issue dividing them. In Kings 17:18, Michaud claims to find an equivalent expression -- or better, a negative
equivalent of mah-li walak, and in II Kings 3:13 he translates the phrase as “*quel rapport peut-il y avoir entre nous, entre moi, prophète de Yahweh, et toi, adorateur des Baals?*”21 The clear implication is that there is, and can be, no rapport between the two parties so described. Michaud concludes, therefore, that mah-li walak has a certain flexibility according to its context. There is consistently a measure of surprise, often a concern for reconciliation rather than confrontation, sometimes the anticipation of eventual conflict. Such Old Testament parallels, he concludes, do not reveal a sufficiently uniform pattern to provide a reliable guideline. Equivalent Semitic expressions may be found that imply either commonality or separation.22

Turning his attention to the New Testament, Michaud claims to find equivalent expressions employed by demons to articulate their lack of commonality with Jesus. In Mark 1:24, the text reads τί ἡμιν καὶ σοί, which is taken verbatim into Matthew 8:29 and Luke 4:34. In Mark 5:7, however, we read ἄ έξων καὶ σοί, precisely the construction found in Jn. 2:4 and Luke 8:28, rendered by NAB as “Why meddle with me....?”

6. Catching sight of Jesus at a distance, he ran up and did him homage, 7. shrieking in a loud voice, “Why meddle with me (ἄ έξων καὶ σοί), Jesus, Son of God Most High? I implore you in God’s name, do not torture me!”

Thus, a Synoptic expression found exclusively on the lips of demons or those possessed by demons, is employed by the evangelist as Jesus’ response to his mother at Cana. Michaud does not comment on the potentially negative significance of this usage.

“Woman”

By 1963, Michaud could write that the majority of scholars considered “Woman” to be a title that implied no disrespect, since the more obvious way of expressing something uncomplimentary would have been to employ the dative rather than the vocative γυνα. The title
“Woman,” he concludes, is an honorary title, equivalent to “mother” but with greater solemnity. This does not, however, satisfactorily explain why γυνή appears alongside “mother” in 19:27, and is not apparently the reason for its use in other Fourth Gospel texts, e.g. 4:21. Nevertheless, the fact that the mother immediately issues instructions to the waiters is inconsistent with a negative interpretation of “Woman,” especially since the evangelist notes that the mother accompanies Jesus to Capernaum after these events.

It is to Fourth Gospel theology we must turn to understand the significance of “Woman.” The title is encountered at two key moments in the Gospel: at the beginning and at the end, i.e., at Cana and at Calvary. In this way, it creates a kind of inclusion, entitling us to find in the first usage the same resonance found in the second. And in that second usage, the title has a decidedly messianic quality: the Calvary scene is not a simple manifestation of filial piety, but “un acte interessant la redéption du monde, redéption ou la femme a son rôle à jouer.” In the final analysis, Michaud concludes that the Cana narrative is actually something of a rough draft of the final Gospel, in which Jesus’ mother appears in increasingly important positions vis-à-vis her son and the work of the Church (the sequence being Cana, Calvary and Revelation Ch.12). Having heard Jesus employ the title “Woman” at Cana, the evangelist meditated on its significance throughout a lifetime of encounters with this woman, and eventually composed his account, highlighting her role in the story of salvation, from the promise of Genesis 3:15 to the culminating scene in Revelation 12. For this reason, in the mind of the evangelist, the meaning of “Woman” in 2:4 would have been more positive than what would perhaps occur to someone reading the text from our contemporary perspective.
The “Hour” of Jesus

The word ὧν occurs more frequently in the Fourth Gospel than in any other. More importantly, in this Gospel the word has a significance not detected in the Synoptic usages. After setting aside those texts in which ὧν is used in a non-theological sense, and those that may be Synoptic parallels, as well as those in which Jesus’ hour is clearly related to Messianic times, there remains a group of texts in which ὧν is modified by a possessive adjective, e.g., my hour, his hour, etc., by a demonstrative adjective, e.g., that hour, or by a definite article, e.g., the hour. In these instances, we are concerned, Michaud argues, not with chronological time, but with a highly-charged notion of theological time. The ultimate significance of Jesus’ hour is related to 512:23 and 13:1, where we learn that the time has come for Jesus to be glorified, i.e., to pass from this world to the Father. Thus, in performing the first of his signs at Cana, Jesus was pointing to that hour when he would be fully revealed to the world as Messiah, i.e., at Calvary. Cana is, indeed, the hour of his first miracle, but its relevance does not lie in the performance of miracles per se, since these are oriented to the full revelation of Jesus’ glory in an hour that has not yet arrived. Cana is also the hour of Jesus’ glorification, but only to the extent that the sign of Cana points to a glory not yet fully revealed. Prior to the arrival of his hour, Jesus works signs that have the twofold purpose of revealing his glory and enhancing the faith of his disciples.

Having examined the various problematic passages within Jn. 2:1-12, Michaud summarizes his findings: Jesus’ mother is asking for a remedy for a specific situation, the lack of wine. Jesus responds to her request with highly-charged theological language that points to a messianic, rather than material fulfillment. Jesus’ mother understands from these words that she is to act, and the subsequent performance of the miracle vindicates her understanding as well as her actions. The focus of Michaud’s investigation now turns to the overall text.
A Symbolic Portrait

In Michaud’s view, there are two levels of meaning in the Fourth Gospel: the material/historical level, and the symbolic/theological level. Each of the events in the narrative actually took place in the historical life of Jesus. Yet the evangelist has chosen to preserve them, not for their own sake, but in order to convey through them a deeper, theological-symbolic meaning oriented to faith in Jesus.30 Throughout the so-called Book of Signs, the emphasis is constantly on the replacement of the ancient economy of salvation with the new and superior economy: “For while the Law was given through Moses, this enduring love came through Jesus Christ.” (1:17) Especially in the deliberate mention of the water used for Jewish ritual purification, which is replaced by the abundance of wine, Michaud sees the symbolism of the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood replacing the Old Covenant of laws and observances, even as the wedding motif is a symbol of the new and superior union between God and humankind taking place in Jesus. The transformation of water into wine manifests the glory of Jesus as Messiah and points to the economy of the Spirit as the fullness of the messianic era in the final hour, when Jesus announces that “It is finished” and gives over his spirit (19:30).

Michaud resolves the problem of Jesus’ enigmatic response to his mother by suggesting that the mother had made a request for material wine, while Jesus responded in terms of the messianic significance of the wine. Therefore, the expression found in 2:4 is actually a transitional phrase from one level of meaning to another, serving to alert the reader to the “something new” going on just beneath the surface of the text. For the same reason, Jesus employs the peculiar form of address “Woman” to heighten our attention to the messianic nature of what is to follow.
Mariological Symbolism

Michaud is careful to note that although the Cana narrative is attractive to those who search for Marian content, it is primarily Christological. Even in the proper Christological perspective, however, the role of Jesus' mother should not be reduced to that of a mere functionary: she is portrayed as a woman of faith and confidence in her son's ability to work wonders, even prior to the disciples' movement to faith. Michaud therefore suggests that this is an instance of her functioning as Mediatrix: she is not simply an auxiliary at Cana, but the mother of all the living, even as Eve was the mother of all those who drew physical life from her. Mary is the mother of all those who will believe in her son, represented by the disciple Jesus loved in 19:25-27 -- all of which is prepared by her mediation at Cana, where the first disciples are brought to faith through her intervention.

Michaud, Ceroke, and Braun

Although they diverge in terms of method, the works of Braun, Ceroke, and Michaud tend to converge on certain main ideas. First, more than anything else, they are concerned with the Cana narrative as a historical reality that took place within the lifetimes of Jesus and his mother, rather than as a theological construct. Second, each of them assumes the unity and integrity of the Fourth Gospel, and therefore of the Cana narrative. Third, they take for granted the apostolic eyewitness authorship of the entire Gospel, as well as the Book of Revelation. Fourth, they assume the compatibility of the Gospels, as well as the orientation of the Old Testament to its fulfillment in Jesus. This permits them to move back and forth among the scriptures without apparent discomfort. Fifth, by drawing on the knowledge gleaned from other biblical sources, they consider themselves free to psychologize concerning the motives of various biblical characters, as well as those of the evangelist in composing his work. Sixth, they are convinced
that in order to interpret the Cana narrative, one must first solve the puzzles associated with the notion of Jesus' hour, the use of "Woman" as a form of address, and the enigmatic phrase η ἡ δεξία καὶ αὐτή. Seventh, they are obviously reacting to the felt necessity of defending a traditional understanding of Jesus' mother, complete with certain privileges. Thus, for example, Michaud introduces the subject of mediation into a discussion where it seems at least slightly superfluous.

History, Theology, and Symbol

In Michaud's view, it is Jesus who is the primary theologian at Cana, not the evangelist. Jesus' use of the title "Woman" is the signal for the evangelist to reflect on what he has witnessed, and to arrive at a deeper understanding of what he has experienced. Jesus himself performs signs and employs language that will, in the light of the Spirit, point toward the fullness of his self-disclosure as Messiah, as well as to the coming of the Spirit.

In keeping with this rather limited notion of theological creativity, Michaud understands the Fourth Gospel's use of symbolism to be allegorical, with the sensus plenior becoming clear only in light of the Easter events. There are, then, only two levels of meaning in the Gospel: the historical and the symbolic, with the theology of the evangelist a vehicle for each.

Michaud published his research in 1963, as the Second Vatican Council was taking shape, and therefore before the promulgation of either Dei Verbum or Lumen Gentium. To grasp how the Ecumenical Council influenced the interpretation of the scriptures, we turn now to the word of a scholar whose career spans a period of many years before and after the Council.

AN ABIDING PORTRAIT: RENE LAURENTIN (1968)

Among those authors of this period who have studied the Cana narrative in detail, few were as influential, and none as prolific, as Canon Rene Laurentin. Although his pre-conciliar and post-conciliar works number in the dozens, it is to his Court Traite sur la Vierge Marie that we
may turn for insight into the effects of scholarly research and conciliar teaching, since this particular work has been published and revised many times in the years before and after the Council. Court Traite addresses in detail many of the historical and theological questions in Marian studies. It is divided into two sections: the first, "Doctrinal Development," outlines the history of Marian doctrines in six historical periods, beginning with the Scriptures. The second section is a study of the principal Marian doctrines, from their preparations in the Old Testament up to the parousia where the Church will rejoin the Theotokos in her integral glorification. The scriptural and historical view of Marian doctrines was in sharp contrast to the more speculative approach prevalent in the preconciliar period in the search for the fundamental principle of Mariology. Vatican II saw the development of Marian doctrine within the framework of salvation history: Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church.

Nevertheless, the mature Laurentin always writes as a scholar whose life has been informed by the experience of Jesus' mother: an experience that is at once personal and communal. At the personal level, he has dedicated his life to the study of Marian themes. At the communal level, he has become the world's foremost expert on Marian apparitions and, although he does not evaluate such phenomena uncritically, he understands himself to be a member of a Church uniquely privileged by these experiences.

In the General Introduction to his fifth edition of Court Traite, Laurentin recognizes the contributions of both Braun and Michaud, yet he willingly acknowledges the silence of scripture on many Marian themes, including those that have evolved into dogmas. This edition, he tells readers, represents ten years of scientific research, as well as studied reflection on the new orientations provided by the Council. From now on, Marian theology will have to be more
attentive to its sources in scripture and patristics, more Christocentric, and more clearly linked with ecclesiology.

In particular, Laurentin identifies two conciliar orientations that will be influential for the future of Marian theology: the anthropological and the penumatological. For this reason, he studies the mother of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel in relation to the Lukan infancy narratives, in which her human qualities and relationship to the Spirit are most in evidence. In his view, the Fourth Gospel explains the Gospel of Luke "come se essi furono testimoni di due tappe di una stessa riflessione." Already in the first chapter, the evangelist shows his familiarity with and preference for typically Lukan themes: the Baptist as precursor, the idea that Jesus finds no home among his own people, the virgin birth, the divine sonship. Having thereby justified future appeals to the Lukan narrative, Laurentin now turns his attention to the Cana and Calvary narratives.

Each of these texts treats the mother's function during Jesus' hour; in each, the mother is addressed by Jesus as "woman," while the evangelist speaks of her only as "the mother of Jesus." In this way, Jesus is leading us to see in her "l'omologo di Eva nella nuova creazione che inaugura la venuta del verbo. Essa è la donna per eccellenza, associata al nuovo Adamo, la madre dei viventi (cf. Gen. 3:20, Jn. 19:27)." Jesus' response to his mother, therefore, should be understood, not as a rebuke, but in light of the response he makes to her in Luke 2:49, which merely indicates that she has not fully understood all that was implied by Jesus' identity and mission. Nevertheless, Laurentin does not shrink from the full implications of the text: "Queste parole significano la separazione del Figlio e della Madre durante il ministero del Salvatore." It will be, however, a separation that is neither rigid nor permanent, since the mother is soon to accompany her son to Capernaum. And, in the final analysis, it will be a fruitful separation, since
the son immediately grants the mother’s request. It remains clear, however, that mother and son have different perceptions of the event and its significance. “Gesù ha visto nel banchetto e nel matrimonio di Cana un simbolo, non soltanto del banchetto eucaristico, ma anche delle nozze escatologiche di Dio e dell’umanità che l’Eucaristia significa e prepara.”

As had Michaud, Laurentin suggests that the mother was discussing only the lack of material wine, while Jesus was discussing the need for both the Eucharist and for the fullness of gifts appropriate to the messianic banquet. As had Braun, he appeals to Calvary for relief from the tension implicit in 2:4. Just as the words of the first man according to the flesh constituted Eve as mother of the living, the words of the first man according to the Spirit constitute Mary as mother of those who will have new life through Jesus. The working of Jesus’ first sign at Cana prefigures the events of Jesus’ passion and death, in which the Church will be born. In these latter events, the mother receives the Church into her care, entrusted to her by her son. It is precisely as mother of all believers in Jesus that the Woman of 2:4 becomes the New Eve in 19:27.

Laurentin has adopted a methodology that differs considerably from those of Braun, Ceroke, and Michaud -- due in large part to the fact that he is reworking an earlier text instead of composing a new essay. In this way, he shows comparatively little interest in the so-called problem passages with which these authors struggled, and arrives at his destination -- the identification of Jesus’ mother as the New Eve -- with relatively little difficulty. Clearly, he shares most of their exegetical presuppositions: unity and integrity of the Gospel, apostolic authorship, compatibility of biblical texts, a positive understanding of the encounter between mother and son at Calvary, and a tendency to confine symbolism within allegorical boundaries.
Yet he realizes that these presuppositions will no longer be taken for granted outside the increasingly-narrow confines of post-conciliar Mariology.

History, Theology, and Symbol

As had Michaud, Laurentin sees Jesus himself as the primary theologian of the Fourth Gospel, with the evangelist faithfully recording the theological and symbolic motifs through which Jesus communicates to his listeners and readers. Seeing the deeper, messianic significance of the wine, Jesus employs language that points toward the fulfillment of his signs in his hour, i.e., the hour of his passion and glorification. In this way, the historical and symbolic levels of meaning are delicately intertwined, while the theological tends to get subsumed in the process. Nevertheless, it seems legitimate to ask whether Laurentin has, in fact, discovered the New Eve motif, or has perhaps superimposed it upon the text. His failure to explain why other Johannine uses of “Woman” are not similarly related to this motif seems to argue in favor of eisegesis. This same tendency becomes visible in the Apostolic Exhortation, Marialis Cultus.

AN ECCLESIASTICAL PORTRAIT: MARIALIS CULTUS (1974)

The influence of authors sympathetic to Laurentin’s approach may be seen in the structure and content of Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation, Marialis Cultus. In the first section of this document, Mary is presented as “model of the Church in divine worship,” while in the second we encounter “Trinitarian, Christological, and Ecclesial aspects of devotion to the Blessed Virgin.” It is within the presentation of Mary as model of the Church that we first encounter the Cana narrative. After having explored the notion of Mary as attentive virgin, for which the biblical evidence is taken from the Lukan infancy narratives, the exhortation proceeds to identify her as the virgin at prayer, combining Lukan and Johannine imagery to achieve a unified portrait. The Magnificat, Mary’s prayer par excellence, is “the song of messianic times in
which there minglesthe joy of the ancient and the new Israel. Mary is the model of the Church
at prayer in that her hymn has become the prayer of the whole Church in all ages. It is as the
virgin at prayer that Mary appears at Cana, intervening to seek relief for a human need, and
evoking faith from the disciples. Her words, “Do whatever he tells you,” echo the words of
Israel in response to the Old Covenant, as well as the words of the Father during the baptism
theophany.

The effort to relate Jesus’ mother at Cana to both Old and New Testament parallels is not
new in Marian theology. We have seen it in Braun, Ceroke, and Michaud. Here, however, the
parallel is explicitly with the theme of covenant, so that the mother is portrayed as instructing the
waiters to comply with the New Covenant made by God through Jesus. Her role, then, is not
merely to invite faith and/or obedience -- relatively docile attitudes in themselves -- but active
compliance with the New Covenant, a theme that will be taken up by Ignace de la Potterie in his
work on Mary in the mystery of the Covenant.

History, Theology, and Symbol

Marialis Cultus makes no distinction between levels of meaning in scripture; such
distinctions are not ordinarily expected in magisterial documents, which are a genre unto
themselves, and not one bound by the conventions of critical scholarship. The failure to do so in
this particular instance, however, would seem to indicate what direction Marian theology will
take in years to come. Following the lead of scholars like Laurentin, the effort will be to return to
the patristic interpretation of scripture as the foundation upon which theological presentations of
Mary should be constructed. Within that narrowly-confined approach, Mary’s role in the life of
Christ and the Church, her relationship to the Spirit and to the liturgical life of the Church, will
be studied. In this view, “history” may be understood as the biblical witness, “theology” as the
patristic interpretation of that "history," and "symbol" as a deeper sense (sensus plenior) within the biblical portrait.

More than anything else, Marialis Cultus shares with the authors we have studied the conviction that the biblical portrait of Mary is positive, and that this positive portrait is also present within the Fourth Gospel. The Exhortation, however, goes well beyond authors like Braun and Michaud in extending that positive valuation to the Cana narrative. Significantly, even as the Exhortation was being prepared, other scholars were rapidly undermining the premises upon which that positive portrait was thought to be built, including the unity and integrity of the texts in question.

RECONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE: JOHN MCHUGH (1978)

John McHugh examined the Cana narrative within the context of his study of the Mother of Jesus in the New Testament. Like many of the authors whose works we have reviewed, McHugh is aware of certain problematic passages in the narrative. Unlike them, he acknowledges the validity of Rudolf Bultmann's critique, which held that the Gospel as we now have it is a composite from various sources by various authors, who employed at least a Signs Source, and perhaps also a Discourse Source, to weave together the Gospel. Bultmann had distinguished between the work of the evangelist and that of an alleged Ecclesiastical Redactor, who was thought to have edited the sources to make their contents more palatable to an audience more concerned with Church and sacraments than with history. Within the alleged Signs Source, the Cana narrative is identified as "the first of Jesus' signs," while 4:46-54 describes the second sign. Whereas the awareness of numerous breaks (aporia) in the narrative had led Bultmann and others to suggest rather elaborate reconstructions, none of these satisfied McHugh,
who proposed to reconstruct the pre-Johannine text by eliminating characteristically Johannine words, phrases, and constructions, which he assumed to be Johannine insertions.

1. There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2. Now Jesus also had been invited, with his disciples, to the wedding. 3. So when the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus told him, “They have no wine.” 4. Now there were six stone water-pots there, for the Jewish custom of purification, each having a capacity of two or three firkins. 5. So Jesus said (to the waiters), “Fill the water-pots with water,” and they filled them right up to the top. 6. Then he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the head waiter,” so they took it. 7. And as soon as the head waiter had tasted the water, he called the bridegroom 8. and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when men are half-drunk, that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now.” 9. This Jesus did as the beginning of signs, in Cana of Galilee.

According to McHugh’s somewhat labored reconstruction, the evangelist originally had this Synoptic-pattern miracle narrative before him, to which he added the Marian dimension in order to emphasize that this was not merely a wonder, but a sign, a symbol of great religious truth about Jesus. Since the Greek construction found in 2:3 (λέγει ... ποτήρι) is rare in the Fourth Gospel, the words of Jesus’ mother must be considered pre-Johannine, although Jesus’ response belongs to the evangelist, and not to the source in which the mother’s words were found. Furthermore, since the transition from 2:3 to 2:5 would be a “complete non sequitur” if we were to interpret Jesus’ words to his mother as anything like a rebuke, McHugh follows Michaud in considering 2:4 a transitional phrase meant to elevate the reader’s understanding from the material to the spiritual plane. His translation of 2:4 -- “what concern is it to me and to thee?” -- has the effect of linking together mother and son in an attitude of prescience and
confidentiality. At the same time, the subsequent interpolation in 2:9, viz., “only the waiters knew, since they had drawn the water,” is meant to help the reader understand that certain truths will only be grasped much later, in the light of Jesus’ hour. Only in the light of the resurrection will we comprehend that Jesus has indeed saved the best wine for last, i.e., the best and most powerful of his signs. In some mysterious way, however, Jesus’ mother is already aware that his mission is not confined to the things of this world. Thus the evangelist places upon her lips words which only one who believed in Jesus totally could utter: “Do whatever he tells you.” At Cana, the mother is represented as believing in her son before his first sign is performed. This order of faith is acknowledged at Calvary, where Jesus first “sees” his mother, and only then “sees” he disciple he loved. His seeing, in the highly-theological Johannine sense, has the effect of establishing a new relationship between them, much as one who sees Jesus as Son enters into a new relationship with the Father.  

McHugh and His Predecessors  

On certain exegetical issues, McHugh clearly stands within the traditional approach to Cana and Calvary, e.g., linking 2:1-12 and 19:25-27 and the translation of 2:4 as an association of mother and son. Yet he numbers among his premises certain ideas quite foreign to the Braun-Ceroke-Michaud continuum. First, he posits the existence of multiple sources and multiple authors. Second, he employs the insights of Form Criticism, distinguishing between the original form of a pericope in its sitz-im-leben and the more elaborate form in which the pericope may appear in one or more New Testament texts. Third, he acknowledges that the basic story of Cana may have been pre-Johannine, including the presence, but not the activity, of Jesus’ mother, so that the extant text would be considered to contain intentional glosses by the evangelist. Fourth, he heightens the theological creativity of the evangelist in the Cana narrative, while reducing the
historical event to the status of a miracle performed at the implied request of the mother. What emerges from McHugh’s analysis is a two-tiered portrait of Jesus and his mother. On the first, historical level, Jesus appears as a kind of thaumaturge, albeit within a family context unknown in the Synoptics outside the infancy narratives; the mother appears as a kind of shadowy figure who approaches her son only to move the story along, departing the scene as soon as her function is performed. On the second, theological level, the evangelist weaves a tale that portrays Jesus, not as a thaumaturge, but as one whose identity will not be fully disclosed in such limited events as miracles. And the mother is portrayed as a woman of faith whose actions reflect the attitude of those who will eventually believe in her son: “do whatever he tells you.”

History, Theology, and Symbol

McHugh’s work constitutes a genuine departure from the earlier tendency to mesh history and theology into one’s interpretation of Jesus and then superimpose it upon the text. Instead of Jesus the theologian, we now have the evangelist who, employing sources in a new and creative way, tells the story so its deeper meaning becomes available to the reader. To be precise, the theologizing of the evangelist is still limited to a kind of sensus plenior, but it is the evangelist himself who helps us see that deeper sense by putting words in Jesus’ mouth -- not the historical Jesus speaking at two levels. To accomplish his theological purpose, the evangelist uses symbols and symbolic discourse, but these are meant to function within the theological project, and not to yield results independent of the evangelist’s intention.

Transitional Summary

With the work of John McHugh, we have reached something of a watershed in our survey of the literature dealing with the Cana narrative. On one side, the authors we have already examined link history and theology rather closely, and study the text as the unified work of a
single author. On the other side, we will encounter authors who feel less comfortable linking history and theology, and who therefore attribute more creativity to the author(s) and to the symbolic dimension of human experience.

At this point in the history of interpretation, there would appear to be four main options available to the exegete. First, one may follow the traditional path by linking Cana and Calvary and resolving any allegedly negative connotations by association. Second, one may follow McHugh into the uncharted waters of literary reconstructions, thereby gaining the status of one who has opted for critical method, but perhaps losing much in the way of content in the process. Third, one may return to the study of Old Testament parallels in search of a code that will solve the Cana puzzle. Fourth, one may strike out in a new direction. As will be seen, few if any Marian theologians opted for the task of reconstructing the Gospel, with the corresponding burden of winning acceptance for one’s reconstruction. Ecclesiastical writings, on the other hand, tended to continue the traditional linking of Cana and Calvary. Among those who followed this path, Aristide Serra stands out as one whose research examined all three levels of the Cana narrative -- history, theology, and symbol. Before turning to an examination of Serra’s considerable body of work, it will be useful to note that the rise of feminist studies had already introduced new symbolism into the dialogue.

**A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE: LEONARDO BOFF (1981)**

In *O Rostro Materno do Deus,* it is not the historical Mary who stands center-stage, but The Feminine as a category by means of which God is and should be revealed. Indeed, it is precisely because patriarchal societies have ignored The Feminine that they have failed to understand their God. The Feminine, then, is the symbol of Life viewed from a specific perspective. For the purposes of this study, it is significant to note that The Feminine is not a symbol employed by
the evangelist to communicate a message, but a dimension of reality itself that may not be avoided without distorting one's perceptions.43

In the first part of his work, Boff proposes The Feminine as the organizing principle for Marian theology, arguing that the traditional presentation of Mary attempts to interpret her person and role without understanding her specifically as a woman when, as Marialis Cultus insisted, the human (i.e., anthropological) dimension is the key to a proper understanding. The second part of the book investigates the epistemological difficulties involved in any attempt to understand God, among which Boff cites a scientific rationalism that reflects a near-complete disregard for The Feminine. There is, he argues, a way of knowing that is proper to The Feminine, and in the absence of this knowing, our epistemological efforts are inevitably one-sided and rationalistic. In the third part, Boff returns to study the historical Miriam-Mary through the medium of the scriptures, and it is here that he examines her person and role in the Fourth Gospel.

Miriam-Mary in the Fourth Gospel

Boff accepts the view adopted by most literary and source critics: "los sinópticos (Mc, Mt, Lc) fuera de los relatos de la infancia, parecen tener un fondo histórico más seguro."46 For this reason, the first text to be examined is the encounter between Jesus and his biological family, found in Mark 3:31-35, with parallels in Matthew 12:46-50 and Luke 8:19-21. Here Boff follows many commentators in translating the text so the encounter is between Jesus and his family, who are portrayed as being concerned for his mental health: "Temen que Jesús se haya vuelto loco."47 Nevertheless, he engages in a good deal of psychologizing that seems out of synch with strictly critical method: Mary must have guessed what was happening with Jesus, although his relatives did not. Jesus' response appears to reject his mother, but only in appearance. "María más que
ningún otro es la que entra en el proyecto Salvador de Dios y se abre a la total colaboración con él. Su grandeza no reside tanto en su maternidad física como en realizar plenamente el designio que anuncia el propio Jesús. De este modo, ella es más profundamente madre.\textsuperscript{48}

Following the lead of Raymond Brown, et. al., Boff considers the Cana narrative to be an event that probably took place before the beginning of Jesus’ public life, within the context of his family. Working a miracle in response to his mother’s request, Jesus was in effect a thaumaturge. \textit{It is upon this historical foundation that the evangelist constructs his theological reflection.} At the historical level, Mary lived her life as a woman of her culture, participating in feasts, rejoicing with others, worrying about the complications of everyday life, doing what was possible to lend a hand. At the theological level, the evangelist employs the title “Woman” to draw our attention to the Eve-Mary typology, which will become complete at Calvary.

The Radical Feminine

The proper category for interpreting the Cana narrative is not \textit{problem}, as Braun, Ceroke, et. al., would have it, \textit{but mystery}. Problems have solutions, and once the solution is found, the problem tends to disappear. But mystery has no solution: to enter into mystery is to penetrate one layer after another, as the mystery draws us into itself. Yet a mystery is itself a light that helps us see, while a problem closes itself to our sight once the solution \textit{is found}. The figure of Mary at Cana is not a problem to be solved, although patriarchal consciousness would have us search for only one solution. It is, instead, the mystery of the Radical Feminine, manifesting itself in the curious words and behavior of this woman, who invites us to explore the mystery with her. The biblical \textit{figure of Jesus’ mother} as woman challenges us to move away from a world dominated by \textit{Logos} and enter a world of \textit{Mysterion}, not dominated by, but immersed in \textit{Anima}, i.e., feminine consciousness.
The mystery lies not merely in the evangelist’s theological presentation of Jesus’ mother, but in the historical Miriam-Mary precisely as woman, because this mysterious dimension is part of her very existence. As woman, her words at Cana appear open-ended and susceptible to multiple interpretations: they engender mysterious actions and cry out for some interpretation that will make sense of the whole as well as its parts, releasing the tension within us. Whether or not the historical Miriam-Mary ever spoke the words attributed to her in the Fourth Gospel, her being constitutes for us both a challenge and an indictment: the God revealed by Logos can only be understood if we surrender our presuppositions about God and ourselves, and ask for the new wine saved for those who recognize the divine standing in their midst. God does not conform to our expectations, and God answers our requests for assistance in ways that defy human reason. This is the mystery of The Feminine, of Mary in the Gospels, of Jesus’ mother at Cana, and of every human being before God.

The most extraordinary aspect of Boff’s work is his hypothesis that in the Incarnation, not only was the Second Person of the Trinity hypostatically united to the man, Jesus, but the Third Person of the Trinity, i.e., the Holy Spirit, was hypostatically united to Mary, mother of Jesus. This is Boff’s interpretation of Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35, and proceeds along what Boff considers to be syllogistic lines. First, the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity demonstrates that human beings have an obediential potency for hypostatic union with a divine Person. Second, the perfection of human nature requires the absolute realization of all potential, including the obediential potency for hypostatic union. Third, the human nature assumed by the Son is simultaneously male and female; both genders have been divinized in Christ. Fourth, it is fitting that God divinize the feminine, not only through the hypostatic union of Jesus and the Son, but directly and immediately through a female human being. Fifth, the divinizer of the masculine is
the Logos of God is the divinizer of the feminine is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is both fitting and necessary that God realize the absolute perfection of female human beings, even as the absolute perfection of male human beings was realized in Jesus.

Boff's hypothesis, though remarkable, amounts to an a priori assumption of equality that belies the history of salvation as portrayed in scripture and tradition. The notion that "potuit, decuit, ergo fecit" functions better as an a posteriori explanation of why God has done something as revealed in scripture or tradition than as an argument that God has done something neither scripture nor tradition has ever discerned. Nevertheless, Boff's interpretation of Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35 seems to do justice to the theology of the evangelists, in spite of the fact that many exegetes would have problems with their historicity.

History, Theology, and Symbol

The importance of Boff's contribution cannot be overstated: reality has a symbolic dimension that must be considered in any attempt at interpretation. Although Boff develops only the feminine aspect of this symbolic dimension, his insight is all-pervasive. Symbolism is not something that may or may not be added to the historical, as one layer upon another, but is the mysterious dimension of the historical, inviting the observer to understand it ever more deeply.

While Boff concentrates on the symbolic dimension, he leaves the theological more or less unattended, apparently satisfied with making a clear distinction between the earliest layers of tradition (the Synoptics) and the theologizing of the evangelist in the Fourth Gospel. In this, however, he is not demonstrably consistent, since he does not develop The Feminine in association with the figure of Jesus' mother in Mark 3:31-35 — or with any other woman in the Gospels, for that matter.
As our study of the Cana narrative evolves, we find three sets of questions posed at three levels of meaning and interpretation. Braun, Ceroke, Michaud and Laurentin appear to be asking “What did the historical Jesus say and do that communicates the deepest meaning of the text?” To pose the question this way is to blend history and theology, and to confine symbolism to certain known categories, e.g., New Eve, virgin at prayer, church). Boff, on the other hand, appears to be asking “What is the symbolic truth of the text inviting us to see and reflect upon in order to understand God and ourselves?” To pose the question this way is to recognize the symbolic dimension of history itself. A third question remains, posed in a preliminary manner by McHugh, but awaiting full articulation: “What role does the theologian play in developing the full (symbolic) meaning of the events described in the Gospel?” To pose the question this way is to refuse to engage in reductionism, and therefore to examine a wide variety of possible avenues of interpretation. And this is what is attempted, with no small measure of success, in the work of Aristide Serra.

TOWARD A NEW SYNTHESIS: ARISTIDE SERRA (1980 -)

Serra’s work appears in a body of essays that consistently examine one central theme: “the role of the Virgin in the larger panorama of the history of salvation.” The phrase history of salvation already reveals the author’s orientation, viz., history and theology are intimately linked in scripture, and we may understand one only in light of the other. He seeks to build his argument more upon the internal evidence of Christian tradition (scripture and patristics) than upon contemporary commentaries that might drive a wedge between history and theology.

The Sign at Cana

Serra accepts the traditional notion that the evangelist was an eyewitness of Jesus’ first sign, who subsequently deepened his understanding of that event as he reflected on his personal
experience with Jesus. Ultimately, as the Spirit helped him understand the words and deeds of Jesus in light of his resurrection, the evangelist was able to see the deeper, theological import of what he himself had seen and heard, and to communicate that deeper meaning to us through his theological portrait. For this reason, the evangelist emphasizes the third day motif, which would not have been a strictly necessary part of the story apart from this theological understanding. The evangelist wants us to see in the Cana narrative a double polarity: that of Sinai and that of Easter, each of which took place on the third day. The text of Exodus 19:10ff reads,

Go to the people and have them sanctify themselves today and tomorrow. Make them wash their garments and be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the people.

Again in 19:15 we read: “Be ready for the third day.” The evangelist would have been aware of this motif, and – in Serra’s view -- intentionally included it in his Gospel. Immediately after the Cana narrative, we find two references to Jesus’ rising from the dead “after three days” (2:19,20).

“Destroy this temple,” was Jesus’ answer, “and in three days I will raise it up.” 20. They retorted, “This temple took forty-six years to build, and you are going to raise it up in three days’!”

These two passages (Exodus 19 and Jn. 2:19-20) are the twin poles between which the evangelist suspends the Cana narrative where, on the third day, Jesus reveals his glory and the disciples put their faith in him (2:1:11). Serra proposes four reasons why the ancient Jewish literature appears to offer new perspectives for understanding the Fourth Gospel: first, the significance of the first week of Jesus’ ministry in light of the Genesis creation account; second, the saying in 1:51 in light of the signs of Cana and the temple cleansing; third, the instructions of
Jesus’ mother to the servants; fourth, the symbolism of wine. Serra believes that the evangelist has depicted the first week of Jesus’ ministry according to an ancient Jewish tradition that distributed the deeds accompanying the revelation at Sinai in similar order. In that tradition, the third day occupied the most important place, since it was on the third day that the Lord gave the Law to Moses.

In Jn. 1:51, Jesus says to Nathanael, “You will see the skies opened and the angels of God ascending and descending above the Son of Man,” a text recognized as intentionally recalling the dream of Jacob at Bethel (Gn. 28:12). Serra therefore suggests that: 1) Jewish tradition interpreted the stairs of Jacob as a symbol, principally a symbol of Mount Sinai and the Temple; and 2) the evangelist appears to be aware of this tradition, portraying Jesus as the New Ladder of Jacob, the privileged place of divine revelation. “Nel terzo giorno della Pasqua, Egli apparirà fra noi come il Sinai (cioé come la legge) e come il tempio della nuova alleanza fra Dio e gli uomini.”51 This theme -- Jesus as a living theophany who recalls the theophanies of Jacob, of Sinai, and the enduring theophany of the Temple -- is central to Serra’s thesis, i.e., that the evangelist has intentionally cast Jesus so that the sign of Cana appears as yet another instance of God’s self-revelation, evoking faith from true believers. Jesus appears in the Gospel as the New Ladder of Jacob, the New Law of God, and the New and Living Temple. Between Nathanael’s proclamation of him in 1:49 (“You are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel”) and the evangelist’s commentary on the meaning of Jesus’ words in 2:21 (“Actually, he was talking about the temple of his body….”), the evangelist includes only Jesus’ promise that the disciples will see greater things, and the Cana narrative, followed by the temple cleansing -- all in association with the theme of the third day. One may not, therefore, attempt an interpretation of the so-called problematic exchange between Jesus and his mother without taking into account
this theological purpose of the evangelist and the twin poles upon which he has suspended the Cana narrative.

Serra notes that commentators often connect the words of the mother with those of Pharaoh to the Egyptians in reference to Joseph (Gn. 21:55). Here again we find that the words of the Cana narrative appear first in the Old Testament, and always with the Law, and therefore Sinai, as their ultimate theological referent. Those who obey Joseph, as well as those who obey the Law given through Moses, are doing what God has told them. At Sinai, Moses stood between the Lord and the assembly of his brothers, while at Cana Mary stands between Jesus and the servants. At Sinai, the people declare themselves ready to listen to, and abide by, all that the Lord would say through Moses, while at Cana Mary exhorts the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. At Sinai, the gift of the Law takes place after the people make their profession of faith, while at Cana the gift of the new wine is preceded and precipitated by the faith of Jesus’ mother. Serra concludes that “L’evangelista opera una identificazione indiretta fra tutto il popolo d’Israele e la madre di Gesù.” It is for this reason that Jesus addresses his mother as “woman,” since in the language of the bible Israel is often represented as a woman. This, then, is a theological device employed by the evangelist to draw our attention to the Old Testament context in which God first gave the Law to Israel, alerting us to the fact that in Jesus the new and superior Law is to be given on the third day of his resurrection.

In Serra’s view, Mary is the Woman Israel, standing before God’s offer of the New Law, beseeching God as Moses did at Sinai, instructing her people to accept the Law with complete fidelity. Serra sees Jesus’ mother, not as a symbol of an outdated Israel that must be replaced, but in continuity with the Israel in whom God has worked of old, and is working again, ever more wonderfully, in Jesus, whose glory is manifested in response to the mother’s intercession.
The Wine at Cana

Because the evangelist mentions wine five times (vv. 3, 9, 10), Serra believes it occupies a singular place and has singular importance within the narrative. The fact that the abundance of wine, as well as its exceptional quality, are highlighted leads him to examine these with special care. Palestine, Serra observes, was farm country, the inhabitants of which would have been familiar with wine and its multiple symbolism, e.g., the messianic era (Jer. 31:12, Amos 9:13, Joel 2:24), where wine is characterized by its surpassing quality; the Word of God (Jer. 23:9, Prov. 9:2, Eccl. 24:17); the New Law (Targ. Is. 55:1), Targ. Zach. 9:17), Targ. Ct. 8:12). Each of these themes appears so frequently in Jewish writings that, in Serra’s view, the symbolism cannot be overlooked. In the Old Testament, the wine of the Law is presented as equal to the wine of Lebanon (Hos. 14:8), prepared by the Lord (Is. 25:6) for the day of favor (Zech. 9:17). In Hosea 2:21-22, this theme is specifically related to the idea of a marriage between God and the people of Israel. Serra sees this as an instance of the Old Testament theme of abundance accompanying God’s blessing (cf. Gn. 27:28). Therefore, the Messiah, a descendant of Isaac and Jacob, will also enjoy the abundance of the earth, depicted in the New Testament in terms of the multiplication of loaves and transformation of water into a large quantity of superior wine. In terms of both quantity and quality, the Cana narrative offers us symbolism consistent with Old Testament imagery. The wine of Cana is a symbol of the eschatological salvation that comes through Jesus, signifying not only abundance, but above all fullness: “it is his fullness of which we all have a share.” (Jn. 1:16) Not only is the evangelist concerned to present Jesus as the new and abundant wine, but he does so by contrasting Jesus’ new wine with the old, inferior wine that has now been exhausted: “they have no wine.” In terms of both quality and quantity, the New Wine of Jesus is seen to be superior.
Particular Phrases

The fact that the very first verse mentions Cana of Galilee, and v. 11 concludes in the same way, should alert us to the possibility that Galilee may have its own place in Fourth Gospel symbolism. Serra notes that in 7:52, where the Pharisees object to the suggestion that the prophet would come from Galilee, we find an instance of the evangelist's use of irony: according to the conventional wisdom, the prophet cannot possibly come from Galilee, yet it is precisely in Cana of Galilee that he appears, as one Galilean among many. The irony is clear: the One long awaited by the Jews has arrived in their midst, but they are prevented by their prejudice from recognizing him. "To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him." (1:11)

The double use of "Woman" and "mother of Jesus" in 2:1-12 and 19:25-27 is meant to alert the reader to the fact that these two texts must be understood in light of one another. And because in the latter text neither the mother nor the disciple is named, Serra believes that the evangelist is primarily concerned with their roles, and therefore with their symbolic value, rather than with their personal identities. At Calvary, the mother of Jesus is the Woman who represents Israel, while the disciple represents the Church: in their new union, the Old and New Covenants are joined by Jesus.

The words "they have no wine" do not indicate that the mother was requesting a miracle per se: "In her act of faith and her prayer, Mary appears as a representative of humanity in difficulty and Judaism in its messianic hope; she is the figure of humanity and of Israel, who await liberation, mysteriously for humanity, messianic as well as human for Israel." And because the mother is being theologically portrayed as Israel, the words of Jesus in response may not be considered a personal rebuke. She herself is not asking for anything, and nothing is being
refused. The dynamics of the story are being managed by the evangelist according to his theological purpose.

As Serra sees it, Jesus’ response in 2:4 does not constitute a rebuke, but a distancing -- and then not from the mother personally, but from the inadequate understanding she had at the moment. Jesus’ mother is a woman of faith and hope, whose understanding still lies at the material level, but who, precisely because her faith and hope are tied to her Son, is nonetheless open to the spiritual meaning her words evoke, as may be seen from her reaction, “Do whatever he tells you.” Only in the light of the resurrection will the mother’s faith and hope be matched by complete understanding.

The notion that there are actually two grooms at the wedding -- the physical spouse and the spiritual one, viz., Jesus -- derives from the observation that it is not the physical groom who has kept the best wine until last, but Jesus himself. Furthermore, since the Baptizer has already proclaimed Jesus as Lamb of God, and since the Book of Revelation speaks of the wedding of the Lamb with the New Israel (19:7-8), Serra concludes that this same symbolism is operative at Cana. Finally, since the Sinai covenant was often represented as a marriage between Israel and the Lord, it seems likely that the evangelist drew on this tradition to present Jesus as the New Groom of the New Covenant.56

The Mother at Calvary

In the exchange between mother and son at Calvary, Jesus establishes her as mother of all the disciples, symbolized by the figure of the Beloved Disciple. These are her new sons in the economy of salvation. The sign of Cana is thus completed in that of Calvary, as the Daughter of Sion becomes the Mother of the New Israel. From a woman of faith and hope, lacking full understanding, she has become a woman of Christian faith and hope, who now understands that
the road to Easter leads through Calvary, and who makes the cross of her son her own way of being his disciple.

In Serra's view, the role Jesus' mother plays at Cana is an anticipation of the role she will play for the Beloved Disciple and for the community of believers, beginning at Calvary and continuing in the life of the Church. At Cana she is physically present and spiritually attentive to the needs of those around her. At Calvary, she is physically present and spiritually attentive to the needs of the Beloved Disciple and, through him, to the needs of all those who will believe in her son.

For its scope and depth, Serra's research constitutes a quantum leap beyond the piecemeal approaches of earlier commentators. He is not preoccupied with the task of reacting to issues posed by other scholars, although he demonstrates awareness of many issues raised by them, but with illuminating the figure and role of Mary within the history of salvation. His exegesis of the Cana narrative is not an apology for the problematic phrases one finds, but an interpretation that combines history, theology, and symbol according to the author's methodology.

History, Theology, and Symbol

More than any other author whose work we have examined, Serra shows an awareness of the theological contributions of the evangelist, who employs well-known Old Testament symbols to communicate his deeper sense of the Jesus story. The truth he wishes to convey is not merely what Jesus said and did, but the theological significance of Jesus' person, words and actions. In his view, the reader's theological consciousness will be determined by the guidance of the Spirit and by the symbolic richness of Old Testament motifs, so that the deeper significance of the narrative may become clear. To someone operating without either or both of these faculties, the narrative may well appear a puzzle that lends itself to multiple solutions -- or to none. But to
someone operating within this theological context, the narrative is an obvious theological commentary on the new work God is accomplishing in Jesus.

While it is clear that Serra takes the historicity of the narrative for granted, it is not always clear that he takes history itself as seriously, for the events seem to disappear behind the evangelist's theological portrait of Jesus and his mother. There is something ethereal about the Jesus who emerges from this analysis: he is the New Ladder of Jacob, the New Law of God, the New Wine of God, the New Groom of the Eschatological Banquet. The mother is the Daughter of Sion, Israel in expectant faith and hope. But neither her portrait nor that of her son seems securely anchored in space and time. One is left with the impression that Serra's work could have been written about almost any woman who fit well with these themes and issues.

Finally, we note that Serra's understanding of symbol has more to do with the patristic notion than with, for example, Boff's contemporary notion, viz., that history itself is fundamentally symbolic. In his view, the evangelist had a message to communicate, and he chose the symbols that would best communicate that message. There is no hint that Jesus' person, words and deeds were themselves open to a variety of interpretations precisely because of the symbolic nature of reality. The result is an interpretation that owes much to the symbolic, although there is one meaning intended by the author in using these symbols, and only one appropriate interpretation of that meaning. If the Spirit guides the Church to an understanding of the Fourth Gospel, there remain a number of questions to be answered, as will be seen in the works of the authors who now follow.

PNEUMATOLOGICAL PORTRAITS: COHEN & GRASSI (1986)

An evolving awareness of the role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation soon led a number of commentators to emphasize that the biblical portrait of Mary deliberately relates her
to the work of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{57} H. Cohen observes that in Jn. 7:37 Jesus invites all who are thirsty to come to him in search of living water, to which the evangelist adds parenthetically, "Here he was referring to the Spirit, whom those who came to him were to receive."\textsuperscript{58} The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus' hour had not yet come. In the Cana narrative, the thirsty guests at the wedding feast may be said to have come to Jesus, through the intercession of his mother, in search of nourishment, only to have Jesus provide new wine in abundance -- a sign of the outpouring of the Spirit at Easter.\textsuperscript{59} In Cohen's view, the mother at Cana is a model of intercession, and her intercession bears fruit at Calvary, where Jesus hands over his Spirit. It is in this sense that she is a model for all believers, who must likewise plead that God send the Spirit to enliven the Church.

That the Cana narrative may have as its primarily theological referent the outpouring of the Spirit is also suggested by J. Grassi, for whom the story constitutes a \textit{pentecostal meditation}.\textsuperscript{60} Grassi notes that the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which originally marked the end of harvest and gradually took on the characteristics of a celebration of the covenant and the giving of Torah, lies in the background of the story of the Spirit's outpouring in Acts 1-2. In the Book of Jubilees, used extensively by the Qumran community, Pentecost is considered the most important of feasts, deliberately linked to the giving of the Law. His effort is first to demonstrate that numerous similarities exist between the Cana and Pentecost narratives, and then to suggest a pneumatological interpretation.

According to Grassi, the reference to the \textit{third day} in 2:1 may well be a reference to the three days before the giving of the Law at Sinai, which are called the "days of bounding" - a time of prayer, abstinence, and preparation not unlike the experience of the disciples awaiting the outpouring of the Spirit in \textit{Acts}. Like Serra, Grassi notes that Jesus' resurrection on the third day
may be related to the third day on Sinai, with each marking the giving of a new covenant. The first of Jesus’ signs takes place at Cana of Galilee, which may recall the observation in Acts 2:7, viz., that all those who received the Spirit at Pentecost were Galileans. And the use of “mother of Jesus” may recall the same designation, which occurs outside the Fourth Gospel only in Acts 1:4, within the community awaiting the gift of the Spirit.

Grassi suggests that Jesus’ mother is symbolically presented as a figure of the Church implicitly asking for the new wine of the Spirit: “they have no wine.” In Acts 1:4, during the preparatory days of binding, Mary the Mother of Jesus, the brethren, and the Twelve pray together for the gift of the Spirit. The effects of the Spirit are likened to those of new wine by the crowd: “They have drunk too much new wine.” (2:13) And the brethren of Jesus are part of both stories; in the Cana narrative they accompany him to Capernaum while in the Pentecost narrative they are waiting for the gift of the Spirit.

The words “do whatever he tells you” belong to the covenant background of the Pentecost feast of the Torah. In the Fourth Gospel, the Spirit comes through following Jesus, and obeying his word, just as in Acts 2 the Spirit comes upon the assembly as a result of Jesus’ command to gather in his name. Both the Cana narrative and the Pentecost story of Acts emphasize that the people did what they were to do precisely because they were told.

The reference to the six stone water jars is intended to indicate the incompleteness of the ritual purification attainable through the Law of Moses. The Pentecost account also emphasizes this theme of filling to abundance: they were filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with new wine. Similarly, in the Cana narrative the steward does not know where the new wine has come from, just as Jesus says that no one knows where the Spirit comes from; in Acts 1 a sound like a strong wind of unknown origin suddenly fills the house. The words “you have kept the good wine until
now” refer to the arrival of messianic times (cf. *Amos* 9:13-14, *Jer.* 31:12). In *Acts*, when certain people claim that the disciples are drunk on new wine, Peter replies that the coming of the Spirit is nothing less than the fulfillment of what Joel had prophesied: an outpouring reserved for the last days (2:16-17). The Cana narrative emphasizes that the disciples believed in Jesus because of his sign; in *Acts*, the early community is described as those who believed (2:44). Grassi concludes on the basis of this considerable number of similarities that “the wedding at Cana has a deep symbolic meaning in the mind of the evangelist as he thinks of Jesus’ words as a new Torah. It has many aspects of a Pentecostal meditation, with some striking similarities to the description of the great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2.”

History, Theology, and Symbol

In their relatively brief essays, Cohen and Grassi do not treat the relationship between the various levels of meaning in the Cana narrative. Yet their work bears one important resemblance to that of Serra: in articulating the symbolic meaning of the narrative, both authors seem to lose sight of the historical meaning of the text, as well as the relationship between that historical meaning and the symbolism employed by the evangelist. This tendency to lose sight of the historical in search of the theological and/or symbolic meaning becomes even more evident in the work of Patrick Bearsley, who claims to perceive a new paradigm in Marian theology.

MARY AS PERFECT DISCIPLE: P. BEARSLEY (1980)

In the work of Patrick Bearsley, there is a new paradigm for Marian theology: Mary as the perfect disciple of the Lord. It is by means of the perspective offered by this new paradigm that we may see Mary’s divine maternity, her relationships to Christ and the Church, her perpetual virginity, immaculate conception and assumption “as facets of the one whole which is the mystery of Mary in the plan...of salvation.”
Bearsley, however, seems to link the idea of Mary as perfect disciple to her theological portrait, and not to her historical existence. There is, he contends, no evidence that she was in fact one of those chosen to accompany Jesus during his public ministry. In fact, the biblical evidence is problematic, seeming to support just the opposite idea. The essential teaching of texts such as Mk. 3:31-35 is that Jesus placed greater value on discipleship than on familial relationships, not that Jesus’ family necessarily fell completely outside the boundaries of his community of disciples. Motherhood must therefore be seen in light of discipleship, not vice-versa. It is within this question of Mary’s conformity to the requirements of discipleship that Bearsley studies her role in the Cana narrative.

The Perfect Disciple at Cana

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, the evangelist emphasizes that what is primary is not to have had a special status or charism, but to have followed Jesus, obedient to his word. At Cana, Mary is portrayed as the one who invites others to do precisely that: “do whatever he tells you.” Following A. Vanhoye, Bearsley suggests that the words “How does this concern of yours involve me?” must be understood in their most obvious sense, i.e., as a question, the significance of which varies according to the context. Jesus is neither rejecting nor refusing his mother, but telling her something about their relationship. He is calling into question the relationship they have had until that point -- the familial relationship of mother and son -- and suggesting that this relationship has now been transcended. The use of “woman” as a form of address is meant to signal this transition, which takes place now that the hour of Jesus has arrived: thus the translation “Woman, what is this to me and to thee? Has not my hour come?” Now that the hour of Jesus has arrived, such material considerations form no part of his ministry or their relationship. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the mother proceeds to act, as if she
has understood the son’s reply to warrant positive action, accepting their new relationship in the act of addressing the servants instead of her own son. The nature of this new relationship is that of discipleship, i.e., doing what Jesus says to do, rather than the familial relationship in which a mother might make demands on her son.

The Perfect Disciple at Calvary

In this perspective, Bearsley invites us to see the Calvary scene, not as a positive encounter in contrast to Cana, but as complementary. Noting that neither the Beloved Disciple nor the Mother is named in 19:25-27, he considers this a deliberate theological device by the evangelist; considering the fact that none of the other gospels mentions the incident, its historicity is open to question. The Beloved Disciple is here presented as the ideal disciple, the model for all others, and therefore the model for the Church as community of disciples. In this climactic scene, the themes of motherhood and discipleship are rejoined, as mother and disciple enter into a mother-son relationship at Jesus’ command.

If the Beloved Disciple is the ideal disciple, then the mother must be the ideal mother, the spiritual mother of all who will become disciples of her son. Jesus brings his messianic mission to an end by breathing the Holy Spirit on mother and disciple, who now represent all faithful Christians. “On Calvary, Mary and the Beloved Disciple are witnesses to this breathing out of the Spirit and outpouring of water. They are thus pictured as receiving the first outpouring of the Spirit on the newly-constituted Church.”

History, Theology, and Symbol

In claiming to perceive a new paradigm for Marian theology, Bearsley offers us one that effectively separates the historical from the theological/symbolic: Mary is the perfect disciple, even though she was not one of those who accompanied Jesus during his public ministry. To the
extent that this paradigm takes root in Marian theology, then, it will be only loosely connected to the historical portrait of Mary in the New Testament, and thus vulnerable to criticism on two important points: 1) Bearsley's paradigm may not, in fact, be adopted by the majority of scholars, and 2) it may not be rooted in history, and may therefore tell us little about the woman being extolled as the perfect disciple of Jesus. And yet it is this image of Mary as Perfect Disciple that finds its way into the Papal Encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*.

**A NEW ECCLESIATICAL PORTRAIT: *REDEMPTORIS MATER* (1987)**

The fact that the International Marian Year was inaugurated on the Feast of Pentecost was no accident. Pope John Paul II wanted to emphasize the link between Mary and the Spirit in the history of salvation. In this encyclical, Mary is portrayed as *Redemptoris Mater*, the Mother of the Redeemer, a title that makes the history of salvation the abiding context for her person and role.

Part One deals with “Mary in the Mystery of Christ,” and it is here that we find the first reference to Cana. The immediate context is provided by the Lukan version of Mk. 3:31-35, which should be understood in terms of the question posed in Luke 2:49 and not as a negative attitude toward the family of Jesus. The son is not distancing himself from his mother according to the flesh, but facilitating her transition from mere biological maternity to a new and different maternity akin to the relationship Jesus enjoys with his disciples. To be precise, this new motherhood was hers from the moment of conception, but as she became increasingly attuned to the messianic mission of her son, she became ever more open to that new dimension which was to constitute her role in the history of salvation. “Thus in a sense Mary as Mother became the first disciple of her Son, the first to whom he seemed to say, ‘Follow me’ even before he addressed this call to the apostles or to anyone else (cf. Jn. 1:43).66
At Cana the mother of Jesus enters into a “motherhood according to the Spirit” as her human concern for others becomes more and more focused into a spiritual concern for all people. “Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between herself and her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself in the middle, that is to say, she acts as a mediatrix, not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.” 67 This initial manifestation of the mother’s mediation achieves its fullness at Calvary, where she receives the Beloved Disciple as symbol of all those who will believe in her son, entrusted to her care and mediation. “Thus, she who is present in the Mystery of Christ as Mother becomes, by the will of her Son and the power of the Holy Spirit, present in the Mystery of the Church.” 68

History, Theology, and Symbol

*Redemptoris Mater* relies almost exclusively on scripture and patristics for its theological foundation -- to be specific, on scripture as interpreted through the Fathers of the Church, filtered through the lens of Catholic doctrine. The result is a rich portrait of Jesus’ mother that preserves doctrine and satisfies piety without manifestly contributing to the ongoing theological discussion. The document shows an awareness of Mary as First Disciple, called by God to *share* her son’s life and ministry, and therefore of the notion of Perfect Disciple, (although this is not specifically developed). Also, there is an attempt to *rebuff* the idea of distance between mother and son, accomplished by introducing the notion of mediation. Finally, there is an apparent reference to the idea of Jesus’ “breathing the Spirit” on mother and disciple at Calvary, tangible in the phrase “by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.”

In this encyclical we find the levels of history, theology, and symbol intertwined in a way that makes them virtually indistinguishable. It is not simply that the evangelist wants to communicate the *idea* of Mary’s mediation, or even that the Church is able to see her mediation...
in the events of Cana, but the historical Mary was herself a mediatrix between her Son and humankind. Similarly, it is not simply that the later Church may see its origins vaguely mirrored in the words of Jesus at Calvary, but that Jesus himself intended to give birth to the Church by joining mother and disciple in a new relationship.

While the methodology adopted in *Redemptoris Mater* allows the encyclical to rise above the squall of opinions concerning exegesis of the Fourth Gospel and Cana narrative, it is nonetheless disturbing to watch a dichotomy developing within Marian theology. On the one side, there are those authors who, pursuing the questions posed by Braun and his successors, recognize that history, theology, and symbol have different contributions to make to the task of exegesis, and may not be lumped together for the sake of a desirable theological portrait. On the other side, there are authors who appear willing to subordinate theology and symbol in order to anchor their portraits in their version of history.


Ignace de la Potterie consciously attempts to interpret the Cana narrative within the larger context of the Fourth Gospel, and for this he must answer the question “does 2:1-12 belong to 1:19ff or to 2:13ff?” Chronologically and thematically, it must be said to belong to 1:19ff, thus creating the hermeneutical context 1:19-2:12. Not only does the narrative refer to the *third day*, thereby drawing attention to the events of a first and second day (1:29, 35, 43), but it continues the theme of Jesus’ first disciples and their response to his self-revelation. We may speak, then, of a certain progression within the text: the revelation of Jesus by the Baptizer (1:31) is the reason why Andrew and his companion follow Jesus (35-40), Andrew’s report to Simon is the reason why the brother comes to Jesus, Jesus himself then calls Philip, who in turn calls Nathaniel, and the first disciples accompany Jesus to Cana, where he manifests his glory.
The Cana Narrative

The author accepts as his text the 4th century Codex Vercellensis, which reads “et vinum non habebant, quoniam consummatum erat vinum nuptiarum. Deinde dicit mater ad Jesus: vinum non habent.” These words are not a request for a miracle, but a straightforward statement of fact, which includes the discrete suggestion that Jesus do something. The fact that the mother had a certain confidence in making her suggestion is borne out by her subsequent instructions to the servants.

Within the context of the Cana narrative, the negative understanding of Jesus’ reply is totally excluded. Rather than tension between mother and son, one must see here a lack of understanding: the mother is speaking of the lack of material wine, while the son speaks of mystical wine. With his words, he elevates the dialogue to a higher plane, although the vocabulary remains the same (wine). And he does so precisely because his hour has come, i.e., the hour to move to that higher plane. The hour of Jesus’ self-revelation begins at Cana and will be completed at Calvary.

The mother’s instructions to the servants constitute a quasi-technical formula found in the Old Testament in connection with the Covenant, when Israel promises obedience to God (Ex. 19:8, 24:3-7, Dt. 5:27). In the Cana narrative, the mother is portrayed as Israel within the context of the Covenant, calling on the people to be perfectly submissive to the will of God. The emphasis on obedience is manifest in the punctual response of the servants (vv.7,8). Since all this takes place at the request of the mother, it may be said that she is a mediatrix between Jesus and the servants. The servants who obey Jesus’ words are the new people of God, the disciples of Jesus, who follow their mother faithfully.
Christological Significance

Three factors contribute to the Christological interpretation of the narrative: the messianic manifestation of Jesus, the messianic wine, and the messianic banquet. Citing the work of Michaud, de la Potterie argues that the principal intention of the evangelist is to emphasize the messianic character of Jesus and the superiority of the Christian economy over that of the Old Covenant. In Jewish tradition, wine is a powerful symbol of messianic times: the good wine at Cana is the messianic wine that announces the arrival of the New Covenant in Jesus' hour. In the Prologue, the evangelist presents this idea thematically -- while the Law was given through Moses, this enduring love came through Jesus Christ -- but in the Cana narrative he presents the same idea symbolically. Jesus is the Spouse of the Messianic Banquet and the wine is the Gospel, the truth of God's enduring love for humankind.

Mariological Significance

In the moment of Jesus' self-manifestation, the relationship between mother and son is dramatically changed, as indicated by the use of "woman" as a form of address. The author agrees with M. Thurian that the mother is passing from her role as mother of Jesus to that of Mother of the Church. Rather than the New Eve, she is now the Daughter of Sion, in whom the historical community of Israel is symbolized. She is the personification of the messianic people in the eschatological times. As such, she speaks the words of fidelity to the covenant: "Do whatever he tells you."

At Cana, Jesus appears as the True Groom of the Messianic Banquet, Mary as the True Bride (in her capacity as Daughter of Sion). The fact that Jesus calls her "woman" points to her identity as the woman of the wedding, i.e., the bride, and it is in this capacity that she collaborates with Jesus in the preparation of the good wine. Furthermore, this notion of the mother as bride is
related to that of her spiritual maternity, for she calls the disciples to obey the words of Jesus, i.e., to believe in him and do as he says.

Spiritual Maternity

The proper context for interpreting 19:25-27 is the preceding story of the seamless garment and the words of Jesus “It is finished.” (19:30) This text is also a formal parallel to Jn. 2: 1-12, so that within the proximate and distant contexts one may find the deeper sense of 19:25-27. The author sees in the language of the two texts an intentional link. Claiming that tradition has always seen in the tunic a symbol of the unity of the Church -- the new messianic community prefigured by mother and disciple -- de la Potterie suggests that the Daughter of Sion is portrayed as joining Israel to the new people of God. The clue is found in 11:47-52: “It is better that one man die...not only for the nation, but also for the reunion of the dispersed children of God.” This reunion of the dispersed children of God is accomplished in the joining of mother and disciple at Calvary. The subsequent reference to the fulfillment of scripture (v.28) should be linked, not to the words “I thirst,” but to the union of mother and disciple. Now that the New People of God has been formed, Jesus can announce that “all is accomplished” because only now has the hour of Jesus attained its fullness.

Evaluation and Critique

There are many advantages to de la Potterie’s approach, as well as -- from the perspective of this study -- a number of disadvantages. First, his work provides a kind of inclusion for the development of the approach first seen in the works of Braun and Michaud, with the result that nearly thirty years after Michaud we are able to view the progression of ideas and the evolution of research that, in general, adopts the same methodological premises. Second, de la Potterie has attempted to examine not only the figure of Jesus’ mother within the Cana narrative, and not
only the narrative in isolation from the Gospel, but has produced a serious study of the Fourth
Gospel, focusing on the two Marian pericopes. Third, he has consciously employed the
theological category of the Covenant, situating the mother of Jesus within the history of
salvation. Fourth, his research concerning the immediate contexts of 1: 1-12 and 19: 25-27 is a
genuine contribution to the ongoing discussion. Assuming that this was his intended project, it
should not surprise us to learn he has not devoted equal time to the relationship between the
levels of meaning in the text.

History, Theology, and Symbol

The author is keenly aware of the theological activity of the evangelist, studying not only his
use of language, but his placement of texts in ways that mutually influence their interpretation.
Yet de la Potterie reflects the tendency we have already seen to mesh history and theology within
the evangelist’s sensus plenior and to confine symbolism within rather narrow boundaries
(Daughter of Sion, Church, New People of God, etc.). Neither is it obvious that he takes the
historical characters themselves very seriously, since there is no consideration of the human
aspects of mother, disciple or, for that matter, Jesus himself. They are theological figures with
symbolic significance, but their history is either presumed to be visible beneath the theological
portrait or, incredibly, unimportant to the interpretation.

The influence of de la Potterie, as well as his breadth of scholarship, makes his approach all
the more important for the future of Marian theology, because it will be precisely this issue -- the
relationship between history, theology, and symbol -- that will preoccupy the second group of
scholars whose works we will examine. As we turn our attention to proponents of what has
come to be called historical-critical method, it cannot fail to be significant that an author of de la
Potterie’s stature has set the stage for us.

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Summarizing the Marian research of the last half-century, L. Chacón insisted that the various phrases of Jn. 2:1-12 not be artificially separated, but be interpreted as parts of a whole. Nevertheless, he agrees with many recent exegetes that historical truth is not the priority of the evangelist: “Debemos también hacer abstracción de la ‘historicidad científica’ del pasaje, para centrarnos en la cualidad narrativa del mensaje teológico.”

The title “Woman” is unique in biblical literature, and therefore unlike any known form of address of its time. It is decidedly respectful, and has “una densa coloración mesiánica,” as may be seen from the fact that the title is employed at key moments in the Gospel. In this sense, it is perfectly legitimate to allude from this text a certain reference to the protoevangelium, which is the first messianic text of Sacred Scripture. This implies a certain complementarity between the title “Woman” and that of “mother.” “María es la mujer-madre presente en todo el proceso de incorporación de la humanidad a Cristo.” The use of this peculiar form of address is prophetic and alerts us to the messianic ministry of Jesus. “Tanto aquí como en la cruz, Jesús está diciendo, casi al modo como ella le ha insinuado en la peticion, que ella es la Mujer y él la Descendencia, pero que todavía no ha llegado su hora.” This “hour” refers, Chacón tells us, to the hour of Jesus’ passion/exaltation. Thus the mother’s statement, “They have no wine,” is less a petition than an insinuation, i.e., that she knows who he is and what he will be doing when his hour arrives. Yet Jesus, hearing his mother utter the words that reveal his true identity, wishes to avoid any premature recognition, and so he speaks mysteriously and curiously to his mother, in words we cannot easily understand. His purpose at Cana was not to reveal himself to the general public, or even to his disciples, but to perform a sign so they would believe. The Cana narrative is, then,
a Johannine tale of the messianic secret that is more clearly and coherently revealed in the Synoptics.

Chacón's treatment of the text is quite traditional and historical, emphasizing what Jesus actually said and did at the historical level, and saying nothing about the contributions of the evangelist, who merely recorded what happened. In this view, there is no relationship between history, theology, and symbol, precisely because the Gospel records history as it was and is. In this sense, Chacon's presentation is an anachronism reflecting ideas and approaches that have been out of date for many years.

At the same time, Chacón contributes an idea worth further exploration, namely, the notion that 2:4-5 represents a Johannine version of the messianic secret's revelation, and that his impatience with his mother's words has more to do with his not wanting to reveal himself at a public gathering than with their relationship as mother and son. The idea that the Fourth Evangelist is telling a Synoptic Story in his own terms is one that will fall on deaf ears as we turn our attention to the world of exegesis.
CHAPTER TWO

FOCUS ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL

If the authors whose works we have examined have focused primarily on the figure and role of Mary, and through her on the Fourth Gospel and its narratives, especially Cana and Calvary, the group we are about to examine is dramatically different in their approach. Not only do their investigations rarely draw them into discussions of the mother of Jesus, but their overwhelming concern with either history or theology or symbol all but eliminates the possibility of an integrated, coherent portrait. To one extent or another, each of these authors acknowledges a debt to Rudolf Bultmann, whose seminal work on signs and sources gave rise to an abiding revolution within Fourth Gospel studies. Thus, although Bultmann’s landmark commentary falls well outside our period of interest, his influence remains powerful throughout, and it would be inappropriate to begin without identifying this abiding contributions to the discussion.¹

THE JOHANNINE PUZZLE: BULTMANN, SCHNACKENBURG, AND BROWN

Bultmann's Commentary

Few World War II explosions sent such shock waves rippling through the western world as the 1941 publication of Rudolf Bultmann’s Commentary, in which he argued that: 1) the Gospel as we know it is a patchwork quilt of originally-independent and at times opposing sources, among which he proposed a pre-Christian Gnostic Redeemer Myth, a Discourse Source, responsible for most of the lengthy addresses of Jesus, and a Signs Source, the existence of which is indicated by the enumeration of the two Cana signs; 2) the Gospel presents Jesus as the Man from Heaven², the Revealer of God, whose glory (δόξα) becomes tangible in history through him; 3) the Gospel was composed in two or more stages, with the evangelist responsible for the original version and an Ecclesiastical Redactor responsible for the edition that has come
down to us; 4) the existence of numerous *aporia*, or breaks in the text as we know it, points to a rearrangement -- intentional or otherwise -- in the process of editing, so that the original order of the narratives has not been preserved.

Although many of Bultmann's theories have since been refuted the influence of his ideas remains enormous, shaping the direction of Fourth Gospel studies for decades. Upon examination, we may see that if any of these theories were proved true, much of what had been taken for granted by Braun, Ceroke, et. al., would have to be revised or even discarded. If the Gospel as we know it: 1) is not the work of a single author, 2) is not preserved in its original order, so that the work of multiple authors cannot be easily detected, 3) is a complication of several sources, the extent of which is the subject of considerable conjecture, or 4) includes a presentation of Jesus saturated with pre-Christian mythical ideas, then one must begin the study of the Cana narrative, not by focusing on the problematic phrases found in 2: 3-5, but by providing a theory that satisfactorily addresses these issues. Does the Cana narrative belong to the evangelist's sources and, if so, which one? Does it belong to the evangelist's own theological portrait, or to the work of one or more redactors, revising the text according to one or more ideologies? Which of the verses within the Cana narrative derive from which source(s)? Is the meaning of the narrative related to its historicity, to the theology of the author(s)/redactor(s), or to the theology that emerges from the text as it is proclaimed and read aloud in subsequent ecclesial situations? These would be some of the preliminary questions to be answered before one could credibly begin interpreting John 2: 1-12.

Each of the authors whose works we shall examine shares Bultmann's project to this extent: they expect the exegete or theologian to state clearly the premises he or she brings to the task, taking stands on the issues raised by Bultmann and revised by collaborators and critics alike.
And herein lies the makings of a permanent dichotomy between two groups of scholars, one of which, as we have seen in our brief review of the literature, has continued to explore the theological meaning of the text without reference to these modern exegetical questions, and one of which, as we shall see, will be preoccupied with precisely those methodological questions. In a certain very real sense, it will be the relative paucity of results from historical-critical scholars that will convince the first group of scholars not to sacrifice the contents of their received traditions, while it will be the allegedly-exaggerated claims of the first group that will inspire the second to be critical in their methods.

Finally, Bultmann’s concern for demythologization had the effect of stripping away the mythical colors with which the evangelist had painted his canvas, leaving behind only the blank canvas of history devoid of divine intervention. Operating on the conviction that the mythical mentality was an impediment to understanding the abiding influence of Jesus, Bultmann and the post-Bultmannians sought to scrape away everything that smacked of myth, including especially miracles and mythical language. Thus, when the Cana narrative speaks of the first sign of Jesus, the idea that something super-human occurred must be understood as part of mythic consciousness, and therefore dismissed as irrelevant to the historical narrative. The implications of demythologization for the study of Jesus’ mother at Cana become obvious when critical method has as its purpose precisely this stripping away of ideas that allegedly derive from another time and worldview.

Although Bultmann reveals keen interest in all three levels of meaning, his concern with myth tends to focus attention on the theology of the author(s) and away from the historical core of the Gospel, which he considers to be fundamentally irretrievable by critical method. The concern of the theologian is not with the Jesus of history, but with the Christ of faith, so that the
so-called “quest for the historical Jesus” must be considered fundamentally illegitimate. Jesus himself was the Proclaimer of God’s Word, thereby giving rise to a crisis for the hearer, who must choose to respond in faith or retreat and be lost. The authentic purpose of biblical exegesis is to make this same challenge shine through the text for contemporary readers and would-be believers.4

Theology, too, tends to be a more complex enterprise in Bultmann’s world, inherently complicated by the intertwining of various strands of tradition in the same narrative -- at times, within the same phrase or sentence. Thus, Bultmann speculates that certain apparently sacramental aspects of the Cana narrative are to be attributed to the Ecclesiastical Redactor, who wrote in order to accommodate a non-ecclesiastical Gospel to the evolving needs of his community, while the basic Cana narrative is to be attributed to the Signs Source. The result is a narrative that may well speak of sacramental significance, but does so by imposing these ideas on the original Gospel. The historical narrative, albeit admixed with the evangelist’s own theology, is here at cross-purposes with the theology of the Redactor.

In Bultmann’s monumental work on the Fourth Gospel, the notion of symbol is intimately tied to that of sign: the signs by which Jesus reveals God’s glory. Nearly gone is the patristic sense of allegory: John’s signs do not represent other realities in allegorical relationship as much as they do the glory of God revealed through the works of Jesus. As will be seen, the notion that reality has sign value for the potential believer will become increasingly important as the scientific study of symbol develops during the post-War years.

Although Bultmann published his Commentary in 1941, the circumstances of the times did not allow widespread dissemination or translation into other languages. Moreover, the 1943 publication of Divino Afflante Spiritu only gradually permitted such ideas to penetrate Catholic
It comes as little surprise, therefore, that a scholar like F.-M. Braun, writing in the early 1950s, shows no preoccupation with Bultmann's theories, or that those who respond to Braun do so with similar disregard. Nevertheless, by the early 1960s, exegetes like Rudolf Schnackenburg and Raymond Brown could do little without paying homage to the opinions expressed by their colleague at Marburg.

Two Major Commentaries: Schnackenburg and Brown

Writing independently of one another, Rudolf Schnackenburg and Raymond Brown published major commentaries within a year, thereby creating a new watershed within Fourth Gospel studies. For the next decade or more, scholars on both continents would reflect the issues raised by Bultmann as these drew responses from Schnackenburg and Brown. When the opinions of the two exegetes converged, it became acceptable to let their research determine the flow of one's argument, with Schnackenburg's work cited more often in Europe and Brown's more often in America.

Schnackenburg and Brown suggest a pre-Gospel tradition that may well be as early as the material known to the Synoptics, although the Gospel itself was written late in the first or early in the second century. Brown posits five stages in the process of composition: 1) a collection of traditional sayings of, and stories about Jesus, akin to but independent of the Synoptic tradition; 2) decades of teaching and preaching (oral tradition) that shaped the material into the sign-discourses format characteristic of the Gospel; 3) a first writing, probably by a teacher-theologian, weaving together the materials found in the tradition; 4) one or more editions, probably by the same teacher-theologian, to accommodate various groups within the Johannine community; 5) a final redaction, perhaps after the evangelist himself had died. In Brown's view,
Chapter Twenty-One is an addition to the original Gospel, the work of the Redactor who points back to the evangelist.

Schnackenburg not only speculates concerning stages of composition, but attempts to actually reconstruct the original narrative. Both commentators attempt to rearrange the text as we know it in order to eliminate some of the obvious breaks (aporia). Each contends that the farewell discourses now found in Chapters 15 through 17 have been inserted by later redactors, who inexplicably left the transitional phrase, “Come, then, let us be on our way” (12:31) in place.

Where these two scholars depart more obviously from Bultmann is in a certain distaste for Source Criticism, understood as the attempt to re-stitch the narrative according to its sources, assigning pericopes, passages, sentences -- even phrases -- to their sources on the basis of certain premises. Not only do they not believe that the Gospel came about in that way, they think it quite impossible to reconstruct the process itself. Thus Brown will continue to be quite active in the work of identifying the stages through which the Gospel passed in the process of composition, while other scholars, following Bultmann’s lead into Source Criticism with a vengeance, will be preoccupied with the task of assigning the text to its various sources.

With these two major commentaries, we find a new shift in Fourth Gospel studies: away from theological interpretations and toward the detective work that must be done to respond to the issues raised by Bultmann. Each of these commentators spends the bulk of his time on research that tends to point in one direction or another, rather than positing a specific interpretation of the text in question. Thus the interpretations proposed for the Cana narrative are comparatively sketchy, and focus little upon the figure of Jesus’ mother. More attention is paid to the pre-history of the narrative, and its possible meanings in pre-Gospel stages, than on the kinds of theological-allegorical insights provided by the Fathers of the Church.

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The Gospel is the work of one principal author, whose work we have in a perhaps unoriginal form, and who in the course of editing earlier material produced some or all of the breaks one now finds in the text. The significance of this position is that the Johannine aspect is seen to appear at both ends of the author-redactor continuum: “John” both composed an original Gospel and edited his own original material.

Fortna’s most radical development of Bultmann’s thesis consists in his suggestion that not only a Signs Source, but a full-fledged Signs Gospel complete with its own passion narrative, is retrievable on the basis of Redaction Criticism. Included within this Signs Gospel would be the two Cana signs, designated as such by the Redactor, as well as a number of similar signs that conform to Johannine criteria rather than Synoptic criteria for miracle stories.

One of the evangelist’s principal motives for redacting the Signs Gospel was to correct the misunderstanding of the role Jesus’ miracles should play in Christian faith. In the Signs Gospel, the signs themselves had virtually no meaning; they pointed beyond themselves to Jesus and his messiahship, but no further. In the Fourth Gospel as redacted, however, the signs are oriented, not to the amazement evoked by miracles, but to belief in Jesus. For the evangelist, one does not believe in Jesus because his signs have been amazing (this kind of faith is explicitly rejected in the Gospel), but one sees and believes in Jesus through the medium of his signs.

In Fortna’s reconstruction of the Signs Gospel, he considers it likely that each of the original seven stories ended with some indication of belief in Jesus by those who witnessed the sign, although only three examples of this have survived the redaction, viz., 2:11, 4:53, and 6:14. Indeed, the Signs Gospel ends by identifying belief in Jesus as the purpose of recording his signs (20:31). But the evangelist redacts these stories, retaining and strengthening the original emphasis on belief. For this reason, Fortna suggests, Jesus rebukes the nobleman seeking to save
his son’s life (“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you do not believe,” 4:48) and rebuffs his mother’s request for a simple miracle unconnected to faith (“How does this concern of yours involve me?” 2:4). In this view, a sign understood as an arbitrary miracle will produce only hardening in one’s unbelief, while signs understood as semeia will produce faith in Jesus as messiah.

Fortna devotes only ten pages to the exegesis of Cana -- the emphasis now being on the redaction and reconstruction of the text -- but his brief treatment radically transforms the meaning of the narrative. The text is a composite, betraying several breaks that can best be explained as Johannine additions to a pre-Johannine source. The first Johannine addition is the temporal note in 2:1a, which serves only to connect the story with the events of Chapter One in the redaction. The rest is pre-Johannine, except possibly the expression “of Galilee”. Fortna speculates that the evangelist may have wanted to heighten the prominence of Jesus’ mother by mentioning her so early in his redacted text.

Bultmann had considered the whole of v.3, and even v.4, as pre-Johannine. Fortna contends that the mother’s request belongs to the source because: a) the harder reading is the better one if it can be explained by source criticism, and b) internal evidence makes the break a more likely development in the evolution of the text than an unreconciled redundancy would be, i.e., “the wine having run out… they have no wine.” Verse 4 clearly portrays Jesus as rejecting what is at least an implicit request for a miracle, yet v. 5 shows Jesus apparently performing one. This tension is resolved by positing an original miracle story in the Signs Gospel that had Jesus performing the sign without a prior exchange with his mother, redacted by the evangelist to show his theological bias against miracles/signs as an inducement to belief.
Fortna contends that the Cana story is not a “true tale,” so that the entire encounter with the mother must be less than historical, and only the fact that the evangelist saw fit to invent a negative encounter seems to require explanation. Since the tendency is to see the evangelist in relation to Mark, and to see signs in relation to faith, Fortna concludes that the evangelist drew on the Synoptic tradition to reinforce a bias against any claims made on Jesus by his biological family, especially claims related to miracle-working and not to his role as messiah.

The influence of Fortna’s work is considerable. Redaction Criticism will now become an invaluable tool of the exegete, with the result that exegesis itself will be more oriented to textual problems than to theological interpretation. This approach has the effect of posing the question to future exegesis, especially those who may search for a Marian interpretation, “How can you claim to understand the parts without the whole?” And this is perhaps the greatest difficulty one encounters in trying to understand the figure of Mary at Cana. The new synthesis sought by Michaud in 1963 never really developed, and the new paradigm proposed by Bearsley seems lost on scholars like Fortna, who cry out for a new synthesis, but insist that it derive from a new and critical reconstruction of the text and its sources. This enterprise, however, is itself so subjective that another Johannine scholar could write: “It often becomes so hypothetical that no one but the critic himself believes it.”10 Searching for an approach that would not end in reductionist theories of composition, J. Louis Martyn studied the role of the Church in shaping the Fourth Gospel.


Instead of attempting to reconstruct the Fourth Gospel according to its original sources, J. Louis Martyn11 sought to understand the role of the Church in shaping the Gospel as we know it. Arguing that the life-situation of the early Church is reflected in the events described by the evangelist, Martyn contends that the Gospel is written on two levels, the historical and the
theological, with the levels intertwined in the evangelist’s narrative. This is not merely to argue, as earlier scholars often had, that the historical narrative has a *sensus plenior*, but that the evangelist deliberately *shaped* the historical narrative to have it reflect and respond to the life situation of the communities for which he wrote.

Martyn studies in detail three Fourth Gospel signs in which he claims to detect a two-level drama being played out. The man born blind, he suggests, *is both* a historical character in the *ministry* of Jesus and, perhaps especially, a representative figure of the Jewish converts to Christianity who had found their way into the Johannine community. Since the Jews who had accepted Jesus as Messiah were excluded from the synagogues, the evangelist portrays the man born blind as rejected by the Jewish authorities for having accepted healing at the hands of Jesus. Martyn claims to find three stages in the life of the Johannine community reflected in the narrative as redacted by the evangelist. First, there was a period during which certain Jews proclaimed Jesus to other Jews within the synagogues, perhaps making no elaborate Christological claims and therefore experiencing no significant opposition or rejection. Second, there followed a period during which some of the converted Jews were ejected from the synagogues precisely because of their faith in Jesus, so that a separate community of Jewish Christians evolved. Third, there followed a period in which Christians perceived themselves to be opposed by “the Jews”, which opposition came to be retrojected into the Gospel story, especially that of the man born blind. In this way, the evangelist could portray the man as receiving his sight and faith from Jesus, while the authorities are denounced for their own blindness. *The Fourth Gospel* is not, therefore, merely a guide to the historical events of Jesus’ life and ministry, but a theological guide to the events that shaped the evolution of the Johannine community of faith.
**Crisis and Response: Raymond Brown Revisited (1979)**

In his essay, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*[^14], Raymond Brown reflects the influence of both Fortna and Martyn, announcing as his purpose that of “reading the Gospel as a key to church life thirty to sixty years after Jesus’ lifetime.”[^15] In Brown’s estimation, the primary yield of the Gospels is information about how an evangelist conceived of and presented Jesus to a Christian community, which indirectly yields some insight into that community’s life during the period the Gospel was being written. Layered with the views of authors, the Gospels “offer limited means for reconstructing the ministry and message of the historical Jesus.”[^16]

For Brown, as for Martyn, the conflict with the Jews is the single most important factor shaping the Fourth Gospel -- not because Jesus himself necessarily experienced this antagonism from the Jewish authorities, but because the Johannine community did, and therefore sought to explain it to themselves in order to legitimate their continued existence once expelled from the synagogues. “What has happened in the Fourth Gospel is that the vocabulary of the evangelist’s time has been read back into the ministry of Jesus.”[^17] The early Church encountered a crisis that threatened its existence; its response to that crisis is mirrored in the Fourth Gospel.

**History, Theology, and Symbol**

The work of these scholars radically alters the perceived relationship between history and theology in the Fourth Gospel. On the one hand, they are acutely preoccupied with the task of finding out what actually happened. On the other hand, they are convinced that what actually happened was not the primary interest of the evangelist in preparing his narrative.

Fortna’s reconstructions drive a wedge between history and theology, distinguishing between texts that reflect the evangelist’s theology and those (presumably earlier) sources that reflect the theology of unidentified authors. While the result is a product that is inescapably theological, the

[^14]:
[^15]:
[^16]:
[^17]:

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task of reconstruction is designed to get behind the text as it now stands, which is considered to be relatively unimportant in itself.

Martyn’s research also drives a wedge between history and theology, although this one is not of his making. The evangelist himself has not only interpreted the story he is telling, but shaped it according to his theological purposes, so that it speaks as eloquently of the life-situation of the later Johannine community as it does of the historical Jesus. If one wishes to understand what actually happened in the life of Jesus, one has relatively little material with which to work.

Finally, Brown’s research tends to support Martyn’s approach more than Fortna’s, and his explicit endorsement has the effect of promoting the two-level hypothesis. In later years, there will be no shortage of scholars attempting to reconstruct the Fourth Gospel, but those who attempt to write commentaries, however brief, will now have to refer back to the works of Brown and Martyn.

In all of this, the figure of the Mother of Jesus tends to remain in the shadows, confined to one corner by Source Criticism, in which she is perceived as the creation of the evangelist and not part of the original story, to another corner by proponents of two-level theory, since she is not part of the conflict with the Jewish authorities. The effect, however, is remarkably similar: Johannine scholars are suddenly disinterested in the figure of Jesus’ mother except as it relates to the demonstration of their respective theories. The notion that the mother occupies a special position in the Fourth Gospel, taken for granted in much popular literature as well as the authors we studied in Chapter One, is now openly questioned by scholars, who speak more of the silence of scripture on this score than its eloquence. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the academic community was soon invited to weigh in on the subject and provide an ecumenical portrait of the Mother of Jesus.
In an essay entitled *The Meaning of Modern New Testament Studies for an Ecumenical Understanding of Mary*¹⁹ Raymond Brown identified the Cana narrative as singularly important for an historical quest, since it is the only New Testament scene in which Jesus and Mary converse as adults. The narrative is problematic in at least three ways: 1) the context — Jesus is portrayed as being among his family, where he is thought not to have performed mighty works (according to the Synoptics); 2) the miracle is apparently worked for the convenience of family and friends, which has no Old Testament precedent; 3) the tension between Jesus’ words to his mother and her subsequent instructions to the waiters requires some explication.

Brown relies on a recent study by Barnabas Lindars which suggested that the narrative derives from the kind of pre-Gospel folk legend found in the infancy narratives.²⁰ He therefore speculates that “the pre-Lukan story of Jesus in the Temple and the pre-Johannine story of a miracle worked at Cana may represent first-century Christian speculation on the hidden life of Jesus.”²¹ The headwaiter’s estimate of the new wine may originally have been a saying of Jesus enshrined in a parable, which was subsequently included in the folk legend as its moral.

Lindars’ theory can perhaps explain why the story takes place in Galilee and within a family context, but it does little to explain the curious exchange between mother and son. For this, Brown turns to the work of Robert Fortna. In the pre-Johannine stage as reconstructed by Fortna, there is no need to explain the awkward exchange between mother and son, because it does not exist; Fortna attributes the dialogue to the redaction. Brown sees this as an effort to bring the mother’s portrait into line with what is found in Mark 3: 31-35 and Luke 2:49, where no importance is attributed to family relationships and the central question is that of doing the will
of God. “It is possible, then, that a popular story which arose in a context of Jesus working miracles for his family and friends before he begins his ministry has been corrected by a Gospel understanding that Jesus did not react to his earthly family in such a way.” Thus Brown dismisses the Cana exchange as “nothing more than another form of the tradition common to the Synoptics” and concludes that “in terms of our quest for historical information about Mary, Cana adds little to the general Gospel picture.” It is only at the foot of the cross, where she appears alongside the other great unnamed figure of the Gospel, that the mother is seen in a new light. “The woman whose request he rejected at Cana is now brought into family relationship with the ideal disciple.”

The significance of Brown’s position cannot be overstated: he has gone searching for the historical Mary and come back empty-handed. The New Testament gives us precious little information about the historical Mary, who comes to us shrouded in the theology of the various communities who reflected on her in search of truth about God and themselves. In this particular essay, however, Brown’s views remain confined within relatively narrow boundaries: an article appearing in a scholarly publication, with rather limited circulation. Only when these same ideas find a public forum will they impact a larger Christian audience. And this is precisely what was attempted by the ecumenical task force that produced *Mary in the New Testament*, a book translated into numerous languages for consumption by an international audience.


The authors of *Mary in the New Testament* (hereafter MNT) begin their presentation by acknowledging the improbability of gaining access to verifiable historical information behind the New Testament theological portraits. They specifically reject the practice of interpreting one biblical text through information supplied by another. New Testament authors are to be
considered as having been unaware of one another’s accounts unless the contrary can be proven. Pluralism in theologies is so much a part of the authors’ thesis that no attempt is made to reconcile apparently diverse accounts, which will lead them to accept quite different outlooks on Mary among the NT authors. There is, however, a New Testament portrait of Mary that is neither static nor uniform, evincing a trajectory from one period to another. Finally, since the New Testament accounts are documents of faith rather than history, the inability to retrieve verifiable historical data is not to be considered fatal. What is retrievable on the basis of critical method is largely the portrait of a person as viewed through the theological lenses of a particular individual or group.

Although the authors of MNT announce their intention to study the theological portraits of individual New Testament authors, the supposed priority of Mark leads them to view the trajectory of ideas as moving out from the Markan Gospel and its traditions and toward the Fourth Gospel and its presumably later traditions. In this way, the burden of investigation falls on Mark 3: 20-35, along with its Synoptic parallels. When this Synoptic portrait has been examined and understood, the effort will be to learn how the evangelist has adopted or adapted the tradition to suit his theological purposes.28

Mark 3: 20-35

The text is a biographical apothegm in service of a saying found in 3:35, i.e., that those who do the will of God are the real members of Jesus’ family. Although Mark does not deliberately exclude the family from membership in the eschatological community of Jesus, the clear implication is that their advances are rebuffed precisely because they do not presently conform to the requirements of discipleship.
It is within the larger context of Mark 3: 20-35 that the *apothegm* attains its full meaning, for the Redactor has deliberately included the saying as part of a sequence of encounters between Jesus and those who fail to understand him, and in the case of the scribes, accuse him of being possessed. Sandwiched around this obviously negative encounter are the observations that some members of Jesus' family ("his own") came to take charge of him because they were concerned about him (3:21) and that Jesus' real family are those who do the will of God. Considered in light of 6:1, where Jesus is portrayed as saying that "no prophet is without honor except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own house," this text appears to point rather clearly to an uncomfortable relationship between Jesus and his biological family, which would -- as 3: 31-35 indicates -- include his mother. "The present form of v. 4 gives strong support to the interpretation in the preceding section that Mark believed that Jesus was not understood by his family." The fact that this text is taken into both Matthew and Luke appears to strengthen the impression that some tension existed between Jesus and his biological family.

The Fourth Gospel

Turning their attention to the Fourth Gospel, the authors of MNT pick up the theme of family disbelief in connection with the Cana narrative, following Fortna in reconstructing the narrative as a story of a miracle performed at the indirect request of the mother -- although, as we have seen, Fortna's reconstruction did not include the dialogue in 2:4). The original significance of the story seems to have been the miraculous changing of water into wine. "Thus Mary emerges as a believer in Jesus, even if the Jesus in whom she believes is primarily a wonder-worker (a view not surprising in a collection of miracles and signs)." The authors join Lindars in speculating that Jn. 2: 1-12, like the Lukan story of Jesus in the Temple, is a pre-ministry, hidden-life story that reflects a period when Jesus performed wonders at his family's bidding. This obviously
favorable pre-Gospel tradition, apparently in conflict with the Markan portrait of Jesus' relationship with his family, was subsequently reworked to bring it in line with the emerging New Testament portrait.

The location of the Cana narrative is meant to fulfill the prediction of Jesus in 1:50, i.e., “You shall see greater things than these.” Indeed, at Cana Jesus’ glory begins to be revealed. Yet even this primarily Christological purpose cannot completely obscure the figure of the mother, who is mentioned early and often, introduced in the opening verse, even ahead of Jesus and his disciples. To the mother's implicit request, Jesus replies with a Semitism that reflects detachment from another person's concern: “How does your concern affect me?” Since John several times informs us that Jesus' hour had not yet come (7:30, 8:20), the statement form of 2:4 -- “my hour has not yet come” -- is to be preferred. In the view of the authors, the mother “falls into the general category of those who, despite their good intentions, misunderstood Jesus (e.g., Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman). However, the fact that the mother apparently perceives no personal rebuke in the response, and proceeds to issue instructions to the waiters, then accompanies Jesus to Capernaum, argue that the dissociation was not personal. Thus the evangelist seems to agree with the Synoptics that the mother and brothers of Jesus were occasionally present during his ministry, but were not regular members of his intimate company.

One could put Mark and John together and postulate an early tradition that at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry his separation from his family was a deliberate action on his part, that they came to Capernaum to try to hold onto him, but recognized eventually that his calling had separated him from them, and that henceforth they remained in Nazareth while he traversed Galilee and Judea.
When the hour of Jesus arrives, the mother re-emerges, along with the Beloved Disciple, as one of Jesus’ “own.” While such details are probably not historical, the mother’s importance in Johannine theology may reflect the significance she had for the Johannine community. But the authors of MNT dismiss the notion that after Jesus’ death his mother went to live with the disciple, at least as the primary message intended by the evangelist. Since the Johannine crucifixion scene has clear, and clearly theological, significance, to accept this one scene as biographical would be inconsistent. Noting that the Calvary scene brings together two figures for whom the evangelist never provides personal names, the authors attune us to their symbolic potential, since we may presume that the Johannine community would have known at least the mother’s name. Here the mother’s role is not biological, but spiritual; related to the disciples, not Jesus. In this way, Jesus is portrayed as being able to leave behind at his death a small but highly significant community of authentic disciples: “the kind of community that in other NT works is called into being in the post-resurrectional or Pentecostal period.” And this is the significance of the announcement in 19:28, “It is finished.” The community of authentic Christian disciples now exists.

The authors mention only to dismiss Bultmann’s attempt to identify the mother with Jewish Christianity and the disciple with Gentile Christianity, holding out a bit more hope for R. Strachan’s thesis, i.e., that the mother is meant to represent Israel, not Jewish Christianity. Similarly, they show little sympathy for the contention that she is being portrayed as either the New Eve or as mother of all believers, although they are open to the suggestion that she is meant to represent the Church as spiritual mother of believers. Nevertheless, they insist that “one cannot prove any of these symbolic suggestions.”
Mary in the New Testament: Conclusions

Acknowledging that the negative portrait of Mary found in Mark does not necessarily reflect a more authentic portrait than that of the obedient Mary of Luke, the authors of MNT nevertheless contend that the lone mention of her in Acts 1:14 must be taken as evidence that even Luke was not concerned to exalt her position or role in the post-Easter community. It is therefore unlikely that Mark's more negative portrait is a Markan creation, since the community would be expected to resist such a presentation if the mother were known to have been part of the post-resurrection community.

Although Mark initially places Mary outside the eschatological family of Jesus, the authors of MNT feel he was not excluding the possibility of her passing from a merely maternal relationship to one of discipleship. Yet Mark himself never indicates that such a transition took place and, in 6:4, seems to imply that Jesus remained without honor among his own relatives and in his own house. Matthew and Luke soften this portrait to accommodate their own theological views, but do not entirely resolve the tension. "Thus in the Synoptic depiction of Mary during Jesus' ministry, we have a development from the negative estimation of Mark to the positive one of Luke, with Matthew representing the middle term."37

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus initially dissociates himself from his mother's misunderstanding of him as a wonder-worker. Yet he does not consign her to the category of the brothers, who are represented as unbelievers (cf. 7:5). She appears again at Calvary, where she becomes the mother of the disciple and a member of the new community of faith. "Thus the Cana story, both on the traditional and redactional level, places Mary in a less negative light than that in which she appears in the Gospel of Mark, but because of her imperfect faith at Cana she is not yet comparable to the believing and obedient Mary of Luke's Gospel."38 At Calvary, Jesus gave his
mother and Beloved Disciple to one another in order to create a new community of disciples, which is the Johannine equivalent of the eschatological family portrayed in the Synoptics.

Whether one views MNT as the highest point of critical Marian theology or the height of irenicism – or something in between – it remains clear that this work has influenced the churches’ perception of Mary, and that this influence has been felt within both Protestantism and Catholicism, within academic halls and popular libraries. Translated into a large number of modern languages, it has been identified as one of the most important efforts in the field of Marian studies in the twentieth century. For many students of the New Testament, this has meant that one need only refer to MNT for the last, best word on Jesus’ mother.

At first glance, the authors appear to have returned to the position put forth by Braun, i.e., that a temporary distancing between mother and son, visible in the Cana narrative, was replaced by the time of Calvary, where the mother is brought into the new and more significant relationship of discipleship. The critical difference, however, is that for the authors of MNT, this is all there is: a theological-symbolic portrait of a woman who is thought to have remained apart from Jesus’ ministry and who is used by the evangelist to make a point, nothing more. The result is a Cheshire-cat portrait that fades when viewed with a critical eye: one that may be significant theologically, but not historically.

History, Theology, and Symbol

What is perhaps most striking about MNT is the tendency to divorce theology and symbol from history: the mother of Jesus was not one of those who accompanied him during his ministry, but has been theologically and symbolically portrayed as such by the evangelist, as is evident at least by the time we arrive at Calvary. This interpretation is made possible by the two-level approach Brown shares with Martyn: the Gospel is not trying to tell us what happened in
the lifetime of Jesus so much as what was happening in the community at the time the Gospel was being written. In this view, one would have expected the authors to have made more of the replacement motif at Cana, since Judaism was being superseded in the life of the community at the time of writing, but no such emphasis is to be found.

Of all the ideas expressed by these authors, four take hold in the literature of those who take MNT as their point of departure: 1) the NT portrait of Mary is rather negative; 2) there is a trajectory within the NT, from the negative portrait of Mark to the more positive portrait of Luke, with Matthew as the middle term; 3) this NT trajectory is symbolic rather than historical; and 4) the authors went in search of the historical Mary and came back empty-handed. What has survived in Christian, especially Catholic and Orthodox tradition is a symbolic portrait of the Church in its ideal self-realization, superimposed upon the figure of Mary.39

The publication of MNT sounded something of a death knell for biblical studies of Mary in the minds of many authors, who felt that nothing more could be said in the absence of a new approach that might yield new insights.40 Bultmann had challenged the integrity of the text, as well as its authorship. Fortna had demonstrated how complex the task of reconstruction could be, and how long we may have to wait for some kind of consensus to emerge. Martyn had demonstrated that the Gospel was written on two levels, not written to reflect the deeper sense of Jesus' ipsissima verba. And Brown had shown that the Gospel passed through a number of stages, each of which left a layer of theological residue upon the original Gospel, until the historical figures and their stories could hardly be recognized.

In the absence of a clear consensus on exegetical premises, a number of authors returned to the study of Johannine symbolism as the key to understanding the Fourth Gospel. Even here, however, the efforts reflect the revisionist thinking of the times, calling into question not only the
extent of Johannine symbolism, but the nature and function of symbol within a human meaning-universe.

SACRAMENTS AND SYMBOLS: Vawter, Brown, Dillon, Clark, Collins

Commentators have long attempted to define the precise referents of Johannine symbols, as they encountered in the Gospel a rich vein of images that seemingly defied exhaustive analysis. As we have seen, those who commented on the figure and role of Jesus’ mother have also been wont to assign her a symbolic function, e.g., Daughter of Sion, New Eve, Israel, Church, etc. As the authors of MNT observed, however, it is perhaps impossible to demonstrate that such symbolism was actually intended by the evangelist and/or redactor(s). In the period we are examining, commentators have explored two related avenues of approach. The first tests the theory that the Gospel intentionally employs symbols to speak about the sacramental life of the Church. The second employs the insights of symbol theory itself to explore the scope and purpose of Johannine symbolism.

The Johannine Sacramentary: Bruce Vawter

In *The Johannine Sacramentary*, Bruce Vawter attributed the seminal work on Johannine symbolism to C.H. Dodd and Oscar Cullman. In essence, the argument holds that the Gospel reflects a turn away from concern with *an imminent parousia* and toward an emphasis on the life of the Church, especially the emerging sacraments. Within this context, Vawter claims to see a parallel between the wedding feast at Cana and the anointing at Bethany. The evangelist locates the wedding feast seven days before the resurrection, and the latter seven days after the witness of the Baptizer, in order to highlight the relationship between this anointing and the resurrection of Jesus. The implication is that “the sacraments mean the same for the Church as the miracles of the historical Jesus for his contemporaries.” At Cana, then, the mother of Jesus symbolizes the
Church asking for the sacraments. "The presence of Mary-the-Church at this wedding forecasts the sacramental nature of Christian marriage once the glorification of Jesus is accomplished."

One need not necessarily accept the identification of marriage as the proper sacramental referent of the Cana narrative to appreciate the importance of Vawter's thesis, viz., that in the time after the destruction of Jerusalem, when expectation of an imminent parousia was on the wane, the evangelist turned his hand to composing a Gospel that would emphasize, not preparation for the Lord's apparently-postponed return in glory, but the life of grace, grounded in attachment to the person of Jesus and the sacramental life of the Church. Where Cullmann and other Protestant scholars tended to limit Johannine sacramental symbolism to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Vawter writes of a Johannine Sacramentary, with a very-near-complete array of sacraments.

A Response by Raymond Brown

In The Johannine Sacramentary Reconsidered, Raymond Brown sought to test Vawter's thesis, and to more precisely identify the sacramental referents of the Johannine symbols. Recent scholarship, he writes, may be divided into two camps: the non-sacramental and the ultra-sacramental, with Bultmann at one extreme and Cullmann at the other. Brown attempts to steer a path through the middle of these two camps. Examining the symbols of Cana, Brown sees no compelling argument in the suggestion that the abundance of water, which was relatively useless in itself, was intended to symbolize the transforming waters of Baptism. At Cana, it is the water being transformed, while in baptism the water does the transforming. There is, however, some reason to accept Eucharistic symbolism in the Gospel, and if one reads the Cana narrative in conjunction with the multiplication of the loaves, the symbolism is certainly possible, if not entirely transparent. Finally, the blood-and-water of the Calvary scene may be symbolically related to both Baptism and Eucharist.
The possibility of sacramental symbolism has continued to attract scholars to the discussion in the decades since Vawter’s study, with neither a clear consensus on the extent of such symbolism nor, as we have seen in the work of Fortna and Martyn, a context in which such symbolism would have a more-or-less precise meaning. Those who claim to find sacramental symbolism generally continue to press their arguments without reference to the methodological questions posed by Source and Redaction Criticism.

Symbols and Wisdom: R. Dillon

The question of sacramental symbolism was taken up again by R. Dillon, who argued that the symbolism employed in the Cana narrative is consistent with the language and idea of late Judaism, especially the documents concerned with Wisdom. Dillon writes of a Johannine milieu of refractory Judaism in which certain themes common to sapiential literature are encountered, e.g., personified Wisdom and Logos. He therefore explores the possibility that the Cana narrative is a Wisdom typology.

Soon after the Prologue, wherein we first encounter Wisdom Christology, the Gospel presents the Baptizer as declaring that he is not “the prophet” – a title proffered to Jesus within the Wisdom Christology of Jn. 6: “This is undoubtedly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (v. 14). When two of John’s disciples pursue Jesus, he asks them, “What are you seeking?” And they address him as “Rabbi – that is to say, Master – where are you staying?” To these disciples and to Philip, and through him to Nathanael, Jesus issues the invitation to “come and see,” i.e., to find in him what they are looking for. Dillon writes, “The allusion seems to be to the appeals of Wisdom in the early chapters of Proverbs and to the descriptions of Wisdom’s search by the Pseudo-Solomon. She cries aloud in the streets and by-ways for men who will receive her teaching.”

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Dillon pays close attention to 1:50, "I tell you, you will see heaven opened and God's angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Since this is the text immediately preceding the Cana narrative, there would appear to be a link between prophecy and fulfillment. "The midrash on Jacob's ladder (the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, cf. Gn. 28:12) depicts Christ as the New Israel, embodying the eschatological people of God, as Jacob had the Israel of old." 48

It is at this point in the Gospel that we encounter the Cana narrative, which is announced as occurring on the third day—a clear allusion to Jesus' resurrection from the dead (cf. I Cor. 15:3). 49 Behind the Cana narrative lies an objective event which, as a miracle of Jesus, was objectively capable of symbolic interpretation. The orientation of that symbolism is to the replacement by Jesus of the traditional institutions of Judaism, as in the cleansing of the Temple, the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, the multiplication of the loaves, and the healing on the Sabbath. The evangelist seeks to contrast the outdated and exhausted symbols of Judaism with the new and abundant symbols of Jesus: superior wine, living water, bread from heaven, temple of his body that will rise again. At Cana, Jesus reveals himself as the true Torah, the True Wisdom of the New Israel. "Jesus performs the Cana miracle in the presence of his disciples, and they believe in him, offering him the allegiance which Wisdom demanded of her followers." 50

Symbols in Sequences; D. Clark (1983)

D.K. Clark returned to the connection between Wisdom and the Fourth Gospel in an essay in which he suggested a parallel between the midrashic relecture found in Chapter 11-19 of the Book of Wisdom and the signs found in the Gospel, with the former being reduced to six signs in Wisdom 10:16. 51 Clark suggests the following outline:
Clark observes, “The contents of many, if not all, of the signs in John correspond in a surprising way to the contents of their exact equivalents in Wisdom.” Whether or not one is disposed to accept Clark’s parallels, it is significant to note a possible connection between Cana and Wisdom, for in any such parallel the mother of Jesus would be seen as asking for a new and authentic Wisdom to replace the exhausted Wisdom of Torah.

Retreat from Symbolism: Raymond Collins

If the scholars whose works we have seen reveal a taste for extensive symbolism, others have preferred to be more reserved and far less specific. Raymond Collins argues: 1) that precise referents for Johannine symbols are hard to come by, and 2) symbolic interpretations of Cana should be viewed in terms of the narrative’s real function, viz., that of serving as the key to all the other signs Jesus performs in the Gospel. In this view, the mother is seen as representing all those who faithfully await the fulfillment of the messianic times, symbolized by the abundance of wine poured out for the many. And it is in this sense that the first sign — Cana — is paradigmatic for all Jesus’ signs. “The evangelist has put the entire Gospel, and especially his account of the ‘signs’ of Jesus, in a definite perspective. That perspective is the hour of Jesus. In the hour of Jesus’ crucifixion/glorification, a gift is given to those who faithfully await the Messianic times.” The Cana narrative, Collins contends, is a kind of hermeneutical key
intended to help the interpreter open and understand all the subsequent signs of Jesus. Because at Cana Jesus invites his mother to await the arrival of his hour, and then rewards the guests with abundance typical of messianic times, the reader is alert to find this meaning throughout the Book of Signs.

Collins argues that "it is probably not necessary to attempt to be more specific and see in the wine, as some authors do, a symbol of the joy of Messianic Times, or the gift of the Spirit, or the sacrament of the Eucharist."

It is enough to see the wine as a general symbol of the blessings of the messianic era, poured out in abundance on those who, like Jesus' mother, await them faithfully. Yet because the mother's request apparently envisions, not the blessings of the messianic era, but the simple gift of physical wine, the response by her son comes as something of a correction. "He says that the biological relationship between Jesus and his mother is not as important as the attitude of faithful expectation of the messianic gifts. It is that attitude which is symbolized in the role which John assigns to Mary in 2: 1-12 and 19: 25-27."

History, Theology, and Symbol

With the work of Collins, our study of symbolic interpretations appears to have come full circle. After examining sacramental symbolism in great detail, as well as the connection between Wisdom and Johannine symbolism, we arrive back at the position generally adopted by scholars like Serra and de la Potterie, namely, that the abundance of superior wine is a symbol of the messianic times become present in the person of Jesus. At the symbolic level, the mother of Jesus is asking for the blessings of the messianic era. But there is something missing here that is worth noting. Serra and de la Potterie seek to interpret a Gospel rich in symbolism; Collins seeks to reduce all Fourth-Gospel symbolism to the message he claims to find in the Cana narrative.
There is, then, a greater interest in symbolism here than in the symbols themselves, and considerably less interest in defining the precise historical referents of Johannine symbols.

In the years between Vawter and Collins, there took place an explosion of studies dedicated to the function of symbol, not only within texts with multiple meanings or meaning-levels, but as the key to unlocking all meaning expressed by symbolic human beings in fundamentally symbolic language. The issue is not whether a certain author intended a certain symbol to refer to a certain reality that discloses its meaning, but the symbolic nature of all reality, as well as the symbolic meaning-world that is our world of disclosure, and how these inform all our attempts at communication.

SYMBOLIC CONSCIOUSNESS: X. LEON-DUFOUR: 1980 -

Addressing the Society for New Testament Studies’ 1980 General Meeting, X. Leon-Dufour warned of several traps that appear once one ventures into the arena of symbolic exegesis, not the least of which is an alleged dichotomy between symbol and history. “It is important to reject a false contrast, unfortunately all too common, which opposes the ‘historical’ and the ‘symbolic’ as if bringing out the symbolic dimension of a narrative or of a saying would thereby diminish its historical reality.” It must be considered highly significant that Leon-Dufour chooses a general meeting of biblical scholars to issue this warning. The implication can only be that this trap has been snaring its share of exegetes in the period leading up to the meeting. And this, in fact, is what we have seen, if only briefly, in the works of the scholars we have been examining: an inability to hold history and symbol in dynamic tension, and therefore a tendency to exalt one at the expense of the other, or to lose sight of both in the bright lights of an author’s theology.
Against this false dichotomy, Leon-Dufour argues that *history itself is inherently symbolic* precisely because it becomes history in the act of being perceived by a creature with symbolic consciousness. More precisely, it is not that certain realities *operate at two levels* (so Martyn), or that certain realities have a *sensus plenior*, but that the human intellect, itself symbolically oriented, finds in reality its inherently symbolic dimension.

One might say that there is no such thing as a symbol-in-itself and that everything we know on this earth has many different meanings. Thus, in the bible, water can symbolize life-giving benevolence or purification, as well as horrifying annihilation. It is the human intellect which, in such and such a cultural or literary framework, establishes the symbolic value of a given reality, which we often mistakenly call a ‘symbol in itself’.

Rather than speak of symbols, Leon-Dufour prefers to speak of *symbolic operations*, by which he seeks to describe the human subject in the act of discerning the function of any given symbol. The evangelist has not written his story on two different levels, or with two different sets of meanings, but has *told a tale* which, to symbolic consciousness within a certain cultural context and operating with certain historical knowledge, is perceived as having a certain symbolic meaning, although that single perception does not and cannot exhaust the symbolic potential of the narrative.

Leon-Dufour offers a distinction concerning the interpretations that become possible for Christians during the time of the Spirit. The evangelist composed his narrative according to the material available to him from his sources and his own understanding of the events he was about to describe – an understanding *itself imbued* with symbolic consciousness. But the Church reads and understands that narrative in the power of the Spirit and within a number of cultural contexts that yield different shades of meaning. The reader must hold in dynamic tension the narrative as
told by the evangelist, in which Jesus appears speaking and acting among his contemporaries, and the narrative as it speaks to contemporary experience. "Symbolic reading presupposes, therefore, a continued tension between the past and the future, a tension which constitutes the Christian present pregnant with the Spirit." In terms of Leon-Dufour's distinction, we may say that the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus' mother at Cana is laden with symbolic potential, and therefore susceptible to a wide number of possible interpretations, e.g., the mother as the Daughter of Sion, the True Spouse, the Mother of all believers, the Church, etc. In this view, none of these symbolic interpretations is to be excluded, although none exhausts the full meaning of the text, which continues to make its case as if it speaks only of the original historical event. But the Church, empowered by the Spirit and incarnate within a succession of historical contexts, is able to guide believers to proper interpretations of the narrative, excluding those manifestly hostile to the meaning of the Spirit in the life of the Church.

If, then, the Johannine portrait of Jesus' mother has traditionally been seen in symbolic terms, that symbolism resides as much within the Church's capacity to see and believe as it does within the intention of the evangelist, who has left us no unequivocal guide to his use of symbols in her regard. When the Church claims to see in Jesus' mother the figure of the New Eve, it is not required to demonstrate that such was the intention of the evangelist or, for that matter, that the historical woman, Mary, actually lived and functioned as such. All that is required is the ecclesial perception of Jesus' mother as susceptible to such an interpretation, and that it does not contradict the Spirit-guided understanding of her person and role. Symbolism resides, not only in the intention of the author and in his text, but especially in the consciousness of those who reflect on the author's words within the context of their lives and faith experiences, i.e., those who are able to maintain history and symbol in dynamic tension, without denying the legitimacy and
value of one or the other. A symbolic reading of the Fourth Gospel, then, requires that the interpreter take seriously all the interpretations proposed by symbolic consciousness through the centuries and in a variety of cultural contexts, rather than exclude those not considered consonant with the author's intentions.

Leon-Dufour applies his symbolic reading to the Fourth Gospel, and to the Cana narrative in particular, in a later essay, which he divides into a literary analysis, yielding the author's intention, and a symbolic analysis, yielding both the author's intention and the Spirit-assisted reader's interpretation. Since the immediately-preceding text (1:51) promises a manifestation of the Son of Man, Leon-Dufour suggests that 2:1-12 is the beginning of this self-manifestation, as indicated in 2:11. In the presence of God (the bridegroom), Israel (the mother) addressed Jesus. Her words, "They have no wine," express the distress of her people as they await the eschatological fulfillment of God's promises made through the prophets, as well as their willingness to do whatever they are told. Jesus responds to the hopes of Israel by giving them an even better wine: the wine of eschatological times.

Concerning the specific exchange between mother and son, Leon-Dufour contends that the mother is speaking of the lack of material wine, though we (i.e., the Church) may see in her words a "taking to heart" of the sufferings of her people. To her request, the son replies, "Is my concern your concern?" Jesus' real concern is not the lack of material wine, but the arrival of his hour. By addressing his mother as "woman," Jesus moves the dialogue onto another plane, where the concern will not be with his physical family, but with those who hear and do the will of God. Thus his translation, "has not my hour come?" — a translation he sees as possible because later references to the non-arrival of his hour are made, but by Jesus, but by the evangelist. Since the mother understands these words not to preclude her instructions to the servants, the internal
evidence of the text warrants the interrogative rendition. Jesus is inviting his mother to realize that his hour has, indeed, arrived and it is now time for him to intervene according to the will of God, although his hour will only be fulfilled in the events of Calvary.

Recognizing that the hour has arrived to act according to the will of God, the mother ceases to speak at the level of flesh-and-blood. She is now Israel accepting the yet-unknown conditions of the covenant God is renewing through Jesus. She does not take the place of a mediator, but represents Israel disposed to obey God and God’s envoy. “According to the symbolism of the evangelist, the mother of Jesus is Israel without Christ, yet with a certain confidence in the initiative of God. Jesus announces in figurative language that the faith of Israel is spent....the ancient covenant becomes, through the word of Jesus of Nazareth, the new covenant....”63

History, Theology, and Symbol

If earlier authors tended to interpret the Fourth Gospel at only two levels, the historical and the theological (with some attention to a limited understanding of symbolism), these authors attempt their interpretations at the level of the historical-symbolic, which – in the Gospel as received into the Church – is one and the same. The interpreter can only arrive at the symbolic meaning of the text by studying the historical narrative, and may only arrive at the historical narrative through symbolic consciousness.

The insight that emerges from this analysis is that the historical events to which a given text points and the symbolic meaning that text yields within a given cultural-cognitive context, may only be held in dynamic tension by the theology of the author. To disconnect history and symbol from the author’s theology would be to leave a multiplicity of symbolic interpretations unanchored in history or, conversely, to confine the meaning of the text to the historical facts.
History, theology, and symbol are necessarily interrelated in any Gospel text, but it is not history that governs the abiding meaning of the text. Neither is it the variety of possible symbolic meanings that determine the abiding meaning. Rather, it is the author's theology, including both his intention and the symbolic potential of his words, that can hold history and symbol in dynamic tension without allowing either to wander off on its own.

A SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE: RITVA WILLIAMS (1997)

Treating 2:1-12 as a historically plausible incident, R. Williams attempts to provide a culturally-contextual interpretation of the narrative of the Cana Narrative. In such an interpretation one must take into account the overriding concern for maintaining honor which drove people in the first century A.D., as well as the public nature of weddings in Mediterranean societies, past and present. For the groom to run out of wine in the midst of his wedding celebrations would be for him to lose his honor, his reputation, and his prestige in the community. If he were faced with such a catastrophe, his only recourse would be to find a colleague or patron who could replenish the supply of wine.

The presence of Jesus' family at the wedding celebrations indicates that they and the groom's family are initiating or continuing an ongoing reciprocal relationship. When the mother of Jesus learns of the wine shortage, she seizes the opportunity to enhance her family's honor and extend its web of reciprocal relations. Implicit in her statement to Jesus that "they have no wine" (2:3) are a request that he rectify the situation and a reminder of his obligations as head of her family. Using her privileged access to her son, Mary seeks to broker a favor from him that would establish him as patron of a local family, thereby enhancing his honor and that of his family.

Jesus' response to his mother is a double query: "What concern is that to me and to you, Woman? Has not my hour come?" (2:4). His words signal that he is well aware that he and his
honor are being challenged indirectly by the family of the groom who is in need of help. Jesus' answer is a recognition that his mother is trying to draw him into the local game of honor and patronage. Although his words indicate that there is tension between him and his mother over the question of his patronage and its brokerage, they do not constitute a refusal, rebuff, or rebuke. In Mary's ears they are no more than a complaint, an objection that is not worthy of a reply. Sure of herself and of her son's favor, she instructs the servants to obey him (2:5).

By changing the water into wine Jesus not only preserves the groom's honor but enhances it by the quality of the wine which is now served. The groom, his chief steward, and his guests continue celebrating, unaware that the wine is a gift, an act of patronage. Jesus' honor, too, is enhanced, not in the eyes of the public, who remain ignorant of his actions, but in the eyes of his disciples, who in the changing of the water into wine have witnessed his "glory" and believed in him (2:11). His mother and brothers, apparently satisfied with the outcome of the incident, accompany him and his disciples to Capernaum and stay there with him for some time (2:12).

The incident at Cana reflects some tension between Jesus and his mother. In spite of this tension, Jesus does not dissociate himself from her in this or in any other Johannine narrative, in contrast to what one sees in the Synoptics. When a rift between Jesus and his family members does appear in the Fourth Gospel, it is a rift between him and his brothers (7:1-9), not between him and his mother. Mary is, in fact, dissociated from the brothers by Jesus himself when he places her in the care of the Beloved Disciple (19:28-27).

In this story, Jesus' honor is enhanced, but in an unexpected and ironic way. Mary is a widowed mother urging her son to actions intended to preserve and enhance the family's status and prestige. Although Jesus questions his mother's interference, he is depicted as an obedient
son. What appears at first to be a potential distraction from his divinely-appointed mission turns out, in the end, to serve the purpose for which he was called.


The relationship between history, theology, and symbol took an interesting turn in a 1998 article published in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly,* where Troy Martin argued that commentators were generally divided into three camps: those who saw the mother of Jesus as an historical figure, those who saw her as a symbolic representation (e.g., of Israel), and those who saw her shadowy portrayal as a polemic against an undue emphasis on Mary.

The evangelist refers to the mother of Jesus, not by name, but with an epithet. At Cana, he simply says, "The mother of Jesus (ἡ μήτηρ του Ἰησοῦ) was there" He repeats this epithet in 2:3, and he shortens it to "his mother" (ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ) in 2:5 and 2:12. He employs a similarly abbreviated epithet in 6:42, where the Jews mention Joseph by name but use the epithet "(his) mother" (ἡ μητέρα) in reference to Mary. At the foot of the cross, the evangelist again prefers the epithet "his mother" as a substitute for her name (19:25-26). This scene concludes with Jesus bequeathing his mother to the Beloved Disciple; the epithet now becomes: "Behold your mother" (19:27). Since the Synoptics show no reluctance to name Jesus’ mother, exegetes generally agree that this practice has some significance for the evangelist, but they are unable to agree on what that significance may be. Some explain its significance symbolically, others polemically, and still others historically.

**Symbolic Interpretation**

Several exegetes interpret Mary as a symbol either of Jewish Christianity or of the Christian church as a whole. Rudolf Bultmann succinctly expresses the first of these symbolic interpretations in his comments on John 19:26:
The mother of Jesus, who tarries by the cross, represents Jewish Christianity that overcomes the offence of the cross. The beloved disciple represents Gentile Christianity, which is charged to honour the former as its mother from whom it has come, even as Jewish Christianity is charged to recognise itself as "at home" within Gentile Christianity, i.e., included in the membership of the one great fellowship of the Church. 66

Bultmann does not extend this symbolical interpretation to include Mary's appearance at the wedding feast at Cana, but other exegetes do. In "The Hour of Jesus and the Sign of Cana,"67 A. Feuillet warns against a false dichotomy between history and symbol in the interpretation of this passage. In his attempt to avoid this false dichotomy, Feuillet understands Mary to represent the church but refuses to abstract her from the historical dimension of the scene depicted in the text. In spite of Feuillet's attempt to avoid the false dichotomy, his interpretation is very similar to symbolic interpretations, which often give assent to the historical dimension behind the text. B. Lindars68 attempts to avoid the excesses of the symbolical and historical approaches by using a form-critical approach. He suggests that Mary's anonymity results from the necessity of distinguishing her from other women with the same name. Although Lindars' suggestion may have some merit, it is not supported by the use of Mary's proper name in Matthew and Luke, who also name the other Marys. Even though Lindars interprets other elements of the story symbolically, he interprets Mary's role in John's Gospel historically. M. Thurian interprets Mary both as a type of Israel and as a type of the church.69 In "Wisdom Tradition and Sacramental Retrospect in the Cana Account [Jn 2,1-11],"70 R.J. Dillon comments, "Jesus and His mother become figures of the eschaton....In the retrospect of the final age, Mary becomes the representative of the faithful remnant of Israel, expressing the anguish of the captivity of sin which could not be removed under the old law. They have no wine' is an expression of the
craving of faithful Israel." Raymond Brown articulates the second symbolic interpretation, that
the Johannine Mary symbolizes the Christian church as a whole. In treating the symbolism of
Mary at Cana he turns to the woman in Revelation 12, whom he sees as a symbol of the people
of God. Her "drama," he says, "spans the two Testaments: as Israel she brings forth the Messiah
who cannot be defeated by the serpent; as the church, she continues on earth after the Ascension,
persecuted but protecting her children." Brown then links this woman, who brings forth the
Messiah, to Mary and concludes that the Johannine "stress" is on Mary as a symbol of the
church.

Exegetes who prefer one or the other of these symbolical interpretations find support in the
evangelist's reluctance to mention Mary's name. "The fact that John never uses the name 'Mary'
for Jesus' mother," writes Brown, "is significant; he is interested in her motherhood. In 19.26 the
mother of Jesus is made the mother of the Beloved Disciple, and thus her physical motherhood is
reinterpreted in relation to discipleship." M. Pamment, in her study of the broader issue of
anonymity in the Fourth Gospel, supports this assessment of the Johannine Mary's anonymity.
She concludes that "the unnamed groups and individuals serve a representative function," and
"since the beloved disciple is described and not named, we should expect him to play a
representative role," which is that of representing Gentile Christianity, where the mother of Jesus
"finds her home." This assessment of the significance of Mary's anonymity is common among
exegetes who prefer the symbolical interpretation.

Other studies of anonymity in the Fourth Gospel, Martin notes, do not support the
symbolical interpretation of Mary. W. W. Watty asserts that the Johannine author uses
anonymity to correct the "unhealthy distinction" of "inordinate importance" given to persons in
the gospel story, and that anonymity keeps the "life-giving Name" of Jesus from "drowning" in a
plethora of names. In contrast to Warty's Christological approach, D. R. Beck applies the literary theory of T. Docherty to the issue of anonymity in the Fourth Gospel, arguing that Mary's anonymity creates "the potential for reader identification with her [unnamed] character." Neither Warty nor Beck understands anonymity as something permitting a character to function symbolically. Indeed, for Beck "it is doubtful that a reader would identify this anonymous mother of Jesus either as Judaism finding her home in Gentile Christianity or as the church as the mother of all beloved disciples without the direction of an interpreter."

Historical Interpretation

Many exegetes echo Beck's criticism of the symbolical interpretation of the Johannine Mary and provide a historical interpretation instead. One of them is C. K. Barrett. Noting the mention of the unnamed mother of Jesus in 2:1-12, in 6:42, and in 19:25-27, he comments that in all of these passages except 19:25-27, "it seems certain that John has in mind a historical character, and that he intends no veiled allusion to the Israel from which the Messiah sprang," adding that "the earlier passages probably carry 19.25ff. with them." Even though Barrett does not think Mary's presence at the cross has the same historical reliability as her presence at the wedding, he interprets the scene at the cross in historical terms. He concludes that "there seems no sufficient ground for the view that the mother of Jesus represents allegorically the faithful remnant of Israel from which the Messiah sprang, now absorbed into the New Israel."

Although this historical interpretation avoids the arbitrariness of the symbolical approach, it does not sufficiently explain the anonymity of Mary. Hence, L. Morris, finding the fact that Mary is not mentioned by name puzzling, quotes Green-Armytage's explanation that Mary's anonymity results from the anonymity of the Beloved Disciple. This only begs the question of a rationale
for Mary's anonymity. Elsewhere, Morris indecisively concludes that "the omission of names is as striking a feature of this Gospel as is their insertion, and raises as many problems." 81

A Polemical Interpretation

Other exegetes avoid the difficulties of the symbolical and historical interpretations by proposing a polemical significance for the epithet "mother of Jesus." Herbert Preisker criticizes the symbolical interpretation of Mary as the representative of Jewish Christianity or of the Catholic Church. He then argues that the question of Mary's place in the community established by Jesus is raised in the scene of the wedding at Cana and is answered in the scene at the foot of the cross in John 19:25: since Mary is not a mother goddess, her place is not in the sphere of the divine, and consequently not in the sphere of the Son of God, but rather in the community, where she fills the role of mother along with other mothers in the community. Thus, Preisker argues that the evangelist leaves Mary unnamed because he is concerned about the increasing devotion to Mary, whose name God had made great. 83 According to Preisker, the Johannine author attempts to put Mary in her proper place as a human mother in the community of Jesus.

Preisker's argument, Martin notes, encounters difficulties because it presupposes a view of Mary that may be anachronistic. Devotion to Mary certainly begins very early, and Preisker cites some important evidence, but the propensity to divinize Mary is probably later than John's Gospel. Furthermore, the evangelist does not make an analogous use of anonymity in his attempt to demote Peter, who is named in the Gospel, in favor of the Beloved Disciple, who remains anonymous. For these reasons, Preisker's assessment of Mary's anonymity is as problematic as are the symbolical and historical assessments.
Martin therefore concludes that a definitive understanding of the "Mother of Jesus" epithet is not to be found within either the Fourth Gospel or, by extension, the Synoptics, but in the writings of other influential authors in the ancient world. He concludes that the Johannine preference for referring to Mary exclusively by the epithet "mother of Jesus" is not at all uncommon or unusual. Almost all of the authors of this period substitute the epithet "mother of N" for the name of a mother. Consequently, the idea that the Johannine use of the epithet somehow contributes to a symbolical or a polemical significance to Mary is doubtful. Furthermore, the Johannine employment of this epithet is neither strange nor surprising, as those who advocate an historical interpretation of Mary observe. The Johannine use of the epithet cannot bear the significance attributed to it by exegetes who adopt the symbolical, polemical, or historical interpretation of Mary.


The Fourth Gospel is not only inherently symbolic, but "speaks to Christians of all ages and calls them to make, once and for all, life's most important choice."

84 Building upon his earlier narrative-critical reading of the Gospel, Moloney sets out to study the narrative design of the Gospel story, attempting "to trace the impact the Johannine form of the Jesus story has on the reader." 85 In this narrative design, the Gospel falls into "blocks of material" that should be studied as such, as well as in their relationship to one another and, especially, to the reader: the Prologue (1:1-18), the public ministry (1:19-12:50), Jesus' final evening with his disciples (13:1-17:26), and the account of his death and resurrection (18:1-21:25). There are also certain "turning points" in the narrative: 2:1, 5:1, 11:1-4, 13:1, 18:1-3, 20:1, and 21:1.

The author takes as his point of departure the idea that "there is very little of the Gospel of John that belonged to the life of Jesus...It was a deeply religious, semi-philosophical,
Hellenistic, and perhaps Gnostic reflection on the significance of Jesus. Following Brown and Martyn, Moloney holds that the story of Jesus recorded in the Fourth Gospel reflects, not history, but the historical experiences of an early Christian community.

The community began as a small group of Jerusalem Christians and its members developed an increasingly unique understanding of Jesus as they responded to a variety of experiences, both religious and social. People foreign, and even hostile to the traditions of Israel were admitted to the community (cf. 4:1-41), and this led to a stage when the members of the Johannine Community could no longer be accepted by their fellow Jews. Thus they were expelled from the synagogue (cf. 9:22, 12:42, 16:2). Free from this controlling tradition, a further vigorous affirmation developed of a unified and potentially dangerous understanding of God, the Christ of God, and his Church.

It was from this long and circuitous faith journey that the Fourth Gospel emerged, reflecting the blood, sweat and tears of its people, not all of whom remained faithful to the authors understanding of Jesus and his mission. Thus the author composes his Gospel in order to draw a line in the sand between those who see and believe, and those who refuse to see or believe.

The First Cana Narrative

In Moloney’s narrative design, 2:1 belongs to the public ministry of Jesus and constitutes a turning point in the narrative. His (RSV) translation of 2:4 is revealing: “And Jesus said to her, ‘O Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.’ With these words, Jesus rebukes his mother for her lack of understanding. “He then makes a statement that indicates that Jesus’ life is marked by a sequence of events leading to an ‘hour’.” A world exists between Jesus and God, and the mother of Jesus is outside that world.” His words, however, are a “gentle rebuke that keeps her in her place.”
Yet with unconditional trust in the efficacy of his word (ho ti an legé), she issues instructions to the servants. She is the first person in the narrative to show, at the level of the action of the story, that the correct response to the presence of Jesus is trust in his word.91

Moloney's treatment of the Cana Narrative is standard for those who accept his premises, i.e., the discontinuity between history and theology, the translation of 2:4 as a rebuke, and the mother's admirable expression of faith in her words to the waiters. Yet this author makes a significant contribution when he claims that the two Cana narratives are intentionally linked in the theology of the evangelist. Where Braun, Ceroke, et. al., had sought to understand 2:1-12 in terms of the problematic phrases, and Brown, Schnackenburg, et. al., had sought to do the same in terms of the layers of meaning "behind the text," Moloney discerns an intentional link between the two signs at Cana in the evangelist's words "Cana of Galilee, where he had made the water wine." (4:46) The two narratives form a kind of framework, within which the evangelist tells his tale:

i. The first miracle at Cana (2:1-12)
   ii. Jesus and "the Jews" (2:13-22)
   iii. Comment (2:23-25)
   iv. Jesus and Nicodemus (3:1-21)
   v. Jesus and John the Baptist (3:22-36)
   vi. Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (4:1-15)
   vii. Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (4:16-30)
   viii. Comment (4:31-38)
   ix. Jesus and the Samaritan Villagers (4:39-42)
   x. The second miracle at Cana (4:43-54)

The Cana-Cana continuum is characterized by Jesus' encounters with Israel ("the Jews," Nicodemus) and Samaria, which reveal disbelief on the part of the Jews, inadequate belief on the part of Nicodemus, but growing (if grudging) belief on the part of Samaritans, bracketed by
stories in which Galileans and foreigners (royal official) put their faith in Jesus. In each case, there is an instance of inadequate faith that needs to be expanded by Jesus’ words and/or actions. In the first Cana narrative, the reason the mother’s faith is at least initially inadequate faith is not entirely clear, but in the second Cana narrative the reason is explicit: “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.”

This, then, is the “problem” of the first block of material: people who come to Jesus in search of signs and wonders, but withhold their belief unless the signs and wonders are forthcoming. The Jews in the temple-cleansing sequence ask for a sign that authorizes Jesus to do such things.(2:18) Nicodemus proclaims Jesus because no one could do such things unless he came from God.(3:2) The Samaritan woman and her townspeople believe only after Jesus tells her everything she has ever done. (4:29) Only his mother evinces a faith in him that cannot be explained on the basis of the text. Having received an enigmatic response to her observation about the lack of wine, she immediately turns to the waiters and instructs them to “do whatever he tells you.” “She trusts unconditionally, even in the face of apparent rejection and rebuke, in the efficacy of the word of Jesus.” Curiously, Moloney does not go out of his way to support the RSV translation of the text in which he claims to find both a rejection and a gentle rebuke. He appears content to follow those who find in the words ἓξιολ καὶ σοί an equivalent of mah-li walak, but does not attempt to justify the translation of the latter expression as a rejection, although it is open to the same flexibility that ἓξιολ καὶ σοί so obviously is. Moloney ends his treatment of this block with what appears to be a forced conclusion.

The first Cana story (2:1-12), following the account of the limited belief of the first disciples and Jesus’ promise of greater sight (cf. 1:35-51), provides the criterion for the belief that will allow access to such sight. The mother of Jesus believes in the word of her son (2:5), the doxa of
Jesus is manifested, and the disciples believe. On the basis of this criterion, the responses of a series of characters from Judaism can be assessed: "the Jews" (2:13-22), Nicodemus (3:1-21), and John the Baptist (3:22-36). As Jesus journeys into Samaria, the responses of people outside the world of Judaism can also be judged: the Samaritan woman (4:1-15), the Samaritan woman (sic) (4:16-30), and the Samaritan villagers (4:39-42). Jesus returns to Cana in Galilee where a Gentile official believes in the word of Jesus (4:43-54)."93

History, Theology, and Symbol

Moloney completes the dissociation between history and theology that had begun with Brown and Martyn: the Fourth Gospel provides very little historical material, and Moloney is not inclined to tell us where that material begins and ends. What we have in this Gospel is the theology of the evangelist, presented in a thinly-veiled attempt to promote it at the expense of one or more competing theologies he wishes to refute. To this end, he employs a large number of symbols, which Moloney claims to understand, but which are rarely explained for readers in the text – the exception being verses like 2:21. This, Moloney explains, is because the primary concern of the evangelist was not to provide an historical account, but to confront readers of every generation with the decision to believe in Jesus.

Within this approach, there is little that can be said about the evangelist’s portrayal of Jesus’ mother, save that he used her to make his point in two distinct blocks of material. The author is not interested in the question raised, for example, by R. Brown and others, namely, whether 2:4 represents a Johannine instance of Jesus’ problematic relationship with his family. Although he shows some appreciation for Serra’s research about the third-day motif, Moloney sees it as part of a theological narrative that can tell us little or nothing about the historical woman.

It had long been suspected that a Gospel so inclined toward symbolism lent itself to dramatic presentation. As early as 1907, Hitchcock claimed to see an affinity between the Fourth Gospel and Greek Tragedy.94 Some years later, Hans Windisch wrote of the "broadly-elaborated, dramatically-presented narratives" of the Gospel and attempted to show these sections were originally a script.95 Robert Strachan followed Windisch with a work entitled "The Fourth Evangelist: Dramatist or Historian?"96 Clayton Bowen then argued that the Gospel had originally been prepared as a pageant, which would perhaps explain why certain problematic texts, e.g., 14:31 ("Come, then, let us be on our way!"), were more useful as stage directions than coherent in a literary narrative.97 In 1948, Connick argued in "The Dramatic Character of the Fourth Gospel," that the drama was designed to address specific issues, such as the break with Judaism98 – a theme taken up in 1979 by J. Louis Martyn, who argued that the Gospel as we know it was the product of a community that had been evicted from the synagogue as a result of the Birkat Haminim.99

In Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel, Jo-Ann Brant treats the Fourth Gospel as a play in an effort to "demonstrate that although the gospel may not have been intended for the stage, much of its form is that of a performance text, and that when we attend to this form, the significance of much of the gospel's content that has provoked discussions about the sacraments, soteriology, and ontology becomes instead a matter of tragic mimesis – the poetic representation of action and people."100

Central to Brant's thesis is the notion that as in tragedy, Johannine characters tend to represent themselves through their own speech, which raises new questions about the characterization of certain typically Johannine groups, including women, whom Brant
characterizes as "strikingly vocal in the Fourth Gospel." Among those strikingly vocal women, Brant argues, is the mother of Jesus, although she speaks only two lines in the entire narrative! Brant supports her contention by suggesting that the mother’s words at Cana “replace the annunciation narratives of Matthew and Luke. Jesus’ mother’s speech is an index of her precognition of Jesus’ status.” There is, then, a kind of “birthing” taking place at Cana: not physically giving birth to a child, but giving dynamic birth to one who had been passive, and the mother – precisely as a woman in a tragic play – is best suited for that key role.

The comic elements of the Johannine wedding scene, with the privilege of knowing that Jesus performs a miracle going only to the disciples and the audience, remain obvious to modern readers, but the subtle play upon honor and shame, which perhaps is going on at many levels, may be lost upon them.....In the context of a society in which female assertiveness undermines the male role, when Jesus does what his mother asks, he risks loss of face, but the scene ends with the counterclaim of the narrator, who defends Jesus’ honor by concluding that Jesus has revealed his δόξα (2:11).

Brant’s work is important for several reasons. First, it calls our attention to the fact that the Gospel as written, which we had suspected was not in its original form, may not have been composed solely as a literary narrative. Second, it expands the symbolic process Leon-Dufour had described from one in which symbolic consciousness reflects on history and creates a symbolic narrative, to one in which symbolic consciousness reflects on history, creates a symbolic drama, and then creates the symbolic narrative as we know it. Third, the complexity of Brant’s position may better explain the aporia within the text than did Bultmann’s suggestion that the original pages had been rearranged.
There are, however, certain notable difficulties with Brant’s thesis, not the least of which is that history plays almost no role in the dramatic process as she describes it, and so her symbols tend to be disconnected from their historical matrices. Similarly outside her purview is the theology of the evangelist, who is understood as a playwright, not a theologian — although the case could be made that, in Shakespeare’s words, “the play’s the thing” and that the evangelist is expressing his theology through the play itself. Nevertheless, Brant manages to demonstrate that the scholarly distrust of the Fourth Gospel as history continues unabated, and that there is today greater interest in the theological-symbolic than ever before. Thus we may say that the methodological dichotomy we have been highlighting has not only expanded in the period under consideration, but now threatens to become permanent.

THE END OF AN ERA: R. BROWN AND F. MOLONEY

In a new commentary begun by R. Brown but posthumously completed by Francis Moloney, the Brown era officially came to an end and the Johannine landscape was inevitably reconfigured, nowhere more so than in Brown’s admission — after a career spent getting “behind” the text — that “the duty of the commentator is not to decide what was composed by whom, or in what order it originally stood, nor whether these composers drew on a written source or an oral tradition. One should deal with the Gospel of John as it now stands, for that is the only form we are certain has ever existed. Brown therefore suggests “that the commentator should limit commentary to what most likely was meant by the first-century author and most likely understood by the first-century audience.”

This is an extraordinary concession by America’s foremost Fourth Gospel expert. On the one hand, he is acknowledging the passing of a generation that included giants like Bultmann and the neo-Bultmannians, whose search for what lies behind the Gospel has been less fruitful than they
hoped. On the other hand, he is pointing to the promising work of narrative-critical scholars who, having grown tired of endless quests, are far more interested in what the received text actually said to its intended audience, as well as what it says to those who read it today. Moloney comments: “Many scholars, especially in English-speaking circles, have turned to what can be loosely called a narrative-critical approach to the text as we now have it.”\textsuperscript{105} Therefore, Moloney intentionally limits himself to a reworking of Brown’s notes and a summary of research on the Fourth Gospel in the years since his first Commentary. Moreover, the very structure of the work—less a new commentary than a topical bibliography— influences Moloney’s redaction, which is conspicuous for its lack of interest in specific characters, including the mother of Jesus, who is mentioned only in reference to the Beloved Disciple (19:25-27). There is no attempt to treat the Cana narrative as a pericope, and no apparent interest in the person or role of Jesus’ mother in the Gospel. Instead, Moloney presents his own “From Cana to Cana” approach within his “General Outline of the Book of Signs”\textsuperscript{106}—a tactic that belies Brown’s new disinterest in “getting behind” the text.

Brown is now more skeptical about possible sacramental symbolism in the Gospel, taking issue with claims made by Cullmann and Niewalda, who rely on indications from ancient authors that a given passage was understood sacramentally. Brown responds:

In brief, I would accept the external evidence proposed by Niewalda as a negative criterion. If there is no evidence in the early church that a passage of John was understood sacramentally, then one should be suspicious of modern attempts to introduce a sacramental interpretation. Behind this is a fundamental supposition that the evangelist intended his implicit references to the sacraments to be understood, and that some trace of that understanding would probably have survived in the early Christian use of the
Gospel. The sacraments of baptism and eucharist were popular themes among Christian writers and artists, and it is unlikely that they would have overlooked a Gospel passage that was generally understood to be a sacramental reference.\textsuperscript{107}

More relevant to the study at hand is Brown/Moloney's elevation of theology above the heads of history and symbol. Although there is perhaps a newfound recognition that some aspects of the Fourth Gospel may be more historically reliable than the Synoptics, and that the Gospel itself is highly symbolic, what we have at our disposal is the theological presentation of the evangelist, and that is what has been received into the Church as revelation. Moloney finds Brown's apparent lack of interest in Johannine symbolism disconcerting.

Brown maintains his stature as a giant among those who have used historical criticism to read the Gospel of John. But contemporary commentary on the Fourth Gospel must face the challenge, vigorously argued over several decades by Sandra Schneiders,\textsuperscript{108} of the pervasive use of sign, metaphor, and symbol at every level of this rich narrative.\textsuperscript{109}

If Brown is correct in suggesting that Johannine scholars have turned from historical-critical to narrative-critical methodologies, the implications for Marian theology are significant, for, as we shall see in Chapters Three and Four, the theology of the evangelist points clearly to a positive understanding of Jesus' mother, and not to the negative portrait Brown, et. al., claimed to find in Mark, or to the negative-to-positive trajectory the authors of MNT claimed to find in the New Testament. Once one accepts the text as it now stands, there is no reason to suspect the non-historicity of its various characters, and no reason to conclude that the theological portrayal one finds therein reflects the theological portrayal of Mark or any other New Testament author. If, as Brown and others have argued, Jesus' seems to reprimand his mother at Cana, but to revere her as Calvary, we are entitled to draw no conclusions about the actual historical relationship
between mother and son, which has now become a moot question. The possibility of getting "behind" the Gospel to the historical relationship between mother and son is now viewed as small and, as in Bultmann's view before him, as fundamentally irrelevant. What God has revealed for our salvation is not history, but a highly-symbolic theological portrait that includes the mother of Jesus at two points, but does not give us clues about them or their actual relationship.

Moloney is rightly uncomfortable with this dichotomy between history and theology/symbol, for it leaves the evangelist's theological portrait unanchored in history, and may — as some commentators have always suspected — represent more the imagination of the author(s) than the facts of history.

THE DICHOTOMY RECONSIDERED

The scholars whose work we examined in Chapter One generally focused on the figure of Jesus' mother in the Fourth Gospel, while those whose work we examined in Chapter Two focused on the question how one may arrive at the meaning of the Gospel itself. As has been seen, not only their methodologies, but the premises upon which their methodologies are based, appear to be mutually-exclusive. The former group tends to assume the unity and integrity of the text and its compatibility with other biblical texts; the latter tends to argue that the text as we know it is a composite, perhaps not in its original order. The former group tends to assume apostolic authorship, the latter to engage in speculation about the identity of any number of authors, redactors, and playwrights. And so on. The result is not precisely a silence on the subject of Mary in the New Testament, but an exclusion of voices other than those that sing in a compatible key.
Examining the works of Marian theologians and exegetes concerned with the figure of Jesus' mother, one finds virtually no acknowledgment of the works of scholars like Bultmann, Fortna, Martyn and Brown, whose writings are mentioned only sparingly, and then largely to be refuted. Similarly, an examination of the works of those latter authors reveals virtually no appreciation of the scholarship of Marian theologians, as if they had made no contribution at all to the discussion. Although one finds a few scholars crossing over between camps, e.g., Grassi and Collins, the effort is typically confined by the scholar's chosen method, so that the results are strikingly different from those achieved by members of opposing camps. Thus, when Laurentin does a critical study of the Gospels, his method yields results considered suspect by other critical scholars, and when Brown does a critical study of Mary in the New Testament, Marian theologians find his best efforts seriously flawed.

The point of demarcation between the camps appears to be the relative importance of, and relationship between, history, theology and symbol. For the majority of Marian theologians, it is considered irresponsible to discount the historical value of certain events simply because their historicity cannot now be demonstrated, or reconciled with the exegete's theological views. Neither is it considered responsible to assume an inverse relationship between history and theology, so that one must increase as the other is perceived to increase. For the majority of scholars committed to critical method, on the other hand, it is considered irresponsible to accept either the theology of the evangelists or the commentary of the patristic witnesses as if they intended to provide historical data.

Since the publication of Bultmann's commentary, there has been relatively little communication between camps, with one side dealing with the issues posed by Bultmann and the other continuing to deal with traditional questions, albeit with new approaches. If occasionally
the two opposing camps found themselves addressing the same issue, e.g., the meaning of Jesus’ hour, they did so across a gap that appeared both broad and unbridgeable.

The one common denominator between these two camps appears to be the study of Johannine symbolism, which is acknowledged to be present by virtually all commentators, and which figures, to one extent or another, in virtually every study of the Gospel, including the Cana narrative. Not only do scholars generally agree that Johannine symbolism is an important aspect of any attempt to interpret the Fourth Gospel, but their efforts at interpretation reflect a certain compatibility of focus: the sacramental life, the Church, Israel, messianic times, the beloved disciple, and the mother of Jesus.

In the following chapter, it will be argued that the research of Leon-Dufour offers us some possibility of bridging the gap between opposing camps by pursuing a symbolic interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Within the limited scope of this study, the effort will be to examine the Gospel as it has been received into the Church – ergo, apart from questions of Source Criticism and stages of development – in order to illuminate the images and symbols with which the authors associate the mother of Jesus. By studying the value the authors ascribe to each symbolic association, it will be possible to determine whether their intention was to portray the mother of Jesus positively or negatively. If, as Brown and others have argued, the intention is to portray the mother negatively, then an intention to symbolically portray the mother as Israel or the Church would likely be excluded. If, on the other hand, the intention is to portray the mother positively, these and similar associations become possible.

Finally, it will be argued that the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, and therefore of the mother of Jesus therein, is possible only when history, theology, and symbol are maintained in dynamic tension, with history permitted to disclose its symbolic dimension and symbolism
rooted in the historical narrative. The dynamic factor that maintains this tension is the theology of the author, who reflects on history with symbolic consciousness.
CHAPTER THREE

THE SYMBOLIC PRESENTATION OF JESUS’ MOTHER AT CANA

The investigation of Marian and Fourth Gospel studies during the period 1950-2005 has brought two pivotal questions to the fore. First, what is the intention of the evangelist in presenting the mother of Jesus to us in the Cana narrative? Is it positive, as McHugh, Ceroke, Cohen and others have argued, or problematic, as Bultmann, Brown and others have replied? Or is it merely a temporary distancing, either from the person or from her position, as Laurentin, Braun and others have long maintained? Second, what is the relationship of the evangelist’s theological presentation to the historical Mary? In the first section of this chapter, the effort will be to illuminate the evangelist’s intention by examining the symbols and themes with which he associates Jesus’ mother. In the second section, we shall investigate in some detail the relationship between history, theology, and symbol in the Gospel and in the Cana narrative. Before we may proceed objectively, however, it will be necessary to evaluate the contention that the New Testament, at least in its earliest layers, portrays the mother of Jesus negatively.

EVALUATING THE “NEGATIVE PORTRAIT” OF MARY

The texts relevant to our investigation are: Galatians 4:4; Mark 3:20-35 and 6:1ff and parallels; 1 Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2; John 2: 1-12, 7:5 and 19:25-27; and Acts 1:14. Of these, Galatians 4:4 and Acts 1:14 mention Jesus’ mother only in passing, and John 7:5 mentions only Jesus’ brothers. The so-called negative portrait of Mary is thought to begin in Mark 3:20-35 (and parallels), and to be supported by Mark 6:1-6 and John 7:5, as well as by the conspicuous paucity of Marian references in Paul and the gospels. We begin with the most recent (1991) New American Bible (hereafter NAB) translation of Mark 3:20-35.
20 He came home. Again (the) crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. 21 When his relatives (hoi par’autou) heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

31 His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. 32 A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers (and your sisters) are outside asking for you." 33 But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and (my) brothers?" 34 And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. 35 (For) whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

This passage is complex in structure, contains a number of textual variants, and is therefore open to a variety of translations and interpretations, many of which are interdependent, so that the meaning of one phrase is influenced by the interpretation of another. The NAB introduction to Mark states: "His relatives think him 'out of his mind' (Mark 3:21). Jesus' kinship is with those who do the will of God, in a new eschatological family, not even with mother, brothers, or sisters by blood ties (Mark 3:31-35; cf. Mark 6:1-6)." The question thus becomes: how did the NAB translators arrive at the conclusion that Jesus' relatives think of him as "out of his mind?"

The Greek text of 3:21 reads: hoi par’autou, which NAB translates as "his relatives," but may be translated in a number of ways. In the most literal sense, hoi par’autou means simply "those around him," and has the sense of "those who were usually in his company," i.e., friends and associates. The authors of MNT state: "In itself the term hoi par’autou is ambiguous and could mean simply those who were c Behind the Fourth Gospel. Behind the Fourth Gospel. (London, 1971) usually around him. And if the unity of the present sequence is a Markan creation, we would be very hard pressed to determine who were 'his own' when what is now v.21 was an isolated fragment of tradition." But the NAB translators chose to translate the phrase as "his relatives" because, as
we discover in 3:31, the people who eventually show up are his family: specifically, his mother and his brothers. The translation "his relatives" is based, therefore, not on a literal translation of *hoi par'autou*, but on the conclusion that *hoi par'autou* refers to the people who show up in 3:31: a conclusion that is certainly possible, but one that is not required by the text, which may consist of originally independent traditions and is therefore open to several other possibilities.

First, if *hoi par'autou* refers to anyone but Jesus’ mother and brothers, there is no a priori reason to attribute to them any misunderstanding of, or even opposition to his mission, since all they actually do is show up and ask for him. Second, *hoi par'autou* could refer, not to Jesus’ mother and brothers, or even to his relatives, but to certain scribes who were "usually in his company." The text of 3:21-22 seems to suggest a parallelism between those who say “he is out of his mind” and the scribes from Jerusalem who say “He is possessed by Beelzebul.” The text would then read, “When the scribes who were customarily around him heard this, they came to take charge of him, saying “He is out of his mind,” while the scribes who arrived from Jerusalem asserted, “He is possessed by Beelzebul....” While this translation is by no means certain, it makes at least as much sense in the context of this pericope for certain scribes to say that Jesus is out of his mind than for his own relatives to do so, especially if those relatives include his own mother and brothers. It is also possible to read the text, “When his relatives heard this, they came to take charge of him, because *they* were saying “He is out of his mind,” the implication being that the family was not of this opinion, but were moved to act because they had heard other people saying that Jesus was out of his mind. There are, then, at least three possible translations of *hoi par'autou* (family/relatives, friends/associates, scribes) and a fourth possible speaker ("they"). The translators of NAB, however, conflated all these possibilities into one
straightforward statement: Jesus’ mother and brothers came to take charge of him, saying “he is out of his mind” and a negative portrait takes shape.

Whether or not it is Jesus’ family, including perhaps his mother and brothers, who come to take charge of him, there is reason to doubt the NAB translation “he is out of his mind.” The Greek word *exésthē* can, in fact, mean “out of his mind,” but it can also mean “beside himself,” “agitated,” or “upset.” Once again, the authors of MNT acknowledge this uncertainty: “even if it is probable that Mark understands the ‘his own’ as Jesus’ family, the description of their reactions as described in v.21 is not without difficulty.” These same authors prefer the translation “he is beside himself” instead of “he is out of his mind.” If the text should read “(they) came to take charge of him, saying ‘he is upset’ or even ‘he is beside himself,’ it wouldn’t really matter who was doing the talking, since the statement would be neutral rather than negative. Furthermore, the text could also be read as “(they) came to take charge of him, saying the crowd is out of its mind (beside itself, excited, etc.), which would further remove the statement from both Jesus and his family. Here again, two possible translations have been combined to yield a negative portrait, but that portrait has been painted by the translators, not by Mark.

Finally, when Jesus’ mother and brothers arrive in 3:31, they send for him to come out, only to have Jesus point to his disciples and announce that “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Many commentators have concluded that Jesus is here distancing himself from his biological family and linking himself to his eschatological family, i.e., those who do the will of God, but this idea, though possible, is not required by the text. The use of *whoever* is grammatically inclusive, not exclusive, and has the effect of including Jesus’ biological family in the list of those who can do the will of God. Had the author wanted to
portray Jesus as excluding his mother and brothers from that group, he could easily have used exclusive language, such as “only those who” or “only these disciples,” but instead he uses the inclusive term whoever, which leaves open the possibility that this story is meant to teach us a lesson about discipleship, and not to tell us who were or were not members of Jesus’ true family.

Those who claim to find a negative portrait of Mary in Mark’s gospel often point to 6:1ff for validation. Here NAB reads: “When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished...And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house’.”

The people who hear Jesus speak in his native place are astonished and wonder how he came to teach with such authority, since his apparently humble origins were well known to them and nothing in his background indicated such ability. As a result of their incredulity, Jesus is unable to work miracles there. Mark portrays him as commenting that “a prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.”

The people whose lack of faith disturbs and, in a certain sense, incapacitates Jesus are clearly not his relatives, and certainly not members of his immediate family, since they claim to know the family members by name. There is nothing in this story to indicate that Jesus’ immediate family members did not believe in him; in fact, those who do not believe in Jesus refer to his family members as if they might believe in him, and are “offended” by their humble origins. Mark portrays Jesus as commenting that “a prophet is not without honor except in his native place, and among his own kin and in his own house,” an observation that convinces many commentators Jesus felt misunderstood by his own family. The expression itself warrants a closer look.
First, the word “prophet” seems curiously out of place in Mark, where it appears only twice: here and in 1:2, where its use is required to quote from Isaiah. Thus, the word “prophet” is not typically Markan, although it appears often in Matthew, Luke, and Q, and does not reflect the way Jesus typically speaks of himself. Second, the saying has the distinct ring of a proverb, which is the way it is known to us in English and other modern languages. The authors of MNT actually describe it as such: “most would agree that it is transmitted by the evangelist for the sake of the proverb.” Indeed, no one today uses this expression except as a proverb, that is, to explain that someone is being underappreciated. In such cases, there is often no direct correspondence between the person being described and his or her actual status as a “prophet,” and the symbolism is often strained. In this story, Mark portrays Jesus as being underappreciated by the very people who should have welcomed him and his ministry, and may simply be employing a well-known proverb to make the point that such things happen to people who surpass their peers. In that sense, Mark would be portraying certain people from Jesus’ native place who were not his relatives as unwilling to accept him, and the words “among his kin and in his own house” may belong to the proverb instead of being a clue to the way Jesus’ family treated him. In any case, the word Mark uses here for “kin” is not hoi par’autou, as in 3:21, but sungeneusin, which leads us to believe that he is not describing Jesus’ relatives in both passages. If, then, the people whose lack of faith disturbs Jesus are not his family members, as is sufficiently clear from the text, and if the saying in question is, in fact, a proverb instead of a personal commentary, there is no reason to turn to 6:1ff to validate the conclusion that there is a negative portrait of Jesus’ family in Mark’s gospel.

Those who argue for such a negative portrait do not base their claims solely on Mark, however. Instead, they find their position reinforced by the Fourth Gospel’s portrayal of Jesus’
mother in 2:1-12 and his brothers in 7:5. Each of these pericopes deserves careful attention. The NAB translates the former passage as follows: “...the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ (And) Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servers, ‘Do whatever he tells you’.”

Those who suggest a negative portrait of Mary in the gospels point to 2:3-5 as an “awkward exchange” that reflects the distance Jesus put between himself and those who did not understand or believe in him, including his own family. NAB reads “Woman, how does this concern of yours affect me?” But the Greek reads “ti emoi kai soi” and does not lend itself easily to such a translation. The Vulgate had translated this phrase word-for-word as “Quid mihi et tibi est, mulier?” (“What is that to me and to you, woman?”) On the basis of the Vulgate translation, Catholic tradition has consistently found these words no obstacle to its pro-active portrayal of Jesus’ mother. When, however, scholars returned to the sources and read biblical texts in the original languages, it was discovered that the expression ti emoi kai soi had a number of precedents and parallels in which the exchange had a decidedly negative connotation, and concluded that it should have the same connotation in John 2:4-5, where Jesus should be understood as distancing himself from his mother because of her lack of understanding. Once again, this translation is possible, although there are three significant difficulties. First, it runs counter to the literal meaning of the text, which must be “what is that to me and to you” unless a compelling argument may be made for a different meaning. Second, it is apparently contradicted by internal evidence, for Jesus proceeds immediately to do precisely what his mother asks: an extraordinary turn of events if, as has been suggested, he has just chastised her for making the suggestion. Third, by complying with the mother’s implied request, Jesus reveals his glory, which is one of the priorities of the Fourth Gospel, and his disciples come to believe in him. It
may also be significant that the text does not say or imply that Jesus’ mother and brothers came to believe in him at that point, and leaves open the possibility that, contrary to many authors, the mother and brothers already believed in him. In a later section, it will be argued that on the basis of internal evidence, the portrayal of Jesus’ mother in the Fourth Gospel must be understood to be positive unless new and compelling evidence to the contrary is forthcoming.

The notion that Jesus’ mother and brothers may be assumed to have already believed in him is often challenged on the basis of the NAB translation of 7:1-5: “His brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.’ For his brothers did not believe in him.” At no point does this story suggest that Jesus’ mother did not believe in him. The text here refers only to Jesus’ brothers and, although it is possible that these are not the same brothers mentioned in 2:1-12, there is no reason to believe otherwise. There is some evidence, however, that the belief mentioned in this pericope is different from that mentioned in 2:1-12 and, if the evidence is credible, such a distinction would be important for our discussion. Jesus’ brothers are here portrayed as encouraging him to go to Judea and reveal himself, which would be a curious suggestion if they, in fact, did not already believe in him. Unless we are willing to ascribe ulterior motives to the brothers’ suggestion – an ascription for which we have no evidence whatever – it seems reasonable to conclude that the brothers did, in fact, believe in Jesus, but that they had some reservations about how he should pursue his ministry. Even if these reservations were considerable, however, they do not necessarily preclude the kind of faith in Jesus described in 2:1-12 and do not lend themselves easily to a negative portrait of the brothers’ relationship with him. We conclude, therefore, that there is insufficient evidence in either John 2 or 7 to validate an allegedly negative portrait of
Mary in the gospels in general, or Mark in particular. An objective evaluation of Jesus’ mother in the Fourth Gospel will have to derive from other criteria.

**THE INTENTION OF THE EVANGELIST**

Commentators have identified a number of factors relevant to the portrait of Jesus’ mother at Cana. First, she is presented as a *woman* and *Galilean*, celebrating in the midst of family and friends. Second, she calls to her son’s attention a specific need (wine), only to receive an enigmatic response. Third, she reacts by instructing the servants to comply with her son’s non-specific directives, and what follows – the sign and the faith-response of the disciples – indirectly derives from her intervention. Examining these factors, individually and cumulatively, we will seek to determine if the evangelist intended to portray the mother of Jesus positively or negatively.

**Woman and Mother**

The mother of Jesus *is* addressed as “Woman” in the Cana narrative – the first usage of this form of address in the Gospel, and therefore one with no prior frame of reference. She is also addressed as “Woman” in the only other pericope in which she appears, i.e., 19: 25-27. Furthermore, she is described as “mother” three times in the space of five verses, and is the first person mentioned, in the Cana narrative. This combination of “mother” and “Woman” has the effect of drawing attention to her, not as an individual – she is never named – but precisely as a woman and mother. The question thus becomes whether the evangelist provides us with clues for the evaluation of women and mothers in his narrative. Several passages provide insight into the evangelist’s appreciation of women in the Gospel: 2:1-12; 4:42; 11: 1-45; 12: 1-11; 20: 11-18.
The Woman at the Well of Samaria

The story about Jesus and the woman at the well of Samaria begins with an observation concerning time -- “the hour was about noon” -- and place: Shechem. The encounter itself begins with an explicit, seemingly-brusque request for the woman to wait on Jesus: “Give me a drink,” which would have required her to draw water from a well and serve it. In the course of the dialogue, the woman progresses in her faith-response to Jesus, from believing that he is nothing more than a prophet (v. 19), to believing that he is the Messiah (v. 29), to believing that he is savior of the world (v. 42). In this sense, we may speak of a progressive self-revelation in the narrative, in which the woman is portrayed as first objecting, then posing questions, offering tentative responses, and gradually accepting Jesus’ self-disclosure. Finally, the woman’s words of faith evoke a faith-response from others (v. 39), so that the disciples are sent to reap the harvest sown by her proclamation (vv. 36-38). She has become, in effect, an apostle (αποστέλλειν = to send out), i.e., one sent to bring others to faith.9

Martha of Bethany

The account of Lazarus’ raising from the dead (11:1ff) contains observations concerning place (Bethany) and time: “he stayed on where he was for two days more.” There is an awkward exchange, in which Martha appears to speak brusquely with Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (v. 21) But she immediately adds an obedient note: “even now I am sure that God will give you whatever you ask of him” -- a statement of non-specific faith that reminds us of “do whatever he tells you.” Martha also progresses in her understanding of Jesus, eventually evoking from him the revelation that he is “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), to which she responds with a profession of faith, the equivalent of which in the Synoptics is found on the lips of Simon Peter: “I have come to believe that you are the Messiah,
the Son of God, he who is to come into the world.” Martha follows her profession of faith by calling her sister, Mary, who repeats the same kind of rebuke, although the actions of both women – summoning Jesus and expressing faith – indirectly result in the raising of their brother from the dead, and the consequent faith of the many who saw and heard reports of these events. Yet the women’s faith does not preclude a mild rebuke from Jesus: “Did I not assure you that if you believed you would see the glory of God displayed?” (v. 40) Finally, many of those who saw or heard of this sign put their faith in Jesus. Just as at Shechem, it is the initiative of these women that constitutes an invitation for Jesus to disclose himself and for others to believe in him.

Mary at Bethany

The encounter between Jesus and Mary in 12:1ff also contains an observation concerning time (“six days before Passover”) and place (Bethany, the village of Lazarus). The scene is a banquet, much like that in the Cana narrative, and there is an explicit mention of Martha waiting/serving. In this scene, Mary performs an awkward and surprising gesture: anointing Jesus’ feet and drying them with her hair. This prompts an objection by Judas, to which Jesus replies by interpreting her actions positively and directing that she be allowed to finish what she has begun. Almost immediately after this encounter, we learn that the long-awaited hour of Jesus has arrived (12:23, 13:1), and there is some reason to believe it was Mary’s actions that brought Jesus to this awareness. In any case, Jesus responds to a woman’s actions by revealing that his messiahship will not exclude death and burial (12:7). The narrative ends with the comment that “many Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.” (12:11)

Mary Magdalene

In the Fourth Gospel as in the Synoptics, it is Mary Magdalene who first witnesses to the Risen Lord. Once again, we find a reference to time (“it was early in the morning on the first day
of the week”) and place (“the tomb”). There is an awkward exchange between Mary and the man she assumes to be the gardener, during which Jesus addresses her as “Woman.” Finally, she receives a revelation of Jesus’ identity, experiences a progression in her faith, and rushes off to testify to her experience before the gathering of disciples, causing Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple to rush to the tomb as well. Thus a woman receives the first appearance of the Risen Lord, and is the first to express Easter faith: “I have seen the Lord!” (20:18) She is also the first to proclaim a message that causes others to believe.

The Mother of Jesus at Cana

The Cana narrative begins with an observation concerning time (“on the third day”) and place (“at Cana in Galilee”). Thus the narrative shows certain common characteristics with other narratives in which women encounter Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. Furthermore, although such references are common, there are many instances in which one or the other is absent, e.g., the story of Nicodemus and the man born blind. The references to both time and place are therefore to be seen as part of a general Johannine pattern which, while not necessarily pointing to something specifically true of Jesus’ encounters with women, points to the possibility of further patterns within the Gospel.

The narrative also includes an awkward exchange between Jesus and his mother, generated by an implied request by the mother, “They have no wine.” Jesus responds by addressing her as “Woman,” and proceeds to ask what business it is of his, since his hour has not yet come. The request by the woman is paralleled in the encounter with the Samaritan woman, with Martha and Mary (although not with Mary at Bethany), and with Mary Magdalene in the garden. The awkward exchange, however, is present in all these accounts, so that once more we may speak of
an emerging pattern, in which Jesus encounters women and engages in awkward conversations with them.

The awkward exchange at Cana is followed by the mother's instructions to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you," a function paralleled in the witness of the Samaritan woman to Jesus as Messiah: "Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did! Could this not be the Messiah?" It is also paralleled in the words of Martha and Mary: "even now I am sure that God will give you whatever you ask of him," as well as in the report of Mary Magdalene, whose words cause the disciples to come to the tomb on Easter morning. In the anointing scene at Bethany, it is the woman's actions, rather than her words, that prompt a reaction from the disciples, to which Jesus replies, "Leave her alone. Let her keep it against the day they prepare me for burial." (12:7) In each of these instances, it is the words or actions of a woman that cause others to comply with Jesus' directives, i.e., to do whatever he tells them.

At Cana, the mother's words are accompanied by a sign performed by Jesus, viz., the water-become-wine, which is interpreted by the headwaiter as the groom's having kept the best wine until last. To the woman at the well, Jesus had offered the sign of himself as living water. To Martha and Mary, he offered the sign of himself as resurrection and life. And to Mary Magdalene, he offered the sign of his rising from the dead. In each case, it is the sign Jesus performs, rather than the words/actions of the woman, that give the story its coherence.

Finally, as a result of the sign performed by Jesus at Cana, his disciples believe in him. In the encounter with the woman at the well, her testimony prompted her neighbors to come and see for themselves, and they came to believe in Jesus. The raising of Lazarus prompted many Jews to believe in Jesus. And the resurrection prompted even doubting Thomas to profess is faith: "My Lord and my God!" (20:28) It seems necessary, therefore, to consider that the Cana narrative
must be interpreted in terms of the characteristics it shares with the other four Johannine narratives in which Jesus encounters women—in other words, as part of a discernible pattern. The components of this pattern would include the Cana narrative, the story of the woman at the well, the raising of Lazarus, the anointing at Bethany, and the encounter with Mary Magdalene on Easter morning. The question thus becomes whether this Johannine pattern reveals a positive or negative attitude toward women, and how that applies to the mother of Jesus’ at Cana.

Awkward Exchanges Revisited

The argument that Jesus’ mother was viewed in a less-than-positive light at Cana derives from the alleged “rebuke” that comes in response to her implicit request, “Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me?” As we have seen, the reference to the mother as “Woman” associates her with a number of women who fall within a Johannine pattern, each of whom is seen to have engaged in an awkward exchange with Jesus. In order to further examine the value the evangelist places on the figure and role of Jesus’ mother, it will be useful to observe the results of those awkward exchanges in which similar so-called rebukes are found.

In the encounter with the woman at the well, Jesus rebukes her more than once: for not recognizing who it is who asks her for a drink (4:10), for her marital situation (17-18), for her inadequate understanding of worship (21-24). Yet none of these rebukes manages to stop her, and none apparently disqualifies her from a role we may call missionary-apostolic, since the woman is portrayed as witnessing to her townspeople and her witness results in their coming to believe in Jesus. Indeed, the text recognizes her as one who has listened to Jesus’ words and “seen” him (cf. 4:37), for she is the one who has done the proclaiming while the disciples are sent to reap the harvest she has sown. Thus it seems necessary to consider that in this narrative the presence of multiple rebukes is no reason to interpret the role of the woman as less-than-
positive. What may be operative here is a progression in faith in response to the active presence of Jesus: a progression facilitated by an awkward exchange that requires some movement in faith and understanding.

In the ongoing exchange between Jesus and Martha (11:40ff), she is apparently rebuked for the suggestion that opening Lazarus’ tomb was out of the question after four days: “Did I not assure you that if you believed....?” Significantly, Martha has already professed her faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, he who is to come into the world (11:27). But she has yet to arrive at the full implications of that faith, and so she poses a question that prompts a gentle rebuke. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the text that allows us to believe the relationship to have been negative, or to have become less positive because of this exchange. Indeed, the narrative emphasizes Jesus’ love for the family of Lazarus, and the subsequent episode only reinforces this perception. Here again, therefore, we find no reason to interpret the presence of a rebuke as indicating a less-than-positive role for Martha in the Gospel. Furthermore, the fact that the rebuke comes after a major profession of faith and before the working of Jesus’ greatest sign, only serves to underscore the importance of Martha’s words and actions, which prompted him to disclose himself as the resurrection and the life.

In the exchange between Jesus and Mary Magdalene (20:11-18), we find her addressing the Risen Lord as “Rabbouni,” to which Jesus responds with a distancing statement, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” But Mary is reprimanded only to be sent to the disciples with the first proclamation of Easter faith: “I have seen the Lord!” And this she does in spite of the apparent rebuke, so that the presence of such rebukes should not be considered an indication of a less-than-positive role.
Finally, in the Cana narrative, the mother of Jesus approaches him with the words, "They have no wine," to which he respond, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." In view of the research we have presented, it does not seem necessary to seek parallels for this expression in the Old Testament, but to see the exchange itself as part of a pattern - indeed, the first instance of a pattern to be repeated no less than four times at key points in the Gospel - in which Jesus accomplishes the will of the Father (his self-revelation) by means of such awkward exchanges with women. The assumption should therefore be that the women who engage Jesus in these conversations are being presented positively by the evangelist, unless compelling evidence to the contrary can be brought forward, and that the mother of Jesus is -- at least chronologically -- first among them.

Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel

The positive portrayal of women in the Gospel may be considered intentional if the same Gospel reveals that other identifiable groups are less positively portrayed. In fact, each of Jesus' encounters with women appears to be strategically situated between narratives that reflect a contrasting attitude of disbelief or hostility by men.

Margaret Beirne claims that women were included wholeheartedly among the Johannine disciples because the gospel narrative pairs male and female characters "in literary partnership, as disciples, in ministerial and apostolic leadership, and as catalysts for driving the Gospel's central purpose (20:31)." Using similar studies on the Gospel of Luke to establish her criteria, Beirne identifies six gendered pairs linked structurally or thematically and sharing formal literary parallels, such as formulae and imagery (pp. 20-25).

The common theme for all of these gendered pairs is an encounter with Jesus that reveals something about his identity and mission. For example, the mother of Jesus (2:1-11) and the
royal official (4:46-54) are paired as faith-filled catalysts for Jesus' signs in Cana, and their stories frame the pairing of Nicodemus (3:1-21) and the Samaritan woman (4:4-42), who come to Jesus seeking deeper understanding leading to faith. The man born blind (9:1-41) and Martha (11:1-54) are paired by their presence in healing miracles. Both are asked, "Do you believe?" which leads to a confession of faith. Mary of Bethany and Judas (12:1-8) are paired as opposites in their response to Jesus; Mary's symbolic gesture points to the cross, but Judas, one of the Twelve, does not understand. At the climax of the crucifixion scene (19:25-27), the mother of Jesus is paired with the beloved disciple by the repetition of a literary formula that seals them as a new family of believers committed to carrying on the mission of Jesus: "to draw all to myself."
The final gender pairing features Mary Magdalene (20:11-18) and Thomas (20:24-29); they both experience the risen Jesus and enable the reader to do likewise as the heirs of this faith and tradition. In the Johannine narrative, then, each gendered pair provides an opportunity for Jesus' self-revelation flanked by a range of possible responses to him.

Although there are fewer such pairs in the Fourth Gospel than in Luke, they hold greater significance because they show that the "new family of disciples established by the Johannine Jesus is genuinely inclusive of men and women." In contrast to the Lucan pairing, the Johannine pairing includes actual characters, not just examples in parables; it neither emphasizes the role of women as opposed to men nor separates women into a group. Instead, the Johannine pairing makes it clear that both male and female disciples have a role in the self-revelation and mission of Jesus. In this way, Beirne clarifies the notion of the "discipleship of equals." In light of her research, it would seem that the evangelist's portrayal of Jesus' mother would have to be considered positive.
The encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well of Samaria is preceded by two passages in which men figure prominently: the dialogue with Nicodemus and the final testimony of the Baptizer. The fact that Nicodemus is introduced as “a certain Pharisee” and “a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin” alerts us to potential conflict: Jesus has just confronted the Jewish authorities in the Temple of Jerusalem (2:13ff). The text emphasizes that Nicodemus comes to Jesus “at night” – a negative observation in the Gospel, and one that is repeated when Nicodemus reappears at Calvary. By addressing Jesus as “Rabbi” and “a teacher come from God,” Nicodemus is apparently searching for categories of understanding, much as the Samaritan woman will. In response to his probing questions, Jesus apparently rebukes Nicodemus with the words, “You hold the office of teacher of Israel and still you do not understand these matters?” Unlike the Samaritan woman, however, Nicodemus does not manifestly progress in his faith and understanding, nor does he rush to share his new insights with others. The words of Jesus’ rebuke are the last words of their dialogue. A man enters into an awkward exchange with Jesus, but no new revelation is given, and no sign has been performed to point to the Father’s glory. More importantly, there is no indication that anyone came to believe in Jesus because of his encounter – including Nicodemus himself.

Comparing the encounter with Nicodemus to the encounter with the Samaritan woman, we may note: 1) that Nicodemus comes as a representative of official Judaism, while the woman emphasizes that she – a Samaritan and a woman – has no such official standing, and understands that she has no business speaking casually with a Galilean male; 2) that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, while the woman comes to him at noon; 3) that Nicodemus seeks to understand Jesus within the confines of Jewish categories (Rabbi, Teacher) and never moves beyond them, while the woman seeks to understand him within the categories of Samaritan faith (prophet,
messiah, savior) but eventually comes to accept Jesus’ word of testimony about himself; 4) that Nicodemus receives a rebuke from Jesus and is not heard from again (in this passage), while the woman receives several rebukes and still manages to share her faith with her townspeople; 5) that the implication of Jesus’ discourse in 3:11-21 is that Nicodemus, who has come in darkness, is not yet a believer, while 4:28-41 makes it clear that the woman is now both a believer and a contagious witness to Jesus as Messiah.

The story of Lazarus is immediately preceded by an attempt to stone Jesus (10:31ff), which continues a pattern of unbelief by “the Jews” that began in the dialogue after the Temple cleansing and proceeded through the encounter with Nicodemus, the cure on the Sabbath feast, the discourse on the bread of life, the Feast of Booths, and the story of the man born blind, with its discourse on Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Significantly, Jesus consistently rebukes the Jews much more harshly than he does the women he encounters, but the Jews are manifestly unable to respond to his words with faith. While Martha will proclaim Jesus as “messiah, the Son of God, he who is to come into the world,” the Jews accuse Jesus, “You who are only a man are making yourself God.” (10:33)

If the prior context of the Lazarus story is unbelief and hostility by “the Jews,” the following context is the session of the Sanhedrin, in which Caiaphas asks, “Can you not see that it is better for you to have one man die (for the people) than to have the whole nation destroyed?” (11:50) And the text continues, “From that day forward there was a plan afoot to kill him.” (11:53) Here again, an awkward exchange with one or more women results in Jesus performing a sign that evokes belief from many, while the words and actions of “the Jews” (presumably male leaders of the community) spell death for him who gave new life to Lazarus. We may therefore speak
tentatively of an emerging pattern of belief by women, and of unbelief, as well as outright hostility by men.

Chapter Twelve is tied to the preceding chapter in several ways. First, the introduction to the Lazarus account mentions Mary's anointing of Jesus, although that event has not yet been recorded in the Gospel. Second, the text mentions the same characters (Lazarus, Martha, Mary) and the same setting (Bethany). Third, 11:55ff mentions the time of Passover, and 12:1 notes that these events take place six days before Passover. Additional parallels may be found in the objections of the disciples (11:12, 12:5) and in the life-and-death issues as related to Lazarus and Jesus, both of whom are to die and rise again.

Against this background, we find Martha waiting at table and Mary anointing/drying Jesus' feet with her hair: actions that are misunderstood by male disciples (12:5), but recognized by Jesus for their symbolic import. A woman has ritually articulated the meaning of Jesus' life (love that empowers him to lay down his life for others) – a meaning that has constantly eluded the disciples and, especially, "the Jews."

The final act of the drama is played out in Chapter 20, where Peter and the Beloved Disciple visit Jesus' tomb in response to the words of the woman. But whereas the two men arrive at the tomb without seeing the Risen Lord, Mary Magdalene not only meets him, but receives the commission to proclaim the news to the (male) disciples. In the Johannine narrative, Mary does precisely what she is told to do (20:18), while the disciples remain locked in by their fear of the Jews. The ensuing encounter between Jesus and Thomas only serves to underscore the immediacy and completeness of Mary's movement to faith.

If we have accurately perceived a pattern within the Johannine narrative – one of belief by women within a general context of unbelief and hostility by men – we may now review the Cana
narrative for signs that this pattern is also present in 2:1-12. As has been seen, there are observations concerning time and place, an awkward exchange between Jesus and a woman, an instruction that others comply with Jesus’ commands, a sign performed by Jesus that evokes belief from others. Now we may observe that the prior context of this narrative is provided by the imperfect faith of the first disciples, who are presented as believing in Jesus as Rabbi, Son of God, King of Israel – all in response to a sign, which prompts a rebuke from Jesus, “Do you believe just because I told you I saw you under a fig tree?” (1:50) Significantly, the mother at Cana appears to believe in Jesus before he performs the sign, while the disciples in the preceding narrative appear to believe only because of a sign Jesus himself considers inconsequential, “You will see much greater things than that (1:50).”²¹

The subsequent context of the Cana narrative is provided by the Temple cleansing, which contains the demand by the Jews that Jesus give them a sign of his authority. This prompts two observations: 1) the disciples did not yet understand the meaning of Jesus’ words, and 2) Jesus did not trust the people because he knew what was in their hearts. Within the context provided by these two instances of imperfect faith, we encounter the Cana narrative, in which the mother of Jesus presents him with a situation and proceeds to instruct the waiters to “do whatever he tells you.” Thus we may suggest that the mother of Jesus is here presented as one of those women who manage to put their faith in Jesus, even as their male counterparts remain in their unbelief. Indeed, the subsequent observation by the headwaiter, which amounts to a misunderstanding of who Jesus is and what he has done, indicates the extent to which his words and signs were open to multiple interpretations. This, in fact, is the case throughout the Fourth Gospel and, in each case where a woman is present, the interpretation chosen by the males is typically off the mark.
The assumption should therefore be that the mother of Jesus is being positively portrayed by the evangelist, unless compelling evidence to the contrary is brought forward.

Woman and Galilean

The time-honored discussion concerning the *patria* of Jesus notwithstanding\textsuperscript{22}, the Fourth Gospel is clear about two details: 1) Jesus is a Galilean, as are his first disciples; 2) Jesus’ Galilean origin is an issue in the Gospel, prompting questions and concerns at several points.\textsuperscript{23} Since John 2:1-12 twice mentions Cana of Galilee, it seems necessary to conclude that this designation has some relevance for the evangelist. The first mention of Galilee occurs in 1:43, where we read that “Jesus wanted to set out for Galilee”\textsuperscript{24}, a desire never paralleled when Judea is his destination. Immediately thereafter, we learn that Philip, Andrew, and Peter are also Galileans, and that Jesus himself is from Nazareth, which occasions the sarcastic question from Nathanael, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Much later, in the addition that has become Chapter 21, we learn that Nathanael himself is from Cana in Galilee, which means that the four original disciples of Jesus are all Galileans, as is Jesus himself, and presumably his mother. Furthermore, if the association of Nathanael with Galilee may be trusted, the fact that Jesus identifies him in 1:47 as a “true Israelite” may indicate a preference for Nathanael, and perhaps also for Galileans.

The text of 2:1-12 mentions Cana in Galilee twice: once at the beginning, in association with the mother, and once in the summary statement found in 2:11, after which we learn that Jesus was accompanied from Cana to Capernaum by his mother and brothers. Apparently, since Jesus himself is a Galilean, as well as his mother and brothers, everyone mentioned as being in his company at Cana would be Galileans.
At the outset of Chapter Four, we discover that Jesus decides to leave Judea and journey to Galilee, because the Pharisees had become aware of his success in winning converts. It is en route to Galilee that he encounters the woman at the well and wins over more converts from her (Samaritan) town. The text specifies that the people of Galilee welcomed him and apparently thought highly of his ministry (unlike the account in the Synoptics). And in 4:46-54, Jesus performs his second sign at Cana in Galilee, evoking faith from a royal official and his whole household. Whereas in Judea Jesus had encountered unbelief and, at times, open hostility, in Galilee he is welcomed and appears to work signs with relative ease, evoking faith from the Galilean people who were “his own.”

Chapter Six also has Galilee for its background: the multiplication of the loaves – one of Jesus’ most public and critical signs – takes place across the Sea of Galilee. When the people see Jesus’ sign, they proclaim him as the Prophet who is to come into the world, but when the Jews hear his discourse on the Bread of Life, they attack him. Finally, in 6:66 we learn that many of his own disciples break away from his company on account of this “hard saying.” Significantly, the sign worked in Galilee evoked belief from many spectators, while the discourse with the Jews prompted a teaching that was unacceptable to many. Even here, however, a Galilean (Simon Peter) provides the proper interpretation, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe, we are convinced, that you are God’s Holy One.” (6:69)

Chapter Seven begins with the observation that Jesus now prefers to move about within Galilee: “He had decided not to travel in Judea because some of the Jews were looking for a chance to kill him (7:1).” But Jesus’ brothers are identified as among those who do not believe in him, which indicates that at least some Galileans, and perhaps some of those who had been in his
company at Cana, did not (yet) believe. In the theology of the Fourth Gospel, Galilee emerges as the locus of faith, while Judea emerges as the locus of unbelief and hostility, but each locus has exceptions to the rule.

In 7:40ff, we encounter Galilee as an issue related to the origins of the Messiah. When some people suggest that Jesus may be the Messiah, others object that “surely the Messiah is not to come from Galilee?” And when Nicodemus attempts a backhanded defense of Jesus, he receives the sarcastic reprimand, “Do not tell us you are a Galilean, too... Look it up. You will not find the Prophet coming from Galilee.” Significantly, the word Galilean is employed in two senses here. The usual connotation is geographical, so that Jesus may be accused of being from Galilee. The second connotation, however, is that of being a disciple, that is, a Galilean in the sense that people might refer to themselves as Christians. Thus the Fourth Gospel knows of a designation that equates being a Galilean with believing in Jesus.

Finally, in 12:21 we learn that certain gentiles who desired to see Jesus approached Philip, whom the text again identifies as coming from Galilee, the implication being that as a Galilean (in both senses of the term) Philip would have access to Jesus, while “the Jews” would not. Later on, when Jesus is arrested, we find an emphasis on his origins that remains unexplained unless Galilee and Nazareth have some significance in the mind of the evangelist. When Jesus asks of those who are about to arrest him, “Who is it that you want?” the question is strikingly similar to the one posed to his first disciples, “What are you looking for?” (1:38) The answer now comes back, “Jesus the Nazorean.” When the question is repeated, the reply comes back again, “Jesus the Nazorean.” In each case, Jesus accepts the identification with the words, “I am he.” And when he is crucified, the words of the inscription read, “Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews.” (19:19) Even granting multiple possible understandings of the term “Nazorean,” it
is clear that Jesus is publicly identified with that term, and that it is meant to distinguish him from “the Jews.”

Chapter Twenty-One, considered by most commentators to be an addition to the Gospel apparently presumes a Galilean background. The opening scene takes place at the Sea of Tiberias, and Nathanael is now identified as coming from Cana in Galilee. The disciples are presented here as fishermen, an occupation that is theirs in the Synoptics, where their Galilean origins are explicit. Thus it seems clear that Galilee is a place of some significance throughout the Fourth Gospel, from the calling of the first disciples to the final scenes. Jesus is not only presented as a Galilean, but typically encounters faith and acceptance from Galileans, while he regularly encounters unbelief and opposition from Judeans. W. Meeks comments, “The geographical symbolism of John is not dominated by Jerusalem to the exclusion of Galilee, but is shaped by the apparently deliberate dialectic between Jerusalem, the place of judgment and rejection, and Galilee and Samaria, the places of acceptance and discipleship.”

To the question, “what does it mean that the mother of Jesus is identified with Galilee?” we may now reply that it means something more than a concern for geographical precision. Since Galilee is the place of acceptance and discipleship, we may rightly turn to the Cana narrative in search of evidence to support these attitudes. In 4:45, Galilee is identified as a place where Jesus was welcomed. In 2:2 we learn that Jesus and his disciples had been invited to a celebration. Already in 2:1, the mother of Jesus, whose status as a woman would have cast her in a favorable light according to the evangelist, is associated with the location: there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. In 2:11, we learn that Jesus performed the first of his signs at Cana in Galilee, which revealed his glory and evoked belief from his disciples. Each time Galilee is mentioned, therefore, we find a theme that has positive value in the Gospel:
welcoming, woman, signs, believing. In view of the mother’s status as a woman and her intentional association with Galilee and Galileans, the assumption should be that her role at Cana is positive unless compelling evidence to the contrary is forthcoming.

The Awkward Exchange Between Galileans

“They have no wine.”

The obvious meaning of the mother’s words, “they have no wine,” is not a symbolic-cryptic reference to Israel, or to humanity without Christ, or to the desire for the outpouring of the gifts of the messianic era, or even to the gift of the Spirit at Easter, but to the fact that “they” (i.e., the Galileans gathered for the celebration) have no wine for the feast. The mother, a Galilean, is presented as saying that the Galilean guests do not have wine for their celebration. Whether or not her words have a deeper meaning is a matter for speculation. What is clear is that Jesus’ response has a double meaning in the mind of the evangelist, who portrays him as not only producing a new and superior wine in abundance, but revealing his glory and prompting his disciples to believe in him. The reader is therefore entitled to read into the mother’s words an anticipation of this movement to faith, especially since the association with Galilee proves to have just such a connotation. But this anticipation resides in the mind of the evangelist, and apparently not in the mind of the mother asking for wine. In the Cana narrative, the mother of Jesus is portrayed, not as a woman of mature faith in her son as Messiah, but as one in whom the movement to faith can be anticipated: a woman and a Galilean, pleading the case of her fellow Galileans at a wedding feast, and providing an opening for Jesus to work a sign and reveal his glory. Her figure and role should therefore be assumed to be positive, unless compelling evidence to the contrary is forthcoming.
“How does your concern affect me?”

The immediate response to the mother’s request is the enigmatic reply of her son.²⁸ Here again, the meaning of this expression should not be sought in Old Testament parallels²⁹, but in the obvious sense it has within the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus consistently seeks to draw attention away from peripheral questions and toward himself. When the Samaritan woman asks for water, Jesus reveals that he is the living water that can quench her thirst. When the crowd asks for bread, he reveals that he is the bread of life come down from heaven. When the disciples ask about a man’s blindness, Jesus reveals that he is the Light of the World, who can make the blind see and the sighted blind. When Martha and Mary want their brother to live again, Jesus reveals that he is the resurrection and the life. Throughout the Gospel, the evangelist portrays Jesus as the central focus, and draws our attention back to him again and again. This tactic is necessary precisely because we tend to get lost in the details of the narrative, losing our focus on Jesus. Thus, time and time again, the evangelist brings us back with the same implicit question, first articulated in 2:4: How does your concern affect me?” How does our thirst concern Jesus, the fountain of living water? How does our hunger concern Jesus, the bread of life? How does our blindness concern Jesus, the light of the world? How does our death concern Jesus, the resurrection and the life? And, at Cana, how does our lack of wine concern Jesus, who will give us a new and superior wine in abundance? If there is symbolism to be perceived here by the Church reading this narrative in the light of Easter faith, this does replace or preclude the primary meaning of the expression within its context: the mother’s request must be seen to concern Jesus, or it can have no importance in the Fourth Gospel.
“My hour has not yet come.”\(^{30}\)

The above interpretation is reinforced by the immediate reference to the non-arrival of Jesus’ hour, which is identified in the Gospel as “the hour...for him to pass from this world to the Father.” (13:1) In this sense, Jesus’ question at Cana means that until the time comes for him to leave this world, everything must be shown to concern him, i.e., to be focused on his person and mission, or be considered irrelevant. Thus the words of Jesus to his mother are not a rebuke, but a legitimate question, meant to draw her attention back to him and, with her, those who read the Gospel. Until the time comes for Jesus to leave, everything must be related to him and his mission. But when that time comes, new relationships will be formed, as may be seen in the Calvary encounter between Jesus, his mother, and the Beloved Disciple. At Cana, the emphasis was on everything being related to him, but at Calvary, as Jesus is about to leave this world, the emphasis is on those who love him relating to one another. In all of this, the figure and role of the mother should be assumed to be positive, precisely because her words anticipate the faith-response of the disciples, which is the Gospel’s response to the question of Jesus, i.e., this concern of hers involves Jesus because through his subsequent actions (signs) he can reveal his glory and his disciples can come to believe in him.

“Do whatever he tells you.”

Commentators have long struggled to understand the emphasis placed on these enigmatic words within the Cana narrative. While some have suggested that there is an intentional reference to Joseph (cf. Gn. 41:55), and others that the reference is to Israel response to the covenant (cf. Ex. 24:3), neither of these theories, nor the combination of the two, explains why this symbolism would be intended by the evangelist. The obvious sense of her words is that the servants are to comply with Jesus’ instructions, whatever they may be. That she may have
intuited something more to come, or that her words are intended for a larger audience, is supported by the fact that eventually the disciples not only witness Jesus’ sign, but come to believe in him. The reader is therefore entitled to see in the mother’s words a layer of hidden meaning that may or may not have been part of the historical encounter. Nevertheless, these words in themselves, i.e., apart from any deeper symbolic meaning, suggest a positive role for the mother at Cana. She is the one who anticipates the faith-response of the disciples in her words to the waiters.

“Fill those jars with water.”

That Jesus views his mother’s intervention positively is suggested by the fact that his action-response (sign) proceeds according to the lines she has opened: he acts through the medium of the waiters, rather than through some other medium. Instructing the servants to fill six stone jars with water, Jesus has the water taken to the headwaiter for inspection. The symbolism of stone water jars at Cana may be understood within the larger context of stone symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, the first reference to which is found precisely in 2:6, where the jars are associated with Jewish ritual purification. Significantly, the jars are empty, and are only refilled at the words of Jesus.

In 2:13, the Temple of Jerusalem, where ritual purification is most an issue, appears in a decidedly negative light vis à vis the resurrected body of Jesus. The temple built of dead stones will be replaced by the living temple of Jesus’ body. The obvious parallel, if it may be supported, would seem to suggest that the stone jars at Cana are to be understood in inverse relationship to Jesus: whereas they are now empty, they will be filled to the brim at Jesus’ words. In 4:4ff, the symbolism of Jacob’s well is compared unfavorably with the fountain of living water that is Jesus himself, with the Samaritan woman providing the interpretation: “Surely you do not
pretend to be greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it with his sons and flocks?” Like the stone temple of Jerusalem, the stone well of Jacob is lifeless, unable to nourish those who come there in search of sustenance. It must be refilled with the living water only Jesus can give.

Within the same story, the worship of the Samaritans, which takes place on the stone mountain, and the worship of the Jews, which takes place in a temple made of stone, is compared unfavorably with the worship made available through Jesus, i.e., worship in Spirit and Truth (19-23). When the woman has received Jesus’ revelation as Messiah and is about to proclaim him to her townspeople, we are informed that “the woman then left her water jar and went off to the town.” (v. 28) When it becomes possible to accept the living water Jesus offers, one must leave behind the stone wells and jars that are empty and lifeless.

The symbolism of stone appears again in a different, even more negative light in 8:5-7, in 8:59, and in 10:31-33, where the reference is to stoning someone – first the woman caught in adultery, and then Jesus himself. In these instances, the spiritualization of the symbol is made unnecessary by the fundamentally negative, rather than neutral nature of the act itself. Where the scribes and Pharisees seek the woman’s death by stoning, Jesus restores her right to live by his words and signs. Once again, the implication is clear: stone symbolizes emptiness and lifelessness, contrasted with the fullness of life that comes through Jesus (cf. 1:16).

In 11:38 we read, “Once again troubled in spirit, Jesus approached the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across it.” The use of λίθος as the substantive of the verb λίθωσαν now has a clear connotation of death, preventing any commerce between the living and the dead. But in 11:30 we find that Jesus’ words are capable of removing the stone, so that death must now loose its grip on those it has concealed behind stone walls. In 20:1ff, we learn that a stone had been
rolled across the entrance to Jesus’ tomb, although the text implies that the Risen Lord had been able to remove the stone as he rose from the grave. And in 20:19 and 26, the inability of the stone walls and doors to keep Jesus away from his disciples seems to imply that even death cannot impede the will of God and the work the Father has given Jesus to do.

The implications of this analysis for the Cana narrative are that: 1) the stone symbolism will appear ambiguous until the rest of the Gospel provides the proper context for its interpretation; 2) stone is consistently employed by the evangelist to describe what is empty and lifeless, incapable of bringing forth what it was intended for; 3) the presence of Jesus means a movement from emptiness to fullness, from death to life; 4) only Jesus can set this process in motion; and 5) the ultimate context for interpreting the stone symbolism is provided by Jesus’ resurrection.

In the Cana narrative, the words and actions of Jesus are anticipated in the words of the mother to her son and to the servants. Each time she speaks, she refers, not to the stone jars that lie empty, but to the need for fullness. In a certain sense, therefore, the Cana narrative anticipates symbolically Jesus’ final victory over death (the stone tomb) and his glorification in resurrection fullness, so that the words of the mother may be seen to point beyond their obvious sense and toward full resurrection faith. Just as the allegedly negative response of Jesus gives way to the new abundance of superior wine, so the experience of death will give way to a new abundance of life. To the extent that resurrection faith is anticipated in the words of the mother, the assumption should be that her role is positive unless compelling evidence to the contrary is forthcoming.

“You have kept the choice wine until now.”

The eventual result of the mother’s intervention is the observation by the headwaiter to the groom: instead of doing what is ordinary, he has saved the choice wine until last. Even at this
most ordinary level, however, the observation of the headwaiter is significant: the mother's intervention, apart from signs and miracles, has resulted in something quite remarkable, so that her role in the Cana narrative should be seen as positive. When that role is expanded to include some participation in bringing about the sign itself, the reader is entitled to see her figure as more positive. And when the reader views this scene in light of Easter faith and finds here an anticipation of the gifts of the messianic era, or the outpouring of the Spirit, or both, that role is further enhanced. Finally, when the reader finds in the mother's instructions, "Do whatever he tells you" a prescription for Christian faith and action, her abiding role within the Church is seen to be prefigured in the words and actions attributed to her at Cana in Galilee.

"The Third Day"

That Jesus' sign at Cana is oriented to his resurrection is supported by the original conclusion of the Gospel in 20:31, where we learn that Jesus' signs have been recorded "to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name." Each of Jesus' signs points to his messiahship, revealing his glory, so that we may believe in him and have the life that becomes available to us through his resurrection.

The Cana narrative is not only oriented to Jesus' resurrection in terms of the sign performed, but also in terms of the language employed. The narrative begins with a reference to the "third day" (2:1), which warrants two observations. First, a simply chronological explanation of the third-day motif is out of touch with the text as we know it. Unless we are willing to engage in reconstructions, there is no reason to identify the day of the Cana sign as the third day in any recognizable sequence. According to the only chronological data provided by the text, Jesus encounters John's disciples on the third day, that is, the day following the "next day" of 1:35, two days after John's first testimony, and one day after his first sighting of Jesus. On the fourth
day (1:43), Jesus wants to set out for Galilee, but encounters Philip and Nathanael, inviting them to "come and see" and become his disciples. Only after all this, i.e., after four full days have passed in the ongoing narrative, do we find the reference to the third day in 2:1. The suggestion that this third day is the third day after meeting the disciples is not supported or implied anywhere in the text; neither is there textual evidence to support the notion of a third day paralleled with the third day of creation, when God collected the waters into their basins and separated the dry land. And the fact that the Cana narrative is followed immediately by the dialogue with the Jews concerning the Temple, in which Jesus is seen to speak of raising the temple of his body in three days, seems to weaken a strictly chronological interpretation. Simply stated, if what is to take place in 2:13ff refers to Jesus' resurrection in three days, we are entitled to consider that this same event — the focal point of all Jesus' signs — provides the context for understanding the third day in 2:1.33

The connection between the third day and the resurrection may also be seen in 4:43ff, where Jesus is said to have traveled to Galilee "after two days," and to have raised the official's son from near death. Similarly, in 11:6 we learn that Jesus remained where he was for two days before leaving to visit Martha and Mary on the occasion of Lazarus' sickness. Therefore, according to the chronology of the narrative, the raising of Lazarus would have taken place on the third day. In the Fourth Gospel, whenever we encounter the theme of the third day, there is a rather transparent reference to Jesus' resurrection, which therefore becomes part of the proper context for interpreting the Cana sign.

The Mother at Calvary

Commentators have struggled to decipher the symbolic code almost everyone perceives beneath the mutual entrusting of mother and Beloved Disciple at Calvary. Quite apart from the
possible symbolic references, however, it seems clear that this final act of Jesus' life is one of life-giving: a mother who is about to lose a son, gains a new one; a man who is about to lose a loved one, gains a new mother. By giving these two people to one another in new relationships, Jesus shows that he remains capable, even in death, of generating life. It is this capacity to give life even in death that prefigures his resurrection and, as we have indicated, it is this life-from-death motif that has been prefigured in the sign of Cana. If commentators are also able to see a symbolic reference to the life of the Church, this does not replace or preclude the obvious sense of the pericope: Jesus remains capable of giving life even when, to all outward appearances, there is nothing but emptiness and death on the horizon.

Summary

In the Fourth Gospel, the mother of Jesus is portrayed as a woman among women of faith, as a Galilean in the midst of people who believe, as a believer whose inchoate faith draws Jesus to perform a sign, as one who invites others to act upon her son's words, and finally, as one whose words and deeds anticipate Jesus' ultimate sign, the sign of his resurrection, toward which the sign of Calvary points as well.

At Cana, the mother of Jesus is questioned, not rebuked or rejected, in order to focus all attention where it must be throughout the Gospel, namely, on the person and mission of Jesus. Precisely because the hour of Jesus had not yet arrived, it was proper and necessary to approach him with such requests, so that the mother's words attain their coherence with reference to Jesus' hour: the hour of his glorification and resurrection, toward which all his signs point. In a very real sense, therefore, the words and actions of the mother at Cana must be understood, not in terms of Old Testament parallels and problematic language, and not even in terms of her alleged rehabilitation at Calvary, but in terms of Jesus' resurrection, which is anticipated in the sign of
Cana, worked on the third day and oriented to faith in Jesus as the one who would replace the emptiness and lifelessness of Judaism with the fullness of life Jesus alone brings from God.

HISTORY, THEOLOGY AND SYMBOL

Direct, Not Inverse Proportion

Recent commentators have argued that history and symbol are not to be seen in inverse proportion, so that the existence of one necessarily diminishes the presence of the other. According to X. Leon-Dufour, it is history itself that is symbolic and, perceived by symbolic consciousness, will tend to yield a variety of symbolic interpretations. As early as 1956, M.-E. Boismard had argued that history and symbol are complementary dimensions of the same narrative "dans la mesure ou le symbolisme permet a l'évangéliste de souligner la valeur theologique et soteriologique des faits concrets de la vie du Christ." This fundamental insight tended to get lost in much of the literature that followed, with the unfortunate result that history became the object of certain exegetical quests, while symbolism preoccupied other scholars – with comparatively little conversation between the two. Drawing on the thought of Boismard, Leon-Dufour, et. al., we may say that the fact that the mother of Jesus is said to have asked her son for wine at Cana does not preclude the Church from seeing her as Daughter of Sion, or New Eve, or the Church at prayer, etc. But neither does the Church’s tendency to symbolically perceive and portray the mother preclude the possibility that she actually spoke and acted as the Cana narrative portrays her. History and symbol are not in competition, as if one could not tolerate the significant presence of the other. A symbolic narrative is not a fable, or even an allegory, but a story with symbolic potential told to symbolic consciousness. In other words, the story becomes symbolic precisely to the extent it is assumed to be historical. If, on the other hand, the story is presumed to be non-historical, it is legend or myth. Boismard could safely
explore the sacramental symbolism of the Cana narrative, especially in connection with Baptism, without having to argue that such symbolism was directly intended by the evangelist, who told a story that, in the light of later Church experience, discloses its own symbolic meaning.\(^\text{37}\)

The author of the Fourth Gospel clearly intends his readers to understand his narrative as historical. He summons no less than the Beloved Disciple as witness to the truth of what has been written (21:24). His entire narrative becomes unbelievable if the signs that point to its believability are non-historical. In his mind, these events have a deeper meaning, and he will seek to draw that out in the course of his theological presentation: history will become the vehicle for the evangelist’s theological insights. In one and the same narrative, describing the same events without distinction, the evangelist intends to not only tell us what happened, but explain what it means for us as believers.

Finally, the same narrative – history with a theological message – comes to our symbolic consciousness within a variety of cultural-cognitive contexts, each of which is able to perceive something unique within the rich tapestry of Gospel images. In this way, the historical person who accompanied Jesus during his lifetime becomes, in the theological presentation of the evangelist, the Beloved Disciple, the primary witness to the truth of the Gospel and, in the symbolic consciousness of the Church, becomes the symbol of the community of disciples with full resurrection faith. Similarly, the historical person John becomes, in the theological presentation of this evangelist, the first witness to Jesus as Lamb of God and, in the symbolic consciousness of the Church, becomes the Old Covenant testifying to the arrival of the New Covenant in its midst. History, theology, and symbol are not three layers superimposed upon one another, but three dimensions of one and the same reality. There is an obvious conformity between the Church’s symbolic consciousness (its ability to perceive symbols and their
meanings) and the evangelist’s theological presentation: the Church is not free to find positive symbolism in, for example, the evangelist’s portrayal of Judas, since his theological presentation explicitly precludes it. But there is also a conformity between the evangelist’s theological presentation and the historical persons and events he describes: he himself is not free to violate history in order to make his theological argument. Thus the Baptizer is known to have been an actual witness to Jesus’ arrival, and the Beloved Disciple is known to have been among Jesus’ companions, even if his precise identity is not revealed.

It seems necessary, therefore, to reject the argument that the Beloved Disciple, precisely because he is never named, must be considered part of the evangelist’s theological-symbolic presentation and not an historical figure. On the contrary, unless compelling evidence exists that the evangelist was in the habit of fabricating characters to serve his theological purpose, the assumption should be that the disciple was, in fact, an historical companion of Jesus, whom the evangelist portrayed according to his theological insights, and whom the later Church has seen in terms of a variety of symbolic presentations. It is one thing to acknowledge that we are not able to critically verify the identity of this disciple, another to conclude he did not exist.

In a similar manner, the fact that the mother of Jesus has been symbolically perceived and portrayed by the Church throughout many centuries, so that scholars rightly speak of a symbolic trajectory within scripture and tradition, does not imply that the woman so described did not exist, nor that her actual life did not substantially conform to the portrait(s) of her in the Gospels. On the contrary, unless compelling evidence to the contrary exists, the assumption should be that the mother of Jesus was a real woman, that she was, indeed, present at Cana, and that she participated in that celebration in a manner consistent with the portrayal of the evangelist. It is one thing to acknowledge that we are unable to substantiate the facts of the Cana narrative in
other sources, another to conclude that the facts themselves are more in doubt than the extent of our knowledge concerning them. Furthermore, given the extra-Johannine evidence concerning the mother of Jesus as an historical figure, there is more reason to believe that she not only existed, but took part in events related to the life and ministry of Jesus, than would be true in the case of, for example, the Beloved Disciple.

Three Levels, One Narrative

In the final analysis, it seems necessary to speak of three levels of meaning within the Fourth Gospel and Cana narrative, with each layer so intimately intertwined with the other two that to separate one would be to destroy the narrative itself. At the historical level, the mother of Jesus is said to have taken part in a wedding celebration in Cana of Galilee, and to have interacted with her son in a way that caused him to act meaningfully. At the theological level, the evangelist wants us to see this historical event in terms of the third day motif of the Gospel and his own theological understanding: what had been empty and lifeless will become full and life-giving. And at the symbolic level, the Church is entitled to see in this narrative a story of the woman’s progression in faith and understanding as a model of its own relationship with Jesus. We are not entitled, however, to assume that the narrative’s susceptibility to a number of symbolic interpretations points to the non-historicity of the events themselves. 40

The Mother as Witness

Perhaps the most relevant observation to be made about the portrayal of Jesus’ mother in the Fourth Gospel is that in each of her appearances, she is presented as one who “sees and hears” Jesus – an idea of summary importance in this Gospel. From the very beginning of the narrative section, we are consistently invited to see and hear Jesus, and therefore to believe in him in the basis of what we have seen (his signs) and heard (his testimony). When the Baptist...
witnesses to Jesus, he exclaims, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” In response to the Baptizer’s invitation, his disciples leave him to follow Jesus, who asks them, “What are you looking for?” And when John’s disciples ask to see where Jesus is staying, he invites them to “come and see.” (1:39) When Philip invites Nathanael to follow Jesus as well, the latter asks him whether anything good can come from Nazareth, to which Philip replies, “Come and see for yourself.” (1:46) Throughout the Gospel, the evangelist employs this literary device in order to invite his readers to make the journey of faith with him, i.e., to come and see Jesus and, seeing him, believe in him as Messiah and Son of God. “These signs have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name.” (20:31)

In the Fourth Gospel, those who see and hear Jesus come to faith, while those who refuse to see or hear reject him; they are blinder than the man whose eyes Jesus opened, unable to accept the truth that stands right before their eyes. The evangelist interprets their rejection of Jesus for us in 12:38, “This was to fulfill the word of the prophet Isaiah, ‘Lord, who has believed what has reached our ears? To whom has the might of the Lord been revealed? The reason they could not believe was that, as Isaiah says elsewhere, “He has blinded their eyes and numbed their hearts, lest they see or comprehend, or have a change of heart, and I should heal them”.” To be a believer in Jesus is to see the signs he performs and hear the words he speaks, and to do what he says. In the Fourth Gospel, at two strategic moments of Jesus’ public life, his mother is portrayed as one who sees his signs and hears his words and puts into practice what he tells her.

Not only is the mother portrayed as one who sees and hears Jesus, but she does so in such a way as to function as the single most important witness in the Gospel. If, as many scholars contend, the Gospel was written, along with I John, partly to refute Docetic tendencies, it would
have been necessary to argue effectively that the Son of God did, indeed, become flesh, and not just appear to do so. Certain passages from I John clearly indicate a schism within the early Church between those who deny the Son (2:22-23) and those who accept Jesus as Christ and Son of the Father. This same attitude may well be reflected in the Gospel passages that emphasize the unity of Father and Son, as well as those that insist on the reality of Jesus’ incarnation.

Among the various strands of Docetism operative within the early Church, there was a consistent tendency to reject the reality of Jesus human birth and therefore the reality of his suffering and death. Since he only appeared to be born in the flesh, he only appeared to suffer and die. By situating the mother of Jesus near the beginning and end of his life, the evangelist provides the one person capable of testifying to the reality of Jesus’ human birth – an idea that may well have played a part in describing her as “the mother of Jesus” instead of identifying her by name. Once Jesus is known to have had a human mother, it becomes much more difficult to deny the reality of his human birth. Finally, by situating the mother at Calvary, where she and the Beloved Disciple become the two major witnesses to Jesus’ death – which is described as including the flow of blood and water from his side – the evangelist makes her a witness to Jesus’ very human death as well. And because one of the witnesses is the dead man’s own mother, she is the one person in the narrative capable of testifying to both his human birth and all-too-human death, thus refuting the claims of Docetism. In all of this, the figure and role of the mother continue to be both positive and theologically significant.

The Dichotomy Revisited

The dichotomy we have seen emerge between scholars is not simply a question of method, but is intimately tied to the question of how history, theology, and symbol are interrelated in the Fourth Gospel and, a fortiori, in the Cana narrative. Those who hold that history and theology
and/or symbol are present in inverse proportion, so that the dominance of one implies the subordination of the other, will tend to emphasize either the search for historical data or the symbolic meaning of the text, but will not tend to hold the two in dynamic tension. Those who then search for historical data will tend to assume that whatever symbols are encountered are somehow in the way of their historical quest, and should be more-or-less-carefully peeled away in order to arrive at the truth of the text. The meaning of the text is what actually happened, and this can only be retrieved through a painful process of challenging everything in the narrative until only well-substantiated facts remain. Those, on the other hand, who search for symbolic meaning, will tend to overlook data that might contradict their symbolic interpretations. The meaning of the text is what their symbols say; elaborate historical quests that tend to discard symbols are inherently illegitimate.

Conclusion

Our brief investigation of the literature indicates that this temptation has not always been resisted by scholars. Proponents of strict historical-critical method have often swept away the Johannine portrait of Jesus’ mother on the assumption that her unverified presence at Cana and Calvary must be considered symbolic or theological, not historical. She is thought to be introduced into the narrative in order to make a point, to perform a function that moves the story along and help the evangelist tell us what he thinks about the nature of true discipleship versus family ties. Proponents of symbolic interpretations, on the other hand, have occasionally sacrificed the historical woman for the sake of their symbols, leaving her portrait without the flesh-and-blood that might make her more comprehensible to contemporary believers, for whom the fact that she is portrayed as the New Eve is apparently less interesting than her journey of faith in the face of obstacles.
Even those scholars who attempt to walk a middle path often tend to subsume the entire Gospel under the heading of theology, leaving history to fend for itself and confining symbols within the author's intention. The meaning of the text is what the author intended to tell us, without reference to the historical data or to the ability of symbolic consciousness to perceive deeper meanings not intended by the evangelist.

The purpose of this present chapter has been to demonstrate that the presentation of Jesus' mother in the Fourth Gospel is manifestly positive, and that one does justice to both her historical person and the evangelist's intention, not by isolating the narrative's several layers of meaning from one another, but by reading the text the way it was written—the only way it could have been written, i.e., with history and theology woven together in a narrative that speaks to symbolic consciousness in all its richness. It was because he believed the Cana events to have taken place that the evangelist reflected upon them and interpreted them for us, and it was because of their symbolic potential for our symbolic consciousness that these same events, presumably true, still speak to us today.
CHAPTER FOUR
FROM CANA TO CANA

In the Fourth Gospel, the mother of Jesus is portrayed positively, associated with positive themes and symbols that make her portrayal clear, if not quite transparent. The question remains, however, how significant her role is at Cana, and this is a decidedly different question, presenting us with an apparent paradox: the Cana narrative, as the first of Jesus' signs, is the immediate context for the interpretation of the mother's role, but that sign appears to point in a number of different directions from which one may approach its interpretation. The first section of this chapter will review the various approaches and directions from which authors have approached the Cana narrative. In the second section, we will attempt to outline an approach that will allow us to broaden the hermeneutical context without getting lost in increasingly wide concentric circles.

THE APPROACH TO CANA

In an effort to provide a hermeneutical context for the Cana narrative, scholars have sought to justify wandering outside the narrative itself in search of clues. In general, their efforts fall into one of the following categories: 1) the reconstructed Cana narrative within the reconstructed original Gospel; 2) the Cana narrative within the Fourth Gospel; 3) the Cana narrative within the Johannine Corpus, including perhaps the Book of Revelation; 4) the Cana narrative within the Old and New Testaments; 5) the Cana narrative within biblical and extra-biblical sources; 6) the Cana narrative within the social sciences. Although the positions described below may not be ascribable to any one scholar in their entirety, they serve to indicate the directions in which the interpretation of Cana has been moving.
The Reconstructed Cana Narrative within the Reconstructed Gospel

The narrowest hermeneutical context is the narrative itself, which is thought to conceal its meaning behind one or more layers of redaction, so that one must first attempt to reconstruct the original narrative before one may interpret its meaning. And since this approach operates on the assumption that the entire Gospel comes to us in redacted form, one must first attempt a reconstruction of the Fourth Gospel, and then situate the Cana narrative at the appropriate point within the reconstructed text, thereby assigning it a meaning in terms of the redaction. To one extent or another, Bultmann, Fortna, and McHugh have all followed this path, only to find themselves at dead ends.

In addition to the difficulties inherent in any reconstruction, this particular effort suffers from the necessity of providing the criteria for one’s reconstruction before the process can begin, which then become the criteria for the reconstruction of the Cana narrative. If, for example, one assumes with Bultmann that all sacramental references are the work of the so-called Ecclesiastical Redactor, one will remove all such references from the so-called original text. But this effort is dependent upon one’s ability to identify and isolate all sacramental references, which is a subjective task at best, and upon the supposition of a redactor working with precisely this purpose in mind. If, on the other hand, one assumes with McHugh that the original narrative must have been a Synoptic-like miracle story, one will remove all apparently foreign references, but will arrive at a historical reconstruction very different from that of Bultmann. Even if one may sympathize with the instinctive desire to work within the text rather than wander outside for hermeneutical clues, the proliferation of reconstructions appears to cry out for more objective criteria, in the absence of which there appears to be little to be gained from this approach to Cana.
The Cana Narrative within the Fourth Gospel

Many authors have attempted to decipher the Cana code in the light of Calvary, i.e., 19: 25-27, where the mother of Jesus appears for the second and final time in the Gospel. F.-M. Braun, I. de la Potterie, and J.-P. Michaud all seek to resolve the tension implicit in their interpretations of Cana by referring the tension to Calvary for resolution. The appeal to Calvary, however, has two major difficulties. First, it is not at all obvious that: A) Cana and Calvary, in fact, occur at the beginning and end of Jesus' public ministry, respectively, so that they may be considered to provide a hermeneutical context; one would assume that Jesus' public ministry began when he invited the first disciples to follow him; B) the portrait of Jesus' mother at Cana is typically considered to be negative and in need of rehabilitation; C) the portrayal of the mother at Calvary is more positive than at Cana, so that some improvement would be the result. Second, the very possibility of appealing from one text to another within the Gospel is seriously challenged by Source and Redaction Criticism, so that one engages in such appeals at the risk of losing one's dialogue partners. While the appeal from Cana to Calvary remains theoretically possible, we will do well to justify that appeal on other grounds.

There have also been authors who have explored various aspects of the Fourth Gospel for clues to the interpretation of Cana. Some have argued that the key is to identify and interpret Jesus' signs, of which the sign of Cana is the first (R. Collins). Unfortunately, the evangelist himself does not identify for us all of Jesus' signs, and our attempts to do so tend to reflect subjective criteria. How many signs are there? How may we identify them according to established criteria? Other scholars have argued that the structure of the Gospel, or the structure of the signs as they appear in the Gospel, may be the key to unlock the Cana safe (J. Grassi, F. Moloney). Here again, however, one tends to find a structure one may well have imposed upon
the text according to the premises one brings to the task of interpretation. And if the Gospel is thought to have suffered one or more rearrangements, the structural argument is significantly weakened, if not mortally wounded.

The Cana Narrative within the Johannine Corpus

For some scholars, the Cana narrative must be interpreted within the larger Johannine context, provided by the Gospel, the Letters of John, and perhaps the Book of Revelation. In general, these scholars attempt to understand the Gospel in light of the problems and crises confronting the Johannine community during the period the Gospel and Letters were being written (Brown, Martyn), each of which has shaped the Gospel in response to one or more such problems. The argument tends toward tautology, however, since the crises only become visible through the prism of the writings themselves, which are then interpreted through the lens of these same crises, without reference to the possibility that historical events within the lifetime of Jesus were at least as relevant to the faith life of the Johannine community as the contemporary crises.

For other scholars, the Johannine Corpus, complete with the Book of Revelation, provides the key to interpreting, not specifically the Cana narrative, but the role of Jesus' mother therein (Laurentin). The issue here is not how one may interpret the meaning of Jn. 2:1-12, but how one may illuminate the otherwise-problematic figure of Jesus' mother in the Cana narrative. Many Johannine scholars, however, challenge the place of II and III John, as well as the Book of Revelation, within this corpus. Apart from those texts, the identification of Jesus' mother with the Church is not unambiguously clear.

The Cana Narrative within the New Testament

While many scholars have been content to examine the Johannine Corpus for clues to the interpretation of Cana, others have explored the entire New Testament with apparent freedom,
drawing especially on the Synoptic portrayal of Jesus' mother to fill out her portrait (Ceroke). While this approach brings a whole sphere of otherwise unavailable data within range of the exegete, it also requires that one account for the fact that such details are often not supported in other New Testament texts, are almost never supported by the Fourth Gospel portrait of Jesus' mother, and are at times apparently contradicted by the same sources.

The authors of Mary in the New Testament set out in search of the historical Mary, only to arrive home with an ambiguous portrait of a shadowy figure unrecognizable from the perspective of tradition. In this case, the effort to complement the portrait found in any single Gospel yielded to the issue of historicity, narrowly defined, so that the assumption of Markan priority eventually eliminates the data available for all later portraits, leaving the commentator to wonder why an evangelist would have gone to so much trouble to paint the portrait of a ghost.

The Cana Narrative within the Old and New Testaments

Those authors who concentrate on the problematic exchange between Jesus and his mother often explore the Old Testament in search of parallels with which to interpret the Johannine meaning of these phrases (Michaud, Ceroke). By isolating instances of the same Greek usage in the Septuagint, these authors suggest that the evangelist was not only aware of these precedents, but consciously employed them in a manner that retained their original meaning. Typically, however, they eventually arrive at the conclusion that such phrases derive their specific meaning from their context: an insight that eliminates the seemingly negative connotation of "How does your concern affect me?" only to replace it with a similar connotation arising from the Cana context.

More consistent is the research of A. Serra, who examines key phrases – for example "the third day" – in reference to the Old and New Testaments and suggests that the expression found
in John 2:1 may, consciously or subconsciously, derive its meaning from this association. The relative strength of Serra’s position is that he does not need to argue that the evangelist intentionally employed the expression with reference to either Sinai or Easter in order to conclude that this Sinai-Easter continuum is part of the hermeneutical context for the Cana narrative. Once the interpreter is able to perceive this association, the entire narrative, including problematic phrases, may be understood in its light. The difficulty with this position, as espoused by many of its proponents, is the tendency to argue that the evangelist intended these associations to be made, rather than arguing that the associations have become clear within the cognitive-cultural context provided by the later Church. By identifying such associations with the evangelist’s intention, these authors arrive at a variety of competing interpretations, each of which is attributed to the evangelist, and each of which suffers from the perception of subjective interpretation.

Finally, even with the intermediary of the common-language Septuagint, it is extremely difficult to argue that a Semitic expression in translation retains the meaning it had in the original language. Thus, even if the Septuagint rendering of mah-li walak were precisely the same as the Greek of 2:4, it would still have to be established that δέ ματω καὶ καὶ is the proper rendering of mah-li walak in any or all of its Old Testament contexts. And this is precisely what is at issue: the original meaning of the phrase that qualifies it as a parallel, so that the onus is simply removed one place to the shoulders of the translator who first decided to render the Semitic expression in Greek.

The Cana Narrative within Biblical and Extra-Biblical Sources

When the Johannine puzzle does not yield to biblical analysis, some scholars turn to the extra-biblical literature of ancient Judaism and early Christianity for clues to its interpretation.
Michaud, Serra, and de la Potterie have each examined the commentaries of Jewish and early Christian authors, showing how their interpretations may guide our own investigations. In this way, one may discover that the Law of Israel was frequently spoken of as wine, so that the new wine of Cana may be considered a replacement for the old wine that came through Moses. Similarly, the fathers of the Church employed allegorical interpretation to plumb the depths of scripture, and their insights often provide the first glimpses of images that later became doctrinal or quasi-doctrinal in the Church.

Neither the extra-biblical literature of Judaism nor that of Christianity, however, is easy to evaluate objectively. Many of the relevant Jewish sources derive from prophetic literature, with its accompanying themes of the Lord's vengeance on that terrible day to come. It becomes difficult to extract the idea of Israel's wine from its surrounding context in order to accommodate it to the preaching of Jesus. Similarly, the Fourth Gospel is known to have enjoyed favor within early Gnostic communities, which resulted in its relatively slow acceptance by the Church. An appeal to extra-biblical literature inevitably raises the question of criteria: how one may decide which sources will speak to the issue at hand, and which will be asked to remain silent. Unfortunately, the selection will often prove to be self-serving, as one's sources are chosen according to their eloquence on one's predetermined position.

The Cana Narrative within Scripture and the Social Sciences

Eventually, some scholars have found their way outside the confines of ancient sources and begun to examine modern social science for clues to the interpretation of the Gospel. Leonardo Boff studied the Radical Feminine as a dynamism within human consciousness and a hermeneutical key to the Cana narrative. P. Bearsley examined the image of Mary as Perfect Disciple as an emerging paradigm within Marian theology. And numerous scholars have studied
the function of symbol in organizing human consciousness. Each approach in its own way has reminded us that the most ancient of texts can only be interpreted by modern consciousness, and that the interpreter brings something to the task of exegesis. While this allows a scholar like Leon-Dufour to broaden the range of acceptable Johannine symbolism, it subjects the text to an endless array of investigations, each of which determines its results a priori according to its premises, imposing them upon the narrative in question. It is one thing to acknowledge the function of symbol in organizing human consciousness, quite another to define how human consciousness symbolically interpreted the events preserved for us within a specific text. Unless the exegete allows the author to guide symbolic consciousness toward certain ideas and away from others, the result can only be an exercise in cultural subjectivity.

And this, unfortunately, is what appears to be happening within Johannine studies, as scholars approach the text from a variety of perspectives in ever-increasing concentric circles, seeking to draw into their sphere of interest sufficient data to yield a coherent interpretation. In so doing, their often-opposing efforts have managed to challenge each other's premises, methods, and conclusions until the point of departure of one scholar virtually excludes all other projects. One exegete appeals from Cana to Calvary, while another cries "Foul!" precisely because he has "demonstrated" that the two narratives are themselves composite texts deriving from different sources and authors. One scholar studies the crises within early Johannine Christianity for clues to the interpretation of the Gospel, and another reminds him that the story is to be considered pre-Johannine, so that only the redaction is subject to such interpretations. One scholar identifies the mother of Jesus as Israel in Messianic expectation, another as the Daughter of Sion, still another as the true Bride at Cana, still others as the confused woman who sought to understand her son before it was too late. The predictable result of these broadly-
divergent approaches is a visible dichotomy within Johannine studies, as whole groups of scholars seem not to take each other’s research seriously. Many authors who consider the Cana narrative important for their studies find that other scholars assign Marian speculation an entirely different value. Both groups claim sound scriptural support for their positions.

If some way is to be found out of the present situation, it may well be necessary to retreat from certain extreme positions in order to proceed from a mutually-acceptable point of departure. It may also be necessary to postpone the arrival at more-or-less firm conclusions in order to walk the same road together without violence. In the following section, the effort will be to show how, if such a commitment may be made, the hermeneutical context of the Cana narrative may be expanded without suffering the effects of centrifugal force. The question that will guide our investigations will be where does the evangelist guide us in an attempt to understand the Cana narrative?

2: 1-12: 1 καὶ ἡ ἡμέρα τῇ πρώτῃ γάμος ἐγένετο ἐν Κανά ἀπὸ Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκ 2 ἐνδήπετα δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἐξ τοῦ γάμου 3 καὶ υπερήφανος οὖν λέγει ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν οὖν οὐκ ἐξουσίαν 4 καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἰ ἐμὸ καὶ σοὶ γὰρ νῦν αὐτῶν ἦπερ ή ὄρα μου 5 λέγει ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τοῖς δικαίοις οὗ τῶν ἐμῆς ποιήσατε 6 ἦσαν δὲ ἦκαθι λίθαι ὑδάτινος ἔς κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων καθισθήσατο ὁμοίως μεταφέρθη διὸ ἡ φράσις 7 λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς γεμίσατε τὰς ύδρας ὑδάτινος καὶ ἐχέσσαν αὐτῶς ἔως δίνω 8 καὶ λέγει αὐτῷς ἵνα ποίησατε νῦν καὶ φέρετε τὸν ὑδρατικὸν οἱ δὲ ἠκολούθησαν 9 ὅς δὲ ἐγένετο ὁ ὑδρατικὸν τὸ ὕδωρ οὖν γεγενημένον καὶ οὖς ἦδα πόθεν ἢν αὐτοῖς 10 καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ πάσης ὑδρατικοῖς πρὸς τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ὅταν μεθυσάσθην τοῦ ἰδίου σου σεβασμοῦ τὸν καθαρισμὸν 11 τοῦτον ἔδωκαν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἔν των σημάδισιν ἐν Κανά ἀπὸ Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐφαρώθηκεν τὴν δώσαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκάλεσαν αὐτὸς ἐξ αὐτῶν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ 12 μετα τούτῳ κατέβη ὁ Καπανναοῦμ αὐτῶς καὶ ἦν μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἄδελφοι αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἦκαθι ἐμεῖναν οὐ πελλᾶς ἡμέρας
Bultmann had argued that the Fourth Gospel was a composite of originally-independent sources, including a rather-well-defined Signs Source, based on the textual enumeration of a first and second sign performed at Cana in Galilee. Whether or not one considers the Gospel a patchwork quilt of originally independent sources, it remains clear that the two enumerated Cana signs belong to the same source (relative to their inclusion in the narrative) and, in the context of the present narrative as received into the Church, are intentionally interrelated by the evangelist-redactor. Indeed, the existence of many common terms and structures would appear to support the notion that the two narratives form one hermeneutical context.

Cana and Cana

There are many reasons for reading the two Cana signs together, not the least of which is that the evangelist himself does so: “He went to Cana in Galilee once more, where he had made the water wine.” (4:46) When this same kind of linkage is found in 12:1 (“Jesus came to Bethany, the village of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead”) and 11:2 (“This Mary whose
brother Lazarus was sick was the one who...”), there is an obvious intention to relate the narratives thematically. This is said to be a sign of Jesus, and is numbered as the second sign he performs, linking it to the first, which is designated as such in 2:11. The emphasis on belief as the proper response to Jesus’ signs is strong in both narratives. In terms of the substance of the story at the theological level, therefore, there is good reason to link the two Cana narratives.

At a secondary level, we find a number of striking similarities with the two narratives: the motif of the third day (2:1; 4:43), the phrase “Cana in Galilee” at both beginning and end of each narrative, a reference to Capernaum (2:12; 4:46), to the hour of Jesus (2:4; 4:53), to the notion of restoring what had been depleted (2:3; 4:47), to the servants (2:5ff; 4:51ff) and their accounts of the outcome, and the summary statements (2:11; 4:54). There are also many similarities in vocabulary: the expression ἐκ τῆς Γαλαής (2:11; 4:46), the use of λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν to describe the action of the person making the request (2:3; 4:48), the term σημαίνει (2:11; 4:48, 54), the verbs ἐδόθη (2:11; 4:48, 53) and καταθήκη (2:12; 4:47, 49, 51), the use of ωραν (2:4; 4:52, 53), the verb ἐποίησεν (2:5; 4:54). There may also be reason to see in the mother/father/son dynamics a commonality of themes, as well as in the themes of welcoming and feasting. (2:1, 4:45).

Like the first Cana narrative, there are no textual variants, save one modest alteration in v.51, where Bodmer, Sinaiticus, et. al., read παῖς αὑτοῦ, while a few manuscripts read 'υἱός 'αυτοῦ or παῖς σου. In either translation, the meaning is “his child.” The fact that both narratives contain insignificant variants in their final verse may be pure coincidence, but the coincidence is enhanced by the inclusion of phrases that may be translated either as statements of fact or as questions. In 2:4, the phrase is οὕτω ήκε η ωρα μου, while in 4:48 the phrase is ἔδει μη σημαίνει καὶ τέρματι λόγος οὗ μη παρεκύπτῃ. As a statement of fact, 4:48 reads: “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you do not believe.” As a question, however, it could read, “(Why) don’t you believe
unless you see signs and wonders?” and would constitute less an observation than a plea on Jesus’ part. In this sense, the question form could help explain Jesus’ attitude toward his mother in 2:4 – assuming that the two narratives are, in fact, related. And this, as we have seen, is precisely the position adopted by F. Moloney in his recent commentary on the Fourth Gospel, taking his lead from the fact that 4:54 mentions “Cana of Galilee...where he had made the water wine.” The question becomes whether, in fact, these two signs are related to a signs source of some kind or related to one another, but not to the rest of the Gospel.

Well before 1950, there were commentators who suspected a connection between the two Cana narratives, but recognized no uniqueness in these accounts as compared to the rest of the Gospel, since most scholars assumed these were the first two of seven signs, and that the remaining signs probably belonged to the same source (or gospel). If, however, the evangelist meant to build his account around seven, or any other number of signs, it would be remarkable for him to number only the first (αρχήν, 2:11) and second (δεύτερον, 4:54). One would expect that if the evangelist intended to draw attention to a specific number of signs he would number all -- either plainly or in code -- or number none, leaving the mystery to be solved by the enlightened reader. The numbering of only two signs would suggest that the evangelist was drawing attention to, or poorly concealing, the fact that there was something different about the two episodes so numbered.

Careful examination of the relationship of the two Cana narratives to other material in the Gospel reveals that these are the only episodes that stand alone and are nowhere reflected in the rest of the work (with the exception of 7:53—8:11, the story of the woman caught in adultery, which is generally assumed to be non-Johannine). Elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel the accounts of events are connected with discussions that follow, e. g., John’s witness (1:19-35) develops into
the call of the disciples; the temple episode (2:13-20) leads to the conversation with Nicodemus; the ministry of the Judean countryside (3:22-23) leads to a second witness by John, then to the Samaritan episode -- and so on throughout the gospel. But neither the water-to-wine episode nor the account of the healing of the official's son leads into anything else. These two narratives stand alone and apart from the remainder of the work, joined only by editorial introductions and conclusions.

When attention is turned to the form of presentation, it is also apparent that these two are of a narrative form not otherwise found in the Fourth Gospel (except, again, in 7:53—8:11). They are of approximately the same length (eleven and nine verses respectively) and in length and type are similar to pericopes found in the Synoptic gospels. In such form the scene is set; then the event is carried along to a climax that comes in Jesus' words or in an editorial statement regarding the effect of the event on those who observed it. In the Synoptic gospels the episode may and often does stand quite alone except for editorial connections; in the Fourth Gospel this is true only in the case of the reports found in 2:1-12 and 4:46-54 (and, once more, in 7:53—8:11). These pericopes, then, may derive from a type of tradition different from the one that provided the source for the rest of the Fourth Gospel.

In support of this argument, there is the use of the phrase, "signs and wonders" (σημεία καὶ ῥέματα), at 4:48 which is found nowhere else in John nor at all in the Synoptic gospels, although it is often used in the Acts (2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 7:36; 8:13; and 14:3 (cf. 2:19 where σημεία is added to the quotation from Joel to balance with ῥέμα); three times in Paul's epistles, and once in Hebr 2:4. On the basis of the evidence presented by the use of this phrase one might conclude that the kerygma which has come down to us through the Synoptics is earlier than -- or represents an earlier stage in the development of the tradition than -- that kerygma preserved in
Acts, in the Letters of Paul, and in Hebrews. Then it would follow that the Fourth Gospel (minus these two narratives) shared the position of the earlier tradition found in the Synoptics, while these two signs have taken the coloring and, in one case at least, the phraseology of the later kerygma of the church. This position, which suggests that the gospels contain an earlier tradition than do the Pauline Letters, will require much more proof than that given by this one phrase but the evidence cannot be disregarded.

The two numbered pericopes that appear to be independent of the rest of the Gospel are definitely connected with one another, showing that they were incorporated into the gospel account at the same time. The second is connected with the first in its introduction, "So he came to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine" (4:46), and in the conclusion, "This was again the second sign that Jesus did, when he came from Judea into Galilee" (4:54).

The second section has much in common, of course, with the episode of the healing of the centurion's servant in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. What is of special interest for the present study is that the Synoptic report, which is probably from the Q source, recounts an event that takes place in Capernaum, while the second sign report in John moves the episode to Cana, though the official comes from Capernaum. It would seem that the Q tradition of the event was preserved in Capernaum circles (cf. Matt 4:13, "and leaving Nazareth he came and dwelt in Capernaum"). The section in the Fourth Gospel which appears to be concerned with the same event was either part of the Cana collection of traditions, or was changed by the editor so that it would agree with the locale of the first sign. Though the sick boy remains in Capernaum, the miracle is worked in Cana. We conclude, then, that Moloney is correct in directing our attention to the second Cana narrative as the proper hermeneutical context for the interpretation of 2:1-12.
Reading the first Cana narrative in light of the second, we may suggest that the key to understanding both narratives lies in the necessity of moving from the level of seeing signs and wonders to that of believing in Jesus’ words and deeds. In the second sign, the man is first reprimanded for appearing to ask for a sign; only when he puts his trust in the word of Jesus does the story proceed. Similarly, the mother, whose faith at first appears to reflect only a maternal concern, is first questioned by Jesus as to the relevance of her request to him and his mission, only to instruct the servants to “do whatever he tells you,” i.e., she puts her trust in Jesus and instructs the waiters to do the same. This motif of signs/belief/word/trust is common to both Cana narratives.

The Structure of 4:46-54

A surface analysis of the second Cana narrative reveals a structural pattern that provides significant points of comparison with the first, including those textual similarities that have already been mentioned. It is in terms of these points of comparison that certain similarities will come to the fore, and the figure of the mother of Jesus in the first Cana narrative will be illuminated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He went to Cana in Galilee once more, where he had made the water wine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Capernaum there happened to be a royal official whose son was ill.</td>
<td>Jesus and his disciples had likewise been invited to the celebration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When he heard that Jesus had come back from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and begged him to restore health to his son, who was near death.</td>
<td>At a certain point, the wine ran out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no wine.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jesus replied, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you do not believe.’

‘Sir,’” the royal official pleaded with him, ‘come down before my child dies.’

Jesus told him, ‘Return home. Your son will live.’

The man put his trust in the word Jesus to him, and started for home.

He was on his way there when his servants met him with the news that his boy was going to live.

The OBJECTION

Jesus replied, ‘Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.’

THE PERSISTENCE

His mother instructed those waiting on tables, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’

THE COMPLIANCE

As prescribed for Jewish.... ‘Fill those jars with water, Jesus ordered....’

Now draw some out and take it to the waiter in charge.

THE FIRST CONVERSION

They did as he instructed them.

THE SIGN

The waiter in charge tested the water made wine....Then the waiter called the groom over and remarked to him, ‘What you have done is keep the choice wine until now.’

THE SECOND CONVERSION

Jesus performed the first of his signs at Cana in Galilee.

Thus did he reveal his glory, and his ciples believed in him.

He and his whole household thereupon became believers. This was the second sign that Jesus performed upon returning from Judea to Galilee.

If, as we have suggested, the key element in both narratives is the conversion of the person who requests the sign – conversion from a faith based on signs and wonders to faith in Jesus’ person and mission – then we may interpret the enigmatic expression in 2:4 in terms of the comment of Jesus in 4:38, where he is manifestly resisting the idea that he should work a sign so that others may believe in him. Only when the royal official persists in his faith without receiving a sign does Jesus work the sign, and only when the mother instructs the servants to “do whatever he tells you” does he work the sign he has so recently resisted. In each case, it is a question of faith based on signs versus faith without signs, and in each case it is the latter that is
identified as appropriate. The mother of Jesus at Cana is not being rejected, or rebuked, or put at a distance. She is being challenged to believe without seeing signs and wonders, and she meets the challenge, issuing instructions in clear and precise language: “Do whatever he tells you.” Like the royal official, she puts her trust in Jesus and his word.

Cana and Calvary

In this view, the difference in Jesus’ reactions to his mother at Cana and at Calvary is not to be seen in terms of her “rehabilitation” at some unspecified point in the narrative – an idea that hardly coincides with strict historical-critical method – but in terms of her having met the challenge of believing without seeing signs and wonders. It is not necessary to either remove the allegedly negative connotation of 2:4, nor to heighten the positive connotation of 19:27 in order to perceive in the Fourth Gospel a portrait of Jesus mother consonant with Christian tradition. When challenged to believe in her son without first seeing signs and wonders, the mother does so, and this explains why she was seen in such a positive light at Calvary.

Far from seeing the Cana narrative as a Johannine version of Jesus’ allegedly negative attitude toward his family, it may now be seen as a Johannine response to the question of discipleship. According to the Markan text, the true family of Jesus consists of those who do the will of God. In the Fourth Gospel, when the mother is challenged to do the will of God, she does so, and she instructs others in unequivocal language to do the same. In a certain sense, the evangelist has answered the question left open by mark: Jesus’ mother is a member of his true family precisely because she does the will of God.

Similarly, rather than seeing 2:3-5 as a Johannine version of Lk. 2:49, the former may be seen as a step forward in the New Testament portrait of Jesus’ mother. Whereas in Luke the mother appears unable to grasp what her son is saying and doing, in Jn. 2:3-5 she seems to catch
on immediately and to respond with equal speed. If, as some argue, Luke has attempted to soften the Markan portrait by including Jesus’ mother as part of Jesus’ true family, (cf. Lk. 8:21), the Fourth Gospel tells us why this is so: she was challenged by Jesus to believe without first seeing signs and wonders, and she did so.

Finally, it is important to note that the faith of the disciples remains (according to the text) a faith based on signs, so that the faith of Jesus’ mother must be considered somehow superior to that of the disciples who accompany Jesus during his public ministry. And this raises the question of authentic discipleship in the Fourth Gospel. While it cannot be argued on the basis of textual evidence that the mother was one of Jesus’ intimate companions, it can be argued with some conviction that she believed well before the companions did, and that her movement to faith-without-signs takes place at the very outset of Jesus’ ministry, while this same movement to faith on the part of the disciples is not visible, if at all, until after Easter, and is not manifestly supported by their actions. (cf. 6:60ff)

Resurrection Faith

If, as the evangelist himself suggests, the two Cana narratives are intentionally linked, so that one may be understood in terms of the other, it seems reasonable to explore the dual reference to the third day in light of the obvious resurrection motif found in the second narrative. As A. Serra has argued rather convincingly, the third day of the first Cana narrative may be linked to the resurrection of Jesus. In the second narrative, we find the expression “when the two days were over” in association with Galilee, the locus of authentic faith in Jesus, and the restoration to health of the royal official’s son. Without risking an allegorical interpretation of the father-son motif, we may suggest that the association with restoration and the third-day motif are sufficiently clear to justify a search for similar themes and motifs in the first Cana narrative as
well. And there, as we have seen, we find not only a clear reference to the third day, but to a replacement/restoration of the old, inferior wine with a new, superior wine in abundance. The implication here is that the mother of Jesus is portrayed as meeting the challenge of believing in him without first having seen signs and wonders, and that her faith is somehow oriented to his resurrection from the dead, prefigured in the replacement of the old wine and the restoring to health of the royal official’s son. The fact that Jesus frames his response to his mother in terms of his hour, which is the hour of his crucifixion and glorification, only serves to underline the notion that what is being asked of her is resurrection faith, and what she demonstrates in the words “do whatever he tells you” is nothing less. For this reason, when Jesus’ hour finally arrives, the mother is portrayed as standing by his cross with the Beloved Disciple, accepting the latter’s filial care at the direction of her son — without a word. The woman who first demonstrated resurrection faith in her son will be the last of his disciples to do so before her faith is vindicated. In the Fourth Gospel, the mother of Jesus is portrayed as a woman of faith from beginning to end.

History, Theology, and Symbol

In light of the evangelist’s linking of the two Cana narratives, we may now say that the first narrative portrays the mother of Jesus as being challenged to move from a faith based on signs and wonders to a mature resurrection faith that has no need of such phenomena. According to the narrative, the mother meets that challenge head-on, demonstrating her open-ended faith by means of her instructions to the servants, who remain bound by their lack of faith and understanding.

At the theological level, the evangelist wants us to read this first Cana narrative in terms of the second, in which the association with restoration/resurrection is clearer. At this level, Jesus’
words to his mother constitute a challenge to see everything in reference to him, oriented to his resurrection and the fullness of which all believers will have a share. At the symbolic level, the Church is entitled to see in these narratives the transition from Old Testament faith, based on the Law of Moses which is now exhausted and unable to nourish, to New Testament faith, based on the person and mission of Jesus, whom God will raise from the dead to give us the gifts of the Messianic era in abundance.

In all of this, the mother of Jesus is portrayed as one who puts her trust in Jesus’ words, thereby fulfilling the main requirement for discipleship in the Fourth Gospel. As such, in the theology of the evangelist, she would be included as one of those who “hear my word and have faith in him who sent me” and who therefore “possess eternal life” (5:24). At the symbolic level, she is a type of the Church, living in the power of Jesus’ promise, “I solemnly assure you, the one who has faith in me will do the works I do” (14:12). Finally, in the mind of the evangelist, the mother of Jesus is one of those who have seen Jesus’ signs and believed that he is the Messiah and Son of God and received life in his name. Her portrayal in the Fourth Gospel, therefore, must be considered as both positive and highly significant.
NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION


4. So G. Sloyan, op. cit., p.1. R. Fortna comments: "With the first appearance, in 1941, of Rudolf Bultmann's commentary, a kind of climax was reached. So exhaustive was the source theory...that a kind of moratorium was declared, with the result that since the Second World War there has been on the whole only a discussion of the problems raised by his work...and a dwindling one at that." *The Gospel of Signs*. (SNTS Monograph Series, 1970), footnote, p.1.
NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Even those authors who observe that Jesus’ mother is never mentioned by name often refer to her as “Mary” -- e.g., Mary in the New Testament.

2. J.-P. Michaud, for example, seems to introduce a discussion of the mother’s mediation, not because that discussion is required by the text, but apparently because the idea is rooted in Catholic tradition. Cf. Le Signe du Cana dans son contexte johannique. (Montreal: Editions Montfortaines, 1963).

3. The reader would perhaps expect, for example, Boismard’s important study, Du Bapteme a Cana, to appear rather early in our study. For reasons that will become clear, his work will be considered in Chapter Three, where its sacramental-symbolic significance can be appropriately analyzed.


7. It should be noted that Braun himself is not entirely certain about the texts in question, and that his argument for the fulfillment of prophecy is weakened by that uncertainty.
8. While many authors make this association, it is not manifestly clear that the Cana and Calvary narratives actually constitute the beginning and end of Jesus' public life, or even his self-manifestation. There is, for example, the question of his prior encounters with John and his disciples in John 1.

9. Braun does not explain why other Fourth Gospel instances of "woman" do not warrant similar interpretations.

10. The evangelist provides us with an interpretation of 19:25-27: the disciple takes the woman into his care as a son would his mother. The meaning of his words, and the disciple's actions, is a matter of theological/symbolic interpretation.

11. Braun's work has been called "the most important and most interesting study of the mother of Jesus in the writings of St. John" which "with some qualifications and amendments...has been widely accepted among Roman Catholic theologians." John McHugh, The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), p. 361.

12. For example, Christian Ceroke, "Jesus and Mary at Cana: Separation or Association?" Theological Studies 17 (1956), 1-38.


15. Ceroke, "Jesus and Mary," p. 35.

16. The notion that John wrote a "spiritual gospel" is attributed to Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius, H.C., 6:14,7.


18. Michaud is engaging in psychologizing at two levels. First, he speculates about Jesus’ awareness. Second, he attempts to establish that apparent parallels were knowingly employed by the evangelist according to the meaning associated with their original biblical context.

19. The context of Joel 4:4 shows what difficulty one encounters in attempting to smooth over the hostile connotations of expressions like *mah-li walak*: “Moreover, what are you to me, Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Would you take vengeance on me by some action? But if you do take action against me, swiftly, speedily, I will return your deed upon your own head.”


21. Cf. footnote 8, above.


23. The term “hour” occurs 26 times in John, 21 in Matthew, 17 in Luke, and 12 in Mark. Michaud does not explain why these relatively similar numbers are significant to his argument.


25. 16:2, 4, 21, 32.


29. Rene Laurentin, *La Vergine Maria.* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1973). This Italian edition was chosen because, as Laurentin himself notes in the Introduction, he has made an effort here to incorporate the meaning and contents of the Second Vatican Council.


31. The idea of the virgin birth is not explicit in the Fourth Gospel, and may rely on a minority reading of 1:13, where the manuscript tradition contains a number of variants.

32. Laurentin, *La Vergine Maria,* p. 56.

33. Laurentin, *La Vergine Maria,* p. 56.


37. Much of what is said of the Magnificat might also be said of Zechariah's Canticle (Lk. 1: 68-79).

38. This is obviously an interpretation of the mother's request, as well as a limited understanding of prayer.


41. The text of 4:54 permits the variant translation “the second of Jesus’ signs performed at Cana of Galilee.”

42. The expression appears 150 times with the dative, only 7 with the accusative.

43. This interpretation is not supported by the fact that it is the mother who is subsequently entrusted to the disciple’s care.


51. This, of course, would be an inevitable effect of the so-called “hermeneutics of suspicion.”

52. Serra., *Maria a Cana*, p. 30.

54. Serra, Maria a Cana, p. 64.
55. Serra, Maria a Cana, p. 75.
56. The notion of Jesus and his mother being the True Groom and Bride at Cana is inherently problematic.
59. “So Jesus is saying to Mary, ‘On one level, the level of giving them the Spirit, my hour is not yet come. What do you want me to do? But I’ll give you the best foretaste of the Spirit that you’ve ever had.’ And he gave them the abundance of this wine.” Cohen, Mary at Cana, p. 47.
66. Redemptoris Mater #20


70. Codex Vercellensis adds the notion that the wine had run out. The original Greek simply states that “they have no wine.”


**NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO**


3. Cf. G. Sloyan, *What Are They Saying about John*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 11: “Important as B’s work on sources has been to Johannine scholarship, it has led to a verdict of ‘not proven’ with respect to any but a signs source.”

4. The existentialist interpretation of scripture emphasizes the Word proclaimed (kerygma), the event in which Jesus’ challenge to authentic living becomes effectively present to the believer, requiring an (authentic) response.


9. In this, Fortna would be at odds with Serra and de la Potterie, who see in this expression a Sinai-Easter motif.


28. This is not necessarily to argue that the author of the Fourth Gospel was aware of, or dependent upon, the Gospel of Mark.


31. It is not clear that Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman should be grouped with those who do not understand Jesus. Cf. our discussion in the following chapter.


33. Jesus "own" is the expression used in Mark 3:20ff to identify those who were customarily in Jesus' company, which NAB takes to mean his family.

44. Vawter, *Interpretation*, p. 164..
49. Cf. our treatment of Serra’s work in Chapter One.
53. R. Collins, “Cana – the First of His Signs or the Key to His Signs?” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 47 (1980), 79-95.


60. X. Leon-Dufour, “Toward,” p. 440.


63. X. Leon-Dufour, Lecture, pp. 236-37.


67. A. Feuillet, “L’heure,” p. 17,


69. M. Thurian, Mary, Mother of the Lord, Figure of the Church (London: Faith, 1963), 36-38.


86. F.J. Moloney, *Gospel*, p.3.


**NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE**


2. Textual variants are found in v. 20, 21, 29, and 32. For the purposes of this study, the most significant variant is v. 21, where Sinaiticus and other reliable texts read *akousantes hoi par' autou*, while other texts read *peri autou* or *uper autou*; still other texts read *akousantes peri autou hoy grammateis kai hoy loipoi* and *hote ekousan peri autou hoy grammateis kai hoy loipoi*.


8. Note that many ancient Greek manuscripts do not include John 7:53 to 8:11. Nestle-Aland does not include it in the Fourth Gospel at all.

9. Cf. 4:28, where the implication is that the disciples will be sent to do what the woman has already gone to do, and that in so doing, they will become *apostles,* i.e., people sent to announce the good news to others.

10. Cf. Mark 8:27ff; Mt. 16:13-16; Lk. 9:18ff.


18. The arrival of Nicodemus at night may be seen in terms of the evangelist’s dualism of light and darkness. The woman, on the other hand, comes to Jesus at noon, leading us to anticipate a more positive encounter.

19. Jewish expectation was for a Messiah to save the Jewish people; Samaritan expectation was for a Messiah to save the world.


27. The implication here is that the reason for the mother’s words is given in the initial clause.

28. The interpretation of 2:4 is dependent on the NAB translation, which recognizes a distinction between the concerns of mother and son. Several theologians have suggested that the words should be translated to connote an association instead of a separation between them. Cf. C. Ceroke, op. cit.
29. The use of OT parallels to interpret NT texts is difficult unless clear signals are given by the NT author that such references are accurate.

30. The interpretation here depends on the declarative translation, although the interrogative is grammatically possible.


32. The Greek reads “They have no wine,” and not, as NAB has it, “they have no more wine.”

33. For a discussion of the third day motif, cf. Serra, La Madre.


35. S. Schneiders, op. cit., 371-76.


38. There are those who claim to “know” the identity of the Beloved Disciple. Some have argued that “he” was Mary Magdalen, while others have suggested he was Lazarus.

39. The text of 19:27 is unambiguous in stating that it was the disciple who took the mother into his care.


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