THE VIRGIN MARY: A MUSLIM, A PROTESTANT, AND A GODDESS

by

IVY NICOLE CAMPBELL

(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

Examination of The Virgin Mary’s role in Protestant circles and increasing popularity within the denomination of Christianity. This thesis also looks at Mary in texts other than the New Testament. I perform a comparative study of Mary in the Qur’an and the apocryphal text, The Protoevangelium of James. Lastly, I will apply Mary’s function in Goddess Theory to Sue Monk Kidd’s novel, The Secret Lives of Bees.

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B.S., University of Central Missouri, 2001.

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GA

2007
C 2007

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all of those who have supported me in various ways through this journey. I am especially dedicating this to my husband, John, for taking the journey with me and his unconditional love and support. To my parents for their sacrifices and the many things I have learned and am still learning from them. More specifically, to my mom for teaching me how to be a strong and independent person; to my dad for teaching me how to believe in myself and to laugh in life; to Davie for teaching me how to read between the lines and how to change the oil in my vehicle; and to Len for teaching me how to stand up to those who disrespect you and that it is okay to do so. Also, to my little brother, Matty, for helping me see in innocence of life again. To my friends, especially Patrick, who rescued me at times I felt like pulling my hair out. Finally, to Karen for her patience, flexibility, and friendship.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the entire Religion Department at the University of Georgia for their support throughout my academic career at Georgia. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Carolyn Jones Medine, Dr. William Power and Dr. Elizabeth LaRocca-Pitts for all of their help in preparing this work.

I would also like to thank Zinetta and Kim for keeping us all in line.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: AN EXPLANATION OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS

When we look at Mary, we see a woman of many contradictions. She is an obedient woman of God, yet she is a strong independent woman. More importantly, she is a mother, but is at the same time a virgin. Throughout history, there have been many different portrayals of Mary: from Jesus’ mother to the perpetual virgin to a figure in the Nativity Scene to a Goddess. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how Mary’s image has transformed through time with use of religious texts, the Bible and the Qur’an, and a novel, The Secret Lives of Bees. First, to fully understand, we should look at the construction of the religious texts I will refer to in this thesis.

Within the Bible, Mary’s story takes place in the New Testament Gospels. To fully understand Mary in the Gospels, one must first understand a few important aspects of the Gospels themselves. The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written in different eras in history and each had a distinctive message for a specific audience. The term “gospel” literally means “good news.” The first three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are commonly known as the Synoptic Gospels because they have a generalized idea of who Jesus is what and his actions are. They often tell the same stories using the same language. Bart Ehrman says they are called the Synoptic Gospels “because they have so many stories in common that they can be placed side by side in columns and ‘seen together’ which is the literal meaning of the word “synoptic.”¹ On the other hand, Matthew, Mark and Luke have stories that disagree. There are some stories found in

all three, others found in only two, and other stores are only found in one Gospel. The explanation for the variance in agreement and disagreements within the first three Gospels is commonly known as the “Synoptic Problem.”

Scholars have come up with several theories in response to the Synoptic Problem. One theory suggests Matthew was written first, followed by Luke and Mark, which would make it a condensed version of Matthew. However, the theory that is widely accepted among scholars to solve the Synoptic Problem is the “four-source hypothesis.” According to this hypothesis, Mark was the first Gospel written. Matthew and Luke were compiled next and used Mark as a source. In addition to Mark, Matthew and Luke also had access to a second source known as the “Q-source,” which comes from the German word quelle, meaning “source.” The last two sources defined in the “four-source hypothesis” are known as M and L; which are sources used independently by Matthew and Luke. They are tales that exist nowhere else within the Gospels but their respective books.

There are several reasons why scholars argue that the “four-source theory” is factual. First, Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source and expanded on the Gospel, but each having a different twist. According to Ehrman, “Sometimes all three Gospels tell a story in precisely the same way. This can be easily accounted for; it would happen whenever two of the authors borrowed their account from the earliest one, and neither of them changed it.” For example, Matthew 24:4-8, Mark 13:5-8, and Luke 21:8-11 have the same wording which suggests there is a direct literary meaning between them. The passage reads, “Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must

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2 Ibid, 84.
3 Ibid, 85.
take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs."

There are also cases in which Mark and Luke share the same language when Matthew differs and sometimes Mark and Matthew have the same wording when Luke differs. This occurs when both of the later authors borrowed the story but only one of them changed it. Consequently, one of the later authors would agree with the language of the earlier, and the other would not. If Matthew or Luke were the source for Mark, this pattern would not emerge. For instance, if the story where Jesus is rejected in Jerusalem temple in Matthew 13:53-58 and Mark 6:1-6 were placed in columns next to each other, one would see how they are almost identical in verbiage. They read, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of powers? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his bothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sister with us?” The Gospel of Luke omits this passage in the narrative, Luke 4:16-30, and instead he begins the story with Jesus entering the temple and reading from the scroll of Isaiah. The author of Luke gives the background to the reason why the people rejected Jesus in the temple. The passage ends with the people driving Jesus out of the town, whereas in Mark and Matthew, the people simply take offense to him.

Furthermore, there are instances where Matthew and Luke have the same stories when Mark does not. This source is known as Q, which is believed by scholars to be a written source comprised of Jesus’ sayings. Jonathan Reed says, “The Q hypothesis explains the remarkable verbal agreement between large blocks of Jesus teachings found both in Matthew and Luke but

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not in Mark.”⁶ The Q source contains some of the most characteristic parables and ethical teachings of Jesus, such as the Beatitudes, love your enemies, and the Lord’s Prayer. There are only two narratives sources in Q, the temptation and the healing of the centurion’s servant, but even in these passages the primary focus is Jesus’ sayings.⁷

The last two aspects of the “four-source theory” are the two sources related specifically to Luke and Matthew. Both Luke and Matthew contain sources that are exclusive to these Gospels. For example, Luke, 15:11-32, has the parable of the prodigal son about a man with two sons. The younger demands his share on his inheritance with his father is still living. His father gives it to him and he goes off to a distant where he carelessly spends it all and is forced to take a job looking after pigs. Some time passes and he realizes his rashness and returns home to a father who welcomes him with open arms.

The authorship of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are varied. They were written at different decades in the first century and for distinct audiences. The Gospel of Mark is believed by scholars to have been written first in the period between 65 to 70CE because of its references to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70CE. The writer of the Gospel was originally believed to be Mark, a companion to the disciple Peter, who reportedly wrote it down as he heard Peter preach. However, scholars today do not believe this to be true. Paul J. Achtemeier writes, “The nature of the material in Mark points to a period when it was circulated in oral form before the author collected it and wrote it down, so it is doubtful that Mark simply wrote down what he

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⁷ Ibid.
had heard Peter preach.”

Whoever wrote the Gospel of Mark is believed to have been a Greek-speaking Christian, presumable one living outside of Palestine, who had heard a number of oral stories about Jesus.

Because the Gospel of Mark is believed to have been written in Greek and to interpret phrases in Aramaic, the language of Palestine, the original readers were not Palestinians. In fact, the Gospel of Mark has a Jewish theme suggesting that his readers were of Jewish tradition. For instance, the gospel begins by stating, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah” (Mark 1:1). The gospel introduces Jesus as an epilogue to the Old Testament. The author of Mark puts Jesus as the son of God, the Jewish messiah that is prophesied about in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. He does not explain why he states this, he simply expects the reader to believe. Why should Mark have to explain who the messiah is when Jews should already know who he is? The Gospel of Mark stresses Jesus’ suffering and death, rather than his exalted identity and spectacular power.

The Gospel of Matthew is believed, by scholars, to have been written in 85CE by an unknown source. According to older traditions, the author of Matthew is Matthew, the tax collector named in Matthew 9:9. Later traditions have discounted this theory because the author never actually identifies himself in Matthew 9:9, which says, “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting.” The author does not say “he saw me.” Also, if Matthew was the original author, he would not have relied so heavily on Mark’s Gospel for the stories of Jesus. He would have simply recounted them himself.

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The Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Greek, presumably for a Greek speaking audience outside of Palestine.¹¹ Jack Dean Kingsbury writes, “Antioch of Syria is most likely the place of writing because the social conditions reflected in Matthew correspond with those that seem to have prevailed there, the church of Matthew was resident in a prosperous, urban, Greek-speaking area and subject to persecution from the side of a seemingly large population of both Jews and Gentiles.”¹² This statement is plausible considering the Gospel of Matthew is written for all Jews, unlike the Gospel of Mark who emphasis the Pharisees and other high Jewish officials.

Matthew is extremely concerned with placing Jesus as the Jewish messiah, and he approaches this issue head on. The author begins, “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). Jesus is portrayed as a direct descendant of two of God’s favorite and most faithful followers. Moreover, Matthew explains the genealogy of the Jewish messiah by starting with Abraham and ending with Jesus. He recounts Jesus’ genealogy in generations of fourteen years, Abraham to David to the Babylonian exile to Jesus. The author is making a strong case for the fact it is not a coincidence that something or someone will alter the Jewish community every fourteen generations and there no such thing as coincidence. The author of the Gospel of Matthew had to make the 14-generation theory fit because we know from the 1 Chronicles 26:1 that Joram is Uzziah’s great grandfather, not his father as Matthew states.

Another reason the author of Matthew is believed to be heavily targeted at the Jewish community is because of the way the author parallels Jesus’ life with Moses, one of the, if not the, most important prophets of the Old Testament. For instance, Mary and Joseph have to

¹¹Ibid, 93.
escape to Egypt because King Herod was going to kill Jesus, the first born son. The author is comparing this episode to the Jewish slaves escaping from Egypt and God killing all of the first born son’s in Egypt. Matthew also relates the story of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount with Moses ascending Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Neither of these episodes appears in the Gospel of Mark. Matthew is making a strong case for Jesus’ Jewishness by portraying him as The Messiah.

The Gospel of Luke is believed to have been written by the same person as The Book of Acts because of the literary styles and certain themes that can be traced throughout the two books. Both books begin with prologues and dedications to Theophilus and the prologue in Acts has a brief but fitting description of what is there called “the first book,” which is held as a reference to the Gospel of Luke. The author of these books has been cause for much debate. Irenaeus, a Christian bishop who lived and wrote near the end of the second century, claimed the author was a companion of Paul. This is likely, considering Paul mentions a character named Luke in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, and 2 Timothy 4:11. Furthermore, the writer of Luke and Acts narrates in the first person in the Book of Acts suggesting he had an eye-witness account of Paul’s actions. Bart Ehrman argues that this theory may not be accurate because, “three of the Pauline passages that mention ‘Luke,’ two of them occur in books that are widely thought to have not been written by Paul himself.” Therefore, there is debate over the authorship of Luke and Acts. Consequently, one can assume the writer is anonymous.

Scholars believe the Gospel of Luke was written around 85CE, the same time as the Gospel of Matthew. In the prologue the author implies that he is not an eyewitness to the events

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14 Ibid, 629.
described and he consulted other documents. The Gospel reads in 1:2 “just as they were handed on to us by those who form the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word.” The Gospel of Luke is written for gentiles because he begins by placing the gospel in a world history context, “In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zachariah…” Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke is not as concerned with placing Jesus as The Messiah.

The Gospel of John is the fourth of the canonized Gospels. The book is believed to have been written around the 95CE. The author is anonymous, like the synoptic gospels. In early Christian traditions, the name “John” was attached to this Gospel by the church, and its author was identified as the apostle John. However, there is no evidence in the gospel to suggest that it was actually written by the apostle. The Gospel does name “the beloved disciple” (19:35; 19:20-24) as the guarantor of its tradition but does not give the disciple’s name. The Gospel of John does not provide a clear indication of its place of composition; it was written in Greek, which was spoken throughout the Mediterranean world.

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the beginning of John does not define Jesus in terms of a relationship to Jewish scriptures or in a historical setting. John is more concerned with showing how God is incarnate in human form. The Gospel of John begins with “In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all the people” (John 1:1-4). In the Gospel of John, Jesus is bold. Jesus adopts a “you-have-seen-it-therefore-you-must-believe attitude.” He delivers no Sermon on the Mount, tells no parables, performs no exorcisms, does not instruct his disciples to pray the Lord’s Prayer (Q-Source), and does not institute the Lord’s

17 Ibid, 381.
Supper. It is here that Jesus makes some of his most familiar and yet extraordinary declarations about himself, here he describes himself, “the bread of life,” “the light of the world,” the good Shepard who lays down for his sheep,” and “the way, the truth, and the life.” The Gospel of John is the Gospel that identifies Jesus as the Word of God “through whom all things were made.” It is in this Gospel that Jesus performs many of his most memorable acts: turning water into wine, raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, and washing his disciple’s feet.

The other religious text I will be referencing in this thesis is the Qur’an. The Qur’an is believed to have been dictated directly from Allah to The Prophet Muhammad. It reads, “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men but the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets. And God knows everything.” Muhammad was illiterate and therefore believed by his followers to be a pure vessel to receive the words of Allah. Therefore, he would be unable to alter the words of Allah. Muhammad’s close companions wrote down the words as he recited them. The Qur’an has a poetic rhythm such that when followers read the sacred text it is supposed to evoke rhythm and emotion. The chapters, or Surahs, are arranged from longest to shortest. There are 6,600 verses, or ayahs.

The Qur’an was written over a twenty-one year span of time in Islam’s two major cities, Mecca and Medina. Mecca is where Mohammed was born and where the Hajj is celebrated every year, therefore making it the holiest city in Islam. The most holy structure in Islam, the Ka’ba, is also situated in Mecca and is, according to Islam, the centre of the world. During Salat, prayer, Muslims pray in the direction of the Ka’ba. The area around the Ka’ba is considered sacred, and inside the area the truce of God reigns. Man and animals are all safe here, and shall not be forced away. The Koran states, “the first temple set up for humankind was

19 Ibid, 154.
the one at Mecca, as blessing and guidance for all beings." As illustrated in this example, the Meccan verses in the Koran are concerned with developing foundations of faith; such as monotheism. Meccan verses also point to matters such as how to confront polytheistic societies, ethics, morality, virtuous living, and stories of other prophets and their hardships. In other words, Meccan verses focus on the foundations of the Islamic faith.

Muhammad and his followers fled to Medina after an angry mob wanted him dead. This time period, in 622CE, is the immigration from Mecca to Medina is known as the Hijra. Medina verses are concerned with issues such as laws, how to build an Islamic society, social rules, and how to confront Jesus and Christianity. The doctrine of Jihad is introduced during this era. Jihad is a term meaning to “battle” or “struggle.” Jihad has two possible definitions: the greater, which is the spiritual struggle of each person against greed, passion and ignorance. The lesser Jihad is the term for holy war against infidels. Surah 9:41 reads, “Go forth, lightly or heavily armed and strive for the sake of God with your possessions and your person. This best for you, if you knew.” The stories of Mary and Jesus are found in the verses written in Medina.

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21 Ibid, 30.
22 Ibid, 91.
CHAPTER 2

THE PROTESTANT MARY

Throughout history, Mary has been extremely popular in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox circles. They believe Mary maintained her virginity throughout her life and she herself was immaculately conceived, untainted by the original sin of sexual conception. When Gabriel spoke the words “Hail, full of Grace,” he gave her the gift of sanctifying grace and other special gifts--one of them being that she will always be free from absolutely every stain of sin and full of innocence and holiness for eternity. Therefore, Mary’s Immaculate Conception becomes a privilege. Mary’s predestination as the worthy mother of God assumes that her soul, from the very first moment of existence, was filled with grace. She has the inability to sin. Upon her death, The Virgin Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven.

The Council of Ephesus, in 431CE, bestowed the title of *Theotokos* upon Mary. The term is made up of two Greek words; *Theos*, meaning “God”, and *tokos*, meaning “child bearer”. As a result, the term is translates as “God-bearer” or “the one who gives birth to God.” David Van Biema writes, “It repudiated a specific heresy – that Mary’s son and the messiah were two different beings – and in general it made the Incarnation much more immediate. God’s taking on human flesh became far less abstract when one discussed his human mother and the actual fact of his birth.”²³ The council could have named her *Christotoks*, mother of Christ, but instead gave her a more controversial title, a title that elevated her to God-like status.²⁴

²³ David Van Biema, “Hail, Mary,” in Time Magazine (March 21, 2005), 63.
²⁴ Ibid.
Mary’s “mother of God” role evolved into several personas within the history of Catholicism. She has been named the Queen of Heaven, which references the bodily assumption of Mary. It honors the biblical precedent that the crown of Israel, as held in Christianity, was passed to Jesus. Luke 1:32 reads, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.” In ancient Israel, the title of queen was not given to a king’s wife, but his mother. Therefore, since Jesus is the king of heaven, and of David’s lineage, then his mother must be queen.

Historically, in many Protestant circles Mary has solely been seen as Jesus’ mother. Protestants granted Mary her indisputable place as Jesus’ mother, but regarded any additional enthusiasm as Mariolatry, the practice of elevating the virgin to a status approaching Christ’s. The idea that Mary is on the same divine level as Jesus Christ is one of the several reasons Martin Luther wished to break away from the Catholic Church. It is true that Martin Luther considered Mary a model of faithfulness and regarded her as someone who showed belief, instead of good works and donations to achieve salvation. He is quoted as writing, “Mary suckled God, rocked God to sleep, and prepared broth…for God,” but still condemned her role as heavenly intercessor.25 He believed Christ should be the only high priest and intercessor before God.

Presently, Protestant circles are starting to welcome Mary as more than just Jesus’ mother. “It is time that Mary becomes more than just a once-a-year thing,” Kathleen Norris writes “We dragged Mary out at Christmas along with the angels and placed her at center stage.

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Then we packed her safely in the crèche box for the rest of the year.”

It is this attitude that has, in the past, denied Mary her place in Protestant circles.

More and more Protestants, especially women, are welcoming Mary back into their devotional and spiritual lives. Several new books by protestant authors are spurring new interest in Mary. Beverly Gaventa, a New Testament Scholar at Princeton University, set in motion a new approach to the Virgin Mother. She was invited to write about Mary for a series called *Personalities of the New Testament*. During this time, she was shocked to find that very little to nothing had been written about Mary. People have invited Gaventa to speak at churches, but hesitate at the mention of Mary. “I would offer to do something on Mary,” she says, “and there would be an embarrassing pause and they would eventually say, ‘Oh, we’re mostly Protestant around here.’” Thus began Gaventa’s research on Mary. She says she approached her Mary work in “a protestant sort of way.” “We pride ourselves on reading Scripture, so let’s read Scripture and see what we find.”

Who is Mary in Protestantism? The Gospel’s tell us Mary is the one “of whom Jesus was born” and that she is the “favored one.” Christian piety has honored Mary as the one who first recognizes her son as The Messiah and helps him develop his faith. Gaventa believes that Mary is also a woman full of surprises and a character of her own.

Even though the Gospel of Mark offers the least sympathetic portrayal of Mary, she still plays a character within the text. The first scene in which Mary appears casts her and her other children as enemies of Jesus. Mark 3:21-22 reads,

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27 Van Biema, “Hail, Mary,” 64
28 Ibid, 64.
When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

E. Elizabeth Johnson, Professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Exegesis at Columbia Theological Seminary, believes this is a shocking scenario because, “commentators ancient and modern have devoted great quantities of imagination and ink to the family’s defense.” Various translations provide someone other than Jesus’ relatives to restrain him or question his emotional stability. For instance, The King James Version reads, “And when his family heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him and they said, ‘He is beside himself.’” The New Revised Standard Version reads, “And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying ‘He is beside himself.’” Surely, Jesus’ family could not consider his ministry demonic or delusional.

In actuality, the moment Jesus appears in Marks’ Gospel, he engages in hand-to-hand combat with Satan. After Jesus’ Baptism, God drives him into the wilderness to do battle with the devil. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is being tested, not tempted, as a worthy opponent by Satan. After Jesus rebuffs the devil’s challenge in the wilderness, he embarks on a crusade of exorcism and healing. Jesus cures those who are sick with diseases and casts demons out of those with unclean spirits. These episodes make in clear that Jesus is unquestionably Satan’s enemy. Because Jesus’ family believes he is mad and speaking the words of Satan, Jesus renounces his biological family and embraces his spiritual family instead.

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Mary appears again in the Gospel of Mark in chapter six (6:1-7) when Jesus returns to Nazareth. The passage reads,

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

Here we learn Jesus’ mother’s name is Mary, but it is an interesting usage. Saying that he is Mary’s son is used here as an insult. Johnson writes, “One is conventionally identified by the name of one’s father, so the remark alludes to questions about Jesus’ paternity. The slur becomes bitterly ironic in the context of Mark’s Gospel because Mary is no longer Jesus’ mother.” Jesus replaces his family with those who do God’s will in the earlier episode. The crowd contemptuously reminds Jesus that his sisters are with them; they are not with their brother who is supposed to care for them. Mary continues to show up with Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, but is not revered for the mother that she is in the other three Gospels. She is but an outsider to her son’s ministry. The writer of the Gospel of Mark deemed it unnecessary to tie Jesus to his biological family; there is no birth narrative, and he is portrayed as estranged from them throughout the text. From the first verse of the Gospel, Mark titles Jesus as the “son of God,” as to infer he could not be the son of any one else.

Unlike the Gospel of Mark, The Gospel of Matthew opens up with the genealogy of Mary and Jesus. Four women appear in the scene, which is unusual because in the Old Testament when a single line of descent is presented, it normally does not include women’s names. The

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first one listed is Tamar, the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah who disguises herself as a prostitute. She tricks her father-in-law into hiring her because her husband died and neither of his brothers would marry her as they were supposed to by Israelite custom. She demands Judah’s signet and staff as payment. When she becomes pregnant and is brought before Judah to be punished, she shows Judah his belongings and he repents by saying, “She is more righteous than I.” She bears twins, the elder of whom, Perez, is an ancestor of Jesus.

The second women mentioned is Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who lived in the walls of Jericho and helped Joshua’s spies escape the city. She also provided them with information about the current socio-cultural and military situation due to her popularity with the high ranking nobles she served. In return, the spies promised her safety during the invasion. When Israel conquers Jericho, Rahab leaves prostitution, converts to Judaism and marries a high prominent member of the Jewish people.

The third female listed in the genealogy of Mary and Jesus is Ruth, a widow from Moab who was adamant on keeping her husband’s, Mahlon, lineage alive. After Ruth’s husband dies, she stays with Naomi, her mother-in-law, instead of returning to her own family. In order to provide food for them, Ruth attracts Boaz, Naomi’s kinsman, in order to redeem the estate of Elimelech, Ruth’s father-in-law, by bearing a child. The child is Obed.

The final woman mentioned is the “the wife of Uriah,” also known as Bathsheba, who commits adultery with King David while her husband is on the battlefield. She becomes pregnant, and King David arranges the death of her husband to cover up their sin. According to Israelite custom, it was unlawful to have sexual relations with your wife during war. When Bathsheba realizes she is pregnant, she tries to seduce Uriah, but he upholds the law.
Consequently, to cover up his sins, King David sends the righteous Uriah into the battle field carrying his own death note. David and Bathsheba can then marry.

The stories of the four women included in Matthew’s genealogy do not offer a tidy pattern by which to explain their selection. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, Professor of Old Testament Literature and Exegesis at Princeton Theological Seminary, explains, “Two of the women (Rahab and Ruth) and possibly a third (Bathsheba), are foreigners, but the fourth (Tamar) is not known as a foreigner in Biblical traditions. Three of them have children by relationships that are extraordinary in one way or another, but in the case of the fourth (Rahab) we have no information about her marriage.”31 Christian interpreters have sought to find commonalities on the basis of sinfulness among the women, but when their stories are examined further, one can see this is not always the case. What the women do have in common is they break the mold of the way things are supposed to be. Each one stands up for herself or her family and secures her own future. What can be concluded is the fact that these four women foreshadow the extraordinary circumstances around Mary’s pregnancy and a life that does not “fit” within the standards of the social norm. “Even before Jesus’ birth,” Gaventa writes, “Mary already stands with those who do not comply with human expectations. She is a surprise by virtue of the company she keeps.”32

A long history of exegesis has attempted to analyze the reasons for these particular women in the Virgin Mary’s ancestry. Gaventa explains that the tendency of interpreters is to make all the women, including Mary, into a single woman with a single story. However, they are not all one woman and their stories are not all the same. For example, they are not all sinners

or all Gentiles. “Instead, what the stories have in common,” Gaventa writes, “is that each of these women in some way threatened the status quo, and each is in turn threatened by that status quo.”33 For instance, Bathsheba threatens David with her report of pregnancy, and he in turn threatens her by bringing about the death of her husband.

When Mary’s name appears at the end of the genealogy, and after the four women, readers anticipate that she has something in common with these other women. In the case of Mary, she is threatened by the fact that she is pregnant and that she and Joseph are only engaged to be married. The Gospel of Matthew reveals to the reader that the conception is “from the Holy Spirit,” but Joseph is not comforted by this news.34 Matthew writes, “Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.”

In Palestine in the first century, consummating a marriage is the sign that a couple is wed. However, engagement at that time was not merely a private declaration that could be broken by either party for any reason. Therefore, according to the law, Joseph had the legal rights of a husband.35 Mary’s pregnancy is a sign of adultery. If Deuteronomic law were being observed at this time, Mary would have been liable to death for her supposed adultery. Joseph could not simply divorce her.

The writer of Matthew tells his readers that Joseph is a “righteous man” who decides to “dismiss her quietly,” so as to not cause a scandal. What is not explained is what Joseph thought would happen to Mary and her child. How would he keep his actions a secret? It is tough to hide pregnancy and even tougher to hide a newborn baby without a father. Gaventa writes, “In

34 Ibid, 52.
35 Ibid.
an age in which adultery and illegitimacy brought with them harsh treatment, even Joseph’s righteous remedy would have had disastrous consequences for Mary and her child.”

Public consequences would result from Joseph’s private actions. Of course, Joseph does not take this plan of action due to divine intervention. However, like the four women in her genealogy, Mary threatens the status quo, she is a pregnant virgin.

According to Gaventa, Matthew’s treatment of Mary in the second half of the infancy narrative is striking because in every reference to Mary there is a reference to the baby and almost every reference to the baby carries a reference to Mary. As a result, the two figures are connected so that they become a single unit. For example, King Herod orders the death of all the first born sons, and if he had succeeded in destroying Jesus, then he would have in some since destroyed his mother too just as Joseph’s earlier plan to divorce Mary also jeopardizes the life of her child. Whoever threatens Jesus also threatens Mary and whoever protects Jesus also protects Mary. This statement is also true in reverse; if Mary is protected then Jesus is protected and if Mary is threatened then Jesus is threatened. God intervened for Mary during her pregnancy. If he had not sent Gabriel to reason with Joseph, Mary and Jesus could have been in danger or dead.

Gaventa’s most shocking revelation is how little attention is paid to Mary at the Cross. She has studied the infancy narratives and events that include Mary, in relation to Jesus’ crucifixion. She dissects the major events in Jesus and Mary’s relationships in each Gospel, except for Mark, who does not call her by name and says very little about her. The Gospel of John does not call her by name either, but her role is significant in both of the scenes in which she appears: two episodes referenced no where else in the Gospels.

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid, 53.
In the Gospel of John, Mary first appears in the wedding feast at Cana. According to Gaventa, this event introduces the ominous theme of Jesus’ death. She believes “the story abounds with symbolic feature (a wedding, water, wine), but its importance extends far beyond any specific symbolic or allegorical application.”\(^3^8\) Not only does Mary initiate Jesus’ first miracle, but she also anticipates the crucifixion. Jesus gathers his first disciples (1:35-51) and attends a wedding with them and his mother. They are invited guests like everyone else. Gail O’Grady argues “Jesus’ ministry thus opens with Jesus as the recipient of a gesture of hospitality. The beginning of his ministry is played out in an intimate, personal, familial setting.”\(^3^9\) Jesus is in an atmosphere conducive to him feeling comfortable to show his divine capacity.

When the wine at the wedding depletes, Mary informs Jesus of the deficiency. The conversation that follows is important. When Mary says to him “they have no wine” she is asking nothing explicit but Jesus’ response, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come,” makes it clear her words contain an implied request. His response seems disrespectful, but when the reader takes a closer look, Jesus’ reaction is neither rude nor hostile. Jesus frequently addresses women with the greeting, “woman.”\(^4^0\) For instance, Matthew 15:28 reads, “Woman, great is your faith!” and Luke 22:57 reads, “Woman, I do not know him.” The expression in verse four translates to “what concern is that to you and me?” Using the term “woman” is a formula of disengagement, not rudeness.\(^4^1\)

Mary is not swayed by Jesus’ rejection. She promptly tells the servants, with utter confidence that Jesus will fix the problem. Mary knows he will do something to fix the lack of

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\(^3^8\) Ibid, 49.
\(^4^1\) Ibid, 537.
wine. Consequently, she becomes the model disciple by the loyalty she shows to her son. She knows Jesus will fix this desperate situation. She trusts that Jesus will act and allows him to act in freedom. As a result, Jesus turns the water into wine, the scarcity into abundance. It is an act of repaying the hospitality offered to him. Mary is the one who appears to have an intuition about what miracles Jesus is capable of performing. She is the catalyst for the miracle in the story. Jesus turns the water to wine, thus beginning his amazing ministry, because his mother requests it of him.

Furthermore, when Jesus initially refuses Mary’s request to turn water into wine, he says, “My hour has not come yet.” This is the first reference, out of four, that references Jesus’ “hour,” a term the writer of the Gospel of John uses to refer to the time of Jesus’ death. For example, John 12:27 reads “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is this reason that I have come to this hour.” The encounter between Jesus and his mother foreshadows Jesus’ death and her presence at the cross.

The second scene, in which Mary appears, in the Gospel of John, is the death of Jesus. John 19: 25b-27 reads,

“Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother,’ And from that hour the disciple took her into this own home.”

Gaventa writes that the scene portrays Mary in two distinct ways. First, she is a silent character. She does not speak a single word, and the Gospel writer does not devote a single word to her description. Her sole action is standing near the cross as Jesus perishes. Gaventa writes, “there is, in one sense, no ‘characterization’ of Jesus’ mother in this scene. Nevertheless, her presence at the cross recalls the story of the wedding at Cana, the only other scene in which she appears,

where Jesus makes his initial announcement about his ‘hour.’ When Mary and the disciple are given to one another and depart the scene, Jesus’ connection to earthly existence ceases to exist.

Second, Mary recalls the fact that Jesus has an earthly existence. According to Gaventa, Protestant interpreters often understand this to be an emotional scene in which Jesus displays his devotion to his mother, but she believes this is hardly the case. Gaventa considers that they are reading into the text what is not there. The focus is not on what happens to the Beloved Disciple or Mary, but on the death of Jesus and his separation from those relationships that illustrate his human existence.

However, the writer of the Gospel of John mentions his disciple and his mother as separate entities, which is indicative of two issues. First, Jesus gathers his first disciples and travels around with them. Therefore, through simple deductive reasoning, Jesus’ mother is also a disciple since she is mentioned as accompanying Jesus. Second, the writer might have mentioned her separately as to say she was the most important disciple. There has to be a reason the writer of John chooses to mention Jesus’ mother and disciple. There are other characters present at Jesus’ crucifixion, but they are not pointed out. As a result, it can be concluded that these two people are important to Jesus, since he chooses to speak to them.

Gaventa explains that Mary is like all other characters in the Gospel of John, she exists in the narrative to reveal something about Jesus rather than something about herself. For instance, in his last words, Jesus speaks to his mother and his disciple in parallel sentences, “women, here is your son” and to the disciple, “here is your mother.” Both Jesus’ mother and the disciple function as symbolic figures. Mary is Jesus’ birth mother and is someone who has been a witness from the beginning. She represents the continuation of Jesus’ ministry. The beloved disciples represent the community and are representative of the connection between Jesus and

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the faith of the community. ⁴⁴ Therefore, in the moment when Jesus is about to die stands the past and the future of his ministry.

By contrast to Matthew, Mark, and John, the Gospel of Luke portrays Mary in several scenes. Mary plays three distinct roles in Luke’s writing: disciple, prophet, and mother. Even though Mary largely appears in the infancy narrative, according to Gaventa, these roles all connect Mary to the cross.⁴⁵ For the writer of Luke, Mary establishes herself as a disciple first. She responds to Gabriel’s announcement of her impending birth, with the words, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” She declares herself a “servant of the lord,” which has generated the idea that Mary became subservient. To Gaventa, this is not the case, “such an interpretation is a strong misreading of the text, which concerns not Mary’s subservience to men but her recognition of the prerogative of God to rule in her life. This is what is takes to become a disciple, male or female: obedience to God’s will.”⁴⁶

Mary continues throughout the Gospel of Luke to be the model disciple. When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple to present him to the Lord after his birth, as is written in the law, Simeon blesses them and the child and says to his mother, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own heart too, (Luke 2:34-35).” Simeon does not address Joseph or even allude to the fact that he will be a part of Jesus’ life to come. Not only does Luke portray Mary as the prevailing parent, he also creates a positive portrait of her as the model believer.

After Mary’s conception, she visits her cousin, Elizabeth, which is where she takes on her second role as prophet. She delivers her proclamation to God in what has been named The

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⁴⁵ Gaventa, “Standing Near the Cross,” 54.
⁴⁶ Ibid.
Magnificat. Mary is the only women in the Gospel of Luke (1:47-55) whom he has given a full speech of proclamation.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones; and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Mary’s oracle is the epitome of her faithfulness, how blessed she feels to be the woman the Lord chooses for his son’s birth, and the wonder of God’s work of redemption. Mary’s words are an answer to Elizabeth’s praises. This hymn of praise also echoes Hannah’s song over Samuel’s, birth (1Samuel 2:1-10) in which God is also praised for salvation of the lowly and oppressed. Samuel becomes one of Israel’s most celebrated judges. He is an overseer of major social and political transitions at the end of the period of the judges and the beginning of the United Monarchy. Samuel anoints the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. Hannah prayed to God and asked him for a son that she could send to live in the Shiloh Shrine and be dedicated to the Lord forever. It is not difficult to see the correlations between the two unborn sons: their mothers are righteous and faithful to God, and they are born to perform God’s work.

Both oracles open with a couplet exalting the Lord. Hannah’s oracle, in 1Samuel 2:1-10, begins with, “My heart exalts in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory.” The words of praise speak of God’s redeeming work not as a future but as already having been fulfilled. “The overthrow of the powerful has not come about through the mounting up of the weak in rebellion but through the coming of God
in the weakness of a child... The proud are scattered. The powerful are disposed. Hannah and Mary remember God’s promise to Israel and his mercy. The Magnificat praises God for the goodness of his nature and the redemption of Israel and the church through her son, Jesus. Mary’s Magnificat echoes lines of scriptures from Israel, making extremely clear the pattern of God’s activity and will. She praises God for his appearance in her life and his grace on Israel. More importantly, the Magnificat reflects the prophet themes of God’s intercession on behalf of the weak and powerless, his scorn for Israel’s enemies, and God’s promise to his people.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke excludes Joseph’s hesitation in wedding Mary because she is pregnant, unlike the Gospel of Matthew. He simply talks about them moving to “the city of David, called Bethlehem,” and while they are there, the time came for her to deliver the child. After Jesus is born, angels tell the shepherds in the fields of the newborn saying, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you; you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” The shepherds leave and go find Jesus and his parents and tell them what the angel of the Lord had said. Luke tells the reader that “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary is also a mother, her most obvious role. Gaventa says that in the Gospel of Luke, Mary’s maternity introduces a certain tension. After the shepherds, who have heard angelic instruction to go visit the baby Jesus, they observe the child and “made it known what had been told them about this child.” Luke also adds that “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

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47 New Interpreter’s Bible, 55.
returning from a Passover meal, they find that their twelve-year-old-son is not with them. They
discover him in the temple with the priests and ask him where he has been. He responds, “Did
you not know that I am in my father’s house.” Then Luke says, “But they did not understand
what he said to them.” The above quotation alludes to Mary’s worry. Although, Luke does not
state Mary’s presence at the Cross, his choice of words clearly connects Mary with the rejection
her son awaits.

Jesus’ presentation to the temple is another significant moment for Mary in the Gospel of
Luke. At the end of eight days, Jesus is named and circumcised. The naming fulfills the
command Gabriel gave to Mary, “you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will
name him Jesus.” His parents then take him to the temple to present him to the Lord, where
Simeon, “a righteous and devout” man picks up Jesus and delivers an oracle. Luke 28-35 reads,

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are
dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen
your salvation, with you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for the
revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” And the child’s
mother and father were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon
blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling
and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the
inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul
too.”

Simeon sees the salvation of God in Jesus. After this passage, Anna, a prophet who lives in the
temple, comes and speaks about the child “to all who were looking for the redemption of
Jerusalem.” When Simeon is finished praising the child, he looks to his parents and addresses
his prophesy towards Mary, not Joseph. Mary is the one forced to anticipate the tragic death of
her son. She is the one forced to see the rejection of her son and his tragic fate.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Simeon’s words is the fact that he connects Jesus
to Mary spiritually. By saying “a sword will pierce your own heart too,” he is saying she will
feel the pain of her son. Joseph seems to no longer be a significant factor in Jesus’ life. Simeon’s statement suggests Jesus will remain connected to his mother, Mary, for eternity.

The temple dedication of Jesus is an example of another reason why Gaventa considers maternal anxiety to exist in the Gospel of Luke. Mary’s encounter with Simeon foreshadows the crucifixion. She writes, “Commentators sometimes deny that this oracle refers to Mary’s grief at Jesus’ death, since Luke does not explicitly report that Mary is present at the cross. Yet is seems odd indeed to imagine that Mary must be present at the crucifixion to be grieved by it, and the oracle clearly connects Mary with the rejection that awaits her son.”\(^{49}\) Simeon’s words tell the reader that whether she is present at the Cross or not for the crucifixion, she will defiantly feel the anguish of her son whether she physically sees the crucifixion or not.

In summary, Mary has a chain of appearances longer and more strategically placed than those of any other character in the Gospels, except Jesus. However, her role as anything other than Jesus’ mother has rarely been examined. Although Mary will inevitably always be connected to her son Jesus, she can also be viewed as Mary, the person. The person who stands by her son even through rejection; the person who believes her son is extraordinary when no one else does, even himself; the person who is foretold her son’s future demise and still allows it to happen because she knows his importance; and finally, the person who becomes the model mother so much so that when Pope John Paul II was shot in 1981, he prayed to Mary and thanked her for opening up her womb and saving his life.

\(^{49}\) Gaventa, “Standing Near the Cross,” 55.
CHAPTER 3
MARY AND ISLAM: A TEXTUAL COMPARISON BETWEEN BIBLICAL TEXTS
AND THE QUR’AN

In the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Virgin Mary is an immensely studied icon, independent of, what is written of her in Biblical references. Even though Mary is the mother of the most important person in Christian tradition, she is not mentioned without relation to Jesus in the Bible. However, in the Qur’an, a tradition in which Mary is not traditionally thought of as having a big influence, a Surah is dedicated to the events surrounding her birth and life. This chapter will examine how Mary is portrayed differently in the contexts of the Bible and the Koran.

The nineteenth Surah, or chapter, is named after Maryam, which is the Arabic name for Mary. She is the most prominent female character in the Koran and the only one identified by name. Her story is recited in three Meccan Surahs (19, 21, and 23) and four Medina Surahs (3, 4, 5, and 66).50 “Overall, there are seventy verses that refer to her and she is named specifically in thirty-four of these.”51 However, in the New Testament there are only a few verses that refer to or that call her by name. She is usually acknowledged as solely the mother of Jesus. Although the stories in the Koran correspond to the Biblical tales, Mary’s story is told in greater detail in the Qur’an.

Mary is the daughter of ‘Imran and Hanna. Although Mary’s mother’s name is not directly mentioned in the Qur’an, it is widely accepted to be Hanna according to Brannon M.

51 Ibid.
Wheeler, author of *Prophets in the Qur’an*. In the Koranic story, Mary’s parents are elderly and childless. One day Hanna sees a bird in a tree feeding her young which awakens her yearning for a child. She prays to Allah asking him to fulfill her desire. She promises him that if he hears her prayer that she will dedicate the child to the temple. *Surah 3:35* reads, “Behold! A woman of Imran said: O My Lord! I do dedicate unto thee what is in my womb for thy special service: so accept this of me, for thou hearest and knowest all things.”

Hanna had promised her child to the temple not knowing she would give birth to a baby girl. According to William Brinner, “Imran became upset and said to her, “Woe to you! What have you done? Don’t you realize that what is in your womb may be female? The female is imperfect, unsuitable for such service?”

When Hanna does give birth to a girl she calls to Allah, “O My Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!’-- And Allah knew best what she brought forth-- and no wise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring into Thy protection from the Evil One, The Rejected.”

Upon Mary’s birth, Hanna invoked on behalf of Maryam and her prosperity Allah’s protection from Satan. This premise is later narrated in the *Sahih Bukhari Hadith* collection, but in relation to Jesus, “When any human being is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta cover instead.”

This tradition is used in support of the perfection of the Prophets in general. For that reason, Mary’s birth becomes a prime example of the magnitude in which Prophets are held.

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According to Brinner, it was customary at the time to consecrate boys to the temple:

“They say that when a child had been dedicated and pledged, he was assigned to the sanctuary, to care for it, sweep it, and serve it, and would not leave until he reached puberty.”

Even though Hannah bore a girl, she was still bound to the vow she made to Allah and set out towards the Temple. Allah had accepted the offering knowing the child would be a girl. According to Muslim tradition, ‘Imran died before the birth of Mary. As a result, Zachariah, who is Mary’s uncle by means of Elizabeth (who is Hannah’s sister), became her guardian.

Surah 3:36-37 reads,

Right graciously did her Lord accept her: he made her grow in purity and beauty; to the care of Zachariah was she assigned. Every time that he entered (her) chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, “O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you?” She said, “From Allah, for Allah provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure.”

Mary grew under Allah’s protection in the temple. Whenever Zachariah comes to provide her with food and drink, he is amazed to find that she has already been provided for, not just with sustenance, but with the best of sustenance, including “the fruit of winter in summer and the fruit of summer in winter.”

Allah not only welcomes a female into the Temple, he makes sure she is amply provided for in the best manner possible. The substance pertains not only to food and drink, but also her spiritual nourishment as well. Barbara Stowasser further concludes, “The exegetical literature and the genre of literature known as ‘tales of the prophets’ further relate that Mary grew up in the temple where she worshiped day and night until her unequaled piety and

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57 Brinner, Lives of the Prophets, 624.
59 Yusuf, Mary and Jesus in the Qur an, 26-27.
60 Aliah Schleifer, Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1997), 24.
righteousness become known among the Israelites. She lived in a mihrab, a secluded cell or upstairs chamber; the door to this chamber was always locked and only Zachariah had the key.\textsuperscript{61}

The Qur’anic account of Mary is similar to an account in the Apocrypha, which is derived from a Greek word meaning “hidden” or “secret.” The writings were “secret” because they claimed to communicate teaching reserved to a few or the readings were private or in the worst case scenario they concealed the truth of the Gospels.\textsuperscript{62} According to Fred Lapham the Apocrypha “is used at one level to describe those scriptural texts which, though regarded by some to be spiritually valuable, nevertheless failed to meet the criteria set by the early Christian scholars who settled the ‘canon’ of the New Testament.”\textsuperscript{63} The formulation of the New Testament was a gradual process, but by the forth century there had emerged an agreed list for Christians to reference. Another term frequently used in Apocryphal study is the word “Pseudepigrapha,” which literally means “false writings.” The connotation is that their authorship was not genuine. Not all Pseudepigraphal works are considered Apocryphal nor are all Apocryphal works are not considered Pseudepigraphal.

Although Mary is not an important figure in many of the Apocryphal works, she cannot be ignored in the traditions from a historical or theological point of view. They are wirings outside the canon that fed the holiness of Mary to the faithful through centuries of church history. The most influential of these Marian-Apocryphal texts is The Protoevangelium of James.

The Protoevangelium of James is believed to have been written by James, Joseph’s son and the brother of Jesus. The work belongs to the group of infancy narratives and stories of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[61]{Stowasser, “Mary,” 290.}
\footnotetext[62]{Alan Blancy, Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints (Mahwah, NJ: Pauliest Press, 1999), 24.}
\end{footnotes}
Mary’s life from her birth to the birth of Jesus. The original title was “The Nativity of Mary,” but the title that is more universally known is the *Protoevangelium of James*, since it is attributed to the apostle James. The book is believed by scholars to have been written in the middle of the second century. Edgar Hennecke says, “the book cannot have been written before 150CE. It presupposes the canonical infancy stories, is certainly not to be regarded as their source, is not derived from a common written source and was not originally written in Hebrew.” The author was most likely a non-Jew who lives outside Palestine.

The Virgin Mary is presented in *The Protoevangelium of James* as having been an extraordinary child from her conception and destined to do great things. Her parents’ names are given, Joachim and Anna (father’s name is different from the Qur’an, but Anna is a form of Hannah). They are a wealthy couple. They are a sterile couple who turn to the Lord in prayer for a child. He answers their prayer. Mary’s birth is a product of divine intervention. An angel of the Lord appears to announce the event, “Anna, Anna! The Lord has heard your prayer: you shall conceive and bear and your offspring shall be spoken of in the whole world. Joachim, Joachim! The Lord has heard your prayer. Go down from here; behold your wife Anna shall conceive.”

Mary is born prematurely. She is given the name Mary, which means “perfect one.” On her first birthday, her parents hold an official presentation to the people of Israel. The chief priest blesses Mary saying, “O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name eternally renowned among all generations…Look upon this child and bless her with a supreme blessing

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with cannot be superseded.” Mary’s importance to Israel is established early in her life. Anna responds to the praise declaring, “I will sing a song to the Lord my God, for he has visited me and taken away from me the reproach of my enemies. And the Lord gave me the fruit of his righteousness.”

When Mary is three years old, she is placed on the third step of the Temple and given to the Lord to fulfill a promise made by her parents. She is received by the high priest who embraces her and declares, “The Lord has magnified your name among all generation; because of you the Lord at the end of the days will reveal his redemption to the sons of Israel.” Once again, very early in Mary’s life, she is revered as the vessel in which Israel will one day rise again.

She remains in the Temple until puberty, at which time the council of the priests decided she needs to leave the temple and be given marriage to a widower of Judea chosen by the Lord. The phenomenon of menstruation brought official periods of legal impurity, as defined in Leviticus 15:19, “when a woman has discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening.” Mary had to leave because her presence would be unacceptable to Old Testament Jewish law. It is the angel of the Lord who specifies the solution to the high priest, Zachariah, future father of John the Baptist and husband of Mary’s cousin. Consequentially, Zachariah calls together all the widowers of Israel and commands that each of them bring a staff. Zachariah collects the staffs and takes them into the temple with him to pray. When he returns the staffs to all of the suitors nothing happens, except for Joseph’s. A dove flies out of his staff and rests on

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid, 37.
his head. Zachariah proclaims, “You have been chosen by lot to receive the Virgin of the Lord as your ward.”

Joseph asks to be excused of this task because he is an old man and already a father. After Zachariah reprimands him, Joseph resigns himself to the will of God. Joseph takes Mary into his home, but shortly there after he left her “to build my buildings.” It is during Joseph’s absence that the unexpected event occurred. One day when Mary is about to leave to fetch water, she hears a voice say “Hail, highly favored one, the Lord is with you, you are blessed among women. Do not fear, Mary: for you have found grace before the Lord of all things and shall conceive by His Word.” Mary asks the angel to clarify, “Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God, and bear as every woman bears?” The angel response, “Not so, Mary; for the power of the Lord shall overshadow you; wherefore that holy one who is born of you shall be called the Son of Most High. And you shall call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.” And Mary consents, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord before Him: be it to me according to your word.” The conversation between the angel of the Lord and Mary presented here parallels The Gospel of Luke’s account.

Furthermore, *The Protoevangelium of James* tells the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth much like the Gospel of Luke’s account. However, there is one notable exception. Mary forgets the words the angel had spoken her. After Elizabeth recites her poem, Mary’s reaction is one of complete surprise, “Who am I, Lord, that all generations of the earth count me blessed?” Mary stays with her cousin for three months. She decides to return home after she notices her belly is growing larger. She is sixteen, a fact not presented in the canonical Gospels or the Qur’an.

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69 Ibid, 38.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid, 39.
In the sixth month of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph returns home to discover her condition. *The Protoevangelium of James* describes his hysterical initial reaction and interrogation of her.

> You are cared for by God, why have you done his and forgotten the Lord your God? Why have you humiliated your soul, you who were brought up in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hand of an angel?” But she wept bitterly, saying, “I am pure, and know not a man.” And Joseph says to her, “Whence then is this in your womb?” And she said: “As the Lord by God lives, I do not know whence it has come to me.”

This account presents Mary as totally ignorant of the mystery, even after she received the message from the angel. He presents her as if she is a pure, naive girl.

A short time after, Anna, who is the temple scribe, visits Joseph and Mary. Having heard that Mary is with child, she wants to the priests to denounce Mary and Joseph and accuses them of having consummated their marriage in a concealed and unlawful manner. They prove their innocence by submitting to a bitter water test as described in Number 5:11-13. They had to drink water mixed with dust, which in the case of guilt would cause physical symptoms that lead to punishment. Nothing happens to them and they are released. This part of the story is not presented in the New Testament Gospels or the Qur’an. Fred Lapham says, “there follows a tradition unknown to the canonical evangelist (or at least unused by them) of the priestly condemnation of Joseph for consummating his marriage to one who had been set aside as a Temple virgin.” The canonical Gospels do allude to him being angry and confused, but not to the extent of *The Protoevangelium of James*.

When the emperor Augustus publicizes his edict, Joseph takes his children and his pregnant wife and sets out for Bethlehem to be registered in the census. The journey to Bethlehem includes another tradition found no where else: the story of the Hebrew midwife who delivers the child in a cave at Bethlehem and how Mary is certified to be pure and undefiled.

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73 Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, 381.
After Mary has given birth, the midwife runs out of the cave meeting Salome (who is known as one of Jesus’ followers in the canonical Gospels) declaring, “Salome, Salome, I have a new sight to tell you about; a virgin has brought forth, a thing which her condition does not allow.”

Salome does not believe her and pronounces, “unless I insert my finger to test her condition, I will not believe that the virgin has given birth.”74 So the midwife marches into the cave and prepares Mary, and Salome tests her condition. Salome finds out the truth and declares, “Woe for my wickedness and unbelief, that in your name I perform my duties and from you I have received my hire.”75 Not only does Joseph witness the virgin birth, but, in The Protoevangelium of James, so do Joseph’s children, the midwife, and Salome. After Jesus’ birth, the Gospel follows the accounts of the Magi and the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem.

The principle objection of The Protoevangelium of James is to demonstrate how extraordinary Mary is from the womb of her mother, like in the Qur’anic tale. The book also verifies the virginal conception of Jesus and Mary’s virginity before and during Jesus birth. The bitter water test confirms her virginity while she is pregnant. Salome’s examination of her confirms her virginity while giving birth. The text illustrates Mary’s devotion and special nature. She is dedicated to the Lord at the time of her own birth. The reader knows from the beginning of Mary’s capacity within God’s favor. She is chosen from a very early time in life to bear the child of God.

The Protoevangelium of James affords the early development of the tradition of Mary. Lapham writes, “Already in the second century, the notion of the immaculate nature of the mother of Jesus is being promulgated, reinforced by this record of her miraculous birth; while the theory of her perpetual virginity is not expressly stated, there is not doubt that the entire tenor of

74 Ibid, 384.
75 Ibid, 385.
the book leads to such an assumption.” In the Eastern Church *The Protoevangelium of James* had an avid readership; celibacy and chastity were highly prized. The west failed to see the significance of this book, but it has no doubt helped lead to many of the present day ideals about Mary. Since the Qur’an was written in the seventh century, it is safe to assume it used *The Protoevangelium of James* as a source for the stories of Mary and Jesus.

In the canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Mary’s life is told in relation to being Jesus’ mother. Each one makes reference to her in distinctive ways. In Mark, the oldest of the Gospels, Mary only appears in a brief scene and is mentioned in another. Mark 3:31-35 simply refers to Mary as “mother.” It reads, “Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.’ And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” This passage pictures Jesus as estranged from his family and they travel to where Jesus is preaching to take him home. His reply appears to be a disavowal of his own family. His true families are those that believe and live according to the will of God. His reaction is from an earlier passage where Jesus’ family tries to seize him saying, “He is mad.” Jesus does not denounce his family for eternity; they come to believe in him. His brother James becomes an apostle and a leader in the church. “His language indicates the seriousness of this message and the need to commit to it.”

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76 Lapham, An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha, 64.
77 Dunn Rogerson, “Mark” *In Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 1076.
78 Ibid.
Both the reference to Jesus biological family and spiritual family refer to his mother and siblings with no mention of Jesus’ father. This description is steadfast in chapter 6, verse 3, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” The question is a reaction to Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath in Nazareth. The people who hear him are in disbelief, not because of his miracles, but because they are in disbelief of his audaciousness. Since Mark does not feel it is important to include a birth narrative, it seems as though Jesus’ birth has no special circumstances. Therefore, Mary is merely his mother. “Designating Jesus as ‘son of Mary’ rather than ‘son of Joseph’ may have been intended as an insult by the crowd.”

This coincides with the theme of the ever-suffering Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. No one believes who he is, not even his family, and especially his own mother. This episode in Jesus’ life is recounted in the Gospel of Matthew with the exception that Jesus is identified as Joseph’s son, rather than a builder himself. Mary plays an almost insignificant role in the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospel of Matthew contains one of two stories of Jesus’ birth. Mary is introduced in chapter one, first in the genealogy of Jesus and second in the birth narrative. In response to the report of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph plans to dissolve his relationship with her. But the Angel Gabriel appears to him in a dream and tells him “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save the people from their sins.” Joseph concedes and marries her.

In Matthew’s gospel, Mary is fairly passive, Joseph is the more significant parent, “…and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the

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Jesus’ lineage is traced through Joseph, not Mary, which is odd because in Jewish tradition, out of the two parents, your mother is the one you know is without-a-doubt is your biological parent. Nevertheless, Jesus could trace his ancestry through Davidic descent with Joseph, not Mary, which is the vital connection that tied Jesus to Old Testament messianic prophecy.

The nativity account in the Gospel of Matthew is an example of Mary’s passivity and Joseph as the model of higher righteousness. Matthew 1:18-25 reads,

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is form the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and named him Jesus.

Mary’s passiveness serves to undercut the privileged position she acquires by being Jesus’ mother. Joseph does what he considers proper, even though his action is neither legally necessary nor socially expected.80 Amy-Jill Levine writes, “Joseph first resolves to divorce Mary quietly and so, apparently, to avoid her being charged with adultery or assumed to be the victim of rape.”81 The angel does not appear to Mary, he appears to Joseph. Therefore, when Joseph weds Mary and names the child, he legitimates both mother and son socially. Joseph must adopt Jesus in order for him to become part of the Davidic line.

81 Ibid.
Is Joseph really the dominant parent? Mary is the parent who conceives by means of the Holy Spirit, “a term that is grammatically neuter in Greek but feminine in Semitic languages such as the Hebrew of the Bible and Jesus’ native Aramaic.” The Spirit acknowledges Jesus divine role in chapter three by saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). God proclaims Jesus as his son in this verse. Therefore, the combination of the feminine spirit and Jesus’ lack of a human factor indicates there is a restructuring of the human family. Subsequently, Mary’s role as a mother becomes increasingly valuable. In the story in which Herod is threatening Jesus’ life, the angel comes to Joseph and tells him to take “the child and his mother,” supporting the idea of how imperative the maternal role in a child’s life is. Although Mary is portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew as passive, she remains the vessel through which God’s son will be born.

In the depiction of Mary, Luke gives the fullest, most favorable picture of her. The conception of Jesus by Mary merits special attention. Luke’s account of Jesus’ origins is very different from Matthew’s, but a close reading shows that the two accounts have many points in common; however, the emphasis is different. For instance, both accounts report that Mary and Joseph, who was of Davidic descent, were Jesus’ parents and that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus. They agree that Mary’s conception occurred between their betrothal and marriage and that Jesus’ birth took place after they came to live together in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great. Both Gospels consider Mary a virgin. Lastly, Matthew and Luke agree that the angel Gabriel announces the role of the Holy Spirit in the pregnancy, gives the child the name Jesus, and predicts his role in the history of Israel.

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82 Ibid.
83 Schaber, 371.
The major difference in the announcement of Jesus is the parent in whom the angel Gabriel chooses to proclaim his prophesy. Mary is the more central parent in the story of Jesus’ birth. Luke 26-38 reads:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to the town in Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”…The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus…Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will over shadow you; therefore the child will be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God. And now your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this I the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible to God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according your word.”

Gabriel appears to Mary in Luke’s gospel and reassures her that her reputation will not be ruined when she conceives a child out of wedlock. She is the active parent in Luke’s account, which firmly places her as the chosen one. Perhaps, Mary’s hesitation comes from the story of Tobit, a popular folk tale included in the Apocrypha. The story tells of a jealous angel who appeared on a bride’s wedding night each time she married and killed her bridegroom. Against the background of this popular tale, her fear is more understandable. Although she is troubled by the appearance of the angel at first, she finally realizes why she must accept her role and concedes to God. Luke portrays Mary as the model female believer. Schaberg writes, “Mary is directly in touch with the heavenly world in her dialogue with the angel Gabriel.”

After Mary’s encounter with Gabriel, she goes to visit the priest Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth, who is Mary’s cousin and is pregnant with John the Baptist. Earlier in the gospel an

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84 New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX, 51.
angel of the Lord, Gabriel, appears to Zachariah and gives him the good news that he is going to have a son named John. Elizabeth is barren but conceives a child. The angel tells Zachariah “you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth for he will be great in the sight of the Lord…He will turn many of the people if Israel to the Lord of the God.” John the Baptist’s conception is much like Jesus’ in that Gabriel visits and announces the conceptions and tells of how great the sons will be to the house of Israel.

When Mary arrives and greets Elizabeth, John “leaps in her womb.” Elizabeth tells Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” Luke has given no indication that Elizabeth knows of Mary’s angelic announcement of her child. The writer implies that her knowledge of Mary’s pregnancy is given to her by the Holy Spirit. He also implies that John the Baptist and Jesus knew each other in the womb. He must have known the prophesy because he is elated by Elizabeth’s voice and the impending Son of God. Luke 1: 39-45 reads:

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of you womb. And why has this happened to me, the mother of the Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

The birth of John the Baptist is also presented in the Qur’an but parallel to Mary’s birth. Elizabeth is old and barren. She and Zachariah do not have children. Surah 3:38-39 reads,

There did Zachariah pray to his Lord, saying: “O my Lord! Grant unto me from thee a progeny that is pure: for thou art he that heareth prayer! While he was standing in prayer chamber the angels called to him: “Allah doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a word from Allah and (be besides) noble chaste, and a prophet – of the goodly company of the righteous.
It is once again the angel Gabriel who appears to Zachariah to tell him of his impending offspring. Zachariah asks Allah for a child after he witnesses the unbelievable events surrounding Hannah’s daughter.

In the gospel of Luke, Mary gives birth to Jesus and presents him to the temple after eight days to be circumcised, thus drawing attention to the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph. The birth of Jesus in the Koran is a story of a son being born of a virgin, like in the Bible, but in greater detail. After the angel appears to her and tells her of her soon-to-be son, Mary “retired with him to a remote place.” Mary experiences the great pains of childbirth under the trunk of a palm tree and cries out to Allah, “Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!” She is but human and experiences the pain of an expectant mother, with no one attending to her. A voice answers Maryam saying,

“Grieve not! For they Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; and shake towards thyself the truck of the palm tree; it will fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, ‘I have vowed a fast to (Allah) most gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being.’”

She must “cool her eyes,” perhaps from her tears, with the fresh water and take comfort in the remarkable babe that has been born to her. Mary is not to speak to anyone. Perhaps the reasoning is to ward off any importunate questions.

After giving birth to Jesus, Mary returns to her people with the infant in her arms. Upon seeing Mary with child and the townspeople, having no knowledge of her ever been married, slander her using the epithet, “O sister of Aaron.” In ancient Semitic usage, a person’s name was often linked with that of a prominent ancestor or founder of a tribal line. Since Maryam

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86 Yusuf, Mary and Jesus in the Qur’an, 10.
87 Ibid.
belongs to the priestly caste, she is labeled a descendant of Aaron. The purpose of the insult is to remind Maryam of her high lineage and that she is supposed to exhibit exceptional morals, and having a child out of wedlock contradicts those morals. Jesus, still a newborn, miraculously addresses the crowd saying,

I am indeed a servant of Allah: he hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; and he hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. He hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; so peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!^90

Allah miraculously allows the new-born infant to speak on his mother’s behalf and thereby, he redeems her reputation. Jesus exposes his relationship to Allah and announces that he is His slave and Prophet. Furthermore, he is exerting the fact that he is not an ordinary man because he is born of an extraordinary woman.

The subject of the Trinity is significantly different from the Bible to the Qur’an. In Christianity, the Trinity consists of God, his son, and the Holy Spirit. However, according to the Koran, Jesus is not the son of God; he is a prophet and so is Mary. *Surah 4:171* reads,

“O followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of Maryam is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which He communicated to Maryam and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.”^91

Whether Mary is thought a prophet or not, she remains a subject of devotion; she remains protected by Allah.

The *Surah Maryam* was revealed at a time when the Prophet Mohammad and new Muslim converts in Mecca were being persecuted for their belief in the Unity of God. Unable to

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^90 Yusuf, *Mary and Jesus in the Qur’an*, 12.

end the discrimination, the Prophet Mohammed asked them to relocate to a country where they could find freedom in worship.\(^{92}\) Following The Prophet’s advice, eleven men and women, which eventually turned into around eighty, traveled to Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia) into a Christian kingdom where “a king (the Negus) rules with justice” and in “a land of truthfulness.” The king tells the Muslims that they may stay in the land until “God leads us to a way out of our difficulty.”\(^{93}\)

Outraged by the displacement of the Muslims, the Meccans sent two ambassadors, armed with gifts, to plead for the extradition of the Muslims back to Mecca. When they arrived, the king of Abyssinia gathered his court and bishops and summoned the Muslim exiles. The Negus asked the Muslims,

What is this religion where in you have become separate from your people; though you have not entered my religion or that of any other folk that surround us?” A spokesman for the Muslim group, Ja’fat ibn Abu Talib replied, “O King! We were a people steeped in ignorance, worshipping idols, eating unsanctified carrion, committing abomination, and the strong among us devour the weak. Thus we were until God sent us a Messenger from our midst…He called us onto God…For these reasons our people have turned against us, and have persecuted us…That is why we have come seeking justice and protection, to your country, having chosen you above all others.”\(^{94}\)

The Negus further asks the Muslims if they have any Revelations with them that their prophet had brought from God. Ja’fat recites the following passage from the Surah of Maryam:

Relate in the Book (The story of) Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then we sent her Our Angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said, “I seek refuge from thee to (Allah) most gracious: (come not near) for thou dost fear Allah.” He said, “Nay, I am only a messenger from the Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son.” She said: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?” He said: “so (it will be): they Lord

\(^{92}\) Yusuf, Mary and Jesus in the Qur’an, 2.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.

\(^{94}\) Ibid.
saith, ‘that is easy for me (we wish) to appoint him as a sign unto men and a mercy from us’: It is a matter so decreed.’”  

After the recitation, the Negus and his bishops weep and tell the Muslims they might stay in his land. But the messengers sent from Mecca were not yet deterred. They went again to the Negus and his court and claimed that the Muslims believed Jesus, the son of Mary, was a slave. When the Negus questioned the Muslims, they assured him that Jesus was viewed as he was: a servant of Allah brought to them by the Prophet Mohammad. The Negus dismissed the emissary’s statements by picking up a piece of wood and declaring, “Jesus the son of Mary exceeds not what you have said by the length of this stick.” He proceeded to tell the followers of Islam “not for mountains of gold would I harm any one of you.” The Muslims were able to ward off the persecutors by reciting a passage from the Koran from the Surah Maryam. Her devotion was present in the very beginning of the Islamic faith and continues today.

Mary is highly venerated in Muslim folk tradition. According to Wensinck, “Muslim women have taken her as an example and as recourse in time of trouble, often visiting Christian shrines. Christian and Muslim traditions both honor her memory at Matariyya near Cairo and in Jerusalem.” There are also accounts describing Mary as a spiritual light comparable to that of a prophetess:

“Al-Walid ibn Muslim related: ‘Some of our respected elders [ashyakh] narrated that when the Messenger of God appeared at the Noble Sanctuary of Bayt al-Maqdis on the night of the Isra’, two radiant lights were shining to the right of the mosque and to the left, so he asked, ‘O Gabriel! What are those two lights?’ And he replied, ‘The one on your right is the [mihrab] of your brother David, and the one on your left is the grave of your sister Mary’.”

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95 Ibid, 8-9.
96 Ibid, 4.
97 Ibid, 631.
98 Schleifer, Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam, 24.
Although some Muslims scholars, like Baydawi for example, reject the idea of Mary as a prophet of Allah’s, even though there exists a case for it in the Koran. Surah 3:42 reads, “Behold! The angels said: ‘O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee—chosen thee above all women of all nations.’” This verse infers that Mary was unique in Allah’s eyes and held in higher regard above all other women. Nevertheless, whether Maryam is referred to as a prophet or simply a woman of special qualities, devotion to her is recognized by Muslims.

In conclusion, although, Mary plays a significant role in both Christianity and Islam, she is known first apart from Jesus—as, perhaps, prophetess, but certainly as a woman of devotion—in the Koran. By the textual comparison presented between the Bible and the Koran, one can see that Mary is regarded as more than solely Jesus’ mother in the Koran while, the Bible relates her exclusively to Jesus. However, one can not deny the magnitude in which she has crossed religions boundaries. As she becomes of interest to Protestant women—understood, presently, as the image of discipleship and more—the scholarly examination of the influence of Mary may add a richer texture to dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

99 Yusuf, Mary and Jesus in the Qur’an, 28.
CHAPTER 4
MARY, GODDESS, AND THE HONEYBEE

Sue Monk Kidd’s novel The Secret Lives of Bees, set in South Carolina in 1964, tells the story of a Caucasian fourteen-year-old Lily Owens girl, whose life has been shaped by an unfortunate afternoon when she was four-years-old; the afternoon her mother was killed. Lily was left with a less than average father, whose actions, or non actions, left her longing for the mother-figure she lost. Throughout the novel, Lily searches to fill the lack of feminine guidance in her life. Her quest lands her in the midst of an unlikely group of surrogate mothers in a very unusual place: on a honeybee farm with three unique and eccentric African American sisters known as the Calendar Sisters—May, June, and August Boatwright.

Many themes are present throughout The Secret Lives of Bees: remembrance, forgiveness, community, family, and liberation. But, the most prevalent theme is the feminine power that is evident by the divine spirituality present in the worship of the Virgin Mary. According to Carol Christ, the rebirth of the religion of the Goddess is one of the most unexpected developments of the late twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ Men and women alike are rediscovering the language, symbols, and rituals of the Goddess. Christ states, “For me and for many others, finding the Goddess has felt like coming home to a vision of life that we had always known deeply within ourselves: that we are part of nature and that our destiny is to participate fully in the cycles of birth, death, and renewal that characterize life on this earth. The

return of the Goddess inspires us to hope that we can heal the deep rifts between women and men, between ‘man’ and nature, and between ‘God’ and the world, that have shaped our western view of reality for too long.”

Christ believes the Goddess is a necessary counterpart to God and deserves as much attention and devotion. Christ has worked to redefine the Goddess in terms of the God. She argues that we must look at the problems within God history and reexamine God theory. In her book, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, Christ begins to redefine the Goddess by clarifying women roles in patristic Paleolithic and Neolithic societies. She defines matriarchy as literally meaning “the rule of the mother or mother principles and has often been understood to mean a society that is the opposite of a patriarchy, a society ruled by the fathers or the father principle.”

Christ goes on to explain that women played vital roles in these societies and that the Goddess was a primary religious symbol. Goddess devotion celebrated women as birth givers, transformers of seed to grain to bread, of clay to pot, and of wool to thread to cloth.

According to Christ, the Goddesses of the Neolithic and Paleolithic Eras were overshadowed by later Goddesses of the Iron and Bronze Ages: such as Athena, Aphrodite, and Ishtar. It was also at this time that the Gods of patriarchal warriors wanted to dethrone the Goddess in order to legitimate themselves. For example, the Babylonian creation myth the *Enuma Elish* is a story about a God, Marduk, who slaughtered the Creatress of Sumerian religion, Tiamat, the Goddess of the Salty Sea. The tale is one of sadistic violence against the female body. Christ follows this argument by explaining that there is in existence a key fundamental patriarchal lie that must be maintained for patriarchy to function; the lie is the denial of the womb that gives us birth. Christ argues, “The lie of patriarchy tells us that the

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101 Ibid.
Father is the only one true parent. Its corollary is that whatever the Father does is justified because he is the Father.”

Everyone knows it is the mother who gives birth. The mother is the parent who very little questions arise; it is the father that can be doubted.

To connect this issue to this argument, one could say that Mary has the most popular womb in history. She gives birth to the Son of God while keeping her innocence in tact. She has been known as the ultimate mother figure for many centuries. She willingly paid the greatest sacrifice so that her son could bring salvation to millions of people. When the angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her of her upcoming pregnancy, she questioned him only once and when he gave her further explanation, she embraced the news becoming Jesus first disciple. She stayed by her son’s side at the Cross and watched as he perished before her.

Who is the Goddess? Christ defines the study of the Goddess as “thea-logy” from the two terms thea, “Goddess” and logos “meaning.” The Goddess is the power of intelligent embodied love that is a basis of all beings, and Mother Earth is the body of the Goddess. All living beings are interdependent in the web of life. Christ believes the symbols and rituals in Goddess worship help us build communities and have provided a consciousness about basic ethics allowing us to create a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world. For example, in Sue Monk Kidd’s book the honeybee places a significant role. From the beginning of the novel, the honeybees are narrators. They are constant and ever responsive to human need. Amy Lignitz Harken writes, “Throughout the novel, the winged insects buzz in and around each character. They portend life and death, signal both divine and earthly companionship, and urge

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103 Ibid, 67
104 Ibid, xv.
some characters to new life while holding others to the stable life.” We are introduced to the importance of bees on the first page of Kidd’s novel by Lily.

At night I would lie in bed and watch the show, how bees squeezed through the cracks of my bedroom wall and flew circles around the room, making that propeller sound, a high pitched zzzzzz that hummed along my skin. I watched their wings shining like bits of chrome in the dark and felt the longing in my chest. The way the bees flew, not even looking for a flower, just flying for the feel of the wind, split my heart down its seam…Looking back on it know I want to say they showed up like the angel Gabriel appearing to the Virgin Mary, setting events in motion I could never have guessed.

From the beginning we know Lily is a troubled soul much like the bees just swarming around her room without a path or direction. The honeybees also act as divine representations throughout the novel. Lily compares them to Gabriel, the divine messenger that brings the good news to Mary that she is God’s chosen vessel. This episode lets us know that Lily wishes for a messenger. She longs for God’s intervention in her life. Moreover, the bees become a symbol of Lily’s freedom. One day, she opens the lid to a jar of bees Lily was keeping beside her bed. They did not fly off. They stayed in the caged habitat, like Lily who stayed with a father who made her kneel on grit-covered floor for extended periods of time as punishment for the smallest mishap. Eventually the bees flew off, like Lily finally did when she left her home.

You could say I never had a religious moment, the kind where you know yourself spoken to by a voice that seems other than yourself, spoken so genuinely you see the words shining on trees and clouds. But I had such a moment right then, standing in my own ordinary room. I heard a voice say, Lily Melissa Owens, your jar is open.

The honeybees are a well-oiled community, from the Queen bee to the worker bee. August, the oldest of the Boatwright sisters, explains the secrets of the hive to Lily. The nest builders are the group that makes the comb; the field bees are the ones with good navigation.
skills who gather nectar and pollen; mortician bees rake the dead bees out of the hive, and there is the Queen and her attendances who feed her, bath her and keep her warm. All the while, Lily and August are standing in the midst of a tornado of bees. August is using the bees, a part of nature, to explain community and relationships. August is also trying to let Lily know she is her confidant. Lily is keeping a secret that she and her mammy, Rosaleen, ran away. Lily is afraid to tell August that she broke Rosaleen out of the hospital after a group of racist men beat her. August knows she has a secret and is letting her know is it okay to trust, like the bees trust each other. August is waiting for Lily to find a voice, to find her strength, and to find her way.

Furthermore, Christ believes the Goddess can speak to us through the natural world, through human relationships, communities, dreams and visions. She speaks to us in order to express her desire to manifest life more fully in the world. Her power is the intelligent embodied love that is the ground of all being. Christ argues, “This intelligent embodied love undergirds every individual being, including plants, animals, and humans, as we participate in the physical and spiritual process of birth, death, and renewal. If intelligent embodied love is the ground of all being, then intelligence, love, embodiment, relationship, and interdependence are the ‘stuff of life’ and are ‘in the nature of things.’”

In Kidd’s book, Lily holds steady to the memory of her mother. She speaks to and adores inanimate objects that once belonged to her mother: a wooden picture of The Black Madonna of Breznichar of Bohemia, her mother’s picture, and a pair of her mother’s gloves. She often wears Deborah’s lace gloves in order to feel her deceased mother’s touch. Lily truly believes these objects keep her connected to her late mother and will pave her way to a better life. Lily has faith that her mother’s spirit will help her. Deborah does just that by leading her, by means

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of the wooden picture, to the honeybee farm where she spent her young years. Lily’s mother,
Deborah, is her guiding force, her guiding love even in her death.

Is the Goddess God in female form? According to Christ, “the Goddess calls us to
transform powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting images and ideals about God.”

When Christ writes about God, she discusses him in terms of Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, when she
writes about God verses Goddess, she is writing about the Jewish-Christian God and its ideals in
conflict with the Goddess. Christ argues, “…the traditional images of God found in the Bible
and expressed in prayers, chants, and hymns and the interpretations given in traditional
theologies continue to provide the primary access to God for the vast majority of Christians and
Jews. Until and unless these sources of religious experience and knowledge are transformed,
traditional understandings will still be with us, no matter what liberal and radical theologians
say.”

In addition, Christ writes that traditional views of the origin and history of God are
reinforced by profoundly held presuppositions about time, text, and God found in biblical
religion. She argues that these views cause religions historical writings to be biased. The
concept of time is shaped by Biblical patriarchs, like Abraham and Moses, and proceeds through
the Davidic kingship to the prophets of Israel to the origins of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism.
When a time before Abraham is mentioned, it is usually discussed with the Hebrew religion as a
backdrop. For instance, the Enuma Elish, as we said, is a Babylonian epic that depicts the
slaying of the primordial mother Tiamat by the God Marduk. Christ says, “It is clear that if
history begins at Sumer, then all history is patriarchal history. We may discover the roles of

110 Ibid, 89.
111 Ibid, 46.
women within patriarchal history…but we will not have the history of a time when women’s roles in religion were central and unquestioned.”\textsuperscript{112}

The Goddess hypothesis challenges scholarly commitment to text. Christ argues that for scholars to develop methods for dealing with nontextual artifacts of history in order to pay attention to a time before Sumer. The resistance to do so is rooted in the unquestioned assumptions about the Bible. For example, Genesis 1:1 reads, “And God spoke and said, ‘Let there be light.’” John 1:1 reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Christ says the texts about Goddess come from times when patriarchy was already established; therefore, we are forced to surmise Goddesses do not reflect female power. According to Christ, “we can begin to allow physical data to transform not only our understanding of Goddesses and women in religion, but also notions about religious origins and theories about the nature of religion.”\textsuperscript{113} The Goddess hypothesis challenges historians of religion to look elsewhere from text, such as physical evidence.

The Goddess hypothesis also challenges biblical and traditional natures of God. The Goddess presented in the Bible, such as Asherah, are said to be abominations because of “idoltral” worship. Christ says, “It is hard for scholars to shake the mind-set that has encouraged all of us to think of Goddesses in relations to terms such as idolatry, fertility fetish, nature religion, orgiastic cult, bloodthirsty, and ritual prostitution.”\textsuperscript{114} She further defines these prejudices.

An idol is someone else’s religious symbol. The Goddesses represent fertility and sexuality as the cosmic power of transformation. There is little evidence of blood sacrifice in Neolithic religion, but it becomes a widespread practice in later patriarchal Bronze and Iron Age societies. Sexuality in Goddess religion is transformative power. Prostitution is not the oldest profession. Rather, it is the

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 76.  
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 77.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 78.
product of patriarchal and class-stratified societies. When sexuality is mutual and women are equal, there is no question of buying and selling. Yet these labels stick in the mind.\textsuperscript{115}

Because scholars assume that divinity is supposed to represent order and transcendence and that this omnipotent presence is God, they automatically assume the chaos or nature of the Goddess is a false and unruly.

One of the most well-known critics of goddess theory is Cynthia Eller. In contrast to Carol Christ, Eller argues that we have no way of dating the first Goddess figure. She says most spiritual feminists assume that goddess worship began with the first human societies, of which we have no record. Since the goddess theorists cannot prove anything about religions that have nothing left but bones, they usually date ancient matriarchs back to the first archaeological evidence they can find for Goddess worship. Eller writes, “Merlin Stone, author of \textit{When God Was a Woman}, initially dated goddess worship from the beginning of the Neolithic period, approximately 7000 BCE. Based on her continuing research, she pushes the date back farther and farther.”\textsuperscript{116} In other words, Eller believes there is really no way of knowing when the first Goddess worship took place because no concrete evidence exists to assure a definitive answer.

Furthermore, Eller contends that spiritual feminists are iconoclasts. She writes, “they love to flout the rules of the theological discipline, to challenge the categories usually use to think about the sacred. They don’t think most of these categories apply to what they experience anyway.”\textsuperscript{117} In addition, spiritual feminists are sensitive to the limitations language imposes and seeks to escape pinning down the goddess with theological labels. Keeping the goddess free from definition is part of what keeps her divine. What is the definition of Goddess? According to Eller, if you asked spiritual feminists if they believe in one Goddess or many Goddesses, their

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 131.
answer is both at the same time. If you ask them if their goddess is within, a part of them, or is she completely outside of them, the spiritual feminist will answer both at the same time. Eller is suggesting that goddess theorists will not label the Goddess for fear of constraining her to a certain genre or label. Therefore, the Goddess can be anyone, exist anywhere, and in anything.

Does the Goddess give women power? Eller is skeptical. She writes, “For spiritual feminists, it is not enough for a woman to think of herself as a strong and powerful person who happens to be female; she need to think of herself as a powerful woman.”

Through Eller’s point of view, one can deduct that goddess theorist will not label the Goddess, however they will label themselves. Spiritual feminist cannot think of themselves as powerful independent of the Goddess; therefore, they are putting constraints on their own abilities as a person by only seeing themselves as being powerful only as a woman. Eller believes if you are a strong person, be a strong person who happens to be a woman. In the case of Mary, one may look at her as a powerful female, but she may also be seen as a powerful person. Eller would see her as a powerful person and Christ would see her as a powerful woman.

Cynthia Eller’s difficulty with Goddess theory arises when there is no basis or history for such worship. For example, if I am walking down the street and I come across a beautifully bright colored pick rock and I pick it up and take it home and build a shrine for it and call it the Pink Rock Goddess of Athens, Eller believes my goddess would be a fabrication and therefore, my devotion arbitrary. There would be no history or reason behind my Pink Rock Goddess, other than the fact that I thought it was pretty. Eller argues that there must be a history in order for a goddess to be taken seriously.

In Kidd’s novel, the question of whether God is Goddess is not a consideration. The Virgin Mary is depicted as the central deity and the omnipotent divinity. Kidd focuses on Mary

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118 Ibid, 212.
as a protector and guardian; as the face of God in female form. Mary is a black wooden statue that the Boatwright sisters keep in their parlor. Lily gives Kidd’s readers the most descriptive of the Mary statue.

Over in the corner was a carving of a woman nearly three feet tall. She was one of those figures that had leaned out from the front of the ship in olden times…She was black as she could be, twisted like driftwood from being out in the weather, her face a map of all the storms and journeys she’d been through. Her right arm was raised, as if she was pointing the way, except her fingers where closed in a fist. It gave her a serious look like she could straiten you out if necessary…She had a faded read heart painted on her breast and a yellow crescent moon, worn down and crooked, painted where her body would have blended into the ship’s wood…She was a mix of mighty and humble all in one.\textsuperscript{119}

Her description bears little resemblance to images often see of the Virgin Mary. She is typically pictured with an angelic likeness with either white or tan skin and sometimes with Jesus on her lab. In \textit{The Secret Lives of Bees}, the Virgin Mary appears worn and tattered as if her life has been a struggle. She is a black feminine expression of the divine Goddess. August tells Lily, “everybody needs a God who looks like them.”

Mary is a Goddess with whom the Daughters of Mary centralize their worship. They give the name Our Lady of Chains to the parlor statue because slaves in early times adopted her as their religious icon. A slave named Obadiah found the black Mary washed up on the shore of a river near Charleston, South Carolina. When he knelt down beside the tattered statue, she spoke to him saying, “It’s alright. I’m here. I’ll be taking care of you now.”\textsuperscript{120} By the next Sunday word had spread of the statue and how she had spoken to Obadiah. Obadiah told the story of the statue to the other slaves, but was unaware that is was a depiction of the Virgin Mary. Finally, a lady name Pearl stood up and told the congregation she was the Mother of Jesus. Everyone knew who Mary was and related to her. She had seen suffering of every kind.

\textsuperscript{119} Kidd, \textit{The Secret Lives of Bees}, 70.  
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 108.
She was strong and constant and had a mother’s heart. She became their Goddess who knew everything they had suffered. When the master heard of the figure, he ripped the Mary statue out of the praise house and chained her to the barn, but she escaped. Consequently, the people called her Lady of Chains, not because she wore them, but because she broke them. They recognized in her what they did in themselves; dark skin, a watery journey to South Carolina, experience and empathy with the sorrows of the world. The black Mary passed though generations of slaves before it ended up with the Boatwright sisters. The statue of the Virgin Mary is their symbol of persistent strength and freedom.

The Boatwright sisters along with the Daughters of Mary unearth strength and determination from the statue, especially in the turbulent, frightening peak of the Civil Rights Movement in the South. But the black Mary is many other things to the characters in Kidd’s book. For the Boatwright sisters, she is the object of their gratitude for the honey crop. She is the Goddess in their Sunday worship. She is the main character in the feast of the Assumption which celebrates the angels carrying Mary to heaven after she awoke from her death. However, the festival is not just about the Assumption, the Daughters of Mary reenact their Lady of Chains story in remembrance of her struggle. They start by baking honey cakes and adorn the house with streamers and Christmas lights. They pinch off pieces of honey cake and eat it in symbolism as “the body of the blessed Mother.” Afterwards, they reenact the Lady of Chain’s story by chaining her to the honey house for a night. The festival ends with the group anointing her with honey and washing it off with water, as if to say the Mary has taken on all of your sticky situations and washed them away. It is the dawn of a new day, a new beginning.

The black Mary is also a symbol of acceptance. Lily, a Caucasian teenage girl, is enamored of the statue and feels the overshadowing power of Mary from the first time she sees

the tattered wooden statue in the parlor. In fact, it is Deborah’s wooden picture of The Black Madonna of Breanichar of Bohemia that leads Lily and Rosaleen to freedom. It is the same picture as the on the honey jars from the Boatwright farm. Lily followed that picture to Tiburon because her mother had written the name of the town on the back. She found the honey farm by way of the same depiction on the jars of honey at the local convenience store. The Black Virgin Mary helped Lily find her surrogate family. Mary led Lily and Rosaleen to safety. Lily’s mother had kept the relic because she lived on the honey farm too in a tumultuous time in her life, and the wooden Mary was her connection to this peaceful place. There are many feminine factors contributing to Lily’s liberation: the Boatwright sisters, her mother, Mary, and herself.

Is Goddess yet another deity out there or is she the Goddess in us? According to Christ the Goddess is woman whole in herself. She says, “She speaks to us of a power that is our birthright.”¹²² August tells Lily “our Lady is not some magical being out there somewhere, like a fairy Godmother. She’s not the statue in the parlor. She’s the something inside of you.”¹²³ Each character in Kidd’s novel finds her own strength by channeling energy from the statue. Lily, who longs for someone to love her, discovers she has several women who have already fulfilled that desire. Lily pulls the Mary icon out of her pocket many times, not realizing that what is really giving her the strength she desired is the Goddess power she found in herself.

May, the tender-hearted sister who Lily calls simpleminded looses her spirit after the death of her twin sister. Consequently, May is unable to handle distress. She is given solstice by building a wall where she deposits prayers in the cracks, like the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. She does eventually kill herself. Suicide is May’s way of releasing her pain and finding her Goddess

¹²² Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, 8.
again in the afterlife with April. In her suicide note she says, “I’m tired of caring around the weight of the world. I’m just going to lay it down now.”\(^{124}\)

June is moody and insensitive. Her heart has been hardened because she has been left at the alter a few times. She dates Neil throughout the novel, but refuses to marry him even though they have had a long courtship. They quarrel in the tomato field and when she refuses to marry him again, Neil leaves and does not return until May’s death. May’s suicide note urges the sisters to live life to the fullest. She writes, “It is my time to die, and it’s your time to live. Don’t mess it up.” Neil did return and asks June to marry him once again, except this time she accepts. Lily says, “I could see the struggle I her face. The surrender she had to make inside. Not just to Neil but to life.” June realizes marriage is not a surrender to painful memories; it is a path to the future. June finds her inner Goddess strength in May’s death.

August is the head of the household, the Queen bee. She is the primary actor in times of emergency. August is the holder of the history. “August gives voice to her family’s history and to the history of the black Mary.”\(^ {125}\) She is the religious leader and the head of the honey operation. August also helps the characters find their own history. She is the one that fills Lily in on the missing pieces left behind in her life after the death of her mother. August serves as a surrogate mother to Deborah and is able to help Lily connect with her past so she can move ahead to the future. August often looks to the Black Mary for guidance, but it appears she is already in touch with her innate Goddess.

In conclusion, Kidd’s novel, *The Secret Lives of Bees*, is an excellent example of Carol Christ’s definition of worship of the Goddess. Even in Cynthia Eller’s point of view, Mary would suffice as a Goddess figure because there is history within the novel that substantiates

\(^{124}\) Ibid, 210.
\(^{125}\) Harken, *Unveiling the Secret Lives of Bees*, 78.
the claim. The black Mary is a pillar of strength and a symbol of freedom for the Boatwright sisters, The Daughters of Mary, Rosaleen, and Lily. She is a protector and redeemer. Most importantly, Mary is their spiritual leader and guiding light.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In order to study Mary outside Biblical texts, I think it is important to first return to her original stories in text. I think to fully understand Mary is to understand her story. I started with the classic New Testament canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and studied how she is depicted in each one. I then moved to another religious text, the Qur’an, which portrays Mary independent of Jesus. The Qur’an narrates Mary’s birth and dedication to the temple before it tells of Jesus’ birth. Next, I examined her in the Apocryphal text, *The Protoevangelium of James*, which helps us connect the stories from the bible to the Qur’an. The text also tells the readers more detail into the birth of Jesus and Joseph’s rejections and disdain for Mary. Finally, I looked at Mary in a role independent of religious text, as a Goddess in Sue Monk Kidd’s book, *The Secret Lives of Bees*. In order to solidify Mary as a Goddess figure, I feel that it is necessary to first see her in the texts from which her image emerged.

Mary has had a spectrum of identities throughout history. In Catholicism, she is the perpetual virgin free of sin. Recently, instead of continuing to see Catholics worship of Mary idolatrous, Protestant circles have begun to look more in depth into what makes her special. Protestant scholars have, like me, revisited Biblical texts to take a more thorough examination of what it means to be the mother of Jesus. It is through this new emergence of scholarship on Mary that her popularity has spread to other manners of worship. She had been depicted on the
big screen in movies, such as *The Passion of the Christ*, and in novels that help readers see events through her eyes. We are able to more aptly put our feet in her shoes (or sandals) and empathize with her delicate situation. Mary is a character in whom anyone can identify.

Biblically, Mary does not exist apart from Jesus. I do not feel that she can be completely disassociated from him. However, I do feel it is necessary to examine stories from her point of view. Many simply choose only to see Jesus’ point of view and the sacrifices he makes. Yes, from a Christian standpoint, he did give his life for humanity. Mary and Jesus, however, are connected. Therefore, she gave her son’s life for humanity.

Emphasis is placed on God as Jesus’ father, but Mary is often brushed aside as his surrogate. Why is she not included in the Trinity? Why is it father, son, and Holy Ghost? Why can it not be a *quadit*: father, son, Holy Ghost, and the Virgin Mother? She does play a significant role in the life of her son, much like his father, but maybe more so, considering the fact that she had to come to terms with the fact that her son was going to die. God knew Jesus’ fate from conception. Mary prevails as the ultimate disciple and mother. What not ask the question WWMD, What would Mary do?
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