

Article

# The Female Line in the Bible. Ratzinger's Deepening of the Church's Understanding of Tradition and Mary

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the female line in the Bible that Joseph Ratzinger identifies as running in parallel to, and being indispensable for, the male line in the Bible. This female line expands the understanding of Salvation History as described by *Dei Verbum* so that it runs not just from Adam through to Jesus, but also from Adam and Eve to Mary and Jesus, the final Adam. Ratzinger's female line demonstrates that women are at the heart of God's plan for humanity. I illustrate that this line is evident when Ratzinger's method of biblical interpretation is applied to the women of Scripture. Its full potential comes into view through Ratzinger's development of the Christian notion of person: Person as revealed by Jesus Christ is relatedness without reserve with God and is fully applicable to the human being through Christ. I argue that together, the male and female lines in the Bible form the human line in the Bible, in which the male line represents "the humanity", every human being, while the female line represents the communal aspect of humanity. Moreover, I contend that Christianity's notion of mother in relation to God (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) should be understood through Mary's response at the Annunciation. Mother in relation to God is to be understood through the Incarnation when Mary, as person, lived her life wholly in relation with and for God.

**Keywords:** Mary; person; Ratzinger; biblical interpretation; women of the Bible

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Innovating within Tradition, Joseph Ratzinger identified a female line in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> This line emanates from Ratzinger's application of the fullness of the Church's Tradition, in conjunction with several personal insights and developments of that Tradition, to the challenges of the modern era. I first explore how the female line developed in parallel to significant evolutions within Ratzinger's own theological journey, a journey that always remains Christo-centric. I then situate the female line within Ratzinger's reading of Scripture in the light of Christ. Importantly, it is only within that milieu that the female line is apparent. Ratzinger positions Marian theology as the development of the history of the women of Israel, which is the history of the people of God under the covenant. Essential elements of Ratzinger's female line in the Old Testament are discussed, specifically Creation and the Fall, and Wisdom, as a prelude to a consideration of the pinnacle of the female line, the link between the Old and New Covenants, Mary and her symbolism of the Church. Both as persons live in relation to God without reserve, and it is there that the unity of the Bible is experienced. To close, three areas that the female line in the Bible provides a fresh perspective upon are proposed for further consideration: (1) Mother in relation to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (2) purifying traditions from Tradition, and (3) Christian anthropology.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my book *Innovation within Tradition Joseph Ratzinger and Reading the Women of Scripture*, (McKenna 2015). I can only provide an outline of my key arguments. Readers wishing to explore the detailed discussion related to each of these arguments should refer directly to the book.

## 1. Identifying the Female Line in the Bible within the Tradition of the Church

There is a female line in the Bible in parallel to the male line in the Bible. The female line commences with Eve and is fulfilled in Mary and, through her, the Church. The female line, Ratzinger asserts, is no afterthought, but a line that is indivisible from the male line that runs from Adam to the Adam, Christ Jesus. Accordingly, salvation history is not a male affair but a history in which persons, male and female, respond to God's call to them, which culminates in the Word becoming flesh.

[I]n the Old Testament, alongside the line from Adam through the Patriarchs down to the Servant of God, there appears another line from Eve through the Matriarchs to figures like Deborah, Esther, Ruth and finally to the personified Divine Wisdom... The line from Adam receives its full meaning in Christ. Similarly, the significance of the female line in its inseparable interaction with the Christological mystery is revealed in Mary and in the symbolism applied to the Church. (Ratzinger 1988c, pp. 17–18).<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, Ratzinger's assertion of a female line in the Bible appears to be a response to feminist theology, which, in part, of course, it is. However, that is not the whole story. Yes, feminist theology raised issues about women and Christianity; see, for example, critical critiques by (Trible 1979), Schneider (1986, 1991), Schüssler Fiorenza (1989, 1992), LaCugna (1991) and Johnson (1992). Ratzinger was critical of feminist theology where it moved outside of the boundaries of the Church's development of Tradition, for example, where it questioned the Scriptural reference to God as Father (Ratzinger and Messori 1985, p. 97). In parallel, to such criticism he fully acknowledged the issues that gave rise to feminist theology (Ratzinger 1988c, p. 17; Ratzinger 2000, p. 83). However, Ratzinger's notion of a female line in the Bible reflects his response to the much wider theological and social trends of the pre- and post-Vatican II eras, of which feminist theology was an aspect. This response was shaped by Ratzinger's own theological journey and framework. The female line made itself known through Ratzinger's application of the Catholic theological tradition, with certain personal emphases, upon modern issues, and developed around Mary as fulfilment of the line of women in the Old Testament. Ratzinger was far from alone among his contemporaries, either in the pre- or post-Vatican II eras, in seeking to contribute to the clarification of Mary's role in Christianity. Pre-Vatican II, Karl Rahner positioned Mary in relation to the Trinity (Rahner 1963, Rahner [1954] 1961), and Max Thurian, a brother at Taizé in the Presbyterian tradition, wrote of Mary in relation to the Lord and the Church (Thurian 1963). Post Vatican II, Henri de Lubac spoke of Mary as the eternal feminine (de Lubac 1971), Hans Küng developed a set of four principles for an appropriate Mariology (Küng 2001).<sup>3</sup> In 1967 the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in the UK, fostering both scholarly (Stacpoole 1982) and local dialogue on Mary across Christian communities.<sup>4</sup>

Ratzinger admits that at the start of his theological career he was attracted by both the liturgical movement, which emphasised Christ's role in salvation, and by the ecumenical movement (Ratzinger 2000, p. 296). Both movements exhibited minimal Marian influence, even hostility to it. Indeed, Ratzinger admitted in 1985 that prior to and during Vatican II he thought the term Mary as conqueror of all heresies was an exaggeration, something that in the post-Vatican II era he came to embrace (Ratzinger and Messori 1985, pp. 105–6). That is not to say that he embraced the pre-Vatican II Marian movement, which he viewed as poor theology: a maximalist position was contrasted with a minimalist one, leading theologians either to neglect Scripture or use unscientific methods

<sup>2</sup> This article is also published in (Ratzinger and Balthasar 2005). The two publications engaged two different translators, and in the latter, the word female is translated as feminine, so it reads "the feminine line in the Bible" (pp. 43–44). The word female is the appropriate translation as Ratzinger is referring to the women of the Bible and the meaning they point to and represent within salvation history. The feminine speaks to the human characteristic of living for the other and not just to woman or the female, as will be discussed at the end of this section of the paper.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Küng undertook research on this topic from the early 1980s.

<sup>4</sup> The society's website can be found at [www.esbvm.com](http://www.esbvm.com). Accessed 10 June 2014.

(Ratzinger 1965). While Vatican II brought these issues to the fore, Ratzinger's efforts to articulate the appropriate theological position for Mary commenced before Vatican II. In 1962, he published a homily that contrasted the faith of Mary and Elizabeth in the Annunciation with Zachariah's unbelief. (Ratzinger 1962)<sup>5</sup> Ratzinger here presented a Scriptural Mary. He was not alone in desiring a refined Mariology based on Scripture. John XXIII called for just such a theology, which was reflected in the final drafts of chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, having been absent from the initial drafts. (Ratzinger 1965; Ratzinger 1966, pp. 94–96, 140–43).<sup>6</sup>

The catalyst for Ratzinger's Marian conversion came later, when he fused Scriptural Mariology with Church-Centred Mariology. This later perspective, rediscovered in the early post-world-war-II period, understands Mary as the type of the Church, so that what is said of the Church is said of Mary, and equally, what is said of Mary is said of the Church (Ratzinger 1988b, pp. 69–70). Ratzinger points to the work of Hugo Rahner, Alois Muller, Karl Delahaye, René Laurentin, and Otto Semmelroth as the source of this rediscovery.<sup>7</sup> From the medieval period, this element of Tradition has been eclipsed by a theology of Mary in relation to Christ uncoupled from the Church, to the detriment of the Church's ongoing deepening of understanding of God's Self-Revelation. The influence of the rediscovery of Church-Centred Mariology can be seen in chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, which Ratzinger asserts was written as an inner parallel to the chapter on the Church (Ratzinger 1988b, pp. 67–71). It is difficult to understate the importance Ratzinger places on this rediscovery for contemporary theology: it clarifies the place of Mary within Christianity, and in this way also clarifies Christianity itself. "[Th[e] rediscovery of the inter-changeability between Mary and the Church, the personification of the Church in Mary and the universal dimension acquired by Mary in the Church, is one of the most important theological rediscoveries of the twentieth century." (Ratzinger 2000, p. 353). Ratzinger highlights a threefold implication of the inter-changeability of Mary and the Church: first, the Church and Mary are understood through each other, meaning Mariology, while appearing to be a late addition to theology, was always integral to the Church's theological development of ecclesiology and Christology; second, the Church is concretised in the person of Mary, which mitigates against the Church being viewed as only an abstract entity or as just another institution; third, Mary is more than a girl from a town in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire—she, as type, is the fullness of the Church. These threefold implications orientate how Mary and the Church are to be understood, which corrects the one-sided, if opposite, approaches evident in the Liturgical and Marian movements that influenced the early period of Vatican II. Indeed, Ratzinger, who acted as a theological advisor at the Council, maintains that the struggles of the first half of Vatican II cannot be understood without considering the tensions generated by the interaction of these two movements (Ratzinger 1988b, p. 69).

The problem of the appropriate expression for Mary in Catholic thought continued post-Vatican II because, as Ratzinger argues, the rediscovered Church centred Mariology was "alien" to the Marian movement (Ratzinger 1988b, p. 69). Ratzinger continued to offer clarification of the place of Mary in Catholic theology, and it is from here that an initial articulation of a notion of a line of women is referred to in *Introduction to Christianity* (2004[1968]). At that stage, the notion is related to the Incarnation.<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger first explicitly expressed the notion of a line of women of the Bible in *Daughter Zion*, which presents three 1975 lectures designed to contribute to a new perspective on Mary (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 7–8). Here, the relationship between the Old Testament women and Mary and the history of Israel comes to the fore. Ratzinger argues that the history of the women of Israel is the history of the people of God under the covenant. Marian theology is the development of the history of these women,

<sup>5</sup> This article was republished in 1974 in *Dogma und Verkündigung*, pp. 411–14.

<sup>6</sup> The commentaries on the sessions were published in German after each session of the council and published in English by Paulist as one book in 1966.

<sup>7</sup> See as an example Hugo Rahner, 2004. This was originally published in 1951 and collects multiple references by the Fathers interpreting Mary through the Church and vice versa.

<sup>8</sup> In this seminal book, Ratzinger discusses the Church in relation to the Spirit rather than, as he would increasingly later, in relation to Mary. (Ratzinger [1968] 2004, pp. 272–80).

which contains three core elements: first, the great mothers of the Old Testament such as Sarah and Hannah; second, the daughter of Zion; third, the figure of Eve. In this Marian theology, Mary links the Old and New Testaments.

“[I]n a certain respect Mariology ties the knot joining Old and New [Testaments]. Mariology cannot be found apart from its union with the prophetic theology of the bridal people of God.... If Christ brings the marked distinction and break from the Old Testament, in the novelty of his words, his life, his passion, his cross, and his resurrection, Mary, through her silence and faith, incarnates the continuity.” (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 31–32).

In a further important work published in 1979, “On the Position of Mariology and Marian Spirituality within the Totality of Faith and Theology,” Ratzinger continues to clarify the appropriate place of Mary in faith and theology but does not develop the notion of a line. The female line appears explicitly in his 1988 article “The Sign of the Woman,” which Ratzinger wrote in a personal capacity to act as an introduction to John Paul’s 1987 Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (Ratzinger 1988c). The purpose of that introduction was to support an appropriate reading of the papal document by explaining John Paul II’s specific methodology. What this entails is balancing John Paul II’s focus on the person of Mary (he was part of the Marian movement at Vatican II) with the Scriptural and Church-centred Mariology expounded by *Lumen Gentium* and subsequently developed by Ratzinger over the following two decades.

The significance of the journey Ratzinger took to identify a female line in the Bible is illustrated in *Dei Verbum*’s description of salvation history. This document, which Ratzinger contributed to as a theological advisor, does not explicitly refer to any of the women of the Bible. Rather, after reference to “our first parents” follows the line from Abraham to Christ:

God, who creates and conserves all things by his word (see Jn 1:3), provides constant evidence of himself in created realities (see Rom 1:19–20). Furthermore, wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning. After the fall, he buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption (see Gen 3:15); and he has never ceased to take care of the human race, in order to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by preserving in doing good (see Rom 2:6–7). In his own time, God called Abraham and made him into a great nation (see Gen 12:2). After the era of the patriarchs, he taught this nation, through Moses and the prophets, to recognize him as the only living and true God, as a provident Father and just judge. He taught them, too to look for the promise of a Saviour. And so, throughout the ages, he prepared the way for the Gospel. After God had spoken many times and in various ways through the prophets, “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1–2). (Flannery 1996, pp. 97–115, at 98).

In light of Ratzinger’s subsequent assertion of a female line, the absence of reference to any specific biblical women is striking. Ratzinger’s female line can only be seen as a correction of *Dei Verbum* and the whole of Tradition through a fuller, more complete view of salvation history. This clarification is an explicit inclusion within salvation history of the women of that history. However, even without this explicit acknowledgement, the female influence was nonetheless felt in Tradition. Ratzinger positions this latent female presence as the reason for Tradition’s rejection of three distorting ideas: first, the rejection of the fertility cults that existed in antiquity, something which Ratzinger refers to as a theology of prostitution; second, the rejection of Gnosticism, which did not and does not view the female as part of the salvific message of the Bible; and third, the rejection of the Solus Christus movement, which Ratzinger criticises for its denial that human beings can respond to God’s grace (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 13–14; Ratzinger 1988c, p. 17).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> He cites Logion 22 of Thomas and points to a similar text in Logion 37, 106, 46, 31.

A further development of thought that the notion of a female line gave support is evident in “the Letter on the Collaboration between Man and Woman”, issued July 2004 by the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, when Ratzinger was still Prefect ([The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004](#)). It is worth noting that the articles in Helmut Moll’s edited *The Church and Women* ([Moll 1988](#)) are organically linked to this Letter, even if significant development and refinement is evident in the Letter as compared to the articles that appear in that volume. The purpose of the Letter is to clarify aspects of Christianity’s understanding on the relationship between men and women. It describes an anthropology based on humanity, male and female, as the image of God. The Letter speaks of the relationship between man and woman as that of “active collaboration” that recognises the sexual differentiation that marks humanity. Christian anthropology recognises the uniqueness in the difference of the one humanity as the image of God. This understanding of humanity leads the letter to reject two ideas about woman that distort the Triune image of humanity. The first is the rejection of the strictly contrasting characteristics of the masculine–feminine of Aristotelian philosophy, which negatively impacted the female, as the basis for understanding women. The Letter positions its understanding of woman based on the person of Mary. In relation to Mary and the Church, the Letter dismisses what it describes as “a passivity inspired by an outdated conception of femininity . . . an historically conditioned model of femininity”.<sup>10</sup> The Letter positions the word feminine as something other than an attribute of the female sex, that it designates the “fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because the other”. Woman, due to the theological and spiritual implications of biology, is a reminder and sign of these values.<sup>11</sup> The second distortion rejected by the Letter, and linked to the first, is any biblical reading of woman as in some way secondary to the man. The Letter notes that God’s creation of woman from the side of Adam means that humanity is a relational reality, and that prior to the creation of woman, Adam is referred to with the “generic expression” the humanity. Moreover, it notes that when Scripture says Adam needs a helper in reference to woman, this is not a reference to an “inferior”. What is being referred to here is a “vital helper”. The Hebrew word used here for helper, *ezer*, the Letter notes, refers to the assistance that only a person can provide another, and is a term Scripture uses elsewhere to describe God in relation to human beings. (cf. *Ex 18:4; Ps10:14*).<sup>12</sup> In pruning traditions from Tradition, the Letter has opened space for a Christian anthropology that understands humanity, as male and female, through the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Ratzinger’s theological interpretation of the women of Scripture delves into the Church’s resources for a response to feminism and feminist theology. Other scholars took different approaches. Here, I name but a few contributors to the post-Vatican II debate on Mary and Mariology as examples: [Daly \(1986\)](#) and [Beattie \(2002a, 2002b\)](#) sought to reclaim Mary from the distortions of patriarchy. Mary T Malone sought to establish the contribution and the experience, largely negative, of women in Christian history ([Malone 2000, 2001, 2003](#)). Suelzer and Kselman in their paper on “Modern Old Testament Criticism” in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* identify two approaches to the contribution of women to biblical studies: one is to “consider important examples of biblical interpretation produced by women; the other is to consider the feminist critique of the bias in the Bible and in biblical scholarship and on work that studies of the Bible with a feminist hermeneutic ([Suelzer and Kselman 1989](#), p. 1129). They choose the second approach without reference to the third option that Ratzinger pursues: the interpretation of the women of the Bible within the totality of Salvation History. Two of the editors of the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Brown and Fitzmyer, along with Karl P. Donfried and John Reumann, had previously published *Mary in the New Testament* ([Brown et al. 1978](#)). This study uses the historical-critical method in a collaborative assessment by Protestant and Catholic scholars to identify

<sup>10</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration between Men and Women in the Church and the World” 2004, no. 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* no. 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* no 6. and footnote 5.

<sup>13</sup> Moll 1988. I argued this point in ([McKenna 2012, 2013, 2015](#)).

what modern scholars agree on in relation to Mary in the New Testament. Their aim was to remove confusion about the biblical evidence of Mary. Brown had also previously explored the Incarnation from a historical perspective (Brown 1973). More recently, a number of anthologies on Mary have been published, whose edited volumes explore Mary from various theological, historical and contemporary perspectives (Boss 2007; Maunder 2019; Wagner et al. 2017).

## 2. Salvation History Read in the Light of Christ

The emergence of the female line in the Bible in Ratzinger's thought reflects his specific theological approach, which is anchored in the faith of the Church and in the Church's development of its understanding of that faith in theology. For Ratzinger, at the centre of Christian theology stands the Incarnation—the Word become flesh. Everything in Christianity stands and falls upon this proposition. Scripture, then, is interpreted through the light of Christ, and that interpretation is Pauline: Christ is the final Adam, and salvation history runs from the creation of Adam and the Fall of humanity through the history and faith of Israel to the Incarnation of the Word of God. Jesus is not a stand-alone figure but the fullness of God's promise and of humanity. That fullness emanates from Jesus' constant communion with the Father in prayer, such that the person of Jesus is his teaching. Ratzinger follows Barth in the emphasis on the person of Jesus: Christ's being as man is his work (Ratzinger [1968] 2004, pp. 15, 202–5). At the core of the Pauline movement is the movement from Creation and the Fall to God's covenant with Israel, culminating in the Incarnation and Resurrection (Ratzinger 1986, pp. 9–100). The centrality of sin and the need for redemption within his theological thought means Ratzinger's Christology is Pauline Augustinianism, rather than the neo-platonic Augustinism that critics have claimed it to be. This is underscored by the fundamental place the Christian notion of person (as relation) holds within Ratzinger's thought, which he refers to as containing "the whole span of the transition from antiquity to Christianity, from Platonism to faith." (Ratzinger [1968] 2004, pp. 137–61, at 160).<sup>14</sup>

Christian theology is understood by Ratzinger as reason seeking to understand faith. Theologians critique God's Self-Revelation to interpret it as: "theology is pondering what God has said and thought before us." (Ratzinger 1995b, p. 104). Four theological principles are evident in Ratzinger's thought: First, Revelation is the basis and determining factor of theology. Second, as already noted, Scripture is read and interpreted in the light of Christ. Christology is normative for theology. Third, the early Church's equation of the God of the Philosophers with the God of Jesus Christ was critical to Christianity's understanding of God: God is not just pure thought as the philosophers deduced, God is also pure love. God is not simply self-contemplating, but a God of relationship, intra-divine relationship and relationship with humanity.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, Greek philosophy provided an intellectual framework and set of tools through which theology developed its self-understanding. Moreover, philosophy ensures the precision of thought and expression, which clarified the essence of Christianity against misunderstanding vis-a-vis other religions (Ratzinger 1987, pp. 114–15). These last two principles do not mean that theology is distorted by Greek philosophy, even if, as discussed above, philosophical aspects inimical to Christianity did continue to influence it. Tradition holds the resources within itself to prune these distortions. Rather, Greek philosophy enabled the Church Fathers to articulate the meaning of God's Self-Revelation. This is illustrated by his description of the development of eschatology:

"It means the effort of thinking through the inner logic of the Christian dogmas about eternal life, probing this logic from the inner unity of the whole of the Christian message about God,

<sup>14</sup> See, in particular, 158–161. For a detailed discussion of Ratzinger's understanding of the notion of person, see Ratzinger 1990 *Communio* article, "Retrieving the Tradition concerning the Notion of Person in Theology." The article in its original form was a lecture given at a congress on the understanding of the person in educational theory and related disciplines; it was subsequently published in 1973 in his book *Dogma und Verkündigung*.

<sup>15</sup> Ratzinger argues that the synthesis of biblical faith and the rationality of Greek thought that arose from the equation of the God of Jesus Christ with the God of the Philosophers gave rise to the idea of Europe. See my articles (McKenna 2017, 2018, 2019).

world and man, and thus bringing its content to bear on human thinking in a meaningful way. This quest for the logic of faith allowed the Church Fathers to call the faith a philosophy, in the sense of a meaningful overview of reality.” (Ratzinger 2008a, pp. 224–25).

Theologians, in Ratzinger’s view, undertake this quest for the inner logic of faith within the Church. Ratzinger’s female line demonstrates that Mary and the Church is the place where the unity of the bible’s testimony is expressed, and where this place is lost, as is the case with much post-Vatican II theology, it leads to an inability to read the Bible in its totality (Ratzinger 1988c, pp. 18–19). What Ratzinger means here is that theology is undertaken by the Church—all generations of the Church. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in “remembrance” to understand what it has yet to grasp. (Ratzinger 1995b), p. 61; Ratzinger and Messori 1985, pp. 71, 113; Ratzinger 1996a, p. 99). That remembrance as Tradition is a deepening of understanding. Tradition is the continual transmission of the memory of the Church; in doing so, the Church unifies the past, present and future. Ratzinger describes this as the “transtemporal relationship of person to person” (Ratzinger 1987, pp. 87, 88). While this precludes a rupture with the Church’s Tradition, Tradition does require a continual pruning of traditions that build up over time. Ratzinger refers to these as casuistical and accidental traditions that are not, in fact, part of Tradition. Tradition, then, in parallel to the deepening of understanding, must continually prune from itself arbitrary traditions. Jesus is the criteria for this pruning (Ratzinger 1987, pp. 89–101). Ratzinger in his 1967 commentary on *Dei Verbum* acknowledges that *Dei Verbum* does not, in his view regretfully, give a formal account of how Tradition can be pruned of a distorting tradition (Ratzinger 1969, pp. 155–98, at 193). This remains a major gap in theology, and it is to be hoped that Pope emeritus Benedict will address this gap in his retirement.

In the Church’s transmission and development of Tradition, how biblical interpretation occurs opens or closes the door to the riches of that Tradition, including, and important for the female line in the Bible, Church-Centred Mariology. Ratzinger takes up Yves Congar’s pre-Vatican II thought on Tradition in the post Vatican II era. The context within each operated had significant influence on how that thought was presented. Congar, in *Tradition and Traditions*, fills substantial space considering key Protestant themes such as the sufficiency of Scripture (Congar 1966). Ratzinger’s discussion is a consideration of Catholic thought on Tradition in response to the post-Vatican II debate.<sup>16</sup> The principles of biblical interpretation applied by Ratzinger that open the riches of Church-Centred Mariology are threefold. First, the unity of the Bible: the 72 books of the Scripture are one book, and the role of theologians is to search for the one voice that runs through those books. Individual texts or books are not understood in isolation from each other, but only by considering the whole do we comprehend the whole. In that way, Scripture interprets Scripture (Ratzinger 1988c, pp. 11–14). A practical example of this principle would be to interpret John’s Gospel through Mark’s Gospel (4:33–34) as Jesus’ private conversations and activities with his closest collaborator.<sup>17</sup> Second, typology as the tool to interpret the fulfilment of the Old Testament through the New, a method already used by Israel to interpret the events of Israel’s history as types of future events: therefore, the exodus from Egypt is understood as a recapitulation of God’s victory over chaos and a future renewal of creation was expected. (Kelly 1977, p. 71) In typology, figures point to what is to come, to their fulfilment, so Christ is typologically interpreted as the fulfilment of Adam and Mary of Eve. The loss of typological exegesis has led to the loss of the unity of the Testaments. Third, the Church’s role in mediating Tradition means that every generation contributes to an ever-deepening understanding of God’s Self-Revelation. This means that the Church’s interpretation is ongoing; it did not end sometime in the past. Ratzinger, therefore, rejects the search for the original in Christianity as if it reflects something pure (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, p. 38). If anything it reflects something true but yet to be comprehended.

<sup>16</sup> On the issue of Tradition see (Ratzinger 2008b), in particular the article, “The Question of the Concept of Tradition: A Provisional Response”.

<sup>17</sup> “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.”

In contrast, he insists that, “Each generation, from the point of view of its own circumstances, is able to discover new dimensions of faith that even the Church did not know before.” (Ratzinger 2000, p. 38). Ratzinger’s identification of the female line in the Bible is one such new dimension.

Biblical interpretation in the modern era is dominated by what is described as the historical approach and the search for the historical Jesus. Ratzinger, while not setting history aside, is highly critical of what he sees as a methodology, while presenting itself as history, essentially undertaking philosophy, a philosophy which has pre-determined that the Gospel’s depiction is not that of the real historical life, ministry and death of Jesus. Scholars then proceed to produce hypotheses of what did happen, which are contradictory of each other and endlessly overturned by the latest ideas (Ratzinger 1988a). Moreover, Ratzinger insists that to believe Jesus is the Christ is beyond the realms of historical judgement. It is worth noting that Brown acknowledges this point. In his consideration of the Incarnation and Resurrection from a historical critical perspective, Brown maintains that these are eschatological events where “the limits of history yield to God’s freedom from space and time.” (Brown 1973, p. 50). Only faith can enable one to confess that Jesus is the Christ. Faith enables Ratzinger to accept that the Jesus of the Gospels is the real, human historical Jesus (Ratzinger 2007, pp. xix–xxiii, 78). Why? Primarily because Ratzinger trusts the testimony of the Gospels and Tradition the Church has transmitted. Faith opens history to God’s actions within the world. Ratzinger’s position, while currently a marginal view, goes to the heart of the problems with the historical critical method and reconstructions of Jesus. In the attempts to reconstruct a Jesus that is deemed to be probably or possibly the historical figure of Jesus, not only do scholars ignore that highly improbable and unlikely events happen—to scientists, our life on earth is highly improbable—(as an example, see Hawking and Mlodinow 2010, pp. 161–62, 164) two distortions occur. The figure becomes devoid of the eschatological dimension and data are rejected when they are thought to be contradictory, and hence not historical. In this process, scholars fail to perceive the Gospels and the testimony of Tradition as describing something like a mountain. Various descriptions from north, east, south and west, and from afar in the plains (Synoptic Gospels) or high up from the peak of the mountain (John’s Gospel) can appear radically different but are, in fact, from multiple different perspectives, describing one and the same mountain.

Ratzinger’s historical approach, in contrast, is twofold. First, it is to use history to understand history. This is evidenced in his Christological consideration of the meaning of the name of Bar Abbas, the prisoner Pilate released during Jesus’ trial, through the name Bar Kokhba (Star of the Son) who led the last messianic war (Ratzinger 2007, pp. 40–41). Another example is Ratzinger’s rejection of Augustine’s assertion that Mary took a vow of virginity. This rejection is based on the historical evidence of Jewish first century thought on virginity (Ratzinger 2012, pp. 34–35). Second, Ratzinger’s theology interprets the meaning of historical events, specifically the events described in the Gospels, the Incarnation, Jesus’ ministry, Crucifixion and Resurrection. These events, for Ratzinger, are the essence of the tension between the ontological and the historical that salvation history reconciles through Christ: Christ is the union of being and history (time). This union is, for Ratzinger, the mystery of salvation in human history, the meaning of the God-man’s being in time (Ratzinger 1987, pp. 153–90).

At the core of Ratzinger’s theological thinking and biblical interpretation is a hermeneutic of faith. That faith hermeneutic has four elements. First, God’s self-gift is given, it is a gift that is received, and God is known through our response to that gift. Specifically, Christian faith is the confession of the Triune God in communion with the Church as articulated by the Our Father, the liturgy, the Creed (Ratzinger 1987, pp. 131, 350). Second, faith as receiving God’s self-gift is ecclesial and hence communal. Ratzinger illustrates this communal aspect of faith in that we receive the sacraments from another person; they are never self-administered (Ratzinger 1987, pp. 27–32). Third, the God of faith is the God of a person, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Faith commenced with Abraham’s journey into the unknown land, and Israel’s faith is a remembrance of God’s deeds in the lives of its people, of God’s acts and continuing fulfilment of God’s promises. Jesus adds a new dimension to the faith of

Israel as the eternal Word of God. Seeing as Jesus sees enables us to see God's love. The God of faith, that is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus Christ, interacts with humanity and establishes a covenant with humanity. "Faith is our response to a word which engages us personally, to a "Thou" who calls us by name" (Francis 2013).<sup>18</sup> Fourth, faith is a light, not darkness, which offers knowledge of truth and love. Faith knowledge "is a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists." (Francis 2013, no. 27; Ratzinger 1987, pp. 67–69). Faith knowledge is a communal knowledge based on hearing God's Word, in contrast to the sight or seeing of Ancient Greek philosophy.

While Ratzinger may be criticised for not developing a more explicit hermeneutic of faith that fully illustrates how the faith hermeneutic operates in theology and biblical interpretation, it is this faith hermeneutic which enables him to accept Jesus as the Christ and to perceive Jesus' divine person in his human and divine natures. However, without a more formal methodology that explicitly outlines how and why the faith hermeneutic allows an understanding of history's mediation in the realm of ontology in Jesus Christ, the crisis of theology's rupture of faith and history will continue (Ratzinger 1987, p. 161). What is required is a "Theological Historical Method" that outlines principles of faith for theology's engagement with history. Such a faith hermeneutic would need to enable an understanding of how the union of the historical and ontological occurs in Jesus Christ. Edith Stein's considerations of faith in *Knowledge and Faith* (Stein 2000)<sup>19</sup> would be a valuable starting point, in conjunction with *Lumen Fidei*, for the development of such a theological historical method. However, without a parallel engagement with history that recognises that history is about human beings, not abstractions, such a method will flounder. History is about people of the past: their words, assessments, judgements and actions in relation to that of others. As such, history is personal and it is relational. History can never be understood in neat packages, in the abstract or through ideas, not least because of human freedom. History, indeed, reflects the free movement of human activity and thought within in time and space. History is about the particulars of what happen to specific individuals in the past, and we know of those particular historical events, words and deeds from people.<sup>20</sup> In the primacy of the particular, of human beings and of relationships, history and theology are rightly coupled in the same way that philosophy and poetry are coupled in the primacy given to universals. A history of particulars means that we can only know of those particulars from people, which means that testimony about people and events from credible witnesses is the essence of knowledge of history. The search for credible witnesses, rather than probable or possible data, is the raw material of the scholar. Scholars interpret that testimony to comprehend what happened among people in the past, what it meant then and what is its continuing meaning for humanity.

<sup>18</sup> *Lumen Fidei*, as acknowledged by Francis, is essentially the work of Pope Benedict XVI.

<sup>19</sup> See in particular "Husserl and Aquinas: A Comparison" and "Ways to Know God. The 'Symbolic Theology' of Dionysius the Areopagite and Its Objective Presuppositions". I develop the notion of a theological historical method, that incorporates Stein's thoughts on faith and knowledge, in my unpublished paper "Mary and the Trinity: Mother, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

<sup>20</sup> See Aristotle's comparison of history and poetry in chapter nine of *Poetics*: "The function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that would happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity. The historian and the poet are not distinguished by their use of verse or prose, it would be possible to turn the works of Herodotus into verse, and it would be a history in verse just as much as in prose. The distinction is this: one says what has happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen. For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The *universal* is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity; this is what poetry aims at, even though it applies individual names. The particular is the actions or experience of (e.g.,) Alcibiades." (Aristotle 1996), 9, 1451a36–51b12. Malcom Heath notes that for Aristotle particulars are "necessary precursors" to the more serious work of expressing universals undertaken by philosophy and poetry. *Ibid.* Lxix. It is apparent in Aristotle's comments on history in chapters 8 and 23 of *Poetics* that it is the lack of unity to the actions and events of history that make it unappealing: "An indeterminately large number of things happen to any one person, not all of which constitute a unity"; and histories "describe not a single action, but a single period of time i.e. all the events that occurred during that period involving one or more people, each of which has an arbitrary relation to the others. . . . One thing may follow another in succession over a period of time without their producing a single result". *Ibid.* 8, 1451a22–23 and 23, 1459a24–32. Also (Ranke 2011, pp. 4–25) and (Carr 1987).

### 3. The Female Line in the Old Testament

[I]n the Old Testament, alongside the line from Adam through the Patriarchs down to the Servant of God, there appears another line from Eve through the Matriarchs to figures like Deborah, Esther, Ruth and finally to the personified Divine Wisdom...

In his identification of a female line, Ratzinger does not provide a comprehensive account of each of the women identified as part of the female line in the Old Testament. However, in the corpus of his writing is individual consideration of the women of the Old Testament and what they mean for salvation history. The most important of these considerations is *Daughter Zion* (Ratzinger [1977] 1983). Five themes in relation to the women of the Old Testament are evident across his corpus of writings, all of which reflect a fundamental aspect of his overall theological thought, God's relationship with humanity mediated through Israel and the Church. First, God as Creator and the human being as God's creation and as creature. Second, the dialectical phenomenon of the unblest-blessed. Third, faith and grace. Fourth, the bridal people of God. Fifth, God's covenant with Israel. It is not possible here to go into detail on these five themes, which are addressed in detail in my book *Innovation within Tradition Joseph Ratzinger's Reading of the Women of Scripture*. (McKenna 2015, pp. 135–63) What I intend to do here instead is discuss two areas of the female line of the Old Testament to highlight crucial aspects of Ratzinger's thinking on salvation history and the women of the female line of the Old Testament. These are Creation and the Fall, and Wisdom.

The Genesis story of creation answers, for Ratzinger, the question of who is the human being.<sup>21</sup> Adam is the human and is representative of all humanity, not a single male individual. "The picture which describes the origin of Adam is valid for each human in the same way. Each human is Adam, a new beginning; the origin of each human being is a creation" (Ratzinger 1989a, pp. 206–207).<sup>22</sup> Ratzinger understands the meaning of God's creation of the human being to be that humanity is created for relationship with God: humanity is created from dust in intra-divine dialogue, with God's breath giving life to Adam. As per the Pauline Augustine movement in his theology, for Ratzinger, Christ is the full revelation of what it means to be human. It is John's creation account that is understood as the conclusive Scriptural account of creation (Jn 1:1,3). This Johannine interpretation is also applied to the creation of Eve. While Ratzinger understands Eve to represent life, even if this is ambiguous due to death, he typologically links the taking of Eve from Adam's side to the piercing of Christ's side and the creation of the new community of the Church. Eve is the formation of a new humankind. Adam is "no longer a single individual but 'Adam' from whose side, Eve, a new mankind is formed." (Ratzinger [1968] 2004, pp. 241–42).

What can be extrapolated from Ratzinger's interpretation of Scripture's accounts of creation is that the female line does not just represent the women of the Bible, but also communal life, humanity as community. The male line represents, likewise, a dual mode of humanity, the male of the Bible and the human being. Integral to Ratzinger's interpretation of creation and of the whole of salvation history is the subsequent sin and alienation of humanity from God, and hence from each other, that he understands to occur at the Fall: original sin is humanity's attempt at rejecting the finitude and limitations of being created. Where human beings seek to be autonomous and attempt to break away from being human, creatures of God, the abuse of power among human beings replaces the relational communal humanity that is the image of God (Ratzinger 1995a, pp. 67–71). Humanity is not just very good (Gen 1:31), since the Fall humanity is mired in sin, a sin that God overcomes. That is the history of salvation of which the male and female lines in the Bible speak.

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger presents his interpretation of creation in *'In the Beginning...': A Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall* which is a series of Lenten homilies given in 1981 and subsequently published in German in 1986 and first in English in 1990. These homilies are a response to modern theologies that he believes have abandoned the doctrine of creation, criticizing two works in particular for their reductionist positions.

<sup>22</sup> This article is based on two addresses he gave in 1988. See (Ratzinger [1968] 2004, pp. 234–35).

Divine Wisdom appears near the conclusion of the Old Testament. These texts, Ratzinger notes, are linked to Mary not by the New Testament, as per Church-Centred Mariology, but by the Church's liturgy. Early in his career, reflective of the influence of the Liturgical movement and his concern for ecumenism, he was critical of this link, thinking Wisdom should only be interpreted with Christ. He later came to see the importance of the liturgy's linkage of Mary and Wisdom for the whole Christological mystery, seeing that the Liturgical movement had misjudged the full meaning of the Wisdom texts. As he says:

From the view point of the New Testament, wisdom refers, on one side, to the Son as the Word, in whom God creates, but on the other side to the creature, to the true Israel, who is personified in the humble maid whose whole existence is marked by the attitude of the *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*. Sophia refers to the Logos, the Word who establishes wisdom, and also to the womanly answer which receives wisdom and brings it to fruition. (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, p. 27).

Ratzinger's interpretation of Wisdom encompasses God's creation of and continuing relationship with humanity, and concretises his theological thought in the men and women of salvation history. This enables him to avoid the abstract interpretation of Mary as feminine or as the eternal feminine/woman offered by some of his close collaborators, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri De Lubec and Louis Bouyer, that, as we saw above, distorts the *Christian* insights on person, the female and on Mary and the Church (McKenna 2015, pp. 174–78). What is apparent from Ratzinger's considerations is that Church-Centred Mariology, and, through it, the female line in the Bible, provide the appropriate place to further interpret the relationship of Mary, and hence the Church, with the Wisdom texts. Exploring how Wisdom relates to Mary as both Theotokos and type of the Church, and to the Church as the body of Christ with Christ as its head, provides the resources required to further explore the liturgy's interpretation of Mary with Wisdom. What is striking is that the female line and the male line of the Bible come together in Wisdom, the penultimate figure to the Word become flesh through Mary's collaborative Yes to God. Wisdom, by incorporating the male and female lines of the Bible, encompasses the Human line in the Bible in one figure.

#### 4. The Female Line in the New Testament

The line from Adam receives its full meaning in Christ. Similarly, the significance of the female line in its inseparable interaction with the Christological mystery is revealed in Mary and in the symbolism applied to the Church.

The female line in the New Testament consists of Mary and her symbolism of the Church; Mary is not just one among other women of Scripture but a unique figure who plays an essential role in salvation history. Mary's response to God, her yes, and the Incarnation, God become flesh, are the fundamental elements of Ratzinger's Mariology and the pinnacle of his "female line in the Bible." They are the culmination of the relationship God commenced with Israel through Abraham, and Mary's Yes is the culmination of Israel's faith. This view of Mary is a rejection of the arguments that Mary is an infiltration of pagan religious ideas into Christian faith and theology and the argument that Mary endangers Christology.<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger insists that Mariology is required for Christology to be as radical as it truly is: the one divine person in a fully divine and a fully human nature. Equally, Christ is the fundamental principle of a theology of Mary. Ratzinger's Mariology builds upon Rene Laurentin's work, particularly that on Luke's infancy narrative, and on John's description of Mary as woman.

The archangel Gabriel's address to Mary and his words, "You are Full of Grace", is the core of Ratzinger's interpretation of Mary. This form of address, Ratzinger notes, is present four times in the

<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger specifically calls out Küng on this point. (Ratzinger [1977] 1983), p. 10, n. 1.

Old Testament, and each time it is an announcement of messianic joy: Zeph. 3:14; Joel 2:21; Zech. 9:9; and Lam. 4:21. Ratzinger interprets this to mean that Mary personifies what was prophesied: Mary is daughter of Zion in person. She links Israel and the Church:

Mary is identified with the daughter of Zion, with the bridal people of God. Everything said in the Bible about the Ecclesia is true of Mary, and vice versa: what the Church is and shall be, she discovers concretely by looking at Mary. Mary is her Mirror, the pure measure of the Church's being, because she stands completely within the boundaries of Christ and God, and is "indwelt" by him. And why else should the Ecclesia exist except to become God's dwelling on earth? (Ratzinger 1989b, pp. 56–58, at 58).

Ratzinger's interpretation demonstrates the fundamental role Mary plays in Christianity from the very beginning of the New Covenant, and that Church-Centred Mariology is present in the Gospels and testimony of Tradition. Moreover, the Fathers' understanding of Mary as the type of the Church means that, while the Fathers' first developed ecclesiology, what Tradition later says of Mary is present in the Fathers' ecclesiology: Virgo Ecclesia, the Mater Ecclesia, the Ecclesia Immaculata, the Ecclesia Assumpta. (Ratzinger 1988b, p. 74).

Ratzinger notes that a change of emphasis on Mary arose in the twelfth century with Bernard of Clairvaux's Marian writings. Bernard's theology of Mary fused Patristic ecclesiology with the teachings of Mary from Christology (Bernard of Clairvaux 1993). However, over time, this meant that the Gospel's and the Fathers' Church-Centred Mariology became obscure, with negative impacts for Mary and Catholic theology as a whole. A core theological root of Tradition was lost when the Church became forgetful of Church-Centred Mariology, which meant that Mariology and the four Marian dogmas were perceived by some as alien to Christian thought. Ratzinger maintains that the first two dogmas, Mary's Virginity and Motherhood of God, are historical facts which are ecclesial confessions, while the latter two, the Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption, are theological facts that venerate, not worship, Mary. For Ratzinger, the four Marian dogmas become apparent when the Bible, Old and New Testament, is viewed as a unity, and when typology is used for interpretation. Ultimately, the dogmas speak of God's actions in relation to humanity and are primarily Christological in nature, reflecting the apex of the female line in the Bible. In that apex, the biological aspect is integral to the dogmas (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 32–61; Ratzinger 1988b, pp. 74–77; Ratzinger 2000, p. 303).

The meaning of Mary's Virginity is God's new involvement in history, new creation in old creation. It is, Ratzinger maintains, at once a continuation of the unexpected yet fully biological births of the Matriarchs of the female line in the Old Testament, while also a fulfilment of them in that it is God's power over matter, not humanity's actions, that bring about the Incarnation. It is a theology of grace and salvation (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 47–50; Ratzinger [1968] 2004, pp. 277–78). Mary's motherhood of God reflects that she is at the centre of salvation history, the point where the Incarnation occurs and the Word becomes flesh. However, this always remains a statement on the Christological mystery:

"the moment she utters her Yes [at the Annunciation], Mary is Israel in person, she is the Church in person and as person. Doubtless, she is this personal concretisation of the Church by physically becoming the Mother of the Lord through her Fiat. But this biological fact is theological reality in that it realises the most profound spiritual content of the Covenant which God wishes to make with Israel." (Ratzinger 1988b, p. 75).

Ratzinger views Mary's motherhood of God as the most concrete expression of the faith's interconnectedness. Mary is not a stand-alone figure. Neither is Christ a figure who appears of God's own volition. God sought a response from Israel and God received that response from Mary, Daughter of Zion. Mary's faith is the faith of the history of Israel.

Ratzinger positions the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which states that Mary was preserved from sin, in a twofold perspective: in relation to Original Sin and the Adam—Christology typology—and in relation to Mary as daughter of Zion who is full of grace. Mary being preserved from

sin did not in any way negate the freedom of Mary's yes at the Annunciation. Mary's yes, for Ratzinger, is part of a dialogue of yeses. God's yes to humanity and Israel's yes to God: "God's judgment about her is pure 'Yes,' just as she herself stands before him as a pure 'Yes.' This correspondence of God's 'Yes' with Mary's being as 'Yes' is the freedom from original sin." (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, p. 70). The biblical roots of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception are apparent when Mary is typologically interpreted and understood as the type of the Church: as Ambrose stated in the 4th century, Mary is "the type of the Church, since each is a virgin unspotted (Virgo Immaculata)." (Rahner [1951] 2004, p. 19).<sup>24</sup>

The Bodily Assumption of Mary into Heaven is, Ratzinger acknowledges, an especially difficult dogma. The difficulty is not theological. The assumption is clearly distinguished from the resurrection of Jesus, and the veneration the dogma provides Mary gives the dogma its orientation. Such veneration was prophesied by Luke: "Behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 72–75) The difficulty of the dogma, as Ratzinger perceives it, relates to understanding the terms body and heaven and how those terms relate to humanity's future. As Ratzinger understands it, Mary is in full communion with God and this grace means a new bodily existence (Ratzinger 2000, p. 305). However, Mary stands for the Church, so this new body also applies to the Church:

"[S]he who is wholly baptized, as the personal reality of the true Church, is at the same time not merely the Church's promised certitude of salvation but its bodily certitude also. The Church is already saved in her: the new Israel is no more to be rejected. It has already ascended into heaven." (Ratzinger [1977] 1983, pp. 80–81).

The implication of the Assumption for Ratzinger is that it justifies the expansion of Marian Spirituality beyond Advent, which is its liturgical locus, to the whole of Christian faith: "Advent expands into the eschaton." (Ratzinger 1988b, pp. 78–79). The Marian dogmas are controversial not just from the perspective of the world and other Christian communities, but also within Catholic thought. Ratzinger's notion of the female line in the Bible provides a hermeneutic that demonstrates how each of the four dogmas rightly fits within Christian theology. From the principles of Tradition and its interpretation tools in conjunction with Christology and ecclesiology, Mary's place in faith and theology is illuminated. Both the impact of the loss of Church-Centred Mariology and the importance for theology of its rediscovery are apparent from the reception of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption.

## 5. Mary as Person

Ratzinger, time and again, refers to Mary as person. This specifically Christian insight of person as relation is the connecting tissue of Ratzinger's thinking on both the Triune God and his wider theology. It speaks of God, and, through Christ, it speaks to the fullest potential of humanity. Ratzinger maintains that the notion of person arises from the Fathers' answers to two questions: what is the God of Scripture and who is Christ? In answering these questions, the Fathers' discovered the phenomenon of intra-divine dialogue, and it is this phenomenon that person denotes. Ratzinger describes person in God as the deed of generation, which is the pure reality of act or pure act-being. God is "the act of relativity toward the other. In God, person is the pure relativity of being turned toward the other." (Ratzinger 1990, p. 444). These relations are described by Ratzinger to be being-for (Father), being-from (Son) and being-with (Holy Spirit) (Ratzinger 1996b, p. 28). Ratzinger notes that relation is a new category that moves beyond the Aristotelian category of substance. Moreover, this category is not, as scholastic theology thought, Christ's unique ontology, but rather is fully applicable to humanity through Christ (Ratzinger 1990, p. 445).

<sup>24</sup> Hugo Rahner takes this quote from Ambrose's commentary on Luke II, 7 (Corpus Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum 32, 4, 45).

The potential of human beings to be person, by being in relatedness without reserve, allows communion with the Triune God. In speaking of Mary as person, Ratzinger takes up the description of person in God. Person expresses what being full of grace means:

“Mary is a person who is totally open, who has made herself wholly receptive, and has placed herself, keenly and without limits, without fear of her own destiny, in the hands of God. It also means she lives entirely out of and within her relationship with God.” (Ratzinger 1989b, p. 60).

Relation, communion and dialogue are at the core of Ratzinger understanding of person and he draws on Luke’s narrative of Mary’s meditative prayer to illustrate what this means for her. Mary dialogues with God’s messenger, she listens and asks questions, and then, pondering these words, she holds them together. It is by putting these words together that the meaning unfolds for her. She does not grasp for an immediate understanding. It is through Mary being person, being in relationship, dialogue and communion with God, that the Triune nature of God becomes known to humanity. While Ratzinger acknowledges the phenomenon of complete relatedness, person is only fully realised in Jesus Christ (Ratzinger 1990, p. 445). Mary demonstrates for the Church and the world what it means to be a person: “she is permeable to God, ‘habitable.’ She lives so that she is a place for God.” (Ratzinger 1990, p. 458). This is the Church of yesterday, today and tomorrow. At the pinnacle of the female line in the Bible, as with the male line, stands a person, Mary, and through her the Church, the body of Christ, who live in relation to God without reserve.

## 6. The Female Line in the Bible—Innovation within Tradition<sup>25</sup>

Ratzinger’s identification of a Female Line in the Bible is a practical example of how a development of Tradition occurs. In response to contemporary concerns, Tradition responds, and the effort to develop a response offers opportunities to perceive what had previously remained hidden or obscure in Tradition, but which, nonetheless, was always an element of Tradition. The quest for the inner logic of faith continues today and tomorrow and is, in part, driven by the concerns of the contemporary society. The female line in the Bible is the result of such a modern quest and can be understood as an innovation within Tradition. Innovation within tradition occurs in a twofold process: first, aspects of Tradition are uncovered, brought to the surface and given light, and second, aspects of Tradition, whether new or old or a combination of both, are placed together in new or different ways. The combination of these processes leads to a deepening of understanding of Tradition as new light is shed on the Church’s comprehension of the totality of God’s Self Revelation.

What the female line demonstrates is that the women of Scripture are integral to the history of salvation. The implications of this have yet to be fully worked out and should be the focus not just of feminist or female theologians of varying stripes, but of theology as a whole. The full implications of the interconnectivity of the Trinitarian, Christological and Ecclesiological aspects of Mary, illustrated by her title of Theotokos and her typological interpretation as type of the Church, have laid dormant in Tradition. This title and interpretation are not hers, but reflect Mary’s unique relationship with the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> The female line in the Bible illustrates how Mary connects the Old Covenant with the New Covenant, the Bridle People of God with the Church, and illuminates the path of salvation from the Fall to Redemption and the Church’s continuing role in that salvation. It is from here that three areas for exploration suggest themselves.

First, is the development of the Christian understanding of Mother in relation to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Mary is Theotokos, the Mother of God, because she gave birth to the human

<sup>25</sup> I have taken the opportunity in this section to develop some of the arguments made in *Innovation within Tradition*. Those developments do not revise the original arguments; instead I have attempted to more fully draw out the implications of those arguments.

<sup>26</sup> I present some initial thoughts on the integration of Mary with wider theological thought in (McKenna 2016).

nature of the divine person of the Logos. (Gambero 1999, pp. 233–59, at 239).<sup>27</sup> The Logos as Son took flesh from the Mother, the Mother and the Son united their wills to the Father's will through the activity of the Holy Spirit. We know of no Son without the Mother. There is no Mother without the intra-divine dialogue and acts of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mother in relation to God is the human being's act of personhood, the uniting of the will with that of the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, and the consequent birth of Christ in that person's being. God is provided space in the lives of human beings, and hence the world, through a person's Yes to God.

Second, the development of a formal explicit resource within Tradition to prune distorting traditions from Tradition that Ratzinger identified (Ratzinger 1969, pp.193) that *Dei Verbum* failed to provide. An element of form for this resource is offered through the Human Line in the Bible. In applying the Human Line in the Bible to Tradition, to the criteria of Jesus is added another criterion, that of the Bridle People of God and the Church: The humanity is set within the communion of persons. A test case of how the Human Line in the Bible may act as a resource for pruning distorting traditions is how the Church understands the birth of Jesus from Mary: in light of the Human Line in the Bible, how is that birth to be interpreted? Is it a fully human birth or miraculous birth? Or a combination of both? Adam is the human being and Jesus Christ as the final Adam, one person in two natures who is fully human and fully divine, is the fullest realisation of humanity. While, at the start of the female line (Gen 3:16) and at the close of the female line, the woman gives birth in labour pangs (Rev 12:2). How should these aspects of the human line relate to the apex of that line with the birth of God's Incarnate Word from Mary? This is different to the question of how Mary's Virginity should be understood vis-à-vis her physical birth-giving of Jesus: is virginity to be equated to the process of physical birth or should virginity and child birth be understood as two distinct realities? As with all questions about Mary, it is truly a question about Jesus, and it is with Jesus that answers are to be found. The inner parallels between the Incarnation and birth of Jesus and the death and Resurrection of Jesus means that answers to questions about the Incarnation and birth of Jesus are to be informed by the death and Resurrection of Jesus. Such an approach will guide the Church to approximate conclusions on this difficult topic. Jesus' fully human death on the Cross points to Jesus' fully human birth from Mary.

Third, in opening up new perspectives on salvation history, the female line in the Bible opens an opportunity for fresh perspectives on Christian anthropology. There is no Christian understanding of humanity without an understanding of male and female as the image of God. Equally, Jesus Christ as the final Adam offers a vision of the full potential of humanity, and does so through Mary's Yes and the communion of persons that is the Church. A Christian anthropology is an anthropology of person in communion orientated through God to others. As humanity is the image of God, humanity's glimpses of God are distorted where humanity is understood through one line, male or female, alone. Female imagery of God, such as the womb, makes full sense in this perspective.<sup>28</sup> The Human line in the Bible is made up of the persons, male and female, of Salvation History. The male line represents both man and "the humanity", while the female line represents woman and "the community" human beings need for life. This Human Line in the Bible represents humanity's journey from creation which is "very good" (Gen 1:31) and the Fall (Gen 3:1-7). The Human Line in the Bible, in the journey towards salvation and its realisation through Israel, Mary, Christ and the Church, is the antidote to the implications of the Fall. Only in this way can "humanarchy" be truly overcome. Humanarchy is to be understood as the human disposition to subject others to oneself and one's interests, of which

<sup>27</sup> In response to Nestorius, Cyril of Alexandria stated that: "That is why they do not hesitate to call the holy Virgin *Theotokos*, not in the sense that the divine nature of the Word took its origin from the holy Virgin, but in the sense that he took his holy body, gifted with a rational soul, from her. Yet, because the Word is hypostatically united to this body, one can say that he was truly born according to the flesh". Cyril of Alexandria, Letter II to Nestorius. Gambero sites *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* (Paris: Migne, pp. 1841–64) G 77, 44–49; *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz and J. Straub (Berlin 1914-) 1, 1, 1, 25–28.

<sup>28</sup> Ratzinger highlights Scripture's use of womb imagery to describe God in his article "You are full of grace" and his book *Jesus of Nazareth* (Ratzinger 1989b, pp. 67–68; 2007, p. 139).

patriarchy is but only one subset of many. Adam's subjugation of others means that this subjugation is a potential of and for each Adam: each Adam has the potential, in various simultaneous scenarios, to be both the subjugator and subjugated.

The journey of salvation history from the creation of Adam and Eve and the Fall, all the way through the figures of the Old Testament to Wisdom and then Mary's Yes and the Word become flesh, is a journey open to each one of us. Each of us is Adam and we each live within a community of human beings. From the Fall we have been alienated from God and from each other, through humanity's rejection of its own limits. We, as individual Adams and as communities of Adams, subjugate others to our will. Yet, when we hear God's voice and if we listen to it, in our respond to God we have the potential to be ever more in communion with God. That is not to say that at times we abandon God, like an unfaithful spouse, but God always awaits for each Adam to return to the covenant, so that one day we too may say yes to God, and like Paul can declare, "it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives within me". The journey of salvation is our journey too, and while this journey is a personal journey, that journey can only occur through the communion of faith.

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