

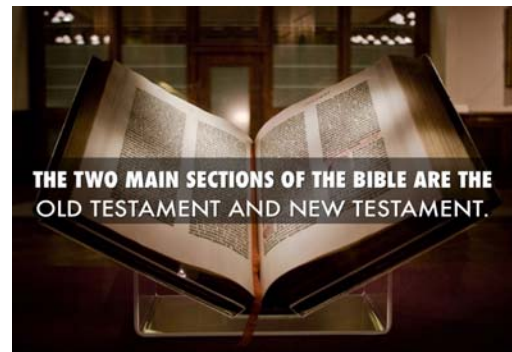
The Third Testament

- Part One -

Liben Mekonnen Gebremikael

If one asks the question, 'How many testaments are there?', one is most likely to get 'two' as an answer. The Old and the New Testaments – the two sections that divide the Bible. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Testament is defined as "something that serves as a sign or evidence of a specified fact, event or quality; covenant between God and the human race and finally either of the two main divisions of the Bible".¹

Even though God made several covenants or agreements with humankind, there are the two covenants that are foundational to Judo-Christian beliefs. The Mosaic covenant established at Mt Sinai through the giving of the 'Law' and the covenant of 'Grace' (to borrow Paul's language) established through Jesus Christ. It is on the basis of these two foundational covenants that the Bible is divided into these two sections – the Old and the New Testaments. The other main covenants are:



- The covenant made with Abraham under which God promised him blessings and a great nation,
- The covenant made with Noah stated as follows - "I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there a flood to destroy the earth" [Genesis 9:11]; and
- The Davidic Covenant assuring him of an everlasting kingdom through the coming of the Messiah.

Christian doctrine institutes that the 'Law' that was given to be observed within the Jewish context in the Old Testament has been replaced or superseded by the New Testament, the new covenant established through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the sins of many – "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is **the new covenant in my blood**, which is poured out for you'" [Luke 22:20. Also in Mark 14:24 and Matthew 26:28]. We find several passages in the New Testament books underlining this position. In particular, Paul writes in Romans 3:21, "But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe". The promises and premises of the New Testament not only supersede the Old Testament but they are

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/testament>



also superior and more glorious. This theme is accentuated by the writer of Hebrews as depicted in the table below.

| Old Testament | Passage in Hebrews | New Testament |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| God spoke through Prophets | Chap 1 | God spoke through his son |
| Moses as a servant | Chap 3 | Jesus as a son |
| Sabbath as rest | Chap 4 | Everlasting rest |
| High Priest from the generations of Levi | Chap 8 | Higher order of high priest |
| Sacrifice of animal blood | Chap 9 | Sacrifice of Christ's blood |
| Earthly tabernacle/temple/holy of holies | Chap 9 | Heavenly temple/holy of holies |
| <p><u>Key Verse</u></p> <p><i>"But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises".</i></p> <p><i>Hebrews 8:6</i></p> | | |

So why give this article the title 'The Third Testament'?

For some Christian denominations such as the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, it appears that the 'Bible' – or more precisely their accepted doctrine of the faith - contains a third testament. I am not as familiar of the Catholic Church doctrine and dogma as I am of the Orthodox Church. Particularly the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (known as the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church) under which I grew up as a child and young adult but also had the opportunity to read and research into its belief and practices for over 15 years now.

You may have sensed where this article is going from the various image clips I have placed at the bottom of the pages. I am (re)stating the fact that the doctrine of Mary's redemptive role as maintained in the above mentioned Christian denominations effectively establishes a 'Third Testament'. And this will be discussed further below. Before delving into the discussion, however, let me just share how I ended up sitting in front of my laptop with books and articles spread all over my study table.

It was only less than a year ago that I published my second book titled 'የተሻለ እውነት በደብዳቤ' – 'Yeteshale Ewenet Bedebdabe'. It discusses the various non-biblical beliefs, practices and rituals that exist in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). I have included historical information on how magical practices and pagan rituals have slowly entered the belief, doctrine and teachings of the EOTC. One such discussed point is the teaching through which the story of Mary's death and assumption into heaven maintains that she had obtained a 'Covenant' (hence a newer testament) from her son Jesus Christ.



This 'covenant' is known as the 'Covenant of Mercy' - ኪዳነ ምሕረት². It is a covenant that guarantees mercy and forgiveness of sins to anyone who approaches Mary, the mother of Jesus, in prayer. The teaching maintains that she beseeched Jesus Christ to grant her this covenant because she was chosen to conceive him and carry him for 9 months and 5 days, because she nursed him for four years, because she carried him and was forced to go into exile and suffered hunger and thirst; so on and so forth. She also implores him to consider her lips that kissed him, her ears that heard his word and message, consider the angels that worship him etc.. One such consideration she mentions in her pleading, which ignited an inquisitive desire in me and led me to research for my book in the first place, was the mention of the names of his 'five' wounds [አምስቱ ቅንዎተ መስቀል] - ሳዶር፣ አለዶር፣ ዳናት፣ አዴራ and ሮዳስ - Sador, Alador, Danat, Adera and Rodas – a corrupted version of the famous magical palindrome 'Sator, Arepo, Tenet, Opera, and Rotas'³.



With this as background context, in recent times, I begun to pay attention to pictures/photos that were being posted on facebook [many of which I have now placed at the bottom of this article's pages]. Most of these pictures describe or present Mary as the 'mediator or intercessor' - አማላጅ, describe or commemorate her feasts days – birth [ልደታ], assumption [ፍልሰታ], the giving of the covenant [ኪዳነ ምሕረት]. But then, just like the magical palindrome mentioned above, a few pictures that bore the statement 'No one can be saved without the intercession/mediation of the Virgin Mary' – 'ያለ ማርያም አማላጅነት ዓለም አይድንም' caught my attention. I asked:

- "How does this stand against the Covenant of Grace instituted by Christ through his blood?"
- "How does this stand against Acts 4:12 which states – 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved'?"
- "How about – 'For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people' – found in 1 Timothy 2:5?"
- "What and when is the origin of such belief and statement?"

And then, after I started preparing the first draft of this article, I came across more pictures. I am not sure if there is an increasing trend in postings of such pictures or it is just my increased interest that is finding more pictures. In any case, the recent picture that attracted, once again, my interest was one that had the following statement:

² ኪዳነ ምሕረት essentially becomes her (The Virgin Mary's) name.

³ የተሻለ እውነት በደብዳቤ - Yeteshale Ewenet Bedebdabe contains detailed information and discussion including the gaps in historical and theological arguments.



"Rejoice in Mary Always!" – "ሁልጊዜ በማርያም ደስ ይበላችሁ!"

Again I asked:

- "Is this not the same theme as Philippians 4:4 *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say again. Rejoice!"*
- "Is there a subtle/subliminal statement here suggesting that Mary has substituted or superseded what Jesus has accomplished on the cross for the redemption of our sins according to the will and plan of God?"
- "Is this what is meant by Mary being the Queen of Heaven?"
- Is this what is maintained by the Catholic and Orthodox churches when it is stated *"Finally the immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things⁴?"*

These are the questions that led me to read up more than I had done before and write up this article. In the Part Two of the article, we will review the origin and development of Mariology – the study or doctrine related to the Virgin Mary.⁵

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church – The Profession of the Christian faith –

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/mary/main-marian-documents-of-the-church/the-assumption-catechism-of-the-catholic-church/>

⁵ Merriam-Webster definition – www.merriam-webster.com



The Third Testament

- Part Two -

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So when did the doctrine of the Virgin Mary become practiced and prominent in the church? When do evidences of teachings, practices, and rituals point to the origin of Mariology? What are the elements of Mariology? These will be some of the questions that Part Two of this article is attempting to tackle.

Mention of the Virgin Mary in the New Testament [compared to her prominence in current Catholic and Orthodox Churches dogma and practices] is very scant. Paul makes reference to her once in his letter to Galatians (earlier book of the NT written around 57 AD); *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law"* (Galatians 4:4). Mark in his Gospel mentions her twice – *"Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him"* (Mark 3:31) and; *"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"* (Mark 6:3). The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to John (the last one to be written, probably around 90 AD) mentions her twice – once at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-12) and once at the cross (John 19:25-27). The Acts of the Apostle mentions her presence in the upper room together with the disciples. Mathew (as in Luke) in his account recounts the birth of Jesus Christ. His purpose is to demonstrate to his audience that Jesus Christ is the 'Messiah King' according to the prophecies of the Old Testament. And so, he tells us how Mary was pregnant while still a virgin even though she was engaged to Joseph (as the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14). He also tells us the story of the wise men finding Jesus with his mother Mary when they find him and pay homage to him (Mathew 2:11).



his mother Mary when they find him and pay homage to him (Mathew 2:11).

Of all the books of the New Testament, however, it is the Gospel according to Luke that has the most elaborate account of the infancy and Mary. It might be a good plan to consider the passages in Luke in three parts. 1) The annunciation account, 2) Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth and the 'Magnificat' (Mary's song of praise), and 3) Jesus' circumcision, dedication and the time he got lost after the family's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is also the passages in Luke (mainly) and the two passages in the John (mentioned above) that tend to be used as evidence and theological argument point to support Mariological doctrines.



What are the elements of the doctrines of Mariology?

1. **The Mother of God – Theotokos.** The English term ‘Mother of God’ (ወላዲተ አምላክ) is a paraphrase of the Greek term ‘Theotokos’; a compound of two Greek words, θεός "God" and τόκος "childbirth." Literally, this translates as "God-bearer" or "the one who gives birth to God."⁶

It is safe to say that the term *Theotokos* started to be used from the 3rd Century onwards. It is also maintained that the origin of or initial reason for the usage of the term *Theotokos* was more Christological than Mariological. It will be recalled that the heretical challenge that the Early Church faced was surrounding the nature of Jesus Christ. Is he divine? Is he human? Is he both divine and human [*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God And the Word became flesh and lived among us*” – *John 1:1-3 and 1:14*]. The logic would have been such that if Jesus Christ is God and Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ then Mary is the Mother of God.⁷

Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople between 428 and 431 AD, argued against Mary being called *Theotokos*. He rather suggested the title *Christotokos* – Mother of Christ; since God could not have originated from Mary. This was seriously and vehemently opposed by Cyril of Alexandria for fear that it would mean to divide the nature of Christ. The debate was settled at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD with Cyril winning the debate and the title of *Theotokos* being confirmed. Nestorius was ex-communicated. However, the Council of Ephesus did not settle the original and underlying controversy over the nature of Christ which led to the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Alexandrian camp maintained that in Christ the two natures of Christ (divine and human) existed as united. The West maintained that the two natures of Christ co-existed without division or confusion. Hence, the schism between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Hence, also the reason why we have the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church. All this to say that the origin of the usage and later controversy over the title of Mary was not so much about her but more about Christ, his nature and Christological doctrine.

According to John Chrysostom also known as “The Golden Mouth” –
የሱህስ አፈወርቅ - *“The Son of God has no father and no mother. But how? Yes, He is without a father according to his earthly generation; he is without a mother according to his heavenly generation. For he had neither a father on earth nor a mother in heaven.”*

⁶ <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Theotokos>

⁷ Cyril of Alexandria wrote, "I am amazed that there are some who are entirely in doubt as to whether the holy Virgin should be called *Theotokos* or not. For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how is the holy Virgin who gave [Him] birth, not [*Theotokos*]?" (Epistle 1, to the monks of Egypt; PG 77:13B).



As time went on, this title, unrelated to the historical origin and usage, begun to reflect an elevated status of the Virgin Mary. Because she can be called Mother of God, she now holds the second most honored place and is the most honored person since creation after her Son even more elevated from angels.

2. **The Immaculate Conception:** Put very briefly, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception maintains that Mary was born without sin. It is very clear that such doctrine or teaching will not be found in any of the books that are canonically accepted as being authoritative [i.e. the Bible including the apocryphal or second canonical books]. The source for such account is found in the Secret Book of James also known as the *Infancy gospel of James* or the *Protoevangelium of James*.

When we study early church history including the development of Christian doctrine or church teachings, particularly as it relates to the Virgin Mary, it becomes evident that there seems to be a slow and gradual development and addition of elements of the doctrine of Mary. Up until the late second and early third Century, no doctrine or church teaching exists as to the status of Mary, the veneration attributed to her, or her role in the redemption and salvation of mankind. All controversies and apologies were focused on the Trinitarian and Christological teachings of the faith. Once it was established that Jesus was God - the second person of the Trinity, the discussion and debate followed towards establishing how the divine and human nature existed in the one person of Jesus Christ. And if Jesus was God then Mary can be called *Theotokos*. And if Jesus is God and Mary can be called *Theotokos*, then Mary must have been without sin since Jesus was without sin. If she was to be without sin then she was born without sin from her parents Anne and Joachim – the story found in the *Infancy Gospel of James* (written in the second century)⁸.

In the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, "*He cleansed Eve's body and sanctified it and made for it a dwelling in her for Adam's salvation. She (i.e. Mary) was born without blemish, for He made her pure, without pollution, and she redeemed his debt without carnal union and embrace.... Through the transgression of Eve we died and were buried, and by the purity of Mary we receive honour and are exalted to the heights*"⁹.

⁸ This hypothesis is suggested because prior to the second century we find no evidence to suggest that this was the doctrine held or teachings given by the church.

⁹ Kebra Negest - ክብረ ነገሥት - 96 Concerning the Prophecy about Christ



Let us now turn our attention to biblical references given as evidence of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Remember earlier I said that it is the Gospel of Luke that is most elaborate in the Infancy account. Well, it is also Luke that is mostly used to justify the veneration appropriated to Mary as well as evidence for the various elements of the doctrine of Mariology. One such evidence for the purity and sinless birth of Mary is the the angel Gabriel's greetings: "*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee blessed art though among women*" (Luke 1:28). The phrase *full of grace* - kecharitōmenē Κεχαριτωμένη renders a sense of 'perfection of grace'.

"Mary was chosen as the woman who would bring Christ into the world, in that sense she was highly favored or "has been graced" or "has been favored" for that great purpose. She was set apart for that task and God put His favor and grace on her for that purpose. That's why He made her sinless, because that was fitting to simply make ONE woman (the Mother of God) by grace to be what Eve was before the Fall and what all of us would have been but for that Fall: sinless"¹⁰.

It is very interesting and even telling, that Luke, the author of the Gospel, never mentions nor alludes to such a concept or teaching. If this was a view and a doctrine held by the early church fathers as their teaching or preaching, I am sure that Luke would have started his account from the Immaculate Conception, from the story of Anne and Joachim. In his own words, Luke explains his primary purpose for writing his Gospel:

"Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating *everything* carefully *from the very first*, to write an *orderly account for you*, most excellent Theophilus, so that you *may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed*" (Luke 1:1-4)

Even if we accept the dogma of Immaculate Conception – it must relate to Mary's preparation to conceive Jesus Christ for the incarnation – pointing to her being a vessel. She is the instrument that God used for his plan. That was her ministry and like any other chosen and blessed individual (Abraham, Noah, Moses, prophets, John the Baptiste etc...) their ministry ends with their departure to meet their Almighty God... and her purity is between her and God, between her and Jesus Christ – what implications does it have or should it have as it relates to salvation or a Christian relationship with his/her savior?

¹⁰ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/davearmstrong/2015/12/dialogue-luke-128-immaculate-conception.html>



- 3. **The Perpetual Virginity:** In a nutshell, perpetual virginity refers to the fact that Mary was a virgin before conception, during pregnancy and after delivery.

All Christian denominations, based on the accounts of the Gospels, believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The difference in dogma particularly among the Catholic and Orthodox Churches on the one side and the Protestant Churches on the other is that Mary continued in her virginity after the birth of Jesus Christ. This dogma does not just infer that she did not consume her marriage with Joseph or did not have sexual intercourse or did not have any other children. According to Catholic Church teaching it actually means that Mary gave a miraculous birth “without any violation to her physical, external virginity”. As the Fathers of the Church explained, as “light passes through glass without harming the glass”, so Jesus was born with Mary’s Virginity “in tact”, that is with the preservation of her physical virginity¹¹. The Protestant Churches quoting passages such as “*And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus*” [Mathew 1:25], maintain that her restraint was until she had Jesus and she would have consummated her marriage with Joseph after the birth.

We also have the contention surrounding the mention of the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Could these be the children of Mary and Joseph? Or half brothers and sisters – children of Joseph from another marriage? Or are these terminologies used to identify his cousins as it was culturally appropriate and customary to refer to cousins as brothers and sisters?

It is again on the *Protoevangelium of James* that proponents of this doctrine rely on as the basis of their teaching and early church fathers’ writings such as:

Athanasius

"Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence deny also that he took true human flesh from the **ever-virgin Mary**" (*Discourses Against the Arians* 2:70 [A.D. 360]).

Jerome

"We believe that God was born of a virgin, because we read it. We do not believe that Mary was married after she brought forth her Son, because we do not read it. . . . You [Helvidius] say that Mary did not remain a virgin. As for myself, I claim that Joseph himself was a virgin, through Mary, so that a virgin Son might be born of a virginal wedlock" (*Against Helvidius: The Perpetual Virginity of Mary* 19 [A.D. 383]).

¹¹ <http://www.motherofallpeoples.com/2012/10/marys-miraculous-birth-of-jesus-the-catholic-churchs-perennial-tradition/>



Augustine

"In being born of a Virgin who chose to remain a Virgin even before she knew who was to be born of her, Christ wanted to approve virginity rather than to impose it. And he wanted virginity to be of free choice even in that woman in whom he took upon himself the form of a slave" (*Holy Virginity* 4:4 [A.D. 401]).

4. **The Dormition and Assumption:** Another much contented doctrine of Mary is her death and bodily assumption into heaven.

Again as we have repeatedly expressed throughout this document, evidences that reinforces any of the Mariological theses is neither found explicitly nor implicitly in the canonical Bible of our day [even after including the apocryphal/second canonical books]. Rightly so, because the Bible [particularly the New Testament] is an account written down for believers of the first century so they know who Jesus is – the Son of God, the Promised Messiah; so they understand what he taught – the Kingdom of God is near, Believe in me and you will have eternal life, I will die on the cross for you so you might live forever with me; so they adhere to his principles and way of life – what the epistles teach etc... It was never about anybody else.

I believe that is why we do not find stories or accounts of most of the disciples and where they ministered after the Great Commission. That is why we do not have any account of Mary and her life journey after the resurrection. We know she was among the believers at Pentecost. We can assume that she lived the remaining of her days with John the Apostle as she was committed to his care. But other than that we don't have any other early accounts referring to her and her life, except the gradual emergence of teachings and stories starting from the late second century onwards.

So it is the same regarding the account of her death or departure from this life. *"Mary Catholics (at least in the West) are under the impression that the Latin (Roman) Church favors the opinion that the Mother of God did not die, but was assumed at the end of her life without suffering the separation of body and soul; while the Eastern Church favors the opinion that the Blessed Virgin Mary did die, and that they refer to this death as a "dormition". In truth, although there are certain modern westerners who (quite rashly) maintain that the Virgin did not die, the Latin tradition has generally been even stronger than that of the East in affirming that our Lady suffered death: While the East speaks of "the falling asleep (dormition) of the Theotokos", the West has traditionally favored the more blunt "the death of the Virgin Mary"*¹².

¹² <http://newtheologicalmovement.blogspot.ca/2011/08/death-of-blessed-virgin-mary-latin.html>



Irrespective of the view whether she actually suffered physical death or not, the doctrine of the dormition and assumption is that, at the end of her earthly life (which is assumed to be between 2 and 14 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ), Mary was assumed into heaven body and soul. There are a few differing accounts as to what actually took place and when. However, the doctrine essentially maintains that Mary after falling ill prepares to die in Jerusalem and summons all the apostles to her.

The tradition that is famous in our *Ethiopian* context is the story where the apostles bury her. However, they did not know that she had ascended into heaven until Thomas, who had the opportunity to witness her assumption as he was traveling to Jerusalem caught up in clouds, arrived. He was scolded by his peers for being late and for having missed Mary's funeral. He tells them that Mary is not dead and that she has been assumed into heaven. When they check her grave they could not find her body. Wanting to be part of this great witness they hold a fasting period for 15 days [ፍልሰታ] after which the Lord Jesus Christ brought back Mary [body and soul] and she was assumed into heaven for the second time in their presence.

The doctrine of the dormition [falling asleep] and the assumption did not surface until the 5th Century.



In the *Ethiopian* context incorporated in this doctrine is also the doctrine of her assuming the role of Intercessor/Mediatrix – such that anyone who would pray to her is guaranteed to receive his/her request because she was given **The Covenant of Mercy**.

This is also where we started our article, to discuss the *Third Testament or the Third Covenant*. Let us look at the last point in discussing the element of the doctrine of Mary to complete the argument of how and when we ended up with the *Third Testament or Covenant*.

5. **Queen of Heaven:** The last element of the doctrine of Mary is that after assuming into heaven she is seated at the right hand of her son Jesus Christ and has been conferred the title of 'Queen of Heaven'.

As described in one of the websites, "*Catholic theology views Jesus as both the King of Israel and the King of Heaven, and since Jewish tradition honors the mother of the king as "queen", then Mary would properly be accorded the title of "Queen of Heaven" as a matter of custom*



and tradition. In the eighth century, St. John Damascene the last of the Greek Fathers, wrote "When she became Mother of the Creator, she truly became Queen of every creature."¹³

A couple of biblical basis is given for conferring such a name to Mary. The first relates to the fact that in Jewish tradition and particularly under some Davidic Kings the mother of the King is usually attributed power as advocate with the King. For instance, supporters of this view cite 1 Kings 2:20 where King Solomon says the following to his mother Bathsheba "Make your request, Mother, for I will not refuse you."



The second biblical evidence provided is Revelation 12:1-3. This eschatological passage refers to a woman crowned of twelve stars on her head who has given birth to a son who is 'to rule all the nations with a rod of iron'. Since the child who will rule the nations with a rod of iron is Jesus Christ, then the woman giving birth to him must be his mother, Mary and the crown signifies her as Queen.

So we have now looked at all the titles and doctrines surrounding Mary as they are taught mainly in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. We have also seen that none of these doctrines or dogma are explicitly mentioned or available as evidence in the canonical books of the Bible (66 in numbers) and including the apocryphal/second canonical books (+/_ 81 books). Most of the teachings are taken from second century writings that were not accepted as authoritative books by the same churches that hold this view (i.e. Catholic and Orthodox Churches).

When taken together, these 5 attributes and titles conferred on Mary have culminated in her not only occupying a higher status and position in the spiritual realm but also holding the key to salvation. The recent pictures posted on facebook with the slogan "The World cannot be saved without the intercession of Mary - ያለ ማርያም አማላጅነት ዓለም አይደንም" is a testimony.

¹³ <http://mqhschool.net/25/index.php/about-us/our-patroness>



The Third Testament

- Part Three -

- Liben Mekonnen Gebremikael

So, based on the discussions in Part One and Two, we have three established testaments or covenants. 1) The Mosaic covenant, 2) The New Covenant of Jesus Christ and 3) The Covenant of Mercy established through the 'Ever-Virgin' Mary, the Mother of God *'Theotokos'*, *the Queen of Heaven*.



As I was growing up in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the extent of Mary's status or role was not very clear to me. I knew that she held a special place. I, personally, favoured praying to and venerating the angel Michael more than Mary (because the church near our house was St Michael's church). I thought that all the *'Saints'* had the same status as intercessors or mediators. It was only during my research into the history, teaching and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church that Mary's scope and status became evident.

Statements such as found in the adjacent picture are alarming. Is this what the apostles really taught and preached in the first century/New Testament period? Did any of them really point towards Mary as a cooperator in the salvation of mankind, as the Co-Mediatrix? Do we even find a hint in Paul's writings (since his writings were the earlier ones) or in the Gospels? Didn't God need to give up his only Son on the cross because nobody, no one, nothing else would ensure the complete redemption of our sins?

It is also important to note, that when we discuss intercession or mediation, Mary's role in this respect is not too different to the ones believed (by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches) to be played by the angels and *'saints'* or martyrs. As far I know, per the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the angels as well as the *saints* have received covenants [ቃል ኪዳን] from Jesus Christ, under which they are able to provide and guarantee the role of mediation. In Ethiopia, *St TekleHaimanot*, *Abune GebreMenfesQidus*, and *St George* are the most common *'saints'*. *St Gabriel*, *St Michael*, and *St Urael* are the common angel mediators/intercessors.

In essence, therefore, the covenants (testaments) that we have available to us are more than three [unless we consider all intercessory covenants as one]. It is also worth pointing out that angels existed before the New Testament period. How is it that they never received any covenants from God to intercede for or mediate between mankind and God before Christ? How come this role only begun during the New Testament period?¹⁴

¹⁴ If they had we would have learned about it in the Old Testament or other Judaic literature



Is salvation attained in the Incarnation or the Crucifixion? I think that is a central question to ask. If it is found in the incarnation then (maybe just maybe – if this can even be considered) Mary had a role to play in securing the redemption of believer's sins. However, as Jesus told his disciples during the Last Supper, He was instituting a new covenant through his blood shed on the cross. "— and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).

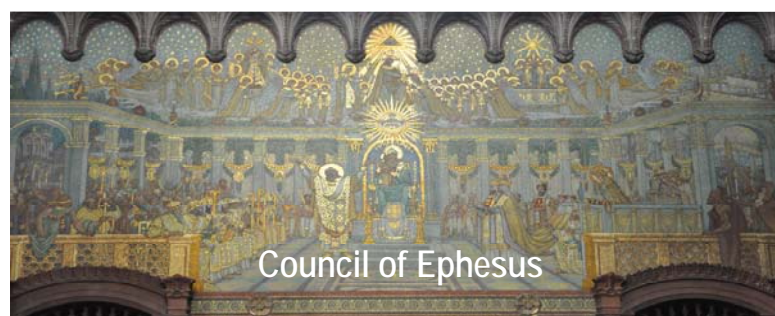
One would find it surprising, if not disturbing, that the proponents of Mariology go as far as suggesting that it is actually Mary's blood that was shed on the cross and hence confirming her cooperation and/or active role in our salvation. According to Mariological teachings: "*Since Mary is really the Mother of Jesus, she gave Him everything that a mother gives to her child. She gave Him His human life; to her, Jesus owes His Precious Blood, since it was formed in her body through the power of the Holy Ghost. And Mary, in turn, owes all her holiness and privileges to the Divine Blood of her Son.*"¹⁵

So when Jesus said, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin*" (Mathew 26:28) or when the writer of Hebrew says, "*He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12);* is reference being made to Mary's blood? Does it include her blood in the achievement of the redemption?

And then we have the historical challenge. We have no evidence demonstrating that the early apostolic church taught or held such belief about Mary or her status. We have seen from earlier discussions and we can confirm from records of church history that the doctrine of Mary begun to appear at least from the third century onwards. The first debates or controversies that the church had to deal with were Christological in nature. Even when we get to the third century and the issue of *Theotokos* is raised, it was never about Mary but about establishing the divinity of Christ. When Nestorius lost the debate at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, and the title *Theotokos* was conferred on Mary, it was not so much about her than about protecting the divinity of Jesus as well as the belief that he had one united nature (divine and human) as opposed to the two natures existing distinctively in one person [which was later discussed at the Council of Chalcedon – 451 AD].

Then I contend, if the debate in 431 AD was about Mary and her status, and if all the elements of the doctrine of Mary were established before then, it is but natural that the theologians of the day; and we are talking about eloquent theologians to the standard of Cyril of Alexandria or before him John Chrysostom [Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος]; they would have communicated these elements as their point of

¹⁵ <http://www.salvemariaregina.info/SalveMariaRegina/SMR-098.html>



argument to prove that she deserves the title *Theotokos* because of her Immaculate Conception, her Perpetual Virginity, Her role as Co-Mediatrix whose blood Jesus shed on the cross for our sins, her status as Queen of Heaven. I am certain with these evidences at hand no one would have stood a chance to argue against. But we know that none of these arguments were presented by the debaters at the Councils of Constantinople, Ephesus, or Chalcedon. It can only be because none of the doctrines existed at the time. They were developed and taught much later.

We also know that Old Testament passages are some times used to support elements of the Mariological doctrine. For instance, Genesis 3: 15 is usually quoted as evidence to uphold the doctrine of Mariology. *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."* Interestingly enough, I learn recently that when the bible was first translated into Latin by Jerome in the early 5th Century it was stated as, *"I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."* Now, why would a man who was known to have been very well versed in classical language deliberately make these changes in translation? Was he influenced by the debates and theological [Mariological] development of his time?

The second passage used as evidence to prove that Mary is the Queen of Heaven is Revelation 12. The passage reads, *"A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days."* (Rev 12:1-6).

According to Catholic theologians there is no other way of interpreting this passage except that the woman clothed with the sun and with crown of twelve stars on her head refers Mary, and she is the Queen of Heaven. Obviously she gives birth to a son who is to rule all nations – Jesus Christ. Is it a cut and dry deal? No, say the Protestant theologians. Actually the woman refers to Israel. The apocalyptic symbolism of the book of revelation and specifically this passage needs to be interpreted with the help of Joseph's dream in Genesis. *"He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, 'Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, 'What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your*



brothers, and bow to the ground before you?’ So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.” We also have to take note that this woman flees to the wilderness for 1260 days. What is this referring to? We would probably need another article to discuss this fully, however, bible commentators agree that this refers to the last part of the tribulation period (3 ½ years) when Israel will take refuge, and God will protect/care for her (as per the prophecy of Daniel 9).

As I said in the concluding part Part One of this article, once I started noticing the increasing postings of pictures referring to the role of Mary and the Angels on Facebook, I went back to reading more on the subject matter. In this quest I was able to watch a few debates on YouTube as well. And it gives me cause for concern and suspicion, when proponents/defenders of Mariology find it difficult to quote evidential passages from scriptures but almost exclusively quote from other writers such as from mediaeval times for instance.¹⁶ I understand that from Catholic and Orthodox churches standpoint, in addition to scriptures (*sola scriptura*), church tradition is as much important. But tradition not supported by scripture is dangerous and amounts to heresy.

I also have a couple of questions that would be useful to address when discussing this subject matter:

- What is the role of Mary during the second coming of Christ – as the Queen of Heaven?
- Where do we find references/evidences for this role?
- If Mary’s role as mediator is given to her because she is the Mother, because of her immaculate conception and perpetual virginity, because she is the Queen of Heaven; on what grounds do the *saints* and *martyrs* receive their role or status as intercessor/mediators?

I believe the article has attempted to explore and discuss the various elements of the doctrine on Mary, their origin and their development. Based on the discussion presented, it is not too difficult to see that, actually in Mary, we have the Third Testament or Covenant whereby we can rely on her [and not just through her mediation] guaranteed redemption and remission of our sins and the attainment of our salvation. It is a fallacy to base any theological doctrine on one or two passages in the bible; by taking these passages out of context and without any apostolic evidence. For instance, proponents of Mary’s intercessory role, point to John 2:1-12 - the wedding of Cana as their evidence. When John

¹⁶ I found Christian vs Roman Catholic debate on Mary (Dr. James White vs. Dr. Robert Fastiggi) very interesting to watch <https://youtu.be/M3ie46V2wfw>



wrote his gospel, he wrote for no other reason except to help us realize that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and by believing in him we are guaranteed eternal life (John 20). Nothing less, nothing more. This is the only theology that he had as his purpose. And hence, we are not allowed to extrapolate additional theology from his writing. We have already talked about the context and theological mandate of the gospel according to Luke in an earlier discussion.

In the last days God spoke to us through his son Jesus and he gave us the final and the superior covenant – salvation and redemption of sins through the shedding of the blood of our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), our High Priest (Hebrews 4), our sacrificed lamb (John 1:29), our advocate (1 John 2:1), and our intercessor (Romans 8:34). What the disciples and the apostles did following the proclamation of the gospel was to highlight the above fact and point to the one and only person, Jesus Christ. We have been warned to be weary of a new gospel; even if it was proclaimed by angels. *"But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8)

When Jesus said "it is finished" on the cross (John 19:30); that is what he meant. It is finished, it is done. Our redemption, the remission of our sins, our salvation **IS** complete. When Jesus decided to empty himself and take the form of a slave (Philippians 2); it was because he was merciful enough to get as close as any one can get to us the sinners, and save us. Why would we think that we are still too distant for him and therefore need someone closer to him to mediate on our behalves? He chose to come to us. He is Emmanuel! Paul writes in Romans, *"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

The New Covenant sealed with the blood of our Lord and God Jesus Christ is complete and guaranteed for anyone who comes to him with a broken and repentant heart and a confession that He is Lord! Amen.

