

De Maria Numquam Satis

A Reflection on Tradition, Scholarship, and Cultural Wisdom



Amal E. Marogy

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Wisdom**

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**Illustrated by
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*For my three inspiring and beloved grandmothers, each of whom
shaped my life in profound ways, including one who left us far
too soon.*

De Maria Numquam Satis*: A Reflection on Tradition, Scholarship, and Cultural Wisdom.

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*(Concerning Mary, [one can] Never [say] Enough, St Bernard de Clairvaux).

Note on Transliteration

In this work, I have aimed to limit myself to the essential transliteration conventions that are necessary for clarity. The following transliteration rules have been applied:

- The Hebrew letter *shin* (שׁ) is represented by *ś* unless it is part of an established biblical name, in which case the *sh* transliteration is preserved (e.g., *Shalom*, *Shimon*).
- The letter *qof* (ק) is transliterated as *q*.
- The guttural *ayin* (ע) is represented by an apostrophe (‘).
- The vowel *a* (א) is also represented by an apostrophe (’) when it carries the phonetic value of a glottal stop.
- The Hebrew *khet* (כ) is represented by *kh* (similar to the Scottish ‘Loch’).

These conventions have been selected to ensure a balance between phonetic accuracy and accessibility for a broad audience.

Introduction



For more than two decades, as I have moved in academic and intellectual circles, certain questions have persistently resurfaced, depending on the subject matter. One topic that has become a near-constant feature in my encounters is the question of Mary's virginity, along with her marriage and her poetic ability.

In an attempt to address what appear to me as unfounded – albeit understandable – doubts, I have decided to put in writing some answers to these questions.¹ These queries have become trendy and are often presented as settled matters, seemingly to dispel the 'naïve credulity and ignorance' of those who, as the argument goes, dogmatically and thus blindly cling to these beliefs 'like a child not wanting to let go of their shabby teddy bear'. But who is the child in this case? To examine this question and related issues, this book is organised into three main sections to address the following questions:

- **Was Mary a virgin or simply a young woman according to Isaiah 7:14?**² In my discussion, I will delve deeper into the nuances, contextual usage and implications of two Hebrew words: עַלְמָה (*almah*) and בְּתוּלָה (*betulah*).³
- **Was the unlettered young woman of Nazareth capable of producing something as highly theological and poetic as the *Magnificat*?** In addressing this question, I will analyse the likelihood of Mary, a young and uneducated woman from Nazareth, being the real author of the *Magnificat*.
- **Was Joseph's and Mary's union a sham marriage?** I will also deal with the doubts cast on the clear position of the Church on whether Joseph and Mary consummated their marriage after the birth of Jesus and so address the question of Mary's perpetual virginity.

I would like to begin by outlining a few principles which will guide my analysis when interpreting or elucidating biblical verses:

1. "The books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching *solidly, faithfully and without error* that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation."⁴
1. The permanent theological meaning of the Old Testament can only be established in the light of the New Testament.⁵

2. The true meaning and authority of the *individual parts* of the Old Testament can only be fully understood and interpreted “as a whole and starting from the light of the event of Christ”.⁶
3. As an heiress to the Middle Eastern ‘Aramaic’-speaking Christian culture, which until recently was imbued with the ancient social and cultural traditions and mores described in the Bible, my own experience offers a unique perspective. Being a woman enables me to highlight nuances that only women with my cultural background and heritage can fully comprehend, appreciate, and explain.
4. Some familiarity with the following fundamental Jewish terms would not only be helpful but also vital when dealing with issues related Jewish law, ethics and practices. In fact, these terms constitute the backbone of Jewish sources on religious life:
 - a. **Tanakh** (תנ"ך): is an acronym for the Hebrew Bible and is derived from the initial Hebrew letters of the following three sections of the Bible:
 - **Torah**: (תּוֹרָה - Instruction or Law)
 - **Nevi'im** (נְבִיאִים - Prophets)
 - **Ketuvim** (כְּתוּבִים - Writings or Books of Wisdom)
 - b. **Torah** (תּוֹרָה): Commonly referred to as the Pentateuch, this venerable text encompasses the Jewish teachings that serve as the cornerstone of Jewish religious practices and beliefs. It comprises the

written Jewish law and is composed of five books, namely:

- Genesis (בְּרֵאשִׁית, Berešit)
 - Exodus (שְׁמוֹת, Šemot)
 - Leviticus (וַיִּקְרָא, va-Yiqra)
 - Numbers (בְּמִדְבָּר, be-Midbar)
 - Deuteronomy (דְּבָרִים, Devarim)
- c. **Talmud** (תְּלִמּוּד): the Rabbinic tradition that extends beyond legal principles to cover ethics, rituals, and history. It consists of two parts:
- **Mishnah** (מִשְׁנָה), is the first written compilation of the Rabbinic oral traditions by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi around 200 AD.
 - **Gemara** (גְּמָרָא), completed around the year 500 AD, consists of commentaries on and discussions of the Mishnah.
- d. **Halacha** (הִלְכָּה): refers to the Jewish law derived from the Torah. It represents a living body of law that continues to evolve, drawing on the Mishnah, Talmud, and later rabbinic decisions in response to contemporary issues and challenges.

In this book, Bible verses and translations are primarily based on the texts available from *Mechon Mamre*, unless otherwise stated. These translations have been selected to faithfully reflect the original Hebrew scriptures, as they are understood in the Jewish tradition. The Gospel verses, on the other hand, are mainly based on the Knox Bible translation.

Having identified all the essential building blocks for the edifice, I will, in the next chapter, delve into a linguistic and

cultural analysis of the Hebrew terms *'almah* and *betulah*. I address the crucial question that lies at the heart of this book, namely, have the applicability and the consensus regarding the meaning of these words remained immutable, or is it one that has evolved and shifted? In the pursuit of reliability and accessibility in my analysis, a more chronological approach has been adopted, beginning with an examination of the contested meaning of עַלְמָה (*'almah*) and its implications for Messianic prophecy. This approach should help guide readers progressively through the discussion, preparing them for the more conceptually and theologically challenging aspects that follow.



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