

# Was the Virgin Mary a Raped Girl?

The controversial essay “Mary, Purest Maid”  
in The German Pastors’ Journal, March 1998, and its Making Of

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October 14, 2025

This book combines texts published at <https://bibelwelt.de/maria-missbraucht/>  
URL: <https://bibelwelt.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Mary-Purest-Maid.pdf>

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## “Mary, Purest Maid”

### A Pastor’s Plea for the Virginal Innocence of a Sexually Abused Girl<sup>1</sup>

This controversial essay—first published in “Deutsches Pfarrerberblatt” [The German Pastors’ Journal], March 1998—takes as a starting point the hypothesis: Mary, the mother of Jesus, may have been abused. Nevertheless—that is the thesis which is crucial for me—in God’s eyes she is his “pure maid,” and Jesus is the Son of God.—To quote from the Bible I usually go back to the New American Standard Bible of 1995.

A three months vacation for self organized studies, which a minister of the Evangelic Church in Hessen and Nassau [abbreviated EKHN, a Protestant regional church which contains parts of two Federal States of Germany, Hessen and Rheinland-Pfalz], is allowed to take every ten years, I used in 1995 to intensively deal with the subject of “sexual abuse as a challenge to pastoral counseling, church and biblical exegesis”<sup>2</sup>. For, both during my service in the parish and in the mental institution, I gained experience in pastoral counseling of women who had suffered violence in their childhood<sup>3</sup>. In our Bible study group at the psychiatric hospital, some persons concerned became aware of Bible texts reflecting their own experience; inter alia we thought about whether the mother of Jesus might have been a victim of incest. One of these women phoned me in the autumn of 1997 and opined that Gerd Lüdemann the theologian had proven our assumption; his new book had been discussed in an article entitled “Mary was raped” in the journal of our regional Church in Hessen and Nassau<sup>4</sup>. Except well-known facts and assumptions Lüdemann doesn’t sup-

1 About the title of the article: On the website <http://ingeb.org/spiritua/esistein.html> I found a translation of the German Christmas song “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen”, which contains my title citation “...Marie, die reine Magd” (= “Mary, purest Maid”):

A Spotless Rose is growing,	The Rose which I am singing,
Sprung from a tender root,	Whereof Isaiah said,
Of ancient seers’ foreshowing,	Is from its sweet root springing
Of Jesse promised fruit;	<b>In Mary, purest Maid;</b>
Its fairest bud unfolds to light	Through God’s great love and might
Amid the cold, cold winter,	The Blessed Babe she bare us
And in the dark midnight.	In a cold, cold winter’s night.

2 The results of my studies I wrote down in a book entitled [“Missbrauchtes Vertrauen”](#) (“Trust abused”).

3 Until now I could not gather any experience in pastoral counseling of sexually abused male persons.

4 Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Das Sonntagsblatt für Hessen und Nassau [Evangelic Church Journal. Sunday Paper for Hessen and Nassau], No. 42, October 19, 1997, p. 21.

ply further evidence for his thesis; nevertheless, he recommends the church to cancel the doctrine of virgin birth in the Apostles' Creed and to abolish the "Holy Night"<sup>5</sup>. I object against this conclusion, though I agree with Lüdemanns basic thesis: Jesus had a biological father and probably was born to an unmarried mother. But in opposition to him I consider "the statement, that Jesus be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born from a Virgin", not simply as "a corruption of historical facts"<sup>6</sup>, but as the theological interpretation of an appalling occurrence that could be overcome with the aid of God.

### Was Mary raped?

Maybe most of the theologians interpret "the conception of virgin birth as a pictorial expression of God's special initiative within the events of salvation"<sup>7</sup>. If Jesus, however, wasn't generated supernaturally by God's creational power in the womb of Mary, who then was his biological genitor? The obvious assumption that in this case "Josef was the father as a matter of course"<sup>8</sup> is contradicted by the Christmas stories according to Matthew and Luke as well as "the dishonorable name" by which Jesus is named in the oldest gospel: "Son of Mary" (Mark 6:3), indicating that "the father is unknown"<sup>9</sup> (John 8, 41). That there may "have been a veil over the birth of Jesus", is evident as well from the statement of the opponents to Jesus: "We be not born of fornication" (John 8:41), in which "an echo of vicious rumors" is reflected<sup>10</sup>. And by insulting Jesus as "a gluttonous man, and a winebibber" in the Q document (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34), "ancient Palestine Jews opposed to a man coming from an illegitimate liaison and revealing the stigma of his birth by his moral and religious conduct"<sup>11</sup>.

5 Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997, p. 132 and p. 140.

6 Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997, p. 132.

7 Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchen für das Himmelreich. Katholische Kirche und Sexualität* [Eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. Catholic church and sexuality], Hamburg 1988, p. 34.

8 Ibid. Against the statements of biblical texts, it remains conceivable, what Jörg Zink writes in his Christmas meditation "Maria – und die Nacht der Gotteserfahrung" ["Mary—and the Night of Experience of God"], in: *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Das Sonntagsblatt für Hessen und Nassau* [Evangelic Church Journal. Sunday Paper for Hessen and Nassau], No. 51/52, December 21/28, 1997, p. 13: "May be Joseph had made love with her before being married? That would have been in no way a lapse according the law at that time, he only was obligated to marry her afterwards. And that's what he did."

9 Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus. Gestalt und Geschichte* [Jesus. Character and history], Berlin 1957, p. 23.

10 Schalom Ben Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam* [Mother Miriam], München 1984, p. 55.

11 Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus. Gestalt und Geschichte* [Jesus. Character and history], Berlin 1957,

Nowadays, we would feel sympathetic to Mary, if her child had originated—apart from the matrimony with Joseph that was designated for her—“from the genuine and cordial love between two young people”<sup>12</sup>. Assuming with Lüdemann, however, that “a sexual adventure was hardly probable” because of the “Jewish patriarchal structure of Mary’s family and her presumable age at the time of marriage (between 12 and 14 years),” then “one is drawn downright to the assumption of Mary having been raped—however shocking this may be at first sight—as an explanation of this dark spot in her biography and in the biography of her son”<sup>13</sup>. As early as 1987 Jane Schaberg interpreted New Testament and extrabiblical texts as a response to an oral tradition that Jesus was an illegitimate child of Mary and originated from the relation to a man who had raped her during the engagement period with Joseph<sup>14</sup>. But who could have done violence to Mary? “Was Jesus the illegitimate son of a Roman legionnaire? Maybe, maybe not. We know too little and cannot regard such rumors and suggestions as reliable”<sup>15</sup>. The late Jewish legends of Panthera, who is said to have seduced or raped Mary, do not contain historical memories, but belong “to the ambit of suspicion and defamation of which Christian polemics and Jewish apologetics made use”<sup>16</sup>. There is no evidence at all to identify the rapist—unless the mentioned possibility was true that Mary was raped by her own father.

I cannot prove this free of doubt as historical fact, but I call attention to a number of hints which make it appear at least imaginable and open chances of identification for victims of sexual violence who look for consolation in the Bible and in church. Not in any way I am interested in a “sensational denunciation of the Early Christian testimony of Mary”<sup>17</sup>; I also agree with a long-term patient in our psychiatric hospital who reacted to my suggestion of Mary having been raped saying: “Mary was no easy girl!” Important to me is the question: If Mary really was sexually abused, how

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p. 22.

- 12 Jörg Zink, “Maria – und die Nacht der Gotteserfahrung” [“Mary—and the Night of Experience of God”], in: Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Das Sonntagsblatt für Hessen und Nassau [Evangelic Church Journal. Sunday Paper for Hessen and Nassau], No. 51/52, December 21/28, 1997, S. 13.
- 13 Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997, p. 80.
- 14 Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives*, San Francisco 1987.
- 15 Ezzelino von Wedel, *Als Jesus sich Gott ausdachte. Die unerwiderte Liebe zum Vater* [When Jesus Invented God. Unrequited love for the father], p. 64.
- 16 So Dr. Michael Heymel in a reader’s letter to the Evangelische Kirchenzeitung [Evangelic Church Journal], No. 44, November 2, 1997, p. 23.
- 17 *Ibid.*

could she cope with according to the biblical testimony? If you must not even think such a thought furthermore, the tradition of silencing dead sexual violence is continued. For “this extreme experience of violence does not attract very much attention in the church and in academic exegetic reflections on the Bible”<sup>18</sup>.

How difficult it is to imagine a rape of Mary, is paradigmatically indicated in a point that the Christian theologian Origen invokes against the Jewish Panthera legends: Jesus, who did that much for mankind, must have a wonderful birth and not “one of the vilest and most disgraceful of all”<sup>19</sup>. But if God in Jesus let himself been sent to the Roman slave and terrorist gallows, why shouldn’t he be able to put on human shape in its most “despised and rejected” form (Isaiah 53:3) already at his birth? Not even the origin of Jesus from an incest could prevent this child becoming the Son of God through the Holy Spirit. If this thought keeps forbidden, what about other children originated from incest? Must they feel their lives being worthless?<sup>20</sup> Instead, as an act of pastoral care, I raise the claim to make clear to an incest child: Maybe even Mary became pregnant from her own father, and Jesus seemed to be a child of disgrace, and nevertheless he did not lose his sanctity. Nobody is unworthy to live, even if the circumstances of his begetting are appalling; an incest child is loved by God like any other child and keeps his oder her human dignity.

### **Father-Daughter Incest in the Bible**

In biblical times, however, were there as outrageous deeds as the sexual abuse of a daughter by her father? Father Lot is ready to deliver his daughters to the Sodomites for sexual abuse (Gen. 19:8); afterwards they deliberately act out incest with their father for the sake of their desire to have children (Gen. 19:30-38)<sup>21</sup>. A whole series of acts of violence against women in the Old Testament is described by Phyllis Tribble<sup>22</sup>. Revealingly, among all the interdictions of incest in the Book of Leviticus there is no explicit interdiction of the father-daughter-incest! Luthers’s translation: “You

18 Ulrike Bail, Vernimm, Gott, mein Gebet. Psalm 55 und Gewalt gegen Frauen [Give ear to my prayer, O God. Psalm 55 and violence against women], in: Hedwig Jahnow et al., Feministische Hermeneutik und Erstes Testament [Feminist hermeneutics and First Testament], Stuttgart 1994, p.68.

19 Jane Schaberg, The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives, San Francisco 1987, p. 167.

20 In SAT.1 television show “Schreinemakers live” on September 28, 1995, two persons who were born in incest, depicted their emotional situation: a 40 year old woman, who regarded her own existence as worthless, and a 16 year old boy, whose mother had born him as a result of being abused by her own father and could not sense maternal feelings for him.

21 Cf. Josephine Rijnaarts, Lots Töchter. Über den Vater-Tochter-Inzest [Lot’s daughters. About father-daughter incest], München 1991, p. 25 et seq.

shall not have intercourse with the daughter of your son or your daughter” (Lev. 18: 10) doesn’t coincide with the original Hebrew text, whereas the Zurich translation reads correctly: “With the daughter of your son or the daughter of your daughter you shall not have conjugal intercourse.” The explanation of this interdiction—“there-with you will defile yourself”—reveals moreover, that these “primitive rocks of human codes of conduct” don’t even aim at the shelter of personal integrity and dignity of a girl or woman, but at the shelter of the “honor of the (superordinate) man..., be it the father, the husband, the brother or even the offender himself”<sup>23</sup>.

### **Copulation with children in Rabbinic and Canon Law**

In the history of Jewish-Christian law, the topic of copulation with underage girls is explicitly discussed, e. g. in the Babylonical Talmud: “R. Bebaj taught before R. Nachman: Three women may consummate copulation with cotton wool (to prevent a conception): the underage girl, the pregnant and the lactating woman... ‘Underage’ she is called from her eleventh year and a day up to her twelfth year and a day; younger or older, she may consummate copulation as usual—words of R. Meír”<sup>24</sup>. Or even more blatantly: “If an adult was lying with an underage girl, so this is nothing, for under this (the lying with a girl under 3 years) age it is like coming with a finger against the eye (the tear thus flowing out is no loss, since the lacrimal sac becomes full again, likewise the hymen grows again at this age), but if an underage boy lies with an adult woman, he makes her wood-injured”<sup>25</sup>. Wood-injured, according to the Talmud, is a woman, “who lost the attributes of virginity by injury”<sup>26</sup>. This law has nothing to do with the shelter of small girl against sexual violence, but in the first place with the right of husbands to get the unharmed virginity of their future wives.

Similarly, Florence Rush reports on the time of church history. “Canon law payed more attention to the act of copulation as to the age, for if both parties ‘are ripe for marriage, it is a good marriage, howsoever the age.’ ... Children, who were illegally given to marriage as minors or without consent, could annul marriage according

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22 Phyllis Trible, *Mein Gott, warum hast du mich vergessen! Frauenschicksale im Alten Testament* [My God, why have You forgotten me! Womens’ fates in Old Testament], Gütersloh 1987.

23 Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Das dritte Buch Mose. Leviticus (ATD 6)*, Göttingen 1993, p. 228.

24 *Der Babylonische Talmud* [Babylonian Talmud], ed. by Lazarus Goldschmidt, volume 4, Haag 1933, p. 32 (in brackets, I cite the editor’s footnotes).

25 *Der Babylonische Talmud* [Babylonian Talmud], ed. by Lazarus Goldschmidt, volume 4, Haag 1933, p. 489-490.

26 *Der Babylonische Talmud* [Babylonian Talmud], ed. by Lazarus Goldschmidt, volume 4, Haag 1933, note 232 by L. Goldschmidt.

church law, once they were full-aged. But if vaginal penetration had happened, the woman was bound to the husband life-long." As a direct consequence, "disregarding her pains and the arising bodily harm, a woman is suitable for a marital bond by the day of her birth. And the church register of 'obstacles' for incest or 'relationship' made clear, that male adults "copulated with their betrothed, who were seven years old and younger"<sup>27</sup>.

### **Jesus' solidarity with children and the "offended little ones"**

Presumably, Jesus knew about the inhumanity of adults against children, firstly because he—with his fatherly affectionate closeness to children—had to win out over the anti-children attitude of his disciples (Mark 10:13-16) and secondly because of his hard sentence: "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." (Mk. 9, 42). Regarding these people, I take the liberty of thinking especially of children, who are downed in their trust through the conduct of adults<sup>28</sup>. Maybe Jesus' empathy with children can be traced back to his own suffering in childhood from victimization as born to an unmarried mother.

### **Two legends of coping sexual violence in Luke 1:26-56 und Matthew 1**

But is it allowed to read the biblical legends Luke 1:26-56 and Matthew 1 as stories of coping such a traumatic situation as sexual abuse? I proceed on Eugen Drewermann's insight, that in the genre of legend "emotions take centre stage." Whoever "knows corresponding emotions from his own experience, he can read this legend as 'his' own story"<sup>29</sup>. By the way, it might be possible at a certain degree of historical probability, "to make the story of the Lord's birth homey in the so called reality of bare facts"<sup>30</sup>.

Luke outlines Mary's subjective interior situation: How can a sexually abused girl cope with emotions of confusion, anxiety, pain, inferiority, love-hate to her father and fear of repudiation by her destined husband? Matthew in contrast traces the perception of the fiancé, so to speak the social exterior situation: How is Joseph to deal with his feeling as a cuckold, and what can be done about a child having been conceived under ambiguous circumstances: will it grow up without a father?

27 Florence Rush, *Das bestgehütete Geheimnis. Sexueller Kindesmißbrauch* [The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children], Berlin 1988, p. 72-73.

28 Cf. Julius Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* [The Gospel according to Mark], München and Hamburg 1968, p. 125.

29 Eugen Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese* [Depth psychology and exegesis], volume I, Olten 1984, p. 440.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 503, Drewermann doubts that.

### Virgin birth and the power of magical thinking

The Greek word *parthenos*, occurring [in regard to Mary] only Luke 1:27 and Matthew 1:23 in New Testament, and having the self-evident connotation of sexual innocence and being biologically unspoiled, tacitly implies Mary having been pregnant by a supernatural miracle. At the same moment, the notion of Virgin Mary is not the element of a pure myth of Gods and Sons of Gods like in Greek mythology, but it refers to a story of faith with historically present humans: the first Christians put their trust in Jesus based on their experience with him, and they also knew Mary as his mother. As they were people from Jewish cultural sphere, we also have to pay attention to Hebrew reminiscences in the word “virgin,” of course. The reference to Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23 indicates the range of different meanings of words for women or young girls in the Jewish culture; the Hebrew word *‘almah* in Isaiah 7:14, e. g., has “nothing to do with the connotation ‘virgin,’ but is about women of high rank, who usually are members of a royal court”<sup>31</sup>. Only the Hebrew word *bethulah* means “a virgo in the physiological sense, whereas *‘almah* is a young nubile woman, whereby nothing is predicated about her virginity as such”<sup>32</sup>. For the Evangelists, Mary as virgin most likely is both the twelve to twelve-and-a-half year old girl in the age of *na‘arah*<sup>33</sup> and a *bethulah* who—“in a society governed so much by structures within the family as in Israel”—naturally was expected “to preserve her virginity”<sup>34</sup>. Neither Matthew nor Luke show any further interest in an enduring virginity of Mary; both of them want to emphasize the Sovereignty of God who—in view of the begetting of his son—defies human boundaries, be it of biology or of sociology.

In both stories of Jesus’ birth, Mary’s wonderful experience is narrated in the language of supernatural miracle. To do justice to biblical symbolic speech, you must

31 Karen Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche und sozialrechtliche Studie zur Stellung der Frau im Alten Testament* [Women in Old Israel. Studying key words and social rights in view of the status of woman in Old Testament], Stuttgart 1990, p. 179.

32 Schalom Ben Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam* [Mother Miriam], München 1984, p. 47.

33 François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke], fascicle 1, Zürich 1989 (EKK Bd. III), p. 73: “In Jewry a girl of 12 years reached a determining phase in her life. Between 12 and 12½, in rabbinic tradition, she was called *na‘arah*. She was still subdued to the authority of her father, but was regarded as responsible. During this time she could be promised matrimonially.” Cf. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [Commentary to the New Testament from Talmud and Midrash], volume 2, München 1924, p. 10: “A girl up to the age of 11 years and 1 day was considered as *tinogeh* = child, at the age of 11 years and 1 day up to 12 years and 1 day as *q’tannah* = under-age, at the age of 12 to 12½ years as *na‘arah* = virgin and from 12½ years onwards as *bogeret* = nubile.”

34 Karen Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche und sozialrechtliche Studie zur Stellung der Frau im Alten Testament* [Women in Old Israel. Studying key words and social rights in view of the status of woman in Old Testament], Stuttgart 1990, p. 177.

reach a level of truth that takes seriously the “world of psychic reality, of the unconscious, of sentiment”<sup>35</sup>. The effective history of the belief in virgin birth up to the proverbial German phrase, that you can get round to something “like the virgin to her child,” indicates anyhow the power of magical thinking even in modern people as we are: there are child-like wishes deep in our soul to get a grip on reality where it is incomprehensible and threatening. In a story for adults, such, in the world of facts, unrealistic elements act as intermediary between the feeling, that there is no escape from certain life situations, and the wonderful chance, that through love and trust seemingly impossible things may happen.

### **Luke’s starting point: An angel named “My-Man-is-God”**

Luke’s story begins with the apparition of the archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:26), whose name, literally translated, “My Man is God,” according to Ben Chorin, summarizes basically the message passed on by him, “for apparently Mary becomes pregnant of the Holy Spirit just by the annunciation as such”<sup>36</sup>. But can we imagine Mary as God’s wife, in the fashion of the sons of God who take wives of the daughters of men like in Gen. 6:1-4? The relationship to God cannot be understood both as being a child of God and being his sexual partner without smudging the boundary-lines in parent-child love. Thus Archangel Gabriel’s name sounds the theme of incest.

A woman in our clinic Bible study group, who was abused by her father as she was a child, expressed her own ideas about this: Her own father appeared to her like a godly, almighty character, and she felt married to him. For he approached his daughter’s loving sentiments—Freud would have called them oedipal—not with fatherly love, but he abused her for his own sexual satisfaction. Concurrently, the girl—as an attempt of self-healing—at times fancied to be the wife of her father-God, with whom she wished to have a very special child that she could have loved more than the father himself.

As to the etymology of Eve naming her son Cain in Gen. 4:1, the levels of human partnership, parent-child-relationship and relationship to God are oddly mingled, too: *qaniti ’isch ’et-JHWH* = “I have gotten a man: the LORD” resp. “I have generated a man with the LORD”. Adam begets Cain, and Eve—in her motherly power of giving birth to a son—boasts of being God’s partner, resp. of quasi having created her son as her “little man” with the help of the LORD<sup>37</sup>.

35 Eugen Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese* [Depth psychology and exegesis], volume I, p. 31.

36 Schalom Ben Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam* [Mother Miriam], München 1984, p. 45.

37 Not in the Hebrew text “there seems to be a relevant corruption,” as Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, Göttingen 1922, p. 42, assumes, but in the thus paraphrased attitude of a mother who

### **Frightened of mercy and closeness**

Mary is frightened, but not of the angel's apparition as such. Abused girls often build up an ideal realm of fantasy for themselves and use visions or hallucinations to cope their situation. The other way round, they tend to reinterpret the real nocturnal presence of the abusing father as a nightmarish fantasy.

Neither she is frightened of the angel's message which is delivered to her not until later<sup>38</sup>, but of "his saying" and the angel's salutation (Luke 1:29). In case she is an abused child, when addressed as "highly favored" woman who shall rejoice, she can at first only feel unworthy of God's love, for like all victims of sexual violence she is stricken by feelings of guilt. The promise "The Lord is with you!" may even be threatening for her, for she is acquainted only with ambivalent closeness—the tender closeness of an abusing father turns into something painful and loathsome.

At the end of his Gospel Luke reports that the disciples of Jesus are frightened, too, when the risen Lord appears to them with an salutation of peace (Luke 24:36-37). At that time, Jesus had been infamously crucified; and his disciples start to cope with this appalling occurrence experiencing a series of visions of resurrection. In parallel, I consider it a legitimate question, what appalling occurrences might have preceded the angel's visit to Mary, although the Evangelist doesn't mention it explicitly. As a legend unfolds "according to the Old Testament genre of a promised birth"<sup>39</sup>, you should expect anyhow "the description of the emergency", which necessitates divine intervention as in the case of Elizabeth (Luke 1:7). But there are situations of emergency, about which you don't remain silent, "because any such doesn't exist," but because they are taboo as a public theme<sup>40</sup>. I presume, that Luke did know just as little as anybody else in detail about Mary being abused, but maybe he—or a tradition which he takes over—intuitively preserved a bit of Mary's reaction to an overly terrifying occurrence, that happened absolutely in hiding.

### **Mary "knows not a man"**

Mary's question to the angel after the announcement of Jesus' birth: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" is contrary to the notion of a consciously experienced

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idolizes her motherhood resp. reinterprets the relationship to her son as a partnership. By the way, even fifty years later Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis* (ATD 2/4), Göttingen 1972, p. 75, regrettably still opines: "The passage cannot become clear any more."

38 Against François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke], fascicle 1, Zürich 1989 (EKK Bd. III), p. 74: "When the virgin is confused and compelled to contemplate, that is because of neither the unusual greeting nor of the angel's apparition, but of the content of his message."

39 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

40 Against Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke] (NTD 3), Göttingen 1982, p. 17.

rape, but is imaginable if she was abused by her father. Maybe Mary didn't really "know", that she had "known a man" in the Hebrew literal sense of having sex with him.

A woman, who was treated with psychotherapy due to her borderline personality disorder<sup>41</sup> and who dared to confide in me as clinical pastoral counselor over time, had been abused sexually by her father throughout all her childhood and youth. To stand the terrible experience, that her beloved father reacted to her love with the violent abuse of her most vulnerable feelings, she escaped mentally into a fantasy world and split the figure of her father in two: the day-father, who handled her half-way normally, although he often blamed or even mistreated her, and a shadowy wicked figure, who came to her in the dark of the night to "play" with her and "hurt" her. When this girl was examined by a gynaecologist for the first time at the age of 15, he noticed that her hymen wasn't intact. But when he asked her for her sexual experience, she answered: "I never slept with a man."

Ursula Wirtz labels this method of coping with sexual violence—done to a child by its own parents—as psychic "defence mechanism of [peritraumatic] dissociation". By this means, despite the abuse, "the belief in the loving and protective parents" can partially be retained, but maybe at the price of most serious psychotic episodes or split personality<sup>42</sup>.

### **The miracle occurring to Mary and to the embryonic life in her**

With the words "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1:35) the angel does not really answer the question, in what way Mary gets pregnant. Only when translated into our cultural sphere, the words "come over" and "overshadow" sound like a begetting by God himself; in Luke, by Old Testament word usage, they "as such" have "no sexual component"<sup>43</sup>.

41 The ability of Borderliners to establish trustful relations is severely limited; occasionally psychotic episodes may occur. According to Lutz Besser, *Zerbrechende Seelen, fürs Leben geschädigt. Kindesmisshandlung und sexueller Missbrauch* [Crashing souls, damaged for life. Child assault and sexual abuse], in: *Ergotherapie und Rehabilitation*, number 6, November 1993, p. 512, borderline syndrome is in first place of the psychiatric "diagnoses and symptoms, behind which often hide (unrecognized) the most serious stories of abuse of the people concerned."

42 Ursula Wirtz, *Seelenmord. Inzest und Therapie* [Soul murder. Incest and therapy], Zürich 1989, p. 141. Similarly, Barbara Kavemann and Ingrid Lohstöter, *Väter als Täter. Sexuelle Gewalt gegen Mädchen* [Fathers as offenders. Sexual violence against girls], Reinbek bei Hamburg 1987, p. 65, write: „To be able to live with their experiences, the girls must try to forget, not to be aware of what happens. If they act as if everything is a dream, then maybe it never happened at all.“

43 François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke], fascicle 1, Zürich

The miracle occurring to Mary is definitely not “the begetting of the god child by God with a human woman”, for “there is no notion of a begetting God in the whole context”<sup>44</sup>. According to Helmut Gollwitzer, from this it follows that: “the Holy Spirit is not the begetter, not the father, but the creator in this birth”<sup>45</sup>. The creation of the child Jesus in the womb of Mary, however, must not necessarily come along with the notion of a supernatural origin without a human father; for everybody may pray to God: “You wove me in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139, 13), and at least in Johannine intellectual world, all Christians may become child of God without biologically understood virgin birth: “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). In comparison with these passages it is striking that Luke doesn’t not assert God himself having created the child in Mary’s womb. This point he leaves open. Instead, the word *episkiasei* according to Karl Heinrich Rengstorf includes a reference to the “cloud of God (look esp. Exodus 40:34 et seq., but also 13: 21-22; Numbers 9:15 et seq.; 10:34 et seq.; Matthew 17:5). It is in its nature that it shows God’s presence as well as it conceals him from human eyes and keeps his secret. Here, too, the words express that, in view of God’s creational action performed on Mary, the godly secret remains kept. It doesn’t mean for us the elimination of the mystery surrounding God, if we marvelling face the works of God.”<sup>46</sup>

But why shouldn’t Luke talk openly about God’s creational action like the Psalm poet or John the Evangelist? There’s more sense, if he knew: Mary is not having Joseph’s child, and there are evil rumors about the origin of the child. That’s why he leaves the question unanswered, how and with whom she got pregnant, but—in the angel’s promise—clarifies that God is able and willing to let his son come into the world, mysteriously, in this child of all children: the beginning life (to *gennomenon*) in Mary’s womb is holy, is even the son of God (Luke 1:35). Saying this, he also is opposed to antique patriarchal texts which picture “women, who bring forth a child without a man, as defiant and their children as monstrosities”<sup>47</sup>.

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1989 (EKK Bd. III), p. 76.

44 Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke] (NTD .2), Göttingen 1937, p. 20.

45 Helmut Gollwitzer, *Die Freude Gottes. Einführung in das Lukasevangelium* [God’s delight. Introduction to the Gospel according to Luke], Gelnhausen et al. 1979, p. 17. Cf. Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke] (NTD 3), Göttingen 1982, p. 20: “In Jewry, begetting power is not attributed to the Spirit, but creation, however (Psalm 33:6, Genesis 1:2), and recreation (Ezekiel 37:14).”

46 Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke] (NTD .2), Göttingen 1937), p. 20.

47 Luise Schottroff, *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern. Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen*

Thus the promise of God's Spirit and power to Mary just indirectly illustrates God's miraculous acting with the child; unintermediately, however, the angel is speaking of Mary's wonderful preservation and encouragement, of which she is in urgent need, being pregnant owing to sexual abuse. Holy Spirit shall come upon her as in Acts 1:8 and give her strength to stand a hard lot and to bear witness of the "great things the Mighty one has done for her" (Luke 1:49). And as for the "overshadowing power of the Most High" Jane Schaberg verifies in detail that in the word "shadow"—in Hebrew context and as contrasted with the occident—there is no dark or threatening connotation, but the meaning of God's "protective presence"<sup>48</sup>. Power and protection of God is promised to Mary, although and just because she must experience violence. That matches with Hebrew female gender of the word "spirit"; ruach naturally is not expected to beget a child, but she is godly-motherly protection in time of dearth<sup>49</sup>.

Finally the angel mentions Elizabeth's wonderful pregnancy to encourage Mary to have faith in God, "with whom nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:36-37). What the legend tells about Elizabeth as a supernatural miracle, that she as barren woman is having a child in the end, can be understood as a miracle on the level of inter-personal occurrences: the woman who has not born a child at an early age is considered as a locked vessel, as a punished woman without fulfilled life; by giving birth to a child at an advanced age, Elizabeth avoids the fate of being a despised childless old woman. With a young woman as Mary, however, who hasn't kept her virginity until her marriage, the degree of contempt is a whole lot higher because she herself is held responsible for it; greater is the miracle occurring to Mary, too: her child is the "son of the Most High," no matter which human father has begotten it. By using the language of magic, the narrator bypasses dealing with Mary's traumatic experiences, expressing anyhow what Mary needs to cope with her situation emotionally and—without a thought of analysing her trauma—opening her a path to get comforted and encouraged.

### **Mary's conforming to God's will**

According to what has been stated, it is no surprise that in the narration of the Bible we hear nothing about Mary's biological father. Maybe we can learn a little more

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Christentums [Lydia's impatient sisters. Feminist social history of early Christianity], Gütersloh 1994, p. 284.

48 Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives*, San Francisco 1987, p. 115.

49 Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997, p. 46, asks with reason in view of Moltmann's sentence: "God is the father of Jesus Christ and that is why the Holy Spirit is his godly mother," whether Jesus "was begotten by a female entity."

about the relationship to her father making a detour. There is a parallel to some features of Luke's description in the story of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11), who was "offered up as a burnt offering" to God (Judges 11:31+39) and whose fate is insinuated in the name "Batjah" (daughter of JHWH) that I want to give this nameless girl. Mary's statement "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) coincides with the meaning of Batjah's conforming to her father's intention to offer her up to God because of an imprudent vow: "do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth" (Judges 11:36). Batjah's attitude is conform to the situation of the daughter in an incest relationship—as she is dependent of his love, she is not able to make a stand against the father subduing her, and still less, if there is also lack of motherly protection. 1932, psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi—in his splendid lecture at XII. International Psychoanalytic Congress in Wiesbaden—impressively described child incest victims identifying with the offender: "Their first impulse would be: rejection, hatred, loathing, powerful resistance." But "the overwhelming power and authority of the adult makes them mute or lets them even be out of their senses." And after all, extremely enhanced anxiety forces them "to subordinate to the offender's will, to guess and accomplish any of his wishes, to identify totally with the offender, denying themselves"<sup>50</sup>.

In the case of Jephthah, too, who was the son of a whore, outcast by his half-brothers, you can only deduce from hints, whether the father abused his daughter before offering her up. Just like Mary, Batjah "knew no man" (Judges 11:39). Jephthah's utterance, anyhow: "Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me" (Judges 11:35), that is to say, the attempt "to scapegoat the daughter and to pass all guilt on to her projectively, is only too well-known with incest offenders. The offering of the daughter, whether it happens for the fortunes of war or the fathers' sexual lust, is an age-old theme"<sup>51</sup>.

The parallel between Batjah and Mary reminds of the more common comparison between Isaac's offering, claimed by God (Elohim) from Abraham, and Jesus' death by crucifixion, interpreted as an expiatory sacrifice. The question, whether God wants the death of Jesus who is not—like Isaac by God (JHWH) himself—rescued from violent death, must be unequivocally denied. Not the heavenly father does violence to his son, but in his son God himself experiences violence of humans hostile to him. Analogously, not God is to be considered as the initiator of the act of vio-

50 Sándor Ferenczi, Sprachverwirrung zwischen den Erwachsenen und dem Kind. Die Sprache der Zärtlichkeit und der Leidenschaft [Confusion of language between the adults and the child. The language of tenderness and of passion], in: Ferenczi, Schriften zur Psychoanalyse [Psychoanalytical scripts], volume II, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 308.

51 Ursula Wirtz, Seelenmord. Inzest und Therapie [Soul murder. Incest and therapy], Zürich 1989), p. 56.

lence to Mary, neither the violator's deed is glorified or played down, but it is God who rescues a victim of violence from the status of remaining a victim.

The parallelism to the fate of Batjah, who is not rescued, shows quite obviously what miracle occurs to Mary. Her humble submission to the angel's words superficially match the anxious customising to a sexual offender, but in Gabriel's words she has experienced a God who doesn't humiliate her once again, but to the contrary breaks through the vicious circle of defilement and humiliation and restores virgin dignity in the violated girl. By saying to the angel: "may it be done to me according to your word," she overcomes her submissiveness to her offender. She does not comply with every humiliation, but her "consent is to empowerment in the midst of humiliation," that God awards her through the angel<sup>52</sup>. Before Gabriel leaves Mary, her statement "Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord" (Luke 1:38) makes clear that her relationship to God is all right again: She has her child not as the wife of the godly father, but as his servant or "handmaiden"; her relationship to God is like childchip, not partnership. Martin Luther's translation "Magd" (likewise the King James translation "handmaiden") in its double meaning of servant and girl purport an intuitive synopsis of this statement.

### **Mary goes to the mountains meeting Elizabeth**

Another parallel to the story of Jephthah is remarkable: After Batjah's consent to her father's will she asks for admission to "go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions" (Judges 11:37). Mary also goes "to the mountains" (Martin Luther's translation, whereas the King James Version reads "into the hill country") to meet her relative Elizabeth (Luke 1:39). Batjah asks for two months' respite until she is offered, a time which she won't have to spend with her father; equally, by going to the mountains, Mary escapes the clutches of her father for three months (Luke 1:56). Jörg Zink (a wise German theologian and author) comments: "Three months, for a woman in such a situation, may be the time needed for saying Yes to her maternity"<sup>53</sup>. Possibly, Luke refers to a tradition that in turn refers to the old ritual in Judges 11:39-40: Israelite girls, during the often conflictual and anxiety-provoking transition from their parental home to married life, collectively celebrate a festival, dedicated to Batjah, to take farewell of their maidenhood.

52 Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives*, San Francisco 1987, p. 135: "Consent is to empowerment in the midst of humiliation."

53 Jörg Zink, "Maria – und die Nacht der Gotteserfahrung" ["Mary—and the Night of Experience of God"], in: *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Das Sonntagsblatt für Hessen und Nassau* [Evangelic Church Journal. Sunday Paper for Hessen and Nassau], No. 51/52, December 21/28, 1997, S. 13.

In my view, Mary's trip to the mountains keeps the only remembrance of the tears she weeps over her virginity, anxiety, pain and humiliation—and maybe over the lost love of her father. What the angel promised her, the power of God and motherly protection, she obviously couldn't find at home, but with Elizabeth who is pregnant as well—and a person with much experience in life. Luke doesn't explicitly pass down in what way Mary is comforted, but that Elizabeth meets her and her child with great appreciation (Luke 1:41-45).

Looking back, from the context of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, I should like to reinterpret the story of Annunciation as a miracle of healing, in which “paradigmatically is shown the rescuing power of trust against the awful destroying power of anxiety”<sup>54</sup>. The conjectural illness in the background of the story, in this case, is the “murder of soul”<sup>55</sup> that Mary's father committed in abusing her childlike trust; as a miraculous physician, God helps her intrapsychically through his angel Gabriel and in exterior reality through Elizabeth, “a prudent and warmhearted friend”<sup>56</sup>.

### **Mary keeps her human dignity despite being humiliated**

The Magnificat, put into Mary's mouth (Luke 1:46-55), consequently can be read as the rejoicing psalm of a young woman who, after events of massive sexual violence, has experienced comfort and preservation. That's the only way to understand her praising God for looking upon her tapeinosis—which is to translate adequately as lowering, humiliation, defilement (Luke 1:48). No one except God perceives Mary's fate to be helplessly delivered to her offender's violence, not even today's exegetes who read her lowering as a generally humble attitude<sup>57</sup> or as an expression of social oppression<sup>58</sup>. However, “to think of lowering in the meaning of social stratification

54 Eugen Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese* [Depth psychology and exegesis], volume II, Olten 1985, p. 240.

55 Ursula Wirtz, *Seelenmord. Inzest und Therapie* [Soul murder. Incest and therapy], Zürich 1989, S. 9, über den Titel ihres Buches: “I chose the title ‘Seelenmord’ (Murder of the Soul) because it addresses the issue directly, without sugarcoating it. Incest is an attack on identity and humanity.” [translation mine, H. S.]

56 Jörg Zink, “Maria – und die Nacht der Gotteserfahrung” [“Mary—and the Night of Experience of God”], in: *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Das Sonntagsblatt für Hessen und Nassau* [Evangelic Church Journal. Sunday Paper for Hessen and Nassau], No. 51/52, December 21/28, 1997, S. 13.

57 Walter Schmithals, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke], Zürich 1980, p. 30: “If you understand the term ‘lowness’ (v. 48) in the sense of ‘disgrace’ (v. 25; cf. 1 Samuel 1:11; Genesis 29:32), the Magnificat does not fit into the mouth of Virgin Mary ... Meanwhile lowness in v. 48 means Mary's humbleness mentioned in v. 38.45.50 (cf. v. 52).”

58 Luise Schottroff, *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern. Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen Christentums* [Lydia's impatient sisters. Feminist social history of early Christianity], Gütersloh 1994), p. 291: “The Jewish country girl strikes at the timbal of God's world revolution—

does not correspond to the spirit of the era. To think of lowering in the meaning of human sinfulness is alien to the text as well... Lowering, therefore, is comprehensible rather in the situation itself. The young woman being child-bearing as a bride was looked askew and lowered. God however has taken pity on these humiliated. Just of her the Messiah shall be born"<sup>59</sup>.

By an ingenious intuition, Luke's whole composition of the text, in the one word *tapeinosis*, sounds the previously hidden feeling, with which Mary—like all victims of sexual violence—was all too familiar: that is to say with the feeling to be at fault herself for what was done to her. A child cannot regard its parents as consistently evil for it depends on them to get satisfied its elementary needs. So it regards itself as filthy and bad, defines the own rage and resistance against the father as evil and blames itself "to want to do it, too": by simply looking beautiful, by being a girl or even by being alive. For a girl growing up in accordance with biblical tradition as Mary, the situation exacerbates because due to the Ten Commandments she must feel obliged to obey the father; "as she can't do so in the case of sexual maltreatment, she feels guilty. With her distress, however, she can't go to them, who should have her trust, so she remains lonely with her 'guilt'"<sup>60</sup>.

Incidentally, Ruud Bullens—a Dutch psychotherapist treating especially incest offenders—regards a victim's ability to feel, within a complicated hate-love, the offender's guilt, that he denies, as a particular strength of sexually abused persons<sup>61</sup>. By means of this defence mechanism—introjecting the offender's guilt—they finally resist against the unbearable feeling of being helplessly at mercy to the violence and are feeling "guilty and guiltless at once"<sup>62</sup>.

Only in a time consuming process—if at all—a victim can succeed to delegate the responsibility for what occurred to the offender and to feel herself as lovable. We don't know whether Mary in real life could experience this; the hymn delivered by Luke, anyhow, contains Mary's confidence that "from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Just like, in the resurrection of Jesus, God pronounces his Yes to the same Jesus who was nefariously crucified, God preserves the

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like Hannah did before and like Elizabeth does with her. Her humiliation is part and expression of the people's oppression."

59 Schalom Ben Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam [Mother Miriam]*, München 1984, p. 65.

60 Jochen Kuhn, *Der missbrauchte Gott. Zur sexuellen Kindesmisshandlung in christlichen Familien [The abused God. About sexual child assault in Christian families]*, in: *Reformierte Kirchenzeitung [Reformed church journal]*, number 5, 1995, p. 227.

61 So Bullens in conversation with me when I visited him in Leiden in October 1995.

62 Sándor Ferenczi, *Sprachverwirrung zwischen den Erwachsenen und dem Kind. Die Sprache der Zärtlichkeit und der Leidenschaft [Confusion of language between the adults and the child. The language of tenderness and of passion]*, in: *Ferenczi, Schriften zur Psychoanalyse [Psychoanalytical scripts]*, volume II, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 309.

immaculateness of the Virgin Mary, in spite of her violently being made pregnant. According to this insight, not a society dominated by men is allowed to define due to gynecologic criteria, in which case a girl loses her virginal innocence. Mary may adhere to her inmost confidence to be innocent of the filthy actions that another one forced upon her. She remains a favored young woman, whose human dignity and virgin innocence is not to be pitted against the intactness of her hymen, but against her relationship to God<sup>63</sup>. With reason, in the Apostles' Creed, we refer to the Virgin Mary and we celebrate her in Christmas hymn as "Mary, purest Maid"<sup>64</sup>.

By celebrating the downfall of haughty and mighty men (Luke 1:51-52), she allows herself to adhere to more of her feelings that are usually tabooed for a child experiencing violence, namely to be angry and furious with an offender, against whom it could not defend, up to feelings of hate and thoughts of revenge that we know from Old Testament psalms. She resists the belittlement of injustice, for although God could let grow a lot of good from the most Evil, he thereby does not undo the abuse committed to her<sup>65</sup>. Quite alike, Miriam the prophetess, her ancestor with the same name, took once the timble in her hand and extolled the Lord's wonderful action, when "the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea" (Exodus 15:20-21).

Maybe by coincidence, Mary's psalm contains further elements that are conducive for the emotional growth of victims of sexual violence. Abused children are often premature<sup>66</sup>, either oversexualized or aloof, seemingly adult by acting toughly

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63 Cf. Jörg Zink, "Maria – und die Nacht der Gotteserfahrung" ["Mary—and the Night of Experience of God"], in: Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Das Sonntagsblatt für Hessen und Nassau [Evangelic Church Journal. Sunday Paper for Hessen and Nassau], No. 51/52, December 21/28, 1997, S. 13: "What do we call a 'virgin'? A bodily intact person? Quite surely not only that, or not necessarily that. Virginit—piety in the true sense of the word—is something deep in the heart." Luise Rinser, *Abaelards Liebe* [Abaelard's love], Frankfurt am Main 1993, p. 212, lets Abaelard say: "A woman can lose her virginity for this or that reason and still be virginal, namely if her heart is not stained by willingness to sin."

64 Evangelisches Gesangbuch [Evangelical song book], song 30, 2. In no case, against Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997, p. 132, "all Sunday confessing ... to Jesus born of a virgin" can be "branded as mendacious."

65 Claudia Schewe, "Die Rache ist mein... ." Zur Heilung bei Missbrauch gehört echte Gerechtigkeit! ["Vengeance is Mine... ." To heal abuse with true justice!] In: *Befreiende Wahrheit, Zeitschrift für Seelsorge und christliche Therapie* [Liberating Truth, Journal for Pastoral Care and Christian Therapy], No. 4, February 1995, p. 19, therefore opines, that incest victims should not forgive their offender too soon: "Guilt remains guilt before God, till such time as the culprit personally asks for forgiveness."

66 Sándor Ferenczi, *Sprachverwirrung zwischen den Erwachsenen und dem Kind. Die Sprache der Zärtlichkeit und der Leidenschaft* [Confusion of language between the adults and the child. The language of tenderness and of passion], in: Ferenczi, *Schriften zur Psychoanalyse* [Psychoanalytical scripts], volume II, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 311.

against themselves and others—in the hymn God humbles the proud and mighty and exalts the humble ones (Luke 1, 51-52). To have needs is what children, who are neglected by their parents or abused by them for their wants, secretly forbid themselves—here the hungry are sated, it is all right to have needs (Luke 1:53). Who is as deeply hurt as an incest victim, regards life as an uphill struggle—the psalm mentions Israel, the striver with God (Genesis 32:28), who is helped up, and Abraham's child Isaac who should be offered and experienced mercy (Luke 1:54-55). Lastly, many incest victims learnt to view themselves narcissistically as something very special in a negative way: they regard their fate as a unique punishment for being a whore or a sinner. Conversely, they may be predisposed for superelevating the own personality by identifying themselves with Mary as extraordinary holy woman and as Mother of God<sup>67</sup>. In her song of praise, however, Mary displays herself in a modest human way<sup>68</sup> by exalting not herself, but the Lord (Luke 1:46) and knows herself integrated in the history of God's chosen people (Luke 1:54-55).

### **Matthew's starting point: Defamatory rumors against Mary**

Matthew's nativity story, more obvious than Luke's, serves the purpose to defend Mary against charges of having conceived her son in sin. For not at random in his Tree of Jesse four women of all people turn up, who have "a stigma resting on their names": Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uriah's wife (Matthew 1:3.5.6). "Jesus' ancestresses are mentioned—of that there is hardly any doubt—, because yet at that time defamations against Jesus' mother were circulating in Jewry"<sup>69</sup>. Even if Mary's pregnancy shows up in the twilight of malicious rumors, it is a foregone conclusion that the same applies to her as to the other four women: it is told about them "at points in the story, where God's promise is fulfilled unexpectedly"<sup>70</sup>. Only seemingly, they are sinners, in actual fact they are part of God's plan. "Their partners serve as examples for Joseph who remedies the mistakable situation by reintegrating Mary into the patriarchal system—such as did in those days the ancestors to the four ancestresses"<sup>71</sup>.

67 In parallel to that, psychotic patients delusionally identify themselves with Jesus, being only interested in the supernatural characteristics of the Son of God, and ignoring that Jesus in secret manifested his divineness just by accepting the limits of his true humanity.

68 Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [The Gospel according to Luke] (NTD.2), Göttingen 1937, p. 23: "So in this hymn we do not sense anything of the cult that later church practiced with the mother of Jesus."

69 Julius Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [The Gospel according to Matthew] (NTD 1.1), Göttingen 1937, p. 10-11.

70 Ulrich Luck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [The Gospel according to Matthew], Zürich 1993, p. 20.

### Joseph's wonderful conversion to a loving husband and father

Since Mary got pregnant out of wedlock, Joseph would have had the right to let her be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20 et seq.), according to Schaberg it was in his own discretion, too, either to tacitly get divorced or nevertheless take her home (Matthew 1:18-19)<sup>72</sup>. By the Torah, in case of rape she did not deserve capital punishment only if she had cried for help or, in the open, could not have called a rescuer (Deuteronomy 22:27)<sup>73</sup>. If she was abused by her father within the house, however, she did not come under this law, that simply did not provide for a girl who dares not cry either for fear of the offender or because of her childlike commitment to him<sup>74</sup>. Thus also in Mary's case what had occurred would have to stay in the dark.

By interpreting this dark secret as pregnancy "by the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18.20), both the child and his mother are rehabilitated: This child is no bastard, his birth is no accident and no curse, and this mother is no immoral person<sup>75</sup>. Consequently, Joseph takes home his fiancée as lawful wife, after an angel sent from God had persuaded him of the sacredness of the child she had conceived. A plain righteous patriarch shows manly purposefulness by taking over responsibility as a loving husband and father<sup>76</sup>. Joseph's inner conversion, that is related—as with Luke—in the langua-

71 Luise Schottroff, *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern. Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen Christentums* [Lydia's impatient sisters. Feminist social history of early Christianity], Gütersloh 1994, p. 286.

72 Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives*, San Francisco 1987, p. 42 et seq.

73 In the explanation of Jesus' name (Matthew 1:21), Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives*, San Francisco 1987, p. 61-62, finds an allusion to the missing rescuer for Mary: "God saves—not only the mother, but the people."

74 Lutz Besser, *Zerbrechende Seelen, fürs Leben geschädigt. Kindesmisshandlung und sexueller Missbrauch* [Crashing souls, damaged for life. Child assault and sexual abuse], in: *Ergotherapie und Rehabilitation*, number 6, November 1993, p. 505: "Victims mostly were forced to silence by emotional blackmail, corruption, threats of punishment in various forms and in many cases with open violence up to threats on their lives." The following books explicitly elaborate on strategies, by which offenders of sexual abuse—both inside and outside of the family—get their victims not to put up resistance, to keep secret what occurred and to consider themselves responsible for the offender's evil action: Klaus-Jürgen Bruder and Sigrid Richter-Unger, *Monster oder liebe Eltern? Sexueller Missbrauch in der Familie* [Monsters or loving parents? Sexual abuse within the family], Berlin 1995, and Günther Deegener, *Sexueller Missbrauch. Die Täter* [Sexual abuse. The offenders], Weinheim 1995.

75 Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus. A feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives*, San Francisco 1987, p. 67: "This child's existence is not an unpremeditated accident, and it is not cursed. The pregnant Mary is not to be punished."

76 Against Ezzelino von Wedel, *Als Jesus sich Gott ausdachte. Die unerwiderte Liebe zum Vater* [When Jesus Invented God. Unrequited love for the father], p. 65, who regards Joseph as "a

ge of supernatural miracle, may have been suitable to “abate Mary’s pain” and to prevent the “Holy Night” to be for her only “horrible, loud and heavy”<sup>77</sup>.

Nothing is mentioned by Matthew of applying the procedure in Deuteronomy 22:13-19 to prove Mary innocent; he gets another idea about the conception of the Holy Spirit as the much later Protevangelium of James, which tries to prove that Mary despite of her pregnancy (and even after Jesus’ birth) preserved her hymen intact<sup>78</sup>.

Even the note that Joseph did “not touch” (Luther’s translation) his wife until Jesus’ birth (Matthew 1:25), must not be matched with the later intention to confirm Mary’s everlasting virginity. Incest victims who took part in our clinic Bible study group, regarded this verse bearing in remembrance a man considering his wife’s feelings, who cannot stand sexual closeness at least for a while because of experiencing violence. At the end of the Matthean nativity story a more general conclusion is possible: A man’s commitments toward his wife and her child are “explicitly not bound to her sexual willingness toward him”<sup>79</sup>.

Schalom Ben Chorin in view of Jesus’ parables wonders why “paternal love is crucial to him whereas motherly love is no issue at all”<sup>80</sup>, I suppose with Alice Miller that it was “this really humble Joseph who did not push himself to the fore, sheltered and loved Mary and the child” and enabled Jesus “to be trained in strong and genuine love, a love which is the opposite to performance of one’s duty and obedience and which accrues from experiencing love” and just so to experience “a loving God” who loves us the way we are<sup>81</sup>.

**Information about the author at that time:** Helmut Schütz, born in 1952, academic studies in Bethel, Mainz, Bochum, psychotherapeutic training with Thomas Weil (Institute for Transaktional Analysis and Integrative Depth Psychology, Kassel), 1979-1989 parochial pastor in the Wetterau (north of Frankfurt/Main), 1989-1998 clinical pastoral counselor in Alzey, since 1998 parochial pastor in Gießen.

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weak father, who, moreover, was a weak and in his weakness horribly faithful spouse of a dominant woman and mother.”

77 Against Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997), p. 140.

78 So according to Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus* [Virgin birth? The real story of Mary and her son Jesus], Stuttgart 1997, p. 128-129.

79 Christa Mulack, *Die Weiblichkeit Gottes. Matriachale Voraussetzungen des Gottesbildes* [God’s femaleness. Matriarchal requirements of the concept of God], Stuttgart 1983, p. 269.

80 Schalom Ben Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam* [Mother Miriam], München 1984, p. 69.

81 Alice Miller, *Du sollst nicht merken* [Thou Shalt Not Be Aware], Frankfurt a. M. 1981, p. 124-125.

## The Making Of “Mary, Purest Maid”



Eleven years after the publication of my essay “Mary, Purest Maid”), Sabine Wagner, a research assistant in the Theology Department at Heidelberg University, invited me to participate in a workshop with Jane Schaberg on “The Illegitimacy of Jesus” as part of the seminar “Contemporary feminist approaches as a challenge to exegesis, preaching, and pastoral care,” on October 23, 2009, and asked me for an Response from Experience that would shed light on the background to the writing of my essay.

Sabine Wagner (Image: H. Schütz)

My name is Helmut Schütz. I am no theologian scholar, but a minister of the Evangelic Church in Hessen and Nassau, since 1998 parochial pastor of the Evangelic Paul’s Parish in Giessen.

I never gave a lecture at any University (less than ever in English!), except the presentations during my own studies, which took place in Bethel, Mainz and Bochum in the seventies of the last



Helmut Schütz with Jane Schaberg (Image: Sabine Wagner)

century. More about my person in the course of my remarks.

Now let me begin ninety years earlier: 1880. In this year my Grandma was born, and that before her parents had been married. She was an illegitimate child and had to bear her mother’s name lifelong. Her parents stayed together and married, after all. Their further children were named after the father. 115 years later, my mother told me, how her mother had suffered when her brothers and sisters said to her: “You don’t belong to us, you have another name!”

Another date: 1946. The reversal point in my mother's life. Two days after her thirtieth birthday she had to leave her Silesian home country which now belongs to Poland. On the one hand that was tragic for her. On the other: In West Germany she married and became a little son—me—, while her pre-war life in Silesia had not been only "merry homeland." Having to do hard work as a housemaid with one free Sunday afternoon every 14 days, and when coming home, there was no time to relax, because her family expected her to help with the harvest. But what was worse, she always lived in anxiety, for instance fear of the sons of the lords of the manor in the village, who always looked for a girl who couldn't afford to cry when they said: "Come with me into my chamber, nobody will find out." When World War II. was at its height and Russian troops rolled over Silesia, fear of being raped went sky high. My mother was thankful to God that she never was raped, but she never totally lost her anxiety.

And I think, I inherited some of her basic anxieties, when I was born in 1952, seven years after the war, small and wispy and shy as I grew up in Westfalia as a little boy. I am convinced, my mother wouldn't have survived without her faith in God, pretty much as myself.

How did a man like me, studying theology in Bethel, Mayence and Bochum, become interested in the theme of sexual abuse? Simply because I came across girls and women concerned.

And why did I cling to this theme for inbetween more than 25 years? Because I got the impression that I could really help some of them coping with what had been offended to them.

In addition, I used enough help for myself—in my family, in encounter groups, by engaging in psychotherapeutic training and supervision, and so I protected myself against being overrun or eaten up by the overwhelming problems of others.

First time I was confronted with sexual abuse during the nineteen-eighties, when I was parochial pastor of three villages near Frankfurt/Main. After an information event with the Alcoholics Anonymous in our youth group, a maybe 14 year old girl asked me to have a word with her in private. She told me, her mother was an Alcoholic, but didn't look for help. "Please don't tell my mother or father," she bade me. "I only want to talk to someone. I have nobody who listens to me." I gave her the advice to join a self-help group for relatives of alcoholics, so called co-alcoholics, and in addition kept in talks with her as pastoral carer.

After several weeks, she wanted to tell me something, but didn't bring the words out. Next time we met, she gave me a sheet of paper, which she had covered with writing during her baby sitting job. And I read shocking sentences: "As I could not tell you what my Grandpa wants of me, I try to write it down." She wrote about his

hugs, pressing her lower abdomen to his own, opening his trousers and rubbing his genitals against her. “When being alone with him for a longer time, I should sit on the corner of a table and put my legs on two chairs. Then he tried to penetrate me what mercifully he didn’t succeed with up to now.”

Finally she wrote: “When talking to you I feel OK, sort of secure... Do you know I have complete trust in you?”

When I read these lines, I at first couldn’t (didn’t want to) believe it. Later it turned out that things were even worse; also her father had offended her sexually. But I decided not to call into question what she had confided to me. I simply knew she was no liar. She didn’t want me to talk to her parents or to the youth welfare or to anyone else; so I kept on talking to her till she was old enough to leave home and get further help for herself.



Students in the workshop with Jane Schaberg and Helmut Schütz  
(Image: Sabine Wagner)

My first advice to you as prospective soul carers: If anybody tells you unbelievable stories about sexual traumatisati- on, try to deal with your own reluctan- cy and fear of these themes. You might be the only or

first one to whom a victim dares to tell things of which she or he is terribly ashamed. And if you say “I can’t believe it,” may-be this person feels being proclaimed as a liar once again.

The psychoanalytic therapist Mathias Hirsch says, you can’t really make something wrong if you believe once too often, what at the end turns out to be more phantasy than reality. It is much worse, if real incest has taken place and you take it from the start as a mere fantasy, so to speak in the role of the “repudiating mother”<sup>1</sup>.

1 Mathias Hirsch, Psychoanalytische Therapie mit Opfern inzestuöser Gewalt, S. 135. In: Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse. Beiträge zur Theorie und Praxis, Band 31, 1993, S. 132-148.

It was in these years when I found a book written by Josephine Rijnaarts about "Lot's Daughters"<sup>2</sup> which gave me a first theoretical framework to understand what happens with victims of sexual violence. Ursula Wirtz's book "Soul Murder"<sup>3</sup> also gave good information to the theme.

After ten years as a village pastor, I took over a ministry in a psychiatric hospital in the region of Rhinehessen, south of Mayence. There I met more women who had experienced sexual violence and incest, because many of them develop psychosomatic or psychic symptoms or heavy psychic diseases to cope with unbearable traumas in their childhood.

We had a Bible study group there, and one day a patient asked: "Is sexual abuse a theme in the Bible, too?" We then read Biblical stories of violence to which Phyllis Tribble calls attention in her book "Texts of Terror" (German title: "My God, Why Did You Forget About Me?")<sup>4</sup>.

At that time I became especially aware of a certain person in the Bible, the nameless daughter of the judge Jephthah. I call her "Batjah," God's daughter, because her father, as the book of Judges tells in chapter 11, offers his daughter up as a sacrifice to God. In doing so, this father Jephthah uses the same apologies that are used by every incest offender to justify their deeds. "Alas, my daughter!" Jephthah cries out. "You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back." (11, 35)

And the daughter, as a defenceless victim, answers as most victims of sexual violence would have answered: "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said..." (11, 36).

This sentence in slightly different words will later be taken over in a well-known text of the New Testament. According to the Evangelium of Luke, Virgin Mary, after having been announced by the angel Gabriel that she will become pregnant with the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1, 32), Mary gives the answer: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1, 38)

I wanted to learn more about this alarming coincidence. I found and read Jane Schaberg's book about "The Illegitimacy of Jesus" and thought it made sense<sup>5</sup>.

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2 Josephine Rijnaarts, *Lots Töchter. Über den Vater-Tochter-Inzest*, Düsseldorf 1988.

3 Ursula Wirtz, *Seelenmord. Inzest und Therapie*, Zürich 1989.

4 Phyllis Tribble, *Mein Gott, warum hast du mich vergessen! Frauenschicksale im Alten Testament*, 3. Auflage, Gütersloh 1995.

5 Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus. A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*, New York, USA 1990.

In the clinic Bible study group we discussed if Mary might not only have been a victim of rape or abuse, but of a form of abuse within the family, may-be father daughter incest. At every time of history, such terrible events took place, why not at the time of Jesus, when young girls lived under the control of their fathers until they, after their marriage, were taken along into their husbands' household.

Some of the patients with incest experiences began to relate themselves to Mary.

One woman said: "I often thought I was visited by an angel. But a dark one. It was my father coming into my room and playing games with me, as he said, terrifying, disgusting games." She said: "If the angel Gabriel would have visited me, I'd been shocked at first sight, like was Mary."

Very much later, this woman told me about her first visit to the gynecologist in the age of fifteen. He told her: "Did you have sexual intercourse yet?" She said "No." "But your hymen is not intact, are you sure?" She was sure, that she never had slept with a man. But her father had abused her night by night since the time she was a baby, which she had to split off her conscious perception, in order not to get mad or committing suicide. I think this casts light on the question Mary asks: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1, 34).

Some women (not all of them) began to feel it a comforting thought to imagine Mary having been in a similar situation as they were—and being given new heart to by God's angel and God's help.

It was in the same year 1995, when I took a three months vacation for self organized studies, which my Regional Church allows me to take every ten years. The theme for my studies: "Sexual abuse as a challenge to pastoral counseling, church and biblical exegesis." In the end, it took me a fourth month to write down all my findings under the title "Abused Trust." Only in 2001 and 2002, I published them on my own website <https://bibelwelt.de>. The book version did not appear before the year of 2008<sup>6</sup>.

Already in the autumn of 1997, one of the patients in the Bible study group phoned me: "There is a theologian who has proven our idea. Look in the Evangelical Church Journal..." There I found a review of Gerd Lüdemann's book "Jungfrauengeburt?", and I read it. She was right: Lüdemann also claimed that Mary was raped. Nevertheless, his theological view was completely different. He recommends the church to cancel the doctrine of virgin birth in the Apostles' Creed and to abolish the "Holy Night"<sup>7</sup>.

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6 Helmut Schütz, *Missbrauchtes Vertrauen*, Norderstedt 2008. Meanwhile, an edition expanded by two chapters has been available since 2011: "[Missbrauchtes Vertrauen.](#)"

7 Gerd Lüdemann, *Jungfrauengeburt? Die wirkliche Geschichte von Maria und ihrem Sohn Jesus*, Stuttgart 1997, p. 132 + 140.

Against this conclusion I wanted to object, and so I wrote the essay “Mary, Purest Maid,” being first published in “The German Pastors’ Journal” in March 1998. The news service “idea spektrum” took some citations out of my article. These in turn were published in the newspaper “Welt am Sonntag” (of March, 29) under the title: “Was Virgin Mary Raped?” So there were some days of excitation in the German media landscape.

And my article in “The German Pastors’ Journal” became the most controversial ever published. I was startled by several of the reactions who reproached me of blasphemy or following Old Nazi ideologies or dragging Mary or Jesus through the mire or blaming Mary’s father in an inadmissible way. What most of my critics didn’t understand (or didn’t want to deal with): It never was my intention to go away from Christian faith like Gerd Lüdemann did. It’s not my point to humiliate Mary but to point out her exaltation (Luke 1, 52). Neither do I want to make a tragedy of the Christmas story, like Gerd Lüdemann does.

Listen carefully: I suggest the possibility, that Mary might be a sexually abused girl, not very much older than 11 years, who was but healed of her feeling of being abused and humiliated—and if not healed, at least could experience heavenly comfort in her painful sufferings.

So after having searched for comfort in the mountains with her relative Elizabeth, similar to the ritual in the mountains which Batjah in the Old Testament fulfilled with her girl friends, Mary can praise the Lord (Luke 1, 46-48): “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaid.” Low estate, in Greek *tapeinōsis* exactly means “humiliation.” I think, if God in Jesus let himself been sent to the Roman slave and terrorist gallows at the end of his life, why shouldn’t God be able to put on human shape in its most ‘despised and rejected’ form already at his birth? The Church always read Isaiah’s song of the Righteous Servant of God as a picture of Jesus Christ: “He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53, 3)

At last some thoughts to prevent another misunderstanding of my essay about “Mary, Purest Maid.” I never intended to teach my opinion as hard and fast historical truth. We will never know “how it really was.” But it must be possible to think about different ways to believe in God, to identify with Biblical characters and to understand Biblical texts.

An old member of my parish in Giessen said to me: “You know that I can’t accept your thesis about Mary. I still believe in the virginity of Mary and that ‘nothing is impossible with God’ (Luke 1, 37).” I agreed with her on the point that through faith in

God we experience marvels, but that it must be OK for different Christians to define “marvel” in different ways.

And listen carefully: Admitting different readings of the Bible does not necessarily mean arbitrariness. My home parish in Giessen for a much longer time as well is the home parish of an emerited professor of Philosophy whom I esteem very much, Odo Marquard. He is a friend of pluralist lecture of the Bible, so the confessions don't strike dead one another like in the Thirty Years' War. I close with a citation out of his essay “Slight consolation”:

“By interpreting, a text ... turns into stuff ... where I fit in:

I interpret a text, but in reality the text is interpreting me”<sup>8</sup>.

That's the way the Bible should be read, theologically, personally, spiritually.

Thank you for listening.

*Helmut Schütz*

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<sup>8</sup> Odo Marquard, Schwacher Trost, in: Manfred Fuhrmann, Hans Robert Jauß, Wolfhart Panzenberg (Hg.), Text und Applikation, München 1981 (Poetik und Hermeneutik 9), S. 122 [translation mine].