

THE MAGNIFICAT Luke 1.46-55

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1 The traditional Latin title, which is the first word in the Vulgate, means--following the metaphor in the Greek"--"Make [the LORD] great." A 3/4-c. papyrus letter of a Christian woman to her "lord my father" uses the Greek word: "It makes me [feel] great & fills me with joy when I remember I have such a father!" Mother Mary's prayer aims to make GOD [feel] great &, in others eyes, the world's eyes, be great. Her heart swells up with grateful joy, & her God-image (may I say it?) swells up proportionately. From such praying, God "gets glory and praise" (LXX 39.17 69.5; Phil.1.20, "Christ will be glorified in my person"). Physically, to make large or--as tassels on a prayershawl, Mt.23.5--long. As for the Latin, its usual meaning is to "prize highly, esteem," a meaning the Greek also may bear....Addressing Abraham, God promises "blessing" & "I will make your name great" (Gn.12.2 LXX, our Greek word, as in 1Cl.10.3, quoting Gn.12.2)....Hebrew-Aramaic? Delitzsch Hebrew NT (my copy was printed in [!] Germany in [1] 1937) has *romamah*, lit. "cause to rise, exalt."--ASSIGNMENT: Using all the underlined words above, both the material & the metaphorical, "Make-think-feel sentences: "_____ the LORD, O my soul!"....Many Jewish prayers (eg, the Kaddish & the Lord's Prayer, on which see #2502) & meditations (eg, the Magnificat) begin with a lifting up not only of hands & heart but of God himself--"sanctifying" ("making holy"--"Hallowed be thy name"), "blessing," "praising" (the Hebrew vb. behind [GP 334] "Praise the Lord" being *brc*ⁿ, usu. tr. "bless")....What's common to all the expressions in this § is that God is exalted by an exulting (lit., leaping for joy) soul, spirit, inner being, a mood that finds some outer expression--in public "prayer" (ie, liturgy) & resulting private & public performance of good deeds (the traditional symbolic phrase combining the two being "prayer & almsgiving"). (Any meaning you can make out of the fact that in Eng., "exalt" & "exult" are frequently confused?)

2 This morning in her home, a woman told me that for Episcopal confirmation in her childhood she had to write ten collects (prayers comprising an invocation, petition, & conclusion). A collect's invocation affirms about God what is relevant to the remainder of the collect: how God is addressed is determined by what one is asking from him. It could be said that the invocation sets God up. It would be better to say that it sets the soul up for zooming in on God at the correct angle. Jewish prayer & meditation, in which the first line sets the mood & tone for the whole prayer, is the main model for the Christian collect. (See #2502.2.)

3 Precedents to the Magnificat? Most significant is the song-hymn of **Hannah** (1Sam.2.1-10, beginning "Then Hannah said this prayer:" [Heb. rt. *pll*, "pray," here Hithpa.; n. *tephilah*, the common word for "prayer"; but Pi. can mean "meditate," & here we have, as in the Magnificat, a medi-tation)).

My everyday experience is meditation, rumination, interior soliloquy (talking to myself), interior conversation (talking with actual or imagined others), critical thinking--all merge in & out of prayer, the flower's center.

'My heart exults in Yahweh,
my horn is exalted in my God,
my mouth derides my foes,
for I rejoice in your power of saving.

There is none as holy as Yahweh,
(indeed, there is no one but you)
no rock like our God.

Do not speak and speak with haughty words,
let not arrogance come from your mouth.
For Yahweh is an all-knowing God
and his is the weighing of deeds.

The bow of the mighty is broken
but the feeble have girded themselves with strength.
The sated hire themselves out for bread
but the famished cease from labour;

the barren woman bears sevenfold,
but the mother of many is desolate.

Yahweh gives death and life,
brings down to Sheol and draws up;
Yahweh makes poor and rich,
he humbles and also exalts.

He raises the poor from the dust,
he lifts the needy from the dunghill
to give them a place with princes,
and to assign them a seat of honour;
for to Yahweh the props of the earth belong,
on these he has poised the world.

He safeguards the steps of his faithful
but the wicked vanish in darkness
(for it is not by strength that man triumphs).
The enemies of Yahweh are shattered,
the Most High thunders in the heavens.

Yahweh judges the ends of the earth,
he endows his king with power,
he exalts the horn of his Anointed.'

Note this phenomenon in Hannah's psalm: line 4, & only live 4, is prayer, ie address to God. (In this literal sense, there's no prayer at all in the Magnificat.) ...Testimony (outward addressing of other human beings) is a further dimension of Hebrew psalmody: Mother Hannah & Mother Mary are not keeping what's going on inside them inside them, or we'd never have heard their psalms. (I'm using canonical criticism here, not being concerned about theories of the composition of these two psalms. But I've no doubt Mary was aware of Hannah's prayer; note, eg, that the first line of Hannah is virtually the second line of Mary, whose first line announces the theme of God's greatness, which is also Hannah's theme.) [Both texts are reproduced here from the Jerusalem Bible.]

1 S 2:1-10 Is 29:19	The Magnificat	
	And Mary ^w said:	
Is 61:10 1 S 2:1 Hab 3:18 1 S 1:11	1	'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit <i>exults in God my saviour;</i> <i>because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.</i>
11:27 Gn 30:13 Ps 126:3	2	Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me.
Ps 111:9		<i>Holy is his name,</i>
Ps 103:17		<i>and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.</i>
Ps 89:10; 138:6		He has shown the power of his arm,
Sl 33:12 Ezk 17:24	3	he has routed the proud of heart.
Jb 5:11; 12:19 Ps 107:9		<i>He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.</i>
Ps 98:3 Is 41:8-9		<i>The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.</i>
Gn 12:3; 13; 15; 22:18	4	<i>He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy</i> —according to the promise he made to our ancestors— of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

4 What further parallels do you find in the wording? the ideas? Study this for yourself before reading the rest of this Thinksheet....Describe in your own words the mood of each canticle-song-psalm....What are the major differences? why these differences?

5 The Magnificat's four **strophes** are 46-48, 49f, 51-53, 54f (I've marked & numbered them on the JB text). Do you follow the logic of the divisions? the thought-sequences?

6 Is anything to be made of the fact that these two psalms are by/attribution to women? If so, what? Any extrapolations about sex, family, social policy?

7 What do you think liberation theology makes of these psalms? What do they have to say about power, its sources & uses? Do they consistently view life & the world from God's point of view as you understand God's P.O.V.?

8 Does all this help you grasp Jesus' beatitude, "Blessed are the poor [in spirit]?" (Mt.5.3:L.6.20; cp. Zp.2.3)?

9 Hannah & Mary assume God's special call/mission/favor on their people the Jews, a conviction appearing often in OT (eg., Gn.15 & 17; Dt.7). What meaning does this now have for us Christians in (1) our faith & (2) our relations with Jews individually, nationally, & collectively?

10 Our original Christian Bible (the LXX, all in Greek) has three words for our human total invisible reality. Hannah begins with "**heart**" (*kardia*, Heb. *lev*), Mary with the other two: "**soul**" (*psuchē*, sometimes with emotional connotation) & "**spirit**" (*pneuma*, sometimes with religious-"spiritual" connotation)....Gender of the words? **Neuters**: Gk. "spirit," Lat. "heart" (*cor*). **Feminines**: Heb. "soul" (*nephesh*), Gk. "heart" & "soul", Lat. "soul" (*anima*). **Masculines**: Heb. "heart," Lat. "spirit" (*spiritus*). Anybody wanna make anything of any of this? For one thing, I thank God that Eng. nouns don't have gender! (One superiority over German.)

11 Note the extensive mg.reff. The canticle amounts to a pastiche of LXX qts.--a fact lending credence to the view that the Magnificat is an early Christian hymn, along with the Benedictus (vv.68-79) & the Nunc Dimittis (2.29-32).

12 God as "Savior" is here personal, but also messianic-revolutionary--**radical**.