Ensoulment: Traducianism & Creationism; Fallacy of Traducianism: Theotokos; Mary's Qualifications to Be the Mother of Messiah's True Humanity; the Divine Timing of the Virgin Pregnancy; Mary Commits to Being a Slave Woman to God; Mary's Visit to Elizabeth in Judah; Intro to "Magnificat"

There are two schools of thought on the timing of ensoulment, i.e., the act of endowing with a soul: (1) Traducianism and (2) Creationism. Each requires definition.

> **Traducianism derives from the Latin word *traducere*, meaning "to transfer," and refers to the propagation of the soul by human generation. Traducianism is the view that was held by Tertullian (A.D. 155–220),[1] by the Eastern Orthodox Church, by many Lutherans, and by (some) modern theologians.** (p. 13)
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> **Traducianism denies the creation of the soul directly or *immediately* by God after the Fall. Traducianists believe that both the material, mortal body and the immaterial, immortal soul are the genetic products of procreation. Human life is viewed as beginning in the womb at conception. If the soul and body are propagated through the sperm of the male and the egg of the female, this would imply that the soul and the body are both material and mortal. But anything material is biological life, while soul life is immaterial and invisible—the "breath of God." The tenets of Traducianism make no clear distinction between the origin of material and mortal, and the origin of immaterial and immortal.** (pp. 13–14)
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> **Creationists contend that the soul of every human being is *immediately* created by God and joined with the *mediately* formed, material part of the human being. Creationists differ from Traducianists and with each other as to the time of ensoulment. Some Creationists believe ensoulment occurs at conception, others believe at sometime during the nine months of gestation, and still others believe ensoulment occurs at birth. The Creationist view was held by Jerome (A.D. 347–419), a distinguished early expositor of the Scriptures, and Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225–1274).[2] Among Protestants, most Reformed theologians, including John Calvin, Louis Berkhof, and Charles Hodge (Presbyterian), were Creationists.**
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> **Creationism distinguishes between the origin of man's soul and the origin of the body—between soul life and biological life. The Bible supports these distinctions (Eccl. 12:7; Isa. 42:5; 57:16*b*).[3]** (p. 14)

The theological viewpoint held by this church is Creationism, further stipulating that human life begins at physical birth with the immediate creation of soul life and its imputation to biological life.[4]

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[1] "Tertullian, an early Latin father of the Church … held that the soul was actually material [not immaterial] and that body and soul were both procreated simultaneously by an individual's parents" (Walther A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 1078–79).

[2] Jerome, *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem*, ch. 22. Aquinas wrote against procreation generating the human soul: "Moreover, since it is an immaterial substance it cannot be caused through generation, but only through creation by God. Therefore, to hold that the intellectual soul is caused by the begetter is nothing else than to hold the soul to be non-subsistent, and consequently to perish with the body. It is therefore heretical to say that the intellectual soul is transmitted with the semen." See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.118, 2.

[3] R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Traducianism" and "Creationism," in *The Origin of the Soul*, ed., R. B. Thieme III (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1992), 13–14. For a more detailed exposition on the origin of the soul, see Thieme, "Historical Views of the Soul," in *The Origin of the Soul*, 13–22.

Mary understood her assignment was to do the work of bringing the biological life of the fetus to term at which point God could impute soul life resulting in the Person of Jesus.

The intricate timing that put Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem for delivery is a demonstration of divine omniscience. First of all there had to be available a woman who qualified to bear the biological life of Messiah: Mary had to be a direct descendant of David, she had to be unmarried and a virgin, she had to be "of age" to bear a child, she had to be betrothed to a man who was also a direct descendant of David; these things had to coordinate with the Augustan census decreed in 8 B.C. but which did not apply to Palestine until 5 B.C., and she had to arrive in Bethlehem at the precise time of her delivery.

Secondly, she had to be of a mental attitude that would submit to the assignment willingly, she had to orient to possible ridicule from those who misunderstood her pregnancy, and she had to commit to being the mother of an infant, child, adolescent, and teenager that was not only her son but also the God of Israel. It is to this latter assignment that Mary expresses her commitment in:

> **Luke 1:38 -** So Mary said, "Yes, I am a slave woman of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Her response to become a slave to God's plan for mankind's salvation is one of history's greatest exercises of the Law of Supreme Sacrifice. To further amplify her submission she continues with the statement, "Let this happen to me according to your word."

This statement demonstrates not only Mary's submission to the plan of God for the Incarnation but also her genuine humility. The phrase "let this happen" is an aorist tense in the rare optative mood of the verb **γίνομαι (*ginomai*)**. Its use here amplifies Mary's orientation to the possibilities associated with her participation in fulfilling Gabriel's prophecy. Here we have the "voluntative optative," also referred to as the "optative of obtainable wish," or "volitive optative." Some details are necessary:

> **There are less than seventy optatives in the entire New Testament. The optative is the mood used when a speaker wishes to portray an action as possible. It usually addresses cognition, but may be used to appeal to the volition.** (p. 480)
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> **The voluntative optative is the use of the optative in an independent clause to express an *obtainable wish or prayer*. It is frequently an appeal to the *will*, in particular when used in prayers.**
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> **The use of the (voluntative) optative in the New Testament seems to fit unto one of three nuances:**
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> **(1) *mere possibility* that something will take place; a great deal of doubt in the presentation. It is quite rare in the New Testament.**
>
> **(2) *stereotyped formula* that has lost its optative "flavor."**

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[4] The Creationist view disproves the idea of Immaculate Conception: "Roman Catholic dogma asserting that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was preserved free from the effects of the sin of Adam in the first instant of her conception. … (I)n the 13th century … Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus … argued that Christ's redemptive grace was applied to Mary to prevent sin from reaching her soul. It was not, however, until December 8, 1854, that Pius IX, urged by the majority of Catholic bishops throughout the world, solemnly declared in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* that the doctrine was revealed by God and hence was to be firmly believed as such by all Catholics" [*Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia* , 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979], 5:311).

> **(3) *polite request* without necessarily a hint of doubting what the response will be.**
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> **The voluntative optative seems to be used this way in the language of *prayer*. Prayers offered to (God) depend on his sovereignty and goodness. Thus, although the *form* of much prayer language in the New Testament has the tinge of remote possibility, when it is offered to the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, its *meaning* often moves into the realm of expectation.**
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> **If uncertainty is part of the package, it is not due to questions of God's ability, but simply to the petitioner's humility before the transcendent one.**[5] (p. 481)

The use of the voluntative optative by Mary in her response to Gabriel is an expression of her genuine humility toward God. She has committed to the obligation but recognizes she is but a young woman who may not be capable of pulling it off, yet confident that through divine omnipotence, "nothing will be impossible with God"—Gabriel's final comment in his revelation to Mary in verse 37.

Further indicating Mary's complete acceptance of the Gabriel's veracity, she is said to hurriedly travel to the home of her cousin Elizabeth in the province of Judah where she visited for three months.

Upon Mary's arrival Elizabeth greeted her with several references to her happy set of circumstances: **(1)** "happy are you among women," v. 42*b*, **(2)** "happy is the fruit of your womb," v. 42*c*, and **(3)** "happy is she who believed" v. 45.

Mary's exceeding happiness inspires her to sing a canticle in which she draws from her vast knowledge of Scripture to express her gratitude to God for His favor to her and His faithfulness to Israel.

Luke 1:46–55 is entitled Magnificat, taken from the first word of the lyric in verse 46 from the Latin Vulgate translation which begins, "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*," "My soul does magnify the Lord." The passage was put to music in 1539 and there have been several versions to arise since. We will study the translation from the New American Standard and note the Old Testament references to which Mary refers. Afterward we will take a look at a lyric composed in 1966 by W. W. J. VanOene and then listen to a choral version of the song.

For those interested, I recommend John Rutter's composition of *Magnificat* as he directs the City of London Sinfonia and The Cambridge Singers. (Available on CD: Collegium Records, CSCD 504).

[5] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 480–81.