The canticle of the Magnificat has always held an eminent place in the life of the Church, not only in the liturgy and the popular piety but also in the exegetical and theological study. The bibliography on the Magnificat is so vast that one can easily understand how much the ‘Canticle of Mary’ has been an object of research and study throughout the centuries, especially in the last few decades.\footnote{Many scholars have contributed a lot for the exegetical and theological study of the Magnificat. It is impossible to present an exhaustive list of bibliography here. So, we want to mention here only one scholar: Alberto Valentini, who has published a monograph on the Magnificat and also a number of research papers and articles on Lk 1:46-55. Some of his publications include: «La controversia circa l’attribuzione del Magnificat», in Marianum 45 (1983), 71-103; Idem, «Il Magnificat e l’opera lucana», in Rivista Biblica 33 (1985), 59-93; Idem, Il Magnificat. Genere letterario. Struttura. Esegisi, (Associazione Biblica Italiana. Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica 16), Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 1987; Idem, Maria secondo le Scritture. Figlia di Sion e Madre del Signore, Dehoniane, Bologna, 2007, 145-164; Idem, «Magnificat», in Mariologia, a cura di S. De Flores - V.F. Schieffler – S. M. Perrella, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2009, 785-790.} The Lukan account of the visitation culminates in the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55). In the Magnificat, the Virgin Mary glorifies God for the works of mercy accomplished by Him in herself (vv. 48-50), in the poor (vv. 51-53), and in the people of Israel (vv. 54-55). This article focuses on the theme of God’s tender mercy, within the context of Lukan infancy narratives, with a special reference to the Magnificat. The article is divided into two parts: the first part is dedicated to the literary elements of the hymn, such as literary genre, context, authorship, structure, Jewish background, etc. The second part will deal with the main theme of the study: the tender mercy of God in the Magnificat.

1. LITERARY ASPECTS OF THE MAGNIFICAT

In order to better understand the theological content of the Magnificat, we have to take into serious consideration its various literary aspects. Though we cannot examine all the literary elements in a detailed manner in these few pages, we will try to deal with some of the important aspects of the Magnificat. This literary analysis will help us to bring out the concept of God’s mercy in the ‘Song of Mary’.
1.1. Literary Genre

Among the biblical exegetes, there has been much discussion about the literary genre of the Magnificat. There are a variety of opinions. One of the most famous OT scholars, H. Gunkel, an expert in the literary genres of the Old Testament, says that the Magnificat could be put in the category of Eschatological hymns of Jewish origin and a Christian author would have added it to the Lukan narrative. Another important scholar worthy of mention here is G. Castellino, who differs from the opinion of H. Gunkel. According to G. Castellino, the Magnificat has to be considered as a thanksgiving hymn for its Sitz im Leben, structure and style. A. Valentini, making a critique of the different opinions of various authors, concludes that the Magnificat cannot just be forced to fit within a predefined literary genre of the Old Testament. He is of the opinion that a pure literary genre is rare to find within the canonical poems. In the Old Testament research, we can classify the Psalms into Gattungen (literary types). But this customary classical division of hymns into pure literary genre broke down in the New Testament times and thus we cannot expect these hymns and canticles to fit into a strict literary pattern. For this reason, while we are trying to find out what kind of literary genre a hymn belongs to, we must consider the Sitz im Leben and the origin of the hymn within a given context.

1.2. Context

The Magnificat is inserted within the literary context of Lk 1:39-56, where Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth and sings this song of praise. This canticle is parallel to Lk 1:5-23, where the birth of John the Baptist is foretold to Zechariah. The scholars unanimously agree that these two passages have clear literary connections. F. Peretto observes that these two Lukan passages follow the

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2 Ein christlicher Schriftsteller, der die Legende nach der Sitten des Alten Testaments mit Gedichten, die den handelnden Personen in den Mund gelegt wären, schmücken wollte... hat sie vorgefunden und für die Erzählung um so passender gehalten, als er ganz richtig erkannte, dass sie von der Erfüllung der Weissagungen handelnd. Er hat sie der Legende eingefügt... (H. GUNKEL, Die Lieder in der Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu bei Lukas, Festgabe für A. von Harnack, Mohr, Tübingen 1921, 60).

3 G. CASTELLINO, Osservazioni sulla struttura letteraria del Magnificat, in Studi dedicati alla memoria di Paolo Ubaldi, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1937, 428.


6 We want to quote here the same words of A. Valentini, regarding the question of the literary genre: «In ogni caso, i generi letterari puri — quali inni, canti di ringraziamento, lamentazioni ecc. —, già rari nella poesia canonica, in epoca successiva si incontrano difficilmente; mentre i generi misti — ben noti a Gunkel — sono frequenti: di per sé, essi non sono indizio di decadenza stilistica, ma espressione più diretta dell’ambiente in cui sono sorti. Non bisogna pertanto costringere questi salmi in una singola categoria, o escludere che in essi ci siano caratteristiche di diversi tipi. Va anche osservato che inquadrate un canto in uno schema prestabilito è un’operazione di limitata importanza, se non è accompagnata da una ricerca del suo ambiente vitale e della sua funzione all’interno della comunità in cui è sorto»(A. VALENTINI, «Magnificat», 786).
same literary pattern? A promise is made to Zechariah in vv. 5-23 and it is followed by a sign of fulfilment of the promise (vv. 24-25); likewise Mary is given a divine promise by the angel Gabriel (vv. 26-38) and it is followed by a sign of fulfilment (vv. 39-56). In the narrative structure of the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, the Magnificat should be connected with the other two Lukan canticles (1:68-79 and 2:29-32). In the narrative structure, the Magnificat is at the climax of the visitation scene, as a response to the greetings of Elizabeth. In our exegetical and theological analysis, we will study the Magnificat in the proximate context and also in the broader context.

1.3. The attribution of the Magnificat

Whether the Magnificat is to be attributed to Mary or to Elizabeth has been discussed by various scholars. Except for three Old Latin manuscripts and some texts of Irenaeus (Adv. Haer. 4.7.1) and Origen (In Luc. Hom. 7), all the other witnesses attribute it to Mary. S. Farris argues that these three witnesses are not reliable. The theory supporting its attribution to Elizabeth was vehemently promoted by A. Loisy under the pseudonym François Jacobé. A. von Harnack developed this idea and published articles attributing the Magnificat to Elizabeth. There have been other research works published in favour of attributing the Magnificat to Elizabeth. S. Benko gives a summary of the debate as follows: «If we examine the arguments that were brought forward on both sides, we discover that the so-called 'external evidence' is overwhelmingly in favour of the reading 'Mary said'. But the so-called 'internal evidence' supports very strongly the opposite view.» The arguments laid out by A. Loisy and A. von Harnack in favour of attributing the Magnificat to Elizabeth can be summarized as follows:

1. In v. 41 it is said that Elizabeth is 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. Zechariah is likewise filled with the Holy Spirit before saying the Benedictus. Of Mary, however, nothing is said which indicates that she has been inspired. 2. If the subject had been changed in v. 46 we should find δε ἐκπανθεία rather than καί ἐκπανθεία. 3. The words of v. 56, 'And Mary remained with ber', imply that Elizabeth, not Mary, had just been speaking. 4. Luke treats Mary and

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Joseph with great reserve in Luke 1-2. It is, therefore, unlikely that he would attribute a lengthy speech to her. 5. The hymn is an imitation of Hanna’s song. Elizabeth’s situation is analogous to Hannah’s but Mary’s is not. The hymn suits much better the one who, like Hannah, has long been childless. The ταπείνωσις (v. 48) of the speaker is barrenness. 6. To these may be added the general observation that a change from Mary to Elizabeth is difficult to explain. The reverse is less so. In fact, Harnack supposed neither ‘Elizabeth’ nor ‘Mary’ was the original; Luke wrote simply καὶ εἶπεν. The two names were explanatory additions, Elizabeth a correct one, Mary a false.\footnote{A. von Harnack, "Das Magnificat Elizabeth (Luk 1:46-55)\", 542, in S. Farris, The Hymns of Luke’s Infancy Narratives, 111.} F. C. Burkitt, J. M. Creed, J. G. Davies, B. S. Easton, M. Goguel, J. R. Harris, E. Klostermann, and P. Winter. All these arguments presented above in favour of ascribing the Magnificat to Elizabeth have been refuted by almost all the Exegetes for various reasons, which we will mention later. Considering the overwhelming external evidences and the counter arguments\footnote{For a list of counter arguments against the theory proposed by A. von Harnack, cfr. S. Farris, The Hymns of Luke’s Infancy Narratives, 111-112. There are further severe problems with the hypothesis that the hymn should be attributed to Elizabeth. If, as Harnack and almost all subsequent proponents of the theory have held, the original reading was simply ‘and she said’, one would expect this reading to survive at some point in the textual tradition. It does not. Furthermore, to attribute the hymn to Elizabeth is to ignore the structure of the narrative at this point. […] Moreover, the progression of thought in the passage indicates clearly that Mary must have spoken the Magnificat. As we have seen, there is a consistent promise-fulfilment-praise progression in Luke 1-2. (Ibid., 112).} against the theory proposed by A. von Harnack, we can conclude that the hymn has to be attributed to Mary. A. von Harnack’s hypothesis of ascribing the Magnificat to Elizabeth cannot be accepted. As we already mentioned, almost all the Greek Manuscripts ascribe it to Mary, except three Latin Manuscripts ranging in date from the fourth to the eighth centuries. The word ταπείνωσις (v. 48) goes along with the word “handmaid (1:38)” and thus this theme of her “low estate” mentioned in the Magnificat fits Mary well. The narrative structure of the visitation makes it clear to the readers that the Magnificat is the immediate response of Mary (vv. 46-55) to the praises of Elizabeth (vv. 42-45). Thus, taking into consideration the support of the overwhelming Greek Manuscripts and the internal evidences, we can conclude that the Magnificat should be ascribed to Mary.\footnote{For more details on the attribution of the Magnificat, cfr: R. E. Brown, The birth of the Messiah, 334-336; A. Valentini, "La controversia circa l’attribuzione del Magnificat", in Marianum 45 (1983), 71-103; B.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (Fourth Edition), Deutsche}
1.4. Structure of the Magnificat

Like any other Canticle, the Magnificat too has got its own structure, but there have been a diversity of opinions among scholars with regard to its division. The literary and theological elements present in the canticle need to be studied in determining its structure. Á. Aparicio Rodríguez observes that some scholars divide the Magnificat into two strophes, some into three, some others into five and so on. We present here some examples: H. Schürmann divides the Magnificat into two parts (vv. 46-50, 51-55); L. Ramarson says that the Magnificat has three strophes (vv. 46-50, 51-53, 54-55); F. Zorell divides the Magnificat into four strophes (vv. 46-47, 48-50, 51-53, 54-55); M.-J. Lagrange says that it has five strophes (vv. 46-47, 48-49, 50-51, 52-53, 54-55). According to Á. Aparicio Rodríguez, the various criteria used for determining the structure of the Magnificat include: Poetic Construction, Rhythm, Metric, theological content. Nowadays, most of the scholars prefer the bipartite structure of the Magnificat.

A First part (vv. 46b-47, 48-49a, 49b-50)
   a) Introduction. Joyful song of exaltation to the Lord (vv. 46-47)
   b) Great things done by the Almighty in the life of Mary (vv. 48a-49a)
   c) Conclusion - Transition: the mercy of the Holy (vv. 49b-50)

B Second part (vv. 51-54a, 54b-55)
   b') 3+3 actions of the Almighty: the powerful + the lowly (vv. 51-53)
   c') Conclusion - transition: God’s help to his servant Israel (vv. 54a)
   a') Conclusion of the poem: Eternal promise of God (vv. 54-55).

There are three possibilities:
(1) The original text read simply Kai εἴπεν, Μεγαλούρν ..., and some copyists supplied Mary, and others Elizabeth. (2) The name Elizabeth was present originally, but, because of doctrinal considerations related to the Virgin, most copyists changed it to Mary. (3) The name Mary was present originally, but several copyists, assuming that the Magnificat was included in the subject of εὐλογηθεὶς εὐνοίμως ἄγιον (ver. 41), and noticing the use of αὐτῇ in ver. 56, changed Mary to Elizabeth. Although sympathetic to the supposition that perhaps neither name was present in the original text, the Committee was impressed by the overwhelming weight of external evidence, as well as by the balance of internal probabilities, and therefore preferred to read Μαριάμ as the subject of εἴπεν.

18 Á. Aparicio Rodríguez, “Ha mirado la humillación de su esclava” (Lc 1,48a). La Mirada de Dios se posa en María, in Ephemerides Martilogicae 6 (2011), 169, note 5.
20 Ad structuram cantici "Magnificat", in VD 46 (1968), 30-46.
21 "Magnificat", in VD 2 (1922), 194-198.
22 Evangile selon Saint Luc, Paris 1921, 52.
23 Á. Aparicio Rodríguez, "Ha mirado la humillación de su esclava" (Lc 1,48a), 169.
24 Ibid., 170. The internal structure of the Magnificat and the literary connections between the two parts is explained by Á. Aparicio Rodríguez in the following words: "El paso de un contexto particular (vv. 48a) a otro general (vv. 51-53), así como el paralelismo entre los vv. 50 y vv. 54b-55b pueden ser un aval para la división bipartita que presento. A medida que avanza la composición, desaparece María y aparece el grupo de los que temen el Señor (v. 50b) o los grupos contrapuestos de los poderosos y de los humildes (vv. 51-53). El nombre personal de María, por lo demás, se oculta en su "alma", en su "espíritu"
The structure presented above is based on the parallelism that can be observed in vv.48a//vv.51-53 and vv.50//vv.54-55. The shift from a particular context (vv. 48a) to a general context (vv. 51-53) is an evidence for the parallelism. According to A. Aparicio Rodríguez, another important element that we have to take into consideration is the use of pronouns in the canticle. The personal pronoun of Mary that we find in the vv. 46b-49a, disappears from v. 49b onwards. It is an important linguistic element that gives us a clue that the Magnificat has two strophes. In the second part of the hymn, the parallelism is found between v. 50 and vv. 54b-55. The movement of thought from the first strophe to the second strophe is linear and explicit. The connection between these two subsections is made clear by the pattern proposed by A. Valentini. This parallelism throws light on the concept of God's mercy.

v. 50: 1. τὸ ἐλεος αὐτοῦ 2. εἰς γενεάς καὶ γενεάς 3. τόις φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.

vv. 54-55: 1. ἐλέους 3. τῷ Αβραὰμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ 2. εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

By putting the key words ἐλεος (v. 50) and ἐλέους (v. 54) within a rectangle, we understand how the reference to God's mercy plays a vital role within the proposed bipartite structure. From this bipartite literary structure of the Magnificat, we arrive at two important conclusions: 1) Though there are two parts, the Magnificat is a literary unit which is complete in itself, because the two strophes have strong links with each other from a linguistic and theological point of view. 2) The specific theme (God's tender mercy) that we want to focus on plays a vital role in making a parallelism between v. 50 and vv. 54b-55 within the given literary structure of the Magnificat.

1.5. The Old Testament Background

Anyone who has some familiarity with the Old Testament texts can easily understand the affinity of the Magnificat with the Old Testament. Almost all the commentators and exegesis agree on this point. The Infancy narrative in the Gospel of Luke is noted for its frequent reference to the Jewish tradition and faith in presenting how the Messianic promise becomes a concrete reality in the historical event of the birth of Christ. The theology of the first two chapters of Luke's

(48b-49) o en los pronombres personales (μοι, μοι, με). A partir del v. 49b desaparece definitivamente el pronombre personal de primera persona. Es un indicio lingüístico para sostener que el poema tiene dos partes (vv. vv. 46b-50 y 51-55) y que los vv. 49b-50 forman la conclusión de la primera parte y la preparación de la segunda: de lo singular a lo general, de María a los que temen a Yahvé o se oponen él. (A. Aparicio Rodríguez, «El Dios de Maaji en el Magnificat», in Ephemerides Mariologicae 59 [2009], 217).

25 Cfr. A. Aparicio Rodríguez, «Ha mirado la humiliation de su esclava» (Lc 1,48a), 170.

Gospel is founded on the eternal love of God, which is manifest in the life of the people of Israel, through the birth of Jesus Christ. That’s why many commentators have proposed that the originality of the hymn referred to a general salvation in Jesus Christ given by God to Jews who had become Christians.27

Taking part in the mystery of Incarnation, Mary plays a vital role in the promise of God made to his people. This participation starts from the event of the Annunciation (Lk 1:54-55) in the Gospel of Luke. R. E. Brown, in his commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke gives a long list of Old Testament passages, which are very close to the Magnificat.28 We want to present those parallelisms proposed by him in a brief manner in the following paragraphs.

The first two verses of the hymn (vv. 46-47) reflect Ps 35:9: “Then, my soul will find gladness in the Lord; it will take pleasure in His salvation”; 1 Sam 2:1-2 (Hannah’s hymn): “My heart is strengthened in the Lord; my horn is exalted in my God... I delight in your salvation”; Hab 3:18 (Habakkuk’s hymn): “I shall find gladness in the Lord; I shall rejoice in God my Saviour”.

The prayer of Hanna for a child and Leah’s words after her childbirth is echoed in Lk 1:48a. The “low estate” of the handmaid of the Lord in v. 48a of the Magnificat can be noted in the following OT passages. 1 Sam 1:11: “O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid”; Gen 29:32: “Because the Lord has regarded my low estate”; Gen 30:13: “Fortunate am I, for all women”; 4 Ezra 9:45 (Zion speaking as a barren woman): “God heard your handmaid ad regarded my low estate, and considered my distress and gave me a son”. The great things that the Lord has done in Mary (v. 49a) has connections with Deut 10:21 (Moses to Israel): “He is your God who has done great things in you”, and Zeph 3:17: “The Lord your God is in you, a Mighty One will save you”. Verse 49b “And holy is his name” has a parallelism with Ps 111:9: “Holy and awesome is His name”. In v. 50, we find the same words and content of the following OT texts. Ps 103:17: “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him”; Psalms of Solomon 13:11: “His mercy upon those who fear Him”.

The first three verses of second strophe (vv. 51-53) reproduce the same content of Hannah’s hymn (1 Sam 2:7-8): “The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He reduces to lowliness and He lifts up. He lifts the needy from the earth, and from the dung heap He raises up the poor to seat them with the mighty, making them inherit a throne of glory”. This part of the Canticle (vv. 51-53) resembles Ps 89:11, Sirach 10:14, Job 12:19, 1QM xiv 10-11, Ezek 21:31(26) and Ps 107:9. The concluding part of the Magnificat (vv. 54-55) has close connections with Isa 41:8-9, Ps 98:3, Psalms of Solomon 10:4, Micah 7:20 and 2 Sam 22:51. From all these Old Testament texts, we understand that Luke gives Mary an important role in the salvation history, involving the sequence of Israel. The Magnificat sung by Mary reflects the life of the Israelites and God’s merciful love for them.

27 R. E. BROWN, The Birth of the Messiah, 357.
28 Ibid., 358-360. E. Peretto also explains how almost every verse of the Magnificat has perfect parallelism with the Old Testament texts. Cfr. E. PERETTO, Magnificat, 858-860.
2. MARY SINGS THE PRAISES OF GOD’S MERCY

Having seen some important literary features of the Magnificat, we are now going to focus on the main theme of our reflection. In the Magnificat, a truly theological song because it reveals the experience Mary had of God’s looking upon her, God is not only the Almighty to whom nothing is impossible, as Gabriel had declared (cf. Lk 1:37), but also the Merciful, capable of tenderness and fidelity towards every human being. Before going in depth into the theme, let us first clarify the terms ἔλεος in the light of ḫāsim and ḥēsim.

2.1. The term ἔλεος in the light of ḫāsim and ḥēsim

The concept of ἔλεος is better understood when we analyze it in the context of the Old Testament, with reference to the terms ḫāsim and ḥēsim. In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, we note that ἔλεος is more frequently used for ḥēsim than for ḫāsim. In the covenental relationship between God and Man, the word ḥēsim denotes grace. It also means God’s faithfulness and merciful help. Yahweh reveals Himself to Moses in Mount Sinai as one who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Ex 34:6). Thus, Mercy is one of the most intrinsic attributes of God.

In the relationship of covenant between God and Israel, the term ḥēsim concerns a juridical commitment and faithfulness. But when the Israel did not respect the covenant and broke the rules, God did not cling on to the juridical aspects of the covenant, but his love goes beyond the law. Thus, the term does not limit itself to the juridical obligations but it shows the deeper love of God, a love that surpasses all conditions and laws. It is here that the term acquires a deeper meaning of God’s unconditional and eternal love for His people.

Though there is a difference between ḥēsim and ḫāsim in their etymological meanings, in the later Judaism both the terms were interchangeably used with

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30 The difference between these two terms is very elaborately explained by John Paul II, in his Encyclical Diviti in Misericordia (30.11.2011), note 52: “In describing mercy, the books of the Old Testament use two expressions in particular, each having a different semantic nuance. First there is the term besed, which indicates a profound attitude of “goodness.” When this is established between two individuals, they do not just wish each other well; they are also faithful to each other by virtue of an interior commitment, and therefore also by virtue of a faithfulness to themselves. Since besed also means “grace” or “love,” this occurs precisely on the basis of this fidelity. [...] This fidelity vis-a-vis the unfaithful “daughter of my people” (cf. Lam. 4:3, 6) is, in brief, on God’s part, fidelity to Himself. This becomes obvious in the frequent recurrence together of the two terms heseb which could be considered a case of hendiadys (cf. e.g. Ex. 34:6; 2 Sm. 2:6; 15:20; Ps. 25[24]:10; 40[39]:11-12; 85[84]:11; 138[137]:2; Mi. 7:20). “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name” (Ez. 36:22). Therefore Israel, although burdened with guilt for having broken the covenant, cannot lay claim to God’s besed on the basis of (legal) justice; yet it can and must go on hoping and trusting to obtain it, since the God of the covenant is really “responsible for his love.” The fruits of this love are forgiveness and restoration to grace, the reestablishment of the interior covenant. The second word which in the terminology of the Old Testament serves to define mercy is rabamím. This has a different nuance from that of besed. While
the same connotations with reference to ἐλεος. In the LXX, the word ἐλεος is often used for the mercy of God as the κύριος τοῦ ἐλέους (Wis 9:1). His ἐλεος belongs to the people of Israel (cfr. Jdt 13:14; Sir. 32:25f.; Psalms of Solomon 11:9) and to those who love him (cfr. Psalms of Solomon 4:29; 6:9; 10:4). In 2 Mac 2:7; 7:29, the age of salvation is the age of God's mercy. It has eschatological connotation. The term μητρά with its meaning of a mother's womb denotes God's maternal love for his people. This motherly love of God the Father is revealed in Hosea 11:8 and Is 49:15.

2.2. Mary as an icon of God's tenderness and love

In the New Testament, the term ἐλεος is frequently used, especially in the Lukan Canticles of Magnificat (Lk 1:50.54) and Benedictus (cfr. Lk 1:72.78). It is this particular term that marks the fulfillment of God's mighty works of salvation as had been promised to our Fathers. Regarding this, F. Staudinger writes: "Luke takes up the OT concept of ἱσεδ in its original sense of the gracious and creative faithfulness of God, esp. in OT citations and hymns which allude to the OT (Luke 1:50 [cf. Ps 102:17]; 1:54[cf. Ps 97:3]; 1:72[cf. Pss 105:8; 106:45]; 1:78[cf. Isa 60:1f.]). There is joy according to 1:58 (a Hebraism), over the mercy (grace) by which God favors Elizabeth. This mercy is a sign of God's creative omnipotence. The leitmotif of Luke is sounded in the infancy narrative: The promised mercy (ḥesed) of God, which in the OT is experienced in Israel's salvation history, reaches its fullness in the gracious self-revelation of God among the insignificant and the poor in the incarnation of his Son. Mary, participating in the incarnation of Jesus in a special way, is not just aware of God's merciful love, but rather she is fully convinced that the merciful God has done great things in her life and thus exults in Joy (cfr. Lk 1:46-47). The term ἐλεος is repeated twice in the Magnificat (vv. 50 and 54). In the next paragraphs of the article, we will see how Mary is an icon of God's mercy and how she sings the praises of God's faithful love in the Magnificat.

In the Magnificat, Mary sings of the marvels that God has worked in her. Her song is a witness of God's abundant graces showered upon her and upon the Israel. She exults with Joy, because she herself has experienced in a very concrete manner the ἐλεος of God. A. Valentini says that Mary was the object of God's ἐλεος

besed highlights the marks of fidelity to self and of “responsibility for one's own love” (which are in a certain sense masculine characteristics), rabamim, in its very root, denotes the love of a mother (rehem = mother's womb). From the deep and original bond - indeed the unity - that links a mother to her child there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love. Of this love one can say that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an exigency of the heart. It is, as it were, a “feminine” variation of the masculine fidelity to self, expressed by besed. Against this psychological background, rabamim generates a whole range of feelings, including goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding, that is, readiness to forgive.

52 Ibid., 481.
53 Ibid.
and of God's χάρις, as it is manifested in the greetings addressed to her by the angel Gabriel, who called her κεχαριτωμένη. As the root verb of κεχαριτωμένη is a factitive verb, it means: "to make one favored, to give one grace," of the same stem as χάρις, "grace, favor." The root of this verb is χάρις (grace). Mary is transformed by the grace of God in view of her vocation to be the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God. The Almighty intervenes in the life of Mary in an extraordinary manner in the event of Annunciation. It is again solemnly confirmed by the words of Elizabeth: «Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? [...] And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord» (cfr. Lk 1:42-45). In response to these greetings, Mary bursts out with great joy and sings the Magnificat, declaring the tender mercy of God.

### 2.3. Mary sings the praises of God's mercy

As we explained earlier, the Magnificat forms the climax of the Visitation scene (Lk 1:39-45). The hymn begins with a burst of exaltation: «My soul magnifies (μεγαλύνει) the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour» (v. 46). Here the verb μεγαλύνει «means to declare great, rather than to make great». Mary thanks God for He has looked with favor on her. In v. 49b, Mary declares God to be holy because he has done great and marvellous things for his people.

In v. 50, she sings about God's mercy, which is from generation to generation on those who fear him (τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεάς καὶ γενεάς τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτῶν). R.E. Brown comments on v. 50 in the following words: «If the Magnificat's reference to the endless mercy of God on those who fear Him (50ab) echoes a commonplace of Israelite thought, Mary could attest the truth of that verse in a more personal way. She had been told by the angel not to fear (1:30) and that there would be no end to the kingdom over which her child would rule (1:33), so that the new covenant in Jesus is an example of God's mercy (hesed) from generation to generation». Besides v. 50, Mary sings about the mercy of God in v. 54 as well. There exists a parallelism between these two verses with reference to the theme on the eternal mercy of God, as proposed by A. Valentini.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>v. 50</th>
<th>vv. 54b-55</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. τὸ ἔλεος ...</td>
<td>1. ἔλεος</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. εἰς γενεάς καὶ γενεάς</td>
<td>3. τὸ Αβραὰμ κτλ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτῶν</td>
<td>2. εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα</td>
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</tbody>
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From the parallelism presented above, it is very evident that from lexical and theological point of view there is a close connection between v. 50 and vv. 54b-55. We note that there is a difference of order in the structure, i.e. the position of the elements 2 and 3, in the structural order. The expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα in v. 55 does not apply to the descendants of Abraham, but it completely applies to Ἑλων. God’s tender mercy is everlasting. In these two verses, Mary manifests the authentic face of God, a face that eternally radiates merciful love. The Magnificat does not offer definitions of God’s mercy, but rather God’s liberating acts themselves, speak of His mercy. Thus, the Magnificat is a concrete expression of God’s merciful tender love, manifested in the life of Israel, and in a more specific way in the event of the virgin birth of Jesus.

It is also a paschal hymn, insofar as it celebrates God’s work of salvation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It has to be interpreted in the background of the “Song of the Sea” sung by Miriam (cfr. Ex 15:1-21), celebrating the liberating intervention of God’s power. The prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea” (Ex 15:20-21). With the same spirit of gratitude, Mary too sings the song of praise, remembering God’s works of divine mercy. Thus, we can read the Magnificat from the paschal perspective as well.

Another important characteristic of God’s tender mercy is revealed in his powerful intervention to safeguard and protect the poor and liberate the oppressed: He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty (vv. 51-53). These verses show us that God cannot bear the endless sufferings of the poor. Here we should make a particular reference to the slavery of the people of Israel in Egypt and God’s powerful intervention to liberate them from their sufferings. Yahweh said to Moses: I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey ... The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt (Ex 3:7-10). God’s power wins over the resistance of the rich and the oppressors. Here Mary remembers how Yahweh delivered the people of Israel out of

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61 Cfr. A. Valentini, «Maria canta la Misericordia di Dio», 138. «Dalle azioni di Dio siamo invitati a risalire al suo volto, alla sua identità. Maria, non procede per affermazioni astratte [...] ella ha visto, ha udito e toccato e non può tacere quanto ha sperimentato, che è in fondo l'esperienza di tutto il suo popolo. Ella celebra l'eleos di Dio perché ne è stata gratificata in maniera diretta e personale. Il percorso non è deduttivo, ma dichiaratamente induttivo: dalle azioni di Dio alla rivelazione del suo volto. [...] È questa la logica del Magnificat: dall'esperienza di una misericordia infinita scaturisce un canto senza fine all'eleos di Dio» (ibid.).
slavery in Egypt (cfr. Ex 20:2). In the process of bringing salvation to His people, God takes a stand and fights against the powers of evil. Mary identifies herself with the poor and therefore she speaks of her “low estate” (ταπείνωσις) in the Magnificat. The ταπείνωσις of Mary has to be understood in the light of the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt. Mary’s song of praise is in some way closely connected to the whole history of salvation. Mary identifies herself with the people of Israel and thanks God for having saved the Israelites out of his merciful love.\footnote{Cfr. D.S. KULANDAISAMY, «Maria, Madre di misericordia nella Bibbia», in Santa Maria “Regina Martyrum”, 17 (2015/2), 3-6.}

We note that almost all the verbs in the Magnificat are in the aorist tense (except the first two verbs in vv. 46b-47, and another verb in future tense (v. 48b). The aorist tense in the Greek language is referred to as the “punctiliar” tense. It denotes concrete actions that occurred in the past. Luke uses the aorist tense in order to ascertain and emphasize the concrete interventions of God in the salvation history. These historical events in the life of Israel give witness to the concrete manifestation of God’s loving mercy. The following words of Mary conclude the magnificat: “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever” (vv. 54-55).

The fundamental theme of God’s mercy is found in the whole of the Magnificat, from the beginning until the end. God’s mercy is shown on his servant (v. 48); the same mercy is extended to all those who fear him (v. 50); God has helped his servant Israel in rememberance of his mercy (v. 54); His mercy is extended to Abraham and to all his descendants for ever (v. 55). And Mary is an object of God’s tender mercy in a very special way, especially in the event of Incarnation. Thus, we can say that the theme of God’s mercy is a key element in the theology of the Magnificat.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion of this article, we want to summarize here some of the important insights that we have come across in our study of the Magnificat. The literary analysis of the Magnificat helped to give us better understanding of its origin, context, author, literary structure and Jewish background, etc. The more we study this hymn with a correct exegetical approach, the more we become aware of its literary beauty and theological depth. The Magnificat declares that God, out of his tender mercy, has acted decisively for the people of Israel and in a manner that is more radical and explicit for Mary, in the event of the Incarnation of His only Son.

The image of Mary that we discover in the Magnificat inspires us to sing the praises of God’s tender mercy along with her. As Mary gives witness to God’s bounty and eternal love, by remembering His mighty deeds worked in Israel and in
her own life, we are also called to imitate her to recall the marvellous works that God has done in the life of the Church and in our own personal lives.

We want to conclude with the words of John Paul II: «Mary is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God’s mercy. She knows its price, she knows how great it is. In this sense, we call her the Mother of mercy, or Mother of divine mercy; in each one of these titles there is a deep theological meaning, for they express the special preparation of her soul, of her whole personality, so that she was able to perceive, through the complex events, first of Israel, then of every individual and of the whole of humanity, that mercy of which “from generation to generation” people become sharers according to the eternal design of the most Holy Trinity». The same tender mercy of God, which did marvellous works in the life of Mary, never ceases to guide us in our journey of faith. Therefore, lets us never cease to sing with her: «My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour».

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Este artículo se centra en el tema de la tierna misericordia de Dios cantada en el magnificat. El autor comienza el artículo con una breve presentación de algunas características literarias del himno, como el género literario, el contexto, la estructura, el autor y el trasfondo judío. Y luego la segunda parte del artículo se centra en el concepto de misericordia (δεσποινική) en el magnificat. El autor expone de modo detallado la manera como la tierna misericordia de Dios es un tema fundamental en este cántico lucano. Las intervenciones extraordinarias de Dios en la vida de los israelitas hablan concretamente de su amor misericordioso por su pueblo. La misma misericordia de Dios alcanzó a María misma de una manera especial en el evento de la encarnación de Jesús. Así, María canta las alabanzas de la tierna misericordia de Dios que impregna para siempre cada esfera de la existencia humana.

Cet article se focalise sur le thème de la tendre miséricorde de Dieu dans la Magnificat. L'auteur commence l'article par une brève présentation de quelques traits littéraires de l'hymne, comme le genre littéraire, le contexte, la structure, les caractéristiques de l'auteur et le soubassement juif. Et alors la seconde partie de l'article se centre sur le concept de miséricorde dans le Magnificat. L'auteur expose d'une manière détaillée comment la tendre miséricorde de Dieu est un thème fondamental dans le cantique de Luc. Les interventions extraordinaires de Dieu dans la vie des Israélites parlent concrètement de son amour miséricordieux pour son peuple. Dieu avait la même miséricorde envers Marie elle-même, spécialement dans l'événement de l'Incarnation de Jésus. C'est pourquoi Marie chante les louanges de la tendre miséricorde de Dieu, qui se répand dans tous les domaines de l'existence humaine pour l'éternité.

**Palabras clave**

Mariología lucana, Historia de la Salvación, Alianza, Misericordia de Dios, Teología del magnificat.

**Mots clés**

Mariologie de Luc, Histoire du Salut, Alliance, Miséricorde de Dieu, Théologie du Magnificat.

**Key concepts**

Lukean Mariology, Salvation History, Covenant, God's tender mercy, Theology of the Magnificat.