

MARY UP TO CHALCEDON BY THE FATHERS, THE LITURGY AND THE ASSYRIANS

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I have to speak of the development of the Marian doctrine and piety from the beginning up to the Council of Chalcedon.. The present paper follows and quotes in many parts the study of R. B. ENO presented and discussed in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation¹, and it is also largely indebted of the book of L. GAMBERO on Mary in the Church's Fathers². However several aspects of the development of the Marian doctrine appeared to me insufficiently treated in this works, especially the role of the Apocrypha and the importance of the liturgy. Moreover I was asked also to consider what is the place of Mary in the Assyrian tradition and spirituality. We know that the Assyrian Church, faithful to the Antiochian tradition and to Nestorius, have not accepted until now the theology of Cyril of Alexandria as it was received by the Council of Ephesus (431), i.e. the term *theotokos* for qualifying the Blessed Virgin Mary. However the Assyrian Church has an important Marian piety as it was already for the universal Church before Chalcedon.

I. The evolution within the New Testament

It seems to me that, as a matter of fact, the first theological link of the Christian thought about Mary is with Christology and neither with anthropology (Eve-Mary) nor with ecclesiology. And, as we shall say soon after, with Incarnation Christology³. That is an important starting point for our

¹ Robert B. ENO, *Mary and her role in patristic theology*, in *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII, Edited by H. George ANDERSON, J. Francis STAFFORD, Joseph A. BURGESS, Minneapolis, 1992, pp. 159-177 ff. Quoted ENO in the footnotes of this paper.

² Luigi GAMBERO, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999. Quoted GAMBERO in the footnotes of this paper.

³ In his paper of last year J. MUDDIMAN wrote about the change of Vatican II from anthropology to ecclesiology in the Marian doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church: "The effect of this change of context from anthropology to ecclesiology on the Marian doctrines themselves demands further exploration. But if Mary is the symbol of the

study.

1. In the New Testament itself there is a growth in the doctrine about Mary. We know in fact that:

A. Paul says nothing on Mary, if we except "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4), but this points only on the reality of incarnation and on the fact that Christ was under the Law⁴.

B. Mark has just a short mention of Mary in 6:3, Jesus is "the carpenter, the son of Mary"⁵. This mention of Mark could indicate the virginity of Mary. However there is also the negative statement of Jesus himself: "who is my mother, etc." of Mk 3:33-34. This question of Jesus is found also in Mt and Lk, but these two have a Marian Prologue. Mark has not.

C. Matthew and Luke have a Prologue where Mary has a privileged place. In the Acts of the Apostles Mary is present at the beginning (Acts 1:14) : After the mention of the Eleven (1:13), we find with all of them the women who accompanied Jesus until the Cross and the Resurrection, and Mary, then his brethren. "They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brethren". After this mention that indicates the continuity of the Acts with the Gospel of Luke, Mary disappears.

The place of Mary in the Prologue of Luke is already significant, especially the statements that : « Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in heart », after the report of the shepherds in Bethlehem (2, 19), and : « His mother treasured all these things in her heart », after the statement of Jesus

Church, her Immaculate Conception would represent in a paradigmatic instance the effect of justifying grace on the whole community of the baptised, those born 'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn 1.13). Her sinless life, ever more open to the divine economy, is a paradigm of sanctification and a foretaste of the Church's destiny to appear before God blameless at the last. And her Assumption would be a worked example of the future hope of all Christians at the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. It is not inconsistent with biblical faith to see these eschatological expectations summed up in particular instances wherein they are already realised, and hope thereby assured. What can be said of the conception, transfiguration and resurrection in the case of the Saviour may legitimately be said of the conception, holy life and reception into glory of Mary as symbol for the Church".

⁴ Perhaps the omission of the father of Christ or of the word "man" could indicate also the virginity of Mary? But "born of a woman" indicates more probably that Jesus is really a Jew, because in order to be a real Jew you have to be born of a Jewish mother; the Jewish father does not mean that you are really a Jew if your mother is from the *göim*.

⁵ Note the difference with Mt 13:55: "Is not this the carpenter's son, is not his mother called Mary?"

about the house of his Father (2, 51). That is never said of any other person and indicates a special link between Mary and the mystery of his son Jesus.

D. In John Mary is found at two key positions: the first miracle at Cana (Jn 2:1 ff.) and the Cross (Jn 19:25-27). I don't comment Rev. 12 because the interpretation is very complex and the dating is uncertain. But it is sufficient for our purpose to remark that there is this growth of Marian position inside the New Testament writings from Paul and Mark to John. That is important for our task to present the development of Marian doctrine and piety in writings soon after the New Testament.

2. This NT Marian doctrine depends on Christology. Its purpose is to state at the same time the reality of the human nature of Christ and the peculiar origin of him from God. With a kind of anachronism we could say that there is an anti-docetic purpose. « Jesus birth from Mary pointed to his true humanity while the virginal conception was seen as indicative of a more than human reality in Jesus' life and work »⁶

3. With the canonicity of the writings of the New Testament this Marian doctrines are spread throughout all Christianity. Thus, it is difficult to talk about special regions where these doctrines are emphasized and scattered. Of course, each writings of the New Testament have its peculiar milieu of origin, but at the end of the 2nd century all the Churches received these doctrines as part of the canonical Scriptures. As we shall see, this spreading of the New Testament teaching about Mary is linked also with the appearance of the *Apocrypha*. For this reason it was not possible to speak of the teaching on Mary during the patristic period without considering this growth of the Marian place within the canonical writings of the New Testament.

Robert Eno wrote : « Jesus' birth from Mary pointed to his true humanity while the virginal conception was seen as indicative of a more than human reality in Jesus' life and work. Mary herself came more into prominence when, by extension, related questions were asked: Was it necessary or just fitting that Mary's virginity never be lost in her lifetime? If she was "ever-virgin", then who were the "brothers and sisters of the Lord"? Given that Mary was the "Mother of the Lord", what was to be thought of her as a believer and follower of Jesus? What was to be made of certain incidents in the Gospel which at first sight seemed to show Mary in a less favourable light? In a word, beyond the issue of perpetual virginity, there was also the question of Mary's holiness. »⁷

⁶ ENO, p. 159.

⁷ *Ibid.*

II. The evidences of the IInd century

1. *The first patristic tradition.* – In the most ancient extra canonical tradition *Didachè* and in *I Clem.* nothing is said about Mary. However that does not prove anything.

1) *Ignatius of Antioch.* – In fact, the first Father of the Church after these two writings, Ignatius of Antioch, had to say something very important about Mary even if the meaning of these texts is not so clear as we would like to have them.

Ignatius wrote his letters about the year 110 (or 115 ?), that is not so far from the Gospel of John. One of the main purpose of Ignatius in these letters is to fight docetism. Thus what he writes about Mary is to assert the orthodox Christology and the reality of Incarnation. In three of these letters there is a mention of Mary, the Mother of Christ.

At the beginning of the epistle to the *Smyrnaeans* he expounds his confession of faith about Christ who “is really of the line of David according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 1:3-4), and the Son of God by the will and power of God; he was really born of a virgin, and baptized by John in order to fulfill every command (cf. Mt 3:15)”⁸. The name of Mary does not appear, but what is important is the statement of the virginal birth; and we note also the lineage of David through the virgin.

In an other passage, in the epistle to the *Trallians* he stresses the same about the reality of Incarnation and David lineage, but without mention of the virginity of Mary: “Jesus Christ, David’s descendant and Mary’s Son, who was truly born, and ate, and drank”⁹.

The most important text is found in the epistle to the *Ephesians*. Already in the first part of the letter we find an significant Christological statement: “There is only one physician, having both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God become man, true life in death, from Mary and from God, first possible

⁸ IGNATIUS, *Smyrn.* 1,1. For our purpose we had not to discuss the thesis of J. RIUS-CAMPS who believes to be the four original Ignatian letters “reconstructed from the seven ones of the middle recension” (*The four authentic letters of Ignatius, the Martyr*, OCA 213, Roma, 1980). For him this creed of *Smyrn.* 1,1 was originally in *Ephesians*, chap. 19, but this scholar does not deny the Ignatian authenticity of this passage and of the others quoted below. About this question see : Ch. MUNIER, *Où en est la question d'Ignace d'Antioche ? Bilan d'un siècle de recherches 1870-1988*, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Teil II, Band 27/1, Berlin - New York, 1993, pp. 359-484.

⁹ IGNATIUS, *Tral.* 9,1.

and then impassible, Jesus Christ, our Lord”¹⁰.

However, the most significant passage is in the last part of this letter. It begins in chap. 16 against the corruption of the doctrine about God and Christ. After a statement on the anointing of Christ (chap. 17), comes an extract of the Ignatius creed: “For our God Jesus Christ, according to God’s economy, was conceived by Mary of the seed of David (cf. Jn 7:42; Rm 1, 3), but also by the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptised, that by his Passion he might purify the water”¹¹. These are the five basic articles of the Ignatian anti-Docetic creed – virginal conception, lineage of David through Mary, birth, baptism, passion and death of Jesus¹².

But for Ignatius in these articles three are outstanding mysteries “hidden from the Chief of the present *aion* : the virginity of Mary, her child-bearing and the death of the Lord¹³. These hidden mysteries were manifested to the *aions* by the unique star who is Jesus Christ¹⁴. What is important in this passage is the fact that by the three main mysteries of “God was making his appearance in human form to mould the newness of the eternal life”, two of them are related to Mary: the virginity and, through her, remaining a virgin, the real human birth of God. Of course, the purpose of Ignatius stays christological and anti-Docetic, but the place given to Mary, in the line of the Prologues of Matthew and Luke, is put at the centre. The content is not new, except the statement that the David’s lineage is through Mary, statement as a direct consequence from the gospels because the mother of Jesus is a virgin¹⁵. However there is a shift of the stress, in order to save the reality of Incarnation from God and Mary.

Scholars have noticed the relationship of this passage of Ignatius and the apocryphal *Ascensio Isaiae* 11,2, a docetic writing of which we shall speak below¹⁶. We have already to remark that this passage and that of the *Ascensio*

¹⁰ IGNATIUS, *Eph.* 7,2.

¹¹ IGNATIUS, *Eph.* 18,2.

¹² RIUS-CAMP, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

¹³ IGNATIUS, *Eph.* 19,1 : Καὶ ἔλαθε τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἡ παρθενία Μαρίας καὶ ὁ τοκετὸς αὐτῆς, ὁμοίως καὶ ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Κυρίου· τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς, ἅτινα ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ Θεοῦ ἐπράχθη.

¹⁴ IGNATIUS, *Eph.* 19,3.

¹⁵ According to the gospels of Matthew 1,1 ff. Jesus is son of David through « Joseph, the husband of Mary » (Mt 1, 16) ; for Luke 1,35 the David’s lineage of Jesus is logically through Mary, but in 3, 31 it looks as through Joseph, but Jesus « was thought his son » (3, 23).

¹⁶ *Ascensio Isaiae. Commentarius*, cura Enrico NORELLI, CC, Series Apocryphorum 8, Turnhout, 1995, pp. 652 ff. : Excursus XI : *Al* 11 e i tre misteri di Ignazio di Antiochia (*Efesini* 19, 1). See also E. NORELLI, *Ascension d’Isaïe. Traduction introduction et*

Isaiae depend on a common source, beyond Mt and Lk. The letter of Ignatius is sent to the Church of Ephesus, but the teaching on the three mysteries was part of what Ignatius taught to his Church of Antioch, and perhaps already received from the tradition of that Church.

Here, in this page of the letter to Ephesians, we have some progress in the reflection about Mary. It is a new step in the trajectory starting with the first statements of the New Testament, and beyond the Prologues of Matthew and Luke and the teaching of John, to a new accent on the uniqueness of the Mother of the Lord. This involves not only the virginal conception, as in Mt and Lk, but also the virginity in the birth of Jesus, and probably the perpetual virginity of her. It excludes however any Docetism. Jesus is really incarnated from Mary.

We had to talk about Ignatius with some length because the letters of this bishop and martyr had a strong influence on the subsequent literature¹⁷.

2) Justin Martyr († 165).

« Justin, initially, and then in a more developed fashion, Irenaeus, spoke of the parallelism of Eve and Mary as negative and positive elements in the story of the human race. They built on the imagery of the old and the new Adam already found in Paul. Many have seen this as the origin of Marian theology. In a way of course it was, yet this particular line of reasoning in fact soon came to a dead end and the insight became a commonplace in the Fathers (e.g., Jerome "Mors per Evam; vita per Mariam")¹⁸ ».

One of Justin's works, the *Dialogue with Tripho the Jew*, contains the seeds of several important later developments. The already mentioned Eve/Mary parallelism is one of these: « [The Son of God] became man through a virgin, so that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had begun. For Eve, who was virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the virgin Mary conceived faith and joy; for when the angel Gabriel brought her the glad tidings that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the Holy One born of her would be the Son of God, she answered "Let it be done to me according to your word" (...) Through him, God crushed the serpent, along with those angels and men who

notes, (Apocryphes 2), Turnhout, 1993, pp. 95 ff.

¹⁷ Ignatius' Letters are known by Polycarp (*Fil.* 9 and 13), Irenaeus (AH V, 28, 4), Origen (*De Oratione* 20; *Hom. In Luc.* VI, etc.), Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* III, 36), and others.

¹⁸ ENO, p. 159f.

had become like the serpent »¹⁹.

« (...). The Dialogue with Tripho the Jew was concerned to a great extent with differing views about the interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures. The meaning of Isa 7:14 provided an ongoing focus for Jewish-Christian polemic. But Justin's work contains as well the seeds of several important later developments. The Eve/Mary parallelism is one of these: "For Eve who was a virgin undefiled, having conceived the ward of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the virgin Mary ...received faith and joy."? »

« Here it is interesting to note how Justin already presents Mary's role in salvation as the consequence of a free and conscious choice in response to the angel's message. However, just as the harmful action of Eve was subordinate to that of Adam, on whom fell the primary responsibility for sin, in the same way the action of Mary, in the order of human salvation, remains absolutely subordinate to the necessary and essential action of Christ, the only Redeemer »²⁰

About this Justin's text, Gambero remarks also that this testimony about the parallelism of Eve and Mary comes from « a simple Christian layman who does not see himself as offering his own teaching, but who intends to reinforce the traditional teaching of the Church and to defend it against the calumnious insinuations of pagans and Jews. Finally, Justin's testimony can be related to the faith of the whole Church of his time, since, as an itinerant philosopher, he was undoubtedly familiar with both Eastern and Western Christianity ».

3) *Melito of Sardis* († 190). Melito with his *Peri Pascha* and many other writings had a deep influence on several Christian authors; probably on Irenaeus and certainly on Tertullian²¹. He has a very clear Christology stating openly the reality of the human nature of Christ and of the divine. Unfortunately we possess only the *Peri Pascha*. Other few fragments of a lost conspicuous work were collected, and no more. About Mary in this *Peri Pascha* there is not very much to note. What is interesting is the fact that the three mentions of the incarnation are in the context similar to the symbol of faith²².

¹⁹ *Dial.* 100, 2. Note that for Justin it is Christ who crushes the serpent, not Mary.

²⁰ GAMBERO, cited above, p. 48.

²¹ See Stuart G. HALL, *Melito von Sardes*, TRE 22, 424-428 (1992). The edition of *Peri Pascha* by O. PERLER, in SC 123 (1960) remains classical.

²² 70. « He it is, who came from heaven to earth for the sake of suffering man; he clothed himself in man's flesh in the womb of a virgin from whom he came forth as man and took upon himself the sufferings of him who suffered by means of a body capable of suffering and destroyed the sufferings of the flesh and slew death-dealing

4) *Irenaeus of Lyons.*

« The insight of Justin (about the parallel Eve/Mary) was developed by Irenaeus of Lyon (flourished c. 175). In refuting the various Gnostic teachings, he elaborated his theology of recapitulation. In saving the human race, Jesus, the new Adam, retraced the steps of the old Adam in the undoing of the race. Not surprisingly, other parallels were sought and the one mentioned by Justin, Eve and Mary, was seized upon.

» Jesus, the new Adam, retraced the steps of the old Adam in the undoing of the race. Not surprisingly, other parallels were sought and the one mentioned by Justin, Eve and Mary, was seized upon.

» "In accordance with this design, Mary the virgin is found obedient. ... But Eve was disobedient, for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. Eve ... having become disobedient was made the cause of death, both for herself and the entire human race; so also did Mary ... by yielding obedience become the cause of salvation both for herself and the whole human race. ... The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."²³ "And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the virgin Mary might become the advocate of the virgin Eve.

» And thus as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin."²⁴

» Much later, theologians of a less biblical and more Scholastic turn would speculate whether such texts could be cited to show Mary's essential participation in the redemptive process. Is she a conscious and free participant or more like a passive prop in this drama?

» Despite his high estimate of Mary's role, Irenaeus also exhibited traces of what would become a common thread running through Eastern exegesis.

death by his spirit which cannot die » (PERLER, p. 98).

70-71. « It is he who became incarnate in a virgin, who was hung upon the wood, who was buried in the earth, who was raised from among the dead, who was lifted up to the heights of heaven. He is the mute lamb, he is the slain lamb, he is born of Mary, the fair ewe, he is taken from the flock and delivered over to immolation and slain in the evening and buried in the night » (*ibid.*).

104. « He is who made the heaven and the earth, and who moulded man in the beginning, who was announced by the Law and the prophets, who was incarnated in a virgin, who was hung up to a wood, who was buried in earth, who was arisen from the dead, ... » (*id.*, p. 124).

²³ *Adv. Haer.* III, 22, 4.

²⁴ *Adv. Haer.* V, 19, 1. see *Epid.* 33.

Commenting on Gospel incidents involving Mary, he could be critical of her. So, in the wedding at Cana, she is blamed for excessive haste, seeking to push her son into performing a miracle before his hour had come »²⁵.

That is the opinion of ENO. A question remains: When Irenaeus wrote: « (Mary) by yielding obedience become the cause of salvation both for herself and the whole human race », is it only to state the parallelism between Eve and Mary? At any event the role of Mary is not purely passive. Not only because Irenaeus in the same passage affirms that it is the Mary's faith that causes her obedience, but for two other reasons:

1. If Mary's role in redemption would be only passive, the same could be said about the role of Eve in the disobedience. What would be the meaning of what Irenaeus wrote in *Epideixis* 33 about Marys: « Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience »?
2. Some pages above Irenaeus indicates clearly that he writes against the Valentinians who said that « the Jesus of the economy only went through Mary ».²⁶ Thus it seems to us very difficult according to Irenaeus to deny any active role to Mary in the work of salvation.

About Irenaeus of Lyons it is also noticeable that in the account of the rule of the baptismal faith, i.e. the creed of the Church around the world, at the beginning of his main work *Adversus haereses*, he indicates "the birth from the Virgin"²⁷. That is the same line as the statements of Ignatius, and demonstrates the importance given at this event and consequently at Mary. See below about Hippolytus.

2. *The Apocrypha:*

I have put together the witness of the Apocrypha within the section of the 2nd century. It is clear that the majority of these writings are later than this century, but because some of them contain very archaic elements it was more simple to speak of them in the same category²⁸.

A. *The Ascension of Isaiah*. Thus apocryphon is clearly docetic. According to NORELLI it is also a defence of the prophets with their own charism against

²⁵ *Adv. Haer.* III, 16, 7. ENO, p. 161.

²⁶ *Adv. Haer.* III, 16, 1.

²⁷ *Adversus Haereses* I, 10, 1 (SC 264, pp. 154-156.: καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου γέννησιν.

²⁸ The excellent study of Edouard COTHENET is still useful in *Marie dans les Apocryphes in Maria, Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, tome 6, ed. H. DU MANOIR, Paris, 1961. However new editions and studies have brought a renewal on many points.

the hierarchical newness of the bishops of whom Ignatius is the major representative²⁹. The text contains elements of the Jewish tradition about Isaiah. What is interesting is the way it presents the birth of Jesus: « And while they were alone (i. e. Joseph and Mary), Mary looked up and saw a little child, and she was frightened. And at that very moment her womb was found as it has been before she had conceived »³⁰.

The intent of the narrative is to state that the body of Jesus was only an appearance, not a real human being. For the first time (?) we see clearly affirmed the virginity *in partu* but in a docetic context. Against it Ignatius asserts the reality of Christ' human nature, and also the two hidden mysteries of the virginity of Mary and of the birth of Jesus. Thus both parties, Docetic and Orthodox, as it looks, kept the tradition of the virginal birth of Christ, but the one to state that it was an appearance, the other that it is a mystery.

B. *The Protevangelium of James*

This "Protevangelium of James", as it is still commonly called, was known in a great number of versions and was at the origin of many reshapings. Its spreading in the Greek speaking world was enormous. The Latin translation was known by Zeno of Verona († 371-372), by Prudentius (348-406 ca) and especially by Jerome which fought against it. Pope Innocent I († 417) numbered it among the condemned Apocrypha in 405. Already Augustine in the *Contra Faustum* 23, 9 († 398) said it was not received among the Scriptures and the *Decretum Gelasianum* put it among the Apocrypha (495 ?).

In this apocryphon the purpose is the glorification of Mary and especially her purity³¹. Daughter of the rich Joachim and the barren Ann, she is educated in the Temple of Jerusalem from her earliest youth. She is entrusted by the priesters to an old widow man, Joseph, who has been drawn by lots ; after Jesus' birth she remained intact, as it is verified at her own expense by the midwife Salome. Herod try to kill John the Baptist of whom he thinks he is the Messiah and murder Zacharias his father who refused to deliver him. The narrative is given as the work of a certain James who is the Lord's brother. The second title of the work is in fact « Apocalypse of James ».

This work, *The Nativity of Mary* (*Apocalypse of James*, called *Protevangelium of James*) is probably not much later than the last texts of the New Testament. This *apocryphon* met an enormous success and marked all the

²⁹ E. NORELLI, see above. According to NORELLI, 1995, pp. 65-66, this document is from Antioch. The chap. 6-11 would be of the end of the 1st century and are clearly docetic. The chap. 1-5 are more orthodox and of the beginning of the 2nd century.

³⁰ Translation of GAMBERO, p. 33.

³¹ É. AMANN, *Apocryphes.*, col. 482.

mariology through the centuries in the East but also in the West in spite of the condemnation by the Gelasian Decree. A papyrus of the 3rd century with this *apocryphon* was published in 1958³² and the content shows that is already a reworking and a mixture of different sources of the 2nd century or earlier³³. That was already the judgement of Tischendorff³⁴ who founded his opinion on Justin³⁵ and Origen. This one speaks of our *apocryphon* as a well known writing whom the authority is linked with an other *apocryphon*, *The Gospel of Peter*³⁶.

I think useful also to report at length here the opinion of ENO who writes: « Before proceeding to the usual starting point, the Apostolic Fathers, there is one document of particular interest among the New Testament apocrypha, one which apparently had a considerable influence. This is the Book of James, later called the Protevangelium.³ According to recent studies this was written in Egypt or Syria between 175 and 200. Its principal purpose seems to have been to counteract Jewish attacks against Jesus and Mary, attacks such as those repeated in the *True Doctrine* of Celsus written c. 180. There is present as well that general characteristic of the apocryphal gospels, i.e., a response to the popular desire that *lacunae* in the canonical gospels be filled in.

» This book fills us in on the early life of Mary. Anna and Joachim are named as her parents. There is a certain parallelism suggested between

³² M. TESTUZ, *Papyrus Bodmer V, Nativité de Marie*, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Collogny-Genève, 1958. The title is in Greek : Γένεσις Μαρίας. Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰακώβ.

³³ Luigi MORALDI, *Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. I, *Natività di Maria* (o *Protovangelo di Giacomo*), Torino, 1971, pp. 63 f.; E. COTHENET, *Protévangile de Jacques*, in *DB Suppl.*, VIII, Paris, 1972, col. 1374 ff. E. DE STRYCKER, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, Bruxelles, 1961.

³⁴ *Evangelia apocrypha*, Leipzig, 1852, p. XIII. Sure, Tischendorff did not know the Bodmer Papyrus, so his judgment is still more interesting.

³⁵ Jesus is born in a cave : *Dial.* 78. Cf. *Nativité de Marie* 18, 1. See also É. AMANN (*Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament*, in *DB Suppl.* I, *Le Protévangile de Jacques*, Paris 1928, col. 482) who noted also a striking similarity of wording with some texts of Justin. Justin would have found it from Isaiah 33:16 that he quoted above (70, 2), but this opinion is disputed. E. DE STRYCKER (pp. 414 ff): « On ne saurait donc considérer comme prouvé ni comme sérieusement probable que Justin ait connu le *Protévangile de Jacques*, et il n'a, par conséquent, de ce côté aucune raison de faire remonter la date de notre apocryphe jusqu'à la première moitié du II^e siècle. » (p. 417). It is a fact that in the area surrounding Bethlehem there are a plenty of caves which could be used possibly to shelter the flocks. On the other hand, one must not forget that Justin is a Greek of Palestine. Origen knows also that Jesus is born in a cave (*C. Celsum*, I, 51).

³⁶ In Mt X, 17 : « The brethren of Jesus can be the sons of Joseph's first wedding, as some state who follow the Gospel of Peter and the Book of James. »

Joachim and Elcanah; Anna and Hannah; Mary and Samuel. Mary was presented in the temple, where the priests saw a divine calling for her. She was raised in the temple until puberty, when she was espoused to Joseph, an elderly widower. At the birth of Jesus a midwife was present who testified to the miraculous birth. Clement of Alexandria later referred explicitly to this.³⁷ Another woman, Salome, who doubted that Mary was still a virgin, was punished with a withered hand. Much later Jerome ridiculed the deliramenta of the apocrypha, but the Book of James was influential nonetheless.³⁸ »

C. An other ancient *apocryphon* is the *Transitus Mariae*, recently studied anew by Mimouni³⁹. In the present status the text is not before the 4th century, but it contains older elements. Still more recently Mark SHERIDAN, O.S.B., published on the net a study about the Coptic tradition of a homily on the Death of the Virgin Mary, probably of the time of patriarch Damian (578-607) depending on the *Transitus*⁴⁰. The transmission of this *apocryphon* shows that there were different stages of the development of the doctrine about the final destiny of Mary. The fact that the Coptic and Ethiopian liturgical calendars preserved two different feasts – one for Dormition of Mary, the other for the Assumption, separated with an interval of 206 days – shows that these liturgical traditions represents a stage when the fusion between the doctrines of Dormition and Assumption was not yet accomplished. According to Mimouni, the idea of immortality of Mary preceded that of death followed by resurrection which relied the destiny of Mary with that of Jesus. The idea of assumption *without* resurrection is more ancient than that of assumption *after* resurrection. The first one appeared in julianist milieu⁴¹, the second came from severian milieu as an attempt to conciliate the old belief of Dormition to the new one of Assumption. It receives the idea of incorruptibility and that of the reunion of the soul with the body, but refuses

³⁷ CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* 7. 16 ; GCS 17 : 66, ed. O. Stählin (1909).

³⁸ JEROME, *Adv. Helvidium* 8 ; PL 23 : 192.

³⁹ Simon Claude MIMOUNI, *Dormition et Assomption de Marie. Histoire des Traditions anciennes*. (Théologie historique 98), Paris, Beauchesne, 1995, 716 p.

⁴⁰ *A Homily on the Death of the Virgin Mary attributed to Evodius of Rome* : <http://web.infinito.it/utenti.../EVODIUS%OF%ROME.ht>, october 17, 2000. New improved edition on last March : <http://www.coptica.net>. The purpose of this publication on the net is to provoke reactions of scholars before printing it.

⁴¹ Party of Julian, bishop of Halicarnassus, deposed in 518 (dead some time afterwards), as head of the “aphthartodocetae” or “phantasiastae”, teachers of the incorruptibility of the body of Christ, or of a merely phenomenal body of Christ. The major opponent to the Julianists was the monophysite patriarch Severus of Antioch († 538).

immortality⁴². However, Mark Sheridan contests that there was a feast of the Assumption of Mary by the Copts without her death.

The case of the feasts of the final destiny of Mary is similar to that of the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany. The Monophysites preferred to keep the date of the 6th of January, as it is still the case for the Armenians today. Although the celebration of Christmas on the 25 of December had been introduced in Cappadocia in the last decades of the 4th century, the duplication of 25th of December and 6th of January seemed to the Monophysites a surrender to Chalcedon by distinguishing the human birth and the divine epiphany of the Lord (?). In any event, it is sure that in the East the celebration of Christmas at the 25th of December was not observed everywhere. Emperor Justin II (565-578) published a decree in order to impose to every Church the celebration of Christmas on the 25th of December and the baptism on the 6th of January.

It is well known that the liturgy of Jerusalem had an essential role for the worship of the final destiny of Mary. The christological controversies had, especially in Palestine, a strong impact on the evolution of the liturgy. And this liturgy of Jerusalem influenced all the liturgies of the Christian East and, consequently of the West.

Conclusion: I have emphasised the role of the *apocrypha* because they had in all the Christian world of the first centuries an enormous, even though not officially admitted, in the development of the Marian piety and doctrine.

III. The writings of the 3^d century

1) *Clement of Alexandria*. He is a clear witness of his faith in the perpetual virginity of Mary: « It appears that even today many hold that Mary, after the birth of her Son, was found to be in the state of a woman who has given birth, while in fact she was not so. For some say that, after giving birth, she was examined by a midwife, who found her to be a virgin »⁴³. We must note that Clement opposes the opinion of some who believe in perpetual virginity (and he is among them) to many who don't believe in it. The opinion of Clement is founded in the *Protevangelium of James* and in a text he thinks of the Scripture, but in reality an *apocryphon* also used by Tertullian and others, the *Pseudo-Ezekiel*.

2) *Hippolytus*. Some years after Irenaeus the *Apostolic Tradition*, attributed

⁴² MIMOUNI, p. 19, note 48.

⁴³ *Strom.* 7, 16.

to Hippolytus of Rome, contains a baptismal creed, already very similar to the later Roman creed, where the one Christ Jesus is said "qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine"⁴⁴. One must remember that the Nicene creed have no mention of the virginal birth of Mary⁴⁵. This mention was added by the creed of Constantinople (381)⁴⁶, after several creeds of the 4th century and among them the Roman symbol testified by Marcellus of Ancyra⁴⁷, the symbol I of Sirmium⁴⁸ and all the Western symbols. In the East, before the council of Constantinople, the first testimony of the mention of the virginal birth in a symbol is to be found in the *Ancoratus* of Epiphanius of Salamina⁴⁹.

3) Origen.

« According to the historian Socrates, Origen used the term *Theotokos*, but this cannot be verified from the extant texts⁵⁰.

» While there is no question that Origen upheld the virginal conception, there is dispute beyond this point. Although he believed that Mary had no further children, he did not clearly accept a physical *virginitas in partu*. "As for those who claim that she was united in marriage after giving birth, that have no way of proving that, for the children attributed to Joseph were not born of Mary and no text of Scripture recalls this"⁵¹.

» Origen also brings John's Calvary scene to bear as evidence that Jesus was Mary's only child. "According to those who think wholesomely about her, Mary has no son but Jesus"⁵².

» Yet he also speaks of Mary's need for purification after the birth of Jesus: "... (concerning the purification) of Mary who had given birth, no question will be asked and we would say with a certain boldness: Mary, who belonged to the human race, needed purification after childbirth"⁵³. A little later, more directly, he said: "For the mother of the Lord, her womb was opened at the

⁴⁴ B. BOTTE, *La Tradition Apostolique de saint Hippolyte*, Essai de reconstitution, Münster/W., 1963, p. 48-50.

⁴⁵ DS 125.

⁴⁶ DS 150.

⁴⁷ DS 11.

⁴⁸ DS 139.

⁴⁹ DS 42, 44. However it is well known that the symbols at the end of the *Ancoratus* (374) are of disputable origin, perhaps after the Council of Constantinople 381. Cf J. Willebrands (E.L.).

⁵⁰ SOCRATES, *HE* VII, 32; PG 67, 812.

⁵¹ *Hom. in Lc.* 7,4; SC 87,158. Cf. also Fragment 31 in the *Commentary on John*, GCS 10,506-507; ed. E. PREUSCHEN, 1903.

⁵² *Co.Jo.* 1,23; SC 120, 170.

⁵³ *Hom. Lc.* 14,3; SC 87, 218.

very moment of childbirth, since, before the birth of Christ, no man had approached the womb consecrated and worthy of the greatest respect⁵⁴. Among those who have tried to reconcile apparent contradictions in Origen, the more common opinion is that, for him, the physical loss of virginity at childbirth did not disqualify Mary for the title of 'ever-virgin'. He looked, in other words, primarily at sexual intercourse as that which deprived a woman morally as well as physically of her virginity. In his commentary on Matthew, Origen repeated the story, mentioned in the Gospel (Mt 23:35), of how Zechariah came to meet his death. Mary, after childbirth, came to pray in the temple, in the section reserved for virgins (! ?). When the authorities tried to stop her, Zechariah explained that she, in spite of recently giving birth, was still a virgin. He was killed for this trouble⁵⁵ (...)

» The Role of Mary as model for Christian virgins would become increasingly important in the future. "Jesus was the first-fruits among men of the purity which consists in chastity and Mary among women. It would not be right to attribute to any woman other than Mary the first-fruits of virginity."⁵⁶

» Origen's exegetical views would also come to bear considerable weight with later commentators.

» One of the most influential of these opinions (of Origen on Mary) can be found in his remarks on the Calvary scene. The famous 'sword' that will transfix Mary according to Luke (2:35) has been variously interpreted. For Origen this meant that on Calvary, in the hour of Jesus' suffering and death, Mary wavered in her faith; the 'sword of infidelity' and uncertainty touched her. Origen took some sting away by adding that it was necessary that this happen so that she too would have some sin for which Jesus died⁵⁷ ”.

» He speculated that Mary stayed as long as she did with her cousin Elizabeth because she doubted the angel's message and wanted to see for herself how it would come about⁵⁸. Finally, he adds that even when Jesus was twelve years old and lost in the temple, the faith of Mary and Joseph was still quite imperfect. This passage is interesting because it indicates that Origen was aware of the discrepancy between Mary's disquiet here and her presumed awareness of Jesus' divine status as she should have learned it from the events recounted in the infancy narratives. His somewhat desperate solution was to explain that Mary and Joseph were upset because they feared that Jesus might

⁵⁴ *Hom Lc* 14,8; SC 87, 226; see also *Hom in Lev.* 8,2; SC 287, 12.

⁵⁵ *Ser. Com. Mat.* 25, GCS 38, 42-43 ; ENO, p. 161-162.

⁵⁶ *Com. in Mat.* 10.17 : SC 1& » : 216.

⁵⁷ *Hom. in Lc* 17, 6; SC 87, 256-258.

⁵⁸ *Hom. in Lc.*, fragment 30; SC 87, 484.

have decided to return to heaven⁵⁹. »

4) *Tertullian* († after 221):

« Because of his position as the first of the Latin theologians and his sparkling rhetoric, which contrasted with Origen's more plodding style, Tertullian's views may seem more significant than they really are. In fact, on many matters he was the exception. In the context of his comments on Mary, he was always concerned with refuting docetic christological views, especially those of Marcion. While he was a firm believer in the virginal conception, he stressed the reality of Jesus' humanity by expressing his belief that Mary was no longer a virgin after the birth of Jesus. Nor did he attribute to Mary any special sanctity ».

Certainly Tertullian denies clearly the virginal birth⁶⁰ and the perpetual virginity of Mary⁶¹, but he recognizes the sanctity of Mary because she is the mother of Christ, but thinks in her some imperfections, especially her lack of faith⁶².

ENO continues: « It was a docetic commonplace to interpret the scene in Matt 12:48 as a denial by Jesus of his true humanity, a denial that he had any physical, human origins and family. But Jesus was really of the flesh of Mary, insisted Tertullian. He was 'of' Mary, not just a heavenly being who had been 'in' her womb for the sake of appearances. What would be the point of that? 'If the Word was made flesh out of himself and not out of what the womb contributed, how did a womb who had wrought nothing, performed nothing, experienced nothing, decant its fountain into those breasts in which it comes only by the process of giving birth'⁶³.

» Mary was a virgin "as regard her husband, not a virgin as regard child-bearing... and if as a virgin she conceived, in her child-bearing she became a wife. ... For all other women, marriage opens it. Consequently hers was the more truly opened in that it was the more shut. Indeed, she is rather to be called not-virgin than virgin, having become a mother by a sort of leap, before she was a bride"⁶⁴.

» Further, Mary as well as the 'brothers' did not believe in Jesus' mission. Their arrival to see him while he was teaching showed that she 'did not adhere to him'. At this point their *incredulitas* was exposed. They did not go to hear

⁵⁹ *Hom. in Lc* 20,4; SC 87, 282-284.

⁶⁰ *De carne Christi* 21, 2, CCL 2, 1215.

⁶¹ *De monogamia* 8, CCL 2, 1239.

⁶² *De carne Christi* 7, 13, CCL 2, 889 ; *Adv. Marcionem* 4, 19, CCL 1, 593.

⁶³ *De carne Christi*, 19-20, ed. EVANS, 66, 68

⁶⁴ *De carne Christi*. 23, p. 76.

him 'evidently not valuing what was being done inside'. Mary thus becomes a figure of the synagogue. 'Outside, in them, was Israel; whereas the new disciples, hearing and believing, and being inside, by cleaving to Christ depicted the Church which, repudiating carnal kinship, he designated a preferable mother and a worthier family of brothers'⁶⁵.

» Similar ideas were expressed in the *Adversus Marcionem*. His reaction to his family outside was a disavowal, not a denial (i.e., that he had a physical family). He rather transferred the 'titles of relationship' from them to others who were judged more closely related to him by faith. On another occasion, when Jesus replied to the woman who praised his mother that obedience to the word of God was worthier of praise, Tertullian commented that Mary was not present and that Jesus had in any event already rejected his mother and family »⁶⁶.

5) Gregory the Wonderworker († 270 ca.)

Gregory was a disciple of Origen and the apostle of the Pontus. The family of St Basil of Caesarea and of St Gregory of Nyssa was linked with him. Gregory of Nyssa has written his life in which he reports his vision of St. John and of Mary. However, it is more secure to speak of this vision when we deal with Gregory of Nyssa, than about the Wonderworker. However, it looked perfectly normal to a Father of the late 4th century to talk about a Marian vision of a Father of the 3rd about whom his grandmother told him as a direct source.

Conclusions of ENO on the writings of the 3rd century:

« A summary of the pre-Nicene developments on Mary shows that the Protoevangelium remained unusual in that it showed some interest in and development on Mary for her own sake. Most of the patristic material as such is concerned primarily with the christological issues: that Jesus was a real human being, not just an appearance, nor just a heavenly being with a body composed out of some extraterrestrial matter.

» While they were clear on the virginal conception, there was much less unanimity on other aspects of Mary's virginity. The Mary/Eve line of thought became a commonplace without much further development. However, most felt free to find fault with some of Mary's actions as reported in the Gospels. Positively, Origen showed the way when he asserted that it was appropriate to

⁶⁵ *De carne Christi* 7, pp. 30-32.

⁶⁶ *Adv. Marcionem*, 4, 19, 11-13, ed. EVANS, p. 362; *ibid.*, 4, 26, 30, p. 412; ENO, pp. 163-164.

think of Mary as the starting point of dedicated Christian virginity for women [Com. in Matt., 10, 17; SC 162, 216] »⁶⁷.

III The Fathers of the 4th century

There would be a lot to say about Mary in the Fathers of the 4th century. But here we can only summarize the main trends.

1) *Athanasius*. « His life of Antony, which played such an important role in making known the ideals of the desert monks, was paralleled by his letters to virgins, extant only in Coptic. These writings no doubt influenced Western authors, especially Ambrose, in their enthusiastic espousal of the ascetic ideal. Mary is portrayed as a nun; she had no desire to go forth from her seclusion at home, to be seen by men, to go about in public. She did not waste her time looking out the window but spent her time studying Scripture. She had devoted herself to those things from childhood (influence of 'James'?). She could not even stand the sound of a male voice - hence her apprehension at the annunciation.

» Athanasius also had a place for the Mary/Eve comparison/contrast. Eve is the mother of the dead, Mary of the living. Eve listened to Satan with dire results; Mary heeded Gabriel. "What a heavenly gift man has received through you. O true Virgin!"⁶⁸ In his letter of Epictetus, however, he does not seem to hold for physical *virginitas in partu* ».⁶⁹

ENO remembers us that « The first undisputed usage of *Theotokos* is found at the beginning of the Arian controversy in a letter by Athanasius' predecessor, Alexander ».⁷⁰

2) *The Great Cappadocian Fathers*

« Perhaps it is surprising that someone so prominent in the development of trinitarian orthodoxy – like Athanasius – would have so little to say about Mary. The same is true of the Cappadocian Fathers, creative theologians though they were in other areas. In a letter Basil also speaks of Mary's shaken faith on Calvary, despite, he added, all the miracles, the annunciation, etc.⁷¹

⁶⁷ ENO, pp. 164-165.

⁶⁸ *Ep. ad Virgines*, CSCO 151 : 58-62. About the authenticity see CPG 2, nr. 2147.

⁶⁹ *Ep. ad Epictetum* 5 ; PG 26 : 1057.

⁷⁰ ALEXANDER, *Epistola ad Alexandrum* 1.12 ; GCS 44 (19)23.

⁷¹ BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ep.* 260.9 ; LCL 4 : 70, 72.

His friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, insisted that Mary must be accepted as *Theotokos*; Jesus is really her son. Thus a statement about Mary was urged as a criterion of orthodoxy, but once again the core of the issue here was christological – more specifically, anti-Apollinarian. Gregory wrote: "...[Christ was] conceived by the virgin, who first in body and soul was purified by the Holy Spirit for it was necessary both that child-bearing should be honored and that virginity should receive a higher honor."⁷²

» Basil's younger brother Gregory (of Nyssa) wrote more on Mary than the other two Cappadocians. He greatly extolled the virginal ideal, calling Christ the arch-virgin. He seems to hint at the idea that Mary made a vow of virginity, an idea made explicit later by Augustine. In the context of the annunciation scene, Mary asks Gabriel how the birth will come about since "her flesh is consecrated to God."⁷³ His sermon on the annunciation contains examples of the elaborate and high-blown rhetoric that will become characteristic of Byzantine Marian homilies after Ephesus.⁷⁴

» While we have spoken exclusively of theological views, the two Gregories also give us a glimpse of the growth of devotional aspects of Marian belief. In Nazianzen's *Oratio* 24 on the legend of Cyprian of Antioch and the virgin Justina, the latter, while being seduced by the wicked magus, first prayed for help to Jesus, the one who had protected Susanna and Thecla, and then to the Virgin Mary to assist a virgin in danger. More interestingly, in his life of Gregory the Wonderworker, – as we have said above (E. L.) – Gregory of Nyssa described a vision of Mary and John, who appeared to the third-century apostle of Pontus in the first recorded Marian apparition.⁷⁵ »

We must note that in this text Gregory of Nyssa relates an appearance 1° of St John the Evangelist and, only after, 2° of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Wonderworker in order to confirm him in the true faith. It is true that this was the first reported Marian apparition in the history of the Church. The details given indicate that it was in the night while Gregory the Wonderworker could not sleep because of the questions he had about the right faith. It is remarkable also that it was not an apparition of the one Mary but also of John the

⁷² GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *ep.* 101 ; PG 37 : 177 ; *Orat.* 45.9 ; PG 36 : 633.

⁷³ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Sermo on the birth of Christ* ; PG 46 : 1140.

⁷⁴ *Id.*, *Sermo on the Annunciation* (authenticity discussed) ; PG 62 : 765-768. Cf. CPG , nr. 4677 : « still sub iudice. »

⁷⁵ *Orat.* 24.10-11 ; SC 284 : 58. GREGOR OF NYSSA, *Life of St. Gregory the Wonderworker*, PG 46, 909-912.

Theologian who was discussing with her. According to the Nisenean it was not a dream, but a vision, and Mary in the night appeared surrounded with a light shining.

« To be sure, ENO wrote, the two passages (i. e. of the two Gregories) tell us more about the situation in the time of the writers than about realities of an earlier century. The legend of Cyprian of Antioch is historically worthless, and we have no way of verifying that Gregory Thaumaturgus ever had such a vision. Speaking of his mother in one of his poetic epigrams (28), Gregory of Nazianzus wrote: "Nonna, ...praying by this table, was taken up thence a pure victim, and now, one of the guardians of her sex, shares the glory of the pious women, Susanna, Mary and the two Annas. »⁷⁶

3) *St. Ephrem*. As we talk about the Cappadocian Fathers we have also to speak of St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-c. 373) and the Syriac tradition. « While that tradition is less wellknown to us, it probably should be viewed as closer to the Greek tradition than has usually been recognized. Its outstanding representative, Ephrem, wrote poetry so that the content of his theology is still more difficult to interpret. His work in this regard is not without further problems, e.g., he sometimes confused the Virgin Mary with Mary Magdalene in his comments. Like his Greek neighbours, he could find fault with her. He speaks of her excessive haste at Cana.⁷⁷ But normally Ephrem is noted for his great praise of Mary. "You alone and your mother are more lovely than all others; there is no stain in you and no sin in your mother." "Even after the birth, he was still with you; he shone forth from you. His bright glory was spread through your beauty; the anointing of his body flowed over you. You fashioned a garment for him; but he spread his splendour over all your senses."⁷⁸ ». When we shall speak below of the Assyrians we shall see again the importance of Ephrem in their tradition.

4) *St. Hilary of Poitiers* († 367). During his exile (356-359) Hilary learned more about the Greek Fathers of his time. « The Mother of the Lord has a

⁷⁶ *The Greek Anthology*, Book 8 : Epigrams of St. Gregory the Theologian, nr. 28 ; LCL 412.

⁷⁷ *Comment. in Diatessaron* 2.17 ; SC 121 : 74-75 ; 21.26 ; *ibid.* 388-389 ; 5.5 ; *ibid.* 109. ENO adds : « On Mary and the Church in Ephrem, see : R. MURRAY, *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1975, 144-150. »

⁷⁸ *Carmina Nisibena* 27.8 ; CSCO 219 : 76 ; *Hymni de Nativitate* 28.7 ; CSCO 187 : 129.

place of considerable importance in the writings of St. Hilary. He considers her as an exceptional religious personality who stands out among all other figures of the primitive Church because of her glorious virginity. Further, Mary plays an unique role in the economy of salvation, though this role is obviously subordinate to her Son's absolutely necessary and essential role. Still, Mary's function in God's plan of salvation is so significant that she is associated with Christ as an object of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. »⁷⁹

Here is a sentence of the *De Trinitate* quoted by GAMBERO:

« Other witnesses affirm that the economy of salvation proceeds from the Father's will. The Virgin, the birth and body [of Christ], and, in turn, the Cross, death, and descent among the dead constitute our salvation. For the Son of God was born of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit for the sake of the human race. »⁸⁰

5) *Cyril of Jerusalem* († 387)⁸¹. The teaching of Cyril on Mary is not very developed in his Catechetical Lectures. He uses only once the term *Theotokos* to speak of Mary,⁸² but he has no doubt about the divine character of Mary's motherhood and proposes it to his catechumens as a truth of the Christian faith. « He speaks of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, of whom Mary is "Mother according the flesh"⁸³, and calls him "God, born of the Virgin"⁸⁴. »

Cyril also teaches « Jesus' virginal birth from Mary » and for him it is « a miracle made necessary by motives of the utmost fittingness »⁸⁵.

6) *Epiphanius of Salamis* (315-403). « Whereas these well-known theologians tell us relatively little, it is the lesser-known and less able theologian, Epiphanius of Cyprus († 403), who added some interesting items to the growing tradition. In his compilation of heresies, the *Panarion*, he lists two dealing with Mary. The Antidicomarianites, who are anti-Marian, and, at the other extreme, the Collyridians, who treat Mary as a goddess, supply a perfect balance for his treatise.

» The former try to besmirch Mary by denying her perpetual virginity. In

⁷⁹ GAMBERO, p. 182.

⁸⁰ *De Trinitate* 2, 24-25 ; PL 10, 66. Quoted by GAMBERO, p. 187.

⁸¹ See GAMBERO, pp. 131-140 (136-137).

⁸² *Catechesis* 10.19 : PG 33 : 685 A.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 7.9 ; PG 33 : 616 A.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 12.1 ; PG 33 : 725 A.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 12.35 ; PG 33 : 757 A.

this context Epiphanius elaborated upon the "data" of the Protevangelium. Joseph was an elderly widower of eighty with six children, four boys and two girls. He went into considerable detail about these children, especially James. Joseph died at a great age shortly after the return to Nazareth from the temple visit when Jesus was twelve.

» As for the Collyridians, they are an example of the harm done in the church by women. Mary should be honored, but not to excess. The sacrifices offered to Mary by these women are the work of the devil. If women could have become priests, Mary would have been a priest. But she did not even baptize. If she could have, she, rather than John, would have baptized Jesus.

» In speaking of the Antidicomarianites, Epiphanius broached another topic of interest. He was the first to pose questions about what happened to Mary in her later life. Because he wished to deprive the *virgines subintroductae* of ammunition, he maintained that Mary, after Calvary, did not remain with John. What happened? He maintained that we do not know, but he made several intriguing suggestions. He asked, for instance, whether the prophecy of the sword does not relate to a possible violent end for Mary. In equally elusive terms, he brought up the woman of Revelation 12. He ended by asserting that we do not know if Mary died and was buried but that he did not want to ascribe anything fleshly to her because of the "greatness of the vessel."⁸⁶ This question would be developed later in the *Transitus Mariae* and Dormition literature. »⁸⁷

7) *John Chrysostom*. « The final pre-Ephesine Greek Father to be considered here is John Chrysostom (d. 407), priest of Antioch and bishop of Constantinople. He had no problem with Mary's perpetual virginity, but he realized that the virginal conception was something many had difficulty accepting, and, he said, questions are many and frequent about it. He went into great detail in his homilies on the events surrounding the Annunciation and the Nativity. Some questions are familiar by now: Why do the Gospel genealogies of Jesus trace Joseph's lineage? Or new questions: Why is Mary told the news before the conception rather than after, as in Joseph's case? Answer: Otherwise Mary might have killed herself, if simply presented with a *fait accompli*. Why was Joseph reminded of the prophecy of Isaiah and Mary not? Answer: Because as an unlearned woman, it would have meant nothing to

⁸⁶ *Panarion*, Antidicomarianites 78 ; GCS 37 : 452-475 ; Collyridians 79 ; GCS 37 : 475-484. Fate of Mary 78.11 ; GCS 37 : 461-462.

⁸⁷ ENO, p. 167.

her. Origen had been of the opposite opinion, that Mary knew the Scriptures well and meditated on them.⁸⁸

» John, like many of his Eastern predecessors, had critical comments to make about Mary, but he also tried to temper them. "The virgin is made in no common degree glorious and distinguished."⁸⁹ Jesus loved and respected his mother. Any negative comments and reprimands show how much he loved her and was concerned with her spiritual well-being and salvation. It is interesting to see that whereas in the West the tradition of negative comments about Mary died after Tertullian, the Eastern writers and preachers continued to repeat the criticisms, but such statements did not seem to retard the simultaneous growth of devotion to Mary. Chrysostom tried to combine the critical and the devotional trends.

» In his homilies on the Gospel of John, the Cana incident is once again a focus of attention. In urging Jesus to act, Mary wanted to help her friends in need but also to call attention to herself: "She, because she had borne him, claimed, according to the custom of other mothers, to direct him in all things, when she ought to have revered and worshiped him." Jesus rebuked her for her own good. "For if he cared for others and used every means to implant in them a becoming opinion of himself, much more would he do so in the case of his mother." He held her in high honor. "For the answer (given) was not the answer of someone rejecting his mother, but of one who would show that the fact that she bore him would have availed her nothing, had she not been very good and faithful." Jesus finally performed the miracle at Cana so as not to seem to shame and contradict his mother.⁹⁰

» In the incident of the family waiting to see Jesus during his public ministry, Mary was guilty of excessive vanity. What she needed to discuss was of little importance, but Mary wanted to show people that she had power over her son. Once again, Jesus' reply was not a repudiation but a reprimand to help her improve spiritually. "There is but one nobility: to do the will of God."⁹¹ Nothing more is made by Chrysostom of the Calvary scene than the moralizing lesson that we are to take care of our parents. »⁹²

8) *The great Latin Fathers: Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine*

⁸⁸ *Hom. in Mat.* 1.6 ; PG 57 : 21 ; 4.5 ; 57 : 45 ; 5.2 ; 57 : 56.

⁸⁹ *Hom. in Mat.* 8.4 ; PG 57 : 86.

⁹⁰ *Hom. in Jn* 21.2-3 ; PG 59 : 131-132. *Hom. in Jn* 22.1 (Shame); PG 59 : 134.

⁹¹ *Hom. in Mat.* 44.1 ; PG 57 : 465 f.

⁹² *Hom. in Jn* 85.2 ; PG 59 : 462. ENO, p. 168.

« The three great Western Fathers of the fourth century all had something to contribute. Ambrose and Jerome in particular were greatly influenced by Eastern developments, especially the idea of Mary as the model for Christian virgins. At this time in the West there emerged protests against certain tendencies in Church life and piety-against an excessive emphasis on virginity at the expense of marriage, against other forms of exaggerated asceticism, against the growing cult of relics, against pilgrimages, etc. Because the writings of the protesters such as Jovinian, Helvidius, and Vigilantius were destroyed, we know them and their ideas only through their adversaries. How and why did such complaints arise? We do not know. Jerome was not one to leave any argument unused against an opponent or, following the style of the time, to leave his character unstained. »⁹³

a) *Ambrose*. « Ambrose... sudden propulsion into the episcopate of an important city made his previous lack of theological and biblical study painfully felt. He was thrown back upon such time for personal study as he could find. His views on Mary showed the influence of Origen and Athanasius. His descriptions of Mary in effect make her not just a model for nuns but a nun herself. "Modesty, the companion of purity, makes chastity safer. When in her chamber alone, she is greeted by the angel, she is silent and is disturbed at his entry. The virgin's face is troubled at the strange appearance of a man's form."⁹⁴ Before going to visit her cousin Elizabeth, Mary had always lived in the strictest seclusion.⁹⁵

» Some of Ambrose's statements illustrate his strong Marian devotion. Speaking of her marriage to Joseph in the context of having previously extolled virginity, he said: "The Lord would rather have some doubt cast on his own origins than on the purity of his mother. He knew how delicate was a virgin's honour, how fragile her reputation for purity, and he did not wish to build up faith in his own origins at the price of an insult to his mother."⁹⁶ He supported Mary's *virginitas in partu* and invoked Ezek 44:2 as a proof text. "And when he "was born of Mary's womb, he yet preserved the enclosure of her modesty and the inviolate seal of her virginity." "Holy Mary is the gate of

⁹³ ENQ, p. 170.

⁹⁴ *De officiis*, 1.69 ; PL 16 :44. *Exp. in Lc.* 2.8-9 ; SC 45 :75.

⁹⁵ *Exp. in Lc.* 2.19-20 ; SC 45 :81.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.1 ; SC 45 :71.

which it is written: 'The Lord will pass through it and it will shut.'⁹⁷ The Calvary scene as recounted in John's Gospel is once again cited as proof that there were no other children. Joseph is gone. Indeed, the separation is termed a *divortium*.⁹⁸

» Following Origen, Ambrose believed that Mary's superiority to Zechariah was shown in the reaction of the two to the angelic revelations. What Mary was asked to accept was far more difficult to believe than the angel's message to the priest. She is truly blessed and greater than the priest. "It is not surprising that the Lord, wishing to redeem the world, began his work through Mary; the one through whom the salvation of all was being prepared would herself be the first to gather from her son the fruit of salvation." Addressing the devil, he said: "You were vanquished by Mary, who gave the conqueror birth."⁹⁹ "Mary was alone when she spoke with an angel. She was alone when the Holy Spirit came to her. ... She was alone and she worked the salvation of the world and conceived the redemption of all."¹⁰⁰ He also utilized the Mary/Eve parallelism: "per mulierem stultitia, per virginem sapientia."¹⁰¹ Finally, at Calvary he noted that, whereas the apostles fled, Mary remained by the cross. Looking at Jesus' wounds, she saw not her son's death but the salvation of the world. "Perhaps she thought her own death could add something to the grace accomplished for all. But Jesus did not need help to accomplish universal salvation."¹⁰²

b) *Jerome*. « Jerome's interest lay almost entirely in the area of Mary's virginity, and one may ask whether her appearance in his works was not largely simply a function of his polemic in favor of asceticism. Not surprisingly, as the foremost Scripture scholar of Christian antiquity, Jerome engaged in a polemic with the Jews over the interpretation of Isa 7:14. A significant part of his propagandizing in favor of virginity consisted in denigrating marriage, e.g., as in *Adv. Jovinianum* 1.16.

» Within the context of this polemic, Jerome authored what has been called the first treatise on Mariology, the *Adversus Helvidium* (383). Compared to

⁹⁷ AMBROSE, *ep.* 63.33 ; PL 16 :98 ; *ep.* 43.6 ; PL 1126 ; *De insitutione virginis* 52 ; PL 16 : 319-320.

⁹⁸ *Exp. in Lc.* 2.4 ; SC 45 :73.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 2.17 ; SC 45 : 80 ; *De obitu Theodosii* 44 ; CSEL 73 : 394.

¹⁰⁰ *Ep.* 49.2 ; PL 26 : 1154.

¹⁰¹ *Exp. in Lc.* 4.7 ; SC 45 : 153 ; *ibid.* 2.28 ; SC 45 : 84.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 10.132 ; SC 52 : 200.

the blast against Jovinian, this is a fairly brief work. Here he discusses most of the same issues others treated earlier. Whereas Helvidius claimed that Mary had had other children, Jerome strongly reasserted her perpetual virginity. One original feature is that he denied that the "brothers" of the Lord were children of Joseph by an earlier marriage. It is fitting that Joseph also be virginal. Thus the "brothers" must be more distant relatives. »¹⁰³

c) *Augustine*. « The views of the third great Latin Father of this period would be vastly influential in setting forth both teachings and problems for the future of Western theology. As with all the Fathers, in dealing with Augustine the context of theological controversy must be attended to carefully. Thus there is considerable stress on the virginal conception of Jesus in the context of original sin. Since Jesus did not have a human father and was not conceived in the usual way, he was without original sin. He was not conceived in the heat of human lust (*libido, concupiscentia*). The overshadowing of the Spirit cooled the heat of such lust.¹⁰⁴

» "Although the body of Christ was taken from the flesh of a woman who had been conceived from the flesh of a sinful race, nevertheless, since it was not conceived in her womb in the manner in which she had been conceived, it was not sinful flesh but the likeness of sinful flesh. For he did not thereby contract the guilt that brings death. ...But he received a body immune to the contagion of sin."¹⁰⁵ Christ has only the *similitudo carnis peccati*. "His flesh came from a virgin and was not conceived in lust, that he might be in the likeness of sinful flesh, but not in sinful flesh."¹⁰⁶ These thoughts recur many times. In his controversy with Julian of Eclanum, the latter asked whether, if, as Augustine taught, original sin was an integral part of the human condition, Jesus could really be human without it.¹⁰⁷ The "likeness" reference, of course, is to Rom 8:3, but Julian's question could also pose a problem for Augustine's Christology.

» Within the context of Jesus' conception, Augustine stresses Mary's "yes" to God. Jesus' nature was "proper to one born of a virgin, one whom a mother's faith and not her lust had conceived."

¹⁰³ ENO, 169-170.

¹⁰⁴ AUGUSTINE, *Enarr. In Ps.* 67.21 ; CCL 39 : 884.

¹⁰⁵ *De Genesi ad litt.* 10.32 ; CSEL 28/1 : 320.

¹⁰⁶ *Ep.* 190.25 ; CSEL 57 : 161.

¹⁰⁷ *Opus imperf. C. Iulianum* 4.87 ; PL 45 : 1387 f.

» "Angelus nuntiat, Virgo audit, credit et concipit. Fides in mente, Christus in ventre." "A virgin conceived without the embrace of a husband, not by the concupiscence of the flesh, but by the chaste submission of the mind." The subject lent itself to the impressive compression of Augustinian rhetoric – e.g., "conceptio filii; fides matris"; "credendo, non concumbendo, sancta est fecundata virginitas."¹⁰⁸

» Augustine clearly believed in Mary's perpetual virginity, although the *post partum* aspects claimed only a modest amount of attention. He noted that Ambrose had sufficiently refuted Jovinian, who impugned Mary's perpetual virginity. Mary had no other children; the "brothers and sisters" were Mary's relatives. "Did Mary give birth again? Certainly not. The dignity of virgins begins with her." As Mary conceived and gave birth as a virgin, so she died a virgin.¹⁰⁹

» The question of virginal conception and childbirth was also the object of skepticism and attacks. Concerning *virginitas in partu*, Augustine brought forward the example of the capabilities of Christ's risen body. It is another of God's miracles. The classic example of pagan doubts about the virginal conception is to be found in the exchange of letters between Augustine and Volusianus. Even here, Augustine could say ultimately only that God can do all things and that many of the things he actually does are beyond our comprehension, at least in this life. "This great miracle those people prefer to regard as fiction rather than fact."¹¹⁰

» Concerning Mary's perpetual virginity, Augustine also saw her as the preeminent example for the dedicated virgins of the Christian community, although he is more restrained and less flamboyant than Ambrose and Jerome. Consecrated virginity is a state superior to marriage. "And so too Christ, who established his church as a virgin. ...in no wise deprived his mother of her virginity when he was born. ...And you whom the church out of her unsullied virginity has begotten holy virgins, you who, disdaining earthly marriage, have chosen to be virgins also in the flesh, joyfully and solemnly celebrate this

¹⁰⁸ *Enchiridion* 34 ; CCL 46.68. *Sermo* 196.1 ; PL 38 : 1019. *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1.57 ; CSEL 60 : 57 ; *sermo* 229 P ; PL *Suppl.* 2 : 758 ; *De trinitate* 13.23 ; CCL 50A : 413.

¹⁰⁹ *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2.15 ; CSEL 42 : 267 ; *Tract. in Ioann.* 10.2 ; CSEL 36 : 101 ; *De catechizandis rud.* 40 ; CSEL 46 : 164 : « Virgo moriens ».

¹¹⁰ *Sermo* 191.2 ; PL 38 : 1010 ; *Tract. in Ioann* 121.4 ; CCL 38 : 667 ; *Sermo* 189 ; PL 38 : 1006 ; *epp.* 135, 137 ; CSEL 44 : 89-92, 96-125 ; *ep.* 137.8 ; CSEL 44 : 107 ; *Sermo* 184.1 ; ed. LAMBOT 1 : 75.

day the virgin birth. He who brought you what you should cherish, did not take what you do cherish from his mother. Heaven forbid that he who heals in you what you have inherited from Eve should injure what you have loved in Mary.¹¹¹"

» Mary's famous vow of virginity should be mentioned in this connection. Augustine is well aware that such a vow was not in harmony with Jewish custom of the time, but he spoke of it in a particular context that made it useful as a hypothesis. In comparing the reactions of Zechariah and Mary to the angelic revelations of future births, Augustine sought a way of distinguishing them.

» Zechariah's reaction to the announcement of the coming birth of John was one of disbelief and skepticism. Hence his punishment. Yet Mary too asked a question. But this was not prompted by lack of faith. On the contrary, Mary is the true model of faith. She did not doubt that what was predicted would come to pass, but because of her vow of virginity, she wondered "how" it would come to pass. "She did not doubt God's omnipotence."¹¹²

» The Canadian Augustine scholar, Emilien Lamirande, has noted the general absence of "Marian devotion" in Augustine.¹¹³ The fact is that the North African liturgical calendar of the time contained no Marian feasts. Much of Augustine's theologizing on Mary is to be found in his sermons for Christmas and the feast of the birth of John the Baptist. In his sermons the biblical saints are treated differently than the Christian martyrs. The martyrs are presented as models for living and as intercessors. This is not the case with Mary. There is no discussion of or exhortation to Marian intercession. Mary, as we have seen, is an example, albeit a specialized one, for Christian virgins. Mary was a holy virgin, but she was a human being¹¹⁴. Augustine ventured no speculations about her ultimate state.

» One place where Augustine showed a special tenderness for Mary concerned the question of her sinlessness. Here we are not speaking of original sin. The debate over her immaculate conception comes later in theological history. In a famous passage from an early anti-Pelagian work, *De natura et*

¹¹¹ *Sermo* 191.3 ; PL 38 : 1010-1011 ; *Sermo* 184.2 ; ed. LAMBOT 1 : 75.

¹¹² *Sermo* 291.5 ; PL 38 : 1318 ; *De sancta virginitate* 4 ; CSEL 41 : 238.

¹¹³ E. LAMIRANDE, *En quel sens peut-on parler de dévotion mariale chez saint Augustin ?* in *De primordiis cultus mariani*. Vol. 3 : *De fundamento cultus B.V. Mariae in operibus sanctorum Patrum*, Roma, 1970, 17-35.

¹¹⁴ *Sermo* 265D.7 ; ed. MORIN, *Miscel. Augustiniana*, Vatican, 1930, 1 : 664.

gratia, he states: "We must except the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honor to the Lord; for from him we know what abundance of grace for overcoming sin in every particular was conferred on her who had the merit to conceive and bear him who undoubtedly had no sin."¹¹⁵ As always, he stressed that only by God's grace do the saints accomplish what they do. To be sure, he does not assert here that Mary was without actual sin but simply that he does not wish to discuss it. Nevertheless, it must be noted that even this refusal to discuss it cost him in his argument with Pelagius. The teaching of Pelagius which he was contesting maintained that it was possible (with relative ease) for a human being to lead a sinless life.

» Once Julian of Eclanum accused Augustine of being worse than Jovinian. The latter had denied Mary's perpetual virginity, but Augustine delivered her to the devil through his doctrine of original sin. Here would have been the perfect opportunity to claim that Mary had somehow been exempted from original sin, but Augustine replied only that the condition of fallen nature was remedied by the grace of rebirth.¹¹⁶ This is the solution for all human beings. Mary was not baptized, though no doubt was purified of original sin in some other way.

» The Mary/Eve parallelism did not occupy a prominent place in Augustine's thought. But, like the others, he made use of it. "The devil holds him; Christ liberates him. Eve's deceiver holds him; Mary's son frees him; he holds him who approached the man through the woman; he frees him who was born of a woman that never approached a man; he holds him who injected into the woman the cause of lust; he liberates him who without any lust was conceived in the woman." "Our malady arose through the corrupted spirit of a woman; from the incorrupted flesh of a woman came salvation."¹¹⁷

» The incarnation had to involve a woman to help women avoid despair because of their role in the fall. "By this defeat, the devil would be tormented over the thought of both sexes, male and female, because he had taken delight in the defection of them both. The freeing of both sexes would not have been so severe a penalty for the devil unless we were also liberated by the agency of

¹¹⁵ *De natura et gratia* 42 ; CSEL 60 : 263-264 ; *Enchiridion* 34, 36 ; CCL 46 : 68-70.

¹¹⁶ *Op. imperf. Contra Iulianum* 4.122 ; PL 45 : 1418.

¹¹⁷ *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2.45 ; CSEL 42 : 202-203 ; *De doctrina christiana* 1.13 ; CCL 32 : 14 ;

both sexes."¹¹⁸ If the "honor" of the female sex had been tarnished or lost, Mary and her part in salvation history won it back. "The honor of the male sex comes from the body of Christ; the honor of the female sex is in the mother of Christ. The grace of Jesus Christ has won over the cunning of the serpent."¹¹⁹

» Augustine's skill as a rhetorician is evident in his preaching. Much of what he says about Mary is to be found in his Christmas homilies. Here he loves to dwell on the paradoxes of the incarnation, e.g., *Sermo* 184.3. For apologetic reasons Augustine also discussed the role of Joseph. Sceptics asked why, if Mary was a virgin mother, the genealogies in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke traced Jesus' lineage to Joseph. Among other points, Augustine argued that Joseph, though not the biological father, was nevertheless a true father to Jesus and a true spouse to Mary.¹²⁰ "Joseph might be called the husband of Mary though she was his wife only in affection and in the intercourse of the mind, which is more intimate than that of the body. In this way it might be proper that the husband of the virgin mother of Christ should have a place in the list of Christ's ancestors." Similarly, their marriage was a real marriage; did it not possess the three *bona coniugalia: proles, fides, sacramentum*?¹²¹

» The Gospel passages that earlier led to certain exegetical traditions critical of Mary brought no such result in Augustine's interpretation, writing, and preaching. The "sword" that was to pierce her was not the sword of doubt but of sorrow for the loss of her son.¹²² In the case of the wedding at Cana, the exegesis was more strained. He explicitly repudiated the thought that Jesus was in any sense insulting or repulsing his mother. In an involved explanation he maintained that Jesus was about to perform a miracle that would demonstrate his divine nature. Since Mary was the mother of the human nature, this was not her business. Later, on Calvary, her maternal role would be clearly acknowledged when his human nature was close to death.¹²³ Augustine may be laying himself open here to a charge of crypto-Nestorianism.

¹¹⁸ *De agone christiano* 22.24 ; CSEL 41 : 125.

¹¹⁹ *Sermo* 190.2 ; PL 38 : 1008.

¹²⁰ *Sermo* 51.21 ; PL 38 : 344-345, 348 ; *Contra Faustum* .1-2 ; CSEL 25 : 261-262 ; *ibid.* 23.1 ; 25 : 707.

¹²¹ *Sermo* 23.8 ; CSEL 25 : 713-714 ; *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1.13 ; CSEL 42 : 225.

¹²² *Enarr. in Ps.* 104.13 ; CCL 40 : 1543.

¹²³ *Tract. in Io.* 8 ; 119 ; CCL 36 : 86-89 ; 658-660 ; *De fide et symbolo* 9 ; CSEL 41 : 13.

» The scenes of the family's disbelief in Jesus during his public ministry have sometimes caused difficulties. In a way they help prepare the way for one of the more well-received aspects of Augustine's Marian teaching. In the kingdom of God spiritual relationship is decisive, not physical relationship. Hence Jesus asked: "Who are my father and mother?" And to the cry, "Blessed is the womb that bore you. ...," Jesus replied, "Blessed rather is one who hears the word of God and keeps it." For Augustine, Mary was first and foremost in a close spiritual relationship to Jesus. "So even her maternal relationship would have done Mary no good unless she had borne Christ more happily in her heart than in her flesh."¹²⁴

» "Should the Virgin Mary not have done the will of the Father, she who by faith believed, by faith conceived, who was the chosen one from whom our salvation should be born among men, who was created by Christ before Christ was created in her? Indeed holy Mary obviously did the will of the Father; and therefore it is greater for Mary to have been Christ's disciple than to have been his mother. ...The truth of Christ is in the mind of Mary, the flesh of Christ in her womb; greater is what she bears in her mind than what she bears in her womb." Given the role of Mary in the plan of salvation, she is part of the body of Christ. "Mary is a part of the church, a holy member, an excellent member, a supereminent member, yet but a member of the whole body." The whole is greater than the part. Therefore "the church is better than the Virgin Mary."¹²⁵ Overall, Augustine's Marian teaching is moderate and integrated into his total picture of salvation History. »

IV. The Fifth Century

The Nestorian Crisis.

The teaching of Augustine is especially interesting because he is a contemporary of the Nestorian crisis. He died in 430 at the time of the convening of the Council at Ephesus. We will speak only (and shortly) of Cyril of Alexandria and of the time after Ephesus 431.

1, *Cyril of Alexandria* († 444) with his enthusiastic preaching about Mary

¹²⁴ *De sancta virginitate* 3 ; CSEL 41 : 237 ; ep. 243.9 ; CSEL 57 : 576 ; *Enarr. in Ps.* 127.12 ; CSEL 40 : 1876-1877.

¹²⁵ *Sermo* 72A.7 ; ed. DENIS, *Miscel. Augustiniana*, Vatican, 1 : 162-163.

« greatly contributed to the Marian devotion »¹²⁶. But he was not alone in this time. The term *Theotokos*: « Cyril never intended to give up this term, not only for reasons of sentimental attachment to the tradition of his Church, but above all because he considered it a guarantee of faith in the mystery of Incarnation. »¹²⁷

In Cyril we find also a convinced statement of the mediation of Mary in the work of the salvation, but the thought does not seem to exceed what we can collect already in preceding writers, e. g. in Irenaeus. We can quote, for example, the famous homily at Ephesus :

« I salute you, O Mary, *Theotokos*: through you the prophets speak out and the shepherds sing God's praise... the angels dance and the archangels sing tremendous hymns... the Magi prostrate themselves in adoration... the dignity of the twelve apostles has been exalted... John exulted while still in his mother's womb, and the lamp adored the everlasting light... grace ineffable came forth... the true light came to the world, our Lord Jesus Christ..., light shone on those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death...

» Because of you the Gospel proclaim, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk 19:38); through you the Churches of those who possess the orthodox faith have been founded in the cities, in the villages, in the isles..., the Conqueror of death and Destroyer of hell has come forth... He has come, the Maker of the first creation, and he has repaired the first man's falsehood, he, who governs the heavenly kingdom...

» Through you, the beauty of the Resurrection flowered, and its brilliance shone out... the tremendous baptism of holiness in the Jordan has shone out... John and the river Jordan are made holy, and the devil is cast out....

» Through you, every faithful soul achieves salvation ».¹²⁸

From this Cyril's sentences we can see the Mary's active role in the mystery of Incarnation and its consequences for the all salvation plan. However, it is not said that Mary has still a special role of mediation in the present intercession of the Church. It is her role in the history of salvation which is exalted, not her present action for the Church or the faithful.

¹²⁶ GAMBERO, p. 243.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Homily 11* ; PG 77 : 1030. Quoted by GAMBERO, pp. 244 f.

2, After Ephesus 431.

ENO wrote : « Many have spoken of the great explosion of Marian devotion after 431. This did not arise from nothing. Our survey might lead one to think that previously almost nothing had been happening. This was probably not the case. Indeed, some have even claimed to see signs that things were already threatening to get out of hand. Who, they ask, were the Collyridians? Figments of Epiphanius's fertile imagination, or real evidence that there was a danger of making Mary a goddess? »¹²⁹

ENO mentions afterwards the *Sub tuum praesidium* prayer about that we will speak more below.¹³⁰

This prayer « does not ask for Mary's intercession but asks for her help and direct intervention. Was the concern of someone like Nestorius proof of his stupidity or was it based on a sincere concern for serious theological misunderstanding and/or popular aberrations? Definite answers cannot be given because of our lack of extensive knowledge about popular Marian beliefs and devotions.

» The preaching of some of Nestorius's opponents such as Proclus (bishop of Constantinople 434-46) and Theodotus of Ancyra (d. before 446) is not reassuring¹³¹. Rhetoric begins to run riot. Paragraphs with sentence after sentence beginning "O" or "Hail" are common in such preaching. "O womb in which the contract of the common freedom was written! O belly, in which the weapons against the devil were forged!,"¹³² Increasingly divergent Old

¹²⁹ ENO, p. 176.

¹³⁰ See below, about the Liturgy.

¹³¹ Theodotus, contemporaneous of Nestorius and Proclus, has in his preachings and writings all the images which became usual in the Greek tradition. See for him and for Proclus a choice of texts in GAMBERO, *op. cit.*, pp. 249 ff., 260 ff. It must be remarked that this kind of praise for Mary during the homily is already to be found in Cyril of Alexandria; cfr the *Homily IV* preached at Ephesus against Nestorius, PG 77, 992-997 (quoted by GAMBERO, pp. 247-248)– E. L.

¹³² *Sermo* delivered in Constantinople on the « feast of Mary », 428 AD in the presence of Nestorius. At this time Proclus was appointed bishop of Cyzicus. He became the successor of Nestorius at Constantinople. The text of this *Sermo* was inserted in the Acts of the Council of Ephesus. Here is the quotation of a significant passage : « The reason we have gathered here today is the holy *Theotokos* Virgin Mary, immaculate treasure of virginity, spiritual paradise of the second Adam, workshop of the union of [Christ's two] natures, market place of the saving exchange, bridal chamber in which the Word was wedded to the flesh, living bush that was not burned by the fire of the divine birth, the true light cloud that bore the One who, in his body, stands above the cherubim, fleece

Testament texts were applied to Mary. There arose in Constantinople a tradition of liturgical poetry, with Romanos Melodos its greatest representative (flourished c. 540) and its culmination, the "Akathistos" hymn.¹³³

» In the early fifth century there began to appear as well the *Transitus* literature, which claimed to describe the death of Mary and the taking of her body to heaven by angels. Emperor Maurice at the end of the sixth century instituted the feast of Mary's Dormition on August 15. Noteworthy Assumption sermons are known c. 600 by Palestinian bishops such as Modestus of Jerusalem and Theoteknos of Livias. Popular piety looked more and more to Mary as protectress.¹³⁴ 78 The West remained relatively slow and theologically sober during this period of growth of Marian piety and poetry in the East. »¹³⁵

Conclusions about the teaching of the Ancient Church in the Agreed Statement on Mary by the Groupe des Dombes:

« One can say that the main basic reason to speak of Mary as in the Symbols and in the Fathers depends on this double concern: 1. In order to have the 'right' faith, it is advisable to have on Mary a look which does not get away from his Son, but is a part of the contemplation of the Jesus' mysteries themselves. 2. We must never say anything which would be incompatible with the honour of the Lord, i. e. with his identity of authentic man and true God¹³⁶.

moistened by celestial dew, with which the Shepherd clothes his sheep (*Oratio* 1.1 ; PG 65, 681). All these images will be resumed in the greek liturgy and piety. Each one is not really new. What looks new is this accumulation of them in a preaching.—E.L.

¹³³ According to E. TONIOLO, (*Acatisto*, Roma, 1976) the Acathist Hymn is of an unknown author, earlier than Romanos, probably of the time of the Council of Chalcedon.

¹³⁴ Mary as protectress : ENO mentions several writings about this theme in footnote 78..

¹³⁵ ENO, p. 176.

¹³⁶ « On peut dire que la raison fondamentale pour parler de Marie comme le font les Symboles et les Pères dépend de cette double préoccupation: (1) Pour avoir en Christ une foi "droite", il convient de porter sur Marie ce regard qui ne détourne pas de son Fils, mais appartient au contraire à la contemplation des mystères mêmes de Jésus. (2) Il ne faut jamais dire de Marie la moindre chose qui serait incompatible avec l'honneur du Seigneur, c'est-à-dire avec son identité d'homme authentique et de Dieu vrai » (Groupe des Dombes, *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints* I: dans l'histoire et l'Écriture. Paris, Bayard/Centurion, 1997, pp. 28-29).

The perpetual virginity of Mary.— “This belief antedates the Nestorian controversy and is found in an increasing number of writers toward the end of the fourth century¹³⁷. One indication of its development is the application of the texts Exod 3:2 and Ezek 44:2 to Virgin Mary, an interpretation that is not found in earlier writers (e.g. Origen). Gregory of Nyssa, for example, interprets Exod 3:2 to refer to the virginity *post partum*¹³⁸. The interpretation of Ezek 44:2 in this sense is found in Amphilochius of Iconium (398-404)¹³⁹ and in Jerome (end of 393). However, to appreciate the full significance of this belief in the context of the Nestorian controversy, one must be acquainted with the explanation given by Proclus in a homily preached in the presence of Nestorius in the Christmas season of 430 and clearly intended to be a refutation of Nestorius’ idea. Proclus explicitly applies both of these texts i. e. Ex. 3:2, Ezek 44:2) to the Virgin¹⁴⁰ »¹⁴¹

V. Liturgy

1) Mimouni remembers that a feast of Mary at August the 15th is testified in the first part of the 5th century at the *Kathisma*¹⁴², in the house of Mary in Bethlehem, while at Jerusalem it was celebrated until 451-452 in St. Mary’s church, in Gethsemane. After Chalcedon bishop Juvenal of Jerusalem (422-458) had to transfer this celebration at *Kathisma*, because Gethsemane had fallen into Monophysite hands¹⁴³.

2) The prayer *Sub tuum praesidium*. There is a prayer which became a piece of divine service in Byzantine, Latin and (only catholic?) Coptic rites. It is the famous Latin prayer *Sub tuum praesidium* :

Under your mercy we take refuge, o Mother of God. Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger, [o you] alone pure and

¹³⁷ M. SHERIDAN (*A Homily on the Death...*, cited above, p. 12) notes that the earliest testimony of this belief may be the Protoevangelium of James XX,1-2. However the Ascension of Isaiah goes already in this direction. See also ERBETTA, *Gli apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, Casale Monferrato, I/2, 1981, p. 26.

¹³⁸ *De Vita Moysis*, II, 21.

¹³⁹ *Homilia de Occursu Domini* 2-3 (PG 39, 48A-49B). See also at the end of our period Theodoretus of Cyrus, *Commentary on Ezechiel*, 44 ; PG 81, 1233A-B, and Hesychius of Jerusalem († after 451), *Homilia de Hypapantè*, PG 93, 1467-1478.

¹⁴⁰ *Epist.* 49, 21 (to Pammachius) CSEL 54, p. 386.

¹⁴¹ SHERIDAN, p. 13.

¹⁴² The *Kathisma* was the place where Mary is said to have had a rest on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (cfr. *Protevangelium of James*, XVI and XVII).

¹⁴³ MIMOUNI, *op. cit.*, p. 57 and note 57. B. CAPELLE, *La fête de la Vierge à Jérusalem au V^e siècle*, in *Le Muséon* 56 (1943), pp. 1-43.

alone blessed¹⁴⁴.

According to Ch. ROBERTS, who published the papyrus in which is the most ancient evidence of the prayer, this text is of the 4th century, although the writing points to the 3rd century¹⁴⁵. MERCENIER intended to demonstrate that it is of the 3rd century¹⁴⁶. According to Kilian MCDONNEL¹⁴⁷, who is calling to MERCENIER, the meaning of the word *Theotokos* in the prayer is a sign that it was used in official prayer of the Church (*sic!* E. L.). However, O. STEGEMÜLLER already in 1952 did not believe that the papyrus would be so old. He thought that kind of writing is found from the 3rd to the 6th century¹⁴⁸. According to ENO, the origin and the date of the prayer, *Sub tuum praesidium*, continue to be a matter of dispute. It is put forward as the earliest example of a popular (and thus not liturgical) prayer to Mary, from the fourth (?) century¹⁴⁹. ENO remarks about the word *Theotokos* in the prayer: "The *Sub tuum praesidium* does not ask for Mary's intercession but asks for her help and direct intervention"¹⁵⁰. And he adds "Was the concern of someone like Nestorius proof of his stupidity or was it based on a sincere concern for serious theological misunderstanding and/or popular aberrations? Definite answers cannot be given because of our lack of extensive knowledge about popular Marian beliefs and devotions".

One thing has to be noted: The original Greek text reads : « deliver us from danger » (ῥῥσαι) while the « received » liturgical text has « redeem us from dangers » (λύτρωσαι)¹⁵¹. The idea of λύτρον was added with what meaning? It is not self-evident, but surely it links more strictly what is asked to Mary with

¹⁴⁴ Ὑπὸ τὴν σὴν εὐσπλαγίαν καταφεύγομεν, Θεοτόκε· τὰς ἡμῶν ἱκεσίας μὴ παρίδῃς ἐν περιστάσει, ἀλλ' ἐκ κινδύνου ῥῥσαι ἡμᾶς, μόνη ἀγνή, μόνη εὐλογημένη. This text, used until today in the Greek liturgical tradition (with two changes: κινδύνων instead of κινδύνου and λύτρωσαι instead of ῥῥσαι), would be that of the papyrus of the John Rylands Library Manchester, according to O. STEGEMÜLLER, *Sub tuum praesidium. Bemerkungen zu ältesten Überlieferung*, in ZKTh 74 (1952), pp. 76-82 (77).

¹⁴⁵ C. H. ROBERTS and E. G. TURNER, eds., *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library III*, Cambridge, 1938, N° 470, p. 46.

¹⁴⁶ F. MERCENIER, *L'Antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne*, in *Le Muséon* 52 (1939), pp. 229-233 ; F. MERCENIER, *La plus ancienne prière à la Sainte Vierge : le Sub tuum praesidium*, in *Questions Liturgiques et Paroissiales*, février 1940, pp. 33-36

¹⁴⁷ Kilian MCDONNEL, *The Marian Liturgical Tradition*, in *The One Mediator*¹⁴⁷: *supra cit.* = Luth/Cath USA 1992, p. 43

¹⁴⁸ O. STEGEMÜLLER, *Sub tuum praesidium. Bemerkungen zu ältesten Überlieferung*, in: ZKTh 74 (1952), pp. 76-82.

¹⁴⁹ ENO, p. 166.

¹⁵⁰ ENO, p. 176.

¹⁵¹ Ὁρολόγιον τὸ Μέγα, Athens, 1973, p. 179.

the Christ's redemptive work (cf. Tit 2,14). The plural « dangers » is more including than the singular. The Coptic version has *nohem* which can mean either « deliver » or also « redeem », but with the singular « danger ». Thus the word λύτρωσαι which substituted ρῦσαι in the later text is not free of ambiguity and indicate an evolution of the Marian theology, but when? We cannot say. The famous hymn *akathistos*, which is believed today to have been written soon after Chalcedon, is full of this kind of formulas, and many other so called *theotokia* of a subsequent period..

STEGEMÜLLER has some other interesting remarks about this prayer: there were surely prayers directed to the Blessed Virgin Mary from the 3rd century as we conclude from various testimonies (Gregorius the Thaumaturge, Gregorius of Nazianzus, etc...). But STEGEMÜLLER adds a comparison with gnostic prayers directed to the Holy Spirit as a female power which are similar to the *Sub tuum*. It is understandable that the Orthodox had changed these formulas directing them to Mary¹⁵².

3) *The Marian feasts in the liturgical year.*

ENO wrote about the Marian feasts: "In the liturgy proper the mariological stratum of the sanctoral cycle is the most recent, not having been launched in earnest until after 431. Certain liturgical feasts existed before 431, such as the *Hypapante* (the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple), celebrated in Jerusalem since at least the middle of the fourth century¹⁵³. But it would be unwarranted to presume that liturgical feasts considered Marian in later history were primarily so at their origin".

VI. The Assyrian Tradition¹⁵⁴

The condemnation of Nestorius in 431 and the schism that happened in the

¹⁵² See *op. laud.*, pp. 80 ff.

¹⁵³ This feast is known already by Egeria at Jerusalem in the late 4th century: *Itinerarium Egeriae* 26, SC 296, pp. 254f. See J. PELIKAN, *The emergence of the catholic tradition (100-600)* (The Christian Tradition 1; Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 242, 270, 272. On Marian liturgy, see A. BAUMSTARK, *Comparative Liturgy* (rev. B.BOTTE, Westminster MD, Newman Press, 1958, p. 186..

¹⁵⁴ There is not abundant bibliography about the Marian tradition by the Assyrians (Chaldeans and so-called Nestorians): A. M. MASSONNAT, O.P., *Marie dans la liturgie chaldéenne*, in *Maria. Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, sous la direction d' Hubert DU MANOIR, S.J., Paris, 1949, pp. 341-351 ; Pierre YOUSSEF, *Marie, mère des chrétiens dans la liturgie chaldéenne*, in *Études mariales* 39 (1982), pp. 57-85 ; Georges GHARIB (direction e coordinamento), *Testi mariani del primo millennio*. Vol. IV. *Padri e altri autori orientali*, Roma, 1991 ; Parte seconda *Chiesa sirio-orientale*, pp. 309-437. See also E. TISSERANT, *Nestorienne (Église)*, in DTC XI, pp.

Persian Church faithful to the Antiochene doctors Diodore, Theodore of Mospuestia and Nestorius, at the Synod of Seleucia in 486 separated this ancient Church of the East from the communion of the so-called Western Church (that is the Greek and Latin, but also Eastern Syriac and Coptic Churches). They rejected the Council of Ephesus and especially the word Θεοτόκος for Mary. However the « Nestorian » theologians and hymnographers had a deep veneration for the Mother of Christ and it is noticeable in their liturgical celebrations.

Unique among the Eastern liturgies, the eucharistic anaphora of the Assyrian tradition (Addai and Mari, Theodor of Mospuestia, Nestorius) has no commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary in this prayer. It is only a sign of the archaic structure of these eucharistic prayers, because the memory of Mary in the eucharistic prayer was introduced after Chalcedon, as we said earlier¹⁵⁵. Thus there is no special conclusion to draw from this fact.

1. *Christology and Mary*. The official teaching of the Assyrian Church about christology and about Mary is to be found in the joint statement signed by the Assyrian catholicos-patriarch Mar Dinkha IV with pope John-Paul II in November 11th 1994 (cf: *Information Service* of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 88 (1995/1), pp-2-3) and in the self-presentation of the Assyrian Church on the web (<http://www.cired.org/aceov.html>).

The Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East says in its central part:

« The same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is the reason why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as 'the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour'. In the light of the same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as 'the Mother of God' and also 'the Mother of Christ'. We both recognize the legitimacy and the rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each

¹⁵⁵ The origin of this memory of Mary in the Eastern and Latin eucharistic liturgy is discussed. It does not seem earlier than the half of the 6th century at the time of the Second Council of Constantinople (553). See: S. M. MEO, *La formula mariana « gloriosa semper virgo Maria Genitrix Dei et Domini nostri Iesu Christi » nel canone romano e presso due pontefici del VI secolo*, in Pont. Academia Mariana Internationali. *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani. Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariae in Lusitania. Anno 1967 celebrati*. Vol. II *De Fundamentis Scripturasticis et Dogmatico-Liturgicis Cultus Mariani*, Romae, 1970, p. 439-458.

Church in her liturgical life and piety ».

The official teaching of the Assyrian Church on the web says:

« The teaching of the Church of the East is based on the faith of the universal Church as set forth in the Nicene Creed. The mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mystery of the Incarnation are central to its teaching. The church believes and teaches that the Only-begotten Son of God, God the Word, became incarnate for us the men and for our salvation and became man. The same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was begotten of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity, in a body of flesh, with a rational, intelligent, and immortal soul which he took from the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and united to himself, making it his very own at the moment of conception. The humanity which he took for his own was assumed by God the Word, who was, thenceforth and for ever, the personal subject of the divine and human natures. His divine and human natures retain their own properties, faculties, and operations unconfusedly, immutably, undividedly, and inseparably.

» Therefore, because the divinity and humanity are united in the Person of the same and only Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ, the Church of the East rejects any teaching which suggests that Christ is an 'ordinary man' whom God the Word inhabited, like the righteous men and the prophets of old. The Church of the East further rejects any teaching that explicitly or implicitly suggests that there are two Sons, or two Lords, or two Christs in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. The same, through his passion, death, burial, and resurrection, redeemed humanity from the bondage of sin and death, and secured the hope of resurrection and new life for all who put their faith in him, to whom, with his Father and the Holy Spirit, belongs confession, worship, and adoration unto ages to ages. Amen. »

Everybody can notice that the official confession of faith on the web is very similar to that signed by John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, but the important words that qualify the Blessed Virgin Mary as 'the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour' are lacking. As it seems, this part of the common declaration was not unanimously accepted by the Assyrian Synod of bishops, after the return home of their delegation in Rome, and created problems for the Catholicos.

It is interesting to compare this official confession of faith of the Assyrian Church given on the web with the statement of the Synod of Seleucia in 486 which declared the separation of this Church and qualified her as « Nestorian »: « Our faith about the Incarnation of Christ must be the confession of the two natures, this of the divinity and this of humanity. Nobody of us must introduce

mixture, commixtion, or confusion between these two diverse natures; but divinity remaining and persisting in its properties, and humanity in its own, we unite in only one majesty and in one adoration the divergences of the natures because the perfect and indissoluble union of the divinity with the humanity. And if somebody thinks or teaches to other people that the passion or change is inherent to the divinity of Our Lord, and if he does not keep, about the unity of the person of Our Lord, the confession of a perfect God and of a perfect man, he is anathema »¹⁵⁶. This confession of faith of 486 seems to exclude the *communicatio idiomatum* and consequently the term θεοτόκος, although that is not said explicitly.

In the year 1247, Isho'yab, metropolitan of Nisibis, sent to pope Innocent IV a confession of faith in which he wrote: « Mary gave birth to Christ must be understood that she gave birth herself to God the Son, one of the three Persons, united to a one man of whom the Gospel said that he is the son of David (...), and as we say that Mary gave birth to Christ we understand that herself gave birth to God, in that manner, however, that he is himself God the Son, united to humanity »¹⁵⁷. For Innocent IV this formula, which looks satisfactory at first glance, was in fact ambiguous in saying that one of the three Persons was united to a one man.

2) *The authors.* In spite of her rejection of the *theotokos*, the Assyrian Church gives a large place to Mary in theological works, in her piety and liturgical celebrations. In doing this she is faithful to the inheritance of saint Ephrem whom she considers as one the major doctors of her tradition.

a) *St. Ephrem.* We have already said that Ephrem has written a lot of texts in which he praises Mary. In relation with the Assyrians it is useful to speak more about him. We must remember again his *Commentary to the Diatessaron* in which he upholds the perpetual virginity of Mary and affirm the parallel between Eve and Mary in the line of what wrote Irenaeus. For him it is the Word of God who came in Mary's womb. The idea that Mary became the Mother of God is underlying in many texts of Ephrem. Among many poems we quote only three passages of a *soghita in memory of Mary*: « 38.

¹⁵⁶ *Synodicon Orientale*, ed. J.-B. CHABOT, Paris, 1902, p. 54 ff. for the text, p. 302 for the French translation.

¹⁵⁷ The Latin text quoted in TISSERANT, *Nestorienne (Église)* in DTC XI, col. 299 says : « Maria peperit Christum, intelligitur quod ipsa peperit Deum Filium, unam trium Personarum unitam homini uni, de quo dicitur in Evangelio quod ipse est filius David (...), et in hoc quo dicimus Maria peperit Christum intelligitur quod ipsa peperit Deum : tali tantum conditione quod ipse est Deus Filius unitus humanitati ».

She is the pure temple in which God dwelt, the Giant of the centuries, and here was accomplished as a wonder the mystery for that God became man, and Adam was called Son of the Father »¹⁵⁸. « 47. The Highest, who is the Ancient of days, dwelt as a child in her breast. Yea, the Fire dwelt in a womb of flesh; yea, the one exists from ever set a beginning to himself and was conceived »¹⁵⁹. « 50. Two mothers appeared who gave birth to dissimilar children : the one gave birth to the 'Adam' (i. e. to a man) who filled her with curse, Mary gave birth to God who filled the world with blessings »¹⁶⁰. This last quotation is very clear, in the same line as the Cappadocian Gregor of Nazianzus.

Among the Assyrians (so-called Nestorians) writers we must mention two of them about what they speak on Mary.

b) *Narsai* (399 ?-503) who was disciple of Barsauma and strong supporter of Nestorius. From his Homily on Nativity we quote three significant passages:

At the Visitation Elisabeth said to the Virgin: « Blessed is your child above all the children. Who is he who grant to a barren woman the honour to stay in front of the woman who has been judged worthy to become the mother of the Lord of the universe? »¹⁶¹.

This sentence can be understood correctly, because de Lord of the universe is God. But further he is clearly Nestorian, but not necessary heretic. This appears in a last sentence of the same homily: « The Almighty is not limited in a womb. Mary is the mother of the second Adam, not of the divine essence ». Here is a misunderstanding because the faith of Saint Cyril and of Ephesus never said that Mary gave birth to the divine essence, but to the Word of God incarnate who is God¹⁶².

b) *Babai*. Among the major writers of this Assyrian school is Babai the Great (ca. 550 . ca. 628). One of the most significant treatises of Babai is the *Book on the Union* in which he unfolds his Christology, typically Antiochene. He explains that the Blessed Virgin Mary must be called and Mother of God and mother of the man in order to avoid the heresy of Paul of Samosata, and this of the Manicheans. He wrote: « For this ineffable union that occurred in the womb, the Blessed Mary is said Mother of Christ, because Christ is God and man: from her nature in fact Mary has given birth to the man, who from

¹⁵⁸ *Carmina soghita*, 1, 38 ; CSCO 187, pp. 178-187 (183).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 47 ; *id.*, p. 184.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 1, 50 ; *id.*, p. 185.

¹⁶¹ *Homily on the Nativity of Christ*, PO 40, p. 50, 223-226

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 64-66, 454-455

the beginning of his formation united himself to God the Word. But she is said also the Mother of God, because God the Word assumed this man from the beginning of his formation, and in him dwelt as in a temple by means of the personal union »¹⁶³.

In conclusion we can say that the thought of this Assyrian authors means to be faithful to the Antiochene Christology without what seemed to them innovation of the Alexandrians.

Thus this Church in her liturgy has three special celebrations for Mary during the year and some minor others. Before Christmas four Sundays (of *Subara* i.e. of the Annunciation) are dedicated to the preparation of the Incarnation in which Mary occupies the first place. 1) The day after Christmas is the feast of Mary's congratulations. 2) The Friday between the first and the second Sunday after Christmas is the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. 3) The 15th of August celebrates the Dormition (Assumption) of Mary.

In addition, there are three agricultural feasts in which the intercession of Mary is called upon: the 15 of January Mary protector of the seeds, the 15th of May Mary protector of the spikes, and the 15th of August Mary protector of the harvest and of the fruits. This last feast is mingled with the Dormition of Mary and is connected with the dedication of the first church of Mary in Jerusalem. There is also the feast of the Presentation (*Hypapantè*, the Encounter) of Jesus at the temple (known already by Egeria at Jerusalem in the 4th century¹⁶⁴) is less a feast of Mary than of the Lord. In the weekly services Wednesday is especially devoted to Mary, and this Church like the other Eastern Churches does a very strong extolling of her perpetual virginity and of her highest holiness.

In fact the Assyrian Church has not adopted all the Marian feasts we can find in the other Eastern Churches, but kept the feasts she had before the Council of Ephesus, and probably added some others of her own.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

I see ten points to emphasize as general conclusion:

1° The seeds of all the reflection on Mary is in the Gospels, tied with the mystery of Christ.

2° Christology is at the root of all the Marian thought and devotion.

¹⁶³ *The Book on Union*, CSCO 80, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶⁴ *Itinerarium* 26, SC 296, pp. 254f.

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