

PARADOSIS

Contributions to the History of Early Christian Literature and Theology

XVII

CHARLES WILLIAM NEUMANN, S.M.

THE VIRGIN MARY
IN THE WORKS
OF SAINT AMBROSE

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FRIBOURG SWITZERLAND
1962

PARADOSIS is intended as a series of studies in ancient Christian literature and theology. The Greek term, already familiar to the earliest Christian writers, has been adopted as a title since it is convenient for quotation and reference, while at the same time serving to cover contributions in various languages. It implies, furthermore, both a principle and a programme. Christian theology is by its nature rooted in the past. Only in so far as it remains in living contact therewith is it capable of further growth. Hence any study, however unassuming, that throws light on tradition or its sources becomes by the very fact a contribution to the theology of the present.

OTHMAR PERLER.

Fribourg, Switzerland.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key to abbreviations.	IX
Bibliography.	IX

VIRGO ANTE PARTUM

CHAPTER ONE

Mary, Model of Virgins

A. Historical Survey of the Idea of Mary, Model of Virgins . . .	5
1. The Fresco of St. Priscilla.	5
2. Christian Writers of the Third Century	7
3. Athanasius.	9
a) Athanasius, A Coptic Writer	10
b) Survey of Athanasius' Ascetical Writings.	12
4. Alexander of Alexandria.	18
5. The Gnomes of the Council of Nicea.	19
a) Description of the Gnomes	21
b) Discovery and Publication of the Gnomes	22
c) The Gnomes, Part of the Coptic Sources on Nicea . . .	24
d) Original Language of the Gnomes	27
e) Authorship of the Gnomes	29
6. Remaining Fourth-Century Writers before Ambrose	31
B. Ambrose's Doctrine on Mary, Model of Virgins.	35
1. The De Virginibus	35
2. Mary, Model of Virgins, in Ambrose's other Works	47
3. Mary at the Head of the Choir of Virgins	51
a) Ambrose's Texts on the Choir of Virgins.	51
b) Mary and the Choir of Virgins in Tradition	56
c) Scriptural Origin of the "Chorus Virginum"	60
4. Mary, Consummate Model of all Virtues	64

CHAPTER TWO

The Doctrine of Mary's Virginit^y ante Partum

A. Mary's Virginit ^y ante Partum: A Self-evident Truth for Ambrose	67
B. Ambrose's Teaching on Mary's Virginit ^y ante Partum.	69
1. Scriptural Sources of the Doctrine	69
2. Theological Reasons for the Doctrine.	73
a) Reasons of Fitness.	73
b) Reason of Necessity: Original Sin	77
3. Consequences of Mary's Virginit ^y ante Partum	78
4. Ambrose's Terminology for Christ's Virginal Generation . .	79
C. Historical Circumstances of Mary's Virginal Life ante Partum	82
1. Reasons for Mary's Betrothal to Joseph.	82
2. The Marriage of Mary and Joseph	85
a) The Extent of Mary's "Marriage" to Joseph	85
b) Mary, the "Desponsata" of Joseph.	89
c) Ambrose on Mt. 1:24	91
Mt. 1:24 in the De Institutione Virginis	91
Mt. 1:24 in the Exp. Luc.	94
d) Reasons for His Interpretation of Mt. 1:24	99
3. Mary and a Pre-Annunciation Vow of Virginit ^y	100

VIRGO IN PARTU

CHAPTER THREE

Mary's Virginit^y in Partu in Ambrose's Pre-Jovinianist Works

A. Historical Evolution of the Doctrine of Mary's Virginit ^y in Partu	105
B. The Marian Sense of Exp. Luc. 2:56 f	113
1. Analysis of Exp. Luc. 2:56 f	113
2. Interpretations traditionally given this Passage	120
3. Objections to the Interpretation proposed.	125
4. Confirmations of the proposed Interpretation	133
5. Mariological Value of the Passage Exp. Luc. 2:56 f	134
C. The Virginal Birth in other Pre-Jovinianist Works.	138

CHAPTER FOUR

Ambrose's Reply to Jovinian

A. The Jovinianist Polemic	142
1. Outbreak of Jovinianism	142
2. The Refutations of Jovinian at Rome	144
a) Pope Siricius' Omission of the Marian Error	145
b) Absence of the Marian Error in the Adv. Jov.	146
c) Jerome's Later Declarations on Mary's Virginity in Partu	149
3. Chronology of Events in the Jovinianist Polemic	152
B. Mary's Virginity in Partu Defended by Ambrose.	154
1. Refutation of Error on Virginity and Marriage	155
2. Refutation of Error on Mary's Virginity in Partu.	156
a) The Reductio ad Absurdum: A Corrupted Passage Restored	157
b) Positive Arguments for Mary's Virginity in Partu.	164
C. Jovinianism at Milan after Ambrose's Refutation.	173

VIRGO POST PARTUM

CHAPTER FIVE

Mary's Perpetual Virginity in Ambrose's Earlier Works

A. Mary's perpetual Virginity in the De Virginibus	181
B. The Doctrine in Ambrose's Post-Helvidian Works	184
1. Rise of Helvidius	184
2. Impact of Helvidius on the Church of Milan	185
3. Mary's Virginity and the Calvary Scene in Ambrose's Works	189
a) The Calvary Scene in the Exp. Luc.	191
b) Corollaries to the Calvary Proof of Mary's Virginity	192
– John's Role in Recording the Scene on Calvary	192
– John under Mary's Influence	194
– Mary's Virginity of Spirit.	196
– John's Virginity	197
c) The "Mystery" of Mary's Perpetual Virginity.	198
d) An Objection: Joseph's Role as Spouse	169
e) Ambrose's Sources for the Exegesis of Jn. 19:26 f	201

CHAPTER SIX

Bonosus, Marian Heretic

A. Bonosus: The Personage	206
1. Bishop of Sardica.	206
2. The Marian Heresy of Bonosus.	211
3. Christological Heresy in Bonosus.	216
4. Bonosus, Jovinian, and Helvidius.	221
B. Bonosus' Condemnation	223
1. The Council of Capua.	223
2. Ambrose's Loyalty to Rome in the Bonosian Case	225
3. The Ep. De Causa Bonosi: Contents, Chronology	229
4. Summary of Events in Bonosus' Condemnation	233

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ambrose's Defense of Mary's Perpetual Virginity

A. Ambrose's Replies to Bonosus	237
1. "Mulier".	237
2. "Antequam convenirent".	240
3. "Non cognovit eam donec peperit Filium"	244
4. "Noluit eam traducere"	248
5. "Accepit conjugem suam"	252
6. "Fratres Domini".	252
B. Ambrose's Positive Arguments for Mary's Perpetual Virginity .	257
1. Christ's Choice of a Virginal Mother	257
2. Christ's Choice of a Model for Virgins	258
3. Reward of Virgins Intended for Christ's Mother	259
4. Mary's Awareness of her Dignity.	260
5. Joseph's Respect for Mary's Dignity	260
6. Mary's Virginity attested to on Calvary.	261
7. Mary's Courage on Calvary, Proof of her Virginity:	264
8. Mary as Distributrix of the Grace of Virginity	265
9. The "Porta Clausa" of Ezech. 44:2	268
C. Aftermath of the Bonosian Refutation.	270
D. Absence of "Semper Virgo" in Ambrose's Works.	271
Indices	273

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Franz Joseph DOELGER, <i>Antike und Christentum</i> , Münster-i-W.
DTC	Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Paris.
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies, London.
LTK	Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, Freiburg-i-B.
RHE	Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, Louvain.
RTAM	Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale, Louvain.
RSR	Recherches de Science Religieuse, Paris.
TQ	Theologische Quartalschrift, Tübingen.
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen, Leipzig.
ZKT	Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie, Innsbruck.

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VIRGO
ANTE PARTUM

CHAPTER ONE

Mary, Model of Virgins

In the history of asceticism Saint Ambrose of Milan is known for having glorified the practice of virginity, even for having sponsored a veritable movement in the feminine world of his day toward this way of life. Jerome is no more famous for his letters of direction to the virgins at Rome than Ambrose for his recruitment of virgins in and around Milan. It was altogether natural that the Virgin Mary should have been the soul of this movement and the model whom Ambrose presented to the virgins of his day for imitation. Today, indeed, virginity is but an abstract way of describing the life of the Virgin Mary. This very fact, however, is largely due to the influence of Ambrose, who was one of the earliest to depict Mary as the Virgin of virgins, and the first whom Christian literature shows doing so with such enthusiasm. Hence a double danger must be avoided in appreciating his contribution to asceticism and to Mariology: on the one hand, the mistake of taking for granted his view of Mary as the model of virgins, as though she had always been portrayed under that light; and on the other, the over-simplification of thinking that Ambrose created such a role for Mary, as though no earlier records of the idea are extant – and, what is often overlooked, as though there could not have been earlier evidence of it which perished without leaving a trace in history. If the uninitiated usually fall into the first misconception, the second is proper to scholars intent on tracing ideas and movements back to their sources. Extant sources of the idea of Mary, model of virginal life, are scarce for the period earlier than Ambrose, it must be conceded. But records of any sort for this period are far from abundant. The discovery by Louis-Théodore Lefort of a hitherto unknown *De Virginitate* of St. Athanasius is the most sobering lesson of recent times for those who, for worthy reasons or

base ones, had championed Ambrose's absolute originality in the presentation of Mary as a model to virgins¹.

The idea is none the less the most characteristic of Ambrose's Mariology and the first that he is heard expressing in the works that came from his pen and have been preserved. It merits study, therefore, before any other. At the same time it lends itself to being classified under Ambrose's doctrine on the virginity of Mary in the period of her life commonly called *ante partum*, in the sense that the circumstances in which Ambrose describes Mary in his first memorable portrait of her all center around the Annunciation and do not yet assert her virginity at the birth of her Son or during her life with Joseph. Obviously she is the perpetual virgin, for otherwise Ambrose could not have cited her as a model to be reproduced by virgins. But for imitation he fixes his eyes on her life apart from the marriage which in the divine plan was necessitated by her unique role as Virgin Mother. Only in defense of the doctrine of her perpetual virginity will he pronounce himself on her life with Joseph. Hence his portrait of Mary, model of virgins, may be called the moral aspect of his teaching on Mary's virginity, and more precisely her virginity *ante partum*, since the practical details of her conduct written up as a rule of life for virgins were drawn from the period before and during the Annunciation. The circumstances in which she preserved her virginal state in partu and post partum were her unique privilege, never susceptible of imitation.

With these preliminary remarks in mind it becomes necessary to sketch the history of the idea of Mary, the model of virginal life, in order to see wherein lies Ambrose's claim to be one of its outstanding exponents.

¹ Ambrose's originality was championed by Hugo Koch in the service of his thesis that Mary's perpetual virginity was unknown to the earliest Christian centuries. Koch makes much of the absence of earlier evidence for Mary as model of virgins in his *Virgines Christi*, TU, 31:2 (1907), p. 92 f. After the discovery of the Athanasian *Letter to Virgins* in question, he corrected his view, but only partially, in *Virgo Eva – Virgo Maria*. Berlin 1937, p. 77, n. 1, p. 80, n. 3.

A. Historical Survey of the Idea of Mary, Model of Virgins

1. The Fresco of St. Priscilla

The first traces of the idea of Mary, ideal of virginal life, will always be disputed. No explicit word is found in the known Christian writers or apocryphals of the first two centuries. One of the first bits of evidence, if admitted, would testify to the fact that the image of the Virgin of virgins had already fixed itself in the heart of popular piety at Rome by the third century. In the cemetery of St. Priscilla on the Via Salaria are found two Christian paintings of remotest antiquity. The first, dating from the first quarter of the second century (?) and usually known as the "Virgin of the Prophet", attests to the belief in the Divine Maternity three centuries before Ephesus. The significance of the second is not so clear.

Younger by a century than the other, this mysterious fresco represents three scenes: in the center an orante wearing a long veil, to the right a mother with her child on her knees, and to the left a group of three personages. This group is composed of a bearded man seated on a high-backed chair, his right hand outstretched and eyes directed toward either the woman standing before him or the mother and child in the scene on the right. The young woman who stands before him, head uncovered, holds a white veil or scroll. Behind her is the third personage, a young man presenting what seems also to be a long veil¹. Interpretations of this triple scene have widely varied.

The first studies on the work in the 17th century interpreted it as the veiltaking of a young virgin under the auspices of the Virgin Mother of God. This view has been completed by later scholars, notably by Joseph Wilpert². The bearded personage would be a bishop pointing to Mary and the Child, as though inviting the young virgin to take this Virgin-Mother as model in the new state of consecrated virginity, the entrance into which is marked by the veiltaking. Wilpert³ even associated the bishop's gesture with a sentence (found in the plural) in Ambrose's *De Institutione Virginis*, beginning "Hanc imitami, filiae..."⁴

¹ For a reproduction of the fresco cf. Joseph WILPERT, *Die gottgeweihten Jungfrauen in den ersten Jahrhunderten der Kirche*. Freiburg i. Br. 1892, table 1, and *Die Malereien der Katakomben*. Freiburg i. Br. 1903, II.

² WILPERT, *Jungfrauen*, p. 62. ³ *Loc. cit.*

⁴ *De Inst. Virg.*, 14:87. PL 16:326b.

Other archeologists have not ventured beyond saying that the fresco represents symbols of virginity and maternity.

Recently the hypothesis has been defended that the three scenes are three moments in the life of a young spouse: the group of personages on the left would represent the taking of the veil of marriage (*velatio conjugal*); in the right this same woman would appear as a mother, and in the center under the figure of an orante as a soul now enjoying heavenly bliss. One of the main arguments advanced for this interpretation is that the consecration of virgins at Rome did not comprise any veiltaking until the middle of the fourth century ¹.

Against the interpretation in terms of a virginal veiling and an exhortation to imitate Mary, Hugo Koch had earlier advanced the objection that the idea of Mary as model of virgins does not appear in history as early as the third century, the date ascribed to the fresco. He had concluded, therefore, that the work either portrayed some other ceremony or that it was at least a century later than supposed ². The grounds for this objection, it will be clear, have since been greatly weakened, but it remains impossible in the present state of archeological research to decide what the fresco actually represents ³.

¹ Raymond d'IZARNY, *Mariage et consécration virginale au IV^e siècle*. Supplément à la Vie Spirituelle, 24 (15 février 1953), p. 98. Cf. METZ René, *La Consécration des Vierges dans l'Eglise Romaine*. Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Droit canonique de l'Université de Strasbourg. Paris 1954, p. 64-67. — SCHILLING R., *Le voile de consécration dans l'ancien rite romain*. Mélanges, Mgr Andrieu. Strasbourg 1956, p. 403-414.

² KOCH, *Virgines*, p. 92.

³ A judicious weighing of the evidence for seeing Mary and the Child in the fresco is made by Maurice VLOBERG, *Les Types iconographiques de la Vierge dans l'Art occidental*. Maria : Etudes sur la Sainte Vierge (Direction : Hubert DU MANOIR), II. Paris 1952, p. 487 :

Si des critiques hésitent sur l'identité de la jeune mère qu'elle (la fresque) représente, d'autres y reconnaissent la Mère du Christ plutôt qu'une figure abstraite de la maternité. Cette Vierge à l'Enfant — appelée de la *Velatio* ou de la « Prise de Voile », parce que tel est, semble-t-il, le thème du groupe énigmatique dont elle fait partie — s'apparente à des modèles hellénistiques : on retrouve ce type de mère à l'hypogée juif de Palmyre, mais la figure grave et belle, peinte à Priscille, dépasse la grâce et le sens d'une scène familière. On voudrait être sûr néanmoins qu'elle évoque la maternité divine de la Vierge. A défaut de certitude, un indice est à retenir : la similitude de pose et de nudité de l'Enfant sur cette fresque comme dans la *Vierge au prophète*.

M. P. A. FÉVRIER, *Les peintures de la catacombe de Priscille*. Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire. Paris, 71, 1959, p. 301-309. The author sees in this painting a profane teaching scene.

2. Christian Writers of the Third Century

Where the graphic arts transmitted an ambiguous message, was literature more explicit? History has preserved little record thereof. Among Christian writers of the mid-third century, when in Africa a movement toward the virginal life was being directed into orthodox channels, one searches in vain for mention of Mary as the model of virgins. Tertullian (d. after 220) could not have been expected to cite her example, since he claimed for her the glory of fecund motherhood after she brought Christ virginally into the world. The absence of Virgin of virgins in a work like Cyprian's (d. 258) *De habitu virginum* is a bit more startling, until one recalls that Cyprian's concern, like Tertullian's, was to detail the defensive means for preserving chastity rather than to describe its glories. Moreover, it must not be overlooked that a prevalent abuse among adepts of the virginal life in third century Africa as elsewhere made orthodox preachers wary of exhorting virgins to the imitation of Mary. Under the pretext of spiritual advancement, virgins had taken to living together with male ascetics; known as *virgines subintroductae* or *συνείσακτοι* (sc. *γυναῖκες* or *ἀδελφαί*)¹, they were to leave their influence on a whole series of tracts in Latin and Greek directed against them. (They are referred to hereafter in this study as *ἀγαπηταί*.) It was judged imprudent to direct the attention of such misled women to the figure of the Virgin whom Providence had placed in the company first of Joseph and then of John; the agapetes themselves cited in their defense the fact that in John's Gospel (19:26 f.) the dying Savior entrusted his Virgin Mother to his beloved disciple². Hence it is not at all alarming to observe that Mary is not championed by the orthodox

¹ Cf. Karl BIHLMAYER-Hermann TUECHLE, *Kirchengeschichte*, I. Paderborn 1951, p. 140 for a historical sketch and bibliography. The Greek term *συνείσακτος* (*γυνή* or *ἀδελφή*) is found for the first time, with a pejorative sense, in the history of Paul of Samosate at Antioch (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7:30:12. GCS Eus. 2 710:23. PG 20:713c) and after the fifth century the expression was translated *subintroducta* in Latin (P. QUADT, ZKT, 34 (1910), p. 227-233), although the abuse was much older, having been combated since the third century (Ps-Cyprian, Ep. 4. CSEL 3:2 473:1, 21 f.; 476:7; De singularitate clericorum, 20. CSEL 3:3 196:3-15). It was outlawed by the Council of Ancyra (Canon 19) in 314. Chrysostom and Jerome attest to its presence in Constantinople, Rome, and Gaul in varying forms. It left traces even as far as Ireland under the names of *conhospitae* or *agapetae*.

² Carl Alois KNELLER, "Joh. 19:26-27 bei den Kirchenvätern", ZKT, 40 (1916), p. 604-606.

as a model, the details of whose life could safely be presented to agapetae for imitation.

A contemporary of Cyprian but witness rather for the Alexandrian and Syrian churches, Origen (d. 253), brings the first literary evidence that the view of Mary as model of virgins was not unknown in the third century. His testimony is striking also because, as is to be seen, he wavered in his notion of Mary's virginal integrity in the act of giving birth to Christ. Rallying to the side of those who cite the apocryphal Gospel of Peter to prove that the "brethren" of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a previous marriage, he commends their defense of Mary's perpetual virginity. Without pronouncing on the apocryphal, the great theologian invokes a principle which may witness to the popular devotion of the friends of Mary in question or to his own theological system:

It is right that the first-fruits of absolute purity should be found in Mary as in Jesus ... It would be unseemly to have to attribute to someone other than the Virgin the first-fruits of Christian virginity¹.

That such an idea had taken root in the devotion of virgins of the third century, at least in the Greek church, can be deduced from a story related by Gregory of Nazianzus (329-c390) in his *Oratio* 24, delivered in Constantinople in 379. At the climax of his discourse he relates how the virgin martyr Justina, facing death with the magician Cyprian whom she had converted, invoked as protector of her virginity Christ the bridegroom and then prayed to "the virgin Mary for help to a maiden in danger"². Cyprian and Justina, both Christians of Antioch, are believed to have been martyred at Nicomedia (northern Turkey) in 304. Was Gregory juggling with history to refer a devotion of his own day back to the beginning of the century? To what extent did he embellish the legend?³ Scholars will differ, but there is evidence here, whatever its value, for an idea of Mary as patroness of virgins.

¹ In Mt. Com. 10:17. GCS Orig. 10 21:26 ff. PG 13:878a.

² Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat.* 24, 19 f. PG 35:1180c.

³ For a summary of the legend and bibliography, cf. Gabriel MEIER, *Cyprian St. and Justina, St.*, Catholic Encyclopedia, IV. New York 1908, p. 583. Georg SOELL, *Die Mariologie der Kappadozier im Licht der Dogmengeschichte*. Theologische Quartalschrift, 131 (1951), p. 456, n. 13 accepts Gregory's witness for such cult of Mary at least in his own day (379), as does Fr. DIEKAMP in an article in the *Theologische Revue*, 41 (1942), p. 62-65, which SOELL cites. However, Des. FRANCES, *Mariavereering en de eerste eeuw van de Kerk* (Collectio Franciscana Neerlandica 5:3), 1941, likewise cited by SOELL, rejects the story of *Orat* 24 as incapable even of proving that such Marian devotion existed in Gregory's time. In FRANCES'

The only two mentions of Mary in the long work entitled *The Banquet or On Virginity* of Methodius (d. 311) are not impressive testimony. At the end of the panegyric on virginity in the eleventh discourse, Thecla intones an enthusiastic hymn of 24 stanzas to the bridegroom Christ and to his Church. As martyrs and heroes of virginity or chastity she commemorates Abel, Joseph, the daughter of Jephthe, Judith, Susanna, John the Baptist, and in last place *the one who gave life* to Jesus (ζοη-τόκος), the Virgin full of grace who bore him in her immaculate womb and (in an allusion to Mt. 1:18 ff.) had to support the suspicion of having betrayed her spouse¹. The other mention of the Virgin² simply recalls the well-known similarity of Christ's virginal conception to Adam's creation from the virginal earth³.

3. Athanasius

With Athanasius (295-373) the idea of Mary as model of virgins finds unambiguous expression. The most abundant text is the long description of Mary's virginal life in a work called the *Letter to Virgins* and preserved only in Coptic fragments discovered in 1929 by Louis-Théodore Lefort. This writing indubitably inspired Ambrose to make a similar development in his *De Virginibus*, and will therefore be cited at length when Ambrose's text is introduced⁴. The *Letter* paints a portrait of Mary, model of virgins, so remarkable that other pages of its kind could be expected in Athanasius' works. Yet nothing in his known writings approaches it and, as has just been seen, little among the extant works of the period has prepared for it. The explanation lies probably in the fact that much of this wealth of Marian literature of the Alexandrian

opinion (p. 8) Gregory introduced the story as illustrative of devotion in the age of martyrs, thereby inventing testimony for a third-century Marian devotion which extant sources do not corroborate. It should be remarked, on the other hand, that FRANCES' evaluation of devotion to Mary among virgins of the third century is based primarily on the writings of Cyprian of Carthage, who, in addition to being distant from Nicomedia where Justina suffered martyrdom, had reasons for not depicting Mary as model of virgins.

¹ *Methodius*, Symposium, 11:2:18. GCS Meth. 135:23-28. PG 18:212c.

² *Ibid.*, 11:3:4. GCS 31:6. PG 68a.

³ KOCH, *Virgines*, p. 94, n., shows how a mistranslation of Symposium 1:5 is responsible for the allusion which Otto BARDENHEWER professed to see there and which he recorded in *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, II, 1st ed. Munich 1903, p. 287.

⁴ Cf. *infra*, p. 39-43 where the text is reproduced.

church has not yet been ferreted out of the mass of Coptic codices that lie unsorted in monasteries and libraries, or that have already perished in the turmoil which swept over the church of the Copts.

a) *Athanasius, a Coptic Writer*

On the theme under question more was to be expected from the ascetical literature written in Copt, the tongue of almost the totality of Egyptian monks, than from the dogmatic treatises written in Greek. As far as Athanasius is concerned, it may safely be asserted that many ascetical writings now proved to be his were never known in any Greek version and were probably originally composed in Copt. Athanasius took his first steps in the ascetic life under Antony who spoke only Copt, translated Antony's discourses into Greek, and passed long years of his hectic career in refuge among the Coptic ascetics nearby¹. Later figures in the monastic movement among the Copts, such as Chenoute, Apa Moses, Constantine of Assiout, and Severus of Ašmouneïn mention or cite his Coptic works on virginity². Beyond any doubt, Alexandria

¹ Louis-Théodore LEFORT, *S. Athanase, Ecrivain Copte*, Le Muséon, 46 (1933), p. 32.

² Athanasius' ascetical writings are cited by many little known Egyptian personages:

a) Chenoute of Atripus (d. 466), superior of a monastery for many years ranks with Pachomius as an organizer of Egyptian monasticism and is the outstanding writer of the national Coptic Church. He had happily at his disposition a copy of Athanasian treatises on virginity, which he cited textually (Homily partially published by Johannes LEIPOLDT, *Simuthii archimandritae vita et opera omnia*, III (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, sér. 2, t. 5). Paris 1906, p. 107 f.). This extract, says Chenoute, was drawn from the "letters of the archbishop Athanasius, that man of good who never has his fill of speaking about virginity". LEFORT discovered the folio immediately following those published by LEIPOLDT and observed that the continuation of Chenoute's homily reproduced textually two pages at the head of one of the fragments of the *Letter to Virgins* which LEFORT had unearthed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. (LEFORT, *Athanase, Ambroise et Chenoute: Sur la Virginité*, Le Muséon, 48 (1935), p. 55-73.) Thus the Athanasian authenticity of the *Letter* was confirmed.

b) Elsewhere Chenoute cites a half-page of instructions given to virgins by Athanasius but unknown in any extant work. (Eugène AMELINEAU, *Œuvres de Schenoudi*, I, Paris 1907, p. 204.)

c) The same Chenoute cites in a third tract a long passage under the name of Athanasius on the conduct befitting a virgin, although again the passage is unknown in the extant works of Athanasius. (Henri GUERIN, *Revue d'Égyptologie*, 10 (1944), p. 148 ff.; 11 (1945), p. 15 ff.)

d) Apa Moses, superior of a community of monks and virgins in the early fifth century reproduces an apostrophe to virginity under Athanasius' name. Similar apostrophes conclude three of Athanasius' works and are characteristic of his style, but the one cited by Apa Moses must stem from a fourth

under Athanasius had become the capital of monasticism in the middle fourth century. It is not by pure coincidence, either, that in the early fifth century the champion of devotion to the Mother of God against Nestorius is the Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril. Nor is it surprising that, judging from extant sources, the term θεοτόκος was born in Alexandria in the mind of its bishop Alexander (d. 323) and was passed on by Athanasius to his successors in the see. Finally, it is only natural that the earliest known prayer to the Mother of God, the *Sub tuum praesidium*, probably of Byzantine origin, should have been taken over so enthusiastically into the Coptic liturgy to all appearances during the fourth century¹. Everything points to a radiation of devotion to the Mother of God from the too often neglected center of Christendom that was Alexandria. How natural, then, that the ascetics, for whom the region of Alexandria was no less famous, should have singled out Mary's virginity for imitation and that Athanasius should have addressed them frequently on this theme, should even have been commemorated by Chenoute as a man "who never has his fill of speaking about virginity"².

It is now generally admitted that the long search to find *the* writing thought to be the *De Virginitate* which Jerome mentioned among the titles of Athanasius' works, and the ingenious defenses that each discoverer advanced to prove his claim to have unearthed the work, were largely in vain. As Lefort has shown, Jerome's text does not authorize the limitation of Athanasius' writings on virginity to a single book:

Feruntur ejus (Athanasii) adversus Gentes libri duo, et contra Valentem et Ursacium unus, *de virginitate, de persecutionibus Arianorum*

writing. (Eugène AMELINEAU, *Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire*, IV, Cairo 1909, p. 693. The text is No. 214 in Georgio ZOEGA, *Catalogus codicum copticorum manuscriptorum qui in Museo Borgiano adservantur*. Romae 1810.)

e) Constantine, bishop of Assiout, likewise cites in one of his panegyrics on Athanasius a passage of the patriarch that is known nowhere else. (LEFORT, *Un nouveau 'De Virginitate' attribué à saint Athanase*, Mélanges Paule Peeters, I (Analecta Bollandiana, 67). Brussels 1949, p. 142-152, citing the Ms. P. Morgan No. 579. This article furnished the contents of the present note.)

f) Severus of Ašmounein (10th century), in a fragment analyzed by ZOEGA, *op. cit.*, No. 160, characterizes Athanasius' style and begins an incomplete list of his works by saying, *In this style he wrote four treatises on virginity*.

¹ Cf. Otto STEGMÜLLER, *Sub tuum praesidium – Bemerkungen zur ältesten Überlieferung*, ZKT, 74 (1952), p. 76-82, and the less reliable summary by Giovanni GIAMBERARDINI, *La Mediazione de Maria nella Chiesa Egiziana*. Cairo 1952, p. 6 f. This last study shows however that a Coptic translation of the Greek *Sub tuum* during the first patristic centuries lacks certain testimony.

² Cf. *supra*, p. 10, n. 2a.

plurimi, et de psalmodum titulis, et de historia Antonii monachi vitam continens, et "heortastikai" epistulae, et multa alia quae enumerare longum est ¹.

Beginning with titles, Jerome lapses into recording simply the subject matter of Athanasius' works; the *plurimi*, moreover, concerns *de virginitate* as well as *de persecutionibus Arianorum* ². In addition to Chenoute's testimony just mentioned, other traces of Athanasius' many works on virginity remain: he himself, in the long *Letter to Virgins* speaks of having written the same exhortations to virginal life earlier, and a fragment of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* by Severus of Ašmounein (10th century) after describing Athanasius's style begins its fragmentary list of his works with the remark that "in this style he wrote *four* treatises on virginity" ³.

The contribution which Athanasius has to make to the present search for material on Mary as model of virgins, therefore, probably extends beyond his known writings. When it is recalled that the Coptic fragments of his *Letter to Virgins* are the earliest and most detailed sample that patristic literature has to offer on the theme, there is at first sight every reason to place high hope on what remains to be brought to light of Athanasius' ascetical literature. The fragments already retrieved from the collection of Coptic MSS in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris are due to the eminent scholarship of Louis-Théodore Lefort who has published them year after year upon discovery during the last quarter-century. Others have been found in Syriac or Armenian versions. An up-to-date inventory of Athanasius' important works on virginity and asceticism, all except one of them unknown in Greek, includes the eight works now to be discussed.

b) *Survey of Athanasias' Ascetical Writings* ⁴

1. The *Letter to Virgins* is preserved fragmentarily in a Coptic codex discovered and published with a French translation by Lefort ⁵. This

¹ Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 87. RICHARDSON (TU 14:1 1896), p. 45:2-6. PL 23:693b.

² LEFORT, *Athanase, Ambroise et Chenoute*, p. 70 f.

³ Cf. *supra*, p. 11, n. f.

⁴ On this question, see besides: AUBINEAU Michel, S. J., *Les Ecrits de saint Athanase sur la Virginité*. Revue d'ascétique et de mystique, 31 (1955), p. 141-173, who gives a complete list, with a brief commentary, as a preparation for his thesis on *L'idéal de la virginité au IV^e siècle d'après les Pères grecs*.

⁵ LEFORT, *Saint Athanase: Sur la Virginité*, Le Muséon, 42 (1929), p. 197-275

outstanding writing, from which Ambrose borrowed heavily for his portrait of Mary as model of virgins, will be studied in comparison with Ambrose's text later.

2. The almost complete Syriac version of a Λόγος περί παρθενείας (*De Virginitate*) almost surely from Athanasius was published with a French translation by Mgr. J. Lebon¹. The Armenian version of the same work in its entirety was edited by R. P. Casey². In terms similar to those

(197-212: introduction; 213-219: Coptic text; 240-264: French translation; 265-275: supplements). The codex, dating from the fifth or sixth century, was discovered by LEFORT in the form of seven fragments containing 40 folios drawn from the Coptic MSS Paris 131² ff. 90-113 and 78 ff. 59-61 + 58. The original codex extended beyond 215 pages and was a collection of writings, probably all Athanasian, on virginity. It opened with the letter known under the name of *First Pseudo-Clementine 'Ad Virgines'* (cf. *infra*, p. 15 f.). The *Letter to Virgins*, filling five fragments from the second on, lacks its opening pages and extended no doubt a few pages beyond the last sentences of the fragmentary apostrophe to virginity, which was Athanasius' characteristic conclusion for treatises on virginity. LEFORT, *Encore un 'De Virginitate' de saint Athanase?* Mélanges Joseph de Ghellinck, I. Gembloux 1951, p. 220.) The seventh and final fragment of the codex contains part of another letter.

The Athanasian authenticity of the *Letter to Virgins* is amply demonstrated by LEFORT in *Saint Athanase: Sur la Virginité*, p. 203 f., 273, and in *Athanase, Ambroise et Chénoute*, p. 66-68, 70. The title *Lettre aux Vierges* which LEFORT gives to the acephalic piece is justified in the latter article, p. 69. That Copt was the original language or at least contemporary with the original is proved in the first article, p. 274. See however the criticism of Mgr Georges JOUASSARD, in *Un portrait de la Sainte Vierge*. Vie Spirituelle, 90 (1954) 487, notes 23, 24: "Mgr Lefort a pensé que le copte pourrait être la langue dans laquelle aurait été rédigé l'original, saint Athanase selon lui, ayant connu le copte, et l'ayant pratiqué jusque dans ses compositions littéraires. Si l'évêque d'Alexandrie l'a fait dans le cas, il y a certainement eu édition en grec d'autre part ou traduction, car saint Ambroise ne lisait pas le copte. Il était, par contre, friand de tout ce qui paraissait en grec, et c'est cela surtout qu'il utilisait pour ses discours et ouvrages." – Note 24 (à cause de la supériorité du texte de saint Ambroise, on peut parler d'adaptation méritoire) "à moins que le copte ne nous fournisse qu'un texte dégénéré et nullement la transcription de ce que saint Ambroise aurait eu directement sous les regards en grec".

¹ Joseph LEBON, *Athanasiana Syriaca I: Un Λόγος περί Παρθενείας attribué à saint Athanase d'Alexandrie*, Le Muséon, 40 (1927), p. 205-248. The MS is that of the British Museum, Syriac Add. 14607. The MS itself attributed the text to Athanasius; this was confirmed by agreement noted with other Athanasian writings on virginity. The text is thought to translate an original Greek Λόγος περί Παρθενείας, because among other reasons the Scriptural citations are those of the Septuagint instead of the Peschitta. The work ends with one of Athanasius' characteristic apostrophes to virginity.

² Robert Pierce CASEY, *Der dem Athanasius zugeschriebene Traktat Περί Παρθενείας* (Sitzungsberichte der preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-historischen Klasse, 33). Berlin 1935, p. 1022-1045.

of the *Letter to Virgins* and with a mention of the θεοτόκος, the author describes the reception awaiting a virgin in heaven:

Lorsque tu auras revêtu (comme) vêtements les vertus (...) et que comme un manteau tu les auras (...) par la force de l'esprit de sainteté, alors le roi (te) regardera et désirera (ta) beauté Alors tu seras amenée à lui, car il aura vu ta beauté et t'aura aimée. Alors il t'introduira dans la chambre nuptiale non faite par les mains des épouses et tu crieras et tu diras : Je l'ai saisi et je ne le laisserai pas aller jusqu'à ce que je l'aie introduit dans la demeure de mon père et dans la chambre de celle qui m'a engendrée. J'appelle ta mère la θεοτόκος, avec qui tu as l'héritage. Alors, tu habiteras avec le Christ. Alors tu verras ton époux, ton frère, ton père, ton seigneur, ton roi, ton seigneur Dieu Sabaoth, Adonai, El qui est, était, et est toujours ¹.

3. The well-known Λόγος σωτηρίας πρὸς τὴν παρθένον long thought to be the *De Virginitate* of Athanasius until it became clear that many works on this theme existed, was edited critically by Ed. von der Goltz ². No model for virgins is cited in the work.

4. The opening chapters of the first of the two Pseudo-Clementine Letters '*Ad Virgines*' were discovered by Lefort in a Coptic version at the head of the codex which contained the *Letter to Virgins* described above. They were edited with a Latin translation ³. The second *Ps-Clementines* had earlier been discovered in 1470 in a Syriac MS of the Peshitta version of the New Testament, and were edited by John Wetstein in 1752 with a Latin translation. Scholars subsequently recognized therein some of the citations preserved in Greek by the monk Antiochos (fl. 620)

¹ Athanasius, *Λόγος περὶ Παρθενίας*. LEBON (Muséon 40), p. 225:15-226:1.

² Eduard Frh. VON DER GOLTZ, *Λόγος σωτηρίας πρὸς τὴν Παρθένον* (*De Virginitate*), eine echte Schrift des Athanasius, TU, 29:2 (1905). Greek text, p. 35-60. Again Athanasius concludes with a long apostrophe to virginity.

³ LEFORT, *Le 'De Virginitate' de saint Clément ou de saint Athanase?* Le Muséon, 40 (1927), p. 249-264. The pseudo-Clementine occupies pages 1-10 of the Coptic codex and reaches chapter 8 before the end of the fragment. LEFORT found a further Coptic fragment of the letter in a folio recognized as part of the same codex and published with French translation in Le Muséon, 42 (1929, p. 265-269. He thus succeeded in reconstituting a Coptic version of about two-thirds of the first pseudo-Clementine. A long lacuna extending to p. 60 of the codex still separates it from the *Letter to Virgins* described *supra*, n. 4, p. 12. At the head of the codex the pseudo-Clementine is given a title which LEFORT translates thus: "Epistola abbatis Athanasii archiepiscopi de conversatione congruente his qui continentur." This is the oldest and, for the portion preserved, the best witness of the text of the first pseudo-Clementine, far superior to the Syriac MS of the 15th century, says LEFORT in a review of Hugo KOCH's *Quellen zur Geschichte der Askese und des Mönchtums in der alten Kirche*. Tübingen 1933, found in RHE, 29 (1933), p. 985.

of San Saba (Palestine) in his *Pandects of Holy Scripture*. With the discovery of Antiochos' fragments the original tongue, till that time disputed between Syriac and Greek, was admitted to have been Greek¹. Before Lefort's discovery of the Coptic version of part of the first letter, the two works were variously dated from the fourth even back to the second century². The attribution to Pope St. Clement, long since abandoned, was due to Jerome³ and Epiphanius⁴. In the Coptic codex, which is the earliest and best witness to the text, the first pseudo-Clementine bears a title claiming Athanasius as the author. Nothing more definite on this point can be said than that in Alexandria in the fifth or sixth century, from which the Coptic MS dates, the work passed under the name of Athanasius. According to Lefort Athanasian authenticity is strongly attested by this earliest testimony until solid reasons for rejecting it are found⁵.

The first *Ps-Clementine*, quite possibly therefore of Athanasius' composition, has to be introduced into the present inquiry on early testimony on Mary, model of virgins, as much for what it omits as for the brief mention of her which it contains. In Lefort's Latin translation of the Copt, substantially the same as the Greek, the following sentence is the only one in the letter in which Mary is mentioned:

¹ The most recent edition of both pseudo-Clementines, giving the Latin translation of J. Th. Beelen from the Syriac and collating the Greek fragments of Antiochos, was prepared by Fr. DIEKAMP, *Epistula prior beati Clementis discipuli Petri Apostoli*, Patres Apostolici: Editio Funkiana aucta et emendata, II, 2nd ed. Tübingen 1913, p. 1-49. A good introduction precedes the text. Spanish translation with introduction (which, however, fails to mention LEFORT's Coptic discoveries) in Francisco de B. VIZMANOS, *Las Virgenes cristianas de la Iglesia Primitiva* (Biblioteca de autores cristianos). Madrid 1949, p. 961-988. Among notices found in manuals the best is in Johannes QUASTEN, *Patrology*, I. Westminster (U. S. A.) 1951, p. 58 f. with bibliography.

² Cf. VIZMANOS, *op. cit.*, p. 961 and authorities cited there.

³ Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1:12. PL 23:228d.

⁴ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30:15. GCS Epiph. 1 352:4 ff. PG 41:429-432.

⁵ On the Athanasian authenticity of the pseudo-Clementines, LEFORT's opinion, remaining the same in the many articles which followed, was expressed in Saint Athanasie: *Sur la Virginité*, Le Muséon, 42 (1929), p. 273, n. 1:

Nous ne prétendons pas qu'elles soient de saint Athanasie ; mais, sans que la chose soit absolument certaine, nous croyons qu'il y a un maximum de probabilité pour que ces textes aient été attribués à Athanasie par le scribe ; devant ce fait nous estimons qu'il y a lieu de réexaminer la question et qu'il ne suffit pas de la résoudre en invoquant la fantaisie attribuée gratuitement aux scribes coptes ; il faudra démontrer positivement ou bien que le scribe est dans l'erreur ou bien que le feuillet-titre est venu s'égarer ici à la tête du codex athanasien.

Uterus virginis gestavit Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum Verbum Dei ; et, cum Dominus homo factus est inter homines, vixit vitam virginem in mundo ; in hoc nosce gloriam virginitatis ¹.

As is evident, the attention is centered on Christ the virgin rather than on his virginal Mother. Moreover, in the list of models of virgins which immediately follows, the Virgin Mary is absent. One explanation lies in the fact that the letter vigorously inveighs against the abuses of the agapetae and would therefore refrain from alluding to Mary's example. In addition, all the models cited are masculine: Christ, and then John the Baptist, John the Apostle, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Elias, and Eliseus. The passage concludes as though perhaps the author had in mind to adduce only male examples of virginity:

Vitam ... et aliorum multorum inter sanctos invenimus sanctam et immaculatam ; si vis illos imitari, fortiter imitare ².

In its opening paragraph the letter is directed to virgins of both sexes. If the work is of Athanasius ³, it deserves to be remembered for comparison with the elaborate portrait of Mary presented in the *Letter to Virgins*, written to a feminine audience ⁴.

5. Another letter on virginity attributed to Athanasius was published in a Syriac version with a French translation by Lebon shortly after the Syriac work mentioned above in second place ⁵. Bearing the title *Of the same Athanasius, archbishop of the Alexandrinians, a letter to virgins who had gone to pray at Jerusalem and had returned*, it contains no allusion to models of virginity.

6. Lefort's latest discovery of a passage probably Athanasian is a single folio with a fragment of an apostrophe to virginity, the like of which is not found in any extant patristic literature other than the first three Athanasian tracts on virginity mentioned above ⁶. Lefort

¹ LEFORT, *Le 'De Virginitate' de saint Clément ou de saint Athanase?* p. 263:14-16. This is the first sentence of the sixth chapter. In DIEKAMP's edition it is accompanied by a gloss.

² *Ibid.*, p. 263:30 f. ³ Cf. *supra*, p. 15, n. 5. ⁴ Cf. *infra*, p. 39-43.

⁵ Joseph LEBON, *Athanasiana Syriaca: Une lettre attribuée à saint Athanase d'Alexandrie*, Le Muséon, 41 (1928), p. 169-216. Like the other work edited by LEBON (cf. *supra*, n. 26), this letter comes from the MS Syriac Addit. 14607 of the British Museum.

⁶ LEFORT, *Encore un 'De Virginitate' de saint Athanase?* Mélanges Joseph de Ghellinck, I. Gembloux 1951, p. 215-221. The folio was found in the Copt MS 131⁶ f. 68 of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris.

suggests that the passage may belong to the apostrophe preserved only fragmentarily in the *Letter to Virgins*, or to a fourth Athanasian treatise as yet undiscovered. Severus of Ašmouneîn did, in fact, speak of four treatises on virginity written by the patriarch¹. The question is of less concern here, since the fragment does not allude to any models of virginity.

7. Nor does the letter on love and continence published in a Coptic version by Arn. van Lantschoot contain any word about an example for the virginal life². The work was drawn on copiously by Pachomius already around 335, which is further testimony, along with Chenoute's borrowings from the *Letter to Virgins*³, of the esteem that Athanasius' ascetical writings enjoyed among the Coptic monks of his day⁴.

8. To complete the present list of Athanasian ascetical works, mention may be made of the fragments of a hitherto unknown writing *On Sickness and Health*, edited by Diekamp, although there is no question therein of Mary's virginity⁵.

In resume, then, it can be said that even after an exhaustive survey of Athanasius' ascetical literature, inasmuch as the latest research in non-Greek MSS has brought them out of obscurity, the portrait of Mary as model of virgins found in the *Letter to Virgins* remains without counterpart. The very subject or the audience of some of these other writings often precluded any mention of the Virgin of virgins. Others are too brief or too fragmentary to allow for the idea under investigation. Athanasian authenticity is not equally established, moreover, for all of them. But one conclusion imposes itself: the portrait of the Virgin of virgins remains unique even in Athanasius' own ascetical works, and the occasion never presented itself to develop such an idea in his dogmatic or exegetical works, in so far as they are known today. When an idea developed in such elaborate detail occurs only once in an author, it is justifiable to suppose he is perhaps copying some other source rather than exposing the fruit of his own thought. Were the material fully his

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221. Cf. *supra*, p. 11, n. f.

² Arn. VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Lettre de saint Athanase au sujet de l'amour et de la tempérance*, Le Muséon, 40 (1927), p. 265-292. The title given the letter is *Lettre de notre saint père le révérendissime apa Athanase, archevêque d'Alexandrie sur l'Αγάπη et l'Ἁγνότητα*.

³ Cf. *supra*, p. 10, n. 2a, b, c.

⁴ LEFORT, *Un nouveau De Virginitate*, p. 151.

⁵ Fr. DIEKAMP, *Analecta Patristica*. Romae 1938, p. 508, and ZKT, 62 (1938), p. 259 ff.

own, he would normally have found other occasions to express it. Athanasius does indeed mention two sources besides the Scriptures in his *Letter to Virgins*. Both are rich in promise for the problem being investigated.

4. *Alexander of Alexandria*

Shortly after having depicted Mary as model of virgins, Athanasius exclaims:

Je voudrais avoir des mots suffisants et une voix assez haute pour pouvoir écrire hautement sur la virginité tout ce qu'il faut en dire. Puisque donc j'ai le désir, sans avoir la possibilité, d'écrire sa sublimité, il me faut vous raconter, à vous aussi, pour autant que je pourrai me le rappeler, ce que nous avons entendu de la bouche de notre père *Alexandre*. Lui, en effet, alors que des vierges comme vous étaient venues le trouver et demandaient à entendre une parole de sa bouche, lui, dis-je, en voyant la ferveur de leur esprit et la grâce de leur cœur bien disposée, – il tenait en main les Evangiles, car c'était un vieillard avide de lectures –, leur parla alors aussitôt de leur fiancé, qui est également le vôtre ; il les amena sur l'amour du Verbe, et les joies de la virginité. Il leur ordonna de s'approcher de lui et leur dit : « Si votre fiancé était un homme, vous demanderiez à vos parents et à votre famille comment il est ... »¹

Athanasius continues the citation of a moving discourse pronounced by a man whom he refers to as *our father Alexander*, and who may safely be identified with Athanasius' immediate predecessor, Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328). It was a discourse dating from Alexander's last years, since Athanasius refers to him as an *old man*; and the reminiscence must have been evoked from almost a half-century before, since Athanasius (295-373) calls himself too an *old man*. After finishing Alexander's rather lengthy exhortation, Athanasius adds a few words of his own before passing to a second most interesting citation of the same predecessor:

En disant cela aux vierges, le vieillard les rassurait ; et puis, en les voyant désireuses d'entendre parler de la *conduite des saints* et de la manière dont elles plairaient à leur fiancé, le Christ, il accueillit sur ce point leur ardeur et glorifia le Seigneur qui a fait que son amour opérât dans les hommes à son égard ; il leur dit quelques mots à ce sujet : « Voici déjà, en effet, dit-il, que vous avez reçu de vos parents l'éducation ; d'eux vous avez reçu les germes du désir de la vertu.

¹ Athanasius, *Lettre aux Vierges*. LEFORT (Le Muséon 42), p. 255 f.

Par suite, en effet, de la bonne éducation qu'ils vous ont donnée, le fiancé vous a trouvées et a parlé à votre cœur ; il vous a persuadées de lui rester continuellement vierges. En outre vous avez la *conduite de Marie* qui est *le type et l'image de la vie propre aux cieux*. »¹

The next sure source earlier than Athanasius for the idea of Mary as model of virgins is, therefore, on the word of the writer himself to be sought in Alexander of Alexandria. Athanasius is explicit in acknowledging his dependence on his revered predecessor, for he immediately comments on Alexander's sentence just cited:

La conduite dont il parla, je vous l'ai rappelée et vous en ai écrit brièvement autrefois. Si maintenant encore vous désirez qu'elle vous soit rappelée par le vieillard que je suis, apprenez par les Evangiles ce que vous devez faire, et par les Proverbes ce qu'il ne faut pas faire².

Unfortunately the few extant works of Alexander contain nothing that corresponds to the remarkable discourses which Athanasius had the happy thought to preserve. But on Athanasius' authority it can be admitted that the idea of Mary as model of virgins had thus received very explicit development already at the beginning of the fourth century, and in that capital of monachism, Alexandria, where such an idea was to be expected.

5. *The Gnomes of the Council of Nicea*

There is another lead in the *Letter to Virgins* back to Athanasius' sources for the idea under study. In introducing his portrait of the Virgin of virgins, he writes:

Maintenant donc, que la vie de Marie, qui engendra Dieu, soit à vous toutes, *comme elle est écrite*, l'image à laquelle chacune conformera sa virginité³.

The reference to a written life of Mary has suggested to some scholars an apocryphal, many of which were in vogue in the fourth century⁴.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 244. Cf. *infra*, p. 39 ff. for the continuation of the text.

⁴ Felix HAASE, *Die koptischen Quellen zum Konzil von Nicäa*. Paderborn 1920, p. 110, n. 3 suggests the *Historia de Nativitate Mariae* 6:10 as a principal source of the similar portrait of Mary in the *Gnomes of Nicea*, shortly to be discussed. This apocryphal, which circulated especially in Gnostic circles in the 4th or 5th century, is an abbreviated ten-chapter version of the long *Gospel of Pseudo-*

Lefort takes the allusion to be to the *Gnomes* (or *Maxims*) of the Council of Nicea¹, with which Athanasius' portrait of Mary indeed shows an indisputable resemblance².

What is the history of the strange-sounding work known as the *Gnomes of the Council of Nicea*? The little that has been written on this document renders it necessary to examine it in detail, in order to evaluate the striking portrait of Mary which it draws in lines so like those of Athanasius in his *Letter*. This examination will have to tackle the thorny problem of the manuscript tradition of the *Gnomes*, their haphazard discovery and publication, and their disputed authenticity, since few available works can be referred to for this necessary information³.

Matthew, which in turn is a Latin adaptation of the Greek *Protoevangelium of James*. The *Historia de Nativitate Mariae* extends only as far as the birth of Christ. It is extant in a Latin MS of the 10th century. (Text in C. de TISCHENDORF, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 2nd ed. Leipzig 1876, p. 106 ff.; J. C. THILO, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, I. Leipzig 1832, p. 317 ff.; J. A. FABRICIUS, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, I. Hamburg 1719, p. 19 ff.; Emile AMANN, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses Remaniements latins*. Paris 1910, p. 340-365 with French translation.) Cf. also Felix HAASE, *Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur orientalischesch-apokryphen Evangelienliteratur*. Leipzig 1913, p. 11.

¹ LEFORT, *Saint Athanase : Sur la Virginité*, p. 244, n. 2:

Ne faut-il pas plutôt y voir un renvoi aux *Gnomes du Concile de Nicée* ? Les deux documents montrent en tout cas une parenté littéraire incontestable. S'il en était ainsi, on aurait ici un témoignage capital sur la date *ante quam* et sur l'autorité de ces *Gnomes*. Est-il d'ailleurs vraisemblable qu'Athanase s'en soit rapporté à un apocryphe ? Toute cette question mérite ... d'être réexaminée à fond.

² The pertinent text of the *Gnomes* will be cited after the passages from Ambrose and Athanasius with which it is to be compared, *infra*, p. 45 f.

³ The most extensive work on the collection of Coptic sources on the Council of Nicea, in which collection the *Gnomes of the Council of Nicea* are found, is Felix HAASE, *Die koptischen Quellen zum Konzil von Nicäa*. Paderborn 1920. After collecting the necessary material, however, HAASE threw it together in a confusion worthy of the ancient compilers of the Coptic sources. It is regrettable, for example, that he never indicated which parts of the entire Coptic codex reconstituted on p. 6 he translated, nor where the parts of the codex which form the subject of his commentary (p. 65-117) are to be found in his translation (p. 22-65). Only upon close study does one perceive that the important "Sittenregeln für Mönche und Priester", commented in p. 102-108, were translated from p. 34 on, without any indication apart from an ambiguous footnote with the Greek title of a parallel work attributed to Athanasius. Furthermore, in commenting these "Sittenregeln" (p. 103 f.) he introduces translations of his own for the Borgia MS which differ from the translations which he had just made of the same MS (p. 36:31 ff.). He could have indicated in his translation of the *Gnomes* where the faulty Borgia MS stopped. Despite the good intention of reconstructing the Coptic codex, p. 6:6 ff. is a monument to disorder. In a word, the book under its present form effectively

a) *Description of the Gnomes of the Council of Nicea*

The *Gnomes of Nicea* can best be thought of as a layman's rule of life remotely resembling at least in purpose the *Imitation of Christ*. More exactly, the work is to be classified as a *Church Order* similar to the *Didache* or the *Didascaliae Apostolorum*.

It is a "Church Order" written by an as yet unidentified author for a particular community. It differs, however, from all other works of the same class. The "older Church Orders", from the *Didache* to the *Apostolical Church Order* and *Egyptian Church Order*, indeed down to the *Apostolical Constitutions* and the *Testamentum Jesu Christi*, are written with the purpose of supplying a community with institutions in accordance with the author's ideal. In the case of the *Maxims of Nicea* all such communal institutions are assumed as already in existence; nor has the writer any intention of altering them. ...What caused (him) ... to take up his pen was the realization that the strength of the "first love" had waned. ... This the "Church Order" aims in earnest language at changing and improving; it calls for repentance. It has therefore less the character of a "Constitution" than of a hortatory sermon ¹.

Summarily speaking, the document is made up of a short confession of the Trinity, of exhortations to frequent attendance at church, of rules for virgins (in the lay state), of rules for conjugal life, of exhortations to brotherly love, etc. There is no rigid plan, and quite early the author passes from the gnomic to the homiletic style. In translation the work covers about 15 pages octavo. The title ordinarily given it is doubly misleading: 1. Instead of comprising gnomes of maxims, it is made up of loosely developed paragraphs, the style of which rarely attains the succinctness of an aphorism; 2. the work is associated with the Council of Nicea (325) only because it is found with this spurious title in a collection of Coptic documents which profess to give some of the *acts*

removes from the reader any desire to hear further about the Coptic sources of the Council of Nicea.

A much clearer idea of the *Gnomes* can be formed from the paper by Hans ACHELIS, *The Γνώμαι of the Synod of Nicea* (Translation with notes by Walter E. CRUM), JTS, 2 (1901), p. 121-129.

The note by Henri LECLERCQ in Charles HEFELE – Henri LECLERCQ, *Histoire des Conciles*, I, 1^{re} partie. Paris 1907, p. 400, n. 4 is a good summary, though there are errors in detail (e. g., the Borgia MS of the *Gnomes* is erroneously said to be complete).

Little more than bibliography is given in Felix HAASE, *Altchristliche Kirchengeschichte nach orientalischen Quellen*. Leipzig 1925, p. 247 f.

¹ ACHELIS, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

of this council. Two of the three extant Coptic MSS call the work the *Gnomes of the Holy Synod*.

Generally speaking, therefore, the *Gnomes* are a *Church Order* belonging somewhere in the fourth or fifth century. They enter the discussion here because Athanasius' reference in the *Letter to Virgins* to a *life of Mary, as it is written* may allude to the similar though less beautiful portrait of Mary actually to be found in the *Gnomes*. At least the uncontested similarity of certain sentences in the two works may attest to a third source, as yet undiscovered, in which the *life of Mary* was described as a model for virgins. Thus the *Gnomes* fit very well into the fourth century Alexandrian milieu of Marian devotion as witnessed by Athanasius and Alexander. True to the Marian currents of this same milieu, the *Gnomes* refer to Mary as *Mother of God*¹.

b) *Discovery and Publication of the Gnomes*

Patrologists express themselves only with greatest reserve on this obscure work². Hence it will be necessary to examine the manuscript tradition to discover what value the *Gnomes* have as an early witness to the role of Mary under study. The *Gnomes* have come down to the present century only in a Coptic version in three MSS, two of them incomplete, where the document figures among others professedly dating from the Council of Nicea. The fortuitous way in which the folios of these three MSS have been reconstituted and combined with one another is distressing in its complexity.

1. In 1810 George Zoëga published four fragments from the portion of the Borgia collection of Coptic codices in Rome³. Of the *Gnomes*

¹ The Greek term Θεοτόκος, judging from extant documents, was first used by Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328).

² E. g., Berthold ALTANER, *Patrologie*, 3rd ed. Freiburg i. Br. 1951, p. 210 f.: Ein nur koptisch erhaltenes, wohl Ende des 4. Jh. zusammengestelltes Corpus von Dokumenten zur Geschichte desselben Konzils enthält in der Hauptsache unechtes Material.

³ Georgio ZOEGA Dano: *Catalogus codicum copticorum manu scriptorum qui in Museo Borgiano adservantur*. Romae 1810, p. 242-257, under the title "Historia ecclesiastica No. 159", with a Latin translation, and with this notation:

Folia novem lacera, paginae 19-26; 47, 48; 69-72; quattuor paginae contiguae notis numeralibus destitutae. Characteres classis VII ad VIII transeuntis. Fragmenta auctorum concilii Niceni, quae hic sistimus integra, una cum versione quantum fieri potuit, ad verbum reddita.

These four fragments were reedited with a defective Latin translation by Charles LENORMANT, *Fragmenta versionis copticae libri synodici de primo concilio œcumenico Niceno a Zoega Georgio primum edita nunc denuo recusa cum emendationibus*

hardly more than the title *Gnomes of the Holy Synod* and a page thereafter – about one-fifteenth of the book –¹ appeared in Zoëga's third fragment. He dated the fragments, known hereafter as the Roman fragments of the Borgia collection, from the seventh or eighth century.

2. In 1873 Eugène Revillout published two long Coptic fragments discovered in the Museum of Turin, completing Zoëga's second and third, and containing an integral text of the *Gnomes*². Twelve years later Francesco Rossi published a reworking of these two fragments with an Italian translation; this remains the best edition of the Turin MS, and Rossi's Italian translation is superior to Revillout's French³. The Turin MS, which Rossi dated from the seventh century, is the only one containing the *Gnomes* in complete form.

3. Meanwhile in 1875 Revillout had discovered in the part of the Borgia collection remaining at Naples a new series of fragments which he recognized as belonging to the same codex from which Zoëga had published his four Roman fragments⁴. To Zoëga's third fragment, which

et notis et versione latina plane nova. Spicilegium Solesmense ... curante J. B. PITRA I. Parisiis 1852, p. 509-536.

¹ The Roman fragment of the Borgia collection extends as far as p. 48 : 17 of Haase's translation.

² Eugène REVILLOUT *Le concile de Nicée, d'après les textes coptes*. Exposition de foi. Gnomes du saint concile (papyrus du Musée de Turin). Journal Asiatique, 7^e série, t. 1. Paris 1873, p. 210-287. (Text with ZOEGA's variants: p. 224-230. 234-264; French translation: p. 230-234, 264-287.) Separately edited. Paris 1873,

³ Francesco ROSSI, *Trascrizione di alcuni testi copti tratti dai papiri del museo egizio di Torino*. Memorie delle Reale Accademia della Scienze di Torino, Scienze morali, storiche, e filologiche, Ser. 2, t. 36. Torino 1885, p. 89-182. (Text: p. 95-160; Italian translation: p. 161-182. For the *Gnomes* in particular, text: p. 120-147; translation: p. 170-178.)

⁴ Eugène REVILLOUT, *Le Concile de Nicée, d'après les textes coptes et les diverses collations canoniques*. Seconde série de documents suivie d'une dissertation critique sur l'œuvre du concile promulgateur d'Alexandrie et ses conséquences historiques. Journal Asiatique, 7^e série, t. 5. Paris 1875, p. 5-77, 209-266 (Coptic text without translation), 501-564; t. 6, p. 473-560. (The continuation promised there never appeared.) Separately edited. Paris 1881, 1899.

The Council of Alexandria referred to in REVILLOUT's title is that of 362, presided over by Athanasius. His thesis that this council promulgated parts of the *Coptic Sources on Nicea* is now abandoned. Cf. HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 113 f.; 117, conclusion 1; Xavier LE BACHELET, *Athanase, Saint*, DTC, I. Paris 1902, col. 2165.

ZOEGA had already edited the Naples fragments under No. 239 of his catalogue, with the notation:

Pertinere videntur ad unum codicem, lectiones monasticas complexum, quamquam calamus non idem sit in omnibus. Primum fragmentum spectat ad tractatum de fide et de officiis clericorum, in primis monachorum.

It was left to REVILLOUT to recognize that the fragments belonged to the same

ended shortly after the first paragraphs of the *Gnomes*, the six following folios could be added; this still left the text of the *Gnomes* incomplete in the codex of the Borgia collection. Revillout's find is known as the Naples fragment of that collection.

4. Finally, in 1912 a MS from the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, containing only the *Gnomes* and in a form about half as complete as that of the Turin MS, was published by Joseph Lammeyer¹. The Paris MS has been dated from the twelfth century and is the least accurate of the three.

5. In 1902 Walter E. Crum published the few sentences of the *Gnomes* which he recognized on a Coptic ostrakon discovered in Cairo². This meagre witness to the text may be left out of consideration.

Scholars are generally in agreement that all three Coptic MSS represent translations of an original Greek version, at least for most of the documents contained in the three codices. Lammeyer posits a single Coptic translation, no longer extant, of the lost Greek and holds the three MSS to be variations of this Coptic version³. Felix Haase, on the other hand, who is the latest to have studied the question at length, supposes simply a Greek source of which the three extant Coptic MSS are independent translations⁴.

c) *The Gnomes, a Part of the Coptic Sources on Nicea*

What is essential to the question is to recognize the diversity existing in the various pieces which make up the collection of Coptic writings among which the *Gnomes* appear. These different writings, the collection of which is known as the *Coptic Sources on the Council of Nicea*, include the following:

1. A version of the Nicene symbol⁵ which in the Turin papyrus is

codex of which ZOEGA himself had edited the four Roman fragments under No. 159 (cf. *supra*, n. 3, p. 22). These details illustrate the difficulties under which Coptic scholars labor in piecing together the MSS lying buried in libraries throughout Europe.

¹ JOSEPH LAMMEYER, *Die sogenannten Gnomes des Konzils von Nicäa*. Ein homiletischer Traktat des 5. Jahrhunderts unter Zugrundelegung erstmaliger Edition des koptisch-sahidischen Handschriftenfragments der Bibliothèque Nationale zu Paris Copte-sahidique 129, 14 (75-82) ins Deutsche übersetzt und untersucht. Beirut 1912.

² WALTER E. CRUM, *Coptic Ostraca*. London 1902, No. 16, and *Coptic Monuments: Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire*, No. 8001-8741. Le Caire 1902, p. 38, No. 8123 (Description of the ostrakon).

³ LAMMEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 12. ⁴ HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 6.

⁵ References are hereafter given to the German translation of the Coptic sources

a witness of an even earlier text of the Nicene symbol than is the extant Greek version ¹.

2. An incomplete list of bishops present at Nicea ², followed by a lacuna varying in length in the Turin and Borgia MSS.

3. A dogmatic treatise, beginning with a variation of the Nicene symbol and containing anathemas against the Arians and Sabellius, Photinus, unnamed heretics who attacked the Holy Spirit, and the error of Apollinaris (whose name, however is not mentioned) ³. The Greek *ἐκθεις πιστεως* on which the Copt is indirectly based for this section is extant ⁴. Judging from the heresies anathematized and especially from the silencing of Apollinaris' name, this dogmatic treatise in Copt seems to have been written between 360 and 381 ⁵.

4. A series of rules of conduct for monks and priests ⁶ forms the continuation of the dogmatic treatise. These precepts are also extant in a Greek treatise, the *Syntagma Doctrinae* attributed to Athanasius ⁷, on which the Copt again indirectly depends ⁸. The opening sentence of this section announces rules of conduct for the laity as well, but a lacuna

found in HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 22:28-65:13, where the Borgia MS and the Turin papyrus were followed, as indicated by the editor's titles from p. 22-44 and thereafter by the footnotes on p. 44 and 47. The Nicene symbol is found on p. 22:28-24:27 (Turin papyrus).

¹ HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 70; 117, conclusion 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24:28-28:9 (Turin papyrus).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28:11-31:26 (Turin papyrus); p. 31:28-34:31 (Borgia MS).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65; 103; 117, conclusion 5. For the text of the Greek *ἐκθεις πιστεως* (Expositio fidei) cf. C. P. CASPARI, *Ungedruckte unbeachtete und wenig beachtete Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel*, II. Christiania 1868' p. 1 ff. Cp. the edition of the Greek text in PG 28:1637a-1639b with the Turin text.

⁵ HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 79 f.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34:32-44:20 (BrMS).oa gi

⁷ Cf. Pierre BATIFFOL, *Le Syntagma Doctrinae dit de saint Athanase*, Studia Patristica. Paris 1890, p. 114-160. Text also among the spuria of Athanasius, PG 28:836a-845b, with the title: Τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀθανασίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀλεξανδρείας σύνταγμα διδασκαλίας πρὸς μονάζοντας καὶ πάντας χριστιανούς κληρικούς τε καὶ λαϊκούς. This Greek version is to be compared to the version of the moral precepts in the Greek MS referred to supra, n. 71; in this latter MS the moral precepts are attached immediately to the dogmatic part of the *ἐκθεις πιστεως* (PG 28:1639b-1644c), as in the Coptic version. From the sentence ἐστὶ δὲ ὁ βίος τῶν υἱῶν τῆς αὐτῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας, in fact, this second Greek MS corresponds to the Coptic text of the precepts for monks and priests in HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 34:32 as far as 43:29. This entire second Greek MS, including dogmatic treatise and moral precepts, is known as the *Didascalía of the 318 Fathers of Nicea*, because of the title and the conclusion tacked on the work (PG 28:1637a-1644c).

⁸ HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 103.

occurs in the fragments before any such rules have been given. Haase thinks it possible that the *Gnomes* were intended as the rules of conduct promised for the layfolk, after those detailed for priests and monks¹. The *Gnomes*, in fact, are found shortly after the lacuna just mentioned.

5. This lacuna, however, is followed immediately by a disorderly array of bits of material. They include a brief dogmatic excursus², a letter of the archbishop Rufinus³, a legend on the number of Council Fathers present at Nicea⁴, another brief profession of faith⁵, a letter of the archbishop Epiphanius⁶, and finally the *Gnomes of the Holy Synod*⁷, as they are introduced in the Borgia and Turin MSS⁸. Haase explicitly holds that neither the *Gnomes* nor the moral precepts for priests and monks stem from the council⁹. It is unfortunate that the name given them in these two MSS will continue to be used in referring to them, since it is simply a misnomer, acquired perhaps only by association with the other material on Nicea.

6. A fragment bearing six *canons* of the Nicene Council¹⁰ is to be placed somewhere in the Borgia codex after the material thus far described¹¹. As the Nicene symbol and the list of bishops (Nos.1 and 2 above), the *canons* bear witness to an earlier and better text than extant Greek versions¹².

In the remainder of the Coptic codex of the Borgia collection, as reconstituted by Haase¹³, there is no question of Nicea. The subsequent fragments contain material from the canons of Ancyra, the Council of Ephesus, and various dialogues and replies of bishops on Christological questions.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103, 112. Cf. *infra*, p. 27 f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 44:23-32 (Borgia MS, as for the next four pieces).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44:33-45:12. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45:13-28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45:29-46:25. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46:27-47:9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47:10-63:7 (Turin papyrus). Haase fails to mention that the Borgia MS, which he does not take into account, extends as far as p. 56:22. The Roman numerals in the body of his text are the page numbers of the Turin papyrus.

⁸ The Borgia MS has only the title *Gnomes of the Holy Synod*; the Turin MS has this title also, but under *Logos Athanasiou*. Cf. Rossi, *op. cit.*, p. 120 and facsimile at end of Coptic text reproduced there.

⁹ HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 113.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63:9-65:13 (Borgia MS).

¹¹ The exact position of this four-page fragment in the codex is unknown since the pages, though evidently successive, are not numbered. Cf. *supra*, n. 58: "quatuor paginae contiguae notis numeralibus destitutae".

¹² HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 93-102; 117, conclusion 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

It is evident, therefore, that the *Gnomes* are but one section of a disorderly agglomerate of materials which were only later collected in the same corpus¹. The documents on the Council of Nicea (Symbol, bishops' signatures, *canons*, – Nos. 1, 2, and 6 above) cannot be regarded as the official *acts* of this council², but only as source material on it³. The remaining pieces (dogmatic treatise, moral precepts for monks and priests, *Gnomes* – Nos. 3, 4, and 5 above) date from probably the last quarter of the fourth century⁴. A more accurate dating of these diverse writings, if ever possible, will have to concern each of them in particular. In the case of the *Gnomes*, internal evidence yields nothing more definite than the fourth century, and probably the last quarter thereof, as the time of their composition.

d) *Original Language of the Gnomes*

Can anything more certain be said of the tongue in which the *Gnomes* were originally written? It has just been observed that all the longer

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117, conclusion 2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7-21 ; 113, 117, conclusion 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114:

Gleichwohl halte ich den Titel *die Synode von Nicäa* nicht für unberechtigt. Es ließ sich nachweisen, daß das Symbol, die Unterschriften der Väter, die Kanones einen Text aufweisen, der z.T. besser ist als der griechische. Ich wies ferner nach, daß diese Quellen alexandrinisches Gepräge trugen. Aus diesen Tatsachen ist zu schließen, daß wir alte, *glaubwürdige Quellen über Nicänum vor uns haben*. Über den Verfasser läßt sich nichts Sicheres feststellen.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*:

Dies gilt aber nur für die oben genannten Teile. Die dogmengeschichtlichen Erörterungen führen in die zweite Hälfte oder besser ins letzte Drittel des 4. Jahrhunderts; die Disziplinarvorschriften und Gnomen dürften in die gleiche Zeit zu datieren sein; sicheres läßt sich nicht sagen.

Just three pages earlier (p. 111), however, he had refused to commit himself on the time of composition of the *Gnomes*:

Bei dieser Sachlage ist man bezüglich der Abfassungszeit auf bloße Vermutungen angewiesen; ich halte es deshalb für geraten, gar kein Urteil abzugeben.

On publishing his discovery of the Naples fragments of the Borgia collection, REVILLOUT decided in favor of the attribution to the Council of Nicea clearly made by the Borgia MS, rather than the Athanasian attribution included in the Turin MS (*Journal Asiatique*, 1875, t. 5, p. 257, n. 1). For his reasons, cf. *infra*, p. 30.

LAMMEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 27, basing himself especially on the dogmatic reflections at the head of the *Gnomes*, revised REVILLOUT's opinion to date the *Gnomes* from immediately after the Council.

Current opinion is in HAASE's favor, with an understandably similar reluctance to commit itself.

pieces preceding the *Gnomes* in the Borgia codex (Nos. 1 to 4 in the list above) were witnesses to an earlier Greek text. Can the same be said of the Coptic *Gnomes*, even though there be no extant Greek version corresponding to them? It seems not, replies Haase, at least to judge from the Coptic text itself; for no linguistic indications therein necessitate a corruption of a Greek original as their explanation.

But if the *Gnomes* be considered as a continuation of the moral precepts written for monks and priests (No. 4), the question may still be debated whether the *Gnomes* too, like the precepts, do not suppose a Greek original. For in the title of the Greek version of the precepts for monks and priests a similar set of rules is very explicitly promised for layfolk ¹, and the Coptic version of the precepts repeats this promise, though less explicitly ². Yet neither in the Greek nor in the Coptic versions, as they are preserved, is this preannounced part for the laity found. The precepts there elaborated concern mainly the life of monks. Could the *Gnomes* be the part promised for the laity? It is not impossible ³. They do constitute a tract intended for people who are not in sacred orders or in the incipient religious life then practiced; the title of *wise monaché* ⁴ given to the Christian virgin implies nothing contrary to lay life ⁵. Furthermore, the advice given her is intermingled with counsels directed to married men and women, and all of the material taken together is intended to stimulate a more practical love of one's neighbor and striving towards perfection in circumstances of lay life. Hence the *Gnomes*, if a continuation of the precepts for monks and priests, could possibly have been based on some Greek original, although no such is extant.

¹ Cf. *supra*, n. 74: πρὸς μονάζοντας καὶ πάντας χριστιανούς κληρικούς τε καὶ λαϊκούς.

² HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 34:32 f.: "Über das Leben nun der Söhne der katholischen Kirche, besonders aber der Anachoreten in ihr ..."

Ibid., p. 35:27 f.: "Zuerst geziemt es sich für die Mönche und für die Enthalt-samen. ..."

Ibid., p. 42:30-34: "Dieses sind die Gebote für die Söhne der Kirche, nämlich für die Mönche und Enthalt-samen und dann für die Christen welche in einer reinen Ehe leben. Du aber, Priester. ..."

³ *Ibid.*, p. 103, 112.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52:25 f., 31, 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111. ACHELIS, *op. cit.*, p. 128, though in agreement, is less explicit than HAASE.

e) *Authorship of the Gnomes*

But what is more important is that this possible association of the *Gnomes* and the moral precepts leads back again, on the one hand, to the Fathers of Nicea, and on the other to Athanasius as the authors claimed for both works.

1. On the one hand the Fathers of Nicea appear as authors of the two documents, since

a) the variant of the moral precepts (complete almost to the point where the Coptic version of them ends) which is found in a MS printed by Migne¹ claims to be the work of the Nicene Fathers and is known as the *Didascalia of the 318 Fathers of Nicea*"

b) the Borgia text gives the sole title *Gnomes of the Holy Synod* to the *Gnomes* which have just been shown to be possibly connected in content with the moral precepts; and the Turin text repeats this title underneath an attribution to Athanasius of dubious value.

2. But on the other hand, both the moral precepts and the *Gnomes* are attributed as well to Athanasius:

a) the Greek version of the precepts, known as the *Syntagma doctrinae* of Athanasius claims in its title to stem from the patriarch of Alexandria, though it has long been classified among his spurious works²; and current opinion, after a hearing accorded the proponents of Athanasian authenticity at the end of the last century, continues to regard it as spurious³;

b) in like manner the title of the *Gnomes* in the Turin MS is preceded by an attribution to Athanasius which did not rally any greater credence than the Athanasian authorship claimed for the moral precepts. Haase⁴ upholds Lammeyer's rejection⁵ of this claim for the *Gnomes*.

The moral precepts for priests and monks and the *Gnomes*, then, suffered similar attributions: 1. the moral precepts in their Greek versions to Athanasius and the Nicene Fathers, and in their Coptic versions to the Fathers of Nicea, by reason of the collection of documents in which the precepts were found; 2. the *Gnomes*, extant only in the Copt, to

¹ PG 28:1639b-1644c: the MS begins with the entire *ἐκθεσις πίστεως* on which the dogmatic treatise in Copt (No. 3 in the list above) is based, and goes on without interruption into the moral precepts.

² PG 28:836a-845b.

³ Cf. LE BACHELET, *Athanasie*, col. 2165.

⁴ HAASE, *Quellen*, p. 109.

⁵ LAMMEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

both Athanasius and the Nicene Fathers. And scholars in general reject all of these attributions! As for the *Gnomes* in particular, it is unfortunately clear that no conclusion as to authorship can be drawn:

It is most probable that the *Gnomes* had originally no connexion with the Nicene Synod; nor is the Athanasian authorship, ascribed to them by the Turin MS, any more probable. From the outset, indeed, the curse of pseudonymity has clung more closely to the Church Orders than to any other class of Christian literature. In the earlier ages the twelve Apostles were the favourite source to which the Church ascribed her Rules of Life; later on still higher authority was claimed, and such titles given as the *Testamentum Jesu Christi*. In the present instance it is the oecumenical Synod and the champion of orthodoxy who take the place of the Apostles, an ascription which from frequent use had by that time become somewhat worn and trite. It seems hardly necessary to collect the arguments which negate the supposed Nicene origin. To test the veracity of the claims which such labels make is merely to waste labour when it is recognized that these were expressly devised to deceive the public ¹.

Perhaps all that merits being remembered is that the oldest and most reliable MS containing the *Gnomes* (the Turin papyrus) attributes them to Athanasius, just as the most familiar. Greek version of the moral precepts for priests and monks long traveled under the name of Athanasius. And yet even this attribution of the *Gnomes* by the oldest MS is disputable. For to Lammeyer's and Haase's scepticism, there should be added the valuable observation made by Revillout and repeated by Crum: Many similar instances in Coptic MSS suggest that the attribution 'Αθανασίου λόγου which is found above the title *Gnomes of the Holy Synod* in the Turin MS ² could as well be the subscription to the preceding piece as the title of the following ³.

The *Gnomes*, therefore, remain shrouded in anonymity, with only the feeblest claim to Athanasian authorship. But that, after all, gives them added interest in the present investigation, since they contain a portrait of Mary, model of virgins so strikingly similar in many sentences to Athanasius' *Letter to Virgins*.

In the final analysis, can Lefort's suggestion be accepted that in citing a "life of Mary such as it is written" Athanasius may refer to the

¹ ACHELIS, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

² Cf. facsimile reproduced by Rossi, *op. cit.*, after the Coptic text.

³ CRUM's n. 4, in ACHELIS, *op. cit.*, p. 129, referring to REVILLOUT, *op. cit.*, *Journal Asiatique*, 1875, t. 5, p. 257, n. 1.

Gnomes? The fruits of the study just made on the authorship and time of composition of the work do not warrant a definite reply either way. The similarity of the passages to be noted in the *Gnomes* and in the *Letter*, as reproduced below, do affirm an incontestable parentage. But what is the nature of this parentage? 1. Did the *Gnomes* inspire a part of the *Letter* as Lefort suggests? 2. Or did the *Letter* inspire the *Gnomes*?¹ 3. Or is Athanasius the author of both works? 2 4. Or finally, did both draw on a common source, such as the abundant apocryphal literature on Mary or some teaching like that with which Alexander of Alexandria is credited? Only after further investigation, profiting from the invaluable research of Coptic scholars and the discovery of additional documents, will one be able to venture an answer. In the meantime, as far the sources of Ambrose for his notion of the Virgin of virgins are concerned, it is indeed safe to assert his dependence on Athanasius, and through Athanasius on a sufficiently attested practice of Marian-inspired virginity flourishing in fourth-century Alexandria.

6. Remaining Fourth-Century Writers before Ambrose

After this important stage of the study it is possible to move rather rapidly through the witnesses between Athanasius and Ambrose on the idea of Mary, patroness of virginal life.

The *De vera virginitalis integritate*³, attributed to Basil the Great but probably the work of Basil of Ancyra (d. 364) yields nothing on Mary as model of virginity. The author writes of virginity from an exclusively Christological viewpoint when he is at his loftiest, and more characteristically he descends to physiological details hardly becoming to his virginal audience.

Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) views the state of virginity also in terms of Christ the virgin, seeing its glory in the virginal generation of the Word Incarnate:

For from a virgin was born He who makes souls virginal The Lord, born of a virgin, is adored. Let virgins acknowledge the crown-

¹ The date of composition which HAASE finally suggests might allow for dependence of the *Gnomes* on the *Letter*, instead of the contrary. The offhand opinion of JOUASSARD is similar: "Tout me donne cependant à penser que les *Gnomes* dépendraient d'Athanase ou d'une source d'Athanase, si celui-ci a eu une source." (Letter to R. P. Théodore KOEHLER, S. M., November 12, 1953.)

² Cf. for the *Gnomes* the attribution of the Turin MS.

³ PG 30:669-810.

ing glory of their own state. Let the order of monks know the glory of purity. ... That the Lord who was born of a virgin may say to us also, men who have kept our integrity, women who are crowned therewith, "I shall dwell among them and walk among them. ..." ¹

Amid these considerations, which do not exclude the idea of Mary as also an inspiration to virginity, a more explicit allusion to her occurs:

Virgins have their part with Mary the Virgin ². The idea of Mary's patronage of the virginal state is present, although Cyril did not take any occasion to exploit it.

The Cappadocians too refrain from laying any particular stress on the moral value of Mary's example of virginity ³. This is in great measure explained by the little to be found on such an idea in the Fathers whom they followed ⁴. Fifth-century enthusiasm for the θεοτόκος among the Syrian monks who claimed Basil of Caesarea (330-379) as their father speaks in his favor, but despite his works on virginity ⁵, he neglected to paint the virginity of Mary in colors as bright as, for example, those of the fifth-century *Apophthegmata Patrum*. In his exhortations to virginity he cites especially Old Testament models, such as Joseph. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-c390) describes virginity as resemblance with the angels, or in the light of his Christology and Trinitarian doctrine ⁶. Amphilocius (d. after 394) expresses similar ideas ⁷. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) also views virginity as the heavenly daughter from the womb of the Trinity ⁸, and as the imitation on earth of the angelic life to be led by man in heaven ⁹. But he advanced a step beyond his countrymen

¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 13:31, 33. PG 33:765a, 768ab.

² *Ibid.*, 33. PG 768b. Four codices have *the Mother of God* (τῆς θεοτόκου) instead of *the Virgin*.

³ Georg SOELL, *Die Mariologie der Kappadozier im Licht der Dogmengeschichte*, Theologische Quartalschrift, 131 (1951), p. 434: "... kann man nicht beweisen, daß die Kapp. auf die ethische Würdigung der Gottesmutter besonderes Gewicht gelegt haben."

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 429 f., which is the source for the appreciation of the Cappadocians given here.

⁵ *Ep.* 46 to a fallen virgin, *Ep.* 109 to Amphilocius, and the two monastic rules (*Regulae fusius tractatae*, *Regulae brevius tractatae*).

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carminum Liber* I, Sec. 2: *Carmina moralia*, No. 1: *In laudem virginitatis*. PG 37:523a. Christ is the leader of the chorus of virgins. (Cp. *infra*, p. 52-58 where Ambrose always gives this role to Mary.) The Holy Trinity is the first virgin: πρώτη παρθένος ἐστὶν ἁγνὴ τριάς.

⁷ Amphilocius, *Oratio 2a in Occursum Domini*, 2. PG 39:45-48.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, 2. PG 46:321c.

⁹ *In Cantica Cantecorum*, Hom. 5. PG 44:856d.

in describing death as running aground against virginity incorporate in Mary¹. Gregory of Nyssa indeed does more than any of the other Cappadocians to bring out the ethical import of Mary's virginity. In a passage of the *Oratio in diem natalem Christi*, the authenticity of which is now admitted by serious scholars², he explicitly cites *a certain apocryphal history*³ as the source for his embellishment of the Gospel details of the Annunciation. After briefly describing her virginal life before the Annunciation he exclaims at her reply to the angel, *Quomodo fiat ...*, and goes on to see therein evidence that she had made a vow of virginity⁴.

A newly discovered Greek *De Virginitate* published in 1953 bears a worthless MS attribution to Basil of Caesarea; the work dates from the early fourth century, possibly from an Arianizing milieu⁵. Bypassing *saint Mary*, of whom he had made only one mention in his work, the author presents Thecla as a model for virgins⁶.

¹ *De Virginitate*, 13. PG 46:377d.

² Hugo KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, Tübingen 1929, p. 38 adopts the thesis of USENER who ascribes the work to some unknown author of the fifth century rather than to Gregory. See SOELL G., *op. cit.*, *supra*, p. 32, n. 3. – *id.* in *Alma Socia Christi*, Vol. V, 1, p. 132-135. Romae 1950.

³ The apocryphal story which at some unknown date found its expression in the *Historia de Nativitate Mariae* (cf. *supra*, n. 51) answers Gregory's description of his source; but it cannot be asserted what version in particular of the stories about Mary's childhood he used; they were current coin in his century, especially in the wake of the *Protoevangelium*. SOELL, *op. cit.*, p. 438:

Es ist nicht zu entscheiden, ob der Kompilator der Geburtsgeschichte Mariens aus Gregor von Nyssa geschöpft hat. Vielleicht verdient die Annahme den Vorzug, daß sie beide von einer 3., uns nicht näher bekannten Quelle gespeist wurden.

⁴ *Gregory of Nyssa, Oratio in Diem Natalem Christi*. PG 46: 1138d-1141b.

⁵ David ARMAND – Matthieu-Charles MOONS *Une curieuse homélie grecque inédite sur la virginité adressée aux pères de famille*, *Revue Bénédictine*, 63 (1953), p. 18-69, 211-238 (Greek text with French translation: p. 34-69). In conclusion the authors say:

... homélie grecque originale du IV^e siècle, plus précisément de la première moitié de ce siècle. A la rigueur, son auteur ascète à tendances encratiques aurait pu la prononcer avant le Concile de Nicée (325). Il semble cependant plus probable que notre homéliste ne soit pas un nicéen, mais qu'il se rattache à une communauté arienne ou, du moins, arianisante.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45:5-7:

Fais résonner (à son oreille) cette phrase des divines Ecritures: "Mieux vaut une vie privée d'enfants, mais riche de vertus", et aussi la parole de l'ange à sainte Marie: "Salut, toi qui as reçu une grâce. Le Seigneur est avec toi."

Ibid., p. 61:2 f.:

Lève tes yeux (en haut), là où demeure ton bien-aimé! Suis les traces de cette célèbre Thècle qui t'a précédée et dont tu as entendu parler.

Witnesses have been heard from the churches of Africa, Egypt, Palestine, and Greece. The voice of Nicetas of Remesiana (d. after 414), who represents the Illyrian church closely after if not during Ambrose's lifetime, adds little. His scant testimony is, moreover, open to question, since it comes from a work, the *De lapsu virginis*, which a few scholars still hesitate to attribute to him. In addition it rests on a reading not found in all MSS. Nicetas asks of the fallen virgin:

Quid facies coram castis apostolis ? Quid facies coram Helia, Danihelo, et tantorum exercitu prophetarum ? (Quid facies coram Ioanne ? Quid facies coram Maria, Thecla et Agne, et immaculato choro puritatis ?) Quid facies coram angelis sanctis ? ¹

The words in parentheses are not found in all MSS. Even if they are accepted, the role of Mary as model of virginity was in Nicetas' mind far from being a privilege which Mary possessed preeminently. He shows elsewhere that he is oblivious of the value of her example when for other virtues it could have been expected to present itself to his mind ².

The list of witnesses may be brought to a close without summoning Epiphanius (c 314-403) ³ since his *Panarion* was composed in 384-386, definitely after Ambrose's portrait of Mary had been sketched in the *De Virginibus*. The same holds for Jerome's *Epistola 22 ad Eustochium* ⁴, written in 384. As for the monastic movement in northern Italy, only partially did it precede Ambrose – for example, at Bologna where a monastery of virgins seems to have been in existence before 377, or at Aquileia where one for men was flourishing in 370 ⁵. Extant sources do not show to what degree the movement was inspired by the example of Mary. Eusebius of Vercelli (d. 371c) is usually credited with having exerted an initiative in the foundation of monasteries when in 362 he carried back from his exile in Egypt the flame of enthusiasm for virginity. A spark had already been left behind by Athanasius himself

¹ Nicetas, *De lapsu virginis* 3:10. A. E. BURN, *Nicetas of Remesiana: His Life and Works*. Cambridge 1905, p. 115: 5-9. The words in parentheses are read in the MS which Migne reproduces (PL 16:369d), as BURN notes.

² E. g., in the *De Vigilis*, 6-8, BURN p. 61-64, Nicetas does not enter Mary in his list of models of prayer and vigils; in the *De Psalmodyae Bono*, 14, BURN p. 82:8, Mary, sister of Martha, comes to his mind for her attention to the Savior's words, without suggesting another even more attentive Mary who *kept these words in her heart* (Luc. 2:19, 51).

³ *Panar.* 78:8. GCS Epiph. 3 459:5 ff. PG 42:711a.

⁴ Jerome, *Ep.* 22:38. CSEL 54 202:18 ff. PL 22:422b Cf. *Ep.* 107:7. CSEL 55 298:13 f. PL 22:874b.

⁵ VIZMANOS, *op. cit.*, p. 558, 560.

when passing through on his own exile in Italy in 340. Ambrose called Eusebius the first figure in the West to unite in his person the ascetical life of the monk and the pastoral charge of the bishop¹. But Eusebius' works do not reveal him exploiting the example of the Virgin of virgins. The same holds for his contemporary, Zeno of Verona (fl. 362-372), whose contribution lay rather in a terminology which made the doctrinal defense of Mary's virginity ever more precise.

B. Ambrose's Doctrine on Mary, Model of Virgins

1. *The De Virginibus*

The stage is set, then, for the entrance of Ambrose of Milan (339-397). And a momentous entrance it is, for the impetus which he gave to the virginal life under the inspiration of the Virgin Mary carried on for centuries into the Middle Ages and down to today². Ambrose had been a bishop only three years³ when he answered the request of his sister Marcellina for a sample of his sermons on virginity, already a source of renown for him. The work which he penned in reply, the *De Virginibus* in three books, is made up of three sermons given to a mixed congregation, largely composed of virgins: such is the opinion of most authorities⁴. Others consider it a formal treatise originally written as such, with borrowings from sermon material⁵.

¹ Ambrose, *Ep.* 63:66. PL 16:1207a.

² Jerome, who was far from lavish in his praise of Ambrose, nevertheless esteemed the *De Virginibus* highly: *Ep.* 22:22. CSEL 54 175:3 f. PL 22:410b. *Ep.* 48:14. CSEL 54 374:7 f. PL 22:504b. Augustine likewise: *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4:21:48. PL 34:112 f. The work was imitated, often without acknowledging the borrowings, throughout the Middle Ages: The MS printed as *Sermo 14 de Nativitate Beatae Mariae* of St. Odilo of Cluny, for example, is the text itself of Ambrose's portrait of Mary (*De Virgs.*, 2:2:6 ff.), as appears from an examination of PL 142: 1029d-1031a. St. Bernardine of Siena cites the same passage generously, with, significant omissions, in *Sermo 61 de superadmirabili Gratia et Gloria Matris Dei*, art. 2, c. 2, *Opera Omnia ... cura PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae* II. Florentiae 1950, p. 383:28-384:6.

³ In *De Virgs.* 2:6:39, FALLER p. 60:24. PL 16:218a, he refers to himself as *non-dum triennalis sacerdos*, which would make the date 376 (PALANQUE and DUDDEN) or 377 (RAUSCHEN and FALLER), according as his episcopal consecration is placed in 373 or 374.

⁴ F. HOMES DUDDEN, *S. Ambrose, His Life and Times*. London 1935, p. 695. Max IHM, *Studia Ambrosiana*. Lipsiae 1889, p. 27. Otto FALLER, *S. Ambrosii De Virginibus*. Bonnæ 1933, *Praefatio*, p. 6.

⁵ Gerhard RAUSCHEN, *Jahrbücher der christlichen Kirche unter dem Kaiser Theo-*

The work is the longest and best constructed treatise on virginity of the collection of four or five which Ambrose composed¹. It contains all the essential themes that he was to elaborate on this cherished subject. The literary form which he adopted was largely inspired by the panegyrics (ἐγκώμια) or hortatory discourses (πρωτρεπτικοί) perfected by ancient rhetoricians, and into this literary framework he ordered his sermon material. A discourse of this type called for a threefold plan:

1. praise of virginity and exhortation to embrace it: *exhortatio, laudatio* ;
2. models and examples: *exempla* ;
3. counsels: *praecepta, disciplina*.

This plan lent itself to the division into three books².

In the second book is to be found the singular portrait of Mary as model of virgins which is the term to which the preceding historical sketch was orientated. It is the most beautiful picture of the Virgin Mary that Ambrose or for that matter any Father painted. The historical survey just concluded has forewarned the reader not to take for granted that the fourth-century doctor should have thought as quickly as a modern writer would of Mary as an apt model to present to virgins. Like his predecessors whom he so diligently read and even slavishly copied in his early years as a bishop, Ambrose was more prepared to seek models for virtue in the august personages of the Old Testament.

For virtues other than virginity he relies much more heavily on the Old than the New Testament. The twofold vocation of Old Testament saints was to prefigure Christian mysteries and to reveal and illustrate morals³. The saints of the Bible are cited in general as examples of virtue⁴. Some of them recur for particular virtues: Isaac for his purity of soul and Jacob for his endurance⁵, Abraham for his faith⁶, and for

dosius dem Großen: Versuch einer Erneuerung der Annales Ecclesiastici des Baronius für die Jahre 378-395. Freiburg i. Br. 1897, p. 564. Joined to the first idea, that the *De Virgs.* comprises three sermons, is a classical question as to the evidence in the third book of *De Virg.* 3:3:1 for the existence of a feast of Christmas on December 25 at Milan and Rome in the midfourth century. The problem can only be raised here.

¹ *De Virginibus libri tres. De Viduis. De Virginitate. De Institutione Virginis seu de perpetua virginitate Beatae Mariae Virginis. Exhortatio ad Virginitatem.*

² Thomas CAMELOT, *Les Traités 'De Virginitate' au IV^e siècle. Mystique et Continence* (Études Carmélitaines). Paris 1952, p. 278 f.

³ *De Officiis*, 1:25:116. PL 16:57c. *De Abraham*, 1:1:2. CSEL 32:1; 501:12-502:16. PL 14:420a.

⁴ *De Off.*, loc. cit.: *De Joseph* 1:1. CSEL 32:2; 73:1-14. PL 14:641b.

⁵ *De Jos.*, loc. cit. ⁶ *Loc. cit.*

his perfection in many virtues¹, Joseph the Patriarch for his chastity², along with Elias, John the Baptist, and Mary, the sister of Moses and Aaron. A whole series of woman saints of the Old Testament is apportioned among virgins, widows, and married women for their imitation in the chastity befitting their various states of life³.

Under the New Dispensation Christ is naturally the supreme example, whether it be of the virtues as a whole⁴, or of individual virtues like humility⁵, obedience⁶, patience⁷, or chastity⁸. Even when there is question of virginity, Mary shares the honors of being model with a flock of virgin-martyrs of the early Christian centuries⁹: Thecla¹⁰, favorite example of Eastern writers since Methodius' *Banquet*¹¹, and Agnes¹², favorite of the Western; Pelagia of Antioch¹³, the virgin Soteris of Ambrose's own lineage¹⁴, an unnamed virgin¹⁵, and Lawrence the Deacon¹⁶, alone among masculine examples cited for virginity after the coming of Christ.

Considered, therefore, among the many texts in which Ambrose exhorts the virgins of his day to the imitation of some model, the striking portrait

¹ *De Abra.* 1:2:3. CSEL 32:1; 502:16-503:13. PL 14:421bc.

² *De Jos.* 1:2. CSEL 32:2; 74:3. PL 14:642a.

³ Cf. *infra*, p. 182.

⁴ *De Virgs.* 3:5:24. FALLER p. 73:24. PL 16:227ab.

⁵ *Exp. Ps.* 118:20:20. CSEL 62 455:23-456:4. PL 15:1490b.

⁶ *In Ps.* 61:7. CSEL 64 382:3-31. PL 14:1169ac.

⁷ *De Fide* 2:10:95. PL 16:520a.

⁸ *Ep.* 72:16. PL 16:1248a. *De Virgs.* 1:5:21 f. FALLER p. 27:19 f. PL 16:194c-195b. *De Virgte.* 4:18. PL 16:271a. *De Inst. Virg.* 13:86. PL 16:326a.

⁹ The list is drawn from DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 460, n. 3, which was the source likewise of the preceding citations. On all the saints about to be cited, cf. VIZMANOS, *op. cit.*, *passim*. The work has a valuable index.

¹⁰ *De Virgs.* 2:3:19 f. FALLER p. 52:4 f. PL 16:211c-212b. *De Virgte.* 7:40. PL 16:276b. For the legend of her martyrdom, cf. the so-called Greek *Acta Pauli et Theclae*, which is a part of the *Acta Pauli*, as QUASTEN, *Patrology*, I, p. 131 explains. Greek text: R. A. LIPSUS – M. BONNET, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, I. Leipzig 1891, p. 235-272. Thecla already appears in Methodius' *Symposium* 8:1:170e; 8:17:232; 11:285 f. GCS Meth. 80:20 f.; 112:10 f.; 132:1 f. The last passage cited is her long hymn to virginity. Cf. also Basil of Seleucia, *De vita s. Theclae*. PG 85:477-617, and Sophronius of Jerusalem, *In sanctam protomartyrem Theclam*. PG 87:3796-3800.

¹¹ Marcel VILLER, *La spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens*. Paris 1930, p. 34.

¹² *De Virgs.* 1:2:5-9. FALLER p. 20:11-22:13. PL 16:189c-191b. *De Off.* 1:41:203. PL 16:84b. On the cult of St. Agnes cf. WILPERT, *Jungfrauen*, p. 22, 89 ff., and Hartmann GRISAR, *Die römische Martyrin Agnes*, ZKT, 51 (1927), p. 532-547.

¹³ *De Virgs.* 3:7:33-36. FALLER p. 76:5-77:30. PL 16:229c-231b. *Ep.* 37:38. PL 16:1093ac.

¹⁴ *De Virgs.* 3:7:38. FALLER p. 78:6 f. PL 16:232a.

¹⁵ *De Virgs.* 2:4:22 f. FALLER p. 53:5-54:2. PL 16:212c-213b.

¹⁶ *De Off.* 1:41:204 f. PL 16:84b-85b.

of Mary as model of virgins in the second book of *De Virginibus* retains all its uniqueness. Never again in his works did he return with such enthusiasm to present her life in its minutest detail as the inspiration of virgins. The uniqueness of the text in comparison with similar mentions of Mary in preceding Fathers is already evident from the historical survey just made. Ambrose's dependence on Athanasius' *Letter to Virgins* for this part of the *De Virginibus* has already been frequently referred to; it must now be substantiated by a comparison of the two works. To facilitate the identification of parallel phrases, while at the same time not interrupting the flow of thought in each of the writings, they have been printed in their entirety for the sections to be compared. Reference has been made from each pertinent phrase of the *De Virginibus* to the corresponding phrase which seemingly inspired it from the *Letter*. To further aid the reader, whose attention will be directed to Ambrose's text first, the reference numbers have been placed *behind* each phrase in italics in the *De Virginibus*, and *before* the corresponding phrase in the *Letter*; in addition, the numbers to be found in the portion of the *Letter* printed on any given page have been blocked off at the head of the text of the *Letter* on that page. Finally, after Ambrose's and Athanasius' texts the passage from the *Gnomes of Nicea* bearing a remarkable similarity to the latter has been given. The numbers followed by *g* in the text of Athanasius' *Letter* refer to corresponding phrases in the *Gnomes*.

Ambrose: *De Virginibus* 2:2:6. FALLER, p. 47:4-52:5. PL 16:208c-211c.

Sit igitur vobis tamquam in *imagine*⁶ descripta virginitas *vita Mariae*^{1,4} e qua *velut speculo*⁷ refulget species castitatis et forma virtutis. Hinc sumatis licet *exempla vivendi*³ ubi *tamquam in exemplari*² magisteria expressa probitatis, quid corrigere, quid effingere, quid tenere debeatis ostendunt.

Primus discendi ardor nobilitas est magistri, quid nobilius *dei matre*?⁵ Quid splendidius ea, quam splendor elegit, quid castius ea, quae corpus sine corporis contagione generavit? Nam de caeteris ejus virtutibus quid loquar? *Virgo erat non solum corpore, sed etiam mente*⁹, quae *nullo doli ambitu sincerum adulteraret adfectum*^{10,17,27} : corde *humilis*^{19,20}, verbis gra-

1-20

Athanasius: *Letter to Virgins*. LEFORT (Le Muséon 42, 1929), p. 244-249.

Si donc il en est une qui désire demeurer vierge et fiancée du Christ, il lui est possible de considérer ¹la vie de Marie et de ²l'imiter;^{15g} et ³la règle de la décision de Marie lui suffira pour organiser sa virginité. Maintenant donc, que ⁴la vie de Marie, ⁵qui engendra Dieu,^{25,4g} soit à vous toutes, comme elle est écrite, ⁶l'image à laquelle chacune conformera sa virginité. Il vaut mieux, en effet, que vous vous connaissiez vous-mêmes par elle ⁷comme en un miroir, et ainsi vous parer. Les bonnes œuvres que vous avez négligées, accomplissez-les; et ce que vous avez bien fait, faites-y des progrès, si bien que ⁸votre vie à vous serve un jour de modèle à d'autres pour la virginité; et ayez continuellement en vue l'instruction des autres.

⁹Marie donc était une vierge pure, ayant un état d'âme harmonieux et s'enrichissant doublement. Elle aimait, en effet, les bonnes œuvres tout en remplissant son devoir et en ayant des pensées droites sur la foi et la pureté. ¹¹Elle ne désirait pas être vue par les hommes; ¹²mais elle priait Dieu d'être son examinateur. ¹³Elle n'avait pas non plus hâte de sortir de sa maison. Elle ne connaissait pas du tout les places publiques,^{9g,13g} mais elle demeurait assidûment à sa maison^{10g} vivant retirée et semblable à une mouche à miel. ¹⁴Le superflu du travail de ses mains elle le distribuait aux indigents avec générosité. Elle ne se préoccupait pas de regarder par la fenêtre mais ¹⁵dans les Ecritures. ¹⁶Elle priait Dieu seule à seul, se préoccupant de deux choses: ¹⁷ne pas laisser une mauvaise pensée s'arrêter en son cœur, et ¹⁸ne pas acquérir de la hardiesse, ¹⁹ni non plus apprendre la dureté de cœur. Elle ne laissait aucun endroit de son corps sans le couvrir.^{12g} ²⁰Elle dominait sa colère et calmait l'emporte-

*vis*²¹, animi prudens, *loquendi parcior*²¹, *legendi studiosior*^{15,32}, non in incerti divitiarum, sed in *prece pauperis*¹⁴ spem reponens, intenta operi, verecunda sermoni *arbitrium mentis non hominem*¹¹, *sed deum quaerere*^{12,16} *nulli laedere os*²⁴, bene velle omnibus, adsurgere majoribus natu, *aequalibus non invidere*²⁵, *fugere jactantiam*^{18,26}, rationem sequi, amare virtutem. Quando ista vel vultu *laesit parentes*^{28,42}, *quando dissensit a propinquis?*²⁸ Quando fastidivit humilem, quando risit debilem, quando *vitavit inopem*¹⁴ *eos solos solita coetus virorum invisere, quos misericordia non erubesceret neque praetiret verecundia?*^{13,43} *Nihil torvum in oculis*^{37,40}, *nihil in verbis procax*²¹, nihil in actu inverecundum : non gestus fractior, non *incessus solutior*³⁶, non *vox petulantior*^{22,41}, ut ipsa corporis species simulacrum fuerit mentis, figura probitatis. Bona quippe domus in ipso vestibulo debet agnosci ac primo praetendat ingressu nihil intus latere tenebrarum, ut mens nostra nullis repagulis corporalibus impedita tamquam lucernae lux intus posita foris luceat.

Quid ego exequar ciborum parsimoniam, officiorum redundantiam, alterum ultra naturam superfuisse, alterum paene ipsi naturae defuisse, illic nulla intermissa tempora, hic congeminatos jejunio dies? *Et si quando reficiendi successet voluntas, cibus plerumque obviis, qui mortem arceret, non delicias ministraret*³⁰. *Dormire non prius cupiditas quam necessitas fuit*³¹ *et tamen cum quiesceret corpus, vigilare animus, qui frequenter in somnis aut lecta repetit aut somno interrupta continuat aut disposita gerit aut gerenda praenuntiat*³².

Prodire domo nescia^{13,33}, *nisi cum ad ecclesiam conveniret*³⁴, *et hoc*

21-34

ment dans les pensées de son cœur. ²¹Ses paroles étaient recueillies et ²²sa voix était réglée; ²³elle ne criait pas et veillait en son cœur ²⁴à ne médire de personne et à ne pas écouter volontairement médire. Elle ne se tourmentait pas en son cœur, ²⁵ni n'enviait pas son âme. ²⁶Elle n'était pas fanfaronne, mais humble. ²⁷Elle n'était pas malhonnête en son cœur. ²⁸Elle n'était pas querelleuse avec ses relations si ce n'est pas sur le genre de vie. ²⁹Elle tendait chaque jour au progrès; elle progressait. Lorsqu'elle se levait le matin ³⁰Elle ne mangeait ni ne buvait par plaisir, mais afin de ne pas laisser mourir son corps avant terme.⁸⁹ ³¹Elle ne dormait pas outre mesure, mais pour que son corps seulement se reposât,¹¹⁸ ³²puis elle veillait pour sa besogne et les Ecritures. Le jeûne était pour elle une délectation comme pour d'autres la bonne chère ... ³³Elle n'allait pas et venait, ³⁴mais seulement quand elle devait se rendre au temple; car elle

*ipsum cum parentibus aut propinquis*³⁵. Domestico operosa secreto, forrensi stipata comitatu, *nullo meliore tamen sui custode quam se ipsa*³⁹, *quae incessu adfectuque venerabilis*³⁶ non tam vestigium pedis tolleret quam *gradum virtutis adtolleret*²⁹. Etenim alios habeat virgo membrorum custodes suorum³⁸, *morum autem suorum se habeat ipsa custodem*³⁹. Plures erunt de quibus discat, si ipsa se doceat quae virtutes magistras habet, *quia quidquid egerit disciplina est*⁸. Sic Maria intendebat omnibus, quasi a pluribus moneretur, sic omnia implebat virtutis officia, ut non tam disceret quam doceret.

*Talem hanc evangelista monstravit*⁴⁴, *talem angelus repperit*⁴⁵, talem spiritus sanctus elegit. Quid enim in singulis morer, ut *eam parentes dilexerint*⁴², extranei praedicaverint, *quae digna fuit ex qua dei filius nasceretur*?⁵⁶ Haec ad ipsos ingressus angeli inventa domi⁴⁵ in penetralibus sine comite, ne quis intentionem abrumperet, ne quis obstreperet; neque enim comites feminas desiderabat quae bonas comites cogitationes habebat. Quin etiam tum sibi minus sola videbatur, cum sola esset; nam quemadmodum sola, cui *tot libri*^{15.32} adessent, *tot archangelis*⁵², tot prophetae? Denique *et Gabriel*⁴⁵ eam ubi revisere solebat invenit et angelum Maria *quasi virum specie mota*⁴⁶ *trepidavit*⁴⁷, quasi non inco-

35-47

ne négligeait pas ce point ; ³⁵elle y allait avec ses parents, ³⁶marchait comme il faut et était décente dans sa tenue et ³⁷la vigilance sur ses yeux ; si bien que ceux qui la voyaient pensaient ³⁸qu'elle avait quelqu'un pour veiller à l'avertir et à l'édifier en tout ce qu'elle faisait. ³⁹La bonne pensée, en effet, qu'elle s'était acquise, était le surveillant et le maître qu'elle obtint dès le principe par ses prières ; ⁴⁰car elle ne promenait pas ses regards au dehors, ⁴¹on ne l'entendait pas crier quoi que ce soit ⁴²Elle était soumise à ses parents ; quant à quereller son père ou sa mère, elle considérait cela comme une abomination devant Dieu ⁴³Quant à être familière avec un serviteur du sexe masculin ou avec quelqu'autre du sexe masculin, il est superflu d'en parler, ⁵²car elle leur était à ce point étrangère qu'elle ne supportait pas leur voix ; et eux ils se tenaient à distance et ne la connaissaient

⁴⁴C'est l'Evangile qui témoigne de cette affirmation ; en effet, ⁴⁵quand l'Archange Gabriel lui fut envoyé – comme elle était un être humain auprès duquel il venait, ⁴⁶il avait pris la forme humaine – il lui parla en ces termes : « Salut, Marie, toi qui as trouvé grâce, le Seigneur est avec toi. » La jeune fille, ⁴⁷en entendant qu'on lui parlait avec une voix

gnitum audito nomine recognovit⁵⁰. Ita peregrinata est in viro⁴⁹, quae non est peregrinata in angelo⁵¹, ut agnoscas aures religiosas⁴⁷, oculos verecundos. Denique salutata obmutuit et appellata respondit, sed quae primo turbaverat adfectum postea promisit obsequium⁵¹.

Quam vero religiosa in propinquas fuerit, scriptura divina significat. Nam et humilior facta est, ubi a deo se cognovit electam, et statim ad cognatam suam in montana processit, non utique ut exemplo crederet quae jam crediderat oraculo ; « beata enim, inquit, quae credidisti ». Et tribus cum ea mensibus mansit. Tanti autem intervallo temporis non fides quaeritur, sed pietas exhibetur. Et hoc posteaquam in utero parentis exiliens puer matrem domini salutavit prius compos devotionis quam naturae. Inde tot sequentibus signis, cum sterilis pareret, virgo conciperet, loqueretur mutus, adoraret magus, expectaret Simeon, sidera nuntiarent, Maria mobilis ad introitum, immobilis ad miraculum « conservabat, inquit, haec omnia in corde suo ». Quamvis mater domini discere tamen praecepta domini desiderabat, et quae deum genuerat deum tamen scire cupiebat. Quid quod annis quoque omnibus ibat in Hierusalem sollemni die pascha et ibat cum Joseph ? Ubique in virgine comes singularum virtutum est pudor. Hic individuus debet esse virginitati, sine quo non potest esse virginitas. Nec ad templum igitur Maria sine pudoris sui custode processit.

Haec est imago virginitatis⁵³. Talis enim fuit Maria⁵⁴, ut ejus unius vita omnium disciplina sit^{55,3}. Si igitur auctor non displicet, opus probemus, ut quaecumque sibi ejus exoptat praemium imitetur exemplum⁵⁵. Quantae in una virgine species virtutum emicant : secretum verecundiae, vexillum fidei, devotionis obsequium, virgo intra domum, comes ad ministerium, mater ad templum.

48-56

masculine, aussitôt se troubla fort,^{7g} ⁴⁸parce qu'elle n'était pas habituée à une voix masculine,^{6g} et Marie, dans la pureté de son esprit, ⁴⁹songea à fuir ou même à mourir, ⁵⁰jusqu'à ce que celui qui lui parlait enlevât d'elle la crainte en lui manifestant son nom en ces termes : « Ne crains pas, Marie, je suis Gabriel. » ⁵¹Alors elle demeura et eut confiance en lui répondant, sachant que les paroles des ⁵²Archanges adressées à des vierges sont vraies.

⁵³Voilà l'image de la virginité ; ⁵⁴Marie en fait était telle.^{1g} ⁵⁵Que celle, qui désire être vierge, considère celle-ci ;^{15g} ⁵⁶Car c'est à cause de pareils faits que le Verbe l'a choisie pour prendre d'elle cette chair^{3g,14g} et devenir homme pour nous (2 pages).

O quantis illa virginibus occurret⁵⁷, quantas complexa⁵⁸ ad dominum trahet⁵⁹ dicens : « Haec torum filii mei, haec thalamos nuptiales immaculato servavit pudore. »⁶² Quemadmodum eas ipse dominus commendabit patri⁶¹ nimirum illud repetens suum : « Pater sancte, istae sunt, quas custodivi tibi, in quibus filius hominis caput reclinans quievit. Peto ut ubi ego sum et ipsae sint mecum. Sed non solis sibi debent posse quae non solis vixerunt sibi : haec parentes redimat, haec fratres⁶³. Pater juste, mundus me non cognovit, istae autem me cognoverunt et mundum cognoscere noluerunt. » Quae pompa illa, quanta angelorum laetitia plaudentium, quod inhabitare mereatur in caelo quae caelestem vitam vixit in saeculo⁶⁰. Tunc etiam Maria tympanum sumens⁶⁴ choros virginales⁶⁶ citabit cantantes domino⁶⁷, quod per mare saeculi⁶⁵ sine saecularibus fluctibus transierunt. Tunc unaquaeque exultabit dicens : « 'Et introibo ad altare Dei mei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.' Immolo Deo sacrificium laudis et reddo altissimo vota mea »⁶⁸

Ergo sancta Maria disciplinam vitae informet.^{55,3} Thecla doceat immolari

57-68

⁵⁷Oh combien de vierges rencontrera Marie ! ⁵⁸Comme elle se les adjoindra et ⁵⁹les entraînera aux pieds du Seigneur. ⁶⁰Quelle joie parmi les anges en voyant l'image de leur pureté dans le corps des vierges ! ⁶¹Comme le Seigneur les présentera à son Père en les voyant et dira : « Toutes celles-ci furent et sont comme Marie qui est à moi. » Tel est le fruit du bienfait qui arriva par lui sur la terre. Oh combien de femmes viendront à leur rencontre ! Sara, Rébecca, Rachel, Lia, Suzanne et Elizabeth ! Et surtout les femmes qui ont veillé sur la décence du mariage, avec quelle joie seront-elles accueillies par les Patriarches, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, témoignant pour elles devant le Seigneur en ces termes : « Toutes celles-ci ont gardé ta loi, ⁶²elles n'ont pas souillé leur couche, mais comme tu l'as ordonné, elles ont achevé leur existence avec décence. » Comme Marie les présentera à sa mère ! Comme les anges prieront ⁶³pour les parents de celles-là, parce que leurs filles marchent à l'image de leur pureté ! ⁶⁴Et ensuite, de même que jadis ⁶⁵sur la mer Marie marchait ⁶⁶devant les femmes avec un tambourin, de même arrivera-t-il dans le royaume des cieux : la virginité commandant et marchant en tête avec une grande franchise, toutes formeront un même chœur et une même symphonie dans le ciel, ⁶⁷bénissant Dieu et ⁶⁸disant : « J'entrerai devant l'autel de Dieu, devant le Dieu qui réjouit ma jeunesse » ; et « Je te sacrifierai une hostie de bénédiction, je donnerai mon vœu au Seigneur. »

^{1g}*Eine weise Jungfrau gleicht Maria. Wer aber wird nennen können die Schönheit der* ^{2g}*Mutter unseres Herrn, welche* ^{3g}*von Gott geliebt wurde wegen ihrer Werke. Deswegen nahm sein geliebter Sohn Wohnung in ihr. Man nennt den Vater des Ungezeugten den Vater Christi. Und er ist es in Wahrheit. Man nennt dagegen Maria die Mutter unseres Herrn, und sie ist es in Wahrheit ; sie* ^{4g}*hat geboren denjenigen, der sie geschaffen hatte. Und nicht ist er geringer geworden, daß Maria ihn gebär, und sie hat nicht verloren ihre Jungfräulichkeit, als sie unsern Erlöser gebär, sondern er hat sie sich bewahrt wie einen kostbaren Schatz.* ^{5g}*Maria sah nie das Gesicht eines fremden Mannes,* ^{6g}*Deswegen war sie verwirrt,* ^{7g}*als sie die Stimme des Engels Gabriel hörte.* ^{8g}*Aber sie aß nicht, damit sie einen Leib ernährte, sondern sie aß wegen der Notwendigkeit ihrer Natur, daß sie nicht voll wurde vor ihrer Zeit* ¹; denn sie erkannte ihre Nacktheit.

^{9g}*Und nicht streckte sie ihre Hände aus, noch schüttelte sie sie jemals.* ^{10g}*Denn sie zog sich allein zurück in ihr Haus, indem sie bedient wurde durch ihre eigene Mutter. Wenn sie aber zu ihr kam, konnte sie ihr nicht ein Wort sagen über ihren Zustand, weil sie bei sich selbst geschworen hatte, keinem in dieser Welt das Geringste des Zustandes zu erzählen. Sie saß aber indem sie allemal ihr Antlitz gegen den Osten wandte, weil sie ohne Unterlaß betete. Denn ihre Brüder wünschten sie zu sehen und mit ihr zu sprechen. Und sie empfing sie nicht. Denn die Engel kamen viele Male zu ihr, sie betrachteten die Eigenart ihrer Lebensweise und bewunderten sie.* ^{11g}*Sie schlief aber nur nach dem Bedürfnis des Schlafes und so gab sie nicht Ruhe ihrem Körper.* ^{12g}*Denn auch nicht sah sie die Nacktheit ihres Körpers. Wenn sie aber ein Gewand anzog, pflegte sie ihre Augen zu verschließen. Denn nicht waren in ihr die Gewohnheiten der Frauen.*

Denn sie kannte nicht viele Dinge dieses Lebens, ^{13g}*weil sie fern blieb dem Verkehr der Frauen. Denn der Herr schaute auf die ganze Schöpfung und er sah keine, welche Maria glich.* ^{14g}*Deswegen wählte er sie für sich als Mutter.* ^{15g}*Wenn nun eine wünscht, daß man sie Jungfrau nennt, möge*

¹ LEFORT, *Saint Athanase : Sur la Virginité*, p. 204, n. 6 : « ...le texte copte de Rossi doit être lu ; ce qui nous mène loin de la traduction de HAASE, *Daß sie nicht voll wurde vor ihrer Zeit.* » ROSSI, *op. cit.*, p. 172 : 9 f., translates this sentence thus: « Questa non si consuma al modo di chi nutre un corpo, ma si consuma per necessità di sua natura, non compiendosi prima del suo tempo. »

sie Maria gleichen. Diese aber nennt man in Wahrheit die Mutter des Herrn. Eine Jungfrau, welche nicht täglich bis zum Abend fastet, hat keine Kraft, Jungfrau zu sein

An analysis of Ambrose's portrait of the Virgin in *De Virginibus* is possible now that it has been viewed in conjunction with its Athanasian source and the related *Gnomes*. His plan is quite simple: dwelling on her mode of life before the Annunciation, he then describes her behavior at Gabriel's visit, at the Visitation, and at the annual trips with Joseph to the Temple. Finally he contemplates the welcome that she prepares for the consecrated virgin in heaven. This whole development is envisaged as a rule of life illustrating how virgins should conduct themselves; to show them the courage with which they should defend their virginity unto death, Ambrose cites another model, Thecla, relying largely for the legend of her martyrdom on the *Acta Pauli et Theclae*.

His dependence on the *Letter to Virgins* is so patent as to require little comment. Only two sections of his portrait of Mary are the fruit of his own invention: the Virgin's devotedness toward her kinswoman at the Visitation, and her annual visits to the Temple with Joseph, symbol of modesty. Both ideas were dear to Ambrose and would be introduced into later works.

The Visitation especially was to be developed again at length for the contemplation of virgins in the *Exp. Luc.* ¹, where, however, the emphasis is on Mary's humility and the profit which her three-month stay brought to John the Baptist; in the *De Virgs.* it had been on her promptness to help a relative. In this regard it is not excluded that Ambrose intended by the lesson drawn in the *De Virgs.* to counter the accusations that flew at him from irate parents, fearful of losing their daughters to his persuasive call to the virginal life ². Toward the end of the long passage from the *De Virgs.* just cited, he returns to the theme of the good that virgins bring down on their families: "Sed non solis sibi debent posse, quae non solis vixerunt sibi: haec parentes redimat, haec fratres." A year or so after the *De Virgs.* Ambrose had to devote an entire treatise, the *De Virginitate* (June 377) to a defense of his recruitment of virgins, largely against the misunderstandings of parents.

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:20-30. CSEL 32:4; 52:16-57:17. PL 15:1560a-1563b.

² It is well known that many mothers, fearful lest they lose their daughters, forbade them to assist at his sermons.

As to the annual visits of Mary to Jerusalem in the company of Joseph, many citations could be introduced to exemplify how Ambrose considered modesty ("pudor") the inseparable companion of virginity, personified in Mary's spouse ¹.

Upon examining Ambrose's source it will be remarked that practically every part thereof was tapped for some contribution to the *De Virgs*. The only long passage on which Ambrose did not draw at all is the two-page section of the *Letter* which, for convenience, it was deemed better to omit ². Athanasius therein developed a comparison of marriage and virginity, introducing it by the rather striking notion that the Apostle Paul may have taken the "life of Mary" as a model in writing his opinion on virginity (1 Cor. 7:25) ³.

Finally, it is to be noted that Ambrose's borrowings from the *Letter to Virgins* are not limited to the portrait of Mary, model of virgins, in the opening chapters of the second book of *De Virgs*. ⁴. Lefort has shown that the whole plan and doctrinal content of the first book of Ambrose's work is taken as well from the *Letter*, with sentences, examples, or figures copied here and there. Like Athanasius, Ambrose adopts for his work the form of a letter addressed to a virgin, his sister ⁵. Each of the three books of the *De Virgs*., therefore, reveals a bishop who in his first work was distrustful enough of his inadequate theological preparation to put himself in the school of masters like Athanasius and Pope Liberius ⁶ known for their orthodoxy.

¹ The same identification of Joseph with *pudor* occurs in the *De Viduis* 4:25. PL 16:242b (written immediately after *De Virgs*.). Cf. also *De Off.* 1:18:69. PL 16:44ab; *Exp. Luc.* 2:1 and 17. CSEL 32:4; 41:7-11; 51:5 f. PL 15:1553a-1559a; *Exh. Virg.* 8:71. PL 16:357bc, etc.

² Cf. *supra*, p. 38.

³ Athanasius, *Lettre aux Vierges*. LEFORT (Le Muséon, 42), p. 247 :

Peut-être Paul aussi connaissait-il la vie de Marie, puisqu'en fait il a pris son modèle en elle pour introduire son opinion sur la virginité ; voilà pourquoi il écrivait aux Corinthiens en ces termes : "Sur les vierges je n'ai pas de précepte du Seigneur, mais je donne une opinion avec l'espoir que le Seigneur m'accordera d'être fidèle."

⁴ Ambrose's dependence for the portrait of Mary was first remarked by AL. JANSSENS, *De heilige Maagd en Moeder Gods Maria*, I : *Het dogma en de apocriefen*. Brussel 1930, p. 333-336, and independently and in greater detail by Alexandre SPANN, *Essai sur la théologie mariale de saint Ambroise* (Thèse dactylographiée.) Faculté Catholique de Lyon, 1931, p. 107-113.

⁵ LEFORT, *Athanase, Ambroise et Chénoute*, p. 64-66, demonstrates the dependence of the first book of *De Virgs*. on the *Letter*, citing the parallelism of plan and of many passages in both works.

⁶ The sermon delivered by Pope Liberius at the virginal consecration of Mar-

How did Ambrose hit upon Athanasius' little known work, long lost to history, as a source? It has already been noted that the original language of the *Letter* was Copt or that at least the Coptic version was contemporaneous with the original ¹. Ambrose evidently could have known it only in translation, either in Greek or, what is often overlooked in citing Ambrose's many sources among the Oriental Fathers, in Latin ². And such a translation must have spread as rapidly as the translation (into Latin) of another of Athanasius' works devoured among monastic circles, the famed *Life of Antony* ³. Athanasius, who died in 373 at the age of 78, refers to himself in the *Letter* as an "old man" ⁴; and already in 376/7 Ambrose is found using the *Letter* in translation to compose his *De Virgs*. Athanasius' fame on the subject of virginity, known in northern Italy since his passage there during his second exile (340-346), on his way to and from Trier, made him the most immediate source of inspiration. Moreover, Ambrose had earlier become acquainted with Athanasius' ascetical literature, which was known in Rome since the patriarch's sojourn there during the first year of his second exile. The Roman family of Ambrose was brought into immediate contact with Athanasius' apostolate of virginity when around 353 Ambrose's sister Marcellina was received into the ranks of consecrated virgins by Pope Liberius. Athanasius came naturally to Ambrose's mind, therefore, as he took up his sister's request that was to occasion the *De Virgs*.

2. Mary, Model of Virgins, in Ambrose's other Works

The passage of the *De Virgs*. on the Virgin of virgins, while remaining unsurpassed in Ambrose's later literary endeavor, was in the back of his mind whenever he returned to the same theme. Reminiscences of what he had written on the conduct of Mary at the Visitation and the annual visits to the Temple came up frequently, as has already been remarked. But it was particularly the portrayal of Mary's behavior at

cella in Rome (353c) makes up a large part of the third book of *De Virgs*. 3:1:1-5:15. FALLER p. 63:7-69:15. PL 16:219c-224a.

¹ Cf. *supra*, p. 12, n. 4.

² Cf. Berthold ALTANER, *Alllateinische Übersetzungen von Schriften des Athanasios von Alexandria*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 41 (1941), p. 59.

³ Robert T. MEYER, *St. Athanasius, The Life of Saint Antony* (Ancient Christian Writers, 10). Westminster (U. S. A.) 1950, *Introduction*, p. 5-8.

⁴ Cf. *supra*, p. 19.

the Annunciation that Ambrose chose to cite over and over again as an example for virgins.

The text which includes most of the details of his earlier commentary on the Annunciation, while at the same time compressing them into a few lines laden with meaning, is in the *De Officiis*:

Bonus enim regendae castitatis pudor est comes : qui si se praetendat ad ea quae prima pericula sunt, pudicitiam temerari non sinat. Hic primus in ipso cognitionis ingressu, Domini matrem commendat legentibus, et tamquam testis locuples, dignam quae ad tale munus eligeretur, astruit : quod in cubiculo, quod sola, quod salutata ab angelo tacet, et mota est introitu ejus, quod ad virilis sexus speciem peregrinam turbatur aspectus Virginis. Itaque quamvis esset humilis, prae verecundia tamen salutantem non resalutavit, nec ullum responsum retulit, nisi ubi de suscipienda Domini generatione cognovit ; ut qualitatem effectus disceret, non ut sermonem referret ¹.

As appears from the above text, which is a summary of the more diffuse passage in the *De Virgs.*, there are five details on which Ambrose loves to dwell when drawing the scene of the Annunciation for his audiences: 1. Mary was inside her house at the moment of the Annunciation; 2. she was alone; 3. she was disturbed at the angel's appearance under the form of a man; 4. she refused to reply to his flattering salutation "Hail, full of grace", speaking up only when he called her by her proper name and asked her service; 5. she inquired about the role expected of her in Christ's earthly generation.

Among these details, one of the most delicate is the fourth, which Ambrose never again succeeded in putting in terms as terse and balanced as those of the *De Virgs.*: "salutata obmutuit et appellata respondit". The opposition between the two words cannot be as succinctly rendered in English: "salutare" means to greet a person with "salve" or "ave", or again to pay one's respect to him, even to pay court to him; "appellare", on the other hand, is devoid of flattery and means simply to accost a person, to ask him to do something, to make a proposal to him.

These same five details occur in greater length in a sermon of the *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, comparable to the *De Virgs.* in being addressed directly to virgins. Ambrose is here replenishing his own meditation with borrowings from Origen, particularly on the uniqueness of the salutation "gratia plena" ². Because the passage is too long

¹ *De Off.* 1:18:69. PL 16:44ab.

² Origen, *Hom. 6 in Lucam*. GCS Orig. 9 39:17-40:13. PG 13:1816a.

to be cited in its entirety the commentary on the fifth detail, Mary's question, has been abridged:

« Et ingressus ad eam angelus dixit : Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu inter mulieres. Ipsa autem ut vidit eam, mota est in introitu ejus. » Disce virginem moribus, disce virginem verecundia, disce virginem oraculo, disce mysterio. Trepidare virginum est, et ad omnes viri ingressus pavere, omnes viri adfatus vereri. Discant mulieres propositum pudoris imitari. Sola in penetralibus, quam nemo virorum videret, solus angelus repperiret ; sola sine comite, sola sine teste, ne quo degeneri depravaretur adfatu, ab angelo salutatur. Disce, virgo, verborum vitare lasciviam : Mariam etiam salutationem angeli verebatur. « Erat tamen, inquit, cogitans qualis esset haec salutatio », et ideo cum verecundia ; quia pavebat, cum prudentia, quia benedictionis novam formulam mirabatur, quae nusquam lecta est, nusquam ante comperta. Soli Mariae haec salutatio servabatur. Bene enim sola gratia plena dicitur, quae sola gratiam quam nulla alia meruerat consecuta est, ut gratiae repleretur auctore

« Dixit autem Maria ad angelum : Quomodo fiet istud ; quoniam virum non cognovi ? » Videtur hic non credidisse Maria, nisi diligenter advertas ; neque enim fas est ut electa ad generandum unigenitum Dei Filium, fuisse videatur incredula Sed neque non credere Maria, neque tam temere debuit usurpare, non credere angelo, usurpare divina. Neque enim facile erat scire mysterium absconditum a saeculis in Deo, quod nec superiores potestates scire potuerunt. Et tamen non fidem rennuit, non officium refutavit, sed accomodavit adfectum, spondit obsequium. Etenim cum dicit : Quomodo fiet istud ? non de effectu dubitavit, sed qualitatem ipsius quaesivit effectus

« Ecce, inquit, ancilla Domini ; contingat mihi secundum verbum tuum. » Vide humilitatem, vide devotionem. Ancillam se dicit Domini, quae mater eligitur, nec repentino exaltata promissu est. Simul ancillam dicendo nullam sibi praerogativam tantae gratiae vindicavit, quae faceret quod juberetur ; mitem enim humilemque paritura, humilitatem debuit etiam ipsa praeferre ¹.

Only a shadow of such richness of detail is cast on the screen in this passage from the *Exhortatio Virginitatis* :

Nullus sit tuus sine matre processus, quae sit anxia custos pudoris. Ipsa quoque ad Ecclesiam progressio rarior sit adolescentulis. Considera quanta fuerit Maria, et tamen nusquam alibi, nisi in cubiculo reperitur, cum quaeritur. Illa te doceat quid sequaris. Angelum in specie viri vidit, et pavebat corde, peregrinabatur aspectu. Unde dicit

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:7-9, 14, 16. CSEL 32:4 45:10-46:2; 49:13-50:2; 50:20-26. PL 15: 1555b-1556a, 1558ab, 1558d-1559a.

ad eam angelus : Ne timeas Maria. Docet solitudo verecundiam : et gymnasium pudoris secretum est ¹.

With the above passages many others might be adduced on each of the five points mentioned, although in none of these texts will Ambrose draw the portrait of Mary with as much detail as in the *De Virgs.* ². The image of Mary at the Annunciation, disturbed and silent at the angel's greeting, was the subject of the first of the New Testament « tituli » or inscriptions in the Ambrosian basilica, a little known relic of the great bishop's poetic genius. Each of the inscriptions is composed of two hexameters. The Annunciation inscription is as follows:

Angelus affatur Mariam, quae parca loquendi
Ora verecundo solvit suffusa rubore ³.

¹ *Exh. Virg.* 8:71. PL 16:357b. Cp. Jerome, *Ep.* 22:38. CSEL 54:203:13-19. PL 22:422 f.:

Propone tibi beatam Mariam, quae tantae exstitit puritatis ut Mater Domini esse mereretur. Ad quam cum angelus Gabriel in viri specie descendisset, dicens : "Ave gratia plena, Dominus tecum", consternata et perterrita, respondere non potuit. Nunquam enim a viro fuerat salutata. Denique nuntium discit et loquitur. Et quae hominem formidabat, cum angelo fabulatur intrepida.

Jerome, *Ep.* 107:7. CSEL 55 298:13 f. PL 22:874b:

Imitetur Mariam, quam Gabriel solam in cubiculo suo reperit, et ideo forsitan timore perterrita est, quia virum quem non solebat aspexit.

Cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 22:17. CSEL 54 164:16 f. PL 22:404b; *Ep.* 130:19. CSEL 55 199:22 f. PL 22:1122c.

² The other texts in which Ambrose alludes to Mary's behavior at the Annunciation, viewed in the four details already mentioned, are the following:

1. Mary inside her house: *De Vid.* 4:24. PL 16:242b; *Ep.* 5:16. PL 16:896b; *De Virgite.* 8:42. PL 16:277b.
2. Alone: *De Vid.*, loc. cit.; *Ep.* 5, loc. cit.; *Ep.* 49:2. PL 16:1154a.
3. Disturbed: *De Abra.* 2:9:61. CSEL 32:1 641:10-14. PL 14:484b; *De Virgite.* 11:60. PL 16:281c.
4. Her question: *De Abra.* 2:8:49. CSEL 32:1 602:16-603:3. PL 14:477c. *Ep.* 42:5. PL 16:1125b.

³ *Inscriptio* No. 3, Sebastian MERKLE, *Die Ambrosianischen Tituli*, Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte, 10 (1896), p. 215. Edited separately under same title. Rome 1896. The 21 *Tituli* are edited at the end of MERKLE's article (p. 214-222) under the title "Incipiunt disticha S. Ambrosii de diversis rebus quae in basilica Ambrosiana scripta sunt". This title was used by Franz JURET who first edited the disticha in M. de la BIGNE's *Biblioteca Patrum*, VIII. Parisii 1589. They subsequently appeared in the 1603 reprinting (t. 5, col. 362) of the defective *Editio Romana* of Ambrose's works prepared by Felix Cardinal DE MONTALTO (later Sixtus V): *S. Ambrosii opera cura et labore cardinalis de Monte Alto*. Romae 1579-1587. Since then they disappeared from circulation, to be resurrected by Luigi BIRAGHI, *Inni sinceri e carmi di Sant' Ambrogio*. Milano 1862, p. 144-150, with good notes. Despite the scepticism which

3. Mary at the Head of the Choir of Virgins

a) Ambrose's Texts on the Choir of Virgins

Among the other images of the model of virgins evoked in the *De Virgs.*, that of Mary as leader of the « chorus virginum » in heaven was most frequently alluded to in Ambrose's later writings. The image has its source in the narrative in Ex. 15 : 20 ff. of the passage of the Red Sea, where Mary, the sister of Moses and Aaron, led the women of Israel in singing the canticle which Moses had just intoned. Ambrose had already alluded to this scene in the first book of *De Virgs.* Having stated that the virginal life is so heavenly that it was found on earth only after the Word Incarnate had taken on a human body, he cites as objections to his thesis two notable examples of virginity from the Old Testament, Elias and Mary, sister of Aaron:

Et Maria tympanum sumens pudore virgineo choros duxit ¹. His reply is remarkable because this is the only time that he envisages the Old Testament Mary as a type of the Church:

Sed considerate cujus illa (Maria) speciem tunc gerebat. Nonne ecclesiae, quae religiosos populi coetus, qui carmina divina concinerent, immaculato virgo spiritu copulavit ? ²

Whenever in his later writings the text of Exodus recurs, it is always of Mary, Mother of Jesus, that he thinks.

The longest development is that in the second book of *De Virgs.* ³, where Athanasius was his inspiration. The image became Ambrose's own property thereafter, but did not find expression for another ten years.

The next allusion to it views the two Marys rather as prophets than as virgins. In the *Exp. Luc.* he compares the brevity of Elizabeth's prophecy at the Visitation (Luc. 1:42-45) to Zachary's long *Benedictus*

the renowned Martin SCHANZ, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, IV:1, Munich, shows toward them in both his 1904 (p. 210) and 1913 (p. 232) editions, their Ambrosian authenticity is accepted by both BIRAGHI and MERKLE, who are authorities on them, and by Carl WEYMAN, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Poesie*. München 1926, p. 37. In correction of MERKLE's notes, WEYMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 41 adds his own opinion on the classical model for the second hexameter in the Annunciation *titulus*" Ambrose's line ("ora verecundo solvit suffusa rubore") would be based rather on Ovid, *Metaph.* 1:484: "Pulchra verecundo suffunditur ora rubore", than on the source MERKLE thought to have detected in Virgil's *Georgics* 1:430: "At si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem."

¹ *De Virgs.* 1:3:12. FALLER p. 23:14 f. PL 16:192a.

² *Loc. cit.*, FALLER p. 23:15-17.

³ *Supra*, p. 43 f.

(Luc. 1:68-79) and draws the lesson that it is proper for women to listen to the word of God rather than to preach it. Hence, he concludes, Providence so willed it that no woman in the Scriptures should prophesy at greater length than the Mother of Jesus:

Nec facile ullam prophetasse uberius quam matrem Domini repperimus. Prophetissa ipsa Maria soror Aaron quam cito cantici verba conclusit eademque, ubi prolixius est locuta cum fratre, nequaquam sui poenam sermonis evasit ¹.

In considering Mary of the Old Testament he contrasts her brief canticle at the Red Sea, limited to the repetition of the first verse of Moses' (Ex. 15:20, cp. 15:1), with her later recriminations against Moses. For the latter she was temporarily struck with leprosy (Num. 12). This text is, therefore, also to be set apart from the others in which the virginity of the two Marys and their presiding over the choir of virgins is compared.

The value which the parallel between the two virgins could bring in a polemic on Mary's virginity was too tempting for Ambrose to leave unexploited. In the *Ep.* 42, written shortly after the publication of the *Exp. Luc.* (390), he paints the two personages in the strongest colors ever, attributing to the sister of Aaron a role which Exodus does not say she actually played, namely, that of leading the entire Hebrew army through the Red Sea:

In veteri itaque testamento virgo Hebraeorum per mare duxit exercitum: in novo testamento virgo regis, aula coelestis electa est ad salutem ².

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:35. CSEL 32:4 59:66-60:3. PL 15:1564d-1565a.

² *Ep.* 42:7. PL 16:1126b. Wilhelm HALLER, *Jovinianus, die Fragmente seiner Schriften, die Quellen zu seiner Geschichte, sein Leben, und seine Lehre*, TU 2:2 (1897), p. 77, n. 2, professes scandal at the *duxit* and seems to be unaware that Ambrose uses the text of Ex. 15:20 frequently enough to permit himself a liberty with it. Writes HALLER:

Aber warum das *duxit*? Offenbar (!) nur mit Bezug auf Exod. 15:20, wo berichtet wird, daß Mirjam mit der Pauke in der Hand der Reigen der Frauen geführt habe, worauf Ambrosius an *einer* (!) Stelle (*De Virg.* 3) in allegorisierender Weise zu reden kommt.

Italics added. If by his enigmatic reference to *De Virg.* 3 HALLER has in mind the third chapter of the first book of *De Virginibus* (cited in first place in this series of texts, *supra*, p. 51, n. 2) where the Old Testament Mary is understood allegorically of the Church (and not of the Mother of God, as HALLER insinuates), what does the scholar thereby intend to suggest? Is he oblivious of the eight other far from merely *apparent* allusions to the text of Ex. 15:20 in terms of the Virgin Mary, all to be put in the balance with this one interpretation in terms of the Church? Other amusing examples of his ill-concealed bias, struggling for every possible expression, could be cited. Cf. *Infra*, p. 156, n. 5 for an additional one.

The next occurrence of the text of Ex. 15:20 is another unique example in the series. Writing a couple of years after the text just cited, in that part of the *De Institutione Virginis* preceding by a few lines his polemic against another Marian heretic named Bonosus, Ambrose delivers one of his strange etymologies of the name *Mary* borne by the two personages, the *Mary of the Lord* and the sister of Aaron:

Unde et speciale Maria Domini hoc nomen invenit, quod significat «Deus ex genere meo». Dictae sunt et ante Mariae multae: nam et «Maria» soror Aaron dicta fuit; sed illa Maria «amaritudo maris» vocabatur ¹.

Once having launched on the polemic against Bonosus, Ambrose uses the text of Exodus only in connection with Mary's virginity, and never thereafter in the five or six allusions to the passage, which date from the remaining four years of his life, has he any other aim in view. Twice again in the *De Inst. Virg.* the image recurs, still with the noble role of the Old Testament Mary leading the whole Hebrew army. In *Ep. 42* her leadership had suggested the part played by Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, in our salvation, "Virgo regis, aula coelestis electa est ad salutem!" Here, however, in praising the consecrated virgins to whom he addresses the *De Inst. Virg.* he says that he prefers to leave aside the Old Dispensation and the personal glory of a virgin with a role like Aaron's sister, particularly since the virginal coming of God's Son is already glory enough for the family of virgins:

Sed ipse quoque unigenitus Filius tuus venturus in terras suscipere quod amissum est, puriorem carnis suae generationem reperire non potuit, quam ut habitationi propriae coelestis aulam virginis dedicaret; in qua esset et immacolatae castitatis sacrarium et Dei templum. Quid autem illud attexam quod divino tuo munere cum sanctis Moyse et Aaron virgo Maria pedes per fluctus duxit Hebraeorum exercitum? Relinquo vetera, privata non quaero; satis est ista nobilitas familiae virginali ².

A few lines later he intermingles the scene of Apoc. 14:4, where only the virgins are found worthy to follow the Lamb in heaven, with an allusion to Cant. 1:6 and in the last line to Ex. 15:20:

...ut illic Agni sequatur vestigia, et in meridiano pascat, in meridiano maneat, nec in grege sodalium incedat: sed agnis tui admixta sine offensione versetur comes virginum, pedissequa Mariarum ³.

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:34. PL 16:314a.

² *Ibid.*, 17:105 f. PL 331ab. ³ *Ibid.*, 17:113. PL 333ab.

The name *pedissequa Mariarum*, *follower of the Marys*, which he gives the virgin is unique, and is to be compared to the enthusiastic "O divitias *Marianae* virginitatis !" found earlier in the same work ¹. Clearly Ambrose was taken up with the parallel of the two Marys in his last years.

In a work written probably a year later, the *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, his enthusiasm over the grandiose role accorded to the Virgin Mary in our salvation leads him to see the sister of Aaron now leading not just the daughters of Israel, nor the army, but the entire Hebrew people to safety ! His thought then goes on, as often, to lose itself in other reminiscences of famous virgins, where the theme of public salvation is less apparent:

Multas feminas Scriptura divina in lucem evexit, palmam tamen publicae salutis solis virginibus dedit. In veteri Testamento terra ac mari clausum Hebraeorum populum virgo per maria pedes duxit : in Evangelio auctorem mundi et redemptorem virgo generavit. Virgo est Ecclesia, quam studuit Apostolus virginem castam assignare Christo : virgo est filia Sion ; virgo est civitas illa Hierusalem quae in coelo est, in quam nihil commune intrat atque immundum : virgo est illa quam vocat Jesus cui et dixit : « Ades huc a Libano, Sponsa, ades huc a Libano ; transibis et pertransibis a principio fidei. » ²

Two chapters later the mortification proper to a virgin is under discussion, when Ambrose reverts to the action of the Old Testament Mary in Ex. 15 : 20 for a detail never again commented in his works. Mary's tambourine, made of parched skin stripped of its flesh, is the symbol of the virgin's subdued body which she must take in hand:

Sumite ergo et vos, sicut sumpsit Maria soror Moysis et Aaron, tympanum in manibus vestris, exite dicentes : « Cantemus Domino ; gloriose enim honorificatus est, equum et ascensorem projecit in mare. » Mortificate membra vestra tympani modo : nulla in iis lascivia carnis exaestuet, omnisque flagrantiae corporalis sensus intereat ³

The comparison is not original with Ambrose; Gregory of Nyssa had developed it at length⁴, and Augustine would continue such an allegorical liberty characteristic of the Alexandrian school⁵. Within a few lines Ambrose has soared again to heights more sublime to contemplate the

¹ *Ibid.*, 13:81. PL 325a.

² *Exh. Virg.* 5:28. PL 16:344ab.

³ *Ibid.*, 7:47. PL 349d-350a.

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, 19. PG 46:395ac. Cf. *infra*, p. 57.

⁵ *Enarratio in Ps.* 150:6. PL 37:1964b. Cf. *infra*, p. 57, n. 2.

choir of virgins in heaven, a scene which ever since his first writing had entranced him:

... donec ad illos intelligibiles duodecim fontes, et septuaginta arbores palmarum, ad illam magni requiem sabbati divina vos dignatio perducatur et in montem haereditatis suae plantare dignetur, ubi sancta Maria choros ducit ¹.

Ambrose's last allusion to this famous parallel of the two Marys is a measured statement laden, as befits a writing of his old age, with diverse reminiscences of his life-long teaching on virginity. He is praising the mother of a consecrated virgin for the sacrifice which she makes of her daughter:

Ergo quia et secundum vetus testamentum Mariae sororis Aaron virginitatem, et secundum novum sanctae Mariae matris Domini integritatem in studio suae proles imitata est, remunerationem fidei divino iudicio consequetur; quae nihil sibi ad saeculi subsidium reservavit, sed totum Domino sobolis pia munus impendit ².

The nuance between the Old Testament Mary's *virginity* and the Virgin Mary's *integrity* appears at first sight to be just a rhetorical variation, but it probably reflects Ambrose's desire to reserve to the Mother of Jesus a specially miraculous sort of virginity, complete corporal integrity even in the birth of her Son. (The polemic against Jovinian on the virginity in partu still echoed through these last years ³.) There is Ambrose's solicitude to indicate to parents the gain recurring to them from the gift of a daughter to God ⁴. There is even the allusion to a reward in heaven reserved to them, more vividly depicted already in the *De Virgs* ⁵. Finally, for the first time the imitation of Mary's virginity in its highest reaches, a virginity of the spirit, is now extended even to the mother who shares in her daughter's holy resolve to give all to God by virginal consecration.

The comparison of the two virgins of the Old and New Testaments, therefore, is a favorite theme with Ambrose, since he reverts to it eight times to see Mary, the Mother of Jesus, typified in the narrative of Exodus. (Once, the first time, he sees the Church in this light.) To the texts in the above series where the image *choir of virgins* led by Mary

¹ *Exh. Virg.* 7:48. PL 16:350b.

² *Ibid.*, 14:93. PL 364a.

³ *Infra*, p. 173-177.

⁴ *Supra*, p. 45 f.

⁵ *Supra*, p. 43.

occurs, there might be added the *casto pudicitiae choro* of *De Virgs.*¹ and the “Jesu ... qui pergis inter lilia septus choreis virginum” of a hymn² attributed with good reason to Ambrose.

b) *Mary and the Choir of Virgins in Patristic Tradition*

Today the expression *choir* if encountered in a description of heaven usually suggests a *choir of angels*. Ambrose preferred to speak of a *choir of virgins*. He knew, however, quite a variety of choirs: *chorus sanctorum*³, *chorus sapientium*⁴, and moving into choirs of more abstract membership, *chorus virtutum*⁵, *chorus nequitiarum*⁶, *chorus errorum*⁷, *chorus aerumnarum*⁸, etc. Perhaps a part of the explanation for such a multiplication of choirs lies in the musical bent of the bishop's mind. Even more determining was the liberal use which *chorus* had enjoyed in both Latin and Greek, thanks to the ancient theatre with its chorus. (Somewhat as the expression *lineup* with the same sense reflects modern interest in sports.) But theatrical reminiscences cannot altogether account for the application of *chorus* to virgins, particularly among other Fathers who had often to combat the vicious influence of the theatre. (Were there nothing more sacred than the theatre about *chorus*, it would be as strange to hear the Fathers speak of a *chorus virginum* as to hear a modern spiritual writer refer to a *lineup of virgins*.) The word *chorus* was to enter the vocabulary of preachers on virginity thanks rather to

¹ *De Virgs.* 1:10:61. FALLER, p. 43:16. PL 16:205c.

² Hymn *Jesu corona virginum*, 11. 5 f. Its Ambrosian authenticity is recognized by A. S. WALPOLE, *Early Latin Hymns*. Cambridge 1922, p. 113, who prints it as the last of the collection which he restores to Ambrose. With regard to the long debated question of the number of hymns safely to be attributed to Ambrose, WEYMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 35 remarks that research thereon has progressed beyond the *four-hymn dogma* of long standing, so that, thanks mainly to the work of BIRAGHI, DREVES, and STEIER, a dozen or more hymns are to be recognized as Ambrosian in the strictest sense.

³ *De Fide* 5:13:167. PL 16:681c.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 2:53. CSEL 32:4 71:1. PL 15:1572a. Cp. *chorus philosophorum* in Cicero, *De Finibus* 1:8:26; *Pro Attica* 14:8:1; *chorus vatium* in Horace, *Carmina* 4:3:26; *chorus scriptorum* in Horace, *Ep.* 2:2:77; *chorus puellarum* in Horace, *Carmina* 2:5:21, etc.

⁵ *De Tobia* 1:2. CSEL 32:2 519:7. PL 14:760a. Cp. the same in Cicero, *De Officiis* 3:33:116; *Tusculanae Disputationes* 5:5:13, etc.

⁶ *De Cain* 1:4:14. CSEL 32:1 349:8. PL 14:322d.

⁷ Hymn *Aeterne rerum conditor*, 1. 11. WALPOLE, p. 31. No MS of the hymn has the corrected *cohors* of the Roman Breviary (*ibid.*, p. 32).

⁸ *De Nabutha* 5:22. CSEL 32:2 479:10. PL 14:737b.

the influence of Holy Scripture¹ and especially of the passage of Ex. 15:20 ff.

For Ambrose in particular, the immediate source was Athanasius' *Letter to Virgins* where the essential details of interpretation – Mary a virgin, the choir following her – were already explicit. The materials with which a contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) worked were not as developed, and it is enlightening to hear him shake them into order:

An occasion is given us to comment on this matter by the prophetess Mary who after they had walked through the sea took in hand the tambourine and directed the choir of women round about her. For perhaps in the narrative of this event under the symbol of the tambourine we are given to understand virginity, which was professed by that first Mary, in whose person I think Mary, the Mother of God, was prefigured. For as the tambourine, which is made of skin purged of all humidity and parched besides, emits vibrant sounds, so also virginity remains brilliantly resonant if it receives into itself nothing of the earthly dankness of this life. And if indeed the tambourine that Mary wielded was a dead body and virginity is the putting to death of the body, we are not going amiss here to take this for a sign that the prophetess was a virgin.

We have till now admitted by conjecture or opinion, not by conclusive demonstration, that Mary presided over the choir of virgins ; but many learned men have openly declared the truth of her being unmarried by the fact that nowhere is there to be found any mention of her having wedded or become a mother. Otherwise she would not have been identified by the name of her brother Aaron, but by that of her husband if she had had one, because the husband and not the brother is the head of the wife².

Evidently Gregory was more solicitous about establishing the Scriptural basis for the virginity of the sister of Aaron, which, after all, is more solidly established in the way that the *learned men* he alludes to has devised³. He does not exploit her leadership of the choir of virgins as prefiguring the same role to be played by the Virgin of virgins.

¹ Jer. 31:13: "Tunc lactabitur virgo in *choro*, juvenes et senes simul." Lam. 5:15: "Versus est in luctum *chorus* noster." Ex. 32:19: "Cumque appropinquasset ad castra, vidit vitulum et *choros*." Judges 9:27: "Et factis cantantium *choris*, ingressi sunt fanum dei sui"; 21:21 "Cumque videritis filias Silo ad ducendos *choros* ex more procedere"; 21:23: "de his quae ducebant *choros* ..."

² Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, 19. PG 46:395ac. Cp. Augustine, *Enar. in Ps.* 150:6. PL 37:1964b:

Tympanum laudat Deum, cum jam in carne mutata nulla est terrenae corruptionis infirmitatis. De corio quippe fit tympanum exsiccato atque firmato.

³ Josephus, *Antiquities* 3:2 makes her the spouse of the Hur spoken of in Ex. 24:14, but his opinion is singular.

A decidedly less enthusiastic view of the choir of virgins is taken by John Chrysostom (d. 407) who long had to inveigh against the abuses of dancing and the theatre in Constantinople¹. He is openly sceptical about such a choir:

Just as in war the whole army is not deployed in the same place, but some soldiers are posted on the flank, others in the center, others in the rearguard ... and others appear wherever the king appears and accompany him everywhere, so too the choir of virgins – *if indeed there be any choir of virgins* – has never received any other position than this last².

But another of Ambrose's contemporaries, Jerome, displays an enthusiasm that rivals that of the bishop himself in creating *choirs*. Probably *chorus* did not suggest to Latin ears spectacles as disedifying as *choros* to the Greeks. At any rate we hear Jerome speak of not only a *chorus beatorum*³ and *chorus sanctorum*⁴ but especially of the *chorus virginum* as in these texts:

Redde pretiosissimam gemmam cubiculo Mariae, et cunis Jesu vagientis impone. Nutriatur in monasterio, sit inter virginum chorus⁵
Egrederere quaeso paulisper de carcere, et praesentis laboris ante oculos tuos tibi pingere mercedem, quam nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit. Qualis erit illa dies cum tibi Maria Mater Domini choris occuret comitata virgineis!⁶

As is apparent, the image of a *chorus* and of the Mother of God as its leader has become so familiar to Jerome that to introduce it he hardly does more than allude to Ex. 15:20. Besides, in the second citation he is obviously copying Ambrose's *De Virgs.* which he had praised in

¹ *Homilia* 48 in *Mt.* PG 58:491a:

Where there is dancing there is the devil. God gave us feet, not to be used in a shameful manner, ... but so that we might be united one day to the choirs of angels (ἵνα σὺν ἀγγέλοις χορεύωμεν).

² *Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant*, 6. PG 47:427a.

³ *Chronicon*, anno 378. PL 25:698: "Aquileienses clerici quasi *choros* beatorum habentur."

⁴ *Apologia adv. Libros Rufini*, 3:22. PL 23:473a: "Inter sanctorum *choros* aspidēs latere perspexi" (referring in 401/2 to his visit to Egypt made in 386, with an ex post facto judgment of things in the light of the anti-Origenist bias which he had since acquired).

⁵ *Ep.* 107:13. CSEL 55 303:16-18. PL 22:877b.

⁶ *Ep.* 22:41. CSEL 54 209:4-8. PL 22:424d. Other models mentioned for the *choreis virgineis* are Mary, the sister of Aaron, and Thecla.

glowing terms in the same letter¹. Virgins and monks are associated in another text:

Flos quidem et pretiosissimus lapis inter ecclesiastica ornamenta monachorum et virginum chorus est².

The idea re-echoes the repeated praise of the *grex virginitatis* by Cyprian³ with whom *grex* did duty for *chorus*. And in addition to the choir of virgins a second, the *castitatis chorus* of married women and of widows, makes its appearance. Each group has its proper leaders: Sara, the wife of Abraham, and Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, occupy positions analogous to that of the Mother of God, leader of the chorus of virgins:

Tunc et alius castitatis chorus occurret : Sara cum nuptis veniet ; filia Phanuelis Anna cum viduis⁴.

The image of the virginal choir with Mary has become current after Ambrose and Jerome. Nicetas of Remesiana (d. after 414) alludes to it, at least according to some MSS of his *De Lapsu Virginis*:

Quid facies coram Maria, Thecla, et Agne et immaculato choro puritatis⁵.

A long inscription found at Vercelli, one verse of which repeats a favorite idea of Ambrose's works in terms almost identical to his⁶, likewise mentions the choir of virgins:

...castoque choro comitante Maria
laetatur gradiens germanis septa puellis⁷.

¹ *Ep.* 22:22. CSEL 54 175:3-6. PL 22:409b:

... et Ambrosii nostri quae nuper scripsit ad sororem opuscula. In quibus tanto se effudit eloquio, ut quidquid ad laudes virginum pertinet, exquiescit, expresserit, ordinavit.

² *Ep.* 46:10. CSEL 54 239:25 f. PL 22:489c.

³ Cyprian, *De habitu virginum*, 17. CSEL 3:1 200:6. PL 4:456b: "sanctus et purus grex virginitatis". *Ibid.*, 3. CSEL 189:11-15. PL 443ab:

Flos ecclesiastici germinis, decus atque ornamentum gratiae spiritalis, laeta insoles, laudis et honoris opus integrum atque incorruptum, Dei imago respondens ad sanctimoniam Domini, *illustrior portio* gregis Christi.

⁴ *Ep.* 22:41. CSEL 54 210:2 f. PL 22:425a.

⁵ Nicetas, *De lapsu virginis consecratae*, 3:10. BURN, p. 115, note. PL 16:369d. Cf. *supra*, p. 34, n. 1.

⁶ Line 24 of the inscription reads as follows: "adventum sponsi nunc praestolantur ovantes (sc. virgines)". There is more than simply casual resemblance to the fourth of Ambrose's *tituli* (MERKLE, p. 218), the first line of which is "praestolantur ovans sponsam de gentibus Isaac". WEYMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 38, points out the similarity without drawing any conclusion therefrom.

⁷ These are lines 18-19 of the inscription of Vercelli, reproduced in Ernst DIEHL,

In a seventh-century letter on the subject of the pilgrimage which the well-known Aetheria had made to Jerusalem in a previous century the familiar figure again recurs:

... hic se exercuit ultronea libertate peregrinam ut in choro sanctarum virginum cum gloriosa caeli regina, Domini genitrice Maria, aetherea hereditaret regna ¹.

Though the massive work of Augustine has not been tapped, the above witnesses serve to illustrate how deeply rooted the image of Mary, leader of the virginal choir, had become in Western ecclesiastical literature, thanks to Ambrose's affection for it.

c) *Scriptural Origin of the «Chorus Virginum»*

But the term *chorus virginum* which Ambrose was among the first to popularize probably arose through a loss of the original meaning of a crucial word in the narrative of the passage of the Red Sea. And this is the strangest part of the history of this beautiful addition to ascetical terminology. As has been shown, the text of Ex. 15:20 f. is the Scriptural source of the image of a virgin, Mary, leading other women to whom the name *chorus* is given. It is only in adopting the name *chorus* that Christian tradition was led astray from what seems to have been the original meaning of an obscure term used in the Hebrew. The name *chorus* occurs in both the Greek and Latin versions of the original Hebrew; as for most of the Old Testament, Ambrose probably used the Septuagint for this passage:

Λαβοῦσα δὲ Μαριάμ ἡ προφῆτις, ἡ ἀδελφὴ Ἀαρὼν τὸ τύμπανον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐξήλθοσαν πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες ὀπίσω αὐτῆς μετὰ τυμπανῶν καὶ χορῶν.

Inscriptiones latinae christianae veteres, I. Berlin 1925, No. 1714, and in WILPERT, *Jungfrauen*, p. 79. Contrary to what WEYMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 39 observes in passing, the *Maria* is not the Blessed Virgin but the mother of the seven consecrated virgins; the heavenly chorus of virgins presided over by the Virgin Mary is, of course, presupposed by the allusion made in these two lines.

¹ Valerius abbas Bergidensis (d. 695), *Epistola de beatissimae Aetheriae laude*, in Z. GARCIA VILLADA, *La Lettre de Valerius aux Moines de Vierzo sur la Bienheureuse Aetheria*, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 29 (1910), p. 398:13-16. In the 6th century St. Leander, Bishop of Sevilla (died c. 600) will add a new title: *Mater et dux virginum* (De institutione virginum. PL 72:878 D – cf. A. C. VEGA, El “De institutione virginum de San Leandro de Sevilla”. Escorial 1948, p. 95) which leads to Mary's maternity in our regard.

The Vulgate, representative of Latin versions, renders the Greek faithfully:

Sumpsit ergo Maria prophetissa, soror Aaron, tympanum in manu sua :
egressaeque sunt omnes mulieres post eam cum tympanis et choris.

The last word of either version – χορῶν, *choris* – is beyond any doubt the source of the term *chorus* as applied to the virgins over whom the Virgin Mother of God is said to preside, as did the sister of Aaron. But it has probably not escaped the reader's notice that, whether in Greek or in Latin, the *chorus* is so closely parallel to *tympanum* that one would expect it to be of the same nature as *tympanum*; instead translators have consistently rendered the phrase in terms like *with tambourines and in chorus*¹. Tradition has always understood the crucial word thus as either a chorus or a dance². But how much more natural to expect it to have been – at least in the original Hebrew – some sort of musical instrument as is the *tympanum* which it accompanies.

At first sight the Hebrew word *mahol* (מַחֹל) which is translated χορός or *chorus* seems to offer no solution, because most dictionaries attach to it the following meanings: dance, dance in a round, band of dancers or singers. But in Ps. 150:4, where the word is enumerated in the midst of a series of eight musical instruments³, again it would

¹ In English cf. the Douay-Rheims: "with timbrels and with dances"; Knox: "with tambour and with dances". – In French cf. Bible de Jérusalem "avec des tambourins, formant des chœurs de danses"; Moines de Maredsous: "en dansant avec des tambourins". – In German cf. Riebler: "mit Pauken und Reigentänzen"; Allioli: "mit Pauken und mit Reigen".

² Augustin CALMET, *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament*, I, 1^{re} partie, in 4^o. Paris 1724, p. 461. On Ex. 15:20 he writes:

Chorus (Heb. mecholah) signifie quelquefois des danses, et quelquefois un chœur de chantres, ou même un instrument de musique, que les uns prennent pour un sistre, et les autres pour une musette; au moins c'est l'idée qu'en donne cette description de Strabus: "Pellis simplex, cum duabus cicutis, per alteram quarum inspiratur, et per alteram sonus redditur." Mais la plupart de nos commentateurs croient que le terme hébreu en cet endroit signifie un chœur de chanteuses et de danseuses, à la tête desquelles étoit Marie, qui chantoit un verset du cantique composé par Moïse, lequel étoit ensuite répété comme par une espèce de refrain, par toutes celles qui l'accompagnoient

Another meaning of *mahol* in addition to *dance* is alluded to by W. B. STEVENSON, *Mahol*, A Dictionary of the Bible (ed. James HASTINGS). Edinburgh 1900, II, p. 214: "St. Jerome's rendering *chorus* should be interpreted in this way (sc., as a dance) and not in its *musical interpretation*." Italics added.

³ Ps. 150:3-5:

Laudate eum in sono tubae, | laudate eum in psalterio et cithara ;
Laudate eum in *tympano et choro*, | laudate eum in chordis et organo ;
Laudate eum in cymbalis bene sonantibus, | laudate eum in cymbalis jubilationis.

seem to be an instrument of some sort. Some commentators, in fact, have observed this and have in consequence translated the word, at least in Ps. 150:4, as a sort of flute¹. The majority, of course, have not bothered about a detail of this sort, especially since practically nothing is known of the musical instruments of the Hebrews. In Ps. 150:4 the precise meaning of the word is of little consequence. But anyone who reflects at length on the occurrence of the word there will agree that the context and the parallelism of the sentences, whether in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin, demand that the word *mahol* – χορός – *chorus* be understood of some instrument, and, as the commentators suggest, probably a flute.

The same context exists, admittedly in a less imposing degree, in Ex. 15:20. For there too the enigmatic word is accompanied by *tympanum* as in Ps. 150:4. One will admit that the mere presence of *tympanum* is sufficient to make *chorus* some sort of a wind instrument if he recalls how natural it is to find two such instruments together. Other places in Scripture associate them thus². And even today the fife and drum corps or some variation thereof is almost a cosmopolitan institution. Nowhere are such instruments more fitting than in a march or processional dance such as must have been executed in the circumstances described in Ex. 15:20 f.

¹ E. PANNIER (éd. nouvelle H. RENARD), *Les Psaumes*; Louis PIROT – Albert CLAMER, *La Sainte Bible*, t. 5. Paris 1950, p. 749:

... *chorus* indiquant ici non pas les évolutions liturgiques, mais l'instrument qui en marquait le rythme et le mouvement; on l'assimile souvent au halil (חֲלִיל) "à la flûte".

His translation of Ps. 150:4: "Louez-le avec le tambourin et la flûte (des chœurs)" But on the contrary, the Bible de Jérusalem: "Louez-le avec tambour et danse". In addition to PANNIER's remark that the instrument which marked the rhythm and movement of the dance also took on the name of the dance itself, it should be observed that the Hebrew roots for the two nouns בְּחֹל (dance) and חֲלִיל (flute) are quite similar: בְּחֹל from חוּל, to turn in a circle, to dance; חֲלִיל from חָלַל, to be pierced, perforated.

² Cp., for example, Judges 11:34: "Occurrit ei (Jephte) unigenita filia sua cum *tympanis et choris*."

For a good example where *chorus* has the meaning of *dance*, and where *tympanum* is again accompanied by a word meaning *flute*, cf. Judith 3:10: "ducentes *choros in tympanis et tibiis*".

When *chorus* is not exactly parallel with *tympanum* it does not necessarily suggest any idea of musical instrument. Cf. Ps. 149:3: "Laudent nomen ejus in *choro*, in *tympano* et *psalterio* psallant ei." Jer. 31:4: "Rursumque aedificabo te et aedificaberis, virgo Israel; adhuc ornaberis *tympanis* tuis, et egrederis in *choro* ludantium."

It can safely be admitted, therefore, that *chorus* and χορός in Ex.15:20 should be translated not *choir* but *flute* (or some similar instrument). The strange thing is that translators have not recognized that, even without knowledge of Hebrew musical instruments, they would be authorized to read this meaning into the word. It is a rare meaning, to be expected only when the context demands it; but such a meaning exists in both Greek and Latin.

The Greek *chorós* is defined thus: 1. properly: a dance in a ring, a circling dance; generally: a festive or choral dance. 2. A chorus, choir, i. e., a band of dancers and singers. 3. A troop, band, company of persons; also of things, as χορός καλάμων or χορός δονάκων a row of reeds, i. e., Pan's pipe ¹.

Chorus in Latin has exactly the same meanings. One scholar observes that the *symphonia*, which by many is considered to have been something like a bagpipe,

may have developed from the double flute, one of the pipes being shorter and being used for the melody, while the other furnished a droning bass accompaniment In Rome this instrument was introduced in the time of the Empire under the name of *tibia utricularis* or *chorus* and soon became highly popular ².

Oddly enough, the French *chœur* has preserved the same overlooked meaning, though rarely used in this sense:

CHŒUR : instrument grec attribué à Philamne, et composé d'un double disque de peau et de deux baguettes en fer creux, dont l'une condensait l'air intérieurement, et la seconde produisait le son extérieurement ³.

There is no question, naturally, of regretting the *choir of virgins* which tradition created out of the narrative of Ex. 15:20 f. Obviously a choir of women was on the scene, but that it was called *chorós* or *chorus* was due to the happy hazard of a nearby word which in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin had a double meaning (choral dance – instrument) and which came to be accepted in its commoner meaning, despite the demands of the context here for the rarer meaning. Other examples of the quaint Scriptural origin of many Christian customs and institutions abound.

¹ The word was so used by Coluthus (5th century A. D.). Cf. Henry LIDDELL-Robert SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 8th ed. New York, n. d., p. 1735.

² James MILLAR, *Music*, A Dictionary of the Bible (ed. James HASTINGS). Edinburgh 1900, III, p. 462.

³ *Larousse du XX^e siècle* (Direction : Paul AUGÉ). Paris 1929, II, p. 235.

Be it remarked in concluding that the scene in the fifteenth chapter of Exodus was especially dear to Christian antiquity and that all branches of Christian art drew on it. It is, however, nowhere portrayed in the catacombs¹. One of its earliest applications was to represent the passage of the soul safely into eternity; it is found in the fourth century as the only ornamentation occupying the entire face of Christian sarcophages². In line with St. Paul's indication – "Omnes in Moyse baptizati sunt in nube et in mari" (1 Cor. 10:3) – it became a symbol of Christian baptism³. In sculpture and painting Mary, the sister of Aaron, is always shown with the tambourine in hand, usually at the head of the entire Hebrew people⁴. Christian letters too prized this page of Exodus, for in the song of Moses was recorded the first of the classic canticles of the Bible, the first poem, in fact, to be found in Holy Writ. With meditation on the scene and a bit of liberal interpretation fourth century Fathers came to see the origin therein of the currently introduced manner of chanting the psalms in two choirs: Moses at the head of the men began his canticle, later to be taken up by Mary and the women⁵. Thus Christian music too considered Ex. 15:20 f. a valuable text. Finally, as has been seen, fourth-century ascetical terminology, little concerned with musical instruments, came away from the passage of the Red Sea richer by this beautiful concept of Mary and by the expression *chorus virginum*, having thus, as it were, fished from the waters the prize catch of all.

4. Mary, Consummate Model of all Virtues

Once the Virgin Mary has been placed at the head of the choir of virgins in heaven, there is little to be desired to illustrate better her

¹ Henri LECLERCQ *Mer Rouge (Passage de la)*, Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie (éd. Ferdinand CABROL), XI. Paris 1933, col. 479.

² *Ibid.*, 480. Cf. the sketches of sarcophages, col. 481 (No. 800d) and V, col. 2485 (No. 4722). In both Mary is at the head of the people.

³ Franz-Joseph DOELGER, *Der Durchzug durch das rote Meer als Sinnbild der christlichen Taufe*, AC, 2 (1930), p. 63-69; *Der Durchzug durch den Jordan als Sinnbild der christlichen Taufe*, AC, 2 (1930), p. 70-79.

⁴ Henri LECLERCQ, *Marie, sœur de Moïse*, Dictionnaire d'Archéologie... X, col. 1982.

⁵ Nicetas, *De Psalmodiae Bono*, 3. BURN, p. 70:3-71:5:

Si autem quaeramus quis hominum primus hoc genus cantionis inuenerit, non inuenimus alium nisi Moysen qui canticum Deo insigne cantauit quando percussa Aegypto decem plagis et Pharaone demerso, populus per insueta maris itinera ad desertum gratulabundus egressus est dicens: Cantemus Domino, gloriose enim honorificatus est Primus igitur Moyses dux tribuum Israhelis choro instituit, utrorumque sexum distinctis classibus se ac sorore praeunte, Deo canticum triumphale perdociuit.

role as model and patroness of the virginal life. It remains but to descend to the details of her daily existence and to single out therein the practice of every virtue proper to a virgin. Ambrose has already been heard doing that in the *De Virgs.*, and in this regard again it must be said that nowhere later did he pen any deeper appreciation of the many virtues that adorned the Virgin Mother of God. She is already painted as the sum of them all: "Quantae in una virgine species virtutum emicant!"¹ Every action of hers is a lesson learned from virtue as from a teacher, for she has the various virtues as her masters: "quae virtutes magistras habet"². Attentive to all of them, she learns from them all and practices them all so as to become in turn a teacher of virtue:

Sic Maria intendebat omnibus, quasi a pluribus moneretur, sic omnia implebat virtutis officia, ut non tam discerat quam doceret³.

The first paragraphs (6-9) of the *life of Mary* in the *De Virgs.* are an exposition of all her diverse virtues, leading up to the scene of the Annunciation (10-11), where the list of them is continued with the details of Scripture. The virtues which she displays at the Annunciation have already been commented on. As to the others, a mere list with references will have to suffice, so numerous are the texts in Ambrose's works. Mary is praised for her humility⁴, her silence or moderation in speech⁵, her retirement⁶, her virginal solicitude to keep an unsullied reputation⁷, her modesty⁸, her assiduity in reading the Scrip-

¹ *De Virgs.* 2:2:15. FALLER, p. 50:17 f. PL 16:210d. *Supra*, p. 42.

² *Ibid.*, 2:2:9. FALLER, p. 49:6. PL 209d. *Supra*, p. 41.

³ *Ibid.*, 2:2:9. FALLER, p. 49:7 f. PL 209d. *Supra*, p. 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:2:7. FALLER, p. 47:13. PL 210a. *Exp. Luc.* 2:16. CSEL 32:4 50:21-28. PL 15:1558d-1559a. *Ibid.*, 2:22. CSEL 53:4-10. PL 1560b. Origen had stressed Mary's humility: *Hom. 7 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 44:22ff. PG 13:1817ad.

⁵ *De Virgs.* 2:2:7 and passim. FALLER, p. 47:14 f. PL 16:209a. *Ibid.*, 3:3:11. FALLER, p. 68:6-10. PL 223a. *De Off.* 1:50:257. PL 16:102a. *Exp. Luc.* 2:54. CSEL 32:4 71:8-16. PL 15:1572ab. *Exp. Ps.* 118:2:6. CSEL 62 23:3 f. PL 15:1211ab. *Ibid.*, 2:28. CSEL 37:4 f. PL 1220b. *Ibid.*, 4:17. CSEL 76:12 f. PL 1246d-1247a. The text of Luke 2:19 or 51 (*conservabat omnia verba haec in corde suo*) is usually cited. On exhortations to silence in church, cf. Franz Joseph DOELGER, *Das heilige Schweigen und andere Rücksicht auf den heiligen Raum der Kirche*, AC, 5 (1936), p. 47-51.

⁶ *De Virgs.* 2:2:9 and passim. FALLER, p. 48:19 f. PL 16:209c. *Exp. Luc.* 2:21. CSEL 32:4 52:23-53:3. PL 15:1560b. *Ep.* 5:16. PL 16:896b.

⁷ *De Virgs.* 2:2:9. FALLER, p. 49:2-5. PL 16:209cd. *Exp. Luc.* 2:1. CSEL 32:4 41:7-11. PL 15:1553a. *Cp. De Vid.* 4:26. PL 16:242c.

⁸ Usually under the name of *pudor* or *verecundia*. The occurrences of the former are too numerous to mention. Cf. *supra*, p. 46, n. 1. For more general allusions to Mary's modesty, cf. *De Virgs.* 2:2:7. FALLER 48:6 f. PL 16:209b. *Ibid.*, 2:2:15. FALLER 50:25-51:1. PL 210d.

tures¹, her respect for others², her industry³, and in a special way for two virtues which Ambrose likes to name together⁴, *fides*⁵ and *devotio*⁶. So consummate a model of virtue is she that Ambrose rightly imagined an objection coming from some virgin who would read his portrait of Mary:

Dicet aliquis: «Cur exemplum attulisti Mariae, quasi repperiri queat matrem domini quae possit imitari?»⁷

In the enigmatic fresco of the catacomb of St. Priscilla⁸ not a small part of the mystery lies in the bishop's outstretched hand and in the mother and child to whom he seems to be pointing. This prelate, who may be the first witness to the idea of Mary, model of virgins, has been condemned to eternal silence, except for a debatable gesture. But another bishop in the fourth century supplies on almost every page he ever wrote about Mary the words that fit the outstretched hand:

Haec est imago virginitatis. Talis enim fuit Maria, ut ejus unius vita omnium disciplina sit⁹.

¹ *Ibid.*, 2:2:7. FALLER 48:2. PL 209b. *Exp. Luc.* 2:20, 22. CSEL 52:16-23, 53:6-10. PL 1560ac.

² *De Virgs.* 2:2:7. FALLER 47:14. PL 209a. *Ep.* 41:18. PL 16:1118a. *Exp. Ps.* 118:13:3. CSEL 62 283:11 ff. PL 15:1380b. *Exp. Luc.* 2:18. CSEL 32:4 51:26-52:2. PL 15:1559c.

³ *De Virgs.* 2:2:7. FALLER 57:15. PL 16:209a. *Exp. Luc.* 2:20. CSEL 52:16-23. PL 1560ab.

⁴ Otto FALLER, *Ambrosius, der Verfasser von 'De Sacramentis'*, ZKT, 64 (1940), p. 9, n. 40. He cites the following uses in the works edited in CSEL 31:1, p. 115:14, 393:23, 656:10, 679:4; 32:2, p. 19:8, 101:20, 241:6, 289:2, 512:8; 62, p. 93:4, 151:11, 295:21, 399:18, 404:17, 406:24, 491:11; 64, p. 110:4, 111:5, 342:9 359:11, etc. WALPOLE, *op. cit.*, p. 96, adds *Exam.* 4:7, 1:21, 5:31, etc.

⁵ *De Virgs.* 2:2:15. FALLER 51:1. PL 16:210d. *Exp. Luc.* 2:14-19. CSEL 32:4 49:14-52:16. PL 15:1558a-1560c. *Ibid.*, 2:26. CSEL 55:6-9. PL 1561d. Cf. also the other passages on Mary's question at the Annunciation, *supra*, p. 50, n. 2; *infra*, p. 171.

⁶ *De Virgs.*, *loc. cit.* *De Vid.* 4:24. PL 16:241d.

⁷ *De Virgs.* 2:3:21. FALLER 52:22-53:1. PL 16:212b.

⁸ *Supra*, p. 5-6.

⁹ *De Virgs.* 2:2:15. FALLER 50:22-24. PL 16:210d. *Supra*, p. 42.

At the close of this chapter mention must be made of the encyclical of His Holiness Pope Pius XII, *De Sacra Virginitate*. AAS 46 (1954) 161 s. After repeated citations from Ambrose's works the Pope dwells (p. 188) on Mary's role as patroness of the virginal life, calling her by the title *virginitatis magistra* which Ambrose coined. Even more gratifying is the Holy Father's explicit recognition of Ambrose's dependence on Athanasius' Coptic treatise (for which LEFORT's article is cited) in the sublime pages of the *De Virginitate*. Be it remarked in passing that Athanasius is the earliest source which the Pontiff chose to single out for the idea of Mary as model of virgins.

CHAPTER TWO

The Doctrine of Mary's Virginité Ante Partum

It would be futile to try to comment the innumerable passages in which Ambrose asserts or assumes the truth that Mary, a virgin at the time of the Incarnation of the Word, conceived him virginally of the Holy Spirit. The study, moreover, would yield little specifically proper to Ambrose, since his doctrine on Mary's virginité ante partum presents little originality. The dogma had been the first Marian privilege to be discussed by Christian writers, and it had become so well established by the fourth century that even most Christological heretics admitted it. The purpose, therefore, of this chapter will be to give a synthesis of Ambrose's teaching on Mary's virginité ante partum, usually with references to his works rather than direct citation. The passages alluded to will not include those in which Mary's virginité is set up as a model to be reproduced by Christian virgins, but only those in which it is viewed as a truth to be believed and viewed in relation to other truths of the Christian deposit of faith.

A. Mary's Virginité Ante Partum: A Self-evident Truth for Ambrose

The first fact to be observed in reading Ambrose's works is that he assumes Mary's virginité ante partum to be so evident that he will hardly ever take occasion to elaborate it. In this respect his position was already that which a bishop of the present day takes toward the dogma. The faithful of the fourth century needed as little as the modern Church to be taught that Mary conceived Christ virginally. This is borne out primarily in the name *Virgin* by which Ambrose prefers to designate Mary. Employing it without any qualification, he understands it of her in the sense in which today one speaks simply of *the Virgin*. He calls

her *Virgo* more than one and a half times as often as *Maria*, and this tabulation does not take into account the uses of *Virgo* in the variations of the formula *Natus ex virgine* which recur on page after page of his work¹. The presence of the proper name *Maria*, moreover, is often explained by the demands of variety, *Virgo* having already been used frequently in the context. Again, when Ambrose speaks of her with her spouse he naturally falls on the phrase *Joseph et Maria* (always in that order), instead of using *Virgo*. Finally, in allusions to the Annunciation scene, he prefers the name *Maria*, probably because St. Luke himself introduces it there for the first time. Apart from these circumstances *Virgo* is Ambrose's favorite name for the Mother of Jesus.

Furthermore, although he sometimes qualifies the name *Maria* – *beata Maria* twice² and *sancta Maria* some 16 times – he prefers to use *Virgo* without any adjective. *Beata Virgo* never occurs of Mary, though the expression is found describing consecrated virgins³, and *sancta Virgo*, also applied to other virgins, is used of Mary only three times⁴. The combinations *Maria Virgo* and *Virgo Maria* occur with about equal frequency, neither of them more than a dozen times. These observations, at first sight of only linguistic interest, actually witness to Ambrose's conviction that the name *Virgo*, without qualification, adequately described the one who was the type of all virgins, and for that reason the unadorned name became Ambrose's preferred way of identifying her.

The same conviction appears in the names which Ambrose gives to Mary's son. Whereas the Scriptures usually call him *filius Mariae* in referring to his Mother, Ambrose uses rather *partus Virginis* (some 25 times, where *partus* has the sense of *son* instead of *birth*) or *filius Virginis* (four times)⁵. *Filius ex Virgine* and *fructus Virginis* occur only once⁶. Again, the very marked preference for *Virgo* rather than *Maria* is obvious.

Finally, the womb in which Christ was conceived is called *uterus virginalis* at least ten times.

¹ *Infra*, p. 79-81. ² *Ep.* 42:6. PL 16:1126a. *Apol. alt.* 8:43. PL 14:905a.

³ E. g., *De Virgs.* 1:6:30. FALLER, p. 31:1. PL 16:197b. *Ibid.*, 2:2:18. FALLER, p. 52:2. PL 211b, etc.

⁴ Other virgins: *De Virgs.* 2:4:27, 6:39. FALLER, p. 54:27, 60:24. PL 16:214a, 218a. Mary: *De Spiritu* 3:17:126. PL 16:806c. *Exp. Luc.* 2:54. CSEL 32:4 71:9. PL 15:1572a. *De Patr.* 11:51. CSEL 32:2 152:18. PL 14:689b.

⁵ *De Fide* 5:17:221. PL 16:694c. *De Incarn.* 2:6. PL 16:820a. *Exp. Luc.* 1:6. CSEL 32:4 14:7. PL 15:1536a. *In Ps.* 37:10. CSEL 62:4 144:12. PL 14:1014b.

⁶ *De Fide* 1:1:6. PL 16:530b. *De Spiritu* 1:3:54. PL 16:717b.

The survey of Ambrose's terminology leaves no doubt, therefore, as to his doctrine on Mary's virginity ante partum. It must be remarked, moreover, that such a marked use of *Virgo* attests as well to his conviction that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. Sometimes in earlier Fathers, especially among the Greeks when the word is used without the article, *Virgo* does not explicitly suggest Mary's preeminence nor does it witness to an explicit belief in her perpetual virginity. With Ambrose, however, there is no such ambiguity even in a language lacking the definite article, *Virgo* used as it is in his works necessarily (though not in every single text considered apart) connotes virginity preserved throughout life to a unique degree.

B. Ambrose's Teaching on Mary's Virginity Ante Partum

1. Scriptural Sources of the Doctrine

What Scriptural sources of this belief in Mary's virginity ante partum does Ambrose comment most frequently? Naturally the Annunciation in the first place. The outstanding passages have been investigated in the previous chapter¹, since whenever Ambrose speaks of the Annunciation his interest in Mary the virgin is rather moral than dogmatic.

It has not often been remarked that Ambrose adduces the text of Jn. 1:13 as another Scriptural witness to Mary's virginity in Christ's generation. This verse of the prologue of St. John's Gospel reads in the Vulgate: "qui non ex sanguinibus neque ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri sed ex Deo nati sunt", but more and more exegetes of late are rallying to *natus est* (and the corresponding ἐγενήθη) as a reading attested by Fathers of the greatest antiquity². The text which is thus linked to "nomine ejus (sc. Christi)" in the preceding verse becomes a testimony to the virginal generation of Mary's Son, who was born not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

¹ *Supra*, p. 48-50.

² Cf. François-Marie BRAUN, *La Mère des Fidèles*. Paris 1953, p. 33-38, and *Qui ex Deo natus est* (Jean 1:13), *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne*. Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel. Paris 1950, p. 11-13. M. E. BOISMARD, *Critique textuelle et citations patristiques*, *Revue Biblique*, 57 (1950), p. 401-408. On p. 37, n. 22 of the work cited in first place BRAUN lists BLASS, LOISY, RESCH, ZAHN, BURNEY, BUECHSEL, and BOISMARD among the principal exponents of *natus est*, with A. CHARUE and O. CULLMAN being favorable to it.

Irenaeus¹ is the earliest certain witness for this reading; Justin² and even Ignatius of Antioch³ may already have known it, and its occurrence in the *Epistola Apostolorum*⁴, which apparently originated in Asia Minor but perhaps also in Egypt, may antedate Irenaeus, since some scholars place the *Epistola* as early as 147/8 AD⁵. Tertullian⁶ knows it, thanks no doubt to Irenaeus. Ambrose's citations of the Gospel according to St. John have been studied recently⁷ and a double form of John 1:13 noted⁸, but a third loose citation of this verse escaped notice:

Nec in iniquitatibus conceptus et natus est in delictis, qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed de Spiritu sancto natus ac virgine est⁹.

Here clearly the *natus est* reading is followed and the verse taken as testimony to Mary's virginity throughout Christ's generation. In that light, the allusion to Jn. 1:13 in the line *non ex virili semine* of the hymn *Intende qui regis Israel*, followed two lines later by an adaptation of Jn. 1:14, *Verbum Dei factum caro*, again suggests that Ambrose had the reading *natus est* in mind:

*Non ex virili semine,
sed mystico spiramine,
Verbum Dei factum caro
Fructusque ventris floruit*¹⁰.

By his recourse to this testimony in St. John's prologue for Mary's virginity Ambrose thus shows himself in contact with the earliest current of patristic teaching on that truth.

Ambrose himself once grouped what he considered the principal Scriptural assertions of Mary's virginity in the generation of her Son. The text occurs in the *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, where he is

¹ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3:17:1, 20:2, 26:1; 5:1:3. HARVEY 2, p. 83, 103, 117, 317.

² Justin, *Dial.* 63:2. OTTO, p. 222. *Apol.* 1:22. OTTO, p. 68.

³ Ignatius, *Ad Eph.* 7:2. FUNK, p. 191:2-5.

⁴ *Epistola Apostolorum*, 3. SCHMIDT, p. 28:10. DÜNSING, p. 6.

⁵ Hugo KOCH, *Virgo Eva – Virgo Maria*. Berlin 1937, p. 65 f.

⁶ *De carne Christi*, 19 and 24. CSEL 70 236:1-238:40; 248:10-12. PL 2:784a-785b, 791a.

⁷ Tindaro CARAGLIANO, *Restitutio critica textus latini Evangelii secundum Johannem ex scriptis S. Ambrosii*. Biblica, 27 (1946), p. 30-64, 210-240.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33. The double form is a) *Qui non ex sanguinibus...* in *De Spir.* 2:7:62. PL 16:756a; *De Noe* 4:9. CSEL 32:1 419:6-8. PL 14:366b. b) *Qui non ex sanguine...* in *In Ps.* 61:31. CSEL 64 396:4-6. PL 14:1179bc.

⁹ *In Ps.* 37:5. CSEL 64 140:7-9. PL 14:1011c.

¹⁰ Hymn *Intende qui regis Israel* 11. 9-12. WALPOLE, p. 53.

commenting the “Missus est angelus Gabriel ... ad *virginem desponsatam* viro” of Luc. 1:26. Having completed his exposition of the *desponsatam*, he turns to the *virginem* and introduces a concise set of Scriptural texts in which seven personages, three of them mentioned twice, testify to Mary’s virginity at the time of the Annunciation. These seven witnesses are Matthew (Mt. 1:20), Luke (Luc. 1:26 – *virginem desponsatam*), Mary (Luc. 1:34), Luke again (Luc. 1:26 – *nomen Virginis Maria*), Isaias (Is. 7:14), Joseph (Mt. 1:19), the dying Savior (Jn. 19:26), and in the group around him on Calvary, John the Apostle (Jn. 19:27), Mary, and Joseph. The text is as follows:

Bene autem sibi diviserunt Evangelistae, ut sanctus Matthaeus Joseph ab angelo moneri induceret ne dimitteret Mariam : Lucas illic Evangelista testimonium ferret quod non convenissent, hic ipse Maria fateatur cum dicit angelo : « Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognovi ? » Sed et ipse sanctus Lucas virginem declaravit dicens : « Et nomen Virginis Maria. » Et propheta edocuit, qui ait : « Ecce virgo in utero accipiet. » Et Joseph designavit, qui quoniam praegnantem videbat quam non cognoverat dimittere gestiebat, et Dominus ipse in cruce positus manifestabit, cum dixit matri : « Mulier, ecce filius tuus, deinde discipulo dicit : Ecce mater tua. » Etiam uterque testatus est, discipulus et Mater, quia « Ex illa hora suscepit eam discipulus in sua ». Utique si convenisset, nunquam virum proprium reliquisset, nec vir eam justus a se discedere passus esset ¹.

The array of witnesses is an imposing one. Among the texts those from Luc. 1:26, Mt. 1:19 f. and Jn. 19:26 f. will be commented on later when other works of Ambrose are studied ².

But the well known prophecy from Is. 7:14 – “A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and His name shall be called Emmanuel” – merits at least passing mention here. Ambrose cites it or alludes to it for Mary’s virginity at least 15 times ³, one of them explicitly for her virginity *in partu* ⁴. His use of the text, however, offers no original advance over the interpretation which it had received from preceding Fathers. He

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:4. CSEL 32:4. 43:9-23. PL 15:1554b.

² On Luc. 1:26 cf. *infra*, p. 97 f.; on Mt. 1:19 f. cf. *infra*, p. 95 f., 270 f.; on Jn. 19:26 f. cf. *infra*, p. 189-204.

³ The most notable are the following: *De Cain* 1:3:10. CSEL 32:1 345:7-20. PL 14:320c. *Exp. Ps.* 118:19:17. CSEL 62 430:10. PL 15:1474a. *Exp. Luc.* 2:15. CSEL 32:4 50:13. PL 15:1558c. *Ibid.*, 2:18. CSEL 52:1-2. PL 1559c. *De Inst. Virg.* 5:33. PL 16:313b. *Ep.* 42:5. PL 16:1125b. *Apol. Alt.* 5:30. PL 14:898c.

⁴ *Ep.* 42:5. PL 16:1125b. Cf. *infra*, p. 171.

had little concern about the classical difficulty raised by the Jews over this text when they gave to the term *‘almah* עַלְמָה the sense *woman* instead of *virgin*¹. Only once does he allude to it:

Et utique divini adventus signum in virginis partu, non in mulieris constitutum est².

So insensible is he to their susceptibilities on this text that once he even cites it in an imaginary dialogue with the Jews to prove that God took on flesh and dwelt among us³.

Closely associated with Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's virginal generation is another prophecy from the same writer, cited by Ambrose about half as often:⁴ "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a flower shall rise up out of his root" (Is. 11:1). Mary is here called the rod of Jesse, *virga Jesse*, and Christ is the flower⁵. The genealogy of the Savior and His virgin Mother is thus within the family of David in the tribe of Juda. Alongside this genealogy in Juda as prophesied in Is. 11:1, however, Ambrose also held that the Savior stemmed from the tribe of Levi:

Et maxime propter tribum Levi debemus hoc credere,
Quia ex ea tribu Dominus Jesus videbatur secundum
corporis susceptionem genus ducere⁶.

This curious anomaly is explained by Ambrose's dependence on Hippolyte's work *On the Benedictions of Jacob*⁷, where the tardy Jewish

¹ Justin, *Dial.*, 84. GOODSPEED, p. 196. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3:20:1-3. HARVEY 2, p. 102-105. Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 9. CSEL 70 289:55-60. PL 2:618bc.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:78. CSEL 32:4 84:15 f. PL 15:1581b.

³ *Apol. Alt.* 5:30. PL 14:898c. Cp. *Emmanuel, quod est interpretatum nobiscum Deus* (Is. 7:14).

⁴ *De Spir.* 2:5:38. PL 16:751a. *Exp. Luc.* 2:24. CSEL 32:4 54:14 f. PL 15:1561b. *De Patr.* 4:19. PL 14:680a. *Apol. Alt.* 8:43. PL 14:905a. *Exh. Virg.* 5:31. PL 16:345b.

⁵ The phrase "Radix familiae Judaeorum est, virga Maria, flos Mariae Christus" occurs verbatim in each of the first four passages cited in the preceding note. Cf. the same in Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 21. CSEL 70 243:31 f. PL 2:788 AB.

⁶ *De Patr.* 3:14. CSEL 32:2 132:10. PL 14:678b. Cf. also *ibid.*, 3:16. CSEL 133:1. PL 678d and Hippolyte, *The Blessings of Jacob*, BONWETSCH, p. 26:15-27:15.

⁷ The work first appeared in a German translation of the Georgian version: G. Nathanael BONWETSCH, *Drei georgisch erhaltene Schriften von Hippolyts: Der Segen Jakobs, Der Segen Moses, Die Erzählung von David und Goliath*, TU, 26:1 (1904). (*The Blessings of Jacob* occupies p. 1-46.) The Georgian version, in turn, stems from an original Greek through an Armenian translation. The Greek edition was prepared by Constantin DIOBOUNIOTIS and N. Beis, *Hippolyts Schrift über die Segnungen Jakobs*, TU, 38:1 (1911). The Armenian is being prepared by Mau-

belief is admitted that an intermingling of the tribes of Juda and Levi took place and that the Messiah was to have a Levitic origin as well ¹. Hippolyte in turn seems almost surely to have picked up this Jewish belief from the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, one of the Jewish apocryphals known to have been touched up by Christian hands ². It received one of its last echoes in Ambrose, who despite his effort did not succeed in reconciling it satisfactorily with the tradition of a Messiah born of a Virgin of Juda ³.

2. Theological Reasons for the Doctrine

a) Reasons of Fitness

Ambrose is not content to give only the Scriptural grounds for Mary's virginity *ante partum*. Led on to ponder the truth, he sees the fittingness of the virginal generation of Christ, particularly in three respects: 1. as a sign of His divinity; 2. as a counterpart to the eternal generation of the Word in the Trinity; 3. as the appropriately first step in undoing the evil wrought by the first woman. Inasmuch as these three ideas are already to be found in earlier Fathers and are orientated primarily toward the Word Incarnate rather than toward His Virgin Mother, they will not be treated in detail here.

Suffice it to observe on the first point that Ambrose begins to stress the value of Mary's virginal generation of the Word as a sign that He

rice BRIÈRE, Charles MERCIER, and Louis MARIÉS for François GRAFFIN's *Patrologia Orientalis*. BONWETSCH gives in his notes below the text of *The Blessings of Jacob* citations from Ambrose's *De Patriarchis* depending on Hippolyte's work.

Cf. Louis MARIÉS, *Le Messie issu de Lévi chez Hippolyte de Rome*, *Mélanges Jules Lebreton*, I (RSR 39). Paris 1951, p. 381-396.

¹ MARIÉS, *op. cit.*, p. 382:

Les espérances messianiques avaient été tellement exaspérées par la désolation consécutive à la ruine du temple que le peuple et tous les patriotes ardents étaient prêts à saluer comme le rédempteur promis tout héros victorieux qu'ils estimerait capable de restaurer la nation d'Israël. Nous assistons à la manifestation d'un sentiment pareil au moment du triomphe des Hasmonéens : on vit en chacun d'eux le libérateur attendu : de là des conceptions quelque peu étranges et incohérentes, des *Testaments des Patriarches* : ils représentaient le prêtre nouveau sous des traits messianiques ; ils répètent que le salut viendra par Juda et par Lévi, mais en donnant à celui-ci la primauté ; ainsi tentent-ils, peut-être en vain, de concilier avec la tradition messianique reçue une vue nouvelle et un messianisme nouveau.

² ALTANER, *Patrologie*, p. 46.

³ Cf. Annibale PAGNAMENTA, *La Mariologie di S. Ambrogio*. Milano 1932, p. 69-111.

is God in his anti-Arian writings (*De Fide, De Spiritu Sancto, De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*), and thereafter the same idea is found almost exclusively in the *Exp. Luc.* and *Exp. Ps. 118*¹. Two passages may serve as examples:

Secundum conditionem etenim corporis in utero fuit, natus est, lactatus est, in praesepio est collocatus, sed supra conditionem Virgo concepit, Virgo generavit: ut crederes qui Deus erat, qui novabat naturam; et homo erat qui secundum naturam nascebatur ex homine².

« Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognovi? »

Incredibilis et inaudita generatio ante audiri debuit, ut crederetur. Virginem parere est signum mysterii, non humani³.

In comparing the eternal and temporal generation of the Word, Ambrose reverts to the familiar observation that just as the Second Person of the Trinity is generated by the Father without a mother, so it was fitting for Him to take on flesh of a Mother without an earthly father. The comparison of the two generations occurs almost fifty times in the bishop's works, above all in the *De Fide*, and about a third as often in each of the following works: *De Virginibus*, *De Spiritu Sancto*, *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, and *Exp. Luc.* The attention in practically all these texts is focused not on Mary's virginity but on the divinity of Christ and especially on the duality of His natures. (This latter idea takes shape in formulas like the "Geminae gigas substantiae"⁴ or "non alter ex Patre, alter ex Virgine, sed idem aliter ex Patre, aliter ex Virgine"⁵.) The following passage is representative of his comparisons of the eternal and temporal generation of the Word:

Obtulit ergo Melchisedech panem et vinum. Quis est Melchisedech? Sine patre, inquit, sine matre, sine generationis ordine, neque ini-

¹ *De Fide* 5:4:54. PL 16:660bc; 5:19:232. PL 697a. *De Spir.* 3:10:65. PL 16:791c. *De Incarn.* 6:54. PL 16:832b. *Exp. Luc.* 1:6. CSEL 32:4 14:3-7. PL 15:1536a. *Ibid.* 2:15. CSEL 50:10-17. PL 1558c. *Ibid.*, 2:78. CSEL 83:26-84:16. PL 1581b. *Ibid.*, 5 110. CSEL 227:11-20. PL 1666b. *Ibid.*, 6:73. CSEL 262:22-263:7. PL 1687b. *Ibid.*, 7:12. CSEL 287:16-288:4. PL 1702b-1703a (especially noteworthy). *Exp. Ps.* 118:8:16. CSEL 62 159:13-21. PL 15:1300c. *Ibid.*, 8:37. CSEL 172:11-27. PL 1309bc. *De Isaac* 1:1. CSEL 32:1 641:1-9. PL 14:501ab. *In Ps.* 47:11. CSEL 64 354:6-18. PL 14:1150c.

² *De Incarn.* 6:54. PL 16:832b.

³ *Exp. Luc.* 2:15. CSEL 32:4 50:9-12. PL 15:1558c.

⁴ For this expression of Ambrose's and Novatian's making in dependence on Ps. 18:6, cf. Joseph DE GHELLINCK, *Notes sur l'expression "Geminae gigas substantiae"*, RSR, 5 (1914), p. 416-421 and Gustave BARDY "L'Expositio Fidei" attribué à saint Ambroise. *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, I. Città del Vaticano 1946, p. 210.

⁵ *De Incarn.* 5:35. PL 16:827c. *In Ps.* 61:5. CSEL 64 380:27-29. PL 14:1168b. Cf. also *In Ps.* 35:4. CSEL 64 52:25-53:1. PL 14:955b.

tium dierum, neque finem vitae habens. Hoc habet ad Hebraeos epistola. Sine patre, inquit, et sine matre est, similis cui ? Filio Dei. Sine matre natus est Dei filius generatione caelesti, quia ex solo Deo patre natus est. Et iterum sine patre natus est quando natus ex uirgine est. Non enim ex uirili semine generatus est, sed natus de spiritu sancto et uirgine Maria, utero editus uirginali. Similis per omnia filio Dei sacerdos quoque erat Melchisedech, quia et Christus sacerdos cui dicitur : « Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech. » ¹

Occasionally he is led to dwell at greater length on the temporal generation, and thus on Mary's virginity ante partum:

Non sola admirabilis ex Patre generatio Christi, admirabilis etiam ipsa generatio ejus ex Virgine. Tu illam dicis nostrae similem conceptionis, et ego probo et istam nostrae esse dissimilem, immo te ipsum cogam fateri. Dic quemadmodum sit natus ex Maria, quo usu uterus eum habuerit uirginalis, quomodo sine semine viri partus, unde virgo praegnans, quemadmodum puella mater ante fetus, quam copulam ut uxor experta ? Causa deerat, et generabatur filius. Unde ergo legis novatae partus ?

Si igitur in Virgine usus defuit generationis humanae, quemadmodum in Deo Patre propriae generationis usum requiris ? ²

A third reason of fittingness for Mary's virginal role in Christ's generation appears for Ambrose in the fact that thereby the sin begun in the first woman is undone:

Salutem mundo daturus per virginem venit, et mulieris lapsus partu virginis solvit ³.

In making use of the well known comparison of *Mary to Eve*, Ambrose contrasts not so much the two women as the Virgin and the woman:

Per mulierem stultitiam, per virginem sapientia ⁴

Per mulierem cura successit, per virginem salus evenit ⁵.

Per virum autem et mulierem caro ejecta de paradiso, per virginem juncta est Deo ⁶.

¹ *De Sacr.* 4:3:12. BOTTÉ, p. 81:15-27. PL 16:438cd. *De Fide* 3:11:88. PL 16:607c.

² *De Fide* 1:12:77 f. PL 16:546c.

³ *Exh. Virg.* 4:26. PL 16:343c.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 4:7. CSEL 32:4 142:17 f. PL 15:1614b.

⁵ *Ep.* 42:3. PL 16:1124c.

⁶ *Ep.* 63:33. PL 16:1198c. In addition to the four texts just quoted cf. *De Cain* 1:3:10. CSEL 32:1 345:7-20. PL 14:320c. *Exp. Ps.* 118:2:8. CSEL 62 24:6-9. PL 15:1212a. *Ibid.* 5:3. CSEL 84:1-6. PL 1251c. *Exp. Luc.* 4:39. CSEL 159:3-5. PL 15:1624b. *De Inst. Virg.* 5:32 f. PL 16:313ac. *Ibid.*, 13:83. PL 325c. *De obitu Theodosii* 47. PL 16:1401c.

Mary's virginity is thus thrown into greater relief with Ambrose than with other Fathers who are content to compare Mary and Eve in terms of their common sex and to contrast them for their respective roles.

Two additional comparisons of Mary to other virgins are associated with the parallel of Mary and Eve. One of them, the parallel drawn between Mary and the Church, occurs even more frequently and in greater detail than that between Eve and Mary. The common term of comparison between Mary and the Church, moreover, varies with the circumstances: sometimes it is simply virginity in general, often virginal motherhood, at least twice virginity in partu¹, and once the spousal relation to Christ².

The other parallel, far less frequent, is that between the Virgin Mary and the virginal earth whence Adam was formed.

As an example of the parallel between *Mary and the Church*, the following citation from the *Exp. Luc.* is classic; Ambrose has just described Mary as the *virgo desponsata*:

Didicimus seriem veritatis, didicimus consilium : discamus et mysterium. Bene desponsata, sed virgo ; quia est Ecclesiae typus, quae est immaculata sed nupta. Concepit nos virgo de Spiritu, parit nos virgo sine gemitu. Et ideo fortasse sancta Maria alii nupta, ab alio repleta, quia et singulae Ecclesiae spiritu quidem replentur et gratia, junguntur tamen ad temporalis speciem sacerdotis³.

In another text with characteristic allegorical liberty Ambrose draws a parallel between Mary, who virginally generated Christ, and the Church, which generates truth virginally in the faithful by the preaching of the Gospel; he then extends the same parallel to the soul called to keep the body virginal:

Hanc (sc. Mariam) imitamini, filiae, cui pulchre convenit illud quod de Ecclesia prophetatum est : « Speciosi facti sunt gressum tui in calceamentis, filia Aminadab » ; eo quod speciose Ecclesia Evangelii praedicatione processit. Speciose procedit anima, quae corpore velut cal-

¹ *De Virgs.* 1:6:31. FALLER, p. 31:10-21. PL 16:197c. *Exp. Luc.* 2:7. CSEL 45:4-6. PL 15:1555b.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:57. CSEL 72:173. PL 15:1573a. The parallel between Mary and the Church has since been studied by HUHNS Josef: *Das Geheimnis der Jungfrau-Mutter Maria nach dem Kirchenvater Ambrosius*. Würzburg (Echterverlag) 1954. See also: MÜLLER Alois: *Ecclesia-Maria: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche*. Freiburg (Schweiz), 2. Aufl., 1955. *Idem*, in: *Marie et l'Eglise*, I. Bulletin de la Société française d'Etudes mariales. Paris 1953 (9^e année): *L'unité de l'Eglise et de la Sainte Vierge chez les Pères des IV^e et V^e siècles*, p. 27-38 (Saint Ambroise, p. 33).

³ *Ibid.*, 2:7. CSEL 45:3-9. PL 15:1555b.

ceamento utitur ; ut quo velit, suum possit sine impedimento ullo circumferre vestigium.

In hoc calceamento speciose processit Maria, quae sine ulla commixtione corporeae consuetudinis auctorem salutis virgo generavit ¹.

In viewing Mary the virgin from whom Christ was born as parallel to the virginal earth of paradise from which Adam was taken, Ambrose usually varies the terms of the comparison. Once Christ is the *second Adam* as with most Fathers who use this comparison: "Ex terra virgine Adam, Christus ex virgine." ² But more often He is presented instead as the *tree of life* springing out of the virginal soil of paradise:

« Et erit tamquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum, quod fructum suum dabit in tempore suo. Et folium ejus non defluet, et omnia quaecumque faciet, prosperabuntur. » Quae ista beatitudo est, quae ligno arboris comparatur, nisi intelligamus in paradiso, illo beatorum loco, lignum vitae in medio lignorum aliorum de terra productum ? Inter multa enim ligna quae erant speciosa ad aspectum et bona ad escam, etiam hoc lignum terra produxit, et in medio paradisi erat ; ut caetera ligna ejus viriditate florerent. Quod esse hoc lignum dicimus, nisi per quod nobis salus venit ? Et recte hoc terra produxit, quia eum Virgo generavit, quae erat terra secundum auctoris sententiam quae in eum dicta est : « Terra es, et in terram ibis. » Pulchre quoque in medio legitur lignorum aliorum ; quia erat in medio apostolorum discentium, vel quia in medio erat mentis et cordis, sicut ipse ait : « Medius vestrum stat, quem vos nescitis. » ... Qui ergo beatus est, imitator erit Domini Jesu, qui est lignum vitae, lignum sapientiae, plantatum in utero Virginis, voluntate Patris : a quo in perpetuum mansurum plantatur, ut fructum daret in tempore suo ³.

b) Reason of Necessity: Original Sin

These comparisons of Mary – to Eve, to the Church, to the virginal earth – are all applications of Ambrose's fundamental idea that there is in the virginity of Mary a fittingness which entitles it to a place in God's plan of sending His Son to save man. Over and above this reason

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 14:87 f. PL 16:326b. In addition, cf. *Exp. Ps.* 118:1:16. CSEL 62 16:5-19. PL 15:1206cd. *Ibid.*, 17:19. CSEL 387:9-24. PL 1446c-1447a. *Exp. Luc.* 10:134. CSEL 506:11-21. PL 1838b. *De Inst. Virg.* 14:89-91. PL 16:326c-327b. *Ibid.*, 15:94. PL 327d. *De Interpellatione Iob et David* 2:4:16. CSEL 32:2 278:12-14. PL 14:818a. *Apol. Alt.* 9:47. PL 14:906c.

² *Exp. Luc.* 4:7. CSEL 142:14 f. PL 1614b.

³ *In Ps.* 1:35. CSEL 64 30:25-31:19. PL 14:940d-941b. *Ibid.*, 39. CSEL 34:8-11. PL 942b-943a. *De Patr.* 4:19. CSEL 32:2 135:8-12. PL 14:680a (in dependence on Hippolyte), *The Blessings of Jacob*, BONWETSCH, p. 26:15-27:15.

of fittingness – and the other two already discussed, namely Mary's virginity as a sign of her Son's divinity and as a reflection of the Father's *virginity* in the eternal generation of the Word – there is a more fundamental reason for Christ's virginal generation, one based on more than fittingness. For Ambrose the virginal generation of Christ is demanded so that He be free of the stain of *original sin*:

Nec in iniquitatibus conceptus et natus est in delictis, qui non ex sanguinibus neque ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri, sed de spiritu sancto natus ac virgine est ¹.

The doctor's mind on this point is made up by Origen ². Mary's virginity ante partum appears, therefore, more and more in an instrumental and almost necessary role, that of rendering her Son a *holy one* in every sense of the word, as though He would not have been such without the virginal generation.

3. Consequences of Mary's Virginity ante Partum

With this strongly Christological view of Mary's virginity ante partum are associated three other themes which Ambrose frequently develops, all of which may be called the consequences of Christ's virginal conception:

1. the uniqueness of his generation;
 2. its inscrutability as a mystery;
 3. the dignity of Christ's flesh, thanks to its virginal origin.
- A word must be added about each.

The first of them, that Christ alone of all the children of woman enjoys the privilege of having a virginal Mother, is stressed in over 25 different places in Ambrose's works. Usually he refers to it succinctly as a *novitas naturae* ³, or *novum generationis mysterium* ⁴, or *generationis Dominicae praerogativa* ⁵, or *inuitatus modus* ⁶.

¹ In Ps. 37:5. CSEL 64 140:7-9. PL 14:1011c. Cf. *De Poen.* 1:3:13. PL 16:470bc. *Exp. Luc.* 2:56. CSEL 32:4 72:12-17. PL 15:1572d-1573a. In Ps. 40:35. CSEL 64 253:1-13. PL 1083cd. *Fragmentum ex "De Noe"*, PL 14:415d, cited by Augustine in *Contra Julianum* 2:2:4. PL 44:674a; 2:9:32. PL. 695ab. – Cf. *infra*, p. 161.

² *Com. in Rom.* 6:12. PG 14:1094c-1095a.

³ *De Cain* 1:3:10. CSEL 32:1 345:14. PL 14:320c. Cp. *Exp. Luc.* 2:56. CSEL 32:4 72:16. PL 15:1573a. *De Fide* 1:12:77. PL 16:546c.

⁴ *De Fide* 4:12:164. PL 16:648b. Cp. *De Inst. Virg.* 16:98. PL 16:329a.

⁵ *De Incarn.* 6:53. PL 16:831d. *Expl. Sym.* 5. CONNOLLY, p. 7. *De Inst. Virg.* 17:108. PL 16:331c.

⁶ *De Incarn.* 9:104 PL 16:843d. *De Inst. Virg.* 16:98. PL 16:329a. *Ep.* 42:4. PL 16:

Ambrose sometimes asserts the unknowability of the mystery of the virginal conception considered in itself¹, but he likewise compares it to other mysteries of the faith. It is in one respect more sublime than the Resurrection²; faith in it leads the Christian on to faith in a mystery like the Eucharistic Presence³ or the regeneration of the soul's life at Baptism⁴; once, however, it appears as less overwhelming a mystery than the all-loving Passion of Christ⁵.

Finally, the traditional theme of the Fathers on the incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) of the virginal body⁶ finds application in an eminent degree for Ambrose in the fact that Christ's flesh is not only virginal but also virginally generated⁷.

4. Ambrose's Terminology for Christ's Virginal Generation

After having studied the Scriptural bases of Ambrose's teaching on the virginity of Mary ante partum, the theological reasons of fitness and (as regards exemption from original sin) of necessity for the mystery, as well as some of its consequences stressed throughout his works, it is appropriate to cast a glance on the terminology with which he expressed this mystery. Here again nothing original comes to light by comparison with his predecessors. On the contrary, Ambrose adheres faithfully to formulae which stem from Scripture and which throughout the fourth century were taking definitive shape in the symbols composed at various councils. By far the most frequent of these formulae is the

1125a. For other texts on the uniqueness of Christ's generation cf. *De Incarn.* 9:103 f. PL 16:843cd. *Exp. Ps.* 118:3:19. CSEL 62 51:10-21. PL 15:1129ab. *Exp. Luc.* 2:17. CSEL 51:3-9. PL 15:1559a. *Ibid.*, 10:140. CSEL 502:2-9. PL 1840a. *De Myst.* 9:53. BOTTE, p. 125:1-9. PL 16:407a. *Ibid.*, 9:59. BOTTE, p. 128:11-25. PL 409a-410a.

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:14 and 17. CSEL 49:17-25 and 51:3-9. PL 15:1558c, 1559a. *De Inst. Virg.* 5:39. PL 16:315d-316b. *Ibid.*, 14:88. PL 326c. *Ibid.*, 17:108. PL 331c. *In Ps.* 36:64. CSEL 64 123:3-8. PL 14:1000bc. *Ex.* 5:13. PL 16:895c. Hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia*, 11. 21-24. WALPOLE, p. 43.

² *De Inst. Virg.* 5:39. PL 16:316ab.

³ *De Sacr.* 4:4:17, 19. BOTTE, p. 83:10-20, 84:8-14. PL 16:441ab, 442b. *Ep.* 64:1. PL 16:1219c.

⁴ *De Myst.* 9:59. BOTTE, p. 128:11-25. PL 16:409a-410a.

⁵ *De Spir.* 3:17:126. PL 16:806c. Cp. *De Isaac* 1:1. CSEL 32:1 641:1-9. PL 14:501a.

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virgte.* 12. PG 46:373-376. John Chrysostom, *De Virgte.* 14. PG 48:543-544. Methodius, *Symposium* 4:2, and passim. GCS Meth. 46:10. PG 18:88b.

⁷ *De Inst. Virg.* 16:98. PL 16:329a. *De Spir.* 1:3:54. PL 16:717b. *Exp. Ps.* 118:2:8. CSEL 62 24:2-9. PL 15:1212a. *In Ps.* 36:64. CSEL 64 123:2-8. PL 14:1000c. *De Virgs.* 1:3:13. FALLER, p. 24:1-6. PL 16:192b.

description of Christ as *natus ex Virgine*; it occurs in that form about 30 times in Ambrose's works, and again half as many times under some slight variation, such as *natum est corpus ex Virgine*, or with the verb *nascere* in a personal instead of the participial form. The influence of the Roman creed (*natus est de Spiritu Sancto et Maria Virgine*)¹ is evident here; and that influence is confirmed by the striking fact that the formula *incarnatus ex virgine*, favorite in Greek symbols and with Greek Fathers from whom Ambrose borrowed, is to be found only once in all his works². Other occasional formulae are merely variations of the *natus ex Virgine* and are found far less frequently: *Natus ex Maria* five times³, and *natus ex Maria Virgine*⁴, *natus per Virginis partum*⁵, *secundum carnem genitus ex Maria*⁶, *secundum carnem factus ex Maria*⁷ once each.

The above formulae all express Mary's virginal role in the Incarnation of the Word. In a second set of formulae Ambrose less frequently speaks of both the role of the Holy Spirit and that of Mary, using for this purpose a phrase *de Spiritu Sancto et Virgine*, very closely patterned on the Roman symbol. The formula occurs as such three times⁸, again as often with the word order changed⁹, and once in the variant *de Spi-*

¹ *Infra*, p. 165 ff.

² *Exp. Luc.* 10:42. CSEL 32:4 471:6. PL 15:1814a. The fragment of an *Expositio Fidei* from Theodore, where "ex sancta virgine Maria eundem incarnatum esse" occurs, is usually printed among Ambrose's works, but is unauthentic: Gustave BARDY "L'Expositio Fidei ...", p. 119-218. BARDY's conclusion against Ambrosian authenticity could be illustrated in the phrase just cited where both the name given Mary and the term used to describe Christ's generation would be startling under Ambrose's pen and even more so in his catechetical instruction.

³ *De Fide* 1:12:77. PL 16:546c; 5:14:174. PL 683b. *In Ps.* 1:33. CSEL 64 30:17. PL 14:940c. *In Ps.* 47:11. CSEL 64 354:6. PL 14:1150c. *Historia de Excidio Urbis Hierosolymitanæ* 5:32. PL 15:2178d (if authentic; the only other mention of Mary occurs in 5:44. PL 15:2192a where Christ is described as "secundum carnem genitus ex Maria". If authentic, this is Ambrose's first work, dating from before his elevation to the episcopacy. It is a Latin version of Flavius Josephus' *History of the Jewish War*.)

⁴ *De Incarn.* 5:35. PL 16:827c.

⁵ *Exp. Ps.* 118:14:4. CSEL 62 300:13. PL 15:1391b.

⁶ *Hist de Exc. Urb. Hier.* 5:44. PL 15:2192a.

⁷ *De Fide* 1:14:93. PL 16:550b.

⁸ *De Sacr.* 4:3:12. BOTTE, p. 81:23 f. PL 16:438d. *Ibid.*, 4:4:17. BOTTE, p. 83:16 f. PL 441b. *Ep.* 48:4. PL 16:1152c.

⁹ *In Ps.* 39:18. CSEL 64 224:10. PL 14:1064d: "de Virgine natus est et Spiritu sancto". *In Ps.* 40:35. CSEL 64 253:7 f. PL 14:1083c: "de Spiritu est natus et Virgine". *In Ps.* 37:5. CSEL 64 140:9. PL 14:1011c: "de Spiritu sancto natus ac Virgine". In the last text PERSCHENIG's correction of *ex Virgine* to *ac Virgine* in CSEL is approved by FALLER, *Rezension* ..., p. 606.

*ritu Sancto ex Virgine Maria*¹. Other varied forms are extremely rare: *Ex Spiritu Sancto et Virgine*² and *de Spiritu Sancto et de Virgine*³ occur only once each, and evidence a use of the preposition *de* to express the role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation, a use which Ambrose himself once disapproved⁴.

Finally, the rarest kind of formula is a third set testifying to Mary's virginity by asserting simply the part played by the Holy Spirit in Christ's generation. In a sentence thrice cited by Augustine from Ambrose's lost commentary on Isaias, Christ is described as *de Spiritu natus*⁵, and once the very unusual *de Spiritu Sancto natus sit et renatus*⁶ is found.

In addition to these formulae inspired by the Roman symbol, Ambrose has certain other characteristic verbs reserved to describe Mary's virginal motherhood. It would be fastidious to enumerate them all. Of those in which Mary is the subject, by far the most used is *Virgo generavit* (over 20 times). But most such expressions are in the form of a participle modifying Christ; in the order of their frequency they are: *ortus ex Virgine*, *creatus*, *factus*, *generatus*, and *editus*, all completed by *ex Virgine*. The phrases *carnem suscipere ex Virgine* and *carnem assumere ex Virgine* with Christ as subject far outnumber others like *exire de Virgine*, *prodire*, *recipere*, etc.

¹ *De Spir.* 3:22:168. PL 16:815a.

² *De Fide* 4:4:44. PL 16:625c.

³ *De Poen.* 1:3:13. PL 16:470b.

⁴ *De Spir.* 2:5:41-43. PL 16:751b-752a:

Dubitare ergo non possumus Spiritum creatorem, quem Dominicae cognoscimus incarnationis auctorem. Quis enim dubitet, cum in principio Evangelii habeas, quia "Christi generatio sic erat: Cum desponsata esset Maria Joseph, antequam convenirent, inventa est in utero habens ex Spiritu sancto?"

Nam licet plerique habeant *de Spiritu*, Graecus tamen unde transtulerunt Latini, ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου dixit, hoc est, *ex Spiritu sancto*. Quod enim *ex* aliquo est, aut ex substantia est, aut ex potestate ejus Quomodo ergo in utero habuit Maria *ex Spiritu sancto*? Si quasi ex substantia: ergo Spiritus in carnem et ossa conversus est? Non utique. Si quasi ex operatione et potestate ejus Virgo concepit, quis neget Spiritum creatorem?

⁵ Augustine, *De Gratia Christi et Peccato Originali* 2:41:47. CSEL 42:205:24. PL 44:410a. *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia* 1:35:40. CSEL 42 251:17. PL 44:436b. *Ibid.*, 2:5:15. CSEL 267:14. PL 445a. Cp. *Exp. Luc.* 7:12. CSEL 32:4 287:22 f. PL 15:1702c: *De spiritu Dei natus sit*.

⁶ *De Spir.* 3:10:65. PL 16:791c. Cp. also the important variant in *De Virgs.* 1:5:21. FALLER, p. 27:21 (note), where *renatus* is read in MSS CTEOU for the second *natus* in the phrase "a patre quidem natus ante saecula, sed ex virgine natus ob saecula". The critical edition of *De Virgs.* by Egnatius CAZZANIGA (Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum Paravianum). Torino 1948, along with many other defects, omits all mention of this variant.

C. Historical Circumstances of Mary's Virginal Life ante Partum

Thus far in the present chapter Mary's virginity ante partum has been studied from a doctrinal point of view. It must now be viewed in its historical realization, qualified as it was by certain unique circumstances. For convenience these circumstances may be reduced to three:

1. Mary's state as a virgin who was *desponsata viro* at the time of the Annunciation;
2. her *marriage* with Joseph and the extent to which this term is justified in Ambrose's mind;
3. the possible existence for Ambrose of a vow of virginity made by Mary before the Annunciation.

Inasmuch as Ambrose here manifests ideas much more original than those discussed so far in this chapter, it will be necessary to treat each of these points, and particularly the second, in considerable detail.

1. Reasons for Mary's Betrothal to Joseph

In beginning the second book of his *Exp. Luc.* Ambrose gives six answers to the question why God chose as His Mother a virgin who was *desponsata viro* rather than one who was simply a virgin without any engagement in view of marriage. The principal reason, he wrote, was the need to preserve Mary's reputation which would otherwise have been compromised by a pregnancy. This classic reply was taken over from one of Origen's homilies on the Gospel according to Luke¹, a homily from which Ambrose borrowed heavily throughout the second book of the *Exp. Luc.* The bishop of Milan, however, gave far more weight to the reply, convinced as he was of the essential role that a good reputation played in the life of a virgin². To express it he coined a formula – "Maluit autem Dominus aliquos de suo ortu quam de matris pudore dubitare" – which he was to repeat years later in the *De Inst. Virg*³. The entire passage from the *Exp. Luc.* leading up to this first reply merits citation:

« Eodem autem tempore missus est angelus Gabrihel a Domino in civitatem Galilaeae, cui nomen Nazareth, ad virginem desponsatam viro cui nomen Joseph, de domo David : et nomen virginis, Maria. »

¹ Origen, *Hom. 6 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 37:1-4. PG 13:1814c.

² *Supra*, p. 65, n. 237; *infra*, p. 90, n. 6; p. 99.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:42. PL 16:316d.

Latent quidem divina mysteria, nec facile juxta propheticum dictum quisquam hominum potest scire consilium Dei, sed tamen ex caeteris factis atque praeceptis domini salutaris possumus intelligere hoc perpensoris fuisse consilii, quod ea potissimum lecta est ut Dominum pareret, quae erat desponsata viro. Cur autem non antequam desponsaretur, inpleta est ? Fortasse ne diceretur quod conceperat ex adulterio. Et bene utrumque posuit Scriptura, ut et desponsata esset et virgo : virgo, ut expers virilis consortii videretur, desponsata, ne temeratae virginitatis adureretur infamia, cui gravis alvus corruptelae videretur insigne praeferre. Maluit autem Dominus aliquos de suo ortu quam de matris pudore dubitare – sciebat enim teneram esse virginis verecundiam et lubricam famam pudoris – nec putavit ortus sui fidem matris injuriis adstruendam. Servatur itaque sanctae Mariae sicut pudore integra ita inviolabilis opinione virginitas ; oportet enim sanctos et ab his testimonium habere qui foris sunt, nec decuit sinistra virginibus opinione viventibus velamen excusationis relinqui, quod infamata mater quoque Domini videretur ¹.

To this basic reason Ambrose adds five others, the first four of which he did not find in the homily by Origen which served him as inspiration throughout this part of the *Exp. Luc.* These four reasons for God's choice of an espoused virgin as His Mother are the following: 1. The crime of the Jews in killing Christ would have been attenuated in a measure if He had been considered an illegitimate child; 2. Christ could not have claimed to fulfill the Law instead of abrogating it if he had been born out of wedlock; 3. Joseph's witness to Mary's virginity would have been wanting had she not been espoused to him; 4. Mary would have been forced to resort to some concealment bordering on a lie to explain her condition. Ambrose gives these four reasons thus:

Quid autem Judaeis, quid Herodi posset ascribi, si natum viderentur ex adulterio persecuti ? Quemadmodum autem ipse diceret : « Non veni Legem solvere, sed implere », si videretur coepisse a Legis injuria, cum partus innuptae Lege damnetur ? Quin etiam locupletior testis pudoris maritus adhibetur, qui posset et dolere injuriam, et vindicare obprobrium, si non agnosceret sacramentum. Quid quod etiam fides Mariae verbis major adsciscitur et mendacii causa removetur ? Videretur enim culpam obumbrare voluisse mendacio innupta praegnans. Causam autem mentiendi indesponsata habuit, desponsata non habuit, cum conjugii praemium et gratia nuptiarum partus sit feminarum ².

The sixth reason for Mary's espousal is again drawn from Origen ³,

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:1. CSEL 32:4 40:12-41:15. PL 15:1551d-1553a.

² *Ibid.*, 2:2. CSEL 41:15-42:4. PL 1553b.

³ Origen, *Hom.* 6 in *Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 37:4-39:17 PG 13:1815ac.

before whom it can be traced back as far as Ignatius of Antioch¹. Mary's state as spouse of Joseph served to deceive the prince of this world, which Ambrose shows from Scripture to have been a part of God's purpose in saving mankind. Making use of Origen's distinction, Ambrose goes on to say that, in addition to the prince of this world, the devil was likewise deceived, but less so since the devil and his cohorts finally suspected the secret of Christ's divinity. The *princes of this world*, on the other hand, who were totally absorbed in its vanities, never discovered that Christ was the Son of God, and thus went on to commit the heinous crime of putting him to death. Ambrose's exposition is belabored by this distinction which he owes to his source:

Non mediocris quoque causa est, ut virginitas Mariae falleret principem mundi, qui cum desponsatam viro cerneret, partum non potuit habere suspectum. Fallendi autem principis mundi fuisse consilium ipsius Domini verba declarant, cum apostoli iubentur tacere de Christo, cum sanati prohibentur gloriari de remedio, cum daemones praeci-piuntur silere de Dei Filio. Fallendi, ut dixi, principis mundi fuisse consilium etiam apostolus declaravit dicens : « Sed loquimur Dei sapientiam in mysterio absconditam, quam nemo principum istius saeculi cognovit. Si enim cognovissent, numquam Dominum majestatis crucifixissent », hoc est : numquam me redimi Domini morte fecissent. Fefellit ergo pro nobis, fefellit ut vinceret, fefellit diabolum, cum tem-taretur, cum rogaretur, cum Dei Filius diceretur, ut nusquam divinitatem propriam fateretur. Sed tamen magis fefellit principem saeculi ; diabolus enim etsi aliquando dubitavit, cum diceret : « Si filius Dei es, mitte te deorsum » ; tamen vel sero cognovit, et discessit ab eo. Cognoverunt et daemones, qui dicebant : « Novimus qui sis Jesu, Filius Dei. Quid venisti ante tempus torquere nos ? » Et ideo venisse cognoverunt, quia praecognitum habebant esse venturum. Principes autem saeculi non cognovisse, quo majore possumus quam apostolicae sententiae probare documento : « Si enim cognovissent, numquam Dominum majestatis crucifixissent ? » Daemonum enim malitia facile etiam occulta deprehendit, at vero qui saecularibus vanitatibus occupantur scire divina non possunt².

Ambrose never came back on the reasons for the espousal of Mary in terms as lengthy as those of the *Exp. Luc.* One of his most artistic and succinct expressions on the subject is to be found in the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia*; the dying Christ, in entrusting Mary to John,

¹ Ignatius, *Ep. ad Eph.* 19:1. FUNK, p. 203:10-12.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:3. CSEL 32:4 42:4-43:8. PL 15:1553b-1554b.

demonstrates that Mary's espousal to Joseph was intended simply in view of her reputation:

Praetenta nuptae foedera
Alto docens mysterio,
Ne virginis partus sacer
Matris pudorem laederet ¹.

2. The Marriage of Mary and Joseph

Mary, then, was a *virgo desponsata* at the time of the Annunciation, and to the term *desponsata* the meaning *espoused* has thus far been attached. The question arises as to what extent the term *marriage* is justified as a description of the union of Mary and Joseph. The most revealing reply is contained in the sense which Ambrose gives to the expression *antequam convenirent* found in the pericope of Mt. 1:18-25 ², where Joseph's plan to dismiss Mary secretly on account of her pregnancy is described. Instead of understanding the *convenire* as *to come together* and as thus marking the second and definitive stage of marriage, namely the establishment of a common household, Ambrose interprets it in the sense *to have marital relations*. He thus rejects one of the two Scriptural indications of the time at which Mary and Joseph's marriage ceremony is to be placed in the sequence of events leading up to Christ's birth ³. The other indication six verses later in Mt. 1:24 – *Joseph accepit conjugem suam* – is likewise rejected in a manner which, it will be seen ⁴, is rather extraordinary. It is in this passage of Mt. 1:18-25, therefore, that the investigation of Mary and Joseph's marriage finds its point of departure.

a) The Extent of Mary's "Marriage" to Joseph

From the outset, it must be observed, one is forcing Ambrose's thought to speak of a *marriage* between Mary and Joseph. Their union was for him the dissoluble union created by a marriage pact (*pactio conjugalís*), which can only improperly be called a marriage. But while disclaiming any true marriage, Ambrose himself used the word *conubium* (legal

¹ Hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia*, 11. 21-24. WALPOLE, p. 43.

² *Infra*, p. 240-244.

³ Paul GAECHTER, *The Chronology from Mary's Betrothal to the Birth of Christ*. Theological Studies, 2 (1941), p. 145-170, 347-368.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 91-94.

marriage)¹ and even *conjugium* (marriage, wedlock)² to describe their union, always understanding by such words only a *legal marriage*, a marriage which passes for such in the eyes of the law. The word *marriage* is always used hereafter in our discussion with this qualification.

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:42. PL 16:316c: "Quod autem fuit desponsata conubio" On the meaning of *conubium* cf. Petrus GASPARRI, *Tractatus Canonici de Matrimonio*, ed. nova. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1932, I, p. 12, n. 1.

² *Ibid.* 6:41. PL 316c:

Joseph accepit conjugem suam, ... desponsata enim viro conjugis nomen accepit. Cum enim initiatur conjugium, tunc conjugii nomen adsciscitur; non enim defloratio virginitatis facit conjugium sed pactio conjugalis.

Thus Ambrose justifies Mary's being called a *conjux* by a principle inspired by Roman law (*Dig.*, lib. 23, art. 2, III) in virtue of which a marriage consists in the conjugal pact and not in the beginning of marital relations. Yet in Ambrose's mind this *pactio conjugalis* does not create an indissoluble union, and hence is not a marriage in the full sense of the word; for he does not admit a veritable marriage where there is no carnal union, as appears from his declarations in *Ep. de causa Bonosi* 4 f. PL 16:1174a and *De Inst. Virg.* 7:47 f. PL 16:318b. The value of the *pactio conjugalis* between Mary and Joseph is purely juridical: it authorized their cohabitation and in the eyes of society prevented Mary's maternity from being considered an *injuria legis*, as Ambrose has just been heard saying, *supra*, n. 82: "Quemadmodum autem ipse diceret: non veni solvere legem sed implere, si videretur coepisse a legis injuria, cum partus innuptae lege damnetur." The purely juridical value of the *pactio conjugalis* appears again in the *Exp. Luc.* 10:133. CSEL 32:4 506:7-9. PL 15:1838a:

Quae propter mysterium conjugium praetexuit, completis mysteriis jam conjugio non egebat.

Ambrose is therein referring to the separation of Mary from Joseph made by Christ on Calvary.

The complex notion which Ambrose had of the marriage of Mary and Joseph is hardly more than alluded to in Henri FRÉVIN, *Le mariage de la Sainte Vierge dans l'histoire de la théologie* (Thèse de doctorat polycopiée). Lille 1951, p. 30-32. See especially: HUHNS Josef, *Ein Vergleich der Mariologie des hl. Augustinus mit der des hl. Ambrosius in ihrer Abhängigkeit, Ähnlichkeit, in ihrem Unterschied.* - In Augustinus Magister, I (Congrès intern.). Paris 1954, p. 221-239: Als erster lateinischer Kirchenvater tritt Ambrosius von Mailand an das Problem der jungfräulichen Ehe Mariens heran, indem er eigens die Frage erörtert, ob das Verhältnis zwischen Maria und Joseph eine rechtliche Ehe war oder nicht; das geschieht, indem er angibt, wodurch ein rechtliches eheliches Verhältnis bewirkt wird. In seiner Schrift *De institutione virginis* erklärt er: "*Cum initiatur coniugium tunc coniugii nomen adsciscitur; non enim defloratio virginitatis facit coniugium, sed pactio coniugalis. Denique cum iungitur puella, coniugium est, non cum virili admixtione cognoscitur*" (*De Inst. virg.*, 41). Der Satz: "*non defloratio virginitatis facit coniugium sed pactio coniugalis*", daß also zur Rechtsgültigkeit des Abschlusses einer Ehe nicht der geschlechtliche Verkehr gefordert wird, sondern der Ehewille erforderlich ist, gibt das damals herrschende römische Eherecht wieder. Seit dem 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr. entwickelte sich im römischen Reich die Manusehe in der Richtung auf die Consensehe, die seit dem 3. Jahrhundert die übliche Form der

How, therefore, does Ambrose's notion of the marriage of Mary and Joseph appear in his refusal to understand the *convenire* in Mt. 1:18 in the sense of "beginning their life together?" Their marriage had, in some measure which Ambrose left undetermined, *already begun* before the time of the discovery of Mary's pregnancy, so that the *next moment* of which Ambrose would think in reading *antequam convenirent* would be the moment of conjugal relations. This seemed to him the evangelist's meaning, since the theme of Christ's virginal conception had just been announced for the whole pericope. To say that "before they *had relations*" Mary was pregnant does indeed prove that Joseph was not Christ's natural father. But Ambrose did not perceive that in the opinion of the best commentators today Matthew's intention was, instead of stating the fact bluntly by saying they had not had relations, to assert it equivalently by describing Joseph's bewilderment at the discovery of a pregnancy for which he was not responsible (v. 19 f.)¹. This dis-

römischen Eheschließung war. Um eine rechtlich gültige Ehe abzuschließen, genügte der *consensus nuptialis*, die beiderseitige Erklärung, eine Ehe eingehen zu wollen. Die Willensentscheidung wird zum Ausdruck gebracht in einem Vertrag, in der *pactio coniugal*. Der berühmte römische Rechtsgelehrte Ulpian hatte das Recht in die Formel geprägt: *Nuptias non concubitus sed consensus facit*. Durch den Kirchenvater Ambrosius wurde so dieser Rechtsgrundsatz in die christliche Kirche eingeführt. Ambrosius hält also das Verhältnis zwischen Maria und Joseph für eine wirkliche Ehe.

¹ Marie-Joseph LAGRANGE, *Evangile selon saint Matthieu*, 2nd e. Paris 1923, p. 10, writes that Matthew wanted indeed to state that the miraculous conception occurred before any conjugal relations. But for this purpose, says LAGRANGE, the evangelist thought it sufficient to indicate the legal status of the future spouses as "not yet having come together", since relations were irregular before the time when the husband "took unto him his wife" (*accipere, παραλαβεῖν*, vv. 20, 24). But in his *Evangile selon saint Luc*, 2nd ed. Paris 1921, p. 26, the same author states that the fiancée differed from the wife only in that the wedding, by which she was led to her husband's residence, had not yet taken place; that the betrothal could even begin with marital relations; that the future husband was permitted practically any liberty with his fiancée, particularly in Judea where the Old Law with all its customs prevailed. Elsewhere and with time the presence of foreigners and the influence of Greek and Roman Law brought about a greater distinction between betrothal and marriage. This question is highly controverted, and the opposite opinion is defended by GAECHTER, *op. cit.*, 154-156.

Whatever the solution, it is safe to assert that by the non-sexual sense of *convenire* Matthew did indirectly exclude conjugal relations, in the verses beginning with the *antequam convenirent* ("before they came together"); but the *manner* in which he excluded them is to be sought rather in Joseph's consternation (v. 20 f.) than in the legal status of the betrothed (v. 18).

On the other hand, François CEUPPENS, *Theologia Biblica*, IV: *De Mariologia Biblica*. Romae 1948, p. 64, differs from both LAGRANGE and GAECHTER in thinking

covery is dated as “before they came together”, and presents itself to Joseph as a possible reason for not proceeding to the definitive stage of marriage, the introduction of Mary into his home (v. 24). Ambrose, on the contrary, for reasons which will be explained later, held that this marriage of Mary and Joseph had already entered as definitive a stage as it would ever have. He never wanted to face the problem of what degree of cohabitation that stage involved, except to exclude the exercise of conjugal rights.

Whatever his thought on marriage in general, Ambrose saw only two possible moments in the *marriage* of Joseph and Mary: one actually realized, that of the *pactio conjugal*, entered into already at the *desponsatio* and constitutive, at least in the eyes of the law, of marriage; the second, never realized, that of the conjugal relations. It is this second moment that Ambrose sees excluded in the period before Christ’s birth by the *antequam convenirent* (“before they had relations”). In between the two moments, though, there is obviously another, when Mary and Joseph took up residence together. When did it occur? Ambrose never says. He refused to see Mt. 1:24 (*accepit conjugem suam*) as a Scriptural indication of this moment. One might sometimes wonder how far Ambrose permitted the cohabitation of Mary and Joseph to intrude in the solitude for which he sets up the virgin Mary as model. Repeatedly he dwells on her solitude, at no time more than at the Annunciation. Yet at this period Mary was already *desponsata*, which, as will be seen in a moment, meant that she was already the *conjux* of Joseph, already a party to the *pactio conjugal* with him. She was at that time a *desponsata* just as at the moment when her Son on Calvary separated her from Joseph she was still *tantummodo desponsata*. When

that Matthew wanted to rule out conjugal relations directly, not only in v. 25, but already in v. 18 with the sexual sense of *convenire*:

Partus virginalis aperte exprimitur his verbis: *non cognoscebat eam donec peperit filium suum primogenitum* Mt. 1:25. Conceptus virginalis cum eadem perspicuitate redditur si *sunelthein* apud Mt. 1:18 de commercio carnali intellegatur: *antequam commercium carnale haberent, inventa est (Maria) in utero habens de Spiritu sancto*. E contra, si *sunelthein* de sola cohabitatione explicetur, conceptio virginalis minori cum vi exprimitur.

CEUPPENS cites Maldonatus (*Com. in Mt. 1:18*) who enumerates Ambrose among the “pluribus auctoribus ... et omnibus fere theologis” known in his day who believed Mary to have been already married (*nuptam*) at the time of the Annunciation, and consequently at the time referred to in Mt. 1:18. The majority of exegetes and translators today, however, follow the opinion contrary to CEUPPENS’ in understanding *antequam convenirent* as *before they came together*.

or in what measure did their union pass from the moment marked by the *patio conjugalis* to that of cohabitation? On this point Ambrose is as obscure as he is on the meaning he attaches to *desponsata*.

b) *Mary, the "Desponsata" of Joseph*

He describes Mary as *desponsata* at the time of the Annunciation, following Luke's first mention of her in 1:27 (*ad virginem desponsatam viro*), and one naturally thinks at that moment of only their betrothal. They would still seem only to be betrothed when Mary's pregnancy is discovered, since Matthew begins, "Cum esset *desponsata* mater ejus Maria Joseph, *antequam* convenirent..." (1:18). It is true that Luke calls her still a "*desponsata uxor*" at the time of Christ's birth (2:7), but Ambrose never once quoted this text or commented on the *desponsata* therein. But at the end of Christ's life when Mary was entrusted to John, we read this surprising terminology under Ambrose's pen:

Testis est ergo (Christus) ... quod *desponsata* fuerit viro *tantummodo* Joseph ; nulla tamen conjugalis coitus consuetudine thori jura cognoverit ¹.

Did Mary, therefore, always remain only a *desponsata*? Yes, quite unmistakably for Ambrose. But what is one to understand by this term? It cannot be translated simply as *betrothed* or *engaged*, for Ambrose surely posits a more intimate union than the promise to marry, which is the ordinary notion of a bedrothal or engagement. He calls her "*desponsata conubio*", which almost defies translation in modern terminology ², but which certainly means that Mary was party to at least a union that was in the eyes of the law a marriage. Hence, hiding, as it were, behind the term *desponsata*, Ambrose leaves no clue when the betrothal took on the appearances of a marriage.

Or better, he gives no clue whether the union which on account of the word *desponsata* was taken to be only a betrothal ever lacked the appearances of a marriage. Three indications, in fact, suggest that for Ambrose Mary's betrothal was equivalent to her marriage:

¹ *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* 4. PL 16:1174a.

² Perhaps the expression could be translated "espoused by what the law considered a marriage", where *espoused* keeps in English the same ambiguity which Ambrose left to *desponsata*. The first two meanings for *to espouse* are: "1. to take a spouse; to marry. 2. (Obsolete) to betroth." (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*), 2nd ed. Springfield 1951, p. 281.

1. A *desponsata*, he says, is already called the *spouse* (*conjux*) of her husband, since wedlock (*conjugium*) has already begun¹. By the word *conjux* nothing more than “the existence of wedlock, the celebration of a wedding is declared”².

2. The *pactio conjugalis*, and not the marriage act, constitutes wedlock (*conjugium*)³. And in virtue of this *pactio*, one is already called *desponsata*⁴. Hence *desponsata* for Ambrose evokes rather the marriage contract than the betrothal⁵.

3. Inasmuch as Mary was a *desponsata*, her pregnancy became explicable to her neighbors, as the “*desponsatae partus legitimus*”⁶.

These three samples of Ambrose’s terminology show him describing a *desponsata* in terms of married life, and thus assuming that Mary’s being a *desponsata* was equivalent to her being married. It is therefore safe to say that Ambrose regards Mary from her very first appearance in Scripture – Lc. 1:27 “*virginem desponsatam viro*” as already *married*, that is, already a party to the *pactio conjugalis*. He does not regard the marriage as having entered into its definitive stage when “Joseph, arising from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and *took unto him his wife*” (Mt. 1:24). Yet for ordinary marriages he

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:41. PL 16:316c.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:5. CSEL 32:4, 44:10-12. PL 15:1555a:

Nec te moveat quod frequenter Scriptura conjugem dicit: non enim virginitatis ereptio, sed conjugii testificatio, nuptiarum celebratio declaratur.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:41. PL 16:316c: “Non enim defloratio virginitatis facit conjugium, sed pactio conjugalis.” Cf. also *Exp. Luc.* 2:5, preceding note.

⁴ *De Inst. Virg.*, 6:41. PL 16:316c.

⁵ D’IZARNY, *op. cit.*, p. 96, n. 20.

⁶ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:42. PL 16:316c:

... ut ab his qui Mariam gravi utero cernerent, non adulterium virginitatis sed *desponsatae partus legitimus* crederetur. Maluit enim Dominus aliquos de sua generatione quam de matris pudore dubitare.

Exp. Luc. 2:1. CSEL 32:4 41:2-8. PL 15:1552d-1553a:

Cur autem non antequam *desponsaretur*, inpleta est? Fortasse ne diceretur quod conceperat ex adulterio. ... *Desponsata*, ne temeratae virginitatis adureretur infamia, cui gravis alvus corruptelae videretur insigne praeferre. Maluit autem Dominus aliquos de suo ortu quam de matris pudore dubitare.

Ibid., 2:3. CSEL 42:5 f. PL 1553b:

... principem mundi, qui cum *desponsatam* viro cerneret, partum non potuit habere suspectum.

Ibid., 2:2. CSEL 41:23-42:4. PL 1553b:

Videretur enim culpam obumbrare voluisse mendacio *innupta* praegnans. Causam autem mentiendi *indespensata* habuit, *desponsata* non habuit; cum *conjugii* praemium et gratia *nuptiarum* partus sit feminarum.

had a terminology adapted to describe this beginning of common life, this *traditio* of the betrothed maiden to her husband, after which she was referred to not only as *desponsata* but as *tradita*¹.

c) *Ambrose on Mt. 1:24*

Mt. 1:24 in the *De Institutione Virginis*.

This all points to the conclusion that Matthew's words in verse 24 – "So Joseph, arising from sleep, did as the angel had commanded him and took unto him his wife" – puzzled Ambrose. Never in all his wealth of Marian doctrine and his many references to Mt. 1:18-25 does he once cite the verse entirely. Perhaps the *accepit conjugem suam* troubled him, suggesting the husband's exercise of marital rights. He did not take into account the fact that the evangelist uses the expression only after the *angel of the Lord* had done so (v. 20); he did not notice that Matthew even cites the angel's authority for the expression: "Joseph ... did as the angel had commanded him and 'took unto him his wife'." When toward the end of his life, in the *De Inst. Virg.* (393c) Ambrose finally cites the troublesome expression², his manner of doing so betrays his bewilderment:

1. He cites the *accepit conjugem suam* as an *objection* to Mary's perpetual virginity: how could Mary be called Joseph's *conjux* without having had relations with him?

2. He cites the objection *of his own accord*, inserting it in a preannounced list of objections taken over from Bonosus and like predecessors. It is as though the verse were more a problem for Ambrose than it had been for his adversary, who had already presented an imposing array of difficulties from Scripture.

3. He drags the expression *accepit conjugem suam* entirely out of its context in order to explain it – and this is most significant. For in the pericope Mt. 1:18-25, verse 24 describes Joseph's obedience to the angel's command that he take Mary as his wife. But Ambrose presents the delicate locution in another way:

Nec illud te moveat, quod ait quia « Joseph accepit conjugem suam, et projectus est in Aegyptum »³.

¹ D'IZARNY, *op. cit.*, p. 95 f. cites *Ep.* 60:1. PL 16:1183b as an example of the terminology: "Si quis *desponsata* sibi et *tradita* utatur, *conjugium* vocat"

² *Infra*, p. 252.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:41. PL 16:316bc.

The fragment *et profectus est in Aegyptum* comes from Mt. 2:14, where Joseph's obedience to another command given him by an angel in a dream is described. It is possible, of course, that citing from memory as he often does Ambrose would have confused two similar texts, which, for want of certainty as to the codices he employed, can best be compared in the Vulgate:

Mt. 1:24 *Exsurgens autem Joseph a somno fecit sicut praecepit ei angelus Domini, et accepit conjugem suam.*

Mt. 2:14 *Qui consurgens accepit puerum et matrem ejus nocte, et secessit in Aegyptum.*

Surgens and *accepit* are common to the two verses and could have led Ambrose from the first into the second. But is such a confusion admissible in one who not only knew his Gospels perfectly, but had undoubtedly long meditated on the terms and context of the difficult expression in Mt. 1:24? Hilary, for example, was bothered by the same *accepit conjugem suam*. But so alert is he to the *matrem* in Matthew's story of the flight into Egypt that he justifies the use of *conjux* or *uxor* in Mt. 1:24 and elsewhere by the use of *matrem* in Mt. 2:14:

Denique cum transire Joseph ad Aegyptum admonetur, ita dicitur : « Accipe puerum et matrem ejus » ; et Revertere cum puero et matre ejus » ; et rursum in Luca : « Et erat Joseph et mater ejus. » Et quotiescumque de utroque fit sermo, mater potius Christi quia id erat ; non uxor Joseph est nuncupata quia non erat. Sed haec quoque ab angelo ratio servata est : ut cum desponsatam cum justo Joseph significabat, conjugem nuncuparet. Nam ita ait : « Joseph fili David, noli timere accipere Mariam conjugem tuam. » Ergo et conjugis nomen sponsa suscepit, et post partum in conjugem recognita tantum Jesu mater ostenditur¹

The anti-Arian polemic had rendered the Fathers very attentive to terms like *pater*, *mater*, *parentes*, as applied to Mary and Joseph². Against

¹ *Com. in Mt.* 1:3. PL 9:921b-922a.

² The Gospel citations, for example, in the text from Hilary just given are Mt. 2:13 and 20, and Luc. 2:33; the latter ("Et erat *Joseph* et mater ejus ...") is the Old Latin translation of a Greek codex which read Ἰωσήφ instead of ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ in the verse rendered in the Vulgate "Et erat *pater* ejus et mater mirantes super his quae dibantur de illo." (The Old Latin codices vercellensis, veronensis, brixianus, and corbeiensis all have *Joseph* et mater ejus. Cf. Josephus BLANCHINI, *Eusebii Vercellensis Evangelium cum variis versionis italicae exemplaribus collatum*. PL 12:519 f.) The campaign against the Arians made the *Joseph* a welcome substitution for *pater ejus*. An analogous variant, due to the same campaign, is found in the rendering of Luc. 2:43 in the same codices (together with a few others listed

the enemies of Mary's virginity, they were no less attentive to terms like *conjux*, as Hilary already shows.

How then explain Ambrose's curious transition from a passage where *conjux* occur to one where *mater* occurs, if it is not casual? Four solutions suggest themselves:

1. Ambrose was citing Mt. 2:14 according to some unknown codex in which *matrem ejus* had been replaced by *conjugem*. The solution is improbable, since the old Latin codices of the Gospels known to have been most frequently used by Ambrose, the Veronensis (*b*), Vercellensis (*a*), Corbiensis (*ff*¹), and Brixianus (*f*), all agree with the Vulgate reading *matrem ejus*¹, and no Greek codex recorded in modern critical editions authorizes a different reading.

2. The juxtaposition of the two texts *accepit conjugem suam* and *et profectus est in Aegyptum* offered a more serious objection than simply *accepit conjugem suam*, and Ambrose felt in honesty obliged to state the adversary's case as strongly as possible. Such a solution again is hardly probable, for the flight to Egypt seems to have no connection with Joseph's respect for Mary's perpetual virginity.

3. Ambrose was troubled by the term *conjux* which he knew occurred in Mt. 1:24, but he had the impression that it occurred elsewhere. In another text, in fact, he remarked that "*frequenter Scriptura conjugem dicit*"² in reference to Mary, whereas in reality, at least in the Vulgate, *conjux* is not said of her outside of Mt. 1:20 and 24. Admitting, though, that Ambrose was under a false impression as to its frequency, it seems either sophistic or timorous on his part to have selected a use of *conjux* such as that in Mt. 2:14, where *accepit conjugem suam* simply means *He took his wife (on a trip)*, instead of facing the problem squarely in Mt. 1:24, where it has the juridical meaning *He took unto him his wife*,

by Giovanni ROLANDO, *Ricostruzione teologico-critica del testo latino del Vangelo di S. Luca usato da S. Ambrogio*. Biblica, 26 (1945), p. 252 f.). They read "*et non cognoverunt Joseph et mater ejus*". Ambrose betrays similar concern for semi-Arian and Arian ears in his audiences: Luc. 2:41 ("*Et ibant parentes ejus in Hierusalem in die solemni Paschae*", according to the Vulgate) is cited only twice in his works, partially and freely, with the significant omission of *parentes ejus* in favor of the names of Joseph and Mary placed in the vicinity. (Cf. *De Virgs.* 2:2:14. FALLER, p. 50:17-21. PL 16:210c and *De Vid.* 4:25. PL 16:242b both cited by Rolando, *op. cit.*, p. 252.) For this verse too the Old Latin codices vercellensis and veronensis, which Ambrose relied on most, have *Joseph et Maria* instead of *parentes ejus*. Cf. BLANCHINI, *op. cit.* PL 12:519 f.

¹ BLANCHINI, *op. cit.* PL 12:519 f.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:5. CSEL 32:4 44:10. PL 15:1555a.

source of Ambrose's bother. Besides, can one admit in the first place that he was still belabored by confusion as to the frequency of *conjux*, even after he had undertaken a polemic on Mary's perpetual virginity and introduced therein this difficulty of his own making? Would he have gone on letting himself think that *conjux* was used frequently, hoping thereby that the word would lose the connotation – that of a spouse who now has begun to live with her husband – which it has in the sole passage in which it actually occurs? If so, Ambrose appears as a less astute polemicist than in his younger days. Hence it is very probable that, at least by the time of the *De Inst. Virg.*, he knew that the word was found in one passage only, and that it designated an event which he could not fit into his own idea of a *marriage* already begun between Mary and Joseph (or a *marriage* in which the *living together* was decidedly subordinated to the solitude characteristic of Mary's virginal life). Ambrose can hardly be thought to have cited Mt. 2:14 loosely and from memory, under the impression that a *conjux* there would be easier to explain than the one in Mt. 1:24.

4. There seems, therefore, to be no other solution than to admit that he deliberately made the transition from Mt. 1:24 to Mt. 2:14, in order to draw the troublesome *accepit conjugem suam* of Mt. 1:24 out of its context. *Accipit conjugem suam* of Mt. 1:24 was too hard to explain if *accipere* had the juridical sense of initiating the common life characteristic of marriage. He could explain how Mary was called a *conjux*; to say that Joseph “*accepit conjugem suam*”, understanding *accepit* in the juridical sense, was too much. In the context of the flight to Egypt, Ambrose found no *conjux* but he did find a perfectly innocent *accepit*. By calling up that context, he diluted the connotation of *conjugem* which accompanied it was a title that Mary had already acquired in virtue of her being a *desponsata*.

Mt. 1:24 in the *Exp. Luc.*

In the final analysis, then, it was the juridical *accipere* which Ambrose found hard to explain with *conjux*. This conclusion is confirmed by the only other allusion to Mt. 1 : 24 in Ambrose's works. Writing in the *Exp. Luc.*, probably some six years before the *De Inst. Virg.*, he warns his reader – for the *te* betrays Ambrose at his desk rather than his pulpit – not to be surprised when Scripture calls Mary a *conjux*:

Nec te moveat quod frequenter Scriptura conjugem dicit : non enim virginitatis ereptio, sed conjugii testificatio, nuptiarum celebratio

declaratur. Denique *quam non accepit nemo dimittit et ideo quo volebat dimittere fatabatur acceptam* ¹.

The last sentence is an unmistakable allusion to Mt. 1:24 (*accepit conjugem suam*), for Ambrose had just previously mentioned Joseph's doubt and plan to dismiss Mary. Without alluding to the angel's visit, he passes immediately to the *accepit conjugem suam* and explains it, not as Joseph's obedience to the angel's command, but as a state of affairs *already existing*! Joseph had already *taken* Mary, for otherwise he would not contemplate *sending her away*! His having already taken her, therefore, rules out any idea of a marriage beginning from this point on in any greater degree of intimacy than that which had marked Mary's previous months as the simple *desponsata* of Joseph.

Again the manner in which Ambrose raises this difficulty is revealing. The atmosphere was not a polemical one in the *Exp. Luc.* He had just cited a long list of *witnesses* to Mary's virginal state *at the time of the Annunciation*: Luke, Isaias, Joseph, and then Christ, John the Evangelist, Mary and Joseph, these latter all in the scene on Calvary. He dwells on the person of Joseph, whose *justice* is warrant that on Calvary he would not have permitted Mary to be separated from him, had she been fully his wife; the thought of Joseph as a *just man* leads Ambrose to the passage in Matthew (1:19) where this expression occurs, and he commends Joseph for not wishing to tolerate a spouse whose fidelity is doubted. All this, he says, brings to light Joseph's *justice* and makes him therefore a particularly trustworthy witness in the case of Mary's virginity. Ambrose concludes the passage on *witnesses* in these words:

Ergo ubique in Joseph justi gratia et persona servatur, ut *testis* ornetur: os enim justi mendacium nescit, et lingua ejus loquitur iudicium, iudicium ejus loquitur veritatem ².

Then abruptly the *Nec te moveat...* just cited is tacked on. The difficulty which it raises about Mary being called *conjux* may have been a reminiscence of the polemic which Helvidius had waged. At any rate, thrown in as it is into his exposition, it seems to have been more on Ambrose's mind than on that of his reader. The *Nec te moveat* occurs again for this same troublesome question in the lineup of Scriptural texts explained in the *De Inst. Virg.*: "*Nec illud moveat, quod ait quia Joseph*

¹ *Exp. Luc.*, *loc. cit.* CSEL 44:10-13. PL 1555a.

² *Loc. cit.* CSEL 44:7-9. PL 1554c.

accepit conjugem suam....” Does Ambrose betray by this unconscious repetition that he himself was *moved* by the locution? Not necessarily, since *Nec te moveat* is a frequent formula with him for introducing objections. At any rate his change in answering the objection in the *De Inst. Virg.* indicates a mind dissatisfied with a previous attempt to dispel the problem: in the *Exp. Luc.* he threw the *accepit* into the past to refer to a marriage already entered on as definitive a stage as it was to enjoy, whereas in the *De Inst. Virg.*¹ he draws it out of context to neutralize it and leave only the *conjugem* to explain as a title already acquired.

Ambrose’s discomfiture in the face of *accepit conjugem suam* appears in the passage of the *Exp. Luc.* under discussion in two additional ways.

1. He gives a negative nuance of the angel’s command (v. 20) from which the evangelist repeated these words to describe Joseph’s punctual obedience (v. 24). In the *Exp. Luc.* the passage last cited on the *witnesses* of Mary’s virginity was introduced thus:

Bene autem sibi diviserunt Evangelistae, ut sanctus Matthaeus Joseph ab angelo moneri induceret *ne dimitteret Mariam....*²

Such is the reading accepted by the critical edition of the CSEL, over the significantly different one in Migne: ...“Joseph ab angelo moneri induceret *Mariam conjugem accipere* !” The CSEL reading corroborates the contention that for Ambrose there was no further *accipere conjugem* to be realized, that the marriage had already become as much a marriage as ever it would be, that the angel was counseling Joseph not to dismiss a spouse whom he had already received in the safer terms of a *desponsata*. “Quam non accepit nemo dimittit et ideo qui volebat dimittere fatebatur *acceptam*”, he wrote a few lines later. The angel’s words are thus forced from a command to execute one action to a command to refrain from another. The nuance is delicate but most enlightening.

2. The sentence just cited from the *Exp. Luc.* on the division of material observed by the evangelists has a second member after the mention of Matthew:

...ut sanctus Matthaeus Joseph ab angelo moneri induceret *ne dimitteret Mariam* ? *Lucas illic evangelista testimonium ferret quod non convenissent ...*

¹ *Supra*, p. 91-94.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:4. CSEL 32:4 43:9-11. PL 15:1554b.

What text in *Luke* could Ambrose have had in mind as an illustration of a testimony born by that evangelist, in contrast to Matthew, to the fact that the two spouses *non convenissent*? The question teems with difficulties.

First, it must be supposed that Ambrose understands the verb *convenire* as referring to *marital relations* and not simply to cohabitation: for such is the sense which he gives the word when treating the *antequam convenirent* of Mt. 1:18 as an objection to Mary's virginity¹.

Secondly, *why* does Ambrose choose to hear *Luke* giving in some indirect way the testimony *non cognovissent*, by contrast to Matthew who so clearly said *antequam convenirent*? Since Ambrose could hardly have confused the two Gospels could he have been forcing their testimony a bit in order to create a contrast? Did he fear introducing Mt. 1:18 with the delicate *antequam*? Whatever the answer, he goes to *Luke* for a lesson drawn even more explicitly by Matthew, but drawn in a passage that for Ambrose was sown with difficulties; four of the seven objections answered in the *De Inst. Virg.*, it will be seen², stem from Mt. 1:18-25.

Finally, *where* precisely in *Luke's Gospel* did Ambrose find the testimony that Mary and Joseph had not had relations? The *illic* refers to the passage in *Luke* which he had just commented, the one announced at the opening of the second book of the *Exp. Luc.*:

« Eodem autem tempore missus est angelus Gabrihel a Domino in civitatem Galilaeae, cui nomen Nazareth, ad virginem desponsatam viro cui nomen erat Joseph, de domo David : et nomen virginis, Maria » (Luc. 1:26 f.)³.

In commenting this text Ambrose had singled out the *virginem desponsatam* and clearly indicated that he would explain each of these words. His first development concerned the *desponsatam* and the allusion to *Luke's* testimony *quod non convenissent* is found immediately afterwards, before the commentary on the *virginem* has been taken up. Hence in referring by *illic* to the text of Luc. 1:26 f. in the sense in which he had just commented it, Ambrose has in mind particularly the *desponsatam* as testimony that marital relations had not yet taken place. Why not the *virginem* or the whole expression *virginem desponsatam*? Because he has not yet commented *virginem*, and particularly because

¹ *Supra*, p. 85; *infra*, p. 240-244.

² *Infra*, p. 236 f.

³ *Exp. Luc.* 2, capite. CSEL 40:12-16. PL 15:1551d.

he regards the value of the word *virginem* as an *additional* testimony that Luke brings, as is apparent from what he says a bit further in his list of *witnesses* :

...*Lucas illic evangelista testimonium ferret quod non convenissent, hic ipsa Maria fateretur, cum dicit angelo : Quomodo fiet istud quoniam virum non cognovi ? Sed et ipse Lucas virginem declaravit dicens : Et nomen virginis Maria* ¹.

Furthermore, the viewpoint in *quod non convenissent* is that of both the spouses, so that Ambrose sees the content of that expression repeated first in Luke's statement that Mary was only the *deponsata* of Joseph rather than in his assertion that she was a virgin. To call her a virgin is to declare even more strongly that she had never had relations, and this stronger declaration by Luke occupies Ambrose, as seen in the text just cited, only after he has announced Mary's own testimony that she was a virgin.

The point is, then, that Ambrose here sees Mary's status of *desponsata* at the Annunciation as testimony that she had not had relations with Joseph, that she was "*tantummodo desponsata*" as she will still be called on Calvary². And yet he had explained just earlier and will repeat elsewhere that her status as a *desponsata* saved her reputation in the eyes of her neighbors, who would take her son as *desponsatae partus legitimus*³. Could Ambrose have thought of Mary in terms of Roman customs as having been only betrothed and thus not given over to marital relations at the Annunciation, and then at a later date – though *not* at the one indicated in Mt. 1:24 (*accepit conjugem suam*) – as having become something more than betrothed for whom childbearing was legitimate? If so, he never specified when this date was, or what formality it comprised, and to describe Mary before and after it, he used the same word *desponsata* : a word that for all its equivocality testified to her virginity and yet justified her maternity.

Every indication, therefore, shows Ambrose suppressing the contribution which Mt. 1:24 (*accepit conjugem suam*) brings to the already meagre Scriptural details of the marriage of Joseph and Mary. A final confirmation of this thesis leads back to the starting point of the present

¹ *Ibid.*, 2:4. CSEL 43:11-15. PL 1554b.

² *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* 4. PL 16:1174a.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:42. PL 16:316c.

study of their marriage. It will be remarked that the formula¹ which he used in reply to the objection based on *antequam convenirent* (Mt. 1:18) in the *De Inst. Virg.* had been used earlier in the *Exp. Luc.* in reply to an objection based on *non cognovit eam donec peperit* (Mt. 1:25). This suggests that Ambrose saw in the two verses, 18 and 25, a theme (*causa suscepta*) being developed constantly on the same level, and not, as the evangelist seems to have wished, on two levels, before and after the definitive step in the marriage marked by the *accepit conjugem suam* of v. 24. For Ambrose the juridical relationship of Mary and Joseph remains the same before and after the event of v. 24. The evangelist's assertion of her virginity in v. 25 (*donec*) brings nothing more than that in v. 18 (*antequam*), so that Ambrose shifts his formulated reply from one verse to the other.

d) Reasons for Ambrose's Interpretation of Mt. 1:24

A final question remains: *Why* does Ambrose refuse to admit that the marriage of Mary and Joseph enters on a definitive stage at the time marked in Mt. 1:24 when Joseph *took unto him his wife*? There are two equivalent ways of phrasing this question, each suggesting a reply:

1. Why does Ambrose throw the beginning of marriage, in as definitive a stage as ever it was to have, back earlier than the discovery of Mary's pregnancy? Most probably to save Mary's good name, a theme so dear to him that one of his formulas, since become famous, pleased even his critical ear enough to be repeated verbatim in a later work: "Maluit enim Dominus aliquos de sua generatione quam de matris pudore dubitare." Ignorant of Jewish customs, Ambrose was not aware that in her environment Mary's pregnancy while only betrothed (*desponsata*) could pass without condemnation². He judged betrothal by Roman standards which strictly forbade marital relations until the wedding had been performed. Hence he could not admit that the wedding was performed definitively only after Mary was seen to be with child. It had to be of earlier date – whether before or after the Annun-

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:6. CSEL 32:4 44:21-23. PL 15:1555ab and *De Inst. Virg.* 5:37. PL 16: 315b repeat the formula:

Consuetudo autem divinae Scripturae ea est, ut causam quae suscepta est astruat, incidentem differat.

Cf. *infra*, p. 240 f.

² Cf. *supra*, p. 87, n. 1.

ciation it cannot be said, since he refers to Mary always as *desponsata* and equates even *conjux* with this term.

2. To put the same question differently, why would Ambrose not admit that Joseph acquired any more definitive right as a husband at the time that Matthew says "he took unto him his wife?" Probably because Ambrose was never willing to envisage Joseph's role as husband in the Holy Family. This agrees with the less complimentary idea which Ambrose had of the spouse of Mary, a theme to be touched on repeatedly in the present study¹. It agrees as well with Ambrose's praise of the Virgin Mary, even after the Annunciation, for the practice of virtues which normally would not fit well into married life. The principal of these virtues is the solitude proper to the Virgin even as spouse of Joseph. Ambrose could not deny that the spouses lived together, but he never dwelt on the idea, and when on Calvary he sees Christ separate them, he has not a word for the anguish which such a separation should have caused to a heart as noble in its love as Mary's. For Ambrose, terms like *coming together* and *taking unto him his wife* recalled too much of the down-to-earth detail of married life. Mary's marriage for him was only a veil, a sort of juridical disguise about which he had at heart to exclude one detail above all: the exercise of conjugal rights.

3. Mary and a Pre-Annunciation Vow of Virginity

The third historical circumstance which could have affected Mary's virginity ante partum, in addition to her espousal and marriage to Joseph which have just been discussed, is the possibility that she had made a vow of virginity. Does Ambrose teach that at the time of the Annunciation Mary had already vowed her virginity to God? Despite over-simplified interpretations of his doctrine sometimes encountered in manuals of Mariology, the answer must be in the negative. Ambrose mentions the word *votum* in connection with Mary only twice, and in neither place does it have the meaning of the formal consecration of virginity now understood to be a vow of virginity.

Advertimus enim ex sequentibus quia quotannis in die solemnī Paschae sancta Maria cum Joseph Hierusalem petebat. Ubique impigra devotio, ubique assiduus Virgini comes pudoris adjungitur. Nec inflatur Domini mater, quasi secūra de meritis; sed quo meritum magis agnovit, eo votum uberius exsolvit, officium copiosius detulit, munus religiosius vexit, mysticum tempus implevit².

¹ Cf. *supra*, p. 89; *infra*, p. 199 f, 250 f.

² *De Vid.* 4:25. PL 16:242b.

The second use of *votum* might seem more pertinent:

« Ecce ancilla Domini, contingat mihi secundum verbum tuum. » Habes obsequium, vides votum. « Ecce enim ancilla Domini » apparatus officii est, « contingat mihi secundum verbum tuum » conceptus est voti ¹.

But here also the more general sense of *votum* is apparent from its use in a balanced construction with *officium* and from the apportioning of Mary's reply between these two concepts. *Officium* represents the service that the humble handmaid is ready to bring to her Lord: "Ecce ancilla Domini." *Votum* expresses the entire and unreserved offering of herself to him to be disposed of according to his will: « Contingat mihi secundum verbum tuum. » Hence in Ambrose's works there is no record of a *vow of virginity* ascribed to Mary.

But if the term does not occur, does he perhaps leave room for such a concept in his commentary of Mary's dialogue with Gabriel at the Annunciation? It is well known, for example, that the Fathers who speak of such a vow usually see evidence for it in Mary's reply, "Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non *cognosco*?" The present tense of *cognosco*, they explain, expresses not simply Mary's virginal state, but her determination to remain therein, a determination made in the form of a vow. Her question, they go on to say, lacks its reason unless this verb is so understood; for an ordinary maiden without the determination to remain such would see no obstacle in the angel's message that she was to become a mother. No such maiden would offer as a difficulty the fact that she *does not know* or *did not know* man. What is Ambrose's interpretation of this important verse (Luc. 1:34)?

Contrary to what might be expected, he lacks every trace of the reasoning just supplied, simply because he read the verb in his Latin codices not in the present tense but in the perfect: "Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non *cognovi*?" ² He understands the verb to mean that Mary's reply excluded relations with man in the past, without rendering explicit any determination by vow to exclude them forever. What then is the sense of her question? Knowing from the prophecy of Isaias (7:14) that the Messiah was to be born of a virgin, says Ambrose, Mary inquired *how* a virgin could become a mother. The *manner* of the Messiah' gener-

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:16. CSEL 32:4 50:26-51:2. PL 15:1559a.

² *Ibid.*, 2:4, 15, 16. CSEL 43:13; 50:10; 51:17. PL 1554b, 1558c, 1559a. *De Abra.* 2:8:49. CSEL 32:1 602:23. PL 14:477c.

ation, left unexplained in Isaias' prophecy, was the subject of her question¹. Further than that Ambrose did not go.

His interpretation of *Luc. 1:34* is thus handicapped by a faulty Latin translation, which is encountered oddly enough for the same verb *cognoscere* in another passage². Despite his frequent use of Greek readings³, he never drew any conclusion from the fact that the verb in the Greek codices is indubitably present: ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω. Even among the earlier Greek Fathers, however, who thus enjoyed the advantage of a better reading over the Latin, no interpretation of *Luc. 1:34* in terms of a vow is to be found until the time of Gregory of Nyssa⁴. This Cappadocian, who can safely be taken as the author of the long-disputed *Oratio in diem natalem Christi*⁵, is the first to give the interpretation of *Luc. 1:34* which has since become traditional, and he is very explicit thereon⁶. Let it be remarked in passing that Augustine, who reproduces the same interpretation forty years later⁷ is often wrongly credited with having initiated the tradition; some would have him doing so in the wake of a movement, increasingly powerful thanks to Ambrose, toward the virginal life. It is not always easy to discern the mutual influence which Mariology and asceticism had on each other in their development, and the genesis of the idea of Mary's vow of virginity is not as clear as some would make it.

Ambrose reveals himself, therefore, consistently faithful to earlier tradition in refraining from comments on any vow of virginity in Mary's life. Tradition had always been this rule. In no phase of the virginity of Mary is this more evident than in his teaching on Mary's virginity ante partum – which is altogether to be expected, since no phase of Mary's virginity was more solidly established by the time that Ambrose moved onto the scene.

The same cannot be said for her virginity in partu, and it is there that Ambrose was destined to render his most signal service.

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:14 f. CSEL 32:4 50:1-19. PL 15:1558ac. *De Abra.* 2:8:49. CSEL 32: 1 602:16-603:3. PL 14:477bc. *De Off.* 1:18:69. PL 16:44b. *Ep.* 42:5. PL 16:1125b.

² In Mt. 1:25 ("et non cognoscebat eam donec peperit filium suum") *cognovit* was read in many codices of the Old Latin for the first verb. Cf. *infra*, p. 246 f.

³ *Infra*, p. 245; *supra*, p. 81, n. 4.

⁴ The fact is documented by Hugo Koch, *Adhuc Virgo*. Tübingen 1929, p. 38 f., and *Virgo Eva – Virgo Maria*. Berlin 1937, p. 110.

⁵ PG 46:1140 f. Cf. *supra*, p. 33, n. 2 for authenticity.

⁶ SOELL, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

⁷ Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 4. CSEL 41 238:6 ff. PL 40:398bc. Jerome, like Ambrose, read *cognovi* and thus lacks the interpretation in terms of a vow.

VIRGO
IN PARTU

CHAPTER THREE

Mary's Virginitv In Partu in Ambrose's Pre-Jovinianist Works

More than any other passage, the narrative of the birth of Our Lord in the *Protoevangelium of James* (c. 19) suffices to stamp the work as apocryphal. There one is indeed in touch with Christian curiosity desirous to grasp at every detail knowable about the life of its Savior, but not with the revealed word of God, which chose rather to silence itself on this most delicate moment of Christ's earthly existence. Apart from all demands of polemic against Gnostics and Docetists, the Fathers from the very beginning could be expected to imitate this silence of the Scriptures about Christ's birth. Ambrose reflects similar reticence. Confident of his assertion that Mary was the virgin par excellence, he does not often single out Christ's birth to proclaim the miraculous integrity of His Mother at that moment. His clearest declarations will have to be provoked by a heretic. Even then he nowhere descends to details like the story of the midwife's examination: apostle though he is of Mary's virginitv, he bears no traces in his works of the *Protoevangelium*. To assess Ambrose's eventual contribution, an enormous one, to the evolution of this doctrine, it will therefore be necessary to pick up from its origins the tradition of reticence on the subject of Christ's virginal birth of Mary.

A. Historical Evolution of the Doctrine of Mary's Virginitv in Partu

Though shorn of almost every detail, the Gospels contain the revelation of Mary's virginitv in partu in some degræe. It will be debated how explicitly the truth is stated. At any rate, both Matthew (1:23)

and Luke (1:34)¹ cite the prophecy of Is. 7:14, which reads, "Behold the *virgin* shall be with child and *shall bring forth* a son..." Ambrose will be heard understanding this verse as an assertion that Mary remained a virgin in bringing forth her son². He is far from being alone in so interpreting it³. Jerome drew additional proof of the doctrine from the fact recorded by St. Luke that Mary performed unaided such services as wrapping the child in swaddling clothes and laying him in a manger⁴.

The witnesses of the doctrine among the apocryphals are not to be discredited, as though all apocryphals were of Gnostic or Docetist origin and therefore prejudiced in their presentation of any doctrine that could bolster their opinion of the unreality of Christ's body. If this is true of the later apocryphals, it cannot be said of two of the earliest, the *Protoevangelium of James* and the *Ascensio Isaiae*⁵.

The *Protoevangelium* (mid-2nd century) is known for the testimony in chapters 18-20 on the manner in which Mary gave birth to her child before the arrival of the midwife, who then becomes the eyewitness of her miraculously preserved virginity⁶. Emile Amann calls the fact of Mary's virginity in partu the "idée capitale" of this work⁷. Its influence is to be detected throughout the Patristic era and into the Middle Ages, and is sufficiently well known not to require further comment here⁸.

¹ Marie-Joseph LAGRANGE, *Evangile selon saint Luc*, 2nd ed., Paris 1921, p. 30, holds that Luke has in mind the prophecy of Isaïas in citing the angel's words, "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son". B. E. KLOSTERMANN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 2nd ed. Tübingen 1929, p. 13 assents.

² *Ep.* 42 : 5. PL 16 : 1125b. *Infra*, p. 171.

³ Cf. Gregory Thaumaturgus, Gregory of Nyssa, *infra*, p. 111 f. Paschal R. Bortz, *Die Jungfrauschaft Mariens im Neuen Testament und in der nachapostolischen Zeit*, Bottrop i. W. 1935, p. 39 f., interprets the prophecy in this manner.

⁴ Jerome, *Adv. Helv.* 8 bis. PL 23 : 191d-192a.

⁵ On the apocryphals see Joseph C. PLUMPE, *Some Littleknown Early Witnesses to Mary's Virginitas in Partu*. Theological Studies, 9 (1948), p. 567-577.

⁶ Greek text, C. DE TISCHENDORF, *Evangelia apocrypha*, 2nd ed. Leipzig 1876, p. 34-38; Emile AMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 248-254 (with French translation). English translation in M. R. JAMES, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford 1926, p. 46 f.; PLUMPE, *op. cit.*, p. 571. German translation: Edgar HENNECKE, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*. Tübingen 1904, p. 61; GARITTE G., *Le Protévangile de Jacques en géorgien*, in Le Muséon, 70 (1957), p. 233-265; Michel TESTUZ, *Papyrus Bodmer V, Nativité de Marie*. Bibliotheca Bodmeriana. Genève 1958; E. DE STRYCKER, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*. Subsidia Hagiographica. Bruxelles, 1961. – See also the importance of this question for the Immaculate Conception, in : Othmar PERLER, *Das Protoevangelium des Jakobus nach dem Papyrus Bodmer V*, in Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie, 6 (1959), p. 23-35.

⁷ AMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108-164.

The *Ascensio Isaiae* is a composite piece, partly Jewish and partly Christian, which seems to have been put together around the year 150. It merits special attention since the section in which the testimony to Mary's virginity in partu occurs, chapter eleven, has recently been shown by R. H. Charles to date from even the first century¹, and this dating has been accepted by the eminent authority on eastern churches and later cardinal, Eugène Tisserant². Furthermore, the remainder of the document bears no certain evidence of Docetism. The account of Christ's nativity represents him appearing suddenly, almost as an apparition, with Joseph at first unaware of his coming³.

Many scholars regard the *Odes of Solomon* as a Gnostic production, but a considerably growing number champion the writing as "one of the finest pieces of ancient Christian hymnody, inspired by Johannine piety and mysticism and eminently worthy of companionship with the *Didache*"⁴. The work, originally written in Greek but extant only in a Syriac version discovered by J. Rendel Harris in 1909, is generally dated earlier than 150⁵. In the nineteenth ode, in a section belabored elsewhere by obscurity, the author suddenly gives clear and explicit witness to "the doctrine of the virgin birth in a highly evolved form, as, for instance, the virgin birth, plus painlessness, plus non-necessity of a mid-wife"⁶.

With the *Acts of Peter* one enters literature which is most probably Gnostic and Docetist⁷, so that the testimony of Mary's virginity in

¹ R. H. CHARLES, *The Ascension of Isaiah*. London 1900, p. XXII-IV, XXXVIII, XLIVF.

² Eugène TISSERANT, *L'Ascension d'Isaïe* (Documents pour l'Etude de la Bible). Paris 1909, p. 60: "entre 88 et 100".

³ *Asc. Isaiae* 11:2-11. The work, written in Greek, exists only in an Ethiopian version. English translation: CHARLES, *op. cit.*, p. 74-76. PLUMPE, *op. cit.*, p. 573. German translation: HENNECKE, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

⁴ PLUMPE, *op. cit.*, p. 575. Cf. J. Rendel HARRIS and A. MINGANA, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*. Manchester 1916-1920, II, p. 205. J. H. BERNARD, *The Odes of Solomon* (Texts and Studies 8:3). Cambridge 1913, p. 28-30. J. SCHMID, *Oden Salomons*, LTK, VII. Berlin 1935, col. 674. Pierre BATIFFOL in J. LABOURT - P. BATIFFOL, *Les Odes de Salomon, une œuvre chrétienne des environs de l'an 100-120*. Paris 1911, p. 11-18. H. GRIMME, *Die neunzehnte Ode Salomons, eine Rekonstruktion*. Theologie und Glaube, 3 (1911), p. 11-18. R. H. CONNOLLY, *The Odes of Solomon, Jewish or Christian?* JTS, 13 (1912), p. 306-309. José-Maria BOVER, *La mariologia en las "Odas de Salomon"*. Estudios Ecclesiasticos, 10 (1931), p. 349-363.

⁵ PLUMPE, *op. cit.*, p. 576.

⁶ HARRIS-MINGANA, *op. cit.*, II, p. 305. The passage is from *Ode XIX*, vv. 6-10; *ibid.*, II, p. 299. PLUMPE, *op. cit.*, p. 575.

⁷ QUASTEN, *Patrology*, I, p. 134: "... an author who shows Docetist views."

chapter 24¹ is less conclusive than that culled from the three apocryphals just mentioned. Besides, the work has a later origin, probably around 190 in Syria or Palestine.

The first finds on leaving the apocryphals to enter the current of patristic tradition are less explicit than the detailed descriptions of the *Protoevangelium* and the *Ascensio Isaiae*. It is well known that the apparent silence of the earliest Fathers on the subject is due to the campaign already in Apostolic times against Gnosticism, and shortly thereafter against Docetism. This is admitted by even the bitterest opponents of Mary's virginity².

Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110c) is usually invoked for his text in the *Epistle to the Ephesians*:

And the Prince of this world was in ignorance of the virginity of Mary and her childbearing and also of the death of the Lord – three mysteries loudly proclaimed to the world though accomplished in the stillness of God³.

The Fathers usually interpreted this oft-quoted passage as explicit testimony to Mary's virginity in partu⁴, but it is almost as probable that the famous opponent of the Gnostics wished by mentioning the mysteries of Christ's real birth and real death to assert the reality of His body⁵. In the *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* Ignatius shows the same insistence on the reality of Christ's body, so that his profession that Christ was "really born of a virgin"⁶ is probably also to be interpreted in that light instead of as a witness to Mary's virginity in partu. On the other hand, it is interesting to note the attempt of R. H. Charles to show that the source

¹ The work, only two-thirds complete, is possessed mainly in a Latin version (*Actus Vercellenses*), edited by R. A. LIPSIIUS - M. BONNET, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, I. Leipzig 1891, p. 1-22, 45-103. English translation: JAMES, *op. cit.*, p. 300-336. German translation: HENNECKE, *op. cit.*, p. 391-423.

² KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 7, and *Virgo Eva*, p. 62; in the latter place, while denying the force of the text from Ignatius (*infra*, n. 3) alleged by many for the virginity in partu, KOCH writes: "Nun wäre diesem gnostisch angehauchten Bekämpfer des Gnostizismus an sich eine solche Anschauung wohl zuzutrauen."

³ Ignatius, *Ad Eph.* 19:1. FUNK, p. 203:10-12. English translation: James A. KLEIST, *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch* (Ancient Christian Writers, 1). Westminster (U. S. A.) 1946, p. 67.

⁴ Passages are listed by J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers, Part II: St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp*, II, 2nd ed. London 1889, p. 76 f.

⁵ KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 62 f., criticizes the case for virginity drawn from Ignatius' text by BOTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 91-97.

⁶ Ignatius, *Ad Smyr.* 1:1. FUNK, p. 143:13-21. KLEIST, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

of Ignatius' famous statement just cited from the *Epistle to the Ephesians* is the following sentence of the *Ascensio Isaiae*, which comes after the account of Christ's birth:

This hath escaped all the heavens and the princes and all the gods of this world ¹.

If Ignatius actually drew on this source, he could have had in mind to assert also the virginal birth.

Justin (d. 165c) seems to have known the *Protoevangelium*, though the case is not admitted by all ². At any rate, he shared its idea of the virginal birth, without entering into comparable detail on the subject ³.

Among the texts of Irenaeus (d. 202c) the *Adv. Haer.* 4:33:11 is most frequently adduced on the virginal birth:

...Purus pure puram aperiens vulvam, eam quae regenerat homines in Deum, quam ipse puram fecit ⁴.

The language is reminiscent of the "Omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam" of Ex. 13:2, but with multiplied insistence on the purity of the *opening*, to ward off too literal an interpretation. Opinion is divided, however, as to whether the text is to be understood of Christ's birth from Mary or of the birth of each of the faithful from the Church ⁵. A stronger assertion of the doctrine may lie in the sentence of the *Epi-deixis* with which Irenaeus concludes a commentary of Is. 7:14:

Also, concerning His birth, the same prophet says in another place: "Before she who was in labor brought forth, and before the pains

¹ *Asc. Isaiae* 11:16. CHARLES, *op. cit.*, p. 77 f. PLUMPE, *op. cit.*, p. 574.

² AMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 56, 81, 109 is skeptical about Justin's dependence (*Dial.* 78) on the *Protoevangelium* for the detail of Christ's birth in a cave; "... il est pourtant vraisemblable qu'il a trouvé dans un écrit la tradition de la grotte de la nativité" (p. 81).

³ *Dial.* 100:5. GOODSPEED, p. 215. Note the use of ἔτεκε, suggestive of normal childbirth with its pain, to describe Eve's childbearing, whereas the more general ἐγέννηθε is said of Mary's motherhood. The same verb for Mary is found in *Dial.* 45 and 84:2. GOODSPEED, p. 143, 196. *Dial.* 78, GOODSPEED, p. 189, describes the scene of the nativity. Cp. I *Apol.* 33:4. GOODSPEED, p. 49. For a criticism of most of these texts, cf. KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 63 f.

⁴ *Adv. Haer.* 4:33:11. HARVEY, 2, p. 266.

⁵ Of the Church: Alois MÜLLER, *Ecclesia-Maria*. Freiburg (Schweiz) 1951, p. 66-70. KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 37-43: "Die vulva ist allerdings der Mutterschoß Mariens, aber als Bild des Mutterschoßes der Kirche." Of Mary: Georges JOUASSARD, *Le premier-né de la Vierge chez saint Irénée et saint Hippolyte*, RSR, 11 (1932), p. 518. Joseph GARCON, *La Mariologie de saint Irénée* (Thèse présentée à la Faculté de Théologie de Lyon). Lyon 1932, p. 85 f.

of labor came, there came forth delivered a man child", he proclaimed His unlooked-for and extraordinary birth of the Virgin ¹.

A similar text, *Adv. Haer.* 3:21:6, shows by the use of *partus* where *conceptio* would be expected that Irenaeus understood Mary's virginity in the most complete sense:

...Quoniam inopinata salus hominibus inciperet fieri, Deo adjuvante, inopinatus et partus virginis fiebat, Deo dante signum hoc, sed non homine operante in illud ².

But adversaries deny that any special emphasis is to be given the use of *partus* in such a text, on the grounds that in the works of Irenaeus preserved in Latin the word is interchangeably used with *generatio* and *nasci* to translate γεννησις and γεννᾶθαι and that until in later Greek the entire process of generation without singling out the moment of birth is thereby intended ³. Taken up with the refutation of the Docetists, Irenaeus had no occasion to be more explicit about Christ's virginal birth of Mary.

The name of Tertullian (d. after 220), of course, is synonymous with the denial of Mary's virginity in partu:

...Virgo quantum a viro, non virgo quantum a partu.... Si virgo concepit, in partu suo nupsit: nam nupsit ipsa patefacti corporis lege, in quo nihil interfuit de vi masculi admissi an emissi; idem illud sexus resignavit.... Agnovit adapertae vulvae nuptialem passionem ⁴.

For those who judge Tertullian less severely than Jerome, the only excuse ever offered for his error is that texts like these date from the Montanist period of his career when he was combating the Gnostic Marcion.

The most unfavorable of the texts of Origen (d. 253), found in the *Hom. 14 in Lucam*, recalls the excerpts from the *De Carne Christi* just quoted. It would, however, be difficult to prove Vagaggini's hypothesis ⁵

¹ *Epideixis* 54. WEBER, p. 40. English translation: Joseph P. SMITH, *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (Ancient Christian Writers, 16). Westminster (U. S. A.) 1952, p. 83. For the contrary interpretation cf. KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 43-46.

² *Adv. Haer.* 3:21:6. HARVEY, 2, p. 118.

³ KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 44 f.

⁴ *De carne Christi* 23. CSEL 70 246:12 f.; 247:19-22, 32. PL 2:790ab. Cp. *De pudicitia* 6. CSEL 20:1 230:2-5. PL 2:991a. *De virginibus velandis* 4-6. OEHLER, 1, p. 889 f. PL 2:893a-898b.

⁵ Cipriano VAGAGGINI, *Maria nelle Opere di Origene*. Roma 1942, p. 97. Cf. *infra*, p. 132, n. 1.

of a dependence of the great Alexandrian on one as closely his contemporary as Tertullian, particularly on a work of Tertullian's later years. Furthermore, Origen's subsequent thought on the doctrine is not clear and may have undergone evolution¹. His testimony will be discussed in comparison with that of Ambrose, who borrowed from him on so many other points².

Despite the ambiguity of Origen's expression, Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215) had already clearly spoken out for Mary's virginity in partu:

Many in our day think Mary gave birth in labor, although she did not³.

His explanation shows him dependent on the *Protoevangelium* with its story about the mid-wife⁴.

The *Sermo in Nativitatem Christi*, extant only in a Syriac version, is accepted by many as the work of Gregory Thaumaturgus (d. 270c)⁵. Its testimony is so explicit that no citation can do it justice⁶; opponents of its authenticity, in fact, found much of their case on the improbability of such explicitness before the late fourth century. The painlessness of Christ's temporal generation is compared to that of the generation of the Second Person of the Trinity (c. 8); virginal birth is cited as a proof of His divinity (c. 13) and as a necessary consequence of His being the model of virginity (c. 14); as Eve was taken out of Adam's side painlessly, so Christ was born of Mary (c. 14); Is. 7:14 is interpreted as asserting Christ's virginal birth as well as conception (c. 16).

Among the Cappadocians, the palm goes to Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), whose richness of thought and image on the subject of Mary's virginity in partu contrasts with the few mentions of the doctrine by Gregory

¹ *Infra*, p. 132, n. 1.

² *Infra*, p. 130-133.

³ *Stromata* 7:16:93 f. GCS Clem. 3 66:20-25. PG 9:529b.

⁴ AMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 81 accepts this as the earliest certain testimony of knowledge of the *Protoevangelium* among the Fathers.

⁵ Published in PITRA's *Analecta Sacra*, IV, p. 136 f. (Syriac) p. 388-92 (Latin). KOCH first rejects its authenticity in his *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 25, and then omits all mention of it in *Virgo Eva - Virgo Maria*. But in the earlier work, *loc. cit.*, he admits that LOOFs and others accept the homily as Gregory's. Cf. René LAURENTIN, *Court Traité...* tables, p. 156.

⁶ Especially chapters 8, 13, 14, 15, and 16, about to be summarized. In addition to the Latin translation, cf. the French excerpts in Adhémar d'ALES, *Marie dans l'ancienne tradition patristique*. Dictionnaire d'Apologétique de la Foi catholique, III. Paris 1916, col. 173; Emile NEUBERT, *Marie dans l'Eglise anténicéenne*. Paris 1908, p. 189.

of Nazianzus (329-390c) ¹. As with Gregory Thaumaturgus, the prophecy of Is. 7:14 is used to prove that Christ was not only conceived but born virginally ². Despite his enthusiasm over Mary's integrity, the bishop of Nyssa repeats that he intends only to assert the fact of her virginal childbirth and not its manner, which as the rest of the Fathers he leaves to an ineffable miracle ³. Faced with the *adaperiens vulvam* of Ex. 13:2 cited in Luc. 2:23 in the narrative of the Presentation in the Temple, he says that despite the expression Mary's womb remained closed and intact ⁴. Even without the *Oratio in Nativitatem Domini*, which many deny to Gregory of Nyssa, he would still be the best witness of his time for the virginity in partu ⁵.

The explicitness of Gregory Thaumaturgus and Gregory of Nyssa is witness that Mary's virginity in partu was finding ever more frequent expression in the eastern Church throughout the latter part of the third century and into the fourth. Hilary of Poitiers (315-367c) must have heard the doctrine preached during his exile in the East (356-359) and he alluded to it in his *De Trinitate* which dates from these years. Asking the question, "Quomodo natus ex virgine sit, an detrimentum sui caro perfectam ex se carnem generans perpessa sit", he answers:

Certe non suscepit quod edidit, sed caro carnem sine elementorum nostrorum pudore provexit et perfectum ipsa de suis non imminuta generavit ⁶.

In northern Italy also the doctrine had attained the most unequivocal expression it had so far received in Latin. The little-studied Zeno of Verona (fl. 362-372) put his rhetorical formation to good use in bequeathing to Mariology masterpieces of terminology such as these:

Maria virgo incorrupta concepit, post conceptum virgo peperit, post partum virgo permansit ⁷.

¹ Georg SOELL, *Die Mariologie der Kappadozier im Licht der Dogmengeschichte*. Theologische Quartalschrift, 131 (1951), p. 298. For the thought of Gregory of Nazianzus, cf. *Orat.* 40:45. PG 36:424b and *Carminum* lib. 1, sec. 2, *Carmina moralia*, *In laudem virginitatis*, 190-200. PG 37:537a.

² *Orat.* 1 de Resur. Dom. PG 46:601d.

³ *Orat. in Nativ. Christi*. PG 46:1136ab, 1141b.

⁴ *Orat. de Occursu Domini*. PG 46:1157c.

⁵ SOELL, *op. cit.*, p. 303. Cf. *De Virgite*. 19. PG 46:396d-397a.

⁶ *De Trin.* 3:19. PL 10:87a. KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 29 has to avow:

Dem ganzen Zusammenhang nach – es ist davon die Rede, daß der Vater durch die Zeugung des Sohnes kein *damnum* erlitten habe – ist damit die *virginitas in partu* zwar nicht allein, nicht einmal in erster Linie gemeint, aber sie ist mitgemeint.

⁷ *Tractatus* 2:8:2. PL 11:415a.

Maria fuit virgo post conubium, virgo post conceptum, virgo post filium ¹.

The influence of the *Protoevangelium* is evident throughout his tracts and he assumes its narrative of the nativity to be known to his hearers.

By Zeno's day, then, the doctrine had entered the preaching of the western Church. With Ambrose, in the generation after Zeno, it was taken for granted and hardly spoken of until it had to be defended. The purpose of the present chapter is to study the expressions which it received before the catalyst that was Jovinian prompted Ambrose to his most clearcut declarations.

B. The Marian Sense of Exp. Luc. 2:56 f.

One of the most controverted passages Ambrose wrote on the Virgin Mary occurs in the *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 2:56 f. ², in his commentary on Christ's presentation in the Temple. The root of the difficulty which the Fathers have always experienced with this gospel narrative lies in the words of the Old Law which St. Luke sees fulfilled in some way when Christ was brought to Jerusalem, "Sicut scriptum est in lege Domini: Quia 'omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam sanctum Domino vocabitur'" (Luc. 2:23). In face of the "adaperiens vulvam" of this text, it must be explained how Mary remained a virgin even in the birth of her Son. The commentary which Ambrose makes of the text in the *Exp. Luc.* has traditionally been taken for a pronouncement, less clear than any of his others, on Mary's virginity in partu. His words, therefore, have been introduced in connection with this latter doctrine, although the first task is to ascertain by a painstaking exegesis what the gist of his thought in the passage actually is.

1. Analysis of Exp. Luc. 2:56 f.

Vides omnem legis veteris seriem fuisse typum futuri – nam et circumcisio purgationem significat delictorum – sed quoniam prona quadam cupiditate peccandi humanae carnis et mentis fragilitas inextricabilibus vitiis implicatur, eo per octavum circumcisionis diem culpae totius futura purgatio resurrectionis praefigurabatur aetate. Hoc est enim illud: «Quia omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam sanctum

¹ *Ibid.*, 1:5:3. PL 303a. *Ibid.*, 2:9:1. PL 417a.

² CSEL 32:4 72:1-73:8. PL 15:1572c-1573b.

Domino vocabitur » ; verbis enim Legis promittebatur virginis partus. Et vere sanctus, quia immaculatus. Denique ipsum esse qui Lege signetur in eundem modum ab angelo repetita verba declarant : « Quia quod nascetur, inquit, sanctum vocabitur Filius Dei. » ¹

The thesis underlying Ambrose's whole development, of which the introduction is given above, is announced in the first sentence: "Vides omnem legis veteris seriem² fuisse typum futuri." The "masculinum adaperiens vulvam", then, takes on sense for him only as a type of some mystery of the New Law. One would err grossly in expecting him to interpret the expression literally when applying it to Christ. To prepare his reader for thinking of it as a type, he introduces two examples from the narrative of the Circumcision of Our Lord which he has just commented in the preceding sentences: 1. *Circumcision* under the Old Law signified *purification from sin*. 2. The prescription that the child should be circumcised on the *eighth* day prefigured the *total* purification from sin accomplished in the age of the resurrection. Alluding here to one of his favorite ideas, Ambrose considers the eighth day as a type of the age of the Christian dispensation which dawned with the resurrection of Christ and is to be consummated in our own resurrection³.

In a similar way the text of *Ex.* 13:2 cited by St. Luke in connection with Christ's presentation, "Omne masculinum, etc.", prefigures the *partus virginis*, the fruit of the Virgin, Him whom the Virgin bore. Whatever the sense of *partus* in passages to be studied later⁴, Ambrose does not use it here in the exclusive meaning of the moment of birth,

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:56. CSEL 32:4 72:1-12. PL 15:1572c.

² *Series scripturarum* is one of Ambrose's favorite expressions to designate the "contents of Scripture"; he probably owes it to Origen's εἰρηδὸς τοῦ ῥητοῦ. Cp. *De Sacr.* 1:6:24, 4:1:1; *In Ps.* 38:1; 36:80; 35:2:2. *Exam.* 1:6:22; 2:3:10; 3:2:7, etc. FALKER, *Ambrosius der Verfasser...*, p. 82, n. 32.

³ *Ep.* 44:14 f. PL 16:1140c, 1141a:

The seventh age of the world being completed, the grace of the eighth has shone upon us.... The day of the Old Testament has passed away, and the new day has come, wherein the New Testament is perfected.

This eighth age is "the great day of the Lord", "the uninterrupted period during which we grow up into a perfect man, in knowledge of God and fullness of faith". (*Ibid.* 12. PL 1140b.) The seven ages of the world preceded Christ's coming (*De Jos.* 39), the eighth is that of the Christian era, to end with His second coming (*De Abra.* 2:9:66). DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 663. Cp. *Exam.* 4:5:22; *In Ps.* 38:18; *De Job* 1:14; *De Abra.* 2:8:53; *Exp. Luc.* 5:50; *Ep.* 72:24 f.; *Ep.* 44:3, 5 f.; *Exp. Ps.* 118, prol. 2. Circumcision was prescribed for the eighth day because that was the day of the Lord's Resurrection (*De Abra.* 2:11:79). Cp. Franz Joseph DOELGER, *Zur Achtzahl als Sinnbild des geistigen Kosmos*, AC, 5 (1936), p. 293 f.; 4 (1934), p. 160-182.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 162 f.

as though he wished to see the *adaperiens vulvam* preeminently realized by Christ who opened a womb hitherto intact. It is almost prejudicing the case to interject such a warning, but this traditional interpretation, found among other Fathers, comes so readily to mind that unless one is forewarned, he reads their ideas into the rest of Ambrose's exposition. The very next sentence is guarantee, however, that Ambrose is approaching the text from a different angle, with his eyes fixed not on the *adaperiens vulvam* but on the *sanctum*. For the text of Exodus, he affirms, applies to the *partus Virginis* above all because He is "vere sanctus, quia immaculatus".

Whatever follows in this passage, therefore, is to be interpreted in terms of Christ's sanctity, and not of the integrity on Mary's virginal womb at the moment of Christ's birth.

The *Old Law*, then, prefigures Christ 1. as a *masculinum adaperiens vulvam*; 2. who is *sanctum Domino*. On the first point Ambrose states only the fact that Christ is a male who opens a womb, and thereupon he drops this part of the Old Testament prescription for the moment. Beginning his application rather with the second point, he insists that the Old Law describes Christ as holy because immaculate. In the same way as the Old Law, the *Angel at the Annunciation* called Christ holy: "Quod nascetur, inquit, sanctum vocabitur Filius Dei".¹ But in what sense is the *partus Virginis*, prefigured by the Old Law and announced by the angel, "vere sanctus quia immaculatus?" In the sense that He was of virginal origin. This is the familiar Origenistic thesis that to be exempt from original sin the Word could not take on flesh in the ordinary way, but only virginally. Ambrose immediately explains the theological import of the angel's words:

Non enim virilis coitus vulvae virginalis secreta reseravit, sed immaculatum semen inviolabili utero spiritus sanctus infudit; solus enim per omnia ex natis de femina sanctus Dominus Jesus, qui terrenae contagia corruptelae *immaculati partus novitate* non senserit et coelesti maiestate depulerit².

¹ On the angel's words two remarks might be made: a) by interjecting *inquit* into Luke's text before *sanctum* Ambrose wants to put into relief the key-word *sanctum*; b) in saying that "the words *repeated* by the angel" refer to Christ "in the same way" as the prescription of the Old Law, Ambrose seems to permit the "*sanctum Domino vocabitur*" of Ex. 13:2 to influence a juxtaposition of *sanctum vocabitur* in Luc. 1:35, thus reading the verse "Quod nascetur ex te, sanctum vocabitur Filius Dei", instead of "Quod nascetur ex te sanctum, vocabitur Filius Dei". But in either case the attribution of sanctity to Christ holds in Ambrose's argument.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:56. CSEL 32:4 72:12-17. PL 15:1572c-1573a.

Here again the “*inmaculati partus novitate*” must not mislead the reader into believing that Ambrose is speaking primarily of the moment of birth. If moments in the process of generation are to be distinguished here, it should be observed that in Ambrose’s mind Jesus was immaculate not in virtue of a virginal *birth*, but rather in virtue of his virginal *conception*. In the expression “*inmaculati partus novitate*” human generation is viewed as a whole, without singling out either conception or birth; but if either is in the foreground, it is undoubtedly the virginal conception.

Thus far Ambrose has shown that the *sanctum vocabitur*, whether in Ex. 13:2 or in Luc. 1:35, is to be understood fully of Christ alone, who alone is immaculate. Since in Ex. 13:2 it was the *omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam* who was given this title *sanctum*, Christ also, and Christ alone, is to be understood, in the typical sense, as the male who opens a womb. But immediately an objection arises: Is not the *adaperiens vulvam*, after all, simply another way of designating a *first-born* child and does not the Old Law prescription apply, and quite literally, to every first-born male child of the Jews thus reserved to Jahwe? No, Ambrose has reserved a surprise in the exegesis he makes of Ex. 13:2 when he views its literal sense; for, contrary to what has been written of many other Fathers and for that matter of Ambrose as well, it is clear upon examination that he does not consider the “*omne masculinum*” of Ex. 13:2 as “*omne masculinum primogenitum!*” Taking the words just as they stand in Exodus, he writes that they cannot be interpreted literally:

Nam si litteram sequamur, quomodo sanctus *omnis masculus*, cum multos sceleratissimos fuisse non lateat ? ¹

It would be a distortion of his thought, therefore, to read “*omne primogenitum*”, a gross distortion because the “opening of the womb” which he will mention in a moment again is *not* that which occurs at the birth of a first child, but that which the male brings about at the moment human generation begins. Ambrose wishes to be taken as literally as he himself has taken Ex. 13:2, and in literal terms the problem he envisages is “*Quomodo sanctus omnis masculus?*” He has even avoided mentioning the *adaperiens vulvam* here along with *omnis masculus* to keep his reader from limiting himself to the first-born sense of the Old Testament prescription.

¹ *Ibid.*, 2:57. CSEL 72:17 f. PL 1573a.

The examples to which he refers prove that he is not talking about "omne *primogenitum*":

Numquid sanctus Achab ? Numquid sancti pseudoprophetae, quos ad Eliae preces ultor coelestis injuriae ignis assumpsit ? ¹

Nowhere in Scripture is it said that King Achab was the *first-born* son of Amri. But what is said of him, and what must have suggested him as an apt example of a *masculus sceleratissimus* to a mind as familiar with the Old Testament as Ambrose's, is that he took to wife the infamous Jezabel. Indeed, this is presented by Scripture in its opening words on Achab as the climax of his evil-doing:

And Achab, the son of Amri, did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. Nor was it enough for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nabat : but he *also took to wife Jezabel*, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians ².

Ambrose views Achab, then, as a standing argument against the possibility of interpreting "omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam" literally: could Achab be called *holy* for having opened the womb of Jezabel?

In the second example, too, it is impossible to imagine Ambrose holding that all the false prophets whose execution was brought about by Elias (1 Kings 18) were first-born ³. They come to his mind as other examples of males who *opened the womb*, as did Achab, but could not on that account be called *holy*.

In what sense, then, are these words true? The next sentence contains Ambrose's answer:

Sed ille sanctus, per quem *figuram* futuri mysterii pia legis divinae praescripta signabant, eo quod solus sanctae Ecclesiae virginis ad generandos populos Dei immaculatae fecunditatis aperiret genitale secretum ⁴.

The only male who was truly holy was he through whom the pious prescriptions of the divine law signified the figure of a future mystery;

¹ *Loc. cit.* CSEL 72:18-20. PL 1573a.

² I Kings 18:31 f.

³ On the other hand, the false prophets here appear in contrast with Elias, whom Ambrose occasionally cites as a model of virginity, as in *De Virgs.* 1:3:12. FALLER, p. 23: 11-14. PL 16:192a. It would be asking too much, however, to suppose Ambrose was acquainted with the rabbinical opinion that the true prophetic vocation demanded the practice of virginity or at least of perfect chastity from the moment God's call came, barring His explicit command to the contrary as in the case of Osee.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 2:57. CSEL 72 : 20-73:3. PL 16:1573a.

he alone was holy in that he alone would open the immaculately fruitful womb of the holy Church, a virgin, to generate children of God. In Christ alone, therefore, the prescription of Exodus is fully realized. Did the Holy Spirit speak of sanctity as dependent on the opening of the womb? Then He cannot have meant any womb at all. Only the opening of the *immaculately* fruitful womb of the *holy* Church, a *virgin*, gives Christ, and Him alone, a claim to sanctity on this count.

Thus, only after Ambrose has understood the Old Law prescription in an allegorical sense is he willing to apply the crucial words *adaperire vulvam* to Christ. For although they have been implied throughout in the *omnis masculus* of which he just spoke, Ambrose himself has not pronounced them since introducing the text of Exodus. Now for the first time he says that Christ opened a womb – *aperuit vulvam* – but he immediately adds two precisions of capital importance: “Hic (Christus) ergo *solus* aperuit *sibi* vulvam.”¹ *Solus* has already been met with when Christ was said to be the only one to open the womb of the Church. But that opening had as its purpose “ad generandos populos Dei”. Now Ambrose’s thought is moving on to another sense in which Christ, and still He alone, opened the womb, this time *for Himself* (*sibi*). The allusion here can be only to His temporal generation of the Virgin Mary. And in line with his whole thought up to the present, Ambrose views Christ as *opening the womb* of the Virgin to *fashion for Himself a human body in her*, just as He opens the womb of the virginal Church to generate the children of God.

In taking up the second precision – that Christ opens the womb for Himself – Ambrose suspects his reader’s bewonderment at the idea:

Nec mirum ; qui enim dixerat ad prophetam : « Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te : et in vulva matris sanctificavi te », qui ergo vulvam sanctificavit alienam, ut nasceretur propheta, hic est qui aperuit matris suae vulvam, ut immaculatus exiret².

Do not wonder, he counsels, that Christ opens the womb *even for Himself*, even to clothe Himself with human nature. This He does in virtue of His divine power, He who had said to the prophet Jeremias: “Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee, and in the womb of thy mother I sanctified thee.”³ He who *sanctified* the womb of another woman so that there might be born from it a prophet certainly has the power to

¹ *Loc. cit.* CSEL 73:3. PL 1573a.

² *Loc. cit.* CSEL 73:3-8. PL 1573ab. ³ Jer. 1:5.

open the womb of His mother so as to take His human origin from it immaculate. “Hic est qui aperuit matris suae vulvam, *ut immaculatus exiret*.” The unfavorable interpreters of Ambrose have been lying in wait at this last word. “In cauda venenum !” For does not the interpretation just offered fall down on the *exiret* which seems to demand that one understand the *aperuit vulvam*, after all, of the moment of birth when Christ *came out*?

Not at all, for two reasons:

1. The important word is not *exiret* but *immaculatus*. Throughout this passage, and in others to be analyzed later ¹, *immaculatus* designates a sinlessness proper to Christ in virtue of His virginal origin of Mary. Try as one may, he will never find sense in the idea that in the moment of *birth* Christ should *open* His Mother’s womb so that he might emerge immaculate ². For Ambrose, as for Origen, He is immaculate because in *conceiving* Him His Mother remained a virgin. This is the sense of the last sentence, as of the whole passage: He *Himself*, and not an earthly father, *opened* His Mother’s womb to *enter* therein so that he might *come out* *immaculate*.

2. It can be seen why Ambrose fell on *immaculatus exiret* to complete his thought at this point. Unfavorable interpreters have regarded the expression as the only possible way to end the sentence: Christ opened the womb at birth so that he might come out. This cannot be, for were Ambrose’s idea such, he would not have added the *immaculatus*. It is probable that *exiret* appears by contrast to the idea of *entrance* that lies in the preceding *aperuit*: Christ *entered* His Mother’s womb virginally – “aperuit sibi vulvam” – so that he might *come out* therefrom immaculate – “ut immaculatus exiret” – not having contracted the sin which everyone else contracts on entering his mother’s womb. In the *first* half of the sentence Ambrose could not say “*intravit* in matris suae vulvam” because, as habitually, he wishes to use the words of the Scriptural text in question, which reads “*adaperiens* vulvam”. Would the unfavorable interpreters, before conceding the proposed exposition, demand that in the *second* half of the sentence he say “ut immaculatus

¹ *Infra*, p. 161-163.

² Immaculateness from original sin is in question in this passage. Could Ambrose have had the intention to assert that at the moment of *birth* Christ was immaculate from the *sordes* which Origen attributed to Him in consequence of His human generation? Hardly, because even for Origen such a *sordes* arises not from Christ’s birth, but from his taking on a human body. Cf. VAGAGGINI, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

intraret?” Then *intraret* would have no sense, for the Divine Word is already immaculate from all eternity and certainly, whatever the mode of conception, he would enter His Mother’s womb immaculate. But unless, in the mind of Ambrose, he did so *virginally*, he would lose His immaculateness, so to speak, on taking up residence there and would *come out* therefrom tainted by sin. Hence He *Himself* “*opened*” His Mother’s womb virginally so that having *entered* therein immaculate, He might *come out* immaculate. *Exiret* appears thus as the perfectly suited word, open to misinterpretation only if one loses sight of Ambrose’s thought throughout this whole passage.

2. Interpretations Traditionally given the Passage *Exp. Luc.* 2:56 f.

Such a lengthy analysis has been necessary because interpreters, whether favorable or unfavorable to Ambrose’s thought on the virginity in partu, have habitually misconstrued this passage. Their first mistake has been to expect Ambrose to follow the example of many other Fathers and discuss her virginity on encountering the *adaperiens vulvam*. That is simply not his intention, as has been seen. Hence, by the very fact it becomes superfluous to reply to the misinterpretations about to be reviewed. One has only to give them a hearing in order to observe how far, in varying degrees, they have strayed from Ambrose’s thought.

Bede the Venerable (672-735) followed Ambrose’s *Exp. Luc.* very closely in his own work of the same title ¹. His commentary here, then, may be regarded as an interpretation of Ambrose. “Salvo subtiliore tractatu” – and herein is probably an allusion to Ambrose – he says that the *adaperiens vulvam* is taken over from the language ordinarily used to describe a birth, but that it is unthinkable that at birth Christ would have violated the virginity which he had sanctified by His miraculous conception. Among other interpretations of Ex. 13:2, he adds that *perhaps* the words apply mystically to Christ who is the only *masculus* with the right to open the womb of the Church ².

¹ For references cf. the CSEL edition of Ambrose’s *Exp. Luc.*, although no parallel in Bede is cited for this passage.

² Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium Expositio*, 1. PL 92:341d-342b:

Ubi salvo subtiliore tractatu breviter intimandum, quod illa omnia primogenita, vel figura fuerint ejus qui cum unigenitus esset Dei Filius, primogenitus fieri dignatus est omni creaturae, vere et singulariter sanctus Domino, quia *peccatum non fecit, nec inventus est dolus in ore ejus*, vel certe nostrae fuerint devotionis indicium, qui omnia bonae actionis initia, quae quasi

Paschasius Radbertus (fl. 830) goes to great length to interpret Ambrose in the same double sense. At birth Christ opened His Mother's womb miraculously in such a way that it remained closed; in another way he opened the womb of the Church, His spouse ¹.

corde gignimus, Domini gratiae deputare, male autem gesta redimere debeamus, dignos videlicet poenitentiae fructus pro singulis quinque corporis vel animae sensibus offerentes. Itaque quod ait, *adaperiens vulvam*, consuetudine nativitatibus more loquitur. Non quod Dominus noster sacri ventris hospitium quod ingressus sanctificarat, egressus devirginasse credendus sit, juxta haereticos qui dicunt beatam Mariam virginem usque ad partum non virginem esse post partum, sed juxta fidem catholicam clauso virginis utero, quasi sponsus, suo processisse de thalamo. De quo pulchre propheta (Ezech. 44:2). ... Quamvis possit etiam mystice designari, nullum praeter Dominum Ecclesiae virginis uterum per aquam et Spiritum sanctum ad generandos Deo filios posse reserare, ideoque hunc masculum incomparabili dignitate Domino sanctum vocari.

It is evident that in paging through the works of Ambrose, Bede found two more passages to elucidate the one he had before him in the *Exp. Luc.*: a) The application of *adaperiens vulvam* to the birth of good and evil actions from one's heart is found in Ambrose, *De Cain* 1:10:46 f. and 2:1:5. CSEL 32:1 376:14-377:18; 380:19-381:14. PL 14:338d-340a, 341bd. Cf. *Infra*, p. 131, n. 78. b) The citation of Ezech. 44:2 could have been suggested by the *De Inst. Virg.* 8:52. PL 16:319d-320a. Cf. *Infra*, p. 268 f.

¹ Paschasius Radbertus, *De partu Virginis*, 1. PL 120:1376c-1378c, first gives his own interpretation of Ex. 13:2 as applied to Christ by St. Luk:

Non ideo dicit, ut nos cogat credere quod Christus vulvam matris aperuit, ut alii, sed ut doceret quod ideo sistunt eum Domino ut *facerent secundum consuetudinem legis pro eo; quia omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam sanctum Domino vocabitur*, in mysterio legis et sacramento sacrae praevaricationis. Non enim evangelista hoc testimonium de lege adhibuit, ut monstraret Christum vulvam virginis reserasse, sicut caeteri primogeniti, sed ut ostenderet eum sub lege factum, et de vulva virginis prodisse, non qui vocaretur tantum, sed qui esset essentialiter sanctus, cui jure patet omne clausum. Quod testimonium beatus Ambrosius exponens in evangelio ait. ...

He thus calls Ambrose to his aid, citing the present passage from *Exp. Luc.* ("Non enim virilis coitus" to "ut immaculatus exiret"), but omitting the section on literal interpretation and on the Christ-Church allegory ("Nam si litteram sequamur" up to "aperiret genitale secretum"). On Ambrose's thought thus excised he comments:

Quibus profecto verbis non mihi videtur sibi contrarius, aut caeteris doctoribus sanctis, quia dicit quod *solus sibi aperuit vulvam*. Aperuit siquidem sibi sua potentia mirabiliter, ut esset et pervium iter, ita ut virgineus clausus maneret uterus, sicut fuerunt januae clausae, et tamen per easdem ingressus est ad discipulos, sicut etiam sepulcrum signatum et clausum quando resurgens egressus est per illud; hinc quoque alibi ipse ait:

"Fit porta Christi pervia
Referta plena gratia,
Transitque rex et permanet
Clausa." * (Cf. end of this note.)

Non hoc sic dicit ut intelligas quod contra se sentiat, sed sic utique ut plenissime cognoscas eum de utero et per uterum virginis natum, quem ipse sibi fecit pervium, ac per hoc ipse sibi vulvam aperuit. Sibi quidem, quia vulva virginis licet clausa ei impenetrabilis patuit, tamen cum enixus intraret

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) cites the concluding words of Ambrose's passage in the first objection raised against virginal birth, and he answers, calling on Bede, that *adaperiens vulvam* refers simply to the *exitum prolis de utero matris*¹.

mundum clausam reliquit et signatam sigillo pudoris. Omnino quia Deo nihil difficile est....

Then he returns to take up Ambrose's allegory of Christ and the Church, introducing the thought, foreign to Ambrose in this passage, of Christ *primogenitus ex multis fratribus* by comparison with the children of the Church:

Alias autem, ipse solus sanctae Ecclesiae, quam sibi sponsam dedicavit ad generandos populos, aperuit vulvam virginittatis. ... Cujus genitale secretum tunc aperuit, quando per aquam et spiritum sanctum renascendi gratiam concessit.... Iste est ergo solus essentialiter sanctus, non per quam mater corrumpatur, sed per quem vulva reseretur Ecclesiae, primogenitus ex multis fratribus. Quem "in figura futuri mysterii per ora (PL note: Forte priora aut pia) legis divinae praescripta signabant" in primogenitis suis. Non quod essent vere sancta, sed quia vocabantur ex mysterio legis.

Citing Ambrose's question as to whether in the literal interpretation of Ex. 13:2 Achab or Joram (cf. infra p.129) or the pseudo-prophets could be called holy, he replies

Non utique ; sed in sacramento futurae praefigurationis vocabantur sancti cum non essent, donec veniret Christus essentialiter sanctus, qui et sponsae suae vulvam aperiret, fecunditatemque pariendi filios refunderet. Ipse namque Dominico dignus iudicatus est obtutu ; caeteros omnes juxta *legis seriem typum fuisse futuri* nemo qui ambigat. Et ideo sistunt eum Domino quoniam ipse est purgatio per resurrectionem octavi diei in Jerusalem, ut in eo condonetur et offeratur omnis adoptio filiorum Dei. In eo namque quod lex ait : *Omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam, sanctum Domino vocabitur, promittebatur Virginis partus vere sanctus, quia immaculatus*, qui aperiret vulvam Ecclesiae, ut in eo sanctificarentur reliqua omnia et essent primogenita. Unde signanter angelus ad Mariam : *Et quod nascetur*, inquit, *ex te sanctum, vocabitur Filius Dei*. Non quod corruerit matrem nascendo, quam integram et inviolatam reliquit virginem, sed quia ex ea natus Deus homo aperuit Ecclesiae vulvam, et in carne sua pervium sibi fecit iter, ita ut Virginis aulam clausam servaret, quatenus ex matre Virginem sibi duxisse sponsam ostenderet, quam tali tantoque foedere nascendi virginem permanentem et immaculatam monstrabat.

* The Ambrosian authorship of the fragmentary alphabetic hymn of which Paschasius cites a stanza was proposed by the Maurists (Hymn XII, PL 16 : 1412) on the basis of its citation under Ambrose's name in the sermon *De Parturitione et Purificatione Beatae Mariae Virginis* of (Pseudo)-Ildefonsus. The latter borrowed from Paschasius the hymn stanza and entire paragraphs of the passage just cited. On the hymn cf. WALPOLE, *op. cit.*, p. 308 f.; he holds that its composer cannot be identified.

¹ *Summa Theol.* III, 28, 2, ad 1:

Ambrosius dicit hoc exponens illud quod Evangelista de lege induxit, *Omne masculinum....* Quod quidem, ut Beda dicit, *consuetae nativittatis more loquitur : non quod Dominus sacri ventris hospitium, quod ingressus sanctificaverat, egressus devirginasse credendus sit*. Unde illa aperitio non significat reserationem claustrum pudoris virginei : sed solum exitum prolis de utero matris.

to open the womb. Thus, as in the *Exp. Luc.*, he approaches the *adaperiens vulvam* only through the *sanctum*; this is, of course, an ordering of ideas opposite to that of Ex. 13:2, which reads simply, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord". But Ambrose's desire is to save every element of the Scriptural text, even in the case of those who like the Levites are not in reality first-born. In doing so, unfortunately, he falls into the obscure interpretations typical of the Alexandrian school of exegesis.

This freedom with the *adaperiens vulvam*, then, in his works preceding the *Exp. Luc.* will prepare the reader to be less surprised at his shift of meaning in the passage of the latter under discussion, where he abandons altogether the idea of the first-born to consider rather the opening of the womb made by the spouse. Once before in the works which have just been investigated he had adopted the same spousal sense of *adaperiens vulvam*, which is admittedly foreign to the literal sense of the prescription. The passage is found in one of his earliest works, the *De Cain*, written in 377. Hence when years later in the *Exp. Luc.* (389/90) Ambrose understands *adaperiens vulvam* similarly, he cannot be accused of giving the expression an unheard of meaning simply in order to escape the difficulty which the Fathers usually saw in its application to Christ. In the *De Cain* continuing the passage above cited¹ where he interprets the *masculinum adaperiens vulvam* as the good actions generated in man's heart, Ambrose betrays by the words to be read in italics that he is speaking of the womb as opened by the male at the time of conception:

Ibi quaeramus omne quod aperit vulvam masculinum, hoc est justum et principale, quod sanctificare Domino debeamus. Neque enim hi nos *corporei coitus atque conceptus* partusque sanctificant, quibus vulva feminea deflorato pudore *virginitatis aperitur*. Nam etsi *mulier sanctificet virum et vir mulierem*, tamen plerumque contingit *virginis vulvam etiam sine conjugii sanctitate reserari*².

It should not be surprising, then, to hear him interpret *masculinum adaperiens vulvam* similarly in the *Exp. Luc.* where the riches of doctrine which he can thereby attain on both Mary³ and the Church invite him all the more pressingly⁴.

¹ *Supra*, p. 126, n. 2.

² *De Cain* 1:10:46. CSEL 32:1 376:15-21. PL 14:338d.

³ *Infra*, p. 134-138.

⁴ Ambrose's exegesis is characterized by a freedom to consider the many different senses which a Scriptural text can have. Cf. *Ep.* 33:2. PL 16:1072a:

A third objection to the interpretation proposed for this disputed passage of the *Exp. Luc.* consists in challenging the understanding given Ambrose's examples. Achab and the false prophets, it was said, are cited as examples, not of first-born sons, but of males who were none the holier for having opened the wombs of women. By now any objection on that count has lost its force, for the passages just read reveal that when Ambrose wants to speak of first-born sons who were renegades, he has at hand much clearer examples such as Cain and Esau ¹.

This conclusion is confirmed in an interesting way by the text of Ambrose's *Exp. Luc.* which Paschasius Radbertus was earlier heard citing ². After the mention of Achab the text continues "aut Joram seu caeteri". Paschasius may have added the example of Joram on his own, or he may actually have found it in his copy of the *Exp. Luc.* At any rate, Joram is a good example of a renegade male, but not of a first-born son. For two infamous kings by the name of Joram are known: the Joram who was the *second* son of Achab (2 Kings 3:1 ff.) and the Joram, son but not necessarily first-born, of Josaphat, who married Achab's daughter (2 Kings 8:16 ff.). The value, of course, of this confirmation rests with the value of the copy of Ambrose's *Exp. Luc.* which Paschasius used ³.

The sentence "Hic ergo solus aperuit *sibi* vulvam" has been understood to mean that the Son worked His own conception in Mary's womb. Against this interpretation it may be objected that Ambrose habitually presents the Holy Spirit and not the Son as author of the Incarnation. But the objection fails to take into account that in Ambrose's works, though less frequently than the Holy Spirit ⁴, the Son also is described as fashioning His own body, as in the *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*:

Quis audiat quia non ex Maria virgine, sed ex divina substantia passibilem *sibi* carnem fecerit Dei Verbum ? ⁵

Verum ipse non ignoras quod interdum Scriptura cum allegoriam dicit, alia ad speciem Synagogae, alia ad Ecclesiae refert: alia ad animam, alia ad Verbi mysterium, alia ad diversas species et qualitates animarum: quae discernit qui dijudicat spiritu.

¹ Cf. the texts *supra*, p. 126, n. 4. and p. 127, n. 5. for Cain and Esau. The same two personages, with Ruben, occur in Amphilocius' *Orat. in Occursum Domini* PG 39:48b, which possibly inspired Ambrose. His method of demonstrating that Ex. 13:2 cannot be taken literally closely resembles Amphilocius'.

² *Supra*, p. 121, n. 1.

³ Neither in the notes nor in the supplement to the CSEL edition of the *Exp. Luc.* is Paschasius' citation taken into account.

⁴ Cf. *De Spir.* 2:5:37-43; 3:11:79. PL 16:750c-752a, 795a.

⁵ *De Incarn.* 6:50. PL 16:831b.

But, someone will insist, in the passage from *Exp. Luc.* the idea read into the *aperuit sibi vulvam* of the Son who brings about His own conception is foreign to Ambrose's mind, since the Holy Spirit has just been mentioned a few lines earlier as author of the Incarnation in the words "inmaculatum semen inviolabili utero Spiritus Sanctus infudit". The reply is that such change of perspective is not unusual in Ambrose's works, as appears from yet another example:

Creavit et Spiritus illud omne mysterium, secundum quod legimus, quia « inventa est Maria in utero habens ex Spiritu Sancto ». Habes quia creavit *Pater*, creavit et *Spiritus*: accipe quia creavit et *Filius* Dei, dicente Salomone, « *Sapientia* fecit *sibi* domum »¹.

In the passage from the *Exp. Luc.* Ambrose first attributed Christ's conception to the Holy Spirit, because he was then commenting Gabriel's words in which "*Spiritus Sanctus* superveniet in te" were understood of the Third Person of the Trinity, and likewise because a thought like "*inmaculatum* semen... *spiritus sanctus* infudit" served well to prove his thesis that Christ was "vere *sanctus* quia *inmaculatus*". A few lines later the *adaperiens vulvam*, understood of Christ, entailed the idea of the Second Person of the Trinity working His own conception.

One of the strongest objections to the interpretation of the passage of *Exp. Luc.* herein proposed arises from Ambrose's unmistakable dependence on Origen in this work. Scholars for long have asked whether Ambrose's exegesis of *adaperiens vulvam* is not inspired by that of Origen, who in *Hom. 14 in Lucam* admitted that Mary's corporal integrity was dissolved at the birth of her Son². The correction of this widely prevalent notion which has been shared by many renowned authorities cannot be so quickly dispatched³.

First of all, what is Origen's thought in *Hom. 14 in Lucam* on the virginity of Mary in partu? In answering this question it is essential to observe that Origen pronounces on Mary's virginity here in connection with a question far more embarrassing for him: the *sordes* or taint which Christ incurred in taking on human nature and which necessitated His purification in the Temple. For in Luc. 2:22 – "And when the days of *her* purification were fulfilled" – Origen had read in his Greek codex "*their* purification", and he saw no other way of saving

¹ *De Spir.* 2:6:59 f. PL 16:755c.

² *Hom. 14 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 94:10-102:15. PG 13:1833-1838.

³ *Supra*, p. 123 f.

the truth of Scripture than to admit that Christ too needed purification, since His soul had contracted a *sordes* on being united to the body¹. This, he realized, was a most dangerous approach. Thus when in the next verse he read “Omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam *sanc-tum* Domino vocabitur”, his intention was to claim for Christ the highest degree of sanctity possible. In a spirit of fidelity to the letter, fidelity quite strange for him², he enounced the principle:

Masculina quae *ex eo quod vulvam matris aperuerunt sancta erant* offerebantur ante altare Domino³.

He envisaged sanctity, therefore, in direct function of the opening of the womb; Christ, he said, was supremely holy for having opened His Mother's womb at birth in the strictest sense possible, since no earthly father did so before Him:

Quemcunque enim de utero effusum marem dixeris, non sic aperuit vulvam matris suae ut Dominus Jesus, quia omnium mulierum non partus infantis, sed viri coitus vulvam reserat. Matris vero Domini eo tempore vulva reserata est, quo et partus editus....⁴

Origen thus sacrificed Mary's corporal integrity to prove his thesis of Christ's sanctity. But this will not surprise the reader who remembers Origen's readiness to admit even a sort of impurity in Mary, arising from Christ's birth. Earlier in the homily, in fact, when there was question of *their purification*, he had written:

Si scriptum esset «propter purgationem *ejus*», id est Mariae quae pepererat, nihil quaestionis oriretur, et audacter diceremus, Mariam, quae homo erat, purgatione indiguisset post partum⁵.

Furthermore, in admitting that Mary's corporal integrity was dissolved, he does not seem to have held that her virginity was lost, since many of his texts suggest that he defined virginity in opposition only to sexual intercourse, not to birth⁶.

¹ VAGAGGINI, *op. cit.*, p. 82 f.

² Ignatius ORTIZ DE URBINA, *Lo sviluppo della mariologia nella patrologia orientale*. *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 6 (1940), p. 54.

³ *Hom. 14 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 100:4-7. PG 13:1836bc.

⁴ *Loc. cit.* GCS 100:10-18. PG 1836c.

⁵ *Loc. cit.* GCS 96:8-14. PG 1834a.

⁶ VAGAGGINI, *op. cit.*, p. 94, n. 54. Cf. Origen, *Hom. 12 in Levit.*, 5. GCS Orig. 6 463:10. PG 12:541b and *Hom. 10 in Gen.*, 4. GCS Orig. 6 97:24 f. PG 12:218cd; also the note which HUER adds in PG 17:842b.

Such is Origen's doctrine in *Hom. 14 in Lucam*. Whether he changed it in later works is beyond the scope of the present discussion, because Ambrose is alleged to have borrowed precisely from *Hom. 14 in Lucam*¹.

Now, it is evident that Ambrose's handling of the text of *Luc. 2:22 f.* where the *adaperiens vulvam* is cited is entirely different, because he thinks of Christ's sanctity in different terms:

1. For Origen, the more truly one *opened the womb* the holier he was: "ex eo quod vulvam matris aperuerunt sancta erant". For Ambrose, the more *immaculate* one is, the holier he is: "vere sanctus quia immaculatus".

2. Hence Origen sees the *adaperiens vulvam* eminently true of Christ because of His *birth* from a mother who was a virgin; whereas Ambrose sees the *immaculatus* eminently true of Christ because He was virginally conceived.

3. The consequence for Mary is with Origen the loss of her physical integrity at Christ's birth: "Matris vero Domini eo tempore vulva *reservata est*"; Ambrose says only that Christ "*aperuit* matris suae vulvam" at His virginal conception, just as He opens the womb of the virginal Church to generate children of God.

¹ Ambrose's readiness to silence the opinion which Origen had expressed in the *Hom. 14 in Luc.* is all the more understandable if Origen himself had afterwards moved to a more orthodox position on the virginity in partu. But the measure of Origen's change is disputed. NEUBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 185, without distinguishing virginity from physical integrity, holds that Origen denied Mary's virginity *materialiter* during a certain time but adhered to it *formaliter* always. KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 24, and *Virgo Eva*, p. 68 ff., thinks that any of Origen's pronouncements which are more favorable than *Hom. 14 in Luc.* still concern only her virginity *quantum a viro*, and that it cannot be determined what he later thought of the virginity *quantum a partu*. VAGAGGINI, *op. cit.*, p. 97 summarizes the great doctor's thought on the virginity in partu as follows: Origen does not seem to have withdrawn from his position on Mary's loss of physical integrity, as explained in *Hom. 14* where, pretends VAGAGGINI, he was probably under the direct influence of Tertullian. But the name *Virgin* which he claimed for Mary, even after Christ's birth, and his portrayal of her with Christ as the firstfruits of virginity show that he did not intend to deny her perfect virginity in denying her physical integrity.

On this question the following passages from Origen's works, arranged chronologically, are to be consulted:

Hom. 7 in Luc., Greek fragment. GCS Orig. 9 52:4 f. Written before 233.

Hom. 14 in Luc. GCS Orig. 9 100:10 ff. PG 13:1836c. Written in 233.

Hom. 8 in Levit., 2. GCS Orig. 6 394:25 ff. PG 12:493b-494c. Written in 244.

In Mt. Com. 10:17. GCS Orig. 10 21:26 ff. PG 13:876b-877a. Written after 244.

In Mt. Com. Series 25. GCS Orig. 11 42:14 ff. PG 13:1631ab. Written after 244.

Contra Celsum 1:35-37. GCS Orig. 1 86:15-89:21. PG 11:728a-733a. Written about 250.

In a word, for Origen the opening of the womb is that of a first-born child at birth; in Ambrose that of a spouse at conception.

Hence instead of speaking of Ambrose's borrowing from Origen, it is nearer the truth to say that Ambrose wished to write just the opposite of what he had read in Origen. That he had Origen's text before him is undeniable. His borrowings elsewhere from the Alexandrian are always easily recognizable. This passage is a perfect example of his manner of *correcting* the master; without alluding to an opposite opinion in Origen, he simply omits or contradicts it ¹. He had done so at the beginning of this passage on the presentation in the Temple, where he glided quite conveniently over the "*dies purgationis ejus*" (Luc. 2:22). Origen had said that he would have been only too glad to read *ejus* and understand it of a purification needed by Mary, no matter how that imperiled her stainlessness. Ambrose does not even raise the question. A few lines later upon coming to the present passage he did more than omit in order to correct. Least of all did he copy ².

4. Confirmations of the Proposed Interpretation of Exp. Luc. 2:56 f.

It is clear, then, that Ambrose never understood the *adaperiens vulvam* in any light unfavorable to Mary's virginity in partu. The strongest confirmation of this thesis lies in the fact that in two years or less the same Ambrose who had written the *Exp. Luc.* was to pronounce himself at the Synod of Milan ³ in unmistakable terms for Mary's complete

¹ VAGAGGINI, *op. cit.*, p. 143, suspects a similar correction where Ambrose insists so strongly that Mary is not expressing incredulity by her *Quomodo fiet istud?* Without naming Origen, Ambrose would be righting an interpretation which the master had made in a homily available to Ambrose. No such homily is extant, but it is hardly possible that Origen would have left the Annunciation passage uncommented. Jerome's translation includes no such homily, but he did not translate all of the Alexandrian's homilies on Luke.

² Thus appears the groundlessness of an explanation as facile as that of Ambrose AGUS, *The Blessed Virgin in Origen and S. Ambrose*. Downside Review, 190 (1932), p. 129:

However, S. Ambrose was also a busy man. And in the Commentary on Luke (PL 15:1655) he says unguardedly that Christ *opened His Mother's womb*. It is clear from the context (and from many other passages) that S. Ambrose had in mind no loss of virginity in partu. *Denique, non est aperta* he says decisively elsewhere (PL 16:335b). But that the words should appear at all was due to the unrecognized and uncorrected influence of the original.

³ *Infra*, p. 156-173.

corporal integrity at Christ's birth. The indignation which he expressed in the synodal report toward the contrary opinion would have been heaped on himself if in the *Exp. Luc.* he had ever said anything approaching that error. The volte-face that one would have to ascribe to him becomes absolutely inconceivable if, as Dudden demonstrates¹, the *Exp. Luc.*, composed of sermons delivered during the previous two years, was published in complete form in 390, the very year of the Synod of Milan. Ambrose would have been the first to remove the inconsistency, if indeed there had ever been any.

It is difficult to find among commentators of Ambrose confirmations of the interpretation proposed herein for the disputed passage in *Exp. Luc.* The sampling presented of interpretations which the text has received throughout the centuries shows that Ambrose has suffered his share in misunderstanding from his commentators. Others who wholly distort his thought could have been cited². But at least one patrologist, Philipp Friedrich, recently suggested the general lines of the interpretation here proposed, namely that "there is question of a *reseratio vulvae Beatae Virginis* not in childbirth but in conception"³.

5. Mariological Value of the Passage of *Exp. Luc.* 2:56 f.

Ambrose's attention, therefore, is fixed on Christ in the scene of the presentation in the Temple⁴. His Marian thought appears only

¹ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 694; Henricus SCHENKL, *Praefatio in Exp. Luc.*, CSEL, p. ix, gives 389; RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 293, suggests 388 or soon thereafter.

² In addition to Erasmus' misinterpretation in the *Annotationes* on St. Luke ("Christum nascendo reserasse vulvam maternam"), cf. Johannes MALDONATUS, *Commentarii in quattuor evangelistas*, II. Mussiponti 1597, p. 118 f.; Christianus STAMM, *Mariologia*. Paderbornae 1881, p. 132; Alexius Maria LÉPICIER, *Tractatus de Beatissima Maria Virgine*, 4th ed. Parisiis 1912, p. 430 f.

³ Philipp FRIEDRICH, *Ambrosius von Mailand über die Jungfrauengeburt Marias*. Festgabe Alois Knöpfler. Freiburg i. Br. 1917, p. 109. This article became available after the interpretation proposed in the present chapter had been written. FRIEDRICH expresses himself only in the final paragraph of his article:

Nach meinem Dafürhalten scheidet die inkriminierte Stelle aus dem Lukas-kommentar bei Darstellung der Lehre von der Jungfrauengeburt Marias vollkommen aus, und zwar um deswillen, weil dort von einer *reseratio vulvae Beatae Virginis* nicht in *pariendo*, sondern in *concipiendo* die Rede ist. Zu diesem Ergebnis führt eine genaue Würdigung des ganzen Textes und namentlich auch der Schlußworte: *Hic* (sc. Christus) *est, qui aperuit matris suae vulvam, ut immaculatus exiret*. Dieser Konsekutivsatz hat keinen Sinn, wenn die vorausgehenden Worte auf die *virginitas* Mariae in partu und nicht auf die *virginitas* Mariae ante partum bezogen werden.

⁴ On this score there arises an additional confirmation of the proposed inter-

indirectly. But it reaches some of its most beautiful heights, if only it is exploited.

The *adaperiens vulvam*, first of all, ceases to be an embarrassing expression when one recognizes it to be synonymous in Ambrose's present interpretation with *to render fruitful* (*fecunditate donans*), just as by contrast the Biblical expression *concludere vulvam* means *to render sterile*¹. The fruitfulness of motherhood, in addition to being woman's greatest joy, is a holy thing because by it the Church is enabled to bring forth children of God. "To render a womb fruitful" is intended, therefore, in God's plan to be a source of holiness, so that the husband sanctifies his wife, and the wife her husband (1 Cor. 7:14). Motherhood reflects and participates in the holiness of the motherhood of the Church, rendered fruitful by Christ (Eph. 5:23-32). But, if woman is to possess the joy of motherhood, she must sacrifice another good no less holy, her virginity – a treasure all the more precious inasmuch as it is her dearest remnant of innocence, since the first woman's first punishment was the sorrow and pain henceforth attached to becoming a mother. In taking on human nature, the all-holy Word by His divine power rendered the womb of His Mother fruitful in such a way that He respected her virginity; He thus accorded her the unique privilege of possessing at once the two greatest and holiest joys of woman.

By having rendered her womb fruitful He earns for Himself an eminent claim to sanctity, for the fruit of His action is not just another child of God but the all-holy Son of God become man without any loss

pretation. For the Christological orientation which the passage evidences is wholly in harmony with what is known of the liturgical commemoration of the Presentation in the Temple; only after Ambrose's day did the Marian feast of the Purification bring the Son's Mother into the center of the picture also. Franz Joseph DOELGER *Das Fest Purificatio Mariae und die römische Lupercalien-Feier*, AC, 5 (1936), p. 76 f., cites Jocelyn TOYNBEE, *The Villa Item and a Bride's Ordeal*. Journal of Roman Studies, 19 (1929), p. 79 f., on the fertility ceremonies of the Lupercalia:

Again, the 5th century Pope Gelasius quotes from Livy's second decade, a propos of the Lupercalia, as follows (*Ep. Rom. Pontif.*, THIEL, p. 601) : *nec propter morbos inhibendos instituta commemorat* (sc. Livius) *sed sterilitatem, ut ei videtur, mulierum, quae tunc acciderat exhibenda*. We may note in this connection that the whips with which the women were flogged at the Lupercalia were known as *februa*, and the word *februare* means *to purify*; and that Pope Gelasius, when he abolished the festival (Feb. 15), in 496, substituted for it the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

DOELGER invites students of liturgy to take their stand on this new material adduced to explain the origin of the feast of the Purification, in the Western Church.

¹ FRIEDRICH, *Jungfrauengeburt*, p. 108. Cf. examples of *vulvam concludere* in Gen. 16:2, 20:18; 1 Kings 1:5, etc.

of His holiness. This holiness of Christ is what Ambrose puts in the foreground in the present passage.

But implied in the same mystery is the additional truth that the virginal conception by which He chose to render Mary a Mother is a singular expression of His all-holy love for her as his spouse. Hence, though Ambrose does not say so, there are at least three reasons for completing his thought by seeing Christ as the spouse of Mary in this mystery: 1. because among men the greatest expression of human love is that of spouse; 2. because the Word took it upon Himself to replace a human spouse in rendering His Mother fruitful; 3. because it was as a spouse – Ambrose says so explicitly elsewhere in his works¹ – that Christ rendered the womb of the Church fruitful, which is an action cited parallel to the one he performed in Mary².

The passage of the *Exp. Luc.* 2:56 f., then, is truly a remarkable one on many counts:

1. Nowhere else in his works does Ambrose come so near to viewing the Virgin Mary as the spouse of Christ, although like his predecessors who sang the praises of virginity he repeatedly tells virgins to see and love in Christ their spouse.

2. In the same view that shows him Christ as spouse of the Church, Ambrose glimpses on another plane Christ as spouse of Mary; so often with the Fathers do both Mary and the Church come to mind simultaneously.

3. Christ appears as spouse of Mary in her role of virgin and mother, which she shares with the Church, and not in her role as model of virgins who are also spouses of Christ.

4. Finally, it is in commenting the word *holy* that Ambrose presents the difficult idea of Christ who with regard to His Mother is not only Son but spouse. That He must also be spouse flows from the *holiness*

¹ E. g. chronologically arranged, *De Virgs.* 1:6:31. FALLER, p. 31:10-21. PL 16:197c. *Ep.* 45:4. PL 16:1142c. *Ep.* 41:18. PL 16:1118a. *Exp. Ps.* 118:1:16. CSEL62 16:5-19. PL 15:1207a.

² MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 175, by noting the similarity of this text of the *Exp. Luc.* to Epiphanius, *Panar.* 78:19, 3-6, indirectly suggests that Ambrose here views Christ as spouse of Mary; Epiphanius, he had said on p. 143, concluded that on the basis of having formed a body virginally in Mary without an earthly father, Christ was Himself Mary's spouse. (Any influence, however, of Epiphanius on Ambrose is excluded, since Epiphanius interprets Luke's passage in terms of the first-born.) The paraphrase given on p. 175 of part of Ambrose's development – "Nicht alle Erstgeborenen waren überdies heilig" – suggests unfortunately that MÜLLER did not plumb the depth of his intuition as to Ambrose's meaning here.

of the mystery – Christ’s own holiness, as Ambrose primarily intended, but also the holiness of His Mother. For by the mystery of her virginal motherhood Mary becomes entirely consecrated and reserved to God, which is the meaning of *holy*. Henceforth every movement of love which her womanly heart can conceive – divine love, human love whether for spouse or child – is centered exclusively on the *same* person who is at once her son, her spouse, and her God. She in turn becomes not just the source but also the object of an all-holy love, all holy because in all its paradoxical dimensions it emanates from one and the same person Who is the all-holy God.

Such is the Mariological wealth which this passage conceals. Other Fathers, almost without exception, saw in St. Luke’s verses on the presentation in the Temple an occasion to comment Mary’s virginity in partu; to defend it, one should say, since it almost always seemed imperiled by the “omne masculinum aperiens vulvam”¹. Are the

¹ Cf. the following examples:

Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4:33:11. HARVEY, 2, p. 266: “Purus pure puram aperiens vulvam eam quae regenerat homines in Deum, quam ipse puram fecit.”

Athanasius, *Ep. ad Epictetum*, 5. PG 26:1057c: Καὶ προσήνεχθε δυσία, ὡς διανοίξαντος τοῦ τεχθέντος τὴν μήτραν. The letter is cited by Epiphanius; for the pertinent phrase cf. *Panar.* 77:7. GCS Epiph. 3 422:16 f. PG 42:649c.

Ps. Athanasius (= George of Nicomedia, cf. LAURENTIN, *Court Traité* ..., 159). *Hom. in Occursum Domini*, 5. PG 28:980b: ὅταν μηδενὸς ἐξῶθεν κρούσαντος, αὐτὸ τὸ βρέφος ἐσῶθεν διανοίξῃ.

Basil, *Hom. in Nativ. Dom.* PG 31:1468c: οὐ πάντος ὁ πρωτότοκος πρὸς τοὺς ἐπιγινόμενους ἔχει τὴν σύγκρισιν : ἀλλ’ ὁ πρῶτον διανοίγων μήτραν πρωτότοκος ὀνομάζεται.

Amphilocius, *De Occursu Christi*. PG 39:49ab: Holding to Mary’s integrity, he explains that all is open to Christ in virtue of His divine power, and thus gives one of the most satisfying explanations of Luke’s citation.

Epiphanius, *Panar.* 77:35. GCS Epiph. 3 447:29 f. PG 42:694c: καὶ διὰ τῶν τοκετικῶν πορῶν ἐν ἀληθείᾳ εὐρισκόμενος. *Panar.* 78:19. GCS 469:32 f. PG 729c: οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ἀνοίγων μήτραν μητρός. Πάντες γὰρ ὅσοι ἐγεννήθησαν πρωτότοκοι ...

Petavius, *op. cit.*, lib. 14, c. 5; t. 7, p. 67, explains the sense in which *aperire vulvam* is used in Scripture:

Usus est hoc genere sermonis Evangelista Lucas ex Mose accepto, quo primogenitus significatur. In ferendis porro legibus id spectat legislator, quod naturaliter accidit et ordinarium est, non quod extra ordinem nec sine miraculo evenit. Itaque communi et usitato sermone loquitur. Ac feminae quidem, cum primum admittit virum, uterus aperitur, et virginitatis velut quaedam maceria diruitur. Verum quoniam apertionis illius finis et fructus ac certissimum indicium est fetus emissio, ideo *aperire* uterum pro eo usurpatur quod est simpliciter partu in lucem emitti. ... Fructus et complementum apertionis illius sic in partu loquendi usu consideratur, ut ei, qui primus est, potissimum attribui consueverit. Quamobrem *aperire vulvam* hihil aliud significat, quam nasci et materno ex utero prodire.

Commenting on Irenaeus in the passage cited above, he says, *loc. cit.*, “declarat illiba-

words Ambrose wrote here entirely devoid of meaning for the virginity in partu? Not at all. Would not the fact that he chose not even to bring up the subject show that he held to it too firmly to want to discuss it in terms as open to misinterpretation as the “*adaperiens vulvam?*” The difficulties of other Fathers with the text, one may be sure, were known to him. If he was influenced by any of them, it was to choose a new approach. The commentary which he wrote, far from revealing an Ambrose whose mind was not yet clear on the virginity in partu, might be taken as the strongest evidence that his faith in it was unshakeable and his defense of it truly ingenious.

C. The Virginal Birth in other Pre-Jovinianist Works

Until the attack on the doctrine of Mary's virginity in partu, Ambrose was to follow the same policy of silence which the Scriptures set in regard to the mode of Christ's birth. This attitude, indeed, he shares with the believing faithful of almost all the ages of the Church, at least after the appearance and gradual decline of the Apocryphals. For him it was enough to portray Mary as the ideal virgin. His energetic reaction when her integrity at Christ's birth was eventually challenged¹ proves that her name *Virgin* implied virginity in partu. One does not find on his lips any of the clear-cut formulas of a Zeno of Verona², or in the following generation of a Gaudentius of Brescia³ and an Augustine⁴, who set the pattern for the theological treatises of Mary's virginity with expressions sooner or later to take the forms “*Virgo concepit, virgo*

tum partum istum fuisse, sine ulla fraude parientis virginalis uteri”; he then gives a similar rule for interpreting the Fathers in such statements as those above listed:

Non aliud de Athanasio et Epiphanio iudicium oportet facere, et si qui sunt alii, qui nuda Evangelistae verba referunt : praesertim qui non aliunde temerariae et ab ecclesiastica norma desciscantis opinionis invidia laborant.

¹ *Infra*, p. 156 ff.

² *Supra*, p. 112 f.

³ *Sermo* 8. PL 20:888b: “Perpetuum servet ingressus, dum sine detrimento integritatis maternae nascitur.” *Sermo* 9. PL 20:900a: “Qui sine corruptela matris conceptus creditur, cur non etiam sine corruptela editus praesumatur? Incorrupta virgo peperit, quod intacta virgo concepit.” *Ibid.*, PL 900c: “Clausum virginei pudoris etiam nascendo conservans.” *Ibid.*, PL 899c: “Si credimus conceptum virginis, credere debemus et partum.”

⁴ *De Catech. Rud.* 22:40. PL 40:339b: “Semperque intacta permanserit, virgo concipiens, virgo pariens, virgo moriens.” *Sermo* 186:1. PL 38:999b: “Concipiens virgo, pariens virgo, virgo praevidua, virgo feta, virgo perpetua.”

peperit, virgo permansit" – "Virgo ante partum, in partu, post partum". Ambrose's was not a mind for formulas; and if formulas usually evolve in reply to attacks, it must be recalled that before 390 Ambrose was not troubled by any heresy on the virginity in partu.

It is to be expected, therefore, that the allusions to the doctrine in his earlier writings reveal him taking it for granted rather than exposing it. A sampling of such allusions includes the following:

Hoc unguento (cf. Cant. 1:2) uncta est Maria, et virgo concepit, *virgo peperit* bonum odorem, Dei Filium¹.

Secundum conditionem etenim corporis in utero fuit, natus est, lactatus est, in praesepio est collocatus, sed supra conditionem virgo concepit, *virgo generavit*; ut crederes quia Deus erat, qui novabat naturam, et homo erat, qui secundum naturam nascebatur ex homine².

Ideo eum Maria *non parturivit* sed peperit, quia et Dominum et salutare sciebat ex se esse generandum....³

In commenting Luke's account of Christ's nativity Ambrose lays no special stress on the virginal birth, treating rather the evangelist's notation of the time of Christ's coming, His eternal birth as described in John's prologue, and the abasement symbolized in the manger which Luke took care to mention⁴. The poverty of the manger leads to a contrasting description of the visit of the Magi. Just before introducing them he touches on the doctrine of Mary's virginity in partu:

Ex utero funditur, sed coruscat e coelo; terreno in diversorio jacet, sed coelesti lumine viget. Nupta peperit, sed virgo concepit: nupta concepit, sed *virgo generavit*⁵.

Mary's virginity in partu is stated in the *generavit*, but hardly a more succinct expression could be devised. The apocryphal legends on the subject do not enter even for an allusion.

Earlier in the same book of the *Exp. Luc.* he had made known his mind with similar succinctness. The passage is of interest especially for its mention of Mary in conjunction with the Church, as was the case with the *adaperiens vulvam* already discussed. Since he explicitly calls Mary the type of the Church here, it is certain that the virginal con-

¹ *De Virgte.* 11:65. PL 16:282c. Ambrose depends for this passage on Hippolyte's *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*, BONWERSCH, p. 32:9-33:5.

² *De Incarn.* 6:54. PL 16:832b.

³ *In Ps.* 47:11. CSEL 64 354:13 f. PL 14:1150c.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 2:36-40. CSEL 32:4 60:6-66:10. PL 15:1565a-1568c.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:43. CSEL 66:4-6. PL 1568c.

ception and birth here asserted for the Church was in his mind realized pre-eminently in Mary. Having answered various objections based on Mary's espousal to Joseph, he turns to the mystical significance of her being a virginal spouse:

Didicimus seriem veritatis, didicimus consilium : discamus et mysterium. Bene desponsata, sed virgo ; quia est *Ecclesiae typus*, quae est immaculata, sed nupta. Concepit nos virgo de spiritu, *parit* nos *virgo sine gemitu* ¹.

The Maurist editors of Ambrose's works refer to his hymn *Intende qui regis Israel* ² as an expression of his thought on the virginal birth, an expression limited naturally by the demands of metre. From the remainder of his doctrine one is justified in assuming that verses like "Procedat e thalamo suo" and "Ostende partum Virginis", though not necessarily limited to the act of birthgiving, at least include it and thus imply Mary's virginity at that moment ³.

A less evident allusion might be suspected in the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia*:

Ne virginis partus sacer
Matris pudorem laederet ⁴.

But from the context it appears that "partus sacer" refers not so much to the manner of Christ's virginal birth as to the purpose of Mary's espousal, a sacred safeguard of her good name.

¹ *Ibid.*, 2:7. CSEL 45:3-6. PL 1555b.

² Their reference in PL 15 : 1574, note *a*, to the hymn *De Nativitate Domini* is undoubtedly to the hymn which they printed in fourth place, the opening line of which they considered to be *Veni, Redemptor gentium*; the hymn is known nowadays by the line *Intende qui regis Israel* which opens a first stanza rejected by the Maurists.

³ Probably the Maurists based their judgment on lines 6, 8, 13, 14, 17, and 18, WALPOLE, p. 52-54, which are here underlined:

Veni, redemptor gentium,
Ostende partum Virginis,
Miretur omne saeculum :
Talis decet partus Deo.
...
Alvus tumescit Virginis,
Clastrum pudoris permanet,
Vexilla virtutum micant,
Versatur in templo Deus.

Procedat e thalamo suo,
Pudoris aula regia,
Genimae gigas substantiae
Alacris occurret viam.

⁴ Ll. 23 f. WALPOLE, p. 43. Cf. the Note there on verse 23.

The hymn *Fil porta Christi pervia*, possessed only fragmentarily and printed in twelfth place by the Maurists, contains explicit testimony on Mary's virginity at her Son's birth, but as has been noted¹, its authenticity is disputed.

Thus Ambrose quite clearly held to Mary's complete integrity even in the moment of giving birth to Christ. But since the doctrine did not lend itself to practical exhortations in his sermons, he was content with occasional allusions to it during the first fifteen years of his episcopate. His clearest lines will be written only after belief in it has been challenged. Such a challenge was to come with the attacks of the ex-monk Jovinian.

¹ *Supra*, p. 121, n. 1. towards the end.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ambrose's Reply to Jovinian

A. The Jovinianist Polemic

The year when the obscure Jovinian first stirred up opposition in Roman circles by his heretical opinions cannot be exactly ascertained. To this first problem two others even more obscure are to be added. One is that in their refutations of Jovinian's errors, Pope Siricius, Ambrose, and Jerome, who are the only extant sources on the heresy, each dwell on errors unknown to the others or passed over in silence by them. The refutations must therefore be pieced together to form a complete picture of Jovinian's heresy. Finally the chronology of these refutations and of the Synods of Rome and Milan from which two of them stem has undergone very divergent solutions. In arranging the events differently, scholars have often unconsciously taken for granted that the doctrine of Mary's virginity in partu was at this time (390-393) professed with equal explicitness by all three churchmen who refuted Jovinian, and that therefore a refutation which like Jerome's does not mention the error against virginal birth must correspond to an earlier stage of the heresy than one which, like Ambrose's, attacks this error.

These problems are so joined to one another that at least the last two must be treated simultaneously; only after all three have in some measure been solved, can Ambrose's part in the affair as author of the Synod of Milan be approached.

1. Outbreak of Jovinianism

The first problem is to identify Jovinian and date his appearance at Rome. Baronius describes him as a renegade monk from the monastery founded by Ambrose at Milan ¹. Were this true, the vigor of Ambrose's

¹ *Annales Ecclesiasticae*, Anno 382, no. 30 f., cited in Wilhelm HALLER, *Jovi-*

refutation would be all the easier to understand. But inasmuch as Baronius is alone in tracing Jovinian back to the Milanese convent, it is safe to presume he confuses the heretic with two lesser lights, Barbatian and Sarmatio, who in the aftermath spread Jovinianism to a neighboring church¹. Jerome writes to Eustochium in 384 of vagabond monks, more dandies than ascetics, who were beginning to trouble the church at Rome, but he does not mention any Jovinian². It is safe to assume that the two never met, even though Jerome does not expressly deny personal acquaintance, as he took care to do in reference to Helvidius. The only certain information is that the theatre of Jovinian's activity was Rome, and that he did not openly begin his polemic there against monasticism before 385, when in August Jerome left the city for Palestine³.

His attacks must not have preceded by long Pammachius' ⁴ denunciation of him to Pope Siricius and the convocation of a synod which condemned his works. Siricius reported on this synod in a letter addressed to Ambrose⁵. It is thus essential to determine the date of Siricius' letter, but at this very first date in the chronology opinions vary widely. Traditionally the letter has been dated in 390. Those who place it later have felt obliged to do so because of not finding any other solution to a serious problem: why would Jerome not have drawn additional force from such a papal condemnation – and perhaps also from the Milanese condemnation which followed in short order – had he known of it when writing his scathing *Adversus Jovinianum* in 393? The solution which is shortly to be given this latter problem will justify holding to the traditional date of 390 for the letter of Pope Siricius,

nianus, *die Fragmente seiner Schriften, die Quellen zu seiner Geschichte, sein Leben, und seine Lehre*, TU, 2 : 2 (1897), p. 116, n. 1.

¹ HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 116. *Infra*, p. 179 f.

² Jerome, *Ep.* 22 : 28. CSEL 54 185 : 11-186 : 14. PL 22 : 414a-415a.

³ HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁴ The devout and austere Pammachius, a Roman senator, had after his wife's death given himself over to the ascetical life, eventually becoming leader of the Roman circle. Though a layman, he was once thought of as a possible candidate for the Papacy. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

⁵ Siricius, *Ep.* 7:3. PL 13:1171a: "Facto ergo presbyterio, constitit doctrinae nostrae, id est Christianae legi, esse contraria." This letter, *Optarem semper*, is also printed in the collection of Ambrose's after *Ep.* 41. PL 16 : 1121a-1123c. Earlier editions: MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum amplissima collectio*, III. Florence 1759-p. 663a-664c; COUSTANT, *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum*, I. Parisiis 1721, p. 663, 668; HARDOUIN, *Conciliorum collectio regia maxima*, I. Parisiis 1715, p. 853 f; JAFFE, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum*, 2nd ed. Leipzig 1885, lists it as No. 260, anno 390.

so that Jovinian's appearance in Rome may be placed just before 390. One need not allow more than two years for his activity there prior to the condemnation ¹.

2. *The Refutations of Jovinian at Rome*

After the condemnation described by Siricius in his letter to Ambrose, Jovinian fled Rome. Before following him to Milan, it is necessary to turn to the errors for which he had been condemned. Siricius' letter takes him to task for denying any difference in merit between virginity and marriage, or between the merit of a person who fasts and that of one who dines in a spirit of thanksgiving. These same errors are recognizable in the first and third tenets which Jerome three years later extracted from Jovinian's writings sent him from Rome by members of the ascetical group and which he quoted in the opening pages of the *Adversus Jovinianum*:

Dicit « virgines, viduas et maritatas, quae semel in Christo lotae sunt, si non discrepent caeteris operibus, ejusdem esse meriti ».

Nititur approbare « eos, qui plena fide in baptismo renati sunt, a diabolo non posse subverti ».

Tertium proponit « inter abstinentiam ciborum et cum gratiarum actione perceptionem eorum, nullam esse distantiam ».

Quartum, quod et extremum, « esse omnium, qui suum baptismum servaverint, unam in regno coelorum remunerationem » ².

As is evident, Jerome lists no error of immediate Mariological import. But in the report of the Milanese synod ³ convoked by Ambrose on the

¹ Charles HEFELE - Henri LECLERCQ, *Histoire des Conciles*, II, 1^{re} partie. Paris 1908, p. 79. HEFELE dates the letter in 390, as does VALLARSI, cited in HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 68, n. 3. COUSTANT, *loc. cit.*, dates it somewhere between August / September 388 and June 389 or around September 389, on the basis of the reference which it contains to Jovinian's fleeing to Milan for the support of the Emperor Theodosius; the dates given mark Theodosius' nearest possible sojourns in Milan. (For a contrary opinion cf. RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 378, n. 6.) MANSI, *loc. cit.*, cites Severinus Binius who links Jovinian's coming to Rome, his condemnation, and the letter to Milan in quick succession as events of the sixth year of Siricius' pontificate, i. e., 389/390. HARDOUIN, *loc. cit.*, places it in 390.

² Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1:3. PL 23:214b. The quotation marks indicate passages judged by HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 4 to be citations from Jovinian's writings. Jerome restates the theses in *Adv. Jov.* 2:35. PL 333ac and cites Helvidius' exposition of them in slightly different form in 2:37. PL 336ab.

³ Ambrose, *Ep.* 42. PL 16:1124a-1129a. This letter, *Recognovimus*, is also listed as *Ep.* 8 among Siricius', PL 13:1172b, and is printed as chapter 31 of the *Col-*

reception of Siricius' letter, another tenet had already been denounced: Jovinian went so far in his attack on virginity as to deny that Mary remained a virgin in the act of giving birth to Our Lord. Indeed, it was principally against this error that Ambrose inveighed, omitting altogether the one on baptism which Jerome was later to mention (the second tenet). How is one to explain the fact that this serious error in Marian doctrine is absent in Siricius' and Jerome' replies to Jovinian?

a) *Pope Siricius' Omission of the Marian Error*

First, as to Siricius, Lehner conjectures that the Pope knew nothing of a Marian error, since Jovinian voiced it only in his speeches to gatherings of virgins at Rome¹; the synod convoked by Siricius had judged Jovinian on the basis of his public writings². Jerome does, in fact, imply that Jovinian shrouded at least some of his teaching with secrecy, and precisely the part concerning virginity:

Quid in secreto, quid in cubiculo mulierculas docet? Ut hoc sciant esse virgines, quod maritatae; ut florem aetatis non negligant....³

Haller offers the solution that Jovinian began to preach his error only at Milan⁴. This easy way out had already been followed by the Maurist editors of Ambrose's works, who in addition imagine that the heretic would not have dared to launch the Marian attack at Rome⁵. This last detail is probably amiss of the mark, since Jovinian was anything but circumspect in the attacks he laid down. It would, perhaps, be nearer the truth to picture him as attacking the doctrine of Mary's complete virginal integrity in partu precisely in those churches where it was most deeply entrenched and raised itself as a refutation to his teaching that virginity was no more precious a good than matrimony. Such a church he found at Milan, where, as in Verona under the episcopacy of Zeno (fl. 360c)⁶, and somewhat later in Brescia under Gaudentius (d. after 406)⁷, the doctrine on Mary's virginity in partu had been explicitly preached. In Milan he would feel greater need of sharpening his attack

lectio Quesnelliana. PL 56:556a-571a. Earlier editions: MANSI, *op. cit.*, III, 664d-667d; COUSTANT, *op. cit.*, p. 669-674; HARDOUIN, *op. cit.*, I, 853-855.

¹ LEHNER, *op. cit.*, p. 135 f.

² HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 118 f., 131. Cf. Siricius, *Ep.* 7:3. PL 13:1170a, 1171a:

Blasphemias suas *conscriptioe temeraria* prodiderunt.... Ad meam humilitatem subito per *scripturam horrificam* videtur esse perlata.

³ Jerome, *Ep.* 50:3. CSEL 54 391:9 f. PL 22:514ab.

⁴ HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 127. ⁵ PL 16:1125, note b.

⁶ Cf. *supra*, p. 112.

⁷ Cf. *supra*, p. 138, n. 3.

on this point than he had in Rome, where the group of ascetics who denounced him to Siricius were most probably still under the influence of Jerome's thinking.

b) *Absence of the Marian Error in the Adversus Jovinianum*

And it is when Jerome is summoned to the interrogatory that the case thickens¹. By the time he composed his *Adversus Jovinianum* in the spring of 393², well on to three years after the condemnations at Rome and Milan, he can hardly have been ignorant of an error so gross as later in history to give Jovinian his foremost claim to infamy. Furthermore, Jerome's grasp of the heresy is on all other points the most complete record possessed, the only document citing Jovinian's own writings, and so well-aimed a blow that Cavallera has not hesitated to call it, "à n'en pas douter, l'œuvre la plus brillante et l'une des plus soignées de saint Jérôme"³. It may be objected that the writings sent Jerome by his Roman friends could have been as incomplete a statement as the one which appears in the letter of Siricius⁴; this latter was written at a time when, as has been allowed, Jovinian could still have felt no need for openly taking this decisive step in his attack on virginity.

But that Jerome was so poorly supplied with documentation on the case is hardly probable. First of all, a document like Ambrose's reply to Siricius would rapidly have become known at Rome, particularly among ascetics who in the heat of battle were looking for any and every weapon to throw at one who had assailed their way of life on as broad a front as had Jovinian. Even under less grave circumstances, Roman circles would not fail to prick up ears at a synodal pronouncement emanating from a see as important as Milan. The writings sent Jerome for his perusal were probably dispatched, not at the time of the Roman condemnation, but considerably later, even after the exchange of letters between Siricius and Ambrose, for Jerome says that he read them in a few days on receiving them and in fury penned an answer forthwith⁵; his answer dates from spring, 393. These writings must have constituted an extensive dossier on Jovinian, for Jerome's friends would not withhold any possibly incriminating evidence. Haller pictures the

¹ The following interpretation of Jerome's thought on the virginity of Mary in partu was inspired by JOUASSARD, *Marie à travers la patristique*, p. 108-111.

² Ferdinand CAVALLERA, *Saint Jérôme. Sa vie et son œuvre*. Louvain 1922, II, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 157.

⁴ HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 4, n. 1; p. 128. ⁵ Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1:1. PL 23:211a.

heretic as having stated the substance of his doctrine in a first writing that came to Siricius' hands, and then after the condemnations as having elaborated his defense in a series of *commentarioli* which took up in pamphlet form each of his basic theses, documenting them with further proofs and examples mainly of Scriptural origin. Jerome refuted these *commentarioli*. The longest of them was probably the one written on the first thesis, and it occupied the author of the *Adv. Jov.* throughout the entire first book. The other three *commentarioli* were taken up in short order in the second book. Hidden away in the outburst of invective is a passage where Jerome comes nearest to pronouncing himself on Mary's virginity in partu. He is commenting a Scriptural text undoubtedly among those distorted by Jovinian ¹:

Quod clausum est atque signatum, similitudinem habet Matris Domini, matris et virginis. Unde et in sepulcro Salvatoris novo, quod in petra durissima fuerat excisum, nec ante nec postea quisquam positus est. Et tamen haec virgo *perpetua* multarum est mater virginum ².

The hypothesis that Jerome did not know of Jovinian's attack precisely against Mary's virginity *in partu* has been rejected as highly improbable. Hence there seems to be no other reason for Jerome's not taking up the challenge here than to presume that his own mind on the subject was not sufficiently made up at this time to make him desirous of engaging his adversary on such terrain.

The same conclusion is borne out by a passage in Jerome's *Adversus Helvidium*, written ten years previously. He there goes as far as hyperbole will permit in describing the humiliating conditions of Christ's birth, and although the hardest words seem to be a citation of paraphrase of his adversary, his own reply is not at all satisfying:

Junge si libet et alias naturae contumelias, novem mensibus uterum insolescentem, fastidia, partum, sanguinem, pannos. Ipse tibi describatur infans, tegmine membranorum solito convolutus. Ingerantur dura praesepia, vagitus parvuli, octavae diei circumcisio, tempus purificationis, ut probetur immundus. *Non erubescimus, non silemus. Quanto sunt humiliora* quae pro me passus est, tanto plus illi debeo. Et cum omnia replicaveris, cruce nihil contumeliosius proferes: quam profitemur et credimus et in qua de hostibus triumphamus ³.

The fact that Mary's virginity in partu was championed by the apocryphals may well have caused Jerome to be excessively prudent in

¹ Cant. 4:12: "Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa; hortus conclusus, fons signatus."

² Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1:31. PL 23:254ab.

³ Jerome, *Adv. Helv.* 18. PL 23:202b-203a. Written in 383.

his opinion here. In the work just cited he had indignantly rejected the story of the midwife's examination, adducing instead Luke's "She laid him in a manger" as sufficient witness to the extraordinary character of Christ's birth¹. Gregory of Nazianzus, whom Jerome considered his teacher par excellence², displayed a certain reluctance to touch on the subject of Mary's virginity in partu, so striking in contrast to the wealth of images which, for example, Gregory of Nyssa evokes in its defense³. Jerome's thinking, furthermore, still lay under the sway of Origen, for the anti-Origenist campaign was launched, and then quite out of a blue sky, only around the spring of 393⁴, when the *Adv. Jov.* also was composed. In his translation of *Hom. 14 in Luc.* Jerome saw no need of touching up Origen's unhappy commentary of the *Omne adaperiens vulvam*⁵; yet he had permitted himself the liberty of correction when a subject as dear to him as Joseph's virginity had been imperiled in another of Origen's homilies⁶. And the translation of *Hom. 14 in Luc.*, be it remembered, dates from as recently as 389 or 390⁷. Ambrose, whose mind had long been made up, did suppress what he found objectionable in Origen's homily⁸. But Jerome reprimanded him precisely for shielding Origen's thought on many points (although it cannot be said whether he had this one in mind), and undertook a translation of the homilies *sicut in Graeco habentur*⁹. One cannot further estimate to what extent the two Latin Fathers disagreed on Mary's virginity in partu. But it is safe to say that, put to the test for the first time in the anti-Jovinianist fight, Ambrose replied forthright, whereas Jerome still would not commit himself.

¹ *Ibid.*, 8. PL 192a; Luc. 2:7.

² In *Ep.* 50 he called him (with Didymus) his *catechista*, and in *De Vir. Illus.*, 117 "praeceptor meus et quo scripturas explanate didici". Didymus' rating, of course, was revised after the anti-Origenist controversy. Cf. *Ep.* 50: 1. CSEL 54 389: 2. PL 22:513b. *De Vir. Illus.* 117. RICHARDSON, p. 51:28 f. PL 23:707c.

³ SOELL, *op. cit.*, p. 298. Cf. *supra*, p. 111 f.

⁴ CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, I, p. 208.

⁵ Origen, *Hom. 14 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 94:10-102:14. PG 13:1833-1838. Cf. *supra*, p. 130-133.

⁶ Cp. Jerome's translation "hi filii qui Joseph dicebantur" with the Greek οἱ γὰρ υἱοὶ Ἰωσήφ extant in a fragment found in GCS Orig. 9 49:25. KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 71. The passage occurs in *Hom. 7 in Luc.*

⁷ Henricus SCHENKL, *Praefatio in Exp. Luc.*, CSEL 32:4, p. ix, citing the testimony of Jerome's preface to his own translation of Origen's homilies and his *De Vir. Illus.*, 135 as interpreted by RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁸ *Supra*, p. 130-133.

⁹ Jerome, *prol. in Hom. in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 1:8. PG 13:1799c.

c) *Jerome's Later Declarations on Mary's Virginity in Partu*

Before turning to Ambrose, however, the less favorable appreciation of Jerome's thought on this subject will have to be confirmed by investigating his declarations after the Jovinianist controversy. His fiery *Adv. Jov.* was not criticized for its reticence on the Marian error; as indicated, this point of litigation was perhaps less in the forefront at Rome. Besides, the very people who would have regretted its absence most, the ascetics, had every reason to feel that in other respects he had done their cause justice. He had, in fact, driven his point home too strongly, leaving the unfortunate impression that he defended virginity by depreciating marriage. To clarify his position he replied in a letter to his friend Pammachius¹, who in vain had tried to recall the copies of the incriminating *Adv. Jov.* from circulation. Another friend, Domnio, sent him an excerpt therefrom, asking an elucidation. Ever sensitive about his orthodoxy, Jerome replied immediately². Both these letters fall probably in the year 393 or early 394³.

In the first of them the question of Mary's virginity is still on the perimeter of Jerome's attention and comes up in connection again with the text from Cant. 4:12. At first he is still rather wary on the point:

Christus virgo, Mater virginis nostri virgo perpetua, mater et virgo. Jesus enim clausis *ingressus* est ostiis, et in sepulchro ejus, quod novum et in petra durissima fuerat excisum, nec *antea* quis nec *postea* positus est. Hortus conclusus, fons signatus, de quo fonte ille fluvius manat ...

Then the text from Ezech. 44:2 enters the discussion, a text which Ambrose had already used in his *Ep.* 42:

Haec est porta orientalis, ut ait Ezechiel, *semper* clausa et lucida et operiens in se vel *ex se proferens* sancta sanctorum, per quam sol iustitiae et pontifex noster secundum ordinem Melchisedech *ingreditur et egreditur*. Respondeant mihi quomodo Jesus *ingressus* est clausis ostiis, cum palpandas manus et latus considerandum et ossa carnemque monstraverit, ne veritas corporis phantasma putaretur, et ego respondebo, quomodo sancta Maria sit et mater et virgo: *virgo post partum*, mater ante quam nupta⁴.

¹ Jerome, *Ep.* 48 *Liber apologeticus ad Pammachium*. PL 22:493c-511a. CSEL 54 350:5-387:12.

² Jerome, *Ep.* 50 *ad Domnium*. CSEL 54 388:1-395:3. PL 22:512c-516d.

³ HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 46, n. 3, citing VALLARSI.

⁴ Jerome, *Ep.* 48:21. CSEL 54 386:3-7. PL 22:510bc.

This text evidences a more explicit concept of Mary's virginity in partu, although Jerome will write even more clearly later. In the *Commentarii in Ezechielem*, written after 407, he reverts to only the *ingreditur* and seems not to want to claim credit for this interpretation:

Pulchre quidam portam clausam, per quam solus Dominus Deus Israel *ingreditur*, et dux, cui porta clausa est, Mariam virginem intelligunt, quae et *ante* partum, et *post* partum virgo permansit ¹.

The long exposition of Ezech. 44:2 made in the *Homilia in Joannem Evangelistam* ² cannot be dated, but would seem to fall somewhere between the beginning of the Jovinianist controversy and the last text to be studied on the subject. He again supplements the figure of the closed door facing east with the analogy of Christ's entering the cenacle after his resurrection. Perhaps he confines the thought to *entrance* in both metaphors only by reason of a Scriptural reminiscence: Scripture says nothing more in connection with the door of the temple than that "Pontifex *intrat* in Sancta" (Heb. 9:25), and on the visit to the cenacle only that "*venit* Jesus, januis clausis" (Jn. 20:26). On Mary's virginity he writes:

Sancta Maria, beata Maria, mater et virgo, virgo *ante* partum, virgo *post* partum. Ego hoc miror, quomodo de virgine virgo natus sit, et *post nationem* virginis mater virgo sit.... Da potentiae Dei, quia de virgine natus sit, et tamen ipsa virgo fuerit virgo *post partum* ³.

Jerome's affirmations in such a passage must not be gratuitously over-extended. The fact, of course, that he always maintained the extraordinary character of Christ's birth has already been observed in his first writing on virginity, the *Adv. Helv.* but until it can be shown that Mary's inviolate corporal integrity even in the moment of Christ's birth formed an essential element of her virginity in the mind of Jerome at this time, one cannot conclude from the presence of expressions like "*virgo post partum, post nationem* virginis mater virgo sit" that Jerome professed the doctrine of her virginity *in partu* as explicitly as the Church does today, or (which is the same) as clearly as did Ambrose. Unless one already in Jerome's passages reads into Mary's title *virgo* what

¹ Jerome, *Com. in Ezech.* 44. PL 25:430a.

² Jerome, *Hom. in Joan.* 1:1-14. Edition of Germanus MORIN, *Anecdota Maredsolana*, 3:2. Maredsoli 1897, p. 390:13-392:22.

³ *Ibid.*, MORIN, p. 390:15-17, 27 f. Text also in Gabriel ROSCHINI, *Mariologia*. Mediolani 1942, III, p. 332.

today it is taken to mean, there remains nothing in his words just cited that is incompatible, for example, with a womb miraculously *restored* to virginal intactness immediately after Christ's birth. It was Jerome who preserved Origen's erroneous doctrine on Christ's birth and the notion of Mary's virginity which it presupposes¹; and so far Jerome has not been heard correcting Origen.

But there remains a final text written in 415, wherein Jerome comes out most explicitly. It is interesting to note that when there he puts the key text of Ezech. 44:2 in face of the one from Ex. 13:2 which underlay Origen's false interpretation, he decides in favor of the former. Whatever he may have meant up to 415 by *virgo* or even *semper virgo* or by a door *semper clausa*, one can hardly misunderstand what he means now by doors *remaining* ("*permanserunt*") ever closed ("*clausae jugiter, semper clausa*"), *even though* (cf. "*tamen, nihilominus*") the pontiff entered and *came out* ("*ingreditur et egreditur*"):

Solus enim Christus clausas portas vulvae virginalis aperuit, quae *tamen clausae jugiter permanserunt*. Haec est porta orientalis clausa, per quam solus Pontifex ingreditur *et egreditur*; et *nihilominus semper clausa est*².

If it be said that Jerome thus rallied to Ambrose's idea on the subject after the latter's death, it must not be implied that Jerome's pronouncements on the virginity in partu were clearly opposed to the doctrine as held today. Nor can it be proved, however caustic some of Jerome's remarks on Ambrose's works³, that the two ever disagreed publicly over Mary's virginity at Christ's birth. As early as the letter to Pammachius, Jerome is heard in terms almost approaching those of the explicit text of *Adversus Vigilantium* just cited, where he is at one with Ambrose; and already in the same letter he cites Ambrose, along with Cyprian, Tertullian (!), and other Latins and Greeks, as a hallmark of orthodoxy on questions of virginity and marriage. In his own defense he claims not to have prized virginity any more than they did. The thought properly his own on Mary's virginity in partu appears only between the lines. But it is exactly that strange reluctance to come out openly

¹ *Supra*, p. 148.

² Jerome, *Dial, contra Pelagianos* 2:4. PL 23:538c.

³ On Jerome's criticism for Ambrose's borrowings from Didymus, cf. *Ep. ad Paulinianum*, serving as preface to Jerome's translation of Didymus' *De Spiritu Sancto*. PL 23:104a. For the criticism of Ambrose's borrowings from Origen, cf. *supra*, p. 148, n. 9. and p. 130-133.

on the subject, especially after Jovinian's condemnation at Milan, which demands explanation. The explanation offered is that Jerome's mind was not as clearly made up at the time as Ambrose's.

3. *Chronology of Events in the Jovinianist Polemic*

The only alternatives to this proposed explanation of Jerome's reticence would be either to place the Milanese condemnation after spring 393 when Jerome wrote the *Adv. Jov.*, or else to ascribe Jerome's silence on Jovinian's Marian heresy to sheer ignorance of it. This second alternative, be it remarked immediately, hardly merits consideration now that Jerome's later declarations have been studied; for in that hypothesis, his ignorance would have to extend to 415, when at last a text explicit enough to counter Jovinianism on all scores is found. Thus Jerome, the richest source on Jovinian, would have to be supposed in ignorance of the Marian error throughout a period when, even after Jovinian's death¹, the errors, including the Marian one, continued to make themselves heard, reaching even as far as Augustine's ears².

In that light it will be seen as well that the first alternative offered, that of correcting the traditional date of the Synod of Milan from 390 to 393 in order to place it after the *Adv. Jov.* explains, and quite poorly at that, Jerome's silence only in 393. It must furthermore be ruled out on the basis of a comparison between Ambrose's use of the text of Ezech. 44:2 in the synodal letter and in the *De Institutione Virginis*. This must be shown in detail.

¹ In 406 Jerome alludes to his death: *Contra Vigilantium*, 1. PL 23:340a. Cf. HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 63, n. 3; p. 131.

² Augustine's *De Sancta Virginitate*, written in 400-401, was aimed at Jovinian, though he is not mentioned by name. It was tactfully preceded by *De Bono Conjugali*, for the express purpose of avoiding a repetition of Jerome's misplaced emphasis (cf. *Retract.* 2:22. CSEL 36 156:16-158:2. PL 32:639bc). Throughout his career Augustine returned to the battle with explicit mention of Jovinian:

412: *De pecc. meritis et remis.* 3:7:13. CSEL 60 129:20-140:25. PL 44:193b-194a.

420: *De nupt. et concup.* 2:5:15; 2:23:38. CSEL 42 266:17-268:14; 291:24 f. PL 44:445a, 458b.

421: *Contra Julianum* 1:2:4. PL 44:643c.

427: *Retract.* 2:22. CSEL 36 156:16-158:2. PL 32:639bc.

428: *De haer.* 82. PL 42:45d-46a. (Complete enumeration of Jovinian's theses, including the Marian error.)

428-429: *Op. imperf. contra Julianum* 1:96-98, 101; 4:121 f. PL 45:1112b-1115d; 1116c-1117c; 1415c-1419b (Marian error cited).

In following the scholars who date the Synod of Milan in 393¹, one must be ready to view Ambrose's exegesis of Ezech. 44:2 in the *De Inst. Virg.* 8:52 as though it had been written *before* the citation of the same text in the synodal letter (*Ep.* 42:6), since for other reasons² the *De Inst. Virg.* is to be dated sometime before Easter 393³. A comparison of the two passages, however, reveals that the *De Inst. Virg.* cannot have preceded *Ep.* 42. Even allowing for the limits which a more sober style in the synodal report imposed – and Ambrose is not too sober on Jovinian; nor, for that matter, are Siricius or Jerome – one can hardly explain that so little of the force of the exegesis in *De Inst. Virg.* should shine through in *Ep.* 42, were this the order of their composition. This would be all the harder to explain if they had been composed within a year or so of one another, as would be the case, since the *De Inst. Virg.* could not have been written earlier than Easter 392. Add thereto the fact that their author is the Ambrose who elsewhere⁴ is frequently heard imitating himself to the point of verbatim repetition. He would not describe Mary with a rather far-fetched Scriptural citation as “haec porta *justitiae* (i. e., Christ), sicut ipse dixit: ‘Sinite nos implere omnem justitiam’”⁵ if he had already developed the comparison in a passage which is as unforgettable and perfectly coherent as this:

Haec porta ad orientem aspiciebat; quoniam verum lumen effudit, quae generavit Orientem, peperitque solem justitiae⁶.

The right chronology is necessarily the traditional one, which allows for the *Ep.* 42 written at least a couple of years before the *De Inst. Virg.*

And the striking difference in the exploitation of this text bespeaks more than simply the passage of two or three years. It is known that

¹ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 393, n. 1; p. 395, adopting the chronology proposed by Jean-Remy PALANQUE, *Saint Ambroise et l'Empire Romain*, Paris 1933, p. 545, dates it in 393; RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 378, in 392. For the traditional date, 390, cf. *supra*, p. 144, n. 1.

² *Infra*, p. 234 f.

³ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 696, in dependence on PALANQUE, *op. cit.*, p. 542, places it at Easter, 392, well before the date he assigns for the Synod of Milan; RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 344, proposes 391/2. JOUASSARD, *Marie à travers la patristique*, p. 113, n. 52, while holding Easter 392 as a starting point, is willing to date the *De Inst. Virg.* later than Jerome's *Adv. Jov.*, in 393. For reasons against a date early as that proposed by the first three, or as late as JOUASSARD's, cf. *infra*, p. 244 f.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 190, 245, 249, 258, 267; *supra*, p. 82, etc. FALLER, *Ambrosius der Verfasser...*, p. 95, 86, 91.

⁵ *Ep.* 42:6. PL 16:1126a.

⁶ *De Inst. Virg.* 8:56. PL 16:320c.

Jovinian used Scriptural arguments generously: his *commentarioli* were really elaborated chains of Biblical citations supporting his theses. Vincent of Lerins considered him one of the heretics who used Scriptural texts plentifully and vehemently¹. Ambrose reaches for his Bible as soon as he suspects that the Church's authority in teaching Mary's virginity in partu is not enough to dissuade Jovinian from propagating his error: "Sed si doctrinis non creditur sacerdotum, credatur oraculis Christi, credatur monitis angelorum...."² It is hardly possible that Ezech. 44:2 could have remained outside the polemic. If the initiative of introducing it belongs to Ambrose in *Ep. 42*, the heretic surely did not suffer it to pass without distorting it to his own favor. Ambrose charges it with its full force in the *De Inst. Virg.* In the *Adv. Jov.* Jerome refuses first to touch it, and when later he does take it in hand, he puts it down again most delicately. For whether ignorant, as some will maintain, or circumspect, Jerome chose not to enter the lists: never once in the twenty-five years of his career after the outbreak of Jovinianism did he mention the heretic's error on Mary's virginity. In the meantime, however, the Synod of Milan, which saw Ezech. 44:2 brought into the discussion, had decided the cause.

B. Mary's Virginity in Partu defended by Ambrose

The acts of a synod as crucial in the history of Mariology in the western Church as this Synod of Milan merit detailed study. They were partially reported by Ambrose in his letter to Pope Siricius³. Here, though, another difficulty is encountered: if the text of Ambrose's works has in many instances been very poorly preserved, the fate of *Ep. 42* is particularly lamentable. It is regrettable that so important a letter should make such a poor appearance as a witness for the doctrine of Mary's virginity in partu. The heart of its message in the fourth paragraph is either referred to without quotation⁴, or cited in mistranslated

¹ *Adv. Haer. Commonitorium* 1:25. PL 50:672a: "An divinae Scripturae testimoniis utantur. Utuntur plane et vehementer quidem."

² *Ep. 42*:5. PL 16:1125b. *Infra*, p. 170 f.

³ *Ep. 42*. Cf. *supra*, p. 142 f., 152 f.

⁴ Amid 488 pages on Ambrose's Mariology, this letter is incredibly dispatched with mention in a footnote in PAGNAMENTA, *op. cit.*, p. 167, n. 1. Most authors who refrain from citing it give it some measure of importance; cf. especially JOUAS-SARD, *Marie à travers la patristique*, p. 109, n. 33.

versions¹, or trimmed down to excerpts which omit the troublesome phrases², or quoted boldly in its complete text but in Latin, translate who translate can³.

The plan of the letter, at least, offers no difficulty. As mouthpiece for the synod, Ambrose expresses in terms very close to those of Siricius' letter the general horror at the grossness of Jovinian's folly, and then delivers his refutation of three errors: 1. the assumption that all merit is of the same degree; 2. the denial of Mary's virginity in partu; 3. the attack on the merit of fasting. Returning a blow that the heretics had no doubt directed against the ascetics at Milan as well as at Rome, he accuses the Jovinianists of Manichaeism, on grounds to be investigated later. He concludes by subscribing wholeheartedly to Siricius' measures against them.

1. Refutation of Error on Virginity and Marriage

He first condemns Jovinian for equating virginity and marriage in merit. Boorish bellowing it is to deprive virginity of its beauty, to overturn the ordered degrees of chastity⁴ and to substitute for a hierarchy of merit a heaven too poorly furnished to accommodate people in different ways and a Christ who has only one and the same palm to give to all⁵. "*Una salus liberatis, unus interitus remanentibus*", the heretic wrote in a work which Jerome was to cite. And again, "*Sicut ergo sine aliqua differentia graduum Christus in nobis est, ita et nos in Christo sine gradibus sumus.*"⁶ His interpretation of the Last Judgment where all the sheep are to be together as a single flock on one side and all the goats on the other⁷ was but one of the Scriptural distortions with

¹ Cf. LEHNER, FRIEDRICH, and HALLER in citations given *infra*, p. 157, n. 5, p. 158, n. 1.

² Severin WENZLOWSKY, *Die Briefe der Päpste und die an sie gerichteten Schreiben*, II (Bibliothek der Kirchenväter). Kempten 1876, p. 450. Johannes E. NIEDERHUBER, *Die Lehre des hl. Ambrosius vom Reiche Gottes auf Erden*. Mainz 1904, p. 263. Johannes NIESSEN, *Die Mariologie des hl. Hieronymus*. Münster i. W. 1913, p. 142. M. J. SCHEEBEN (tr. T. L. GEUKERS), *Mariology*, I. Saint-Louis 1946, p. 104 f.

³ ROSCHINI, *op. cit.*, III, p. 333.

⁴ Cf. the patristic tradition of the 30-, 60-, and 100-fold fruits of chastity, and Ambrose's doctrine on the triple degree of chastity in virgins, widows, and married women, expressed in *De Vid.* 4:23 f. PL 16:241d-242b. *Supra*, p. 34; *infra*, p. 185.

⁵ *Ep.* 42:2. PL 16:1124ab.

⁶ Citations preserved by Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 2:18 f. PL 23:313a, 314a.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 and 22. PL 312d-313c, 316ab.

which he tried to prove the thesis “nullam inter justum et justum, peccatorem et peccatorem, esse distantiam”¹. Into the face of his ascetic adversaries at Rome he threw a challenge that Ambrose does not mention:

Esto... nuptiarum et virginitatis sit diversa conditio, quid ad hoc potes dicere? Si virgo et vidua fuerint *baptizatae*, et ita permanserint, quae erit inter utramque diversitas? ²

He twisted whatever Scriptural texts he found in praise of virginity to refer not to persons who practiced virginity but to the virginal Church. Jerome finds him citing “Despondi enim vos uni viro, virginem castam exhibere Christo” (2 Cor. 11:2) and commenting blandly that this refers “ad totam ecclesiam credentium”, and that there are contained “in hac desponsione Christi et maritatas et digamas et viduas et virgines”³. Even the treasured Apoc. 14:4 on the Lamb’s virginal entourage in heaven was bent to his meaning. On this text he must be listened to attentively, as Jerome cites him, since his teaching here contains the key to a textual problem soon to be encountered in Ambrose’s letter:

Sic et unus populus in ipsis (scil., personis Trinitatis) sit, hoc est, quasi filii charissimi, divinae consortes naturae. Sponsa, soror, mater, et quaecumque alia putaveris vocabula, *unius Ecclesiae* congregatio est, quae numquam est sine sponso (al: sponsa), fratre, filio. Unam habet fidem, nec constupratur dogmatum varietate, nec haeresibus scinditur. *Virgo permanet*. Quocumque vadit agnus, sequitur illum: sola novit canticum Christi ⁴.

Writing in the synodal letter against so perverse a heretic, Ambrose does not hesitate to bring out his most powerful weapon, the virginity of Mary and of her Son:

Per mulierem cura successit, per virginem salus evenit. Denique speciale sibi donum virginitatis Christus elegit, et integritatis munus exhibuit, atque in se repraesentavit quod elegit in matre ⁵.

2. Refutation of Error on Mary's Virginity in Partu

Turning then to the error on Mary’s virginity in partu, Ambrose gives free vent to his wrath, qualifying this Jovinianist aberration as “dementia funestorum latratuum”, no less excorating a language than that

¹ *Ibid.*, 35. PL 333bc.

² *Ibid.*, 1:33. PL 255c.

³ *Ibid.*, 1:37. PL 263d-264a.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:19. PL 314c.

⁵ *Ep.* 42:3. PL 16:1124c. One smiles to see HALLER, *op. cit.*, p.74, n. 11 add on *virginem* the footnote “i. e., Christum”.

used by Siricius¹. He immediately begins its refutation with a *reductio ad absurdum*, and then turns to a series of closely connected positive arguments in favor of the virginal birth.

a) *The Reductio ad Absurdum: A Corrupted Passage Restored*

The force of Ambrose's *reductio ad absurdum* is obscured by a text which has undoubtedly suffered corruption. The reader is called to a halt at the very first sentence, which is read as enigmatically in all editions:

Quanta dementia funestorum latratuum, ut iidem dicerent Christum ex Virgine non potuisse generari, quiasserunt ex muliere, editis humanorum pignorum partubus, virgines permanere².

Haller rightly noted that the sentence in this form, as given in Mansi, Coustant, and the other editors, has no sense³. He cited Wenzlowsky who had left the sentence untranslated and had commented that in its present form it states only the truism that children born from women are virgins – which in no way proves Mary's virginity in the act of giving birth to Christ⁴. Others have not seen the wisdom of Wenzlowsky's observation and do not hesitate to make what they can out of the sentence, dismissing his bother about the context⁵. Haller himself suggests a correction which he never states fully or translates; when

¹ Siricius, *Ep.* 7:3. PL 13:1169a, 1170a: "Numquam tales *canes* Ecclesiae mysterium *latratibus* fatigaverunt.... Christianos coeperunt jam vastare atque suae *dementiae* sociare." In addition, according to the text of the letter (par. 5) reproduced by Migne among Ambrose's works, PL 16:1123a: "Eorum autem *insania*...."

² *Ep.* 42:4. PL 16:1125a.

³ Haller, *op. cit.*, p. 75, n. 1.

⁴ Wenzlowsky, *op. cit.*, p. 450:

Der einzige Sinn, den ich darin finden kann, wäre: Welche behaupten, daß die von einem Weibe auf gewöhnliche Weise Geborenen Jungfrauen bleiben; so aufgefaßt beziehen sich aber diese Worte auf die Jungfräulichkeit *Christi* und nicht auf die seiner Mutter und würden daher den Context stören.

⁵ E. g., Lehner, *op. cit.*, p. 133:

...da sie sagen, Christus habe aus einer Jungfrau nicht geboren werden können, während sie doch erklären, daß Personen, die von Weibern auf ganz natürlicher Weise geboren sind, Jungfrauen verbleiben können. Anders also gewährt Christus, was er sich, wie sie sagen, nicht gewähren konnte?

Here an additional misconstruction creeps into the text when *sibi* has to refer to the virginity Christ exhibited in His own person, instead of to that which He chose for Himself in His Mother.

Friedrich, *op. cit.*, p. 94 gives this translation:

... daß sie einerseits behaupten, Christus habe aus einer Jungfrau nicht geboren werden können, während sie doch andererseits erklären, daß Personen, die von Weibern auf ganz natürliche Weise geboren sind, Jungfrauen verbleiben können.

pages later he paraphrases the passage in the light of this correction, he betrays that he has incredibly misunderstood the argument, offering as Ambrose's answer to Jovinian's error nothing less than an elaborate statement of the error itself!¹

The force of Ambrose's argument will not be revealed until there is found in the clause « qui asserunt ex muliere editis humanorum pignorum partubus virgines permanere » some idea which makes it ridiculous for the same persons to assert what is said in the preceding clause, "Christum ex virgine non potuisse generari"². The trouble in the untranslatable clause arises from the absence of any subject for the infinitive *permanere* and, at least if the punctuation of the Maurists be maintained, from the role of *ex muliere* with relation to *permanere*. Both these obstacles disappear if one conjectures that *ex muliere* crept in to replace an original "*et mulieres*". With that restoration the argument reappears in its strongest light:

Oh, the madness of their dismal barking, that the same people should say that Christ could not have been born of a virgin, and yet assert that *even women*, though having given birth to human pledges, remain virgins³.

¹ Agreeing with WENZLOWSKY, HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 75, n. 1, affirms:

Gewiß! deshalb bleibt nur übrig, den Text in diesem Falle zu *ändern* und zwar etwa in der Weise: qui asserunt ne mulieres ..., d. h. nicht können Weiber, welche menschliche Kinder geboren hatten, Jungfrauen bleiben.

How this can contribute to an argument for Mary's virginity in partu remains a mystery. On p. 155 HALLER finally paraphrases the *annehmbaren Gedanken* which he has tried to salvage from the passage:

Sie sagten: es sei unmöglich, daß ein weibliches Wesen, nachdem es in menschlicher Art geboren hatte, dennoch Jungfrau bleibe. Mit der Geburt habe sie aufgehört, Jungfrau zu sein. Sie habe nur als Jungfrau *empfangen*, d. h., in dem Zeitpunkt des Empfängnisses sei sie allerdings noch Jungfrau gewesen, dann aber habe sie die Jungfrauschaft aufgehört.... Dem Jovinian kam offenbar viel darauf an, den logischen Beweis dafür zu erbringen, daß Maria nicht beständig Jungfrau geblieben, daß somit die Cölibatäre sich mit Unrecht auf ihr Vorbild berufen. Daher die Conclusio: Eine Mutter – und das war Maria in dem Augenblick, als sie empfangen bzw. geboren hatte – ist keine Jungfrau. Eine jungfräuliche Mutter ist eine Contradiktion.

This is an accurate statement of the Jovinianist error; unfortunately it is offered as a loose translation of what Ambrose intended to be the answer to that error!

² *Generari* and *generatio* in this passage are undoubtedly to be referred to the act of giving birth, and not to the entire process of generation, although elsewhere in Ambrose's works they have the latter meaning. The restriction of sense here is evident from Ambrose's restatement of the Jovinianist error towards the end of this paragraph as "*Virgo concepit, sed non virgo generavit*", and his pairing off *conceptus* ... *partus* to correspond to this formula.

³ Unfortunately there is no single word in English to render the full sense of

That an ordinary mother should remain a virgin sounds like nonsense confounded, until one remembers that the Jovinianists actually held this, or something so near it as to make the description of their error in such paradoxical terms a thing to be expected from a mind as steeped in rhetoric as was Ambrose's. Jerome's testimony, read above, on the equal status of all the members of the Church in the Jovinianists' system is witness to the fact that Ambrose does not misrepresent the heresy in attributing to it the idea that wives remain virgins. It is not too far-fetched, in fact, to see in the *virgines permanere* with which the sentence comes to a thumping close a satirical allusion to just such an exegesis of Apoc. 14:4 as Jovinian was heard to give¹. The verse which in the Vulgate reads "Hi sunt, qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati; virgines enim *sunt*" was known to Ambrose in the old Latin versions where it read, "Hi sunt, qui cum mulieribus se non coinquinaverunt: virgines enim *permanserunt*"². Like many other Biblical texts, it probably became a sort of catchword in the course of the Jovinianist quarrel, bandied about by both sides. In the seventh paragraph of this synodal letter Ambrose, however, uses the same expression of Mary – "Peperit Maria et virgo permanet" – surely without any reference to Apoc. 14:4, to that so allusion in *virgines permanere* can certainly be demonstrated. It is admitted that in the Latin of the Fathers *manere* took on simply the sense of *esse*³.

The main objection to the proposed restoration of the text is, of course, that it is a conjecture, and of all conjectures the most objectionable: an emendation⁴. But if a more convincing explanation than a scribe's

mulier when in a passage like this, by contrast to *virgo*, it designates a *woman* in her state of *wife*, i. e., a woman who is no longer a virgin. That one should refuse the honors of virginity to Mary once she had given birth to Christ, and yet accord them *even* ("et = etiam") to a woman who has given birth to a mere human creature is indeed madness.

¹ *Supra*, p. 156.

² As cited by Jerome, *Ep.* 22:41. CSEL 54 210:15. PL 22:425b.

³ Joseph LEBON, *Recension de Hugo KOCH: Virgo Eva – Virgo Maria*, RHE, 34 (1938), p. 339:

Manere par lui-même marque simplement la continuité, la durée de l'état, et on sait que, dans le latin des Pères, il a pu en venir à signifier la même chose que *esse* ou à se distinguer à peine de ce dernier verbe en bien des cas.

⁴ One might arrive at a similar restoration in supposing an instance of haplography and a change of punctuation to tack the troublesome *ex muliere* onto the ablative absolute: "qui asserunt (mulieres), ex muliere editis humanorum pignorum partubus, virgines permanere". But Ambrose's style seems thereby sacrificed to the laws of textual criticism.

oversight be demanded for the origin of the defective *ex muliere*, the following may be offered: To a more deliberate copyist who knew his physiology but was probably ignorant of the Jovinianist error on the equality of Christians¹, the primitive reading which he is conjectured to have met would lack sense; to correct it he would consider the other member of the sentence, “ut iidem dicerent Christum ex virgine non potuisse generari”, since the two are evidently parallel. The *ex virgine* would have suggested *ex muliere* in the phrase that troubled him; he would have recognized in the turn which he was thus giving the sentence the more familiar idea that from wedded women virgins are born² and that the loss of virginity in motherhood finds its redemption in the fact that thereby virgins come into the world³. To such a scribe *et mulieres* would in reality have appeared a more difficult reading, and on that account, had he known of modern principles of textual criticism, he ought to have preferred it.

For the remainder of this fourth paragraph of the letter there are many readings in the Maurist text (= Constant) different from those found in Mansi, but the sense in all editions is about the same. In many details Mansi's proves itself the superior:

Aliis ergo praestat Christus, quod sibi (ut dicunt) praestare non potuit ? Ille vero qui sic carnem suscepit, etsi homo factus, ut hominem redimeret atque a morte revocaret, inusitato tamen quasi Deus itinere venit in terras ; ut quemadmodum dixerat : « Ecce facio omnia nova », partu etiam immaculato virginis nasceretur et (sicut scriptum est) crederetur « nobiscum Deus »⁴.

¹ Jovinianism passed rapidly into well-merited obscurity after Augustine. Cf. the sources HALLER cites, *op. cit.*, p. 107-113: Gennadius (after 496) records it in his historical works; Isidore of Seville (towards 636) is next to refer to it, and after Ildefonsus of Toledo (656-667) gives it a last blow, it disappears until the perfunctory mention in the *Libellus de haeresibus* of a certain Paul (after the 11th century) and the book of the same title by Honorius Augustodunensis (1115).

² Cf. Ambrose, *Ep.* 42:3. PL 16:1124b: “Prius est quod nati sumus (sc. virgines), quam quod effecti (sc. conjugati)”. This recalls Siricius, *Ep.* 7:5. PL 16:1123a: “Sed virgines, quas nuptiae creant, Deo devotas majore honorificentia honoramus.” Cp. Jerome, *Ep.* 22:20. CSEL 54 170:7 f. PL 22:406d: “Laudo nuptias, laudo conjugium, sed quia mihi virgines generant.”

³ Cf. especially Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1:27. PL 23:249a:

Tunc ergo salvabitur mulier, si illos genuerit filios, qui *virgines permansuri sunt* : si quod ipsa perdidit (sc. virginitatem) acquirat in liberis....

⁴ MANSI, III, 665cd, as reproduced by HALLER, *op. cit.*, 72 ff., with Coustant's paragraph divisions and, in note, the variants of Coustant's text. Cp. PL 16:1125a.

These are ideas often encountered in Ambrose: the argument that Christ could surely give to his Mother – here, to Himself (sibi) in the person of his Mother – what He can give others ¹; the notion of a new mode of generation proper to the Son of God ².

Mansi's reading, "partu etiam immaculato virginis", is clearly preferable to the "partu etiam immaculatae virginis" found in Migne (Maurists-Coustant), as is borne out by Ambrose's argument in this very long sentence: Though he is defending *Mary's* virginity in partu, he views it in terms of *Christ*, who is the subject of this sentence as of the previous "Christum ex virgine non potuisse generari". Christ chose to come into the world by an *unused* way, an altogether *new* one including *also* a birth which, like his conception, was *immaculate*. Ambrose's thought here attains Mary only through Christ, and it is not centered on her *immaculateness* (whatever sense the word would have here if it applied to Mary) but on her corporal integrity. He does not want to assert that Mary was kept immaculate because she was to give birth to Christ, but rather that for Christ to be immaculate (i. e., sinless) he had to be born from one who remained a virgin – a virgin in conception and even in birth. Ambrose thus followed and even extended Origen's opinion that Christ's exemption from Original Sin rendered a virginal conception the only way in which he could come into the world ³.

The vote goes to Mansi's reading here over the Maurist-Coustant text also by comparison with Ambrose's use of the word *immaculatus* in other instances. In all the wealth of his Marian writings, never once is it applied to Mary. Among the Marian texts, it is predicated by far most often of Christ ⁴, about half as often of virginity ⁵, and a few times of the Church ⁶. Only one application of it to a purely human person was encountered in a careful but not necessarily foolproof check of Ambrose's works: in the earliest of them, and in an outburst of flowery

¹ E. g., *De Inst. Virg.* 6:45. PL 16:317b: "Aliis promittit ut non deficiant: matrem suam deficere patiebatur?"

² *Supra* p. 78.

³ *Supra*, p. 77-78.

⁴ Dispensing with references, the following expressions may be cited, all predicated of Christ and qualified by *immaculatus*: anima, caro, corpus, Dominus, Filius Dei, generatio, homo, origo, partus, semen, etc. Christ is called "immaculatus et sanctus, immaculatus ex virgine, solus immaculatus ex alvo virginis, etc."

⁵ Immaculata virginitas, castitas, puritas, pudor, fecunditas, corona (virginitatis), familia (virginum), aetas (puerorum), etc.

⁶ Immaculata ecclesia (often), immaculata series sacerdotum, etc. Other occurrences: immaculata gratia, immaculatus spiritus (sc. sanctus), etc.

style, he speaks of *immaculatus Isaac* ¹. That this one instance is not representative of Ambrose's usage is evident, in addition, from passages preserved from his lost commentary on Isaias by Augustine, a friend and in a sense a disciple whose ears were sharply attuned to the application of *immaculatus* to men. In two of his works Augustine cites verbatim the same passage in which Ambrose first applies the word to fervent Christians, but then rectifies his thought:

Ita et immaculati sunt in hoc mundo, et immaculati erunt in regno Dei; cum utique si minutius discutias, immaculatus esse nemo possit, quia nemo sine peccato ².

In another passage of the same work Mansi's reading, *partu etiam immaculatio*, is strikingly confirmed when Augustine cites Ambrose on the reason for Christ's immaculateness:

Idcirco Christus immaculatus, quia *nec ipsa quidem nascendi solita conditione* maculatus est ³.

And the same confirmation may be sought, despite a meaning of *natus* or *nativitas* here probably more extensive than *partus* ⁴, in a passage quoted four times by Augustine:

Ideo et quasi homo per universa tentatus est et in similitudinem hominum cuncta sustinuit; sed *quasi de Spiritu natus* abstinuit a peccato ⁵.

Augustine adds that Ambrose wrote the opinion in explaining "Christi nativitatem de virginis *partu*" ⁶.

But the strongest confirmation of Mansi's reading comes from a passage which was encountered in the *Exp. Luc.* ⁷, and which Augustine also cited ⁸ in conjunction with the sentence just quoted:

Solus enim per omnia ex natis de femina sanctus Dominus Jesus, qui terrena contagia corruptelae *immaculati partus novitate* non senserit....

¹ *De Virgs.* 1:7:34. FALLER, p. 32:15 f. PL 16:198c. Three codices of the British-French family, 11th-12th century, give *immolatus* as a variant here.

² Ambrose cited by Augustine, *Contra duas Epistolas Pelagii* 4:11:31. CSEL 60 566:6-10. PL 44:635c. *De Gr. Chr. et Pec. Or.* 1:49:54. CSEL 42:165:4-6. PL 44:384d.

³ Ambrose cited by Augustine, *Contra duas Epistolas Pelagii* 4:11:29. CSEL 60 559:21-23. PL 44:632b.

⁴ Ambrose's interpretation of the "*natus ex Spiritu sancto et Maria Virgine*" of the Roman creed, *infra*, p. 167, will show how he stressed the moment of birth included in *natus*, an expression intended to describe the whole process of generation.

⁵ *Contra Julianum* 1:4:11. PL 44:647a. *De Nupt. et Concup.* 1:35:40; 2:5:15. CSEL 42 251:15-17, 267:12-14. PL 44:436ab, 444d-445a. *De Gr. Chr. et Pec. Or.* 2:41:47. CSEL 42 205:22-25. PL 44:410a.

⁶ *Contra Julianum* 1:4:11. PL 44:647a.

⁷ *Exp. Luc.* 2:57. CSEL 32:4 72:14-16. PL 15:1573a. *Supra*, p. 116 f.

⁸ *De Gr. Chr. et Pec. Or.* 2:41:47. CSEL 42 206:6-8. PL 44:410a.

It was observed that in the *Exp. Luc* "partus", though having a broader meaning which described the entire process of generation without singling out birth, surely included birth; in *Ep. 42* the context shows that its meaning has been narrowed exclusively to the moment of birth, and that this birth, like the conception, enjoys the *novelty* of being immaculate.

Huhn, therefore, is asking too much of the hardly probable reading, "partu etiam immaculatae virginis", given in Migne when he twice cites it as a witness of Ambrose's opinion on Mary's Immaculate Conception¹. The case for her immaculateness is not as difficult as some of the Ambrosian passages preserved by Augustine imply at first sight, and Huhn does well to advance to it from another tack².

Ambrose concludes his refutation in this fourth paragraph of the letter by recalling the *dementia* with which he began:

Sed de via perversitatis produntur dicere : « Virgo concepit, sed non virgo generavit. » Quae potuit ergo concipere, potuit virgo generare, cum semper conceptus praecedat, partus sequatur³.

If by miracle a virginal conception is possible, then by miracle also a virginal birth, for the two events are in the same order, and conception in preceding birth sets the pattern for it⁴.

¹ Joseph HUHNS, *Ursprung und Wesen des Bösen und der Sünde nach der Lehre des Kirchenvaters Ambrosius*. Paderborn 1933, p. 111, 116.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104-126. In his review of the book FALLER, ZKT, 59 (1935), p. 604-608 rectifies the presentation of Ambrose's notion of the Immaculate Conception, without however citing HUHNS's reliance on *immaculate Virginis*.

³ *Ep. 42:4*. MANSI, III, 665d. Cp. PL 16:1125ab, where Migne's version of the last sentence is also possible, in view of Ambrose's flair for rhetorical questions: "Potuit ergo virgo concipere, non potuit virgo generare, cum semper conceptus praecedat, partus sequatur?"

⁴ For this fourth paragraph among the translations in many languages which were consulted, the most satisfying is that of an anonymous scholar (revised, according to the introductory page, by the Rev. H. WALFORD) on p. 238 f. of the unnumbered volume entitled *Translation of S. Ambrose's Epistles* in the series *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West: Translated by Members of the English Church*. Oxford 1881:

How great is the madness of their dismal barkings, that the same persons should say that Christ could not be born of a virgin, and yet asser that women, after having given birth to human pledges, remain virgins? Does Christ grant to others what, as they assert, He could not grant to Himself? But He, although He took on Him our flesh, although He was made man that He might redeem man, and recal (*sic*) him from death, still, as being God, came upon earth in an extraordinary way, that as He had said, *Behold I make all things new*, so also He might be born of an immaculate virgin, and be believed to be, as it is written, *God with us*. But from their perverse ways they are induced to say, *She was a virgin when she conceived, but not*

This first argument, a *reductio ad absurdum* which by the proposed corrections regains its original force, is of importance mainly from the viewpoint of the history of heresy. So far Ambrose has done little else positively than to state in strongest terms what the doctrine to be held is: the Virgin Mary remained a virgin even in the act of giving birth to Jesus.

b) *Positive Arguments for Mary's Virginity in Partu*

The positive arguments which Ambrose will now bring forth for the doctrine have suffered less textual corruption.

Sed si doctrinis non creditur sacerdotum, credatur oraculis Christi, credatur monitis angelorum dicentium : « Quia non est impossibile Deo omne verbum. » Credatur symbolo apostolorum, quod Ecclesia Romana intemeratum semper custodit et servat ¹.

The doctrine just exposed merits belief, he says, from the fact of its being commonly taught by the *bishops*² of our Church. If the Jovianists do not admit this, let them then turn to the Scriptures which they always have at hand. Ambrose's first appeal is to a text asserting

a virgin when she brought forth. Could she then conceive as a virgin, and yet not be able to bring forth as a virgin, when conception always precedes, and birth follows?

The translator followed the Migne-Maurist-Coustant text, permitting himself a correction of *ex muliere* similar to the one here proposed (except for the missing force of "et = etiam"). He added to the "partu etiam immaculatae Virginis" a *sic* ("so also He might be born of an immaculate Virgin") to reply to the previous *quemadmodum* ("as He had said ..."); in so doing he reduced to a parallel construction what Ambrose intended to be a climax of his application of the *Ecce facio omnia nova*. Finally, he let the "immaculatae" stand.

According to the interpretation defended herein, the sentence should read:

... still, as being God, He came upon earth in an extraordinary way, so that, in virtue of His having said, *Behold I make all things new*, He should also be born in an immaculate birth from a virgin, and should, as it is written, be believed to be *God with us*.

¹ *Ep.* 42:5. MANSI, III, 655d. PL 16:1125b.

² Such is the usual meaning of *sacerdos* with Ambrose as with his predecessors (cf. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 131, n. 8). *Ep.* 19:7. PL 16:984c: the veil given spouses by the *bishop* at marriage in the fourth century is called *velamen sacerdotale*. *Ep.* 45:1, 4. PL 16:1142b: "ego ... nondum veteranus sacerdos". *Ep.* 63:3. PL 16:1173c: "accipiant a sacerdotibus auctoritatem". *Expl. Sym.* CONNOLLY, p. 8: "cautiones, licet sacerdotum..." *De Sacr.* 3:1:6. BOTTE, p. 74. PL 16:433b: "Petrus apostolus qui sacerdos fuit ecclesiae Romanae." Siricius, *Ep.* 7:3, 5. PL 16:1122a, 1123a: "ne ignorantia cuspisiam sacerdotis ... ; ut sacerdotali iudicio detecta..." The episcopal meaning of *sacerdos*, however, is not exclusive: *De Myst.* 2:6. BOTTE, p. 109:10. PL 16:391a. *De Off.* 1:30:152; 2:15:69. PL 16:68a, 121a.

the power of God, for whom a virginal birth is only another miracle; this argument is found in Greek sources possibly used by the doctor of Milan ¹.

But then his thought races on to a more interesting retort, the *Apostles' Creed*, mention of which he injects before continuing his Scriptural arguments. Such an interruption bespeaks not only what importance Ambrose attributed to the Creed, but also how readily it came to his mind as an argument for the virginal birth. Yet the aptness of the argument, which he leaves almost at the stage of an allusion, and the fact that he is alone among the Fathers to cite it, is at first sight puzzling.

He calls it the *Apostles' Creed* (*symbolum apostolorum*), and, is believed to be the first to use this term ². He asserts that it has been preserved intact by the Roman Church ³ implying that such has not been the case elsewhere. In fact, he returns frequently throughout his works, perhaps in virtue of his juridical bent of mind, to the idea of adhering literally, even scrupulously, to the terms of the symbol ⁴. Under no pretext will he admit a change, even were it to combat a heresy with some more precise formulation of dogma. He explicitly condemns at least one such modification of the creed, indulged in by well-intentioned members of a neighboring church to the east ⁵. Rome is to his eyes the

¹ Cf. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Sermo in Nativitatem Christi*, 13. PITRA, 4, p. 390 f. Amphilocius, *Oratio de Occursu Christi*, 3. PG 39:50a.

² J. N. D. KELLY, *Early Christian Creeds*. New York 1950, p. 1. In *Expl. Sym.* 5, 10 and 11. CONNOLLY, p. 7 and 11, Ambrose alludes to the composition of the creed by the Apostles, in no way implying that he considers it a legend.

³ An idea to which he returns in *Explan. Sym.* 10. CONNOLLY, p. 11.

⁴ Cp. *Expl. Sym.* 3. CONNOLLY, p. 6. *Ibid.*, 7. CONNOLLY, p. 8: "sufficiunt praecepta apostolorum cautiones, licet sacerdotum, non requirantur". *Ibid.*, 10. CONNOLLY, p. 11 (note 6, for this restoration):

Si unius apostoli scripturis nihil est detrahendum, nihil addendum, quanto nos symbolo, quod accepimus ab apostolis traditum atque compositum, nihil debemus detrahare, nihil adjungere.

In *De Paradiso* 12:56. CSEL 32:1 314:6-316:8. PL 14:302cd he reminds his readers that the serpent's words to Eve (Gen. 3:1) were a garbled version of God's command, intended thus to deceive her, and he draws therefrom the lesson of necessary adherence to the strict letter. A contemporary, Nicetas of Remesiana, in *Ratione Fidei*, 3. BURN, p. 12:11 f. voiced a similar lament regarding Arius:

Hic namque non fuit contentus euangelicis uocibus, apostolorum praedicationibus, quae utique Patrem, Filium, et Spiritum Sanctum sonant....

⁵ *Expl. Sym.* 3, 6, and 7. CONNOLLY, p. 6 and 8:

Scio in partibus maxime orientis quod ea quae primo tradita sunt a maioribus, dum quasi fraude alii, alii diligentia – fraude haeretici, diligentia catholici – dum ergo illi fraudulentè conantur inrepere, addiderunt quod non opus est: dum isti fraudem praecavere contendunt, fines maiorum velut

model of strict literal fidelity: on this point, as on all, he wants to imitate Rome¹. Badcock very plausibly suggests that it was Ambrose who on taking office had imported the creed of Rome into Milan to replace the suspect creed, probably of Cappadocian origin, which his semi-Arian predecessor Auxentius had introduced². Despite his obvious dependence on Greek authors, therefore, Ambrose was strictly Roman in his creed, and even gave expression to his distrust regarding creeds of the Greek churches³.

It must have been natural that in a polemic against a heretic who denied the virginal birth, the two ideas of fidelity to the *Roman* Creed, and *literal* fidelity thereto, should leap to Ambrose's mind. Were the letter of the Roman creed not for him an obviously potent weapon against Jovinian, probably Ambrose would have specified just where therein he found an argument. The contrast between many of the Eastern creeds and the Roman creed begins to unlock the door to his thought here:

The first thing that leaps to the eye is the unanimity of Eastern creeds in teaching explicitly the Father's pre-cosmic begetting of the Son.

pietate quadam et incuria videntur esse praetergressi.... Patripassiani cum emersissent, putaverunt etiam catholici *in hac parte* addendum *invisibilem et impassibilem* (i. e., to the article of the creed on the Father), quasi filius dei visibilis et passibilis fuerit.... Ergo, esto medici fuerint maiores nostri, voluerint addere aegritudini sanitatem; medicina non quaeritur. Ergo si medicina fuit eo tempore necessaria, quo erat haereticorum quorundam gravis aegritudo animorum, et sic fuit tunc temporis quaerenda, nunc non est. Qua ratione? Fides integra adversus Sabellianos. Exclusi sunt Sabelliani, *maxime de partibus occidentis*.

The three underlinings introduced into the text suggest that Dom CONNOLLY erred in his edition of the *Explanatio* when he translated *in hac parte* as *on this account* instead of *in this region* (i. e., Milan), as he had translated *in these parts* in the other two instances. A suggestion coming from his own flock to change the terms of the creed would particularly grieve Ambrose.

¹ *De Sacr.* 3:1:5. BOTTE, p. 73:13-15, 24. PL 16:432c, 433a:

Ecclesia Romana ... cujus typum in omnibus sequimur et formam.... In omnibus cupio sequi ecclesiam Romanam.

² F. J. BADCOCK, *The History of the Creeds*, 2nd ed. London 1938, p. 48-50, 80-85.

³ *Supra*, p. 165, n. 5. The *invisibilis et impassibilis*, an addition of which Ambrose disapproves, is found in the creed of the church of Aquileia as quoted by Rufinus (cf. Hans LIETZMANN, *Symbole der alten Kirche*, Berlin 1935, p. 12), in the creed of the Anomoean Second Synod of Sirmium held in 357/9 (*ibid.*, p. 30), and in the creed which according to CONNOLLY, *op. cit.*, p. 15, Auxentius presented to Valentinian and Valens. Ambrose's attitude towards the many Oriental conciliar creeds is illustrated by his recognition of the first confession sent by the Council of Rimini (359) to Constantius, along with his constant disparagement of the Council itself. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 187, n. 1. He championed Nicea, of course: *De Fide*, 1, prol. 5. PL 16:529b.

In R [the Roman Creed] the doctrine is probably implied, but what characterizes it is the prominence given to the *birth of Jesus* from the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin. The idea of His birth from the Virgin is occasionally taken up in Eastern creeds, possibly out of regard for the Bible story, but the cooperation of the Holy Spirit is almost invariably left out ¹.

The *birth* from the Virgin which the authority just quoted is commenting cannot, of course, be accepted in the exclusive sense of "act of giving Birth"; for that matter, one can safely assert that neither is such the primary intention of the Roman creed ² when it says "*qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto et Maria virgine*" ³. The distinction of two moments, "conceptus de Spiritu Sancto" and "natus ex Maria Virgine", had not yet been introduced into the fourth-century versions of the symbol ⁴;

¹ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

² Ferdinand KATTENBUSCH, *Das Apostolische Symbol*, II: *Verbreitung und Bedeutung des Taufsymbols*. Leipzig, 1900, p. 616-625, 879-887.

³ The old Roman creed is best known in its Latin form through Rufinus' *Commentarius in Symbolum Apostolorum*. PL 21:335-386. The actual text of the creed has had to be reconstructed from Rufinus and from two other sources: the version inserted in the back of the last page but one (p. 226 verso) of the Graeco-Latin uncial *Codex Laudianus* 35 saec. VII of the Bodleian Library, and the version found in a Cottonian MS, 2 A xx = *Codex Swainsonii* saec. VIII, now in the British Museum. Cf. LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 10. In this reconstructed text the third article reads "... qui natus est de Spiritu sancto *et* Maria virgine." In the text of the Roman baptismal creed attested by Hippolyte's *Traditio Apostolica*, RAHMANN, p. 128, this article reads "... *ex* Maria virgine". Cf. LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴ The formula "qui conceptus est de Spiritu sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine" appears in the fifth century in Gaul. Cf. LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, symbol of Faustus of Riez, p. 14; of Cyprian of Toulon, p. 15; of the *Sacramentarium Gallicanum*, p. 15; of Reichenau, p. 15. On the distinction of the two moments, *conceptus* and *natus*, cf. KATTENBUSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 879-887, and especially this passage, p. 879 f. with n. 11:

Das Vorkommen von *conceptus* in einer offiziellen (wenn auch konziliaren) Formel in der Mitte des 4. Jahrhunderts hat unter allen Umständen das Interesse, daß es beweisen dürfte, daß dieser Zusatz keine antihäretische Bedeutung hat. Ich wüßte nicht, mit welcher bis dahin aufgetauchten Häresie er in Verbindung zu setzen sei. ... Die Lehre des Jovinian ... stützte sich, soweit wir sehen können, nicht etwa auf eine im Symbol dargebotene Absonderung der *conceptio* Christi von seiner Geburt. Aber sie mag zeigen, daß diese Sonderung geradezu häretisch hätte fruktifiziert werden können. Freilich hat Ambrosius (oder schon Siricius) solcher Neigung, wenn sie sich je geregt, wohl einen guten Riegel vorgeschoben durch seine Art, R wider Jov. auszuspielen. Es scheint doch, wie ich oben hervorhob, die Pointe seiner antijovinianischen Argumentation aus eben dem *symbolum apostolicum quod ecclesia romana intemeratum semper custodit*, darin zu liegen, daß das *et M. Virgine* darin so gut wie das *de spir. s.* mit *natus* verknüpft sei. Diese Kombination blieb ja auch, nachdem das *de spir. s.* mit einem *conceptus* mehr verselbständigt war.

even after it became the formula generally accepted in fifth-century Gaul, *natus* stood for the entire process of virginal generation, as in the old Roman symbol, and was not limited to the moment of birth. But the point is that the old Roman creed did read *natus*, as generally the Latin creeds know throughout Italy, translating in that word the γεννηθέντα found in many Greek symbols, especially of the fourth century synods¹. By contrast, not a few Eastern creeds had instead of *natus*-γεννηθέντα expressions less associated with Christ's actual birth, such as σαρκωθέντα², or σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα³, or σάρκα ἐκ τῆς παρθένου ἀνελφόντα⁴, or again the bare σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα of Nicea⁵, or the elaborated σαρκωθέντα, ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα of the Council of Constantinople⁶. To the "*natus* de Spiritu Sancto et Maria *virgine*" of the Roman creed, therefore, the legal-minded Ambrose held fast, defying the Roman Jovinianists to escape from the literalness of the faith professed with their own lips⁷.

Was he speaking for an audience wider than the Jovinianist? It has been observed above⁸ that the silence in Siricius' synodal report regarding any error on Mary's virginity could be accounted for by the

¹ Cf. the Latin symbols of Aquileia, Ravenna, and Turin, in LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 12 f; of Milan, p. 11; similar *natum*-formulae in Tertullian (*De Virg. Vel. 1; De Praesc. Haer. 13*), p. 6. Cf. the Greek creeds, all with γεννηθέντα ἐκ Μαρίας or ἐκ τῆς ἁγίας παρθένου or both, given *ibid.* for Rome (Greek text: Athelstan's Psalter in Br. Museum), p. 10; Antioch (Greek and Latin version), p. 22; the *Apostolic Constitutions*, p. 23; the Nestorians (Greek reconstructed from Syriac), p. 24; Synod of Antioch (341), Second Formula, p. 28; Third Formula, p. 30; Fourth Formula, p. 30; Synod of Sirmium (359), p. 32; Synod of Nike (359), p. 33; Synod of Constantinople (360), p. 34.

² Cf. LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, Symbol of Caesarea, p. 18; of Arius and Euzoius, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, Symbol of Jerusalem, p. 19 (probably only ἐνανθρωπήσαντα in original form); of Epiphanius (*Ancoratus* 118:122. GCS Epiph. 1, 145), p. 20 (to be compared to his second symbol, *ibid.*, 119:123. GCS 147, which adds γεννηθέντα as an explanation of σαρκωθέντα;) of the Synod of Nicea (325), p. 27.

⁴ Synod of Antioch (341), First Formula, in LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵ *Loc. cit.* ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷ KATTENBUSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 395:

Es wird nicht eigens gesagt, wiefern R jene Spezialtheorie des Jov. ausschlieÙe; offenbar denkt Ambr. an das *qui "natus" est de spir. s. et M. virg.* Möglich, oder vielmehr wahrscheinlich, daß Siricius mit diesem Argument gegen Jov. vorangegangen war. Immerhin ist bemerkenswert, daß Ambr. es sich mit aneignet. Also als *Helfer* läßt er sich das Symbol gefallen. Wo selbst es eine Theorie ausschließt, da ist sie gewiß gerichtet. Gewissermaßen als eine ultima ratio, der man doch zum mindesten sich füge, erscheint es.

⁸ *Supra*, p. 145 f.

possibility that the ascetical circles who had denounced Jovinian to the Pope had not been as shocked by that error as was Ambrose. On this point the case of Helvidius at Rome in the previous decade offers an enlightening parallel.

From a citation of Helvidius in Jerome's *Adv. Helv.* (written 383), Jouassard concludes that Helvidius' argument takes for granted the defenders of Mary's virginity post partum – among whom Jerome ranked first – held Christ to have been born in the normal way¹. The same scholar sees in the reason for Jerome's entry into the fight against Helvidius at Rome – “ob scandalum fratrum” – a strong proof that Helvidius' pamphlet had won a hearing among the Roman ascetics². Going even a step further, Jouassard concludes from the silence about any papal initiative in Helvidius' refutation that at the moment when Helvidius' pamphlet was spread “it was capable of receiving a sort of

¹ The citation of Helvidius in question is given in *Adv. Helv.* 18. PL 23:202a:

Dicis: « Numquid meliores sunt virgines Abraham, Isaac, et Jacob, qui habuere conjugia? Numquid non quotidie Dei manibus, parvuli finguntur in ventribus, ut merito erubescere debeamus, Mariam nupsisse post partum? Quod si hoc illis turpe videtur, superest ut non credant, etiam Deum per genitalia Virginis natum. Turpius est enim juxta eos, Deum per pudenda Virginis genitum, quam Virginem suo viro nupsisse post partum. »

Georges JOUASSARD, *La personnalité d'Helvidius*. Mélanges J. Saunier. Lyon 1944, p. 149 paraphrases:

(Si) ... on trouve honteux le commerce que Marie aurait entretenu avec Joseph, Jésus une fois au monde, il n'y a plus qu'à refuser d'admettre que ce même Jésus soit né selon la condition commune; car, à se placer dans cette ligne-ci, serait plus honteuse une naissance ainsi survenue, que le fait pour Marie de s'être unie à Joseph postérieurement à la Nativité.

He then remarks, *loc. cit.*, n. 2:

Ici, c'est manifeste, Helvidius, ou du moins son interprète, suppose que les tenants de la virginité post partum admettent que Jésus serait né exactement comme nous naissons tous et par les mêmes voies. On constate justement par l'*Adv. Helv.* 18 PL 202b-203a que saint Jérôme, quant à lui, était à ce moment-là dans de tels sentiments. Helvidius était donc fondé à se prévaloir de ces sentiments pour essayer d'acculer ses adversaires à une impasse.

² *Ibid.*, p. 152 and n. 1:

Ob scandalum fratrum! Quelle meilleure preuve que le pamphlet avait atteint son but? ...

On voit ce qu'il faut penser de cette assertion de Jérôme qu'on lit quelques lignes à peine plus haut (*ibid.*, PL 183a), à savoir qu'Helvidius n'aurait eu personne avec lui: “solus in universo mundo sibi et laicus et sacerdos”. Helvidius a pu commencer de la sorte; il n'a pas tardé à voir des adhésions lui arriver. Non qu'il ait groupé proprement autour de lui des sectateurs; saint Augustin le donnerait à croire (*De Haer.* 84 PL 42:46), mais il ne saurait s'agir de cela. Du moins est-il manifeste que beaucoup ont applaudi au libelle d'Helvidius, et qu'ils l'ont colporté avec ses thèses. Ceci à Rome même, dans cette Rome que Jérôme cherchait à convertir à l'ascétisme.

laissez-passer from the representatives of the hierarchy, in Rome at least”¹. On the more difficult question of Mary’s virginity in partu, a faith still short of the explicitness it was soon to attain could even more readily be expected.

If this were the case, Ambrose’s appeal to the Roman symbol, already recognized to be the first use of the creed in the defense of Mary’s virginity in partu², takes on even greater significance. Speaking from a neighboring church where Providence had presided over a more rapid evolution of this dogma, Ambrose would be inviting the Romans too to recognize the wealth of the faith which their symbol contains in the *natus ex virgine*. One should be thus assisting at a most enlightening example of the explicitation of a dogma already contained in germ not only in the deposit of the faith but even in the all but inspired expression it had been given. Though the hypothesis is tempting in the light of the evidence offered – particularly of Jerome’s sway at Rome just previously – let it no more than raised here. And let anyone who entertains it imitate the measured tact of an Ambrose who clothed his invitation to ponder the *natus ex virgine* in a protestation of fidelity to the Roman hierarchy and admiration of the Roman symbol.

After this reference to the Roman creed Ambrose takes up the *Scriptural arguments* which he had already announced in the opening sentence

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153:

Mais tous en ce temps-là ne tenaient pas [la propagande ascétique et monastique de Jérôme] pour l’idéal ; plus d’un répugnaient même positivement à l’agréer. Nous en avons eu la preuve à l’instant même, ce succès qu’obtint Helvidius dans des milieux qui étaient pourtant en relation avec la cour pontificale. Car c’est à Rome qu’Helvidius a écrit, c’est dans Rome que son libelle s’est propagé et qu’il a été lu, c’est là qu’il a gagné l’esprit de bien des frères. Or que fait cependant la Cour pontificale ? Que fait le pape Damase en personne ? Rien, qu’on sache, pas même, ce semble, pour réclamer de Jérôme réplique à l’audacieux. De fait, l’auteur de l’*Adv. Helv.* ne dit mot de commission qu’il eût reçue en provenance de la Cour romaine pour rédiger cet écrit. Au plus, dans la suite, mettra-t-il en cause Damase pour justifier la doctrine qu’il y avait proposée (*Ep.* 48 : 18. PL 22 : 508). Celui-ci, assurément, n’aurait rien trouvé à reprendre dans l’*Adv. Hel.* Nous sommes heureux de le savoir. La chose a son intérêt. Elle ne prouve aucunement toutefois que le Pape ait requis rédaction de l’ouvrage. S’il l’eût fait, l’auteur n’eût pas manqué sans doute de le claironner et de s’en prévaloir, ainsi que du jugement pontifical.... Encore est-il qu’au moment où il (Helvidius) la lançait, cette théorie demeurerait susceptible d’une sorte de laissez-passer de la part des représentants de la hiérarchie, à Rome tout au moins ; car ailleurs il pouvait en aller d’autre sorte, dans le Nord de l’Italie par exemple et en Gaule, où beaucoup d’évêques se montraient déjà chatouilleux sur ce point. A Rome même, on n’allait pas tarder à le devenir et la cause de la virginité post partum serait définitivement assurée dans le monde catholique.

² FRIEDRICH, *Jungfrauengeburt*, p. 101.

of the fifth paragraph of the letter. He will dwell thereon through the seventh. The first of these arguments represents an exegesis of Luc. 1:34, 38 which again is proper to Ambrose, and, in fact, occurs nowhere else in his work outside this place.

Audivit Maria vocem angeli, et quae ante dixerat : « Quomodo fiet istud ? », non de fide generationis interrogans respondit postea : « Ecce ancilla Domini, contingat mihi secundum verbum tuum. »¹

In this ingenious argument Ambrose calls Our Blessed Lady herself as witness against the folly of the Jovianists who admitted virginal conception but not virginal birth. Her question concerned the mode of conception, as is clear from her remark about not knowing man². On being informed that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her so that what was to be born of her would be holy, she did not inquire how her virginity was to be respected in birth as well as in conception, but accepted it as a thing already guaranteed in virginal conception.

Elsewhere Ambrose's exegesis of Luc. 1:34 is more traditional. All three instances of it antedate Ep. 42. In *De Abraham*, comparing Mary's question to Abraham's (Gen. 15:8), he paraphrases it thus:

Cum id quod naturae est non suppetat quia non solet parere quae viro non fuerat copulata, quaero quomodo praeter instituta naturae possim virgo generare ?³

By the time he wrote the *De Officiis*, he had hit on a formula – she asked the question “ut *qualitatem effectus* disceret”⁴ – which he used again in the *Exp. Luc.*

Etenim cum dicit : Quomodo fiet istud ? non de effectu dubitavit, sed *qualitatem* ipsius quaesivit *effectus*⁵.

¹ Ep. 42:5. MANSI, III, 665e. PL 16:1125b. A division in the sentence must be made earlier than the one suggested by the comma after *interrogans* in MANSI and PL, so as to attach this participial phrase (“non de fide generationis interrogans”) to *respondit* and not to *dixerat*. *Generatio*, furthermore, refers to the act of giving birth in this instance, as appears again in the next sentence, “Haec est virgo quae in utero *concepit*: virgo quae *peperit* filium”. Cf. *supra*, n. 74.

² On Ambrose's having read “virum non *cognovi*” instead of *cognosco*, cf. *supra*, p. 101.

³ *De Abra.* 2:8:49. CSEL 32:1 603:1-3. PL 14:477c.

⁴ *De Off.* 1:18:69. PL 16:44b.

⁵ *Exp. Luc.* 2:14. CSEL 32:4 50:1-3. PL 15:1558b. The four passages on Luc. 1:34 illustrate the richness of Ambrose's exegesis: in *De Abra.* and *Exp. Luc.* he teaches a lesson of unquestioning trust in God, by comparing Mary to Abraham and Zachary; in *De Off.* a lesson in modest reserve, again with Mary as model. In Ep. 42 he uses the text to argue for Mary's virginity in partu. The last inter-

The text of Is. 7:14 follows as the next Scripture demonstration:

Haec est virgo, quae in utero concepit, virgo quae peperit filium.
Sic enim scriptum est : « Ecce virgo in utero accipiet, et pariet filium. »
Non enim concepturam tantummodo virginem, sed et parituram virginem dixit ¹.

This exegesis is frequent enough in preceding literature to make a borrowing on Ambrose's part plausible, perhaps from Gregory Thaumaturgus ² or Gregory of Nyssa ³.

Then a Scriptural argument is drawn from the *porta clausa* of Ezech. 44:2, a text already treated above ⁴. It is to be noted that this is the first time in his works that he cites the text in connection with Mary's virginity. He will take it up only once again in the *De Inst. Virg.*

In the seventh paragraph he alludes to five miracles of the Old Testament and one of the New to demonstrate that the Jovinianists should not deny a virginal birth on the grounds of its being contrary to the laws of nature ⁵. The striking feature which these six miracles have in common is that they all concern the behavior of water in some manner contrary to its nature: the Red Sea and the Jordan divided to permit passage, water twice brought forth by Moses' rod from the rock, iron floating on water at Eliseus' command, and Peter's walking on the waters. Perhaps Ambrose is drawing on a stock of examples ready at hand for his baptismal sermons ⁶. Nowhere else in his work does he cite any of them to demonstrate the credibility of virginal birth. The allusion

pretation is original with Ambrose. In *De Off.* he was inspired by the portrayal of Mary's virtues in the Annunciation scene drawn by Athanasius, since his "prae verecundia tamen salutantem non resalutavit" here recalls the "salutata obmutuit et appellata respondit" of *De Virgs.* 2:2:11, modeled on Athanasius, as has been seen *supra*, p. 41 f. In the other two places he may have picked up the familiar interpretation from a Greek source like Origen, who surely commented the Annunciation scene in Luke's Gospel, even though Jerome has not preserved any such homily in the incomplete collection which he translated.

¹ *Ep.* 42:5. MANSI, III, 665e-666a. PL 16:1125b.

² *Hom. in Nativ. Christi*, 16. PITRA, 4, p. 392.

³ *Orat. 1 de Resur. Dom.* PG 46:611d.

⁴ *Ep.* 42:6. MANSI, III, 666a. PL 16:1126a. Cf. *supra*, p. 159 f.

⁵ *Ep.* 42:7. MANSI, III, 666ab. PL 16:1126ab.

⁶ The second stanza of the Ambrosian hymn *Inluminans Altissimus*, where in connection with the feast of Epiphany the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan is commemorated, reads:

seu mystico baptismate
fluenta Iordanis retro
conversa quondam tertio
praesente sacraris die ;

at the end of this passage to the Old Testament Mary, sister of Moses and Aaron, a reminiscence frequently found under his pen, has already been commented ¹.

With this paragraph, then, the entire refutation of Jovinian's error on virginal birth is concluded. Ambrose has been arguing with a *reductio ad absurdum*, and then positively with an appeal to the ordinary teaching of bishops, a reference to the Roman creed, two Scriptural demonstrations (Luc. 1:34, 38 and Is. 7:14), and a handful of Scriptural examples of miracles no less demanding of God's power than is the virginal birth.

C. Jovinianism at Milan after Ambrose's Refutation

Such is the doctrinal content of this synodal letter which can be said to have played a crucial role in bringing to explicit recognition in the Western Church the doctrine of Mary's virginity in partu. It remains to see how Ambrose effectively ridded the Church of Milan of an influence as noisome to him as Jovinian. It was the mode whenever possible to see Manichaeism in doctrinal aberrations of any sort. There were laws in the Empire against the Manichaean heresy, so that each side in this polemic found it advantageous to tag the other with that execrable name in order to set in motion the organs of civil authority. Of the three anti-Manichaean laws in the Theodosian Code under the title *De Haereticis*, the first forbade the Manichaeans to convoke assemblies; published already by Valentinian in 372, it seems not to have been invoked in the controversy, since a more recent and more stringent measure was at hand. The edict of Theodosius, proclaimed June 17 (XV Kal. Jul.) 389 read:

Quicumque sub nomine Manichaeorum mundum sollicitant, ex omni

WALPOLE, *op. cit.*, p. 66 comments as follows:

"Whether by thy mystical baptism Thou didst on this day sanctify the waters of Jordan thrice turned back...." The reference in the hymn is to Ps. 113:3, a passage often quoted by Ambrose, as in *Hex.* 3:2, "mare vidit et fugit, Iordanus conuersus est retrorsum...." The three occasions were when the Jordan was passed by the Israelites under Joshua (Jos. 3), by Elijah (2 Kings 2:8), by Elisha (*ib.* 14). They are here specifically alluded to as indicating that the Jordan was already prepared by miraculous interventions for this crowning enrichment. See Ambrose in *Exp. Luc.* 1:37: "Ille sub Helia diuiso amne fluuiarium recursus undarum in originem fluminis – sicut dixit scriptura : Iordanis conuersus est retrorsum – significat salutaris lavacri futura mysteria."

¹ *Supra*, p. 51-64, especially 53.

quidem orbe terrarum, sed quam maxime de hac urbe pellantur sub interminatione iudicii ¹.

Baronius takes this to be the law invoked in Jovinian's case, and his opinion is better than that of Godofredus who, following a different chronology cites the law proclaimed in 391, the terms of which also stipulate expulsion ².

Though Ambrose is silent on the point in *Ep. 42*, Jovinian had almost certainly accused him of Manichaeism. Such would be expected from the fact that Jerome was to suffer from similar attacks: he cites Jovinian as saying, "Ex quo manifestum est, vos Manichaeorum dogma sectari" ³, and once in a reply he alludes to the grounds on which the accusation was built: "Neque vero nos Marcionis et Manichaei dogma sectantes, *nuptiis detrahimus....*" ⁴ Augustine too speaks of attempts by Jovinian to tag his adversaries with a Manichaean opinion on marriage:

Et Jovinianus, qui paucos ante annos novellam conatus est haeresim condere, Manichaeis patrocinari dicebat catholicos, quod adversus eum *sanctam virginitatem nuptiis praeferabant* ⁵.

Perhaps a second front of Jovinian's attack appears in the appreciation that Augustine much later gives of Pelagius:

Manichaeos appellat catholicos, more illius Joviniani, qui ante paucos annos haereticus novus *virginitatem sanctae Mariae destruebat* et virginitati sacrae nuptias fidelium coaequabat ⁶.

In another work Augustine states yet even more clearly that it was the Catholic defense of Mary's virginity in partu which gave Jovinian a pretext for launching his accusation of Manichaeism:

Hoc de Manichaeorum nomine et crimine faciebat etiam Jovinianus *negans Mariae sanctae virginitatem*, quae fuerat dum conciperet, permansisse dum pareret, tamquam Christum cum Manichaeis phantasma crederemus, si matris incorrupta virginitate diceremus exortum. Sed in adiutorio ipsius Salvatoris, sicut spreverunt catholici velut acutissimum quod Jovinianus exsuerat argumentum, et nec sanctam Mariam pariendo fuisse corruptam nec Dominum phantasma fuisse crediderunt, sed et illam virginem mansisse post partum, et ex illa tamen verum Christi corpus exortum, sic.... ⁷

¹ *Cod. Theod.*, lib. 16, tit. 5, leg. 18, in the edition of Gustavus HAENEL. Bonnae, 1837.

² HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 79, n. 2.

³ *Adv. Jov.* 1:5. PL 23:217c.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:3. PL 213a.

⁵ Augustine, *De Nupt. et Concup.* 2:23:38. CSEL 42 292:4-7. PL 44:458b.

⁶ *Contra duas ep. Pelag.* 1:2:4. CSEL 60:425:15-18. PL 44:552a.

⁷ *Contra Julianum* 1:2:4. PL 44:643c.

The charge of Manichaeism on account of the defense of Mary's virginity in partu was probably directed by Jovinian above all at Ambrose, as appears from the fact that Ambrose spoke out more clearly than anyone else on the subject. There is as well Augustine's testimony elsewhere:

Numquid etiam istum (sc., Ambrosium), o Pelagiani et Caelestiani, audebitis dicere Manichaeum? quod eum dicebat esse Jovinianus haereticus, contra cujus impietatem vir ille sanctus *etiam post partum permanentem virginitatem Mariae defendebat*.... Si et illum fidelissimum virum hoc secundum Manichaeos sapuisse jactatis, jactate, jactate, ut mensuram Joviniani perfectius impleatis...¹.

Accused, then, of Manichaeism, Ambrose retorts not with defense but with a counteraccusation. He had been charged with reducing Christ to a sort of phantasm by teaching that He came into the world by a virginal birth. To his accusers he replies that *they* are the true Manichaeans ("vere se Manichaeos probaverunt"), for if Christ did not come, *conceived* and *born* of a *virgin* according to the terms of Is. 7:14, then he did not come at all, did not ever take on flesh; hence the being who lived among men and was crucified was only a phantasm: which is the heresy of the Manichaeans, who deny the reality of Christ's flesh².

Such an indictment was the mode of the day. It was sufficient to have Jovinian expelled from Milan, and with his leaving the scene of Ambrose's activity, he must be abandoned in the present study³. But as is the custom in anything written on Jovinian, Jerome should be called in a final time to pen his epitaph:

Epicurus Christianorum....⁴ Ille Romanae Ecclesiae auctoritate damnatus inter phasides aves et carnes suillas non tam emisit spiritum quam eructavit⁵.

¹ *De Nupt. et Concup.* 2:5:15. CSEL 42 267:18-22; 267:25-268:2. PL 44:445a, b.

² *Ep.* 42:12 f. MANSI, III, 667a. PL 16:1128ab.

³ For his obvious resemblance in doctrine and life to Luther others do not so quickly abandon him; HALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 159, cites Adolph HARNACK, *Die Lehre von der Seligkeit allein durch den Glauben*. Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 2 (1891), p. 154, who writes:

In der ganzen Geschichte des Paulinismus in der alten Kirche gibt es keinen Zweiten, der wie Jovinian der Gnade und dem Glauben ihre Rechte zurückgegeben hat, und in der ganzen Geschichte der Versuche, wider die herrschende Strömung die Seligkeit als eine *einheitliche* allein vom Glauben abzuleiten und alle Werkgerechtigkeit auszuschließen, gebührt dem Mönch Jovinian die erste Stelle. Man darf ihn wirklich *einen Wahrheitszeugen des Altertums* und einen *Protestanten seiner Zeit* nennen, wenn man auch einen bedeutenden Unterschied nicht verkennen darf – das Einwohnen Gottes und Christi in dem Getauften ist stärker betont als die Kraft des Glaubens.

⁴ *Adv. Jov.* 1:1. PL 23:211a.

⁵ *Contra Vigilantium* 1:1. PL 23:340a. Written in 406.

In the aftermath of the Milanese condemnation, there must have been a polemic, at least until the death of Jovinian himself, carried on underground wherever he or his disciples could gain a hearing. Ambrose's writings, however, reflect it only indirectly. The development of the *porta clausa* of Ezech. 44:2 in the *De Inst. Virg.* (c. 392-3), though significantly more complete than its first mention in *Ep.* 42¹, occurs at the end of a series of arguments demonstrating Mary's virginity post partum², for Ambrose was by this time grappling with another heretic, the bishop Bonosus, whose denial of Mary's perpetual virginity will be studied in subsequent chapters. His allusion, nevertheless, to the Jovinianist error is unmistakable:

Quae est haec porta, nisi Maria ; ideo clausa, quia virgo ? Porta igitur Maria, per quam Christus intravit in hunc mundum, quando virginali fusus est partu, et genitalia virginittis claustra non solvit. Mansit intemeratum septum pudoris, et inviolata integritatis duravere signacula ; cum exiret ex virgine, cujus altitudinem mundus sustinere non posset.

...Verum una sola (porta) potuit manere clausa, per quam sine dispendio claustrorum genitalium virginis partus exivit³.

A fleeting allusion is found in the *De obitu Theodosii*, delivered in February 395:

...Maria, quae genuit triumphatorem, quae sine imminutione virginittis edidit eum....⁴

But Ambrose's silence elsewhere about the Jovinianist error would almost lead one to see already quite soon after the Milanese condemnation the state of affairs which led Augustine to write of Jovinianism:

Cito tamen ista haeresis oppressa et extincta est, nec usque ad deceptionem aliquorum sacerdotum potuit pervenire⁵.

Writing thus in 428, Augustine was viewing events from already a somewhat distant perspective, to be corrected by recalling that in 393 yet Jerome was called into the fray by friends at Rome itself to combat

¹ *Infra*, p. 268 f.

² The arguments for Mary's perpetual virginity cover chapters 5 to 8 (PL 16: 313a-320b), of which c. 8 contains the exegesis of Ezech. 44:2. Despite its force in demonstrating the virginity in partu, the text is here orientated also toward the virginity post partum, as is evident from the reference to Joseph's respect for the *porta clausa* at the conclusion of c. 8:57 (PL 320cd).

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 8:52, 55. PL 16:320a, b.

⁴ *De Obitu Theodosii* 44. PL 16:1400b.

⁵ *De Haer.* 82 PL 42:46a.

more than a straw man. But Ambrose, at least, did not have to take up arms again in the struggle, except once in 396, and then only on a limited front.

The seeds of Jovinian's error had been carried to the neighboring church of Vercelli by two ill-named monks, Sarmatio and Barbatian, who on Ambrose's entrance had now to suffer the additional handicap of tilting with the head of the monastery from which they had fled. Though they taught the traditional Jovinianist tenets regarding asceticism, as summarized in the letter to Siricius, they added the thesis on the impeccability of the baptized¹. They are of interest here only for not having continued to spread the error on Mary's virginity in partu. For, though in the long letter which Ambrose permitted himself to this sister-church² there are Marian passages to be studied later³. Only once does he speak of Mary's virginity in partu, and then in terms devoid of the wrath which surely he would have displayed had he envisaged contradiction:

Virgo genuit mundi salutem, virgo peperit vitam universorum....
Qui cum ex Mariae nasceretur utero, genitalis tamen septum pudoris
et intemerata virginitatis conservavit signacula⁴.

These lines were written in 396, about a year before Ambrose's death. They represent one of the most concise expressions ever given the doctrine by this man whose gift lay rather in oratory than in the clear-cut formula. They ring a tone of confident victory. The battle had, indeed, demanded not only a sensitively alert and enlightened faith in Mary the Virgin, but also a strategy and boldness of purpose that perhaps no contemporary possessed to Ambrose's degree. That he won the battle, no one can gainsay.

¹ Cf. Jerome's enumeration, *supra*, p. 144.

² In 396 the episcopacy at Vercelli was at stake, and because during the vacancy prolonged by dispute it was not impossible that someone of the circle of Sarmatio and Barbatian be elected, Ambrose wrote to the community there, reminding them of the tradition represented by their recent bishop Eusebius (d. 371c), who for the first time in the West has united the vocations of monk and priest. *Ep.* 63 : 66. PL 16 : 1207a.

³ *Infra*, p. 190 ff. ⁴ *Ep.* 63:33. PL 16:1198bc.

VIRGO
POST PARTUM

CHAPTER FIVE

Mary's Perpetual Virginity in Ambrose's Earlier Works

A. Mary's Perpetual Virginity in the *De Virginibus*

Before the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity was attacked, Ambrose had few occasions to dwell on it explicitly. In the *De Virginibus*, the earliest of his writings (376), he presents the unforgettable portrait of Mary as the model of virgins¹. He omits therein mention of Mary's practice of virginity throughout her life with Joseph because he is speaking to virgins who will never be placed in circumstances similar to those in which Mary lived with Joseph. It is farthest from his mind to give any pretext for the cohabitation of virgins (*agapetae*, *virgines subintroductae*) with ascetics, an abuse that for over a century had plagued the Church. To insist on Mary's virginal life with Joseph was to run the risk of being misinterpreted. His own experience, to say nothing of that of the earlier Fathers, was to teach him how grossly people justified abuses on the alleged grounds of Mary's example. Women even defended their desire to desert their husbands for younger men, by citing the example of Mary, separated by the dying Savior from Joseph who was represented by a current of tradition as still living at the Crucifixion², and entrusted to the young disciple John. Besides, the portrait which Ambrose paints of Mary is closely modeled on Athanasius' treatise³, which in turn speaks of a *life of Mary* quite clearly based on the events which Luke notes in the first chapters of his Gospel. The details which these successive commentaries on Mary's early life and particularly of the Annunciation offered made it unnecessary for Ambrose to seek material elsewhere. Outside of any polemic he could not be

¹ *De Virgs.* 2:2:6-3:19. FALLER, p. 47:4-52:5. PL 16:208c-211c. *Supra*, p. 39-43.

² *Infra*, 189, 199 f. ³ *Supra*, p. 39-43.

expected to introduce the difficulties raised by other Scriptural passages, such as Mt. 1:18, 1:25, Jn. 2:4, Gal. 4:4, etc.¹.

There are, however, positive indications that his portrait of Mary in the *De Virginibus* assumes that she persevered in her virginity. Of what value would it have been otherwise to present her as an incitement to the practice of the virginal life? If in his own belief as well as in that of his hearers Mary had not remained a virgin, Ambrose would have undermined all the long description of her virtues when concluding, "Ergo sancta Maria disciplinam *vitalae* informet. Thecla doceat *immolari*"². Mary would have paled in the light of another virgin who had kept her holy resolve unto death. Only Mary's perpetual virginity, furthermore, authorized her to be the leader of the chorus of virgins in heaven, after the example of the Old Testament Mary, sister of Moses and Aaron, who led the Hebrew maidens in the passage of the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20)³. Already in these first pages that history has preserved of his writings, Ambrose cites this Old Testament personage as a figure of the Virgin Mary, ever a virgin. If for the next ten years he does not find further occasion to allude to the passage, it is not surprising to find him coming back on it in no less than four of his works written between 385 and 394 when attacks on Mary's integrity had aroused his wrath⁴.

It has been seen, moreover, that Ambrose cites Mary as a model primarily for her virginity, not only in the *De Virginibus* but throughout his writings. When speaking to married women or to widows, he has a different series of models at hand: for wives, Sara, Rebecca, and Rachel⁵, and once Anna as well⁶; or again Susanna⁷, or Elizabeth⁸;

¹ For the objections based on these classical passages, cf. Ambrose's refutation in *De Inst. Virg.*, *infra*, 236 ff.

² *De Virgs.* 2:3:19. FALLER, p. 52:4. PL 16:211c.

³ *Ibid.*, 1:2:17. FALLER, p. 51:12 f. PL 16:211b. *Supra*, p. 43 f., 51.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 2:35. CSEL 32:4 59:29-60:1. PL 15:1564d-1565a. *Ep.* 42:7. PL 16:1126b. *De Inst. Virg.* 5:34. PL 16:314a. *Exh. Virg.* 5:28. PL 16:344b; *ibid.*, 7:47; 14:93. PL 349d, 364a. *Supra*, p. 52-55.

⁵ *De Virgs.* 1:7:34. FALLER, p. 32:9 f. PL 16:198c (written 376). *Ibid.*, 3:3:10. FALLER, p. 67:21-25. PL 222d. (But the latter text is wrongly adduced: the Vulgate and many other versions attribute the cry to Rachel, as though out of a modesty violated by Jacob's kiss, whereas the LXX clearly says that Jacob uttered the cry. Cf. Martin KLEIN, *Meletemata Ambrosiana*. Königsberg 1927, p. 15.)

⁶ *Exp. Luc.* 10:22. CSEL 32:4 463:18-464:1. PL 15:1809d.

⁷ *De Vid.* 4:24. PL 16:242a. Even when cited for her conjugal chastity, Susanna is clearly contrasted to Mary and Anna, who are models of chastity for virgins and widows.

⁸ *Exp. Luc.* 2:9. CSEL 32:4 46:2-6. PL 15:1556a.

for widows, the widow of Sareptha¹ and above all Anna². He presents the Church as a model to be contemplated by virgins, wives, and widows alike³, but Mary is particularly reserved to virgins.

Hence it is safe to conclude that already in Ambrose's earliest pages the title *Virgo* which he gives usually without qualification to Mary includes the belief in her perpetual virginity. Ambrose is heir to a faith already become explicit in this dogma by the fourth century, at least in his part of the Western Church. Even had he not been led to pronounce himself more clearly on the subject in later works, the doctrine of the *De Virgs.* would be guarantee of his faith in it.

So firm is his belief, in fact, that he does not fear to explain the Scriptural use of the troublesome preposition *till* in a text like Gen. 8:7 (the raven "did not return *till* the waters were dried up") by citing the use of the same word in Mt. 1:25 in connection with Mary's virginity ("He did not know her *till* she brought forth her firstborn son"). *Till*, he says, cannot mean that the raven returned later, for in Scripture it does not imply the subsequent realization of the action which it governs; this is evident from the way it is used of Mary:

Siquidem et in Evangeliiis habes scriptum de sancta Maria quod non cognoverit eam Joseph, donec peperit filium, cum utique nec postea cognoverit⁴.

Later when heretical misinterpretations of Mt. 1:25 come to his attention, Ambrose will have to follow the example of other Fathers in explaining the Gospel phrase by the uses of *till* in the Old Testament. Writing in 378, the year of the *De Noe* from which the above excerpt is taken, he is so confident of his hearers' faith in Mary and of their right mind that he cites as an explanation of an unimportant phrase in Genesis one of the Gospel texts from which heretics have always forged an objection against Mary's perpetual virginity. Such boldness on the part of a bishop as keenly attuned to his flock's belief and as cautious of the misinterpretations which they were known to give his words bespeaks a solidly established faith in Mary ever a virgin.

¹ *De Vid.* 1:3. PL 16:235b.

² *Ibid.* 4:24. PL 242a. *Ep.* 42:8. PL 16:1126c-1127a.

³ *De Vid.* 3:16. PL 16:240a.

⁴ *De Noe* 17:63. CSEL 32:1 458:8 ff. PL 14:391b.

B. The Doctrine in Ambrose's post-Helvidian Works

1. Rise of Helvidius

Yet the outbreak of heresy on this point was to prompt Ambrose to more explicit defense of it. Shortly after the period just discussed, around 382¹ at Rome, a certain Helvidius circulated a pamphlet in which he attempted to prove that Mary had been the mother of a number of children after Jesus. It is foreign to the present study to investigate whether he was as unlettered and as ill-intentioned as Jerome described, or whether he brought somewhat of a theological formation to his self-assigned task of asserting for Mary the glory of prolific motherhood as well as that of virginity². His ultimate aim, at any rate, was to prove that virginity was not superior to marriage, and thereby to weaken the case of the ascetical circles at Rome³. Jerome had recently arrived from Syria and Constantinople where Scripture and a master like Gregory of Nazianzus had presided over his formation. He was now enjoying the good favor of Pope Damasus and had already acquired a reputation among his Roman friends. They pressed him to take up the pen against this antagonist who pretended to draw his arguments from Scripture⁴. Jerome complied with their wishes and in 383 wrote

¹ JOUASSARD, *La personnalité d'Helvidius*, p. 143, n. 5, places the outbreak of Helvidianism somewhere in 382 or early 383, since the *Adv. Helv.*, written in 383, seems to have followed it in a matter of months.

² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³ JOUASSARD, *Marie à travers la patristique*, p. 106, and *La personnalité d'Helvidius*, p. 155. In the latter place he writes:

... le but premier du polémiste, non point de contrevenir à un enseignement tenu alors comme de foi et proposé comme tel, mais au contraire de poursuivre un dessein par lui considéré comme pieux.

⁴ Helvidius added new Scriptural arguments to the ones exploited by the Marian heretics of his day in the Eastern Church, known as Antidicomarianites, and refuted by Epiphanius in *Panar.* 78. GCS Epiph. 3 452:1-475:25. PG 42:700-740. The comparison of the two heresies is interesting, for the churchmen who replied to them, Epiphanius and Jerome, were closely associated. In the company of Epiphanius and Paulinus of Antioch, Jerome, a young priest, had been brought to Rome where in 382 Pope Damasus was convening a council to attempt to settle the schism raging at Antioch over the person of Paulinus (Meletian schism). Cf. *infra*, p. 223, 228. In need of an interpreter, Paulinus, who had ordained Jerome three years earlier, probably called him away from Constantinople where he had come to study. Ten years later in the spring of 393 Epiphanius was again to brighten Jerome's career. At that date Epiphanius visited Palestine and vainly pressed John of Jerusalem in the name of orthodoxy to condemn Origen's works; from his monastery nearby Jerome, who was always sensitive to possible attacks

the violent *Adversus Helvidium de Mariae virginitate perpetua*¹, the first tract in the Western Church consecrated exclusively to Mary. This work must early have made its way to Milan, for Ambrose, it will be seen, seems to have used it in preparing a few of the sermons which later were edited as the *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* (385-390) and in the *De Institutione Virginis* (c. 393).

2. Impact of Helvidius on the Church of Milan

But Helvidius' denial of Mary's perpetual virginity was not to become a principal preoccupation for Ambrose. Nowhere in his works does he mention the name of Helvidius. Probably Jerome's forthright refutation had foredoomed the heresy at Rome before it spread to Milan. If and when it did reach Milan, its virulence was certainly attenuated in the face of the deeply entrenched Marian faith and devotion that Ambrose had been nourishing there. He could thus best parry such a threat by ignoring it; Jerome too had first brushed off his adversary in silence, lest a reply give him at least some claim to respectability². Ambrose himself shows how highly he esteemed this principle of pastoral solicitude by his conduct in the case of a certain Bonosus, who eight or ten years later reechoed Helvidius' error. Such a sacrilege, Ambrose was to say, is better passed over in silence; only because no less a personage than a bishop like Bonosus had now voiced it, did it merit refutation³.

Gennadius (5th cent.) records two facts about Helvidius which, if authentic, would add greater significance to Ambrose's silence. The heretic is said to have been *Auxentii discipulus* and *Symmachi imitator*⁴. The Auxentius in question is usually taken to be Ambrose's semi-Arian predecessor of that name on the see of Milan⁵, but this identification is by no means sure. It is equally doubtful whether the Symmachus referred to is, as often supposed, the pagan rhetor Quintus Aurelius Symmachus; Helvidius would hardly take a pagan as model for anything but his style – and even discrediting Jerome's classification

on his orthodoxy, rallied to Epiphanius' call, overthrew his attachment for Origen, and broke with his closest friend, Rufinus. Cf. CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, p. 206-208.

¹ PL 23:183-206.

² *Adv. Helv.* 1. PL 23:183a: "Ne respondendo dignus fieret qui vinceretur".

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:35. PL 16:314b.

⁴ Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 33. RICHARDSON (TU 14:1 1896), p. 73:13 f. PL 58:1077a.

⁵ TILLEMONT, *Mémoires*, t. 12. Paris 1707, p. 81 f.

of Helvidius as an unlearned dabbler, one can hardly make of the heretic an admirer of one of the most famous stylists of the epoch¹. Entertaining for a moment, however, the hypothesis of a Helvidius, disciple of the semi-Arian Auxentius and admirer of the rhetor Symmachus, one would be struck immediately by names so odious to Ambrose. As bishop he had spent many years weeding out the tares sown by Auxentius. And Symmachus, prefect of Rome, had incurred his stout opposition by repeated appeals to the Emperor for the reestablishment of pagan cult in the Senate (early summer 384-5)². Ambrose's silence even in the face of connections as offensive as these, if they were actually to be ascribed to Helvidius, may be taken to mean that the heretic was never a menace to the Church of Milan. Gennadius' details about Helvidius, however, cannot be properly evaluated; and Jerome, who had no reason for silencing relations as incriminating as those with the semi-Arian Auxentius and the pagan Symmachus has not a word of them in his *Adv. Helv.*

Ambrose, therefore, is spared the bother of overtly refuting an adversary whom Jerome handled quite well. And fortunately so, for the bishop of Milan was overburdened with other worries during the hectic years following the appearance of Helvidius' pamphlet at Rome: the Council of Aquileia (381), Symmachus' deputations to the Emperors appealing against Gratian's anti-pagan measures (382, 384, 389), the succession of Maximus after Gratian's murder (383) and the embassies which Ambrose had to undertake in consequence, the persecution he suffered from Justina (385-386), her intrigue with another Auxentius, outsd bishop of Dorostorum on the Lower Danube, to secure "freedom of worship" for the Arians in Milan (386), Maximus' invasion of Italy (387) and his death followed by that of Justina (388), the affair of Calinicum (388), etc.³. It is a wonder that the bishop of Milan found time

¹ JOUASSARD, *La personnalité d'Helvidius*, p. 142 f. If another Symmachus, listed by chroniclers of heresies as an Ebionite, is meant by Gennadius, says JOUASSARD, *ibid.*, p. 143,

l'indication qu'il fournit serait de nulle valeur, simple indication de sa part, et rapprochement plus ou moins tendancieux. Il s'ensuivrait que l'indication touchant les rapports entre Helvidius et Auxence pourrait elle-même devenir sujette à caution.

² In *Ep.* 17 and 18 Ambrose appeals to the Emperor to reject Symmachus' plea. Cf. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 261, n. 2 and p. 264 ff. The rivalry between the two men to win the Emperor's ear lasted until 389 or 390 when Ambrose's influence finally prevailed. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 380 f.

³ *Ibid.*, *Table of Dates*, p. 712 f.

for writing anything besides the correspondence which these matters entailed. Although he did compose works as lengthy as the *De Spiritu Sancto* (381), *De Officiis* (386) and *Exameron* (386/7 and later), together with shorter tracts like the *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento*, *De Jacob*, *Apologia prophetae David*, *De Joseph*, *De Interpellatione Job et David*, the half-dozen years following 381 represent from a Marian standpoint the least productive of his career.

Did the outbreak of Helvidianism, then, pass altogether unreflected in his writings? Not quite. In the sermons on the Gospel of St. Luke, which he began composing after 385 and published in 389/90, Ambrose takes for the first time in his works a defensive tone in writing of Mary's perpetual virginity. In the second book of the *Exp. Luc.* he begins ¹ in Origen's footsteps with the problem why God chose as the mother of His Son one who was "*desponsata viro*". Jerome had treated the same problem in his reply to Helvidius' first difficulty ². Ambrose, however, seems not to have borrowed from Jerome's work, since of the six reasons he gives for the espousal of Christ's mother ³ only the first, the safeguarding of her reputation, figures among the three developed by Jerome. Ambrose depends rather on Origen, at least in commenting the *desponsata* of Luke. But Luke had called Mary "*virginem desponsatam viro*", and Ambrose had in consequence announced in the opening lines of this second book the theme of his commentary: "*Et bene utrumque posuit Scriptura, ut et desponsata esset et virgo.*" ⁴ After having commented both elements he would recall the theme: "*Bene desponsata, sed virgo.*" ⁵ When he had finished examining the *desponsata*, therefore, he took up the *virgo*; but on this word he did not find a suitable commentary in Origen. Hence he developed one of his own inspiration, citing ten witnesses to Mary's virginity ⁶. In the context of the Annunciation he is concerned with their testimony that notwithstanding her espousal to Joseph, Mary was a virgin at the time that she conceived Christ. This passage has consequently been studied in its appropriate place in an earlier chapter ⁷. The text is reintroduced here in connection with Mary's perpetual virginity on account of two afterthoughts that Ambrose tacks on:

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:1-3. CSEL 32:4 40:12-43:8. PL 15:1551d-1554a. *Supra*, p. 82 ff.

² *Adv. Helv.* 3 f. PL 23:185b-188b. ³ *Supra*, p. 83 ff.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 2:1. CSEL 32:4 41:4 f. PL 15:1552d.

⁵ *Ibid.* 2:7. CSEL 45:4. PL 15:1555.

⁶ *Ibid.* 2:4. CSEL 43:9-44:3. PL 15:1554b.

⁷ *Supra*, p. 97 ff.

Nec te moveat quod frequenter Scriptura *conjugem* dicit....

Simul etiam movere non debet quod ait Evangelista : « Non cognovit eam, *donec* peperit filium.... » ¹

In these two pastoral exhortations there may very well lie a hint that Helvidius' opinions had after all made their way to Milan.

Helvidius does not seem to have made capital of the first difficulty, since Jerome, who can be supposed to have enumerated all his adversary's arguments, does not mention this one. But it was probably voiced in the controversy that ensued. Ambrose replies succinctly, in terms suggested by his juridical background: *Conjux* is understandable of Mary, he says, « non enim virginitatis ereptio sed conjugii testificatio, nuptiarum celebratio declaratur » ².

The second difficulty, arising from the *till* in Mt. 1 : 25 had already been advanced by Helvidius and refuted throughout chapters five to eight of Jerome's work. Ambrose may conceivably have had Jerome's reply in mind; it may, on the other hand, be only a coincidence that the two Old Testament uses of *till* which he cites – Is. 46:4 and Ps. 109:1 – are also found among the six which Jerome gives. Ambrose's reply is that the evangelist here has in mind to demonstrate only Our Lord's virginal conception, from which Mary's perpetual virginity flows as a consequence. The virginal conception is the subject which the evangelist has taken up (*causam susceptam*) and to which he limits himself:

Satis est ei ut *causam susceptam* adstruat, incidentem differat. Et ideo qui *Incarnationis incorruptum* suscepit probare *mysterium*, non putavit uberius prosequendum virginitatis Mariae testimonium, ne defensor magis Virginis quam adsertor mysterii crederetur ³.

This argument recalls Jerome's remark: "Ad summam, illud requiro, quare se abstinuerit Joseph usque ad partus diem." ⁴ Ambrose's "Certe quando justum docuit Joseph, satis declaravit quod sancti spiritus templum, matrem Domini, uterum mysterii violare non potuit" ⁵ could have been inspired by Jerome's longer development beginning "Et audebat, inquit, vir justus, Dei in utero audiens filium, de uxoris coitu cogitare? Pulchre! Qui ergo somnio tantum credidit...." ⁶

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:5 f. CSEL 32:4 44:10, 14 f. PL 15:1554c, 1555a.

² *Loc. cit.* CSEL 44:11 f. PL 1554d.

³ *Loc. cit.* CSEL 44:22-26. PL 1555b.

⁴ *Adv. Helv.* 8. PL 23:190c.

⁵ *Exp. Luc.* 2:6. CSEL 32:4 44:26-45:2. PL 15:1555 f.

⁶ *Adv. Helv.* 8. PL 23:190c-191a.

3. Mary's Virginity and the Calvary Scene in Ambrose's Works

The clearest evidence that errors on Mary's perpetual virginity had come to Ambrose's attention by the time of the *Exp. Luc.* lies in the emphasis which he gives to the traditional interpretation of the scene on Calvary where Christ gives His Mother to the disciple John (Jn. 19: 25 ff.). The Fathers quite early saw in this passage of John's Gospel not primarily a testimony to Mary's spiritual maternity¹, but an example of the filial piety of the perfect Son and a proof that Mary had remained a virgin. For had she given birth to other children, runs the argument for her virginity, Our Lord would have confided her to them rather than to John. The argument takes on added force if, as Ambrose held, Saint Joseph is admitted to be still living at the time of Christ's crucifixion; for the fact that even under that circumstance Christ entrusted His Mother to John rather than leaving her with Joseph shows explicitly that her marriage with Joseph was never a consummated one. So striking, in fact, was the separation of Mary from Joseph that some insincere Christians drew therefrom a pretext for condoning divorce: even Christ Himself, they said, had dissolved a marriage. Ambrose repeatedly inveighs against this misinterpretation; there was no divorce, he says, because there had been no veritable marriage, no consummated marriage, but only a "pactio conjugalis"². Ambrose seems to have considered the event on Calvary as one of the strongest proofs of Mary's virginity, since he gave it five developments, all in works written in the last ten or twelve years of his episcopate when Mary's virginity was being questioned by heretics such as Helvidius, Jovinian, and Bonosus.

¹ C. A. KNELLER, *Joh. 19:26-27 bei den Kirchenvätern*, ZKT, 40 (1916), p. 597-612.

² The question of divorce occurs in the following texts, cited here in chronological order:

- a) *Exp. Luc.* 2:4. CSEL 32:4 43:23-44:2. PL 15:1554c.
- b) *Ibid.*, 10:133. CSEL 506:4-8. PL 15:1858a.
- c) *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* 4 and 5. PL 16:1174a.
- d) *De Inst. Virg.* 7:47, 48. PL 16:318b.

In *Exh. Virg.* 32 f. PL 16:345bc and *Ep.* 63:109-111. PL 16:1218ad Ambrose does not forestall any misinterpretation about divorce. It is significant that in these two expositions of Jn. 19:26 f, he does not mention Mary's perpetual virginity as attested therein; the lessons he there sees taught by the scene on Calvary are 1. the reward reserved to John's virginity: that he should receive the custody of God's Mother (*Exh. Virg.*), and 2. Christ's filial piety and Mary's maternal love, extending even to the desire to die with Him (*Ep.* 63). Thus only when the passage is used to prove Mary's virginity is the warning added that divorce is not sanctioned by Christ's separating Mary from Joseph and giving her to John.

Four extended developments of the argument are found in the *Exp. Luc.* 2:4 and 10:129-134, *Epistola de causa Bonosi*, 4-6, and *De Inst. Virg.* 7:46-50. The argument is recalled a fifth time in succinct terms in the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia*. It is interesting to situate these five interpretations (1, 5, 6, 7, 8 in the following list) chronologically in relation to Ambrose's other allusions (2, 3, 4, 9) and detailed exposition (10, 11) of the passage of Jn. 19:26 f. for its rich doctrinal content. The lessons which he draws in each interpretation have been summarized to facilitate comparison:

1. 385-390, *Exp. Luc.* 2:4 – *Mary's perpetual virginity*.
2. *Ibid.*, 6:38 – Christ's filial piety.
3. *Ibid.*, 7:5 – Imitation of John, son of the Church.
4. *Ibid.*, 7:9 – John's role as Mary's protector.
5. *Ibid.*, 10:129-134 – Christ's filial piety, Mary's heroic love for her son, her *perpetual virginity*.
6. After Spring 386, "*Iam surgit hora tertia*", 11. 17-24 – *Mary's perpetual virginity*.
7. Early 392, *Ep. de causa Bonosi*, 4-6 – *Mary's perpetual virginity*.
8. About 393, *De Inst. Virg.* 7:46-50 – *Mary's perpetual virginity*.
9. September 392, *De obitu Valentiniani consolatio*, 39 – Mary's courage in bereavement.
10. Before 394, *Exhortatio Virginitatis* 5:32-33 – reward given John's virginity.
11. 396, *Ep.* 63:109-111 – Christ's filial piety, Mary's heroic love for her son¹.

It will be noted that the passage of St. John's Gospel was interpreted in terms of Mary's virginity exactly during the years when first Helvidius, then Jovinian and Bonosus occupied Ambrose. After 393, when

¹ Exact references for the texts cited are as follows:

1. *Exp. Luc.* 2:4. CSEL 32:4 43:18-23. PL 15:1554bc.
2. *Ibid.*, 6:38. CSEL 247:22-248:5. PL 1678c.
3. *Ibid.*, 7:5. CSEL 284:5-19. PL 15:1700c.
4. *Ibid.*, 7:9. CSEL 286:6-13. PL 1701c.
5. *Ibid.*, 10:129-134. CSEL 504:11-506:21. PL 1836c-1838b.
6. "*Iam surgit hora tertia*", 11. 17-24. WALPOLE, p. 42-44. PL 16:1410d.
7. *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* 4-6. PL 16:1173c-1174b.
8. *De Inst. Virg.* 7:46-50. PL 16:317c-319b.
9. *De ob. Val. con.* 39. PL 16 : 1371b.
10. *Exh. Virg.* 5:32-33. PL 16:345bc.
11. *Ep.* 63:109-111. PL 16:1218ad.

the latter two have been condemned and their danger removed, Mary's virginity no longer comes up in connection with the Gospel verses, despite the dependence, in many places verbatim, of a late commentary like the eleventh above on the fifth and eighth ¹.

a) *The Calvary Scene in the Exp. Luc.*

The argument from Jn. 19:26 f. for Mary's virginity comes up, therefore, for the first time in the second book of the *Exp. Luc.*, where Ambrose adduces Christ on the cross as a witness to His Mother's integrity. But, as remarked above ², it is Mary's integrity at the moment of her Son's conception that Ambrose has at heart to prove in this passage of the *Exp. Luc.* St. Luke, he says, in describing her as the *desponsata* of Joseph testifies that they had had no relations ("quod non convenissent"). Referring a few lines later to the words spoken on Calvary, Ambrose recalls the thesis he is proving:

Utique si convenisset (Maria), nunquam virum proprium reliquisset, nec vir eam justus a se discedere passus esset ³.

The rest of the passage, moreover, shows that Ambrose's perspective is clearly that of the Annunciation only. This is the sole instance of his use of Jn. 19:26 f. to demonstrate Mary's virginity ante partum.

As for the other allusions in the sixth and seventh books of the *Exp. Luc.* to the Calvary scene, they do not concern Mary's virginity, as is seen from the summary given in the list above.

The interpretation of the scene, then, in the tenth book of the *Exp. Luc.* represents Ambrose's first use of it to prove that Mary remained a virgin post partum, throughout her life with Joseph. Even here the primary lesson drawn from the text is not Mary's virginity but Christ's filial piety toward her, and her self-sacrificing love for him. The virginity theme is first announced – "Joannes ergo ... non inmerito laboravit, ut quae Deum generaverat mansisse eam virginem declaret" ⁴ – but the exposition continues in terms of Christ's filial piety and Mary's maternal love, to return only afterwards to the thought of her virginity,

¹ The hymn "*Iam surgit hora tertia*" has been introduced into the chronology nearest the *Exp. Luc.*, although the only clue to the time of its composition is that Ambrose began the practice of singing metrical hymns in church during the "second persecution of Justina" in the spring of 386. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

² *Supra*, p. 187.

³ *Exp. Luc.* 2:4. CSEL 32:4 43:22 f. PL 15:1554c.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10:130. CSEL 504:22-25. PL 1837a.

and then in terms quite brief by comparison to later commentaries in the *Ep. de causa Bonosi* and the *De Inst. Virg.*; these are his words about her virginity:

Quo loco uberrimum testimonium Mariae virginitatis adhibetur. Neque enim abrogatur uxor marito, cum scriptum sit: « Quod Deus conjunxit homo non separet », sed quae propter mysterium conjugium praetexit completis mysteriis jam conjugio non egebat. Aut si moralia sequimur, in maerore castitas imperatur ¹.

Ambrose most probably had in mind to supply his hearers with an answer to arguments like those of Helvidius, but the comparative brevity of his exposition here would suggest again that he never regarded Helvidius the danger that a certain Bonosus was to become.

In passing it may be remarked that the ascription made above ² of the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia* to the same period as the passage just quoted from the *Exp. Luc.* is justified in some measure by the striking resemblance which “quae propter mysterium conjugium praetexit” from the *Exp. Luc.* bears to lines 17-20 of the hymn:

Praetenta nuptae foedera
Alto docens mysterio,
Ne virginis partus sacer
Matris pudorem laederet ³.

b) *Corollaries to the Calvary Proof of Mary's Virginity*
St. John's Role in Recording the Scene on Calvary

There will be occasion later to revert to the argument developed from Jn. 19:26 f. in Ambrose's anti-Bonosian writings, but it is appropriate here while studying its first occurrence in the *Exp. Luc.* to bring to notice some of his characteristic comments on it. One of them concerns the choice of the disciple John to record this testimony of the dying Savior to His Mother's integrity. The other evangelists narrate how the earth trembled and opened, how the sun was hidden by clouds, how the thief was pardoned ⁴; in the events which each evangelist wrote

¹ *Ibid.*, 10:133. CSEL 506:4-9. PL 1838a. The passage on Christ's filial piety is found in par. 130-131; that on Mary's maternal love in par. 132.

² *Supra*, p. 191, n. 1.

³ WALPOLE, p. 43. PL 16:1410d. The stanza may be translated as follows: “... Teaching that the covenant of a bride was stretched in front of the deep mystery, so that her sacred birth-giving as a virgin might not impair His Mother's purity (in the eyes of society).”

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 10:129. CSEL 32:4 504:15-22. PL 15:1836cd-1837a:

Alii enim mundum describere concussum, coelum tenebris obductum, refu-

down there is a harmony with his own personality and outlook¹. St. John's fittingness to give the testimony to Mary's virginity is based on his deeper penetration of the mystery of the Incarnation; he is the evangelist

... qui plenius divina penetravit mysteria² ;
 ... qui mystica magis scripsit³ ;
 ... iste dilectus Domini, qui pectore ejus hauserat
 secreta sapientiae et piaie voluntatis arcana⁴.

Thus Ambrose sees St. John qualified in virtue of his deeper acquaintance with God's mysteries to speak precisely on Mary's virginity. When, for example, the text of Jn. 19:26 f. is exposed in terms of Christ's filial piety towards His Mother, Ambrose says no more than that St. John was a *worthy witness* of the dying Savior's testament of piety to His Mother⁵. And this last relatively vague notion of John's fittingness, be it noted, occurs in a passage which reproduces verbatim more than two entire paragraphs of the tenth book of *Exp. Luc.* on Christ's filial piety and Mary's maternal love, paragraphs drawn from a passage where Mary's virginity had also been in question. Thus once her virginity is no longer viewed in connection with Jn. 19:26 f., the vague notion of John's worthiness to speak of Christ's testament of filial piety replaces the very precise attribution to him of special authority on matters of virginity, an attribution which in the tenth book of *Exp. Luc.* Ambrose had stated in terms like these:

Joannes ergo, *qui plenius divina penetravit mysteria*, non inmerito laboravit ut quae Deum generaverat *mansisse eam virginem* declarat⁶.

gisse solem. Addiderunt Matthaeus et Marcus, qui humana atque moralia uberius prosecuti sunt: "Deus, Deus meus, respice in me! quare me dereliquisti?" ut ad crucem Christi susceptionem pervenisse crederemus conditionis humanae. Lucas autem competere evidenter adseruit latroni veniam sacerdotali intercessionem donatam et Judaeis persequentibus eodem munere indulgentiam postulatam.

De Inst. Virg. 7:46. PL 16:318a:

Alii enim evangelistae scripserunt quod in passione Domini terra contremuit, sol refugit, persecutoribus venia postulata est.

Ep. 63:109. PL 16:1218ab:

Mundum alii concussum in passione Domini conscripserunt, coelum tenebris obductum, refugisse solem, in paradisum latronem sed post piam confessionem receptum.

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 10:129. CSEL 32:4 504:15-32. PL 15:1836cd.

² *Ibid.*, 10:130. CSEL 504:23. PL 1837a.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 7:46. PL 16:318a.

⁴ *Loc. cit.* ⁵ *Ep.* 63:109. PL 16:1218b.

⁶ *Exp. Luc.* 10:130. CSEL 32:4 504:22-25. PL 15:1837a.

The connection between John's sharper spiritual acumen and the knowledge reserved to him of Mary's perpetual virginity, therefore, is unmistakably intended by Ambrose. In his mind Mary's perpetual virginity forms not just a part of God's plan, but one of the most mysterious parts thereof, the part which only the sublime John was permitted to scrutinize. Other Fathers had lauded the inscrutability of the virginal conception, where both Son and Mother formed the object of their contemplation; Ambrose says something similar now about the mystery of the Mother's virginity considered in itself and post partum. This represents a decided advance in the concept of Mary, ever virgin.

St. John under Mary's Influence

The depth ascribed to the *mystery* of Mary's perpetual virginity, moreover, becomes even more striking when to the last three brief citations are added other texts wherein Ambrose describes the sublimity of the doctrine reserved to the Evangelist John:

Nemo enim, audeo dicere, tanta sublimitate sapientiae majestatem Dei vidit, et nobis proprio sermone reseravit ¹.

Qui vere prae caeteris vidit magna mysteria.... Omnes quidem sancti evangelistae, omnes apostoli, praeter proditorem omnes sancti. Tamen sanctus Joannes qui ultimus scripsit evangelium quasi necessarius requisitus et electus a Christo, maiore quadam tuba fudit aeterna mysteria ².

As already observed in the citation from *De Inst. Virg.* 7:46 – “iste dilectus Domini qui pectore ejus hauserat secreta sapientiae et pia voluntatis arcana” – Ambrose sees the explanation for St. John's deeper grasp of divine mysteries in his intimacy with the Savior, illustrated particularly at the Last Supper. The idea recurs frequently:

Joannes, cum caput suum supra pectus Jesu domini reclinaret, hauserat profunda secreta sapientiae ³.

Sapientia autem dei Christus, in cuius pectore recumbebat Joannes, ut de principali illo secretoque sapientiae hausisse divina proderetur mysteria ⁴.

¹ *Ibid.*, prol. 3. CSEL 5:3-5. PL 1530a.

² *De Sacr.* 3:2:11. BOTTE, p. 75:23-76:5. PL 16:435a. FALLER, *Ambrosius der Verfasser* ..., p. 82, n. 32, follows a different reading for the second sentence:

Omnes quidem sancti evangelistae, omnes apostoli, *praeter omnes tamen prudentior* sanctus Iohannes.

³ *Exp. Ps.* 118:2:6. CSEL 62 23:5 f. PL 15:1211b.

⁴ *Ep.* 65:4. PL 16:1223b.

Id enim addidit, ut legeres, quod in Christi pectore recumbibat, et intellegeres quod eius caput, in quo principale omnium sensuum est, arcano quodam sapientiae replebatur ¹.

... Qui de pectore Christi hauriat sapientiam ².

Aspice Joannem recubentem in pectore Christi unde Deum verbum assumpsit pietate fateri ³.

Christ, then, is the source whence John drew his wisdom. In one precious text, however, Ambrose refers to another source, Mary herself, who was entrusted to him on Calvary:

Eademque postea Joanni Evangelistae est tradita, conjugium nescienti. Unde non miror prae caeteris locutum mysteria divina, cui praesto erat *aula coelestium sacramentorum* ⁴.

Sacramentorum here is obviously the synonym of Latin stamp for the *mysteria* of a line earlier. The context and name which Ambrose here gives Mary, *palace of heavenly mysteries*, assert for her a powerful influence in passing on the revelation recorded by the Evangelist John, and this in virtue of the virginity which both so perfectly possessed. Ambrose's application of *aula* to Mary bears out the uniqueness of this text. The word always occurs with one of two adjectives, either *heavenly* or *royal*: a) *aula coelestis* four times ⁵, *coelestis aulam virginis* ⁶; b) *aula regalis* twice ⁷, *aula regia* ⁸, *aula regis aeterni* ⁹. Once both ideas qualify *aula*: *aula in qua rex habitaret coelestium* ¹⁰. The context in each case shows that Mary's inviolable integrity is intended in such expressions; often they are joined to *templum Dei* ¹¹ or a similar title. By the *aula coelestium mysteriorum*, however, Mary is described as one reserved to God, not only because she is the sacred vessel in which God's Son took on a human body, but because she is a storehouse of divine mysteries; her virginity has been transferred, so to say, from the physical plane to that of the spirit.

¹ *De Incarn.* 4:29. PL 16:826a. ² *Exh. Virg.* 5:32. PL 16:345b.

³ *Inscriptio* 2. MERKLE, p. 214. ⁴ *De Inst. Virg.* 7:50. PL 16:319b.

⁵ *De Poen.* 1:1:4. PL 16:466b; *De Inst. Virg.* 6:44. PL 16:317a; *Ep.* 42:7. PL 16:1126b; *In Ps.* 45:13. CSEL 64 338:18. PL 14:1139b.

⁶ *De Inst. Virg.* 17:105. PL 16:331a.

⁷ *Exp. Luc.* 10:132. CSEL 32:4. 505:22. PL 15:1837c. *De Inst. Virg.* 12:79. PL 16:324c.

⁸ "*Intende qui regis Israel*", 1. 18. WALPOLE, p. 54. PL 16:1411a.

⁹ *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* 3. PL 16:1173c.

¹⁰ *Ep.* 30:3. PL 16:1062b.

¹¹ *Supra*, n. 5 (*In Ps.* 45:13), 6, 8, 10.

Mary's Virginity of Spirit

Ambrose's concept of Mary under this light and with this title is to be viewed in conjunction with his preference for the text of Luc. 2:19: "Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart." *These words* are for Ambrose the *heavenly mysteries* taught by Christ to his Mother, as later to the beloved disciple who "reclined at Jesus' bosom". The doctor permits himself a liberty with the text of Luc. 2:19 where *these words* are intended by the evangelist to describe what people said of the child's birth and infancy. (The same is true of *these things* in Luc. 2:51.) Ambrose almost always understands *these words* or *things* as the "words of the Lord" ¹ which Mary treasured in her heart. It is thus that the Virgin, *aula coelestis* and *aula regalis* who gave birth to God's Son became the *aula coelestium mysteriorum* in whose mind and heart the secrets of his divine life were virginally locked.

This is already a lofty notion of virginity; it represents the culmination of four centuries of pondering on how one is called to be a virgin in spirit as well as in body. The Virgin Mary is here, in addition, accorded a role in the transmission of God's sublime word to John the Evangelist during the years after her Son's death. The advance of thought is all the more surprising in view of the reluctance of previous Fathers, in their struggle with the abuse of the agapetae, the virgins who lived with male ascetics, to dwell on the life of Mary with John ². The Ps-Cyprian had observed that these women alleged John 19:26 f. in their favor ³. Epiphanius, writing in the same years as Ambrose, expresses apprehension of the same, and adds that Mary's life with John lasted only a while, since she was shortly thereafter taken up from earth and John went on to Asia ⁴. The contemporary Chrysostom also passes rapidly over the text ⁵, and Cyril of Alexandria, years after Ambrose, still has to discredit misinterpretations drawn from the passage ⁶.

Ambrose himself in the tenth book of the *Exp. Luc.*, which preceded by about six years the *De Inst. Virg.* wherein this remarkable explanation of Mary's life with John was met, thought it necessary to forestall another misinterpretation, that made by women seeking a pretext to

¹ The two texts occur in over 15 allusions or citations in Ambrose's works.

² KNELLER, *op. cit.*, p. 601-606.

³ *De singularitate clericorum* 20. CSEL 3:3 196:3-24.

⁴ *Panar.* 78:11 f. GCS Epiph. 3 461:30-463:25. PG 42:716a-717c.

⁵ *Hom.* 85 in *Joan.* PG 59:462b.

⁶ *Com. in Joan.* 12. PG 74:664b-665a.

abandon their elderly husbands for younger men¹. But the bishop of Milan apparently did not fear that the life of Mary and John together would be otherwise misconstrued. The menace of the agapetes in his day and diocese had declined².

St. John's Virginity

It should be noted, finally, that for Ambrose the special qualification for being entrusted with Mary and receiving the deeper revelation of mysteries which her presence afforded lies in John's virginity. She is given over to him as to one "who knew not marriage"³. A few years later in the *Exhortatio Virginitatis* Ambrose develops this fittingness of the virginal John to receive Mary:

Ipsa (Maria) est virga germinans florem, quia pura et ad Dominum libero corde directa virginitas, quae nullis in hoc saeculo curarum anfractibus reflectitur.

Ideo illam Dominus de cruce discipulo suo dilectissimo sibi tradidit sancto Joanni, qui dixit patri et matri : Non novi te. Denique vocatus a Christo reliquit patrem, verbum secutus. Huic traditur virgo, qui suos nesciat : huic traditur virgo, qui de pectore Christi hauriat sapientiam : huic traditur virgo, qui fratres suos non cognovit et filios suos non scivit⁴.

There is, then, in the opinion which Ambrose has of the disciple John a distinct progress from the *Exp. Luc.* (385-390) to the *De Inst. Virg.* (c393) and the *Exh. Virg.* (after 394): from the idea that John, the most sublime of the evangelists, should be present on Calvary to record the sublime mystery of Mary's perpetual virginity (tenth book of *Exp. Luc.*), Ambrose goes on to affirm that John's deeper grasp of the sublime is in part explained by his being chosen to live with the Virgin Mary (*De Inst. Virg.* 7:50), a privilege for which his virginity rendered him particularly fit (*Exh. Virg.* 5:31-33). To follow this development it has been necessary to travel beyond the point of time reached in the chronological exposition of Ambrose's texts on the perpetual virginity of Mary, namely, the date of the publication of *Exp. Luc.* (389/90).

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 10:134. CSEL 32:4 506:10-21. PL 15:1838a, b.

² KNELLER, *op. cit.*, p. 602 f., however, holds that on this text Ambrose still shared the fears of other Fathers, particularly as exposed in *Exp. Luc.* 7:5. CSEL 284:5-19 PL 15:1700a.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 7:50. PL 16:319b. *Supra*, p. 195, n. 4.

⁴ *Exh. Virg.* 5:31 f. PL 16:345b.

c) *The "Mystery" of Mary's Perpetual Virginity*

On returning to the tenth book of the *Exp. Luc.*, it will be recalled that the investigation of St. John's role took its leave from the sentence: "Joannes ergo, qui plenius divina penetravit mysteria, non inmerito laboravit, ut quae Deum generaverat mansisse eam virginem declaret."¹ The question remains: what is the mystery about Mary's perpetual virginity, so sublime that its revelation should be reserved to the Evangelist John? Does it not seem, on the contrary, the most expected thing to the Christian mind that the woman chosen to be the virginal mother of God's Son should never have contemplated the use of marriage after her Son's birth? Has not the first condemnation of heretics who denied Mary's perpetual virginity always been their purblindness in the face of this elementary intuition of Christian sense? Where then is the *mystery* that required for its revelation the pen of a John?

Let it be said in reply, first, that Ambrose never answered these questions explicitly. His conduct toward Marian heretics would suggest that he thought Mary's virginity something far too clear to suffer denial. For he displays indignant impatience with those who cannot come to believe in it. Yet his conduct here is not inconsistent with his esteeming Mary's perpetual virginity a mystery: the Trinitarian and Christological heretics, erring in mysteries still more sublime, were not thereby excused, but bore the same blows of his impatience. If, then, he did not explicitly say where the mystery lay, can an answer be sought by carrying on his thought a step further to its logical conclusion? Two solutions suggest themselves.

1. Ambrose may have meant that Mary's virginal state throughout her life with Joseph was a mystery shielded from the eyes of those around her. It has been shown above ² that Ambrose stressed the juridical value of the *pactio conjugalis* between Joseph and Mary as explaining in the eyes of society the birth of Jesus and their life together. If Joseph were still living at the time of the crucifixion, then to the ordinary folk of the day it would be a matter of bewilderment, almost a *mystery*, why the Savior had entrusted her to John rather than leaving her with him whom they regarded as her husband. But John, who as a virginal soul saw deeper into the mystery, knew that the Mother of Christ could not but remain a virgin; he did not hesitate, therefore, to take her from

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 10:130. CSEL 32:4 504:22-25. PL 15:1837a.

² *Supra*, 85 f., p. 86, n. 1, 2.

Joseph into his home (Jn. 19:27), and he even made it a point to record this scene, the significance of which he alone of the evangelists could fully understand.

2. Another solution consists in transposing the whole *mystery* from the plane of bodily virginity to that of the virginity of mind and heart. That Mary and Joseph lived together as brother and sister, that Mary had no son but Jesus, is admitted to have been known by those around her. But what no other than a virgin like John knew was the height to which Mary's virginity had attained: all along her heart had been given over entirely to her God, who was in addition both her son and spouse¹. Her mind had stored up Christ's words (Luc. 2:19, 51), had in virginal purity been carried aloft by the contemplation of them, so that she was to become the source whence John would continue to draw his deeper knowledge of divine mysteries, just as before Calvary he had learned them from intimacy with the Savior Himself. As all the Fathers who lauded virginity, Ambrose laid its real worth in the virginity of spirit. What more natural, therefore, than to seek there the mystery of the perpetual virginity of the model of virgins?

It is difficult to choose between these two solutions; they do not, indeed, mutually exclude each other. Both are faithful to Ambrose's thought. The second opens out on the marvels of Mary's virginity in their farthest perspective. Ambrose would surely have wished to lead to that point. One should not stop short of it unless somewhere on the way another reason has been found for calling her perpetual virginity a *mystery*.

d) *An Objection: Joseph's Role as Spouse Depreciated*

Against both these solutions, however, and more particularly against the second, an objection arises. Has not Joseph, the spouse of Mary, been pushed off the scene? And if Christ rather than Joseph is called the spouse of Mary, as in the second solution and in the interpretation above made of the text of *Exp. Luc.* 2:56², must it not be remembered that Mary loved Joseph as her spouse? These questions, in so far as they concern Ambrose's thought, have already been partially answered in the study of the marriage of Mary and Joseph³. The following views, with the appreciation of Joseph there presented, are admittedly among the less complimentary that Ambrose expressed about Joseph, and

¹ *Supra*, p. 136 f.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ *Supra*, p. 85-102.

should be counterbalanced with others, where Joseph's claim to the title *just man*¹ is vindicated or his role as guardian of the virgin's purity developed². In expounding such titles Ambrose rightly vaunts his fidelity to Scripture. Where he departs from the meagre Scriptural details, he detracts from Joseph's grandeur as spouse of Mary, especially on two points which have already come to light: 1. in dependence on a patristic tradition, he held that Joseph was still alive at the Crucifixion; Jesus' entrusting Mary to John under this circumstance takes on a prejudicial character, which perhaps did much to leave Ambrose his less elevated idea of Joseph's role; 2. by contrast, furthermore, with Jerome³, Ambrose inclined to the view that at the time of Joseph's marriage to Mary he was a widow and the father of the so-called "brethren of the Lord"⁴. The mutual belonging of Joseph and Mary to each other could not, therefore, in his eyes be as complete as one would desire. The *pactio conjugal*is that united them, he said, was not indissoluble, and its greatest value seems to have been to sanction their unique position juridically. Under the light of these observations the question of the place allowed in Ambrose's thought for Mary's love of Joseph as a *spouse* becomes a tortuous one⁵. A favorable answer is not so clear as to be considered

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:4. CSEL 32:4 43:23. PL 15:1554c; *De Inst. Virg.* 6:45. PL 16:317c.

² With allegorical liberty *pudor* is identified with Joseph in *De Virgs.* 2:2:14. FALLER, p. 50:17-21. PL 16:210c; *De Vid.* 4:25. PL 16:242b.

³ *Adv. Helv.* 19. PL 23:203ab. *Infra*, p. 252-257.

⁴ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:43. PL 16:317a. *Infra*, p. 253.

⁵ The depreciative role which Ambrose accorded Joseph was recognized, for example, by Abbot Ernaldus, friend of Bernard of Clairvaux. In his brief *Libellus de Laudibus Beatae Mariae Virginis* Ernaldus copies entire pages of Ambrose without acknowledging his source. Having begun an exposition of the words spoken by the dying Savior to His Mother, he continues (PL 189:1731c-1732a):

Modo matrem non abjicis, nec ignoras, sed commendas discipulo, et vicariam imponis sollicitudinem illi quem praecipue diligis, qui supra pectus tuum in coena recubuit. "Mulier, inquit, ecce filius tuus"; et ad discipulum: "Ecce mater tua." Supererat Joseph ad quem usque ad illud tempus praecipua obsequii spectaverat ratio, et cui ad hoc ipsum fuerat desponsata; et modo quasi hoc ministerio censeatur indignus, Joannes assumitur. Hunc intellectum circumstantia sermonis videtur exigere. Verum secretiori ratione virginitas virginitati commendatur, ut hoc testimonio juguletur Bonosus haereticus et profanus Helvidius, qui ore fetido ausi sunt garrire quod de utero virginali alius praeter Christum partus effusus est, et post Salvatorem natum Joseph eam licentia maritali contigerit. Ipse Christus de cruce maternae virginitatis est arbiter idem et assertor ... "Suscepit eam Joannes in suam", non abnuente Joseph, nec aliquam calumniam referente, suscepit eam in suam, non quasi maritus, sed loco filii, assecla et custos, et testis et conscius. Erant quidem ambo in ministerio Mariae, Joseph cedente pro tempore et causa, Joanne praeposito.

Ernaldus has only carried to its logical consequences Ambrose's view of Joseph

an objection to the thesis stated earlier, namely, that in Ambrose's mind, though not explicitly in his works, Christ was the spouse of his virginal Mother, as of all other virgins and of the Church. Mary's progress in virginity of heart and spirit throughout her life in the company of Joseph, from whom God chose not to separate her until the hour of her Son's death, would then appear even more rightly a *mystery* worthy of being reserved to the sublime Gospel of John.

e) *Ambrose's Sources for the Exegesis of Jn. 19:26 f.*

There are many sources from which Ambrose could have drawn this characteristic proof of Mary's perpetual virginity. By comparison with them the refinements properly his own come to light. From Origen he may well have taken not only his esteem for the evangelist John, but also the startling notion of Mary's role in the revelation transmitted through John. It is to be noted, however, that in the best known passage where Origen expresses this idea, 1. Mary's role is only that of helping to understand John's Gospel, and not, as in Ambrose's *De Inst. Virg.* 7:50, of being in some way its source; 2. although Origen's language is not clear – because it is not certain what value is to be read into the participles which he piles up – he seems to conceive of Mary's influence on John in terms of her motherhood and not, as in Ambrose, in terms of her virginity:

I would go so far as to say that the flower of all the Scriptures is the Gospels, and the flower of the Gospels, that according to John. No one can understand its meaning who has not reclined on Jesus' bosom and received from Jesus Mary who becomes also his own mother¹.

as the widower of a former marriage who is still living at the crucifixion. In the third of his *Tractatus de septem verbis Domini in Cruce* Ernardus voiced the same opinion as above (PL 189 : 1696b):

Ecce, Joannes, piae haereditatis suscipis testamentum, eligeris, et in hoc praeponeris omnibus. Joseph, qui eatenus ministraverat, te subrogato, cedit; nec maritalia jura opponit, ut obstruatur os loquentium iniqua in posterum, quia matrimonium illud dispensationi divinae, non copulae carnali servierat. Ideoque nec Joseph, cum Joannes eam suscipit in parentem, queritur de disjuncto connubio, quod dispensatorium fuerat sine ullo carnalis copulae commercio.

¹ *Com. in Joan.* 1:6. GCS Orig. 4 8:14-18. PG 14:32a:

Τολμητέον τοίνυν εἰπεῖν ἀπαρχὴν μὲν πασῶν γραφῶν εἶναι τὰ εὐαγγέλια, τῶν δὲ εὐαγγελίων ἀπαρχὴν τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην : οὐ τὸν νοῦν οὐδεὶς δύναται λαβεῖν μὴ ἀναπεσῶν ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος Ἰησοῦ, μηδὲ λαβὼν ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ τὴν Μαρίαν γινομένην καὶ αὐτοῦ μητέρα.

The Calvary scene is introduced immediately to show that John was Mary's son inasmuch as he became another Christ, for Mary had no other son than Christ. Mary's virginity, therefore, comes into the picture only secondarily, and much less boldly than Ambrose will later portray it:

For if, in the opinion of those who think rightly of her, Mary had no other son than Jesus, and if Jesus says to His Mother, "Behold thy son" and not "Behold, this one also is thy son", then it is as if he said, "Behold, this one is Jesus to Whom thou gavest birth".¹

Another source no less familiar to Ambrose was Athanasius' *Letter to Virgins*, extant only in Coptic fragments². Athanasius develops the argument at first apparently without the supposition that Joseph was still living at the Crucifixion: "En disant cela, il nous apprend que Marie n'engendra plus de fils en dehors du Sauveur." But then quite soon he argues on the ground of Joseph's being still in life – "C'est une chose inconvenante d'abandonner *son mari* et ses enfants" – and he concludes that the text of Jn. 19:26 f. proves Mary's virginity. (It is doubtful whether he distinguishes between the fact that she had no other children and the fact that she persevered in her virginity.) John, he says, was chosen to receive her "on account of the great purity of her intelligence and her immaculate virginity". It is only a step forward to Ambrose's statement that John profited from her intelligence of the divine mysteries when he composed his Gospel. This passage, then, seems to be a primary source for Ambrose's use of John 19:26 f. as a proof of Mary's perpetual virginity:

En nous enseignant clairement ceci, le Sauveur nous apprend que Marie persévéra jusqu'au bout dans la virginité. Lorsqu'il monta, en effet, sur la croix il confia sa mère à Jean ; car il dit à celle-ci : « Voici ton fils » ; puis il dit au disciple : « Voici ta mère » ; et depuis ce jour-là le disciple la reçut en sa maison. En disant cela, il nous apprend que Marie n'engendra plus de fils en dehors du Sauveur. Si, en effet, elle avait eu un autre fils, le Sauveur n'aurait pas négligé celui-ci pour la confier à d'autres ; et elle non plus ne serait pas devenue la mère d'autres ; elle n'aurait (pas abandonné les siens) pour choisir des étrangers et demeurer avec eux ; sachant que c'est une chose inconvenante d'abandonner son mari et ses enfants. Mais

¹ *Loc. cit.* GCS 8 : 20-9 : 1:

Εἰ γὰρ οὐδεὶς υἱὸς Μαρίας, κατὰ τοὺς ὑγιῶς περὶ αὐτῆς δοξάζοντας, ἢ Ἰησοῦς, φησὶ δὲ Ἰησοῦς τῇ μητρὶ: «Ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου», καὶ οὐχί: «Ἴδε καὶ οὗτος υἱός σου» ἵσον εἶρηκε τῷ: «Ἴδε οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγέννησας».

² *Supra*, p. 12, 39-43.

parce qu'elle était vierge, et comme elle fut sa mère, il la donna à son disciple comme mère, tout en n'étant pas sa mère, à cause de la grande pureté de l'intelligence et de la virginité immaculée de celle-ci ¹.

In his *Adv. Helv.* Jerome had alluded to the scene on Calvary, but rather for its value in identifying through the women present some of the *brethren of the Lord*. St. John's text is brought up in the long section where Jerome answers his opponent's famous objection on the *brethren*. He does not, therefore, develop it precisely as a proof of Mary's virginity in the sense that Ambrose does. But he implies that Helvidius had been embarrassed by the force of such a proof; Helvidius seems to have tried to escape it by assuming that as a widow Mary was given to John simply for her consolation. Scripture, replies Jerome, does not clearly assert that Joseph was dead. But he goes no further; the argument for her virginity that comes to mind is not introduced ². There was little, therefore, in Jerome to serve Ambrose, particularly by comparison with the more plentiful source in Athanasius.

Hilary seems here even less than on any point of Marian doctrine to have been a source for Ambrose. For if Hilary shares with Ambrose (as against Jerome) the belief that the *brethren of the Lord* were sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage, he implies, contrarily to Ambrose, that Joseph was no longer alive at the Crucifixion. Despite this latter opinion, in Hilary's eyes the argument from Jn. 19:26 f. serves to prove against some unnamed heretics that Mary remained ever a virgin and not simply that she bore no children by Joseph ³.

Epiphanius ⁴, who wrote during the same years as Ambrose, can be dismissed as a possible source.

¹ Athanasius, *Lettre aux Vierges*. LEFORT (Muséon 42), p. 243 f.

² *Adv. Helv.* 13. PL 23:195b:

O furor caecus, et in proprium exitium mens vesana! Dicis ad crucem Domini matrem ejus fuisse praesentem, dicis Joanni discipulo ob viduitatem et solitudinem commendatam: quasi juxta te non haberet quatuor filios et innumeras filias, quarum consortio frueretur? Viduam quoque nominas, quod Scriptura non loquitur. Et cum omnia evangelistarum exempla proponas, solius tibi Joannis verba non placent ...

³ *Commentarius in Matthaeum* 1:4. PL 9:922b:

Verum homines pravissimi hinc praesumunt opinionis suae auctoritatem, quod plures Dominum nostrum fratres habuisse sit traditum. Qui si Mariae filii fuissent, et non potius Joseph ex priore conjugio suscepti; nunquam in tempore passionis Joanni apostolo transcripta esset in matrem, Domino ad utrumque dicente: "Mulier, ecce filius tuus", et Joanni "Ecce mater tua" nisi quod ad desolatae solatium, charitatem filii in discipulo relinquebat.

⁴ *Panar.* 78:11 f. GCS Epiph. 3 461:30-463:25. PG 42:716a-717c.

The emphasis which Ambrose gives his interpretation of Jn. 19:26 f. as a proof for Mary's perpetual virginity, even to the point of depreciating the position of Joseph, is evidence that a contrary opinion on Mary's virginity was making itself heard. Already in the *Exp. Luc.* (385-390) Ambrose is found exploiting the text for its full value. Although previous errors on Mary's perpetual virginity had been alluded to – by Origen, for example, in the first half of the third century¹, and by Hilary, writing sometime before his banishment to the East (356)² – there is no reason to suppose that Ambrose had to strain his ears beyond the Italy of his own day to hear already before 385-390 Helvidius' unwelcome slur to Mary's integrity. Prelate that he was, however, Ambrose was not destined to enter the field until another churchman, himself no less than a bishop, had taken up Helvidius' fantasy. Such was the Illyrian bishop Bonosus.

¹ *Supra*, p. 202, n. 1.

² *Supra*, p. 203, n. 3.

Bonosus, Marian Heretic

Among the personages of the late fourth century who remain enshrouded in obscurity, Bonosus deserves a first rank position. Practically all the data on him supplied by his contemporaries is found in two of Ambrose's letters – *Ep. 56* and the *Ep. de causa Bonosi*¹ – as well as in the *De Institutione Virginis*, and in two letters of Pope Innocent I².

¹ The *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* is printed between *Ep. 56* and *57* in the collection of Ambrose's letters (PL 16:1172b-1174b); as *Ep. 9* in that of Siricius (PL 13:1176b-1178b); in COUSTANT, *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum*, I. Parisiis 1721, p. 679 f. (reprinted in PL 13); in MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Amplissima Collectio*, III, col. 674d-675d; JAFFE, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum*, 2nd ed., Leipzig 1885, p. 41, lists it as Siricius' letter under No. 261, anno 392. Long attributed by the majority of scholars since TILLEMONT to Pope Siricius, its Ambrosian authenticity can no longer be questioned since Ferdinand CAVALLERA's demonstration, *La lettre sur l'évêque Bonose est-elle de saint Sirice ou de saint Ambroise?* Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique (Toulouse), 21 (1920), p. 141-147. A comparison of the proof of Mary's virginity from Jn. 19:26 f. in the letter (par. 3-6) and in the *De Inst. Virg.* (7:46-50) will suffice for those to whom CAVALLERA's article is unavailable. The outstanding difficulty against Ambrosian authorship – the reference to "fratrem nostrum Ambrosium" in the third person – is explained by the fact that Ambrose wrote the letter on behalf of the Milanese synod whose decision it relayed. Knowledge of CAVALLERA's article would perhaps have suggested to Hans CAMPENHAUSEN, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker*, Berlin 1929, p. 120-122, not to take the *Ep. de Causa Bon.* for a reproof by Siricius of Ambrose on account of a previous reply given Bonosus. CAMPENHAUSEN's thesis of a Rome-Milan rivalry thus loses one more of its props. Even today CAVALLERA's research is overlooked too readily, as by Henri FRÉVIN, *op. cit.*, p. 39 f. Because they falsely attributed the *Ep. de Causa Bon.* to Siricius, Jacques ZEILLER, *Les origines chrétiennes dans les provinces danubiennes de l'Empire Romain*, Paris 1918, and Gerhard RAUSCHEN, *Jahrbücher der christlichen Kirche unter dem Kaiser Theodosius dem Großen*, Freiburg i. Br. 1897, must be corrected in much of their presentation of the Bonosian affair.

² *Ep. 16* and *17*. PL 20:519a-522a and 526b-537b. MANSI, III, 1057c-1058b and 1058b-1063d prints them as *Ep. 21* and *22*. *Ep. 17* is also printed as chapter 22 of the *Codex canonum ecclesiasticorum et constitutorum Sanctae Sedis Apostolicae* in the appendix of the works of Pope Leo the Great. PL 56:509-513.

The passing mention of him by the pseudo-Marius Mercator (5th century)¹, Gennadius², and the second council of Arles³ state little more than that his doctrine resembled that of the Photinians, a bit of information the value of which is disputable, in view of the tendency that early ecclesiastical writers had to reduce every new unorthodox doctrine to some known heresy. These meagre details, moreover, have been pieced together in such divergent chronologies that no single historian can be followed in all that he writes about Bonosus.

A. Bonosus: The Personage

1. Bishop of Sardica

Confusion reigns, first of all, over the see of which Bonosus was bishop. A definitive solution to this problem, even were it possible with the date extant, would at first sight seem to lie beyond the scope of the present work. Yet any light thrown on this dark character is welcome, particularly if thereby his true position in the Church can be evaluated: the more formidable an adversary Bonosus was, the greater the scale of Ambrose's deed in refuting him.

Up to the turn of this century scholars generally assumed that he was the metropolitan of Sardica (today Sofia in Bulgaria), on the basis of the pseudo-Marius Mercator's mention of "Sardicensis Bonosus"⁴. The case for his being bishop of Naissus (today Nish in eastern Yugoslavia) rests on a sentence in *Ep. 16* of Pope Innocent I, wherein the Pope speaks of having written to the then bishop of Naissus, Marcianus, and to his neighbors regarding the clerics of Naissus ordained by Bono-

¹ *Dissertatio de XII Anathematismis Nestorii* 15. PL 48:928b. On the reasons for attributing the work to a pseudo-Marius cf. Emile AMANN, *Marius Mercator*, DTC, IX. Paris 1926, col. 2485.

² *De viris inlustribus* 14. RICHARDSON (TU 14:1, 1896), p. 66:25. PL 58:1068b.

³ *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*, canon 17. HEFELE-LECLERCQ, *op. cit.*, II, p. 467. Cf. *infra*, p. 220, n. 5. These *Statuta* are usually known as canons of the Second Council of Arles, but their origin remains unknown. The Bonosus in question is not to be confused with another referred to by Augustine in a letter to Helpidius (*Ep.* 242:1. PL 33:1053a), who was an Arian of the early fifth century, about whom nothing more is known except that he was not an African.

⁴ *Diss. de XII anath. Nest.* 15. PL 48:928b:

Ebionem philosophum secutus Marcellus Galata est, Photinus quoque, et ultimis temporibus Sardicensis Bonosus.

sus¹; it is assumed that Bonosus would have followed the prevailing ecclesiastical discipline in ordaining only his own subjects, and that in consequence he would have been bishop of Naissus. Despite the many authorities who have adhered to this idea of a Bonosus of Naissus since Zeiller's lengthy work on the Illyrian church appeared in 1917², it should be recognized that to establish such a thesis Zeiller brings no more positive proof than the one just stated: the mention in Innocent I's letter of clerics of Naissus ordained by Bonosus. Against his too hastily drawn conclusion Zeiller fails to bring up the objection which already appears in a note on Innocent's letter in the edition reproduced in the *Patrologia Latina*³, and which Rauschen had reiterated⁴, namely, that a heretic like Bonosus could very readily have disregarded the law concerning the jurisdiction necessary to ordain clerics. Innocent states in a subsequent letter, in fact, that Bonosus ordained people "passim et sine ulla discussione"⁵. Such conduct is not surprising especially in a man who, as will be seen⁶, resented so highly being deposed from his see that he wanted to reoccupy it by force. Zeiller's negative argument for rejecting the outright testimony of pseudo-Marius Mercator in favor of the hypothesis constructed from Innocent's *Ep. 16* is that pseudo-Marius is often inexact. He is particularly ill-informed, thinks Zeiller, on the Bonosian affair, since he refers to a condemnation of the heretic by Pope Damasus, and this would place the outbreak of his error before 384, which is hardly possible. But Zeiller here does the pseudo-Marius an injustice, which again a note in the *Patrologia Latina*⁷, if not the very text of the pseudo-Marius, should have forestalled. For the text reads "qui a Damaso urbis Romae episcopo *praedamnatus* est"⁸. This refers, not to a judgment of Bonosus himself, but to a condemnation of the heresy of Photinus and Marcellus of Ancyra, a heresy which the ancient historians all saw renewed in Bonosus'. Such a condemnation was pronounced, after similar ones in the East, by the Roman Synod of 380. From this Synod Damasus sent to Paulinus of Antioch a letter

¹ *Ep. 16:1*. PL 20:519a:

...litteras de clericis Naissensibus transmisisse, his videlicet, qui se ante damnationem Bonosi assererent ab eodem tam presbyteros quam diaconos ordinatos.

² E. g., DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 401, n. 4, and PALANQUE in a review of CAMPENHAUSEN's book, *RHE*, 26 (1930), p. 130, n. 1.

³ PL 20:520b, note *e*.

⁴ RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 341 f., n. 9.

⁵ Innocent I, *Ep. 17:12*. PL 20:534b.

⁷ PL 48:928d, note *c*, and PL 13:1173b *Monitum*.

⁶ *Infra*, p. 227.

⁸ *Infra*, p. 217, n. 2.

with the *Professio Fidei*, containing this sentence: "Anathematizamus Photinum, qui Hebionis haeresim instaurans Dominum Jesum Christum tantum ex Maria confitetur."¹ Hence, far from erroneously antedating Bonosus' appearance, the pseudo-Marius corroborates his and his contemporaries' contention that the heretic was a Photinian. The ancient historian may be inaccurate; there remains, however, no specific ground to mistrust the precious bit of information which he alone records about Bonosus' see.

Moreover, an indication, though a conjectural one, that Bonosus' see could not have been Naissus arises from the correction which A. E. Burn proposes for one of the names of the bishops to whom a certain *Epistola Germinii*² was addressed. Germinius, a semi-Arian, occupied the important see of Sirmium, which first had been in the hands of the heretic Photinus (345c-351) and thereafter remained in schism under Germinius himself (351-376). In 366 or 367 Germinius sent a letter to the neighboring bishops to defend in the face of Arian adversaries his evolution toward orthodoxy. In attempting to identify the eight bishops to whom he wrote, Zeiller observes that many of the names have undergone corruption. For three of them he presents in a favorable light Burn's corrections, by which they are identified with known bishops of the Illyrian Church. Burn proposes, in addition, to read *Marcianus* for *Mucianus*, and to see therein the bishop of Naissus who is mentioned by Innocent I as still governing that see in 409³. But if the same Marcianus were bishop of Naissus already in 366/7 when the *Epistola Germinii* was written, and if after a long but not impossible episcopate of more than 40 years he still headed the see in 409, then Bonosus could not have occupied that post around 390. Thus Bonosus would probably have been, as Marius asserts, bishop of Sardica. This would also be expected in view of the fact that no other bishop can be found for Sardica among the known Illyrian churchmen from the time of Protegenes' death (c343

¹ *Ep. 4 (Confessio fidei catholicae) 5. PL 13:359a.*

² *Ep. Germinii* in the collection of Hilary's historical works, CSEL 65 160: 20-164 : 10. Alfred FEDER, *Studien zu Hilarius von Poitiers* (Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften 162:4, 166:5), Wien 1910, 1911, treats the letter on two occasions; in his first study, p. 184, he dates it at the end of December 366 as the last piece in Hilary's *Opus Historicum*, and in the second study, p. 107-109, he records all the available information about the bishops mentioned therein, leaving however the name of Mucianus altogether without comment.

³ A. E. BURN, *Nicetas of Remesiana*. Cambridge 1905, p. xxxvii.

to the mention of a Julianus in 424¹. On the grounds that the thesis of a Bonosus, bishop of Sardica has already been proved "undefendable", Zeiller rejects Burn's corrected reading². An impartial weighing of the evidence, however, shows the thesis more probable than Zeiller's, even without the confirmation, admittedly conjectural, which it receives from Burn.

It is not irrelevant to Ambrose's Mariology to have discussed Bonosus' see. For if this mysterious adversary headed the church of Sardica, he occupied a more important post than the bishop of Naissus. The bishop of Sardica was the metropolitan in Dacia Mediterranea, a political diocese of the Roman province of central Moesia (today eastern Yugoslavia). Around Sardica were grouped the sees of Naissus, Remesiana, and Pautalia, if not others³. Ambrose is justly apprehensive on learning the error of such an important personage on Mary's perpetual virginity.

But even if one cannot decide between Sardica or Naissus, it should be observed that both sees, separated by that of Remesiana, were in that Danubian Church which during the entire fourth century was seething with brands of Arianism, semi-Arianism, Photinianism, Macedonianism, etc. Such an environment could readily give rise to errors on Mary's virginity. In addition to the opinion of Tertullian, Helvidius had cited as a precedent for his erroneous teaching on the *brethren of the Lord* that of Victorinus (d. 304), bishop of Pettau (Poetovio in the ancient province of Noricum, today northwestern Yugoslavia). Jerome replied simply, "De Victorino vero id assero, quod et de evangelistis, fratres eum dixisse Domini, non filios Mariae"⁴. The measured tone of his reply is striking by comparison to the whole *Adv. Helv.* and to the castigation he had in the preceding sentence given Tertullian: "De Tertulliano quidem nihil amplius dico quam Ecclesiae hominem non fuisse." Jerome seems almost to admit that Victorinus' language was open to misunderstanding on this point and cannot be defended as vigorously as an eager pen would defend anything orthodox against Helvidius. History has preserved no other clue as to how the bishop of Pettau had expressed himself⁵. In the doctrinal sway of Constantinople

¹ ZEILLER, *op. cit.*, p. 156, 599.

² *Ibid.*, p. 176, n. 2.

³ Cf. S. L. GREENSLADE, *The Illyrian Churches and the Vicariate of Thessalonica*, JTS, 46 (1945), p. 27 ff. MARIN TADIN, *La Lettre 91 de saint Basile, a-t-elle été adressée à l'évêque d'Aquilée, Valérien?* RSR, 37 (1950), p. 457 ff. ZEILLER, *op. cit.*, p. 155 ff.

⁴ *Adv. Helv.* 17. PL 23 : 201b.

⁵ For this appreciation of Victorinus cf. JOUASSARD, *Marie à travers la patris-*

rather than of the Western Church, moreover, Illyria must have reflected in some measure the trend of ideas in the oriental capital of which it was the hinterland. And toward the end of the fourth century, in a sermon given apparently at Constantinople and in its bishop's presence, Eunomius (d. 394), bishop of Cyzicus (today in northwestern Turkey), openly voiced the opinion that Mary had given birth to other children than Jesus¹. This was in Arian climate, it is true; but even so the expression in highest Arian circles of such unorthodox Mariology is none the less startling, for the Arians, and Eunomius himself², were at one with Catholics in calling Mary *the Virgin*³.

Thus Illyria had gathered its share of confused ideas about Mary the Virgin. Later it will be observed how, for some unknown reason, the Macedonian bishops assigned to judge Bonosus delayed delivering an outright condemnation, despite the grossness of his Marian error⁴. And Jerome, who stemmed from Dalmatia, rock of orthodoxy that he was, still seems to have had a rather vague notion of Mary's virginity in partu⁵. To cite a final curious example, Nicetas of Remesiana (d. after 414), who was the bishop of the see bordering on Bonosus' (whether Bonosus was of Sardica or Naissus), is one of the last witnesses for the strange reading of Luc 1:46 which attributed the Magnificat to Elizabeth instead of to Mary⁶. The reading is attested to by Jerome himself, in his translation of one of Origen's homilies on Luke⁷, though Jerome, of course, rejects it. It was certainly known to Ambrose, since it was the reading handed down in the old Latin codices Vercellensis and Vero-

tique, p. 84 (with n. 28) and 11; *La personnalité d'Helvidius*, p. 147 f.; KOCH, *Virgo Eva*, p. 82 f.

¹ Philostorgius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6. GCS Phil. 71:3-9. *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaëum*. PG 56: 635-636 (of an unidentified Arian bishop). The Catholic reply to Eunomius came in the *Homilia in sanctam Christi Generationem*. PG 31:1457-1576, almost surely from Basil's pen. Cf. JOUASSARD, *Marie à travers la patristique*, p. 89, n. 14.

² *Liber apologeticus* 17. PG 30:864d.

³ JOUASSARD, *Marie à travers la patristique*, p. 88-90.

⁴ *Infra*, p. 227-229.

⁵ *Supra*, p. 146-152.

⁶ *De Psalmodyae Bono* 9. BURN, p. 76:21:

Nec Elisabeth, diu sterilis, edito de repromissione filio Deum de ipsa anima magnificare cessavit.

Ibid., 11. BURN, p. 79:4: *Cum Elisabeth Dominum "anima nostra magnificat"*.

⁷ *Hom. 7 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 47:19-48:3. PG 13:1817c:

Invenitur beata Maria, sicut in aliquantis exemplaribus reperimus, prophettare. Non enim ignoramus, quod secundum alios codices et haec verba Elisabeth vaticinetur.

nensis¹, which, as will be seen², Ambrose used most frequently of all Latin versions. But Ambrose knows it is an erroneous reading and never even alludes to it. The surprising thing is that Nicetas, who lived on into the fifth century, does not seem to be acquainted with any other reading! Illyria, indeed, does not shine for being well informed about Mary.

From Illyria, then, came Bonosus' attack on the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. No theme was dearer to Ambrose's heart, and of all the sprawling regions more or less under the suspect of aegis of Constantinople, none aroused Ambrose's apprehension more than that Illyria which carried Eastern ideas to the very threshold of northern Italy³.

2. The Marian Heresy of Bonosus

If the person of Bonosus is little known, history has not preserved many more details on his teaching. The first recorded word about it occurs in the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*, which after having passed for centuries as Pope Siricius' composition is now recognized as Ambrose's⁴. Writing about Bonosus to the bishop of Thessalonica in circumstances later to be discussed, Ambrose says:

Sane non possumus negare de Mariae filiis jure reprehensum, meritoque vestram sanctitatem abhoruisse, quod ex eodem utero virginali, ex quo secundum carnem Christus natus est, alius partus effusus sit⁵.

Bonosus, it appears, was reviving Helvidius' error, but nowhere in the letter is it explained with what nuance or on what new grounds he denied Mary's perpetual virginity. Ambrose, who is the only author to

¹ Josephus BLANCHINI, *Evangeliorum Quadruplex*. Romae 1749, reprinted in PL 12:145-146.

² *Infra*, p. 246, n. 5.

³ The cause of orthodoxy in Illyria was one of Ambrose's constant preoccupations; it was served greatly by his energetic intervention in the election of the Catholic bishop Anemius to the see of Sirmium, capital of the province of (Western) Illyricum, at the death of the semi-Arian Germinius. The date is disputed: around 376 according to ZEILLER, *op. cit.*, p. 144 f., 310; with greater probability toward 380 for RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 80 and DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 195 f.

Ambrose knew from experience of the damage caused to the church of Milan by his semi-Arian predecessor Auxentius how much in need of attention was the church in the Lower Danubian provinces, zone of Sirmium's influence.

⁴ *Supra*, p. 205, n. 1.

⁵ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 3. PL 16:1173b.

have indicted him for this false teaching, returns to the charge in the *De Inst. Virg.* Though he does not mention Bonosus by name, his allusion to him has always been considered by scholars as unmistakable. What has long been overlooked is that he alone of all contemporaries preserves a clue to an argument with which the heretic tried to establish his case.

For, having spoken of the way Christians are drawn to the practice of virginity by Mary's example, Ambrose continues:

Et tamen cum omnes ad cultum virginitatis sanctae Mariae advocentur exemplo, fuerunt qui eam negarent virginem perseverasse. Hoc tantum sacrilegium silere jamdudum maluimus : sed quia causa vocavit in medium, ita ut ejus prolapsionis etiam Episcopus argueretur, indemnatum non putamus relinquendum ; et *maxime quia et mulierem eam legimus, sicut* cui (PL qui) in Cana Galilaeae ipse Dominus, *ait*, dicenti sibi : « Vinum non habent, fili », respondit : « Quid mihi et tibi est, mulier ? » ¹

A correction necessary to the sense of this passage has been introduced, where the Migne reading *qui* has been changed to *cui* to agree with *dicenti sibi* as the indirect object of *respondit*. Pending the appearance of a critical edition of the *De Inst. Virg.*, this hypothesis must forego the support which might come from the manuscript tradition on this word. The erroneous substitution of *qui* for *cui*, indeed, may have crept in before the earliest MSS, may even date back to a tachygraphist's confusion of the two words, especially if the sermon was being dictated, as some of Ambrose's were in his last years, or if it was taken down at delivery. Complete sense, moreover, is not restored to the passage until the *ait*, unpunctuated in Migne, is recognized as parenthetical and set off by commas, to leave *respondit* the verb of *ipse Dominus*. These two modifications allow the following translation:

Nevertheless while everyone is being summoned to the cult of virginity by Mary's example, there have been some to deny that she remained a virgin. Such a sacrilege as this we have preferred till now to pass over in silence : but because the suit engaged has called it to the fore, so that even a bishop is accused of falling into it, we do not think it should be left uncondemned; and particularly because we read her to have been also a "woman", inasmuch as she is the one to whom the Lord himself, he says, in answer to her words, "Son, they have no wine", replied, "What is it to me and to thee, woman"?

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:35. PL 16:314b.

The parenthetical *ait*, it is seen, puts the argument based on Christ's words to Mary at Cana (Jn. 2:4) in Bonosus' mouth as an objection to Mary's virginity: How could she have remained a virgin, if even Christ himself called her a *mulier*, i. e., a woman as contrasted to a virgin, a woman in her state of wifehood?

The objection thus built out of Jn. 2:4 is not as frequently encountered as might be thought in the polemics on Mary's virginity. Jerome does not record it among those raised by Helvidius, who comes nearest it only when making a case out of the Scriptural appellations of Mary as *desponsata*, *uxor*, and *conjux*¹. Jerome insists on the fact that Helvidius' errors found a precedent only in Tertullian; but in the long passage² where he discusses the meaning of *mulier*, Tertullian has nothing about that title being given her in Jn. 2:4. He cites only Gal. 4:4 ("Misit Deus filium suum factum ex muliere") and Luc. 1:28 ("Benedicta tu inter mulieres")³. Furthermore, far from citing such examples as objections to Mary's virginity, his whole argument is precisely that they show that *mulier* can be taken as the generic name for *woman*, whatever her condition⁴. There were, of course, others before Helvidius who denied Mary's virginity post partum, to whom Origen and Hilary alluded, but nothing of their arguments has been preserved. Gaudentius (d. after 406), bishop of Brescia in the neighborhood of Milan, brings up the *mulier* of Jn. 2:4 as an objection to Mary's virginity, as though it had been lost not during her life with Joseph but in the act of giving birth to Christ. Moreover, Gaudentius' way of presenting the argument suggests that he was responsible himself for raising it in commenting the pericope on the marriage at Cana⁵. The citation of Jn. 2:4 by Bonosus, then, may be the first time that history has recorded the argument in the mouth of a heretic who denied Mary's perpetual virginity. Jerome, it is

¹ *Adv. Helv.* 3. PL 23:185b.

² *De Virginibus velandis* 4-8. PL 2:891-900.

³ *Ibid.*, 6. PL 2:897b. ⁴ *Ibid.*, 4. PL 2:894b.

⁵ *Sermo* 9. PL 20:899ac:

Sed jam quid Dominus ei responderit, attonitis mentibus audiamus. Ait illi Jesus: "Quid mihi et tibi est mulier? Nondum venit hora mea." Juxta intellectus simplicis rationem probare suffecerit, beatam Mariam virginem sexus causa mulierem nuncupatam, sicut in Genesi de Eva scribitur: "Et injecit Dominus soporem in Adam, etc." Sed dicat fortasse aliquis parvae fidei, ac parum prudens, virginem quidem Mariam non ex viro concepisse Christum, sed de Spiritu sancto, ut in Evangelio ad eam loquitur archangelus Gabriel; nato tamen Christo virginem dici ultra non posse quam constet edidisse partum; et ideo non dixisse Christum, "Quid mihi et tibi est, virgo?" sed "Quid mihi et tibi est, mulier?"

true, cites it as such in conjunction with the use of *uxor* for Mary in Mt. 1:24¹ in his commentary on Gal. 4:4 (“factum ex muliere”) in the *Commentarii in Quattuor Epistolas Paulinas*; but he gives no hint as to who had brought it up, and besides, the commentary just named, written between 387 and 389, may already reflect either the Bonosian attack or the polemic about Mary’s virginity in partu to which Gauden-
tius referred the text.

At any rate, new or not, the objection troubled Ambrose more than any other, since he mentioned it first; he adds that he changed his decision to silence the error, not only because now the case of the bishop had come out into the open, but also and even especially (*maxime*) because this argument had been fabricated. Ambrose deems it worth citing his adversary’s words at least in paraphrase. He does, indeed, add five other objections almost in the same breath, but it is difficult to say how many of them had been brought up by Bonosus. If they stem from Bonosus, none of them were proper to him: the first four had been raised by Helvidius, and the last, that from Gal. 4:4, had already long been known. In fact, the way in which this last objection, likewise centering on the use of *mulier*, is tacked on instead of being joined to the opening one from Jn. 2:4 would suggest that somewhere in the list of objections Ambrose has gone beyond Bonosus’ case to include arguments presented by other enemies of Mary’s virginity. He had already announced that Bonosus was not alone in his error: “*Fuerunt qui eam negarent virginem perseverasse. Hoc tantum sacrilegium silere jamdudum maluimus.*” One thing is sure: the *mulier* argument from Jn. 2:4 was Bonosus’ contribution, and a seductively dangerous one, Ambrose deemed.

He seems to imply that Bonosus rendered his objection even stronger by professing a specious fidelity to the letter of Scripture: “Et mulierem

¹ The editors’ reference in PL to *Luc. 2* is incorrect. Jerome did not err in his citation when he wrote,

Quod autem sanctam et beatam matrem Domini, mulierem non virginem nominavit, hoc idem et in evangelio κατὰ Μαθαῖον scriptum est: quando *uxor* appellatur Joseph,

for he had in mind the reading of Mt. 1:24 which he had used in the Helvidian polemic: “Exsurgens Joseph a somno fecit sicut praeceperat ei Angelus Domini: et accepit *uxorem* suam” (*Adv. Helv.* 3. PL 23:185c). The Vulgate reads “*conjugem* suam”, as in Mt. 1:20. The codices of the Old Latin differ from the Vulgate very frequently for terms like *conjux*, *uxor*, *mater*, *pater*, *parentes*, etc. as applied to Mary and Joseph – differences to which the Fathers were most alert, as remarked above, p. 92, n. 2.

eam legimus, *sicut* cui ... *ipse Dominus*, dicenti sibi 'Vinum non habent, fili', respondit: 'Qui mihi et tibi est, mulier?'" This sentence must be exploited for what it reveals of Bonosus' astuteness. ¹ Scripture, Bonosus would temptingly concede, does not say in forthright terms *Maria erat mulier*, but it states the equivalent inasmuch (*sicut*) as it records that Christ addressed her as *mulier*. ² And Christ used this title, the bishop adds, in answering words in which His Mother had first addressed Him by his proper title *Fili*, so that both titles, *mulier* and *fili*, are to be taken in their full and literal sense. Such is the reason why, as Ambrose cites, the objection is built up with both parts of the dialogue between Mother and Son given in full. ³ Finally, the heretic evidently places great emphasis on the fact that it is Christ Himself, and not some bystander or the evangelist, who calls his Mother *mulier*. Ambrose does his adversary the justice of citing the objection with all its force and seductiveness. Too much has not been read into the phrasing of the argument, for Ambrose did not casually fall on a construction as involved as that beginning, "Et maxime quia...." Had he wished simply to record the objection, he could have used terms as terse as Jerome had earlier used: "Quando ... ab ipso Domino quasi mulier increpatur." ⁴ Or if he had wanted at all costs to cite the exact words of Scripture, as in the five objections that follow, he could have confined himself to citing merely Christ's words, where the *mulier* occurs. Instead he recorded the objection fully, having considered it dangerous enough to warrant his speaking out finally on a case so distasteful.

The nuances in the argumentation would all bespeak on the part of Bonosus an astuteness and competence which unfortunately the meagre relics preserved of him do not permit to corroborate abundantly. But his wily character will appear again soon in one of the steps which he had already taken before Ambrose began his refutation, namely, an appeal to the bishop of Milan himself ². Nor would Ambrose have replied to an incompetent Bonosus in terms as courteous as those which, as will be seen ³, he prided himself in having used on that occasion. A part of the hesitation, moreover, which was displayed by the bishops assigned to judge the case ⁴ may be accounted for by the prestige which the metropolitan of Sardica enjoyed. These shreds of evidence, when pieced together, suggest the portrait of an adversary not altogether bereft of talent.

¹ *Commentariorum in Ep. ad Galatas* 2:4:4. PL 26:372b.

² *Infra*, p. 226 f. ³ *Infra*, p. 227. ⁴ *Infra*, p. 227 f.

He was clever enough, of course, to lay down his attack on the text of Jn. 2:4 instead of on Jn. 19:26 where Mary is called *mulier* by her Son also. For, as has been seen, the scene on Calvary (Jn. 19:26) was already too well associated in patristic tradition with the proof of Mary's virginity to permit its distortion to the contrary purpose. Scriptural applications of *mulier* to Mary other than Jn. 2:4 and 19:26 are not numerous; leaving aside the disputed Apoc. 12:1 ff., the series is rounded out with Gal. 4:4 ("factum ex muliere") and Luc. 1:42 ("benedicta tu inter mulieres"). Bonosus had chosen the one text most easily distorted to his purpose.

How many other arguments did he present? Ambrose's enumeration in the *De Inst. Vir.*, as already remarked, does not provide a conclusive answer, since the five remaining objections probably include some drawn from Helvidius or from an unknown source. They are reproduced later in connection with Ambrose's reply¹.

3. Christological Heresy in Bonosus

Ambrose clearly testifies to Bonosus' denial of Mary's virginity post partum and is the only source, contemporary or posterior, to have recorded this precious information². Did Bonosus' heresy extend further? A detailed answer to this question would lead beyond the present study, but Ambrose's role in the condemnation demands that one know at least in general terms the extent of Bonosus' error.

For this, sources again are meagre. Neither the acts of the Council of Capua, which referred Bonosus' case to his fellow-bishops for judgment, nor the acts of the Illyrian synod which actually condemned him are extant or even alluded to elsewhere for their doctrinal content. Ambrose,

¹ For the list of his objections cf. *infra*, p. 236 f.

² The false attribution of the *Ep. de Causa Bon.* to Pope Siricius has long obscured the signal contribution that Ambrose made to the history of heresies by his two passages (in the *Ep.* and the *De Inst. Virg.*) on Bonosus. Ambrose's contribution here is even more precious than in the case of Jovinian, whose Marian error, though recorded by no other contemporary than Ambrose, was at least known to Augustine in the years immediately following. In the Jovinianist affair a similarly false attribution of Ambrose's *Ep.* 42, again to Siricius, has long deprived the bishop of Milan of the gratitude due him from historians of heresy. BARDY's statement, *Photin de Sirmium*, DTC, XII, Paris 1935, col. 1536, that in the case of Bonosus the letters both of Siricius (i. e., Ambrose's *Ep. de Causa Bon.*) and of Innocent (*Ep.* 16 and 17) insist on the Marian heresy is an error: Innocent says only that Bonosus was condemned, without alluding to the reasons therefor. (Cf. following note.) Ambrose alone speaks of Bonosus as a Marian heretic.

the most copious source on Bonosus, has practically nothing to offer on any other of the bishop's errors; to him Bonosus was identified with a denial of Mary's virginity post partum, and the *Ep. de causa Bonosi* suggests no other aberration. Evidence of something more serious glimmers there and in the *De Inst. Virg.*, but its evaluation must be reserved yet until other more explicit witnesses, if there are any, can be summoned.

Pope Innocent I, who writes in 409 and 414 and is thus the next in time after Ambrose to mention Bonosus, does speak of his condemnation but without alluding to the reason for it¹. Innocent's concern was confined to the validity of certain ordinations performed by the bishop after his condemnation. The ps-Marius Mercator, who apparently wrote in the early fifth century, is the first to link Bonosus with Photinus², an association which every subsequent source will repeat. Because of the readiness with which ancient Church historians tagged the labels of known heresies on subsequent deviations from sound doctrine, the ps-Marius' allegation of Photinianism is not entirely trustworthy. If Bonosus had been known at the time of his judgment to have espoused Photinianism, Ambrose would hardly have bypassed such a gross error, especially in the sort of indictment which in the *Epistola* he sent to the bishops charged with Bonosus' case. He would not have replied to Bonosus himself in terms as cordial as those he used when the heretic appealed to him. Photinus had taught nothing less than that the Person of Christ was essentially human, born naturally of Joseph and Mary. Ambrose's ears would have been alert to catch echoes of such a heresy which he had long combated³ and the center of which, Sirmium, he

¹ Innocent I, *Ep.* 16. PL 20:519 f.: "Ante damnationem Bonosi" (bis); *Ep.* 17. PL 20:534a: "Qui de catholicis ad Bonosum transierunt damnatum."

² Ps-Marius, *Diss. de XII anath. Nest.* 15-17. PL 48:928b:

Hunc itaque Ebionem philosophum secutus Marcellus Galata est; Photinus quoque, et ultimis temporibus Sardicensis Bonosus, qui a Damaso urbis Romae episcopo praedamnatus est. Paulus autem Samosatenus, qui fuit Antiochiae episcopus temporibus Aureliani principis, verum est quidem quod Christum communiter, ut caeteri, natum hominem ex utroque parente definit; Verbum autem Dei Patris, non substantivum, sed prolativum vel imperativum sensit. ... Photinus autem insanissimo Nestorio parem sententiam tenuit, Verbum Dei quidem non negans esse in substantia; sed hoc extrinsecus in isto, qui ex Maria more communi conjugum natus est, Jesu inhabitasse peculiariter ...

Cf. *ibid.*, 19-21. PL 929b-930b on how Photinus, for his assertion that Christ was born of Joseph and Mary, is presented as a predecessor of Nestorius.

³ *De Fide* 1:6:57; 2:117; 3:58; 4:29; 5:104. *De Spir.* 1:164; 2:117; 3:117; 3:129. *Exam.* 3:32. *De Parad.* 58. *Exp. Luc.* 1:13; 5:4; 8:12. *De ob. Theod.* 49. *Ep.* 48:5. Cf. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 186, n. 8.

had restored to orthodoxy in securing the election of a Catholic bishop after the death of Photinus' successor¹. It is questionable, moreover, whether as late as the end of the fourth century another outbreak of Photinianism could be found in one as highly placed as a bishop. Ambrose's *Ep. de causa Bonosi* may therefore be taken as conclusive evidence that Bonosus was condemned not for a Christological but a Marian error.

There are, however, two sentences in the *Epistola* which suggest that already in his first pronouncement Ambrose sensed a far more serious heresy dormant in Bonosus' denial of Mary's perpetual virginity. Rightly are you incensed, he tells the bishops, to hear Bonosus assert that Christ would choose to be born of a virgin ("nasci per virginem") who could not find it in herself to persevere in her virginity:

Qui enim hoc astruit, nihil aliud nisi perfidiam Judaeorum astruit, qui dicunt eum non potuisse nasci ex Virgine. Jam si hanc accipiant (sc. Judaei) a sacerdotibus auctoritatem, ut videatur Maria partus fudisse plurimos, majore studio veritatem fidei expugnare contendunt².

To deny that the Mother of God persevered as a virgin, he says, leads to denying that she conceived and bore her Son as a virgin. The Jews were the first to deny the possibility of Christ's virginal generation, and Ambrose sees Bonosus' error pregnant with the seeds of theirs. The Jewish error was exactly what Photinus revived in asserting that Christ was the natural son of Mary and Joseph. The doctrinal genealogy of Photinus, Cerinthus, Ebion, and the earliest Jewish heretics is familiar to all ancient Church historians. Hence Ambrose does envisage Bonosus' heresy as a step towards Photinianism, that is, toward a denial of Christ's virginal generation and therefore of His divinity. Bonosus himself seems not yet to have gone as far as to assert that Christ was generated naturally, since the first argument in the *Epistola* written to confute him presupposes that he admits the virginal conception:

Neque enim elegisset Dominus Jesus nasci per virginem, si eam judicasset tam incontinentem fore, ut ... illam aulam regis aeterni concubitus humani seminis coinquinaret³.

But the first step had been taken in the direction of a denial of Christ's virginal generation. And Ambrose hastened to warn Bonosus' judges to what graver error a denial of Mary's perpetual virginity would lead.

¹ *Supra*, p. 211, n. 3.

² *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 3. PL 16:1173c.

³ *Loc. cit.*

The same apprehension of the danger to sound Christology in Bonosus' Marian error appears when Ambrose next pronounces on him. The plan of the *De Inst. Virg.* from chapter 5 on is revealing: after presenting Bonosus' objections against Mary's perpetual virginity and answering them one after the other (5:34-6:43), Ambrose takes up positive arguments in favor of his thesis (6:44-7:50), ending with the lengthy interpretation of the "porta clausa" of Ezech. 44:2 which he applies to Mary throughout chapter 8 (51-57) and extends to all virgins in chapter 9 (58-62). Then three chapters intervene in which he refutes the Christological error of unnamed heretics – *dicunt* (10:65), *legunt* (10:67) – who deny Christ's divinity in the sense of calling Him second to the Father. At the end of chapter 12 (12:75) Ambrose reverts to the image of the *porta clausa* left in chapter 9, which he considers so fresh in the mind of his reader that no transition is needed:

Ipse ergo rex Israel transivit hanc portam, ipse dux sedit in ea : quando Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, quasi Rex sedens in aula regali uteri virginalis....¹

The remainder of the work continues on the theme of virginity and of the imitation of Mary the Virgin. It is probable that these three chapters, at first foreign to the subject and circumstance, were introduced by association with Bonosus' error on Mary's virginity, refuted just before them. This may be further evidence of what a threat Ambrose saw in the error of a Bonosus who is later identified by Church historians with a denial of Christ's divinity.

In the two works cited, therefore, the *Epistola* and the *De Inst. Virg.*, Ambrose has preserved a striking example of his alertness to the menace of heresy: in an error on Mary's virginity, not just ante partum but post partum as well, he sees imminent peril for the essence of Christian doctrine. His apprehensions, it seems, were sadly realized in Bonosus' followers, as every witness from the ps-Marius Mercator on testifies. Bonosus thus plotted the inevitable course to be followed by a heretic who begins caviling at the Virgin Mother of God.

Later sources repeat the ps-Marius' testimony that Bonosus himself ended up in the camp of Photinus' followers. Scholars suggest rather that the development occurred among Bonosus' disciples, and not during the lifetime of the heretic. At any rate, the earliest sources posit it of Bonosus personally. The *Decretum Gelasianum*, probably of Gallic origin

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 12:79. PL 16:324c.

in the early sixth century, associates him with Photinus and the two other predecessors, Ebion and Paul of Samosate, mentioned by ps-Marius¹; the names occur in the first group of heretics anathematized after a long list of repudiated books². The same association of Bonosus with Photinus, Paul of Samosate, and Nestorius, found in ps-Marius and repeated (except for Nestorius) in the *Decretum*, is preserved in Pope Vigilius' *Epistola (olim XV) ad universam Ecclesiam*, which dates from 550³, and in his letter known as *Constitutum de tribus capitulis*⁴, written about three years later.

Among the sources which speak of the followers rather than of Bonosus himself, three are worthy of note for their antiquity. Without qualification they all associate the Bonosians with the Photinians. The *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, dating back to perhaps the mid-fifth century in southern Gaul, say that the Bonosians sprang from the same error as the Photinians⁵. Gennadius of Marseilles (d. 492/505) observes in passing that the Photinians of his day were called Bonosians⁶. Avitus, bishop of

¹ *Supra*, p. 217, n. 2.

² *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*. DOBSCHÜTZ (TU 38:4, 1912), p. 74:246-262. PL 59:164a:

Haec et his similia, quae Simon Magus, Nichalaus, Cerinthus, Marcion, Basilides, Ebion, Paulus Samaritanus, Futinus, et Bonosus et qui similiter eadem errore decepti sunt ... confitemur esse damnata.

³ Vigilius, *Epistola (olim XV) ad universam ecclesiam*. PL 69:58b:

Anathemizamus etiam Paulum Samosatenum, Photinum, Bonosum, atque Nestorium, cum nefariis doctrinis suis ...

⁴ Vigilius, *Constitutum de tribus capitulis*. PL 69:103d:

Etenim satis habet, abundeque sufficere debet, quod damnantes atque anathemizantes cum Paulo Samosateno et Bonoso Nestorium, et e diverso cum Valentino atque Appollinare Eutychem simul et errores eorum ...

⁵ *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*. HEFELE-LECLERCQ, *op. cit.*, II, p. 467, "Bonosiacos autem ex eodem errore venientes" in canon 17 just after there had been question of the Photinians in the preceding canon. On the false attribution of the *Statuta* to the second Council of Arles, cf. *supra*, p. 206, n. 3.

⁶ Gennadius Massilienses, *De viris illustribus* 14. RICHARDSON, p. 66:23-29. PL 58:1068b:

Audentius, episcopus Hispanus, scripsit adversus Manichaeos et Sabellianos et Arianos maximeque speciali intentione contra Photinianos, qui nunc Bonosiaci dicuntur, librum quem praetitulavit *De fide adversum haereticos*, in quo ostendit antiquitatem Filii Dei coaeternalem Patri fuisse, nec initium deitatis tunc a Patre Deo acceperit cum Maria matre virgine homo Deo fabricante conceptus et natus est.

His mention of the Bonosians in the *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum*. PL 58:933d is ambiguous and may need to be corrected, perhaps only in punctuation:

... qui non in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti juxta regulam a Domino positam tincti sunt : ut sunt Pauliniani, Procliani, Borboritae, Siphori, qui nunc vocantur Bonosiani ; Photiniani, Montanitae. ...

Vienne in southern Gaul (494c-518), simply calls the Photinians by the name *Bonosians*, and from his comparison it can be gathered that the two parties were at one in denying Christ's divinity¹. Spanish witnesses on into the seventh century continue to identify Bonosians and Photinians, asserting especially that the two admitted only an adoptive divine filiation of Christ. After the seventh century there is no longer any record of the Bonosians, either in Spain or in Gaul².

Such, then, is the history of Bonosus' heresy in so far as it touches on the Marian doctrine of perpetual virginity which Ambrose was led to elaborate in reply. Stemming from a denial of Mary's perpetual virginity, Bonosus' error eventually bore the fruit of Photinianism, though probably not yet during the years when Ambrose, knowing what poison its root contained, delivered the first blows against it.

4. *Bonosus, Jovinian, and Helvidius*

It is enlightening to compare this third Marian heresy to those of Helvidius and Jovinian, which Ambrose had to face. Jovinian seems to have been led to deny Mary's virginity in partu, it will be remembered³, by his desire to prove that virginity was no more meritorious than the married state. The Catholic ascetical party would have lost one of its strongest arguments if she who was the model and inspiration of their practice of virginity were shown not to have been a virgin after all. Some years before Jovinian, against the same ascetics at Rome, Helvidius had laid down his attack from the same starting point. His had been a more blunt denial, in fact, since it implied a weakness of will in Mary who was unable to keep a virginity already miraculously secured. Jovinian refined the attack, in the sense of desiring only to subject Mary to the laws of nature which forbid that a mother remain at the same time a virgin. But in both instances the ulterior aim was the same:

¹ Avitus Viennensis, *Contra Eutychnianam Haeresim*, lib. 2. *Monumenta Germaniae historica, auctores antiquissimi*, 6:2, p. 26:26-29. PL 59:216b:

Unde respiciendum est hic, quantum Eutychniani Bonosiacis baratro profundiore mergantur. Illi (sc. Bonosiaci) Christo divinitatis honorem tantummodo adimunt, isti (sc. Eutychniani) et corporis veritatem. Photinus hominis personam nos adorare deridet, hic nebulam.

The same contrast between Bonosians and Eutychnians had been suggested by Vigilius in his *Constitutum*, *supra*, p. 220, n. 4

² Xavier LE BACHELET, *Bonose*, DTC, II. Paris 1905, col. 1029 f.

³ *Supra*, p. 142 s.

to deprive Christian virginity of its prize possession, the Virgin Mary. Jovinian's and Helvidius' Marian heresies were the backwash of the moral heresy that virginity is not superior to marriage.

Bonosus' Marian heresy, on the other hand, seems to have been the first waters preluding a tidal wave of doctrinal error. It is unknown what led Bonosus to deny that Mary remained a virgin. There is no inkling presently at hand that he was inspired by a moral attitude corresponding to that of Helvidius or Jovinian. That he began with his Marian heresy is quite plausible. But perhaps more endowed than this Roman counterparts with a taste for the speculative, his followers went on to the most grievous doctrinal distortion of the Christian faith possible, the denial that Christ is God. And it is for this latter aberration, term of the evolution of his doctrine, rather than for his initial error, that history indicted him.

Which of the three left the deepest mark? Such a question is of interest here only in terms of Ambrose and of the virginity of Mary. As an enemy of Mary, Helvidius comes first to mind, but that may be, as often, because history in the person of Jerome kept a better souvenir of him than of his comrades. Which of the three was the most redoubtable in Ambrose's eyes? Probably Bonosus. For, as regards the other obvious choice, Ambrose's reply to Jovinian was as succinct as it was prompt; the very language of *Ep. 42* shows how much he despised his adversary; recourse to the secular arm, with its anti-Manichaean measures, helped stamp out this dupery of a renegade monk, whose thought hardly outlived his name. "Cito ... ista haeresis oppressa et extincta est", Augustine could write in 428; and more significantly, "Nec usque ad deceptionem aliquorum sacerdotum potuit pervenire"¹. As for Helvidius, Ambrose did not take up the gauntlet thrown down by that heretic at nearby Rome – "jamdudum maluimus silere". But when bishop Bonosus, from a province two and a half times further removed from Milan than was Rome, repeated by and large the same Helvidian objections already roundly answered eight years before by Jerome, Ambrose felt obliged to reply, and even to return publicly to the charge in the out-of-the-way occasion offered by a virgin's veil-taking or by the later edition of the sermon he there delivered. History verified his apprehensions, for Bonosus' voice echoed down through two centuries as far away as Spain and in tones much graver than those which Jovinian and Helvidius had

¹ Augustine, *De Haer.* 82. PL 42:46a.

sounded. Ambrose had first-hand experience of the virulence of Photinianism; he sensed that in Bonosus he was combating the germs of that same disease. Therein lies the answer as to which adversary he deemed most formidable.

B. Bonosus' Condemnation

1. *The Council of Capua*

The importance which Ambrose attached to defending Mary's perpetual virginity against Bonosus is apparent from the way in which the bishop of Milan was brought into the affair. Bonosus' case is first mentioned in the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* as having been discussed by the Council of Capua. Ambrose was largely responsible for the convocation of this council, although its primary business was not to judge Bonosus but to try to solve the Meletian schism at Antioch. Two bishops, Flavius, who in general was supported by the Eastern hierarchy, and Paulinus, the choice of the Western, had long been disputing the see of Antioch. When shortly before his death in 388 Paulinus uncanonically consecrated a successor, Evagrius, friend of Eusebius of Vercelli and of Jerome, the case of the West was greatly weakened. Eager to reach a solution that would save them from having to support a cause thus compromised, they hoped for a council which might handle the situation more successfully than had the Council of Rome in 382. Ambrose is thought to have brought up the question of a council with the emperor Theodosius during the latter's residence at Milan and to have secured approval for a council to be held at Rome ¹. For some unknown reason, though, the council met at Capua, some hundred miles to the south of Rome. Following the policy of his predecessors with regard to councils convoked under imperial pressure, Pope Siricius did not attend but entrusted this council, as the one at Aquileia (381), to the leadership of Ambrose. Papal legates were present, but the consultations addressed to Ambrose following the council – they form the subject of *Ep. 56* and of the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* – show that Ambrose was the central figure. The group convened toward the end of 391 or the beginning of 392 ², and because it was winter

¹ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 399. (Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.* 5:23, offers the ground for DUDDEN's assumption.) The details here presented on the Council of Capua are drawn from this source.

² This date, due to TILLEMONT's demonstration, (*Mémoires*, X, 753 f., n. 41), is generally accepted. Cf. RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 340, n. 4.

practically only Western bishops attended, but in considerable numbers¹. Six years later the council was referred to as a *synodus plenaria* by the African Church², but this can be taken to mean simply *super-provincial*³.

The discussion of the Antiochean schism is of interest only in so far as it provided the formula which the Western bishops decided to apply to Bonosus' case as well. Feeling themselves ill-informed to adjudicate a dispute as distant as Antioch, they commissioned Theophilus of Alexandria with the Egyptian bishops, neutrals thus far in the affair, to pass judgment in a regional synod. The commission was executed around 393, though the quarrel did not die out completely until Evagrius' death in 398.

It is not known from what quarter Bonosus' name came up in the council's deliberations. The earliest source on the council, the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*, does not record specifically on what grounds he was arraigned, mentioning him only in connection with a denial of Mary's virginity post partum. At any rate, on the same principle as in the Antiochean case, the council referred Bonosus' judgment to a regional synod of his neighbors, especially of the Macedonians, to be presided over by Anysius, bishop of Thessalonica⁴.

Some have adduced the decision of the Capua to entrust the case to the bishop of Thessalonica as additional evidence that Bonosus' see was Sardica; had he been bishop of Naissus, they say, his judgment would have been assigned to his immediate superior, the metropolitan of Sardica, or to a group presided over by the latter⁵. The hypothesis is possible, but it is equally probable that the council would have preferred a third party, wielding the greater authority – possibly the authority of a papal vicar, as is to be seen – proper to a judgment for heresy. The council may in addition have gone on to seek a judge more impartial than would be an immediate superior. For, assuming that

¹ RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 340 f.

² *Codex canonum ecclesiae Africanae*, canon 48. (Council of Carthage, 397.) MANSI, III, 738.

³ S. L. GREENSLADE, *The Illyrian Churches and the Vicariate of Thessalonica*, JTS, 46 (1945), p. 27.

⁴ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 1 PL 16:1173a:

Sed cum hujusmodi fuerit concilii Capuensis iudicium, ut finitimi Bonoso atque ejus accusatoribus iudices tribuerentur; et praecipue Macedones qui cum episcopo Thessalonicensi, de ejus scriptis vel cognoscerent. ...

For the reading *vel cognoscerent*, cf. *ibid.*, note *a*, and *infra*, p. 228, n. 1.

⁵ RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 341 f., n. 9.

Ambrose has transcribed the decision of Capua faithfully, it reflected a most unprejudicial handling of the dispute between "Bonosus and his accusers", when it directed, "Ut finitimi Bonoso atque ejus accusatoribus iudices tribuerentur". Hence the demonstration that Bonosus' see was Sardica cannot with certitude obtain additional support from the council's selection of the bishop of Thessalonica as adjudicator.

2. Ambrose's Loyalty to Rome in the Bonosian Case

The commissioning of the bishop of Thessalonica in this affair raises the whole question of the Roman primacy in the fourth century and requires more ample treatment. As in the Jovinianist case, Ambrose's fidelity to Rome will be seen intimately associated with his defense of Marys virginity.

It has long been questioned whether the Roman pontiff had actually created *vicariates* in the Illyrian provinces this early (391), entrusting the heads of such sees with greater jurisdiction over their neighbors. The ground usually alleged by those who date these vicariates already from Oppe Damasus' time (366-384) is the growing desire of the Roman pontiff to offset thereby the influence of Constantinople over Illyria, at least from the viewpoint of jurisdiction. But it is probably true that no Roman vicariate would have to be supposed on such grounds, because: ① Almost certainly, in the Eastern-Western Empire division, ecclesiastical jurisdiction followed political jurisdiction. And politically Illyria had already long been a part of the Western Empire, normally of the Prefecture of Italy, though a separate prefecture of Illyricum existed from 357-361, and probably from 376/8-395. The eastern half of the area¹ seems to have passed to the Eastern Empire under Theodosius at the division in 379; but there is evidence for the thesis that this division did not last long, and that Gratian had already recovered Eastern Illyria late the following year, though the bishops of Eastern Illyria are found in 381 sitting at the Council of Constantinople while

¹ This half lay east of the line Belgrade-Drine River-Mouth of the Catarro. Scholars differ as to the number of provinces comprised in it, since their creation and suppression cannot be dated. Eastern Illyria, in general, may be said to have included Macedonia, Achaia, and Dacia, in the last of which Sardica was located. Thessalonica became the residence of the prefect of this eastern portion. Cf. Marin TADIN, *La Lettre 91 de saint Basile, a-t-elle été adressée à l'évêque d'Aquilée, Valérien?* RSR, 37 (1950), p. 459.

their brethren in Western Illyria met at Aquileia¹. At any rate, all of Illyria would be western again by the time of Bonosus' case.² Even without a Roman vicariate in Illyria, furthermore, the province thinks of itself as juridically a part of the Western Empire. Bonosus, for example, recognizes that he is a westerner, since his appeal is directed not toward Constantinople but to Ambrose of Milan. And this, despite the fact that in Constantinople he could perhaps have expected, if not intervention, at least the favorable ear that Eunomius, preaching around the same time a similar error, had got³. This all points, therefore, to an Illyria whose western ties would have existed even had there not been a vicariate of the Roman pontiff in Thessalonica already under Acholius (d. 383/4), who preceded the present incumbent, Anysius.

But it is going too far to conclude that, regarding a vicariate of Thessalonica, "the case of Bonosus is strongly *against* its existence in 391-2"³. Without either demanding or excluding its existence, Bonosus' conduct and especially the commission which Capua directed to Thessalonica would seem to harmonize perfectly therewith.

For certainly the council's selection of the bishop of Thessalonica as judge demands some sort of explanation. The most reasonable is that Anysius of Thessalonica enjoyed above other Illyrian bishops the newly acquired prestige of being the vicar of the Roman pontiff. Yet assuming that Illyria was again united as a province under western jurisdiction, the most important city would still be its capital, Sirmium. And, while it is true that Sirmium had for long been a center of heresy under Photinus (345-351) and Germinius (351-376), it had fully a decade before the Council of Capua been restored to orthodoxy. Its orthodox bishop Anemius had, in fact, owed his election and consecration to pressure exerted at great risk of imperial disfavor by the man who presided over the Council of Capua, Ambrose himself. Zeiller places Anemius' death around 392. If he was still alive at the time of Capua (391-early 392)

¹ TADIN, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

² *Supra*, p. 210.

³ GREENSLADE, *op. cit.*, p. 29. Underlining added. On the vicariate of Thessalonica, cf. ERICH CASPAR, *Geschichte des Papsttums*, I: *Römische Kirche und Imperium Romanum*. Tübingen 1930, p. 293-295. CASPAR's presentation of the Bonosian affair there and especially on p. 283, however, is compromised by the fact that he neglected to recognize Ambrose as the author of the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*, and thus has the Illyrians appealing to Siricius instead of to Ambrose. Moreover, contrary to the evidence presented *supra*, p. 205-209, CASPAR speaks simply of a Bonosus of Naissus.

it would not have been impossible for the council to have named him at Ambrose's suggestion to handle Bonosus. Geographically Bonosus' see was not much closer to Thessalonica than to the provincial capital Sirmium. And the hegemony of the papal vicariate of Thessalonica was not so long established as to be incontestable in Illyria. Bonosus himself knew all this, and his first recorded reaction is an appeal to Ambrose. From the *Epistola* it can be gathered that the neighboring bishops commissioned by Capua to judge him did so at least partially, in excluding him from his see. Bonosus had appealed thereupon to Ambrose, asking whether it would be permissible to take possession of his see by force. It seems, therefore, that the metropolitan of Sardica had decided to play off Ambrose (who stood behind Sirmium) against the Roman pontiff (represented by the vicar of Thessalonica) and thus to exploit the Rome-Milan rivalry which periodically strained the Church in Italy. Such cunning well befits the character of this man who, whatever he was, certainly was more than a non-entity.

Ambrose's reply, which he describes in the *Epistola*, is surprising by its mild tenor and suggests that Bonosus enjoyed more prestige than history has recorded of him:

Denique cum Bonosus episcopus post iudicium vestrum misisset ad fratrem nostrum Ambrosium, qui ejus sententiam consuleret, interdictam sibi Ecclesiam irrumpere atque ingredi; responsum est ei, quod *nihil temerandum foret, sed omnia modeste, patienter, ordine gerenda* neque contra sententiam vestram tentandum aliquid; ut quod videretur vobis justitiae convenire, statueretis, quibus hanc synodus dederat auctoritatem ¹.

Had Bonosus been a person of little consequence it would be incredible for Ambrose to have cited such a tempered reply of his own, particularly in a letter in which his whole aim is to excite the Illyrian bishops to take duty manfully in hand and pronounce judgment.

What is of particular interest is Ambrose's infrangible allegiance to Rome, shown by his refusal to lend an ear to Bonosus. The same appears from his reply to the Illyrian bishops who, though commissioned by Capua to judge Bonosus, had written to Milan for counsel. How explain their reluctance to proceed to a definitive judgment? It could have been that they simply shirked the responsibility. Perhaps too they did not think the council had in mind to entrust them with more than an

¹ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 2. PL 16:1173b.

examination of Bonosus' writings¹ and possible exclusion from his see as a sanction, without any condemnation on doctrinal grounds. At any rate, they refrained from exercising the Capuan mandate to a greater extent than to forbid Bonosus access to his see and referred the case back to Ambrose for further enlightenment. His reply, known as the *Epistola de Causa Bonosi*, is to disclaim competence in the matter – not, to be sure, that he feared the responsibility of pronouncing himself, but because he knew that the council's intention was to delegate judgment in its widest sense to the bishop of Thessalonica:

Vestrum est igitur, qui hoc recepistis iudicium, sententiam ferre de omnibus, nec refugiendi vel elabendi, vel accusatoribus vel accusato copiam dare; vicem enim synodi recepistis, quos ad examinandum synodus elegit².

By his refusal to take the initiative in an affair which, since it involved Mary's virginity, was surely close to his heart, Ambrose shows as much his respect for the authority of the council as for the pontiff whose prestige was at stake in the action of the bishop of Thessalonica.

The same loyalty to Rome may be remarked in passing in the advice which during the same year Ambrose dispatched to Theophilus of Alexandria; the latter, in carrying out the instructions which he in turn had received from Capua on the Antiochean schism, had also encountered difficulties and petitioned Ambrose for advice, obtaining the following reply:

Sane referendum arbitramur ad sanctum fratrem nostrum Romanae sacerdotem Ecclesiae; quoniam praesumimus ea te iudicaturum, quae etiam illi displicere nequeant³.

Admittedly a Milan-Rome tension had once existed; but Ambrose had replaced it with unswerving loyalty to the Pontiff.

¹ In the *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 1. PL 16:1173a, reporting the decision of the Council over which he had presided, Ambrose writes:

Sed cum huiusmodi fuerit concilii Capuensis iudicium, ut finitimi Bonoso atque ejus accusatoribus iudices tribuerentur, et praecipue Macedones, qui cum episcopo Thessalonicensi, *de ejus scriptis vel cognoscerent* ...

All the MSS and editions available to the Maurist editors, as they noted, read "de ejus scriptis vel cognoscerent", but the Maurists, embarrassed by a *scriptis* without the correlative apparently demanded by *vel*, corrected the reading to *factis vel scriptis*. The text, however, needs no correction if the sense of *vel* is taken to be *at least*. The decision of Capua would then mean that Bonosus and his accusers should be heard by their neighbors, especially by the Macedonians under Anysius, who should at least take cognizance of his writings.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ Ambrose, *Ep.* 56:7. PL 16:1172a.

It has not been aside the point to bring his allegiance to Rome into focus in the Bonosian affair. For, as will be recalled, the whole case of Jovinian was similarly tripped off in Ambrose's diocese by an exchange of letters with Siricius, and one of Ambrose's first replies to Jovinian was an appeal to the Roman creed, which Ambrose so admired.

3. The "*Ep. de Causa Bonosi*": Contents, Chronology

In the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*, therefore, Ambrose declines to countermand the decision of Capua to subdelegate the case entirely to the Illyrians. But his pastoral zeal and love for the Virgin do not permit him to conceal his opinion of Bonosus' Marian error:

Sane non possumus negare de Mariae filiis, jure reprehensum, meritoque vestram sanctitatem abhorruisse, quod ex eodem utero virginali, ex quo secundum carnem Christus natus est, alius partus effusus sit ¹.

Against an aberration like this Ambrose sketches two arguments, both to be developed in a later refutation of Bonosus: 1. Christ would not have chosen for his mother a virgin who did not have the will to remain such; 2. Christ would not have entrusted his Mother to John on Calvary had she been fully the husband of Joseph. To the first proof he adds the warning referred to above, that a denial of Mary's perpetual virginity is support lent to the Jewish heresy that Christ's generation was not virginal, support particularly perilous if it comes from a bishop. After the second proof, which here appears without the lessons on maternal love and filial piety elsewhere drawn from the Calvary scene ², Ambrose adds his customary explanation that Christ does not condone divorce by separating Mary from Joseph. This entire pronouncement, written in the name of the synod of Milan over which Ambrose was presiding, occupies more than half the *Epistola* and eloquently betrays the pressure he was bringing to bear on the Illyrians to condemn such a blasphemy against the Mother of God.

It is impossible to ascertain how long the Illyrians delayed in responding to such pressure. Practically the only date in the whole affair which can be determined is that of the Council of Capua, which, as has been noted ³, was most probably convened in the winter of 391-392.

¹ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 3. PL 16:1173.

² *Supra*, p. 190. ³ *Supra*, p. 223.

Though it would be interesting to learn how much time elapsed after Capua's commission and Ambrose's strong reiteration of it in the *Epistola*, the task is well nigh impossible from extant sources.

It is difficult enough, in fact, to settle on the sequence of Ambrose's various pronouncements on the case, to Bonosus (in the reply referred to in the *Epistola*), to the Illyrians (the *Epistola* itself) and to his own faithful (the *De Inst. Virg.*). Chronologies proposed before the Ambrosian authenticity of the *Epistola* was recognized are naturally impaired by all sorts of extraneous considerations¹, or else cannot correctly evaluate the influence of one reply on the others². Dudden, who recognizes Ambrose's voice in all three declarations offers this unacceptable chronology after Capua: in 392 (Easter) – *De Institutione Virginis*; in 393 (early part) – Third Council of Milan condemning Jovinian and dispatching the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* to the Macedonian bishops³. Two considerations which led this Ambrosian scholar to his arrangement of the events:

1. The Milanese council which dispatched the *Epistola* on the error regarding virginity post partum was the same which passed judgment on Jovinian for the heresy on virginity in partu, and this council, thinks Dudden, was held in 393⁴.

2. Ambrose's *De Inst. Virg.* must precede the *Epistola*, in Dudden's opinion, because in referring to Bonosus in the *De Inst. Virg.* Ambrose indicates that this is his first public utterance on the subject. This indeed leads Dudden to establish as date for the work the Easter of 392, because the *De Inst. Virg.* was largely composed of a discourse pronounced at the veiling of the virgin Ambrosia, and the Easter of 392 would be the first occasion after the Council of Capua when, according to the customs then prevailing in the Milanese calendar, such a veiling would normally be held.

On examination, it appears that in neither of the two reasons listed is the argument conclusive:

1. As to the Milanese synod from which the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* was sent, nowhere in the available sources is it even implied that this same

¹ For a striking one, due to a prejudicial view of the Roman primacy, cf. *supra*, p. 205, n. 1 on CAMPENHAUSEN.

² So RAUSCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 341-343 (on Capua, Ambrose's reply to Bonosus, the *Epistola*, and Bonosus' condemnation by the Illyrians), and p. 344 (on the *De Inst. Virg.*).

³ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 713 f., 402, 696.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

body had assembled to judge Jovinian. Of the Milanese synod that discussed Bonosus nothing more is known than that bare fact. But there is no difficulty in admitting the existence of such a synod, even if only on the witness of the *Epistola*; there are probably, after all, other Milanese synods in Ambrose's day of which not even such a meagre trace remains. Furthermore, as seen above ¹, the Milanese synod that discussed Jovinian did not meet as late as 393, but even before Capua, probably somewhere in 390 as traditionally held. Hence the two cases were not discussed together and the Milanese synodal pronouncement on Bonosus is certainly earlier than 393.

2. The fact that in the *De Inst. Virg.* Ambrose indicates that he is making his first public declaration on Bonosus does not mean that the *Ep. de causa Bonosi* cannot be a later declaration. The opinion of this particular Milanese synod, written up as a letter by Ambrose and sent to a Macedonian bishop, was not on the same plane of publicity as a sermon to the faithful. On the contrary, in line with his determination, clearly expressed in the letter, not to intervene in this case delegated to the Illyrians, Ambrose would hardly give such a letter publicity; for were it commonly known what pressure he was actually applying therein for a condemnation in face of their dilly-dallying, the Illyrians would indeed appear in a bad light. Ambrose was too diplomatic, as appears from the very tenor of the letter, to prejudice them against his advice by divulging it to others. Despite the fact that Ambrose's first public utterance is the *De Inst. Virg.*, therefore, the *Ep. de causa Bonosi* could precede it.

That it actually did precede it is apparent from the tenor of Ambrose's pronouncements in the two documents.

In the *Ep. de causa Bonosi* his diplomacy with regard to the bishops charged with the case has just been mentioned:

Vestrum est ... sententiam ferre de omnibus.... Sane non possumus negare de Mariae filiis jure reprehensum meritoque vestram sanctitatem abhorruisse.... ²

"Non possumus negare": Ambrose masters his ire to express himself so reservedly on a theme like Mary's virginity; his style is to be compared to that of *Ep. 42*, which though also a synodal report did not prevent him from speaking out his mind on Jovinian in terms worthy almost

¹ *Supra*, p. 152 f.

² *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 1 and 3. PL 16:1173ab.

of a Jerome. In the *Ep. de causa Bonosi*, diplomacy is his watchword: he exercises it first towards the Illyrian bishops. Regarding Bonosus it is hardly less evident: in the *Epistola* he cites his reply to Bonosus strikingly measured in tone, refers to the pending case as a suit between Bonosus and his accusers, and calls for a decision in terms not of condemnation but of justice to be exercised between two litigants.

The *De Inst. Virg.*, on the other hand, shows an Ambrose who minces his words far less. In the name of pastoral solicitude for his own flock he can afford to be more outspoken than when urging the Illyrians to pronounce a judgment which he almost puts in their mouths. Hence he declares himself unequivocally:

...Cum omnes ad cultum virginitatis sanctae Mariae advocentur exemplo, fuerunt qui eam negarent virginem perseverasse. Hoc tantum *sacrilegium* silere jamdudum maluimus: sed quia causa vocavit in medium, ita ut ejus prolapsionis etiam episcopus argueretur, *indemnatum non putamus relinquendum*....¹

The first obvious difference in tone between this pronouncement and the previous one in the *Epistola* is the severity which Ambrose manifests here towards Bonosus. He would have gone as far as to arraign the bishop by name, were it in his style to cite names. It is idle to pretend, as does Dudden², that he shields the proper name of Bonosus in order not to prejudice a judgment pending in Illyria; his hearers surely knew to whom he referred by "a bishop". Had not his people already been au courant of this affair, Ambrose clearly says, he would have kept his silence; but he feels it his duty now to speak out. To condemn Bonosus in Illyria is, indeed, the responsibility of Illyrians; to ward off the danger when it menaces Milan is a duty Ambrose will not shirk. And such a menace had actually developed when the litigation in Illyria came to the public's attention in Milan as well, thanks no doubt to the flux and reflux of news along the overland route that bound Milan to the East via Illyria.

Thus Bonosus is no longer handled as tenderly as in the *Epistola*. It is inconceivable that after the forthright words on the heretic in the *De Inst. Virg.*, Ambrose should afterwards be heard in tones as disen-

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:35. PL 16:314b.

² DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 696. Little can be proved from Ambrose's reticence about namens. In the whole Jovinianist affair, public if any ever was, the name of Jovinian occurs only once under Ambrose's pen, at the end of *Ep.* 42 heading a list of the nine heretics condemned at Rome.

gaged as in the *Epistola*, let alone that he should make an issue of a reply in which he had once counseled the heretic simply to wait, "omnia modeste, patienter, ordine gerenda"¹. Quite unmistakably the *De Inst. Virg.* is a later word on Bonosus.

It may also be a word intended to reach the ears of the procrastinating Macedonians. Is Ambrose using his own faithful as a sounding-board so that his voice pronouncing a condemnation may carry to Thessalonica and encourage the bishops there to shoulder their responsibility? His own mind is clear: "Hoc tantum sacrilegium ... *indemnatum* non putamus relinquendum." He fears not to speak it, although the case is still in the stage of a *causa*, and the defendant still uncondemned: "ejus prolapsionis etiam episcopus *argueretur*".

Ambrose's urgent pressure for a decision thus recalls his prompt action in the condemnation of Jovinian for the error against Mary's virginity in partu. In both cases, with a zeal not surprising in a former jurist, he wants to see the widespread belief in Mary's virginity in partu and post partum put on the record, so to say, in the form of an official anathema of the contrary errors. The time has come when the praises of Mary sung from the pulpit especially throughout northern Italy must be written in the acts of synods. As usual, a heretic gives the occasion. Ambrose's service to Mariology in the West and his influence in stemming heresy is truly far-reaching: in the Jovinianist affair he appends a clause to the condemnation pronounced in the center of Christendom, a clause destined therefore to stabilize the faith of the entire Western Church in the delicate question of the virginity in partu; in Bonosus' case he carries the firm belief of the West in Mary the Virgin to the very threshold of an Eastern Church torn by Arianism and by the errors in its wake, errors which with Nestorius were soon to assail the Mother of God as well.

4. Summary of Events in Bonosus' Condemnation

It has been shown that contrary to Dudden's chronology the *De Inst. Virg.* follows the *Ep. de causa Bonosi*. Furthermore, the date which the scholar proposes for the *De Inst. Virg.*, Easter 392, can be accepted only with the greatest reserve. For a date so closely following on the Council of Capua (held in winter 391-392) hardly leaves time for all the develop-

¹ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 2. PL 16:1173b.

ments which can now be set down as a summary of the history of Bonosus' condemnation:

1. Mandate regarding Bonosus given by the Council of Capua to Anysius of Thessalonica and his Macedonian neighbors (winter 391-392).
2. Preliminary exclusion of Bonosus from his see, pronounced by Anysius' group, who also expressed abhorrence of his Marian error (cf. *Epistola*, 3).
3. Bonosus' appeal to Ambrose.
4. Ambrose's reply to Bonosus: "modeste, patienter, ordine gerenda...."
5. Case referred by Anysius' group to Ambrose for advice or judgment.
6. Ambrose's reply to Anysius,
 - a) declining to intervene;
 - b) advising condemnation: "Non possumus negare de Mariae filiis jure reprehensum."
7. Further procrastination by Anysius' group. (This seems demanded to explain Ambrose's change of tone by the time of the *De Inst. Virg.*)
8. *De Inst. Virg.* with Ambrose's forthright condemnation of Bonosus' Marian error: "Hoc tantum sacrilegium ... indemnatum non putamus relinquendum."

The few months between Capua and the Easter of 392 would hardly allow all this buildup. Hence the date of the *De Inst. Virg.*, which Dudden determines primarily by its relation to Bonosus, should be retarded to the next probable dates when a virgin's veiling, the occasion for the sermon in the *De Inst. Virg.*, could have taken place¹; the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, 392, the Christmas of 392, the Easter of 393, or some intervening date on which a veiling, though apparently exceptional in view of what is known of the Milanese calendar, was always possible. Since the case is still undecided by the Illyrians at the time of the *De Inst. Virg.*, the date of this work could not prudently be retarded beyond

X ¹ Raymond d'IZARNY, *Mariage et consécration virginale au 4^e siècle*. Supplément à la Vie Spirituelle, 24 (15 février 1953), p. 106: At Rome the veil was given on Epiphany, in the octave of Easter, and on the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, judging from the directive of Pope Gelasius at the end of the fifth century aimed at limiting the days of bestowal and presumably returning to these three days because they were the ancient practice. D'IZARNY suggests that, despite the difference in place, the same dates were followed at Milan: Christmas, the vigil of Easter (instead of the octave) and June 29. On these three dates cf. Ambrose, *Exh. Virg.* 7. PL 16:348d; Nicetas, *De Lapsu Virginis* 5:19. PL 16:372a; Gelasius, *Decret.* 12. THIEL (*Epistulae Romanorum Pontificum*, I, Braunsberg 1868), p. 369. PL 59:52b.

those suggested, for this would presuppose a procrastination on their part almost too culpable to imagine in orthodox circles. Therefore Bonosus' definitive judgment by his neighboring bishops, attested to only in the *condemnatum* of Innocent's two letters¹, must have followed relatively soon after the *De Inst. Virg.*, and the heretic's death sometime before 409, the date of Innocent's first letter.

By that time Ambrose's forthright rebuttal, the longest he delivered in any Marian polemic, had removed any Bonosian menace from Milan.

¹ *Supra*, p. 217, n. 1.

Ambrose's Defense of Mary's Perpetual Virginity

Ambrose's formal refutation of Bonosus is found in the *De Institutione Virginis*, beginning with chapter 5 : 35, where it is incorporated into the discourse delivered at Milan at the veiling of the virgin Ambrosia, a daughter of the bishop's friend Eusebius of Bologna. It is difficult to decide to what extent the polemic was actually entered into on such an occasion; most probably the details of the refutation as it now stands were added later. In its definitive form the work dates from sometime after the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*, and is the final word that Ambrose pronounced on a heresy that had occupied him since the council of Capua.

It will be helpful to outline his refutation before taking it up in detail. As remarked above, Bonosus' argument was probably presented with additions from other heretics who denied Mary's perpetual virginity. His case is stated as follows:

1. Mary is called a "mulier" (Jn. 2:4).
2. "Antequam convenirent" implies that marital relations followed later (Mt. 1:18).
3. "Non cognovit eam donec peperit" implies the same (Mt. 1:25).
4. "Noluit eam traducere" shows that Joseph knew Mary was not a virgin (Mt. 1:19).
5. "Fratres Domini" were other children of Mary (Mt. 12:46 f.; 13:55 f.; Mc. 3:31 f.; 6:3; Luc. 8:19 f.; Jn. 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19).
6. Mary is called a "mulier" (Gal. 4:4).

Ambrose replies to these objections in strict order, treating the last one together with the first, and interpolating before the one based on the "fratres Domini" a new objection arising from the term "conjux" which Scripture applies to Mary (Mt. 1:24). He then passes to a series

of nine arguments of varying length in which he develops reasons why it was fitting or necessary that Mary remain a virgin. His entire refutation, therefore, takes on the following plan:

A. Replies to Bonosus, concerning the following Scriptural locutions:

1. "Mulier"
2. "Antequam convenirent"
3. "Non cognovit eam donec peperit"
4. "Noluit eam traducere"
5. "Conjux"
6. "Fratres Domini"

B. Arguments of fittingness for Mary's perpetual virginity:

1. Christ would choose as *Mother* only one who willed to remain a virgin.
2. Christ intended Mary to be the *model of virgins*.
3. Christ wanted His Mother to have the *special reward* of virgins.
4. Mary was for too much *aware of her dignity* to abandon her virginity.
5. Joseph was a "*just man*" and therefore respected her.
6. Christ's *entrusting Mary to John* on Calvary proves that she had remained a virgin.
7. Mary's *courage on Calvary* is proof that she had the strength to keep her virginity.
8. Mary *distributed the grace of virginity* to others.
9. Mary is the "*closed door*" of Ezech. 44:4.

The detailed exposition of each of these fifteen replies and arguments will be taken up throughout this chapter.

A. Ambrose's Replies to Bonosus

1. "Mulier" (Jn. 2:4, Gal. 4:4)

De mulieris nomine quid moveamur? Ad sexum retulit; non enim corruptelae, sed sexus vocabulum est. Vulgi usus non praejudicat veritati ¹.

To Bonosus' first objection Ambrose gives the traditional reply that *mulier* is the generic name for woman, by which her sex and not her entrance into marital relations is designated. Tertullian himself had

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:36. PL 16:315a.

already developed this reply ¹. Jerome, too, in his *Commentary on Galatians* just a few years before Ambrose, had expressed the argument in almost identical terms, tracing the sense of *mulier* back to the ambiguous Greek term γυνή:

Non enim necesse erat semper quasi caute et timide « virginem » dicere, cum « mulier » *sexum magis significet quam copulam viri*, et secundum intelligentiam Graecitatis, γυνή tam « uxor » quam « mulier » valeat interpretari ².

Despite his categorical definition – “Non enim corruptelae sed sexus vocabulum est” – Ambrose was aware that in the Latin of his day *mulier* was also contrasted to *virgo*; such is the concession he makes in saying that the popular meaning of a word (*mulier* as non-virgin) does not exclude the wider reality also designated by it (*mulier* as woman): “Vulgi usus non praejudicat veritati.” But Jerome shows himself even more aware than Ambrose of the fact that *mulier* popularly designated a non-virgin, as is evident in the words just cited from his *Commentary on Galatians*, and particularly from the following, which occur a chapter later in the same work:

Verum *abusive* virgo « mulier » appellata est, propter eos qui illam fuisse virginem nesciebant. Ut itaque propter illos, qui sanctam Mariam arbitrabantur maritum habere, « mulier » pro « virgine » posita est ³.

Hence, if this *Commentary* was known to Ambrose, he did not go as far in recognizing the importance of the *non-virgin* sense which current usage gave to *mulier*.

Passing from profane to Scriptural vocabulary, Ambrose confirms the sense in which he defined *mulier* by citing Gen. 2:22, where at her very creation before there was any question of marital relations Eve was already called *mulier*. This familiar argument also dates at least as far back as Tertullian ⁴. Ambrose states it thus:

Denique virginitas primum hoc nomen accepit ; nam cum sumpsisset Deus unam de costis Adae, et supplevisset carnem in locum ipsius : « Aedificavit, inquit, eam in mulierem. » Utique adhuc virum non cognoverat, et jam « mulier » vocabatur ⁵.

¹ *Infra*, n. 4.

² *Com. in Ep. ad Gal.* 2:4:4. PL 26:372b.

³ *Ibid.*, 2:5:18. PL 414b.

⁴ *De virg. vel.* OEHLER, I, p. 891. PL 2:897b: “Sic mulierem vocans virginem Mariam quemadmodum et Genesis Evam.”

⁵ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:36. PL 16:315a.

He even goes further to cite Gen. 2:23, in which the etymology of *woman* was explained by Adam himself at the moment of Eve's creation:

Rationem quoque nominis hujus Scriptura non tacuit dicens quia « Dixit Adam : os de ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea. Haec vocabitur 'mulier' quoniam de viro suo sumpta est. » Quia « sumpta est », inquit, de viro suo, non quia virum experta. Itaque quamdiu in paradiso fuit, « mulier » vocata est, et cognita viro non erat : ubi autem ejecta est de paradiso, tunc legitur quia « Adam cognovit Evam mulierem suam » et tunc « concepit et peperit filium ». Primus igitur solutus est nodus ¹.

Scholars have deduced from Ambrose's work that he did not know Hebrew ². It is interesting, then, to hear him draw a confirmation of his sense of *mulier* from this verse of Scripture; for the etymology recorded in Gen. 2:23 is evident only in the Hebrew where the word for *woman* (ishah) closely resembles that for *man* (ish) ³. Ignorant of this similarity in the Hebrew, Ambrose was little aided by the Greek versions at hand, which like the Septuagint lost the resemblance in translating the two words as γυνή and ἄνθρωπος. His Latin version of Genesis – or, as frequently, the Latin translation of the verse which he himself made from the Greek ⁴ – still shielded the verbal similarity with *mulier* and *vir*. It is thanks to Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew that the Vulgate recovered the resemblance of the two Hebrew words in translating: "Haec vocabitur *virago*, quoniam de *viro* sumpta est." Unable, therefore, to suspect the meaning hidden in *mulier* ... *viro* in the verse of Genesis as he had translated it, Ambrose shifted his attention to the *sumpta est* following

¹ *Loc. cit.*

² Ambrose implies that he did not read Hebrew, *In Ps.* 40:36. CSEL 64 254:1f. PL 14:1084b: "Ut asseruerunt qui librum legerunt in Hebraicis litteris scriptum." Cf. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 456, n. 5. This passage of the *De Inst. Virg.* 5:36 confirms DUDDEN's deduction.

³ This is not the place to enter on the discussion as to the genuine roots of the two words. Suffice it to remark that Gen. 2:23 is at least an example of *popular etymology* which the sacred writer was inspired to adduce in narrating to the people of his own tongue the origin of woman.

⁴ Cf. DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 456:

He was familiar, however, with the Septuagint (which in his time was of greatest authority in the Church); and with the versions of Aquila and Symmachus; the version of Theodotion is quoted only in the commentary on Ps. 44. He appears to have had access to a copy of Origen's *Hexapla*. He preferred to study the Old Testament in the Greek, since he considered that language more expressive.

Each statement is amply documented from Ambrose's works.

viro, and concluded with an opposition that at least Latin readers would seize: “*Quia sumpta est, inquit, de viro suo, non quia virum experta.*”¹

2. *Antequam convenirent* (Mt. 1:18)

The shortest reply of all is reserved to the second objection:

Consuetudo autem divinae Scripturae ea est, ut causam quae suscepta est astruat, incidentem differat².

A perfect example of Ambrose’s verbatim repetition of formulas which pleased him! In the *Exp. Luc.* a few years earlier he had written:

Qui causam agit satis putat quod causae est dicere, redundantia non requirit; satis enim est ei ut causam susceptam adstruat, incidentem differat³.

Ambrose went on to develop his thought in the *Exp. Luc.*: The evangelist intended in the “*antequam convenirent*” to demonstrate only the virginal generation of Christ (the “*causam susceptam*” in the pericope Mt. 1: 18-25, which begins: “*Christi autem generatio sic erat: Cum esset desponsata ... antequam convenirent ...*”). Matthew did not bother to assert that Mary always remained a virgin, since that was aside from his thesis (“*causam incidentem*”) and would have even left the impression that he was defending Mary’s virginity rather than asserting the mystery of Christ’s generation⁴. In passing it may be observed that Ambrose used the formula “*causam quae suscepta est, etc.*” in the *Exp. Luc.* as the alternative reply to an objection based on the “*Non cognovit eam donec peperit filium*” seven verses later in Matthew’s pericope (Mt. 1:25), the objection which will be taken up next in the *De Inst. Virg.* The formula, of course, holds for both places in Matthew where *antequam* and *donec* occur.

But in the *De Inst. Virg.* why did Ambrose not repeat at least part of his previous explanation of the formula? Perhaps he felt that the explanation had been well enough learnt to come to the mind of his faithful with simply a few catchwords. It is not to be excluded, either, that he left his reply here undeveloped because Jerome’s words on the same difficulty of *antequam*, the first taken up in the *Adv. Helv.*, still

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:36. PL 16:315a.

² *Ibid.*, 5:37. PL 315b.

³ *Exp. Luc.* 2:6. CSEL 32:4 44:21-23. PL 15:1555ab.

⁴ *Supra*, p. 85 f.

rang in the ears of the faithful; Jerome's examples on the use of *antequam*, in fact, are not easily forgotten ¹. His reply in the *Adv. Helv.* had also suggested a formula:

« Ante », praepositio, licet saepe consequentiam indicet, tamen nonnumquam ea tantum quae prius cogitabantur ostendat ².

But Ambrose for once takes the palm for a greater succinctness, to which Jerome would in turn attain in the *Commentary on Matthew*, written in 398, fifteen years after the *Adv. Helv.*:

Quod autem dicitur « antequam convenirent » non sequitur ut postea convenerint; sed Scriptura quod factum non sit ostendit ³.

Neither Ambrose's reply nor Jerome's, however, recognizes what is today generally taken to be the genuine sense of the Gospel locution *antequam convenirent*. Both doctors assume that *convenire* and the Greek *συνέρχομαι* have the meaning "to have marital relations". Such is the sense given it by their adversaries, Helvidius and Bonosus, along with many other men of orthodox as well as unorthodox stamp on to the present day ⁴. Neither Jerome nor Ambrose contests this meaning, which alone permits the *antequam convenirent* to be distorted into an argument against Mary's perpetual virginity. For if the verb here has the other sense "to begin common life, to come together", then the evangelist simply states that "before they began their life together" Mary was found with child; subsequent events make it clear that the action which is thus excluded by *antequam* up to the moment in question was actually later realized: Mary did later begin to live together with Joseph. But this is obviously not to say that she lost her virginity.

Thus to recognize a different meaning in *convenire* is a more telling reply to the objection than to dispute the meaning of *antequam*. The argument based on *antequam*, of its very nature, cannot be conclusive, as Jerome admitted above in the *Adv. Helv.*:

« Ante », praepositio, licet saepe consequentiam indicet, tamen nonnumquam ea tantum quae prius cogitabantur ostendit.

Later in the *Com. in Matt.* Jerome did not envisage grammatically the ambiguous force of *antequam* but simply replied that by this word in

¹ *Adv. Helv.* 4. PL 23:186ab.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ *Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei* 1:1:18. PL 26:24b.

⁴ E.g. François CEUPPENS, *Theologia Biblica*, IV: *De Mariologia Biblica*. Romae 1948, p. 64.

the context of Mt. 1:18 Scripture intended only to exclude the *convenire* in the past without pronouncing on the future. He thus renounces trying to give any *general* rule about *antequam* as used elsewhere. Ambrose, however, in his second version of the reply (*De Inst. Virg.*) does give a general rule: “*Consuetudo divinae scripturae ea est....*” But it is not a grammatical rule – and wisely not, for with Jerome he saw too that no such general rule is possible for *antequam*; – it is rather a general rule of composition: one builds up his main thesis (Christ’s virginal generation), deferring the incidental one (Mary’s perpetual virginity).

Ambrose’s reply thus proves itself superior to Jerome’s. On the plane of a purely grammatical discussion, a conclusive answer is unattainable: Jerome was surely the scholar to come nearest one. Ambrose rises above the grammar of *antequam* to seize the central thought in the whole pericope which Matthew announces in these words: “*Christi autem generatio sic est....*” This is, beyond all doubt, the evangelist’s main thesis, his *causa suscepta* on which alone he concentrates.

For that very reason it is remarkable that of the two doctors, Ambrose at least did not suspect the alternative meaning of *convenire* – *συνέχουμαι*. To translate the expression “before they came together” would not only have dissolved the objection, but would have brought into clearer light the first half of the well worked out thesis (*causa suscepta*) in the passage Mt. 1:18-25. The evangelist is intent on demonstrating that Christ was virginally conceived, or to adopt the exact viewpoint in this passage, that Christ had no earthly father. To this end he deems it sufficient to show that Joseph was not Christ’s father, and this he does in two stages: 1. The pregnancy of Mary, Joseph’s espoused wife, became known before they had begun to live together, and far from being responsible for it, Joseph even contemplated renouncing the marriage – secretly though, because his *justice* led him to leave this mysterious turn of events in the life of his betrothed into the hands of God rather than those of human judges (vv. 18-19). An angel, however, tells him to go through with the first plan of contracting the marriage, since Mary’s child is of the Holy Spirit (vv. 20-23). 2. Joseph contracts the marriage definitively (v. 24), then, and the two spouses take up residence together; but even under these circumstances Joseph respects Mary’s virginity, so that without being known by her husband she gives birth to a son (v. 25) ¹.

¹ Marie-Joseph LAGRANGE, *Evangelie selon saint Matthieu*, 2nd ed. Paris, 1923,

The *antequam convenirent* of v. 18, therefore, refers to the time of the espousals, the first period in which Matthew asserts Christ's virginal generation; it is parallel to the *accepit conjugem suam* of v. 24, which introduces the second period, that of their married life together, in which Matthew takes care again to assert that the child was not the fruit of natural generation. Verse 25 ("And he did not know her....") is not a simple repetition of v. 18 ("She was found, before they came together, to be with child"), as though the demonstration of virginal conception had been already concluded in v. 23 with the angel's explanation to Joseph¹. Rather, it is an insistence that, despite the cohabitation of the spouses, the marriage was never consummated, so that on no conceivable ground could the child ever be explained as their natural child. Furthermore, having asserted that Joseph undertook to be the child's *legal* father (v. 24), the evangelist believed it proper to emphasize that he was not the *natural* father (v. 25)².

The question is, then, why Ambrose did not recognize these two moments in the development of the evangelist's *causa suscepta*; why the key-word *convenire*, which defines the first of these moments, did not persuade him to understand the pericope as it has just been exposed. The sense *came together* was probably known to him as a possible meaning of both the *convenirent* which he read in his Latin codex and the συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς of the Greek. And it is certain not only that he was acquainted with many Greek and Latin codices of the New Testament, but that he consulted them on this very verse³. His choice, then, must have been deliberate. In so far as it is possible to account for it, a solution suggests itself from Ambrose's idea explained at length above⁴, of the *marriage* of Mary and Joseph. Unwilling to allow for their common life

p. 9-18. Paul GAECHTER, *The Chronology from Mary's Betrothal to the Birth of Christ*. Theological Studies, 2 (1941), p. 347-359.

¹ Such is the thesis of KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 34 f.

² Paschal R. Bortz, *Die Jungfrauschaft Mariens im Neuen Testament und in der nachapostolischen Zeit*. Tübingen 1935, p. 3 f.

³ *De Spir.* 2:5:41 f. PL 16 : 751b:

Dubitare ergo non possumus Spiritum creatorem, quem Dominicæ cognoscimus incarnationis auctorem. Quis enim dubitet, cum in principio evangelii habeas, quia "Christi generatio sic erat: Cum desponsata esset Maria Joseph, antequam convenirent, inventa est in utero habens ex Spiritu sancto?" Nam licet plerique habeant *de Spiritu*, Graecus tamen unde translulerunt Latini, ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου dixit, hoc est, *ex Spiritu sancto*. Quod enim *ex* aliquo est ...

⁴ *Supra*, p. 85-100, especially p. 99 f.

together, he preferred to understand the *antequam convenirent* in terms of marital relations, which were thereby excluded.

By so doing he was confident of holding to the literal sense of the Scriptural locution. In his fidelity to Scripture and to the notion of the marriage of Mary and Joseph which he drew therefrom, he did not realize that his answer to the objection could have been more effective by understanding *convenirent* differently. Instead he offered the brief explanation "*Consuetudo autem divinae Scripturae ea est, ut causam quae suscepta est astruat, incidentem differat*". The formula is valid and succinct. But as for its succinctness, it cannot be praised without qualification, since in view of Ambrose's idea of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, it shows Ambrose exemplifying rather well Horace's dictum: When I am briefest, then am I most obscure.

3. Non cognovit eam donec peperit Filium (Mt. 1:25)

The next difficulty which Ambrose takes up from the preannounced list is a classic one which had already occupied his attention in the *Exp. Luc.*, immediately after the one drawn from "*accepit conjugem suam*". In the *Exp. Luc.*, in fact, the present difficulty was accorded more space than the "*accepit conjugem suam*", receiving two replies. The first reply is repeated here in the *De Inst. Virg.*; the second, it will be remembered, also recurs in the *De Inst. Virg.*, but in answer to the objection based on "*antequam convenirent*", the study of which has just been completed. In the *De Inst. Virg.* Ambrose still wishes to associate this second reply ("*Consuetudo autem divinae Scripturae....*") with the present difficulty based on "*Non cognovit eam donec peperit filium*", as is evident from the *etiam* in his opening words here:

Quo solvitur *etiam* tertia quaestio, qua dictum est : « Non cognovit eam, donec peperit filium. » Quid ergo ? Postea cognovit ? Minime. Denique habes scriptum : « Ego sum Deus et donec senescatis, ego sum. » Numquid igitur postquam senuerunt, quibus « donec » dictum erat, Deus esse desivit ? Item in prophetia David legimus : « Dixit Dominus Domino meo : 'Sede a dextris meis, donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum.' » Numquid, subjectis populis nationum qui ante videbantur inimici cum salutis auctorem negarent, simulacris servirent, ad dexteram Patris Filius sedere desivit aut in perpetuum non sedebit ? ¹

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:38. PL 16:315bc.

This is as lightly elaborated form of the first reply that he had given in the *Exp. Luc.*, where he cited the same two examples of the Old Testament usage of *donec*:

Simul etiam movere non debet quod ait Evangelista : « Non cognovit eam donec peperit filium » ; illud enim vel idioma Scripturae est – sicut habes alibi : « Et donec senescatis, ego sum. » Numquid post illorum senectutem Deus esse desivit ? Et in psalmo : « Dixit Dominus domino meo : ‘Sede a dextris meis : donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum.’ » Numquid postea non sedebit – vel quia qui causam agit, etc.¹.

The choice of the two Scriptural texts from Is. 46:4 and Ps. 109:1 in both works could have been inspired by Jerome’s reply to the same difficulty in *Adv. Helv.*², where among the four Scriptural citations Is. 46:4 is also in first place, and Ps. 109:1 is found in the form of a citation from 1 Cor. 15:25. The citation from Ps. 109:1 is commented by Ambrose in terms very similar to Jerome’s. This verse, together with the citation from 1 Cor. found in Jerome, had an interesting history behind it. Marcellus of Ancyra (d. 364) and his followers had used the two to prove that Christ’s kingdom would have an end with this world³. Both Ambrose’s and Jerome’s comments on Ps. 109 may echo patristic refutations of Marcellus. Ambrose did not have any occasion to combat the heresy directly.

The second text, that from Is. 46:4, has always puzzled editors intent on supplying the exact Scriptural reference to Ambrose’s sometimes loose citations. Quite possibly the text had undergone many changes in the then current codices, for Jerome too cites it in a different form: “Ego sum, ego sum, et donec senescatis ego sum.” Ambrose’s “Ego sum Deus, et donec senescatis ego sum” in the *De Inst. Virg.* is a citation, probably from memory, of the Septuagint, which he preferred in commenting the Old Testament⁴:

Is. 46:4. Ἐγὼ εἰμι, καὶ ἕως ἂν καταγῆράσῃτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι.

Unconsciously the *Deus* of Ambrose’s *Ego sum Deus* crept in from a similar verse in a previous chapter of Isaiah:

Is. 41:4. Ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγὼ εἰμι.

The Vulgate for Is. 46:4 differs considerably from Ambrose’s reading.

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:6. CSEL 32:4 44:14-21. PL 15:1555a. ² *Adv. Helv.* 6. PL 23:189ad.

³ Eusebius, *De Ecclesiastica Theologia* 3:13 f. GCS Eus. 4 169:25-171:30. PG 24:1024d-1028b. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 15:29. PG 33:912b. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 30:4. PG 36:108a.

⁴ *Supra*, p. 239, n. 4.

Many other Scriptural examples of *donec* could have been cited to illustrate the reply. *Donec* merely asserts that a state of affairs prevails *until* some given moment; it does not imply a change after that moment. Among the other texts which are encountered among the Fathers, particularly after Jerome, are the following: Gen. 8:7¹, Num. 20:17, Ps. 71:7, 89:2, 122:2, 1 Cor. 15:25, all with *donec* in the Latin versions; and Gen. 35:20, Deut. 34:6, 1 Sam. 15:35, 2 Sam. 6:23, and Mt. 28:20. with *usque ad*. As Jerome had said after adducing four texts:

Poteram super hoc innumerabilia exempla congerere, et omnem laces-
sentis procacitatem, testimoniorum nube celare.

Ambrose thought his reply well enough illustrated with two texts. The difficulty is indeed a specious one. Fifteen years after the *Adv. Helv.*, when exposing Mt. 1:25 in his *Commentary on Matthew*, Jerome no longer even mentioned the difficulty³.

The perfect tense of *non cognovit* which Ambrose reads in Mt. 1:25 is the inaccurate translation which many Old Latin versions gave of the Greek imperfect οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν⁴. This reading, as would be expected, is found in the codex of the Old Latin which Ambrose is known to have most frequently used at least for Luke's and John's Gospels⁵, and thus probably for Matthew's: Codex veronensis (b), vercellensis (a), corbeiensis (ff¹), and brixianus (f). The difference in tense between *cognovi* and the Vulgate *cognoscebat* in Mt. 1:25 does not have the doctrinal consequences that resulted from the difference, noted above⁶, between *cognosco* and *cognovi* in Luc. 1:34. With time *cognovit* disappeared to the extent of leaving hardly a trace in modern critical editions of the New Testament⁷.

If the tense of *cognoscere* – γινώσκειν in Mt. 1:25 is of little consequence, its meaning at least merits attention. In the tradition of

¹ *The raven did not return till the waters were dried up*. Cf. Chrysostom, *In Mt. Hom.* 5:3. PG 57:58. The text is wrongly translated in the Septuagint and Vulgate. For Ambrose's use of it, cf. *supra*, p. 183 f.

³ *Adv. Helv.* 6. PL 23:189d.

⁴ KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 35, n. 3, citing Petrus SABATIER, *Bibliorum Sanctorum versiones antiquae sive vetus Italica et caeterae quaecumque in codicibus manuscriptorum et antiquorum libris reperiri potuerint*. Reims 1739-1743; 2nd ed. Paris 1751.

⁵ ROLANDO, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶ *Supra*, p. 101 f.

⁷ Jerome's version of the Gospels, made in 383 in the light of certain Greek codices, corrected *cognovit* to *cognoscebat*. But Jerome himself did not always follow his revised form: in the *Adv. Helv.*, written at the same time as the revision, he first used *cognovit* and then twice *cognoscebat*, all within a few pages (*Adv.*

Origen¹, Ambrose does not hesitate to take it in the sense of having marital relations, as the evangelist undoubtedly intended it. Such was Jerome's interpretation as well, and the reply of both doctors centers on *donec* rather than on *cognovi*. Another less fortunate answer had been developed by Hilary in his *Commentary on Matthew* written between 353 and 355. Admitting that the *donec* entailed the realization of *cognovit* after Christ's birth, he attempts to explain the *cognovit* thus:

Cognoscitur itaque post partum, *id est transit in conjugis nomen*; cognoscitur enim, non admiscetur².

This non-sexual sense of γινώσκειν is repeated by Epiphanius in his *Panarion*³, written around 384-6, and under his influence by the unknown author of the *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*⁴. Ambrose and Jerome remained aloof from this current of exegesis.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Ambrose does not raise the other difficulty which lies in Mt. 1:25 as read by those codices which resemble the Vulgate: "... donec peperit filium suum *primogenitum*." The classic objection to Mary's virginity based on the word *first-born*, had been raised by Helvidius, but in connection with Luc. 2:7: "Et peperit filium suum *primogenitum*...." Jerome's answer was one of the shortest⁵. Ambrose does not enter the objection in the list to which he replies in the *De Inst. Virg.*; earlier in the *Exp. Luc.* he had passed over Luc. 2:7 ("peperit filium suum *primogenitum*") in his commentary of Christ's

Helv. 3, 5, 6. PL 23:185c, 188b, 189a). Fifteen years later in the *Com. in Ev. Mt.* 1:25. PL 26:25c he cites *cognovit* yet. Some MSS of his revision of Matthew's Gospel even have *cognovit* instead of the correction (cf. PL 29:542c). Besides Ambrose's citation in the *Exp. Luc.* and the *De Inst. Virg.*, *cognovit* is found, for example, in Hilary, *In Mt.* 1:3. PL 9:921a and in Gregory the Great, *Moralia* 8:52. PL 75:856c.

For this verb in Mt. 1:25 Epiphanius cites a Greek aorist reading οὐκ ἔγνω (*Panar.* 78:17. GCS *Epiph.* 3 467:24 f. PG 42:725d) as well as an imperfect οὐκ ἤδει (*ibid.* 78:8; 78:17. GCS 458:25, 467:25. PG 725d, 728b). In the occurrence in *Panar.* 78:17 the οὐκ ἤδει forms part of a confused reading, is even attached to the καὶ ἐγέννησε τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον of Luc. 2:7, the whole being apparently a variant that Epiphanius found for Mt. 1:25. It is conceded, in fact, that the πρωτότοκον crept into the accepted version of Mt. 1:25 from Luc. 2:7. There seems, therefore, to have been a fluctuation for this verb in the Greek codices as well as in the Latin: ἐγίνωκε – ἤδει – ἔγνω.

¹ *Hom. 16 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 36:22 f. PG 13:1814ab.

² *Com. in Mt.* 1:3. PL 9:921ab.

³ *Panar.* 78:17 and 20. GCS *Epiph.* 3 467:18-468:20, 470:15-471:9. PG 42:725c-728b, 732ad.

⁴ *Hom. 1.* PG 56:635.

⁵ *Adv. Helv.* 10. PL 23:192b-193c.

nativity, without citing the verse and thus without having any occasion to refer to the difficulty. It will be remembered ¹ that in commenting Luc. 2:23, where the "Omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam" of Ex. 13:2 is cited, Ambrose likewise avoided applying the expression *adaperiens vulvam* to Christ in the sense of *first-born*. Jerome, on the other hand, proves from this text that *primogenitus* has only the meaning *ante quem nullus*, and that Christ is therefore rightly called *primogenitus* or in a similar sense *adaperiens vulvam*. Jerome was replying to a misinterpretation of the *primogenitus* in a polemic on Mary's virginity post partum; Ambrose seems to have been forestalling a misinterpretation of the *adaperiens vulvam* in connection with Mary's virginity in partu, and in order to do so he transposed the expression from birth to conception, thus eliminating any concern about either *adaperiens vulvam* or *primogenitus*. Whether the objection based on the latter word ever seemed to him worthy of a reply is doubtful. He never alluded to it.

In the exposition of Mt. 1:25 in *De Inst. Virg.*, of course, he has no occasion to introduce it, since his reading of the verse did not add the word *primogenitum* to *peperit filium suum*. The four Old Latin codices of the Gospels which supplied most of his citations all agree in omitting the *primogenitum* in Mt. 1:25 ². The word is thought to have crept in from Luc. 2:7 ³.

4. *Noluit eam traducere (Mt. 1:19)*

The fourth objection to which Ambrose addresses himself concerns Mary's virginity during her life with Joseph before, and not after, Christ's birth: Mary could not be accorded the honors of a virgin because even Joseph implied she was the contrary when he contemplated dismissing her upon the discovery of her pregnancy. The objection, therefore, concerns Mary's perpetual virginity, though not her virginity post partum. It was a particularly offensive one for Ambrose, since it distorted the *witness* which Joseph by his conduct bore to the fact that he had not known his spouse, a witness which Ambrose had developed in the *Exp. Luc.* ⁴.

¹ *Supra*, p. 126 ff.

² Cf. the codices vercellensis, veronensis, corbeiensis, and brixianus, as reproduced by BLANCHINI, *op. cit.*, in PL 12:145-146.

³ LAGRANGE, *Matthieu*, p. 17.

⁴ *Exp. Luc.* 2:4 f. CSEL 32:4 43:22 f. and 44:7-13. PL 15:1554bc. *Supra*, p. 94 f.

His reply is that one should not be surprised to find Joseph ignorant of a mystery as sublime as the virginal conception of the Word:

Quid autem praepjudicat Mariae, si coelestis consilii mysterium Joseph non intellexit et putavit virginem non esse quam praegnantem videret ? Resurrectionem ejus angeli ignoraverunt, quod significant versiculi : « Tollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales, et introibit rex gloriae. Quis est iste rex gloriae ? » Interrogant quasi ignorent ; et alii respondent : « Dominus fortis et potens, Dominus potens in praelio, ipse est rex gloriae. » Et repetivit propheta eosdem versiculos, et nihilominus illi quasi ignorantes iterum interrogaverunt ; sic enim scriptum est : « Tollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales, et introibit rex gloriae. Quis est iste rex gloriae ? » Quomodo ergo homo potuit divinum scire secretum, quod angeli nesciebant ? Et in Esaiiae libro habes : « Quis est iste qui advenit ex Edom : rubor vestimentorum ejus ex Bosor ? » Et utique minus erat hominem resurrexisse, quam virginem parturisse. Etenim jam Eliae precibus, Elisaei orationibus mortui resurrexerant : Numquam autem ante, numquam postea virgo generavit ¹.

The reply contains sublime doctrine alongside a most untoward appreciation of Joseph's conduct. First to the sublime. Ambrose insists on the inscrutability of the mystery of the Incarnation, a theme among his favorites. He often showed how unfathomable Christ's generation was, from the extent to which it contradicted the laws of nature ². He insists that it was unknown even to the highest angels ³. This idea led him in the *De Inst. Virg.* to recall a vivid scene of his own imagining: the stupefaction of the angels in face of another mystery, that of the Resurrection. He had previously painted this picture, but here for the first time he associated it with the Incarnation and concludes that the heavenly powers were all the more ignorant of the Incarnation, since "minus erat hominem resurrexisse quam virginem parturisse". How natural then that Joseph should be unable to suspect the mystery as the explanation of Mary's pregnancy ? With a flair for oratorical effect, Ambrose liked to hear in the "Quis est iste rex gloriae" of Ps. 23:8 the angels' query as they saw the risen Savior mount to his heavenly kingdom. In terms

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 5:39. PL 16:315c-316b.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:17. CSEL 32:4 51:2-5. PL 15:1559a:

Quam cito ergo etiam de inpari condicione credidit Maria ! Quid enim tam inpar quam spiritus sanctus et corpus ? Quid tam inauditum quam virgo praegnans contra legem, contra consuetudinem, contra pudorem....

³ *Ibid.*, 2:14. CSEL 49:24-26. PL 1558b:

Neque enim facile erat scire mysterium absconditum a saeculis in Deo, quod nec superiores potestates scire potuerunt.

remarkably close to those in the *De Inst. Virg.*, he had drawn the scene a few years earlier in the *De Mysteriis*¹, and over a dozen years earlier in the *De Fide*². A very similar scene, evoking when not citing the repeated queries of Ps. 23, had been painted by earlier Greek writers in connection with Christ's descent into hell prior to his Resurrection. In this context the animated dialogue took place among the fallen angels. The tradition of Christ's descent into hell at midnight before His Resurrection³, together with this dialogue, familiar to Athanasius, could easily have reached Ambrose via Athanasius' writings on virginity⁴, or his commentaries on the psalms⁵. Though Ambrose's creed, strictly Roman, does not know the descent into hell⁶, his works contain explicit passages thereon⁷. It is possible that he transposed the dialogue from Christ's descent into hell to his ascending to the Father after the Resurrection.

Such is the sublime half of his reply. The distasteful half is his idea that Joseph suspected Mary of not being a virgin, which is the equivalent (though he does not say so here in the *De Inst. Virg.*) of accusing her

¹ *De Myst.* 7:36. BOTTE, p. 119:8-16. PL 16:400ab:

Dubitaverunt etiam angeli cum resurgeret Christus, dubitaverunt potestates caelorum videntes quod caro in caelum ascenderet. Denique dicebant: "Quis est iste rex gloriae?" Et cum alii dicerent: "Tollite portas principis vestri et elevamini portae aeternales et introibit rex gloriae", alii dubitabant dicentes: "Quis est iste rex gloriae?" In Esaia quoque habes dubitantes virtutes caelorum dixisse: "Quis est iste qui ascendit ex Edom rubor vestimentorum eius ex Bosor, speciosus in stola candida?"

² *De Fide* 4:1:5 and 9:13. PL 16:618c and 619bc.

³ Othmar PERLER, *Die Mosaiken der Juliergruft im Vatikan* (Rektoratsrede zur feierlichen Eröffnung des Studienjahres am 15. November 1952). Freiburg (Schweiz) 1953, p. 20-22, 25. J. KROLL, *Gott und die Hölle*. Berlin 1932, p. 46 ff., 74, 92, 105, 218-54.

⁴ Λόγος σωτηρίας πρὸς τὴν παρθένον 16 and 20. VON DER GOLTZ, p. 41:12 f. and 44:13 f.

⁵ *Exp. in Ps.* 106. PG 27:452b. *Exp. in Ps.* 30. PG 27:157d. Other witnesses to the same idea are listed by PERLER, *op. cit.*, p. 57, n. 60-62 and by VON DER GOLTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 107-110.

⁶ No complete version of Ambrose's creed is extant, but the articles of the creed which he commented in the *Explanatio Symboli* were divided into four groups, each of which was indicated by its first and last words: "Credo ... virgine; sub ... sepultus; tertia die ... et mortuos. Et in spiritum sanctum ... resurrectionem." (*Expl. Sym.* 11. CONNOLLY, p. 11, using the Bobbio-Vatican MS for this manner of citing the creed.) The fact that *sepultus* is followed immediately by *tertia die (resurrexit)* proves that Ambrose's creed, like the Roman of which it was a replica, lacked the *descendit ad inferos*. Cf. KATTENBUSCH, *op. cit.*, II, p. 895-915. LIETZMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 603. The references given include: *De Virgite*. 128; *De Fide* 3:27 and 111; *De Incarn.* 40 f.; *De Exces. Satyrii* 2:102 f.; *Exp. Ps.* 118:19:37.

of adultery. Matthew does not imply that Joseph's bewilderment included this offensive suspicion, although some Fathers – Justin, Ambrose, Augustine, and Chrysostom are among those cited – interpreted him in this way¹. For Ambrose here the thought is unmistakable: since Joseph does not know the mystery, he can only suspect the worst at seeing Mary's pregnancy: "... coelestis consilii mysterium Joseph non intellexit et putavit virginem non esse quam praegnantem videret." Disregarding Matthew's explicit words in v. 19 – "cum esset justus et *nollet eam traducere*, voluit occulte dimittere eam" – Ambrose ascribes to Joseph even the intention of exposing Mary:

Hoc autem opinatus est quod *traduceret eam quasi ream*, antequam ab angelo moneretur ; postea autem quasi fidelis nec dubius virginitatis ejus servavit oraculum².

And these were not the hardest words that Ambrose had written on the subject. Had his opinion mellowed with the years? At any rate, the undated *Ep. 5*, whose firm tone on another matter leads Dudden to place it in these later years of Ambrose's episcopate³ rather than around 380 as the Maurists conjectured, is even more unfortunate a pronouncement than the *De Inst. Virg.*:

His signis et ipsa Mariae virginitas apud ignaros mysterii, *probrum* suspectabatur. Unde et Joseph cui desponsata erat virgo, suspectum habebat *vitium* ; dum adhuc nesciret Dominicae incarnationis sacramentum⁴.

The *Exp. Luc.*, earlier than the *De Inst. Virg.*, evidenced a harshness of expression that Ambrose did well not to repeat:

Pulchre autem docuit sanctus Matthaeus quid facere debeat justus, qui *probrum* conjugis deprehenderit, ut incruentum ab homicidio, castum ab *adulterio* praestare se debeat ; « Qui enim conjungitur *meretrici*, unum corpus est. »⁵

This all accords with the rather unflattering picture of Joseph which Ambrose has often already been seen to present⁶.

¹ LAGRANGE, *Matthieu*, p. 13.

² *De Inst. Virg.* 5:40. PL 16:316b.

³ DUDDEN, *op. cit.*, p. 154, n. 12.

⁴ *Ep.* 5:13. PL 16:895c.

⁵ *Exp. Luc.* 2:5. CSEL 32:4 44:3-7. PL 15:1554c.

⁶ *Supra*, p. 89, 100, 199 f., etc.

5. *Accepit conjugem suam* (Mt. 1:24)

At this point in his refutation of the errors announced beforehand, Ambrose interjects a difficulty not found among those presented by his adversaries: How can Scripture call Mary the *conjux* of Joseph if she never had relations with him? Above all, if the marriage was never consummated, how can Scripture use of Joseph with reference to Mary the technical expression of precise meaning, *accipere conjugem*, to take one's wife?

This difficulty has been dealt with above in the study of Mary and Joseph's marriage¹. Ambrose's reluctance to admit the full sense of *accipere* in its proper context will be recalled. His reply to the objection arising from *conjux* is that Mary has this title in virtue of the *pactio conjugalis* which she made as a *desponsata*. In referring in the reply about to be given from *De Inst. Virg.* to a commentary on Mary's betrothal-marriage and the reasons therefor, Ambrose has in mind his long discourse in the *Exp. Luc.*². The reply in the *De Inst. Virg.*, given here in full, will recall the conclusions drawn earlier from various sentences in the text:

Nec illud moveat, quod ait quia « Joseph accepit conjugem suam et profectus est in Aegyptum » : desponsata enim viro « conjugis » nomen accepit. Cum enim initiatur conjugium, tunc conjugii nomen adsciscitur; non enim defloratio virginitatis facit conjugium, sed pactio conjugalis. Denique cum jungitur puella, conjugium est, non cum virili admixtione cognoscitur.

Quod autem fuit desponsata connubio, licet alibi plenius dixerimus, libare nunc satis est causam coelestis mysterii; ut ab his qui Mariam gravi utero cernerent, non adulterium virginitatis, sed desponsatae partus legitimus crederetur. Maluit enim Dominus aliquos de sua generatione, quam de matris pudore dubitare³.

6. *Fratres Domini*

Ambrose takes up in last place the classical objection which occupied Jerome for over a third of his *Adv. Helv.*⁴. In mentioning on many occasions the "brethren of the Lord", does not Scripture imply that

¹ *Supra*, p. 91-100.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:1-3 on the *desponsata*, 4-6 on the *virgo*. CSEL 32:4 40:12-43:8; 43:9-45:2. PL 15:1552d-1555b.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:41 f. PL 16:316bc.

⁴ *Adv. Helv.* 11-17. PL 23:193c-201a.

Mary had children by Joseph? The objection could have been advanced by Bonosus himself; surely it must have been in the atmosphere after the Helvidian polemic and Jerome's painstaking rebuttal. Ambrose can be assumed to have read Jerome's words, since the *Adv. Helv.* was known to him, but he drew therefrom only two examples, among many, of the Scriptural use of *fratres*, together with the conclusion that the term can be common to many persons for other reasons than that they have the same father and mother:

« Fratres » autem gentis, et generis, populi quoque consortium nuncupari docet Dominus ipse, qui dicit : « Narrabo nomen tuum fratribus meis : in medio ecclesiae laudabo te. » Paulus quoque ait : « Optabam ego anathema esse pro fratribus meis. » Potuerunt autem fratres esse ex Joseph, non ex Maria. Quod quidem si quis diligentius prosequatur, inveniet. Nos ea prosequenda non putavimus, quoniam fraternum nomen liquet pluribus esse commune ¹.

On one point in the reply Ambrose is in disagreement with Jerome. In the *Adv. Helv.* after his exposition of the various meanings of *frater* Jerome had gone to great pains to prove that the *brethren* of the Lord were cousins of Christ, born of the Mary whom the Gospels called the mother of James the Minor and of Joseph, the wife of Alphaeus and sister of the Virgin Mary. He explicitly denied that the *fratres Domini* could be children of Joseph by a previous marriage:

Tu dicis Mariam virginem non permansisse : ego mihi plus vindico, etiam ipsum Joseph virginem fuisse per Mariam, ut ex virginali conjugio virgo filius nasceretur ².

Ambrose, on the contrary, has been heard willing to admit that the *fratres Domini* were Joseph's children; he even inclines to this view as more plausible "if one investigates the matter more thoroughly". To what sources can he be referring for investigation?

Not the Scriptures, one would say at first sight. Yet it must be remembered that Jerome had based his genealogy of the brethren on Scriptural data; thus Ambrose may mean by his remark that to his mind the Scriptures imply, more clearly than Jerome admitted, that Joseph was the father of the *brethren of the Lord*. If this were true, the fact would still remain that Ambrose never stated how a more thorough investigation of the Scriptures would lead to this conclusion.

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:43. PL 16:317a.

² *Adv. Helv.* 19. PL 23:203ab.

On the other hand, it is more probable that Ambrose was referring to the data which tradition offered on the paternity of Joseph. Eager always to steep himself in the heritage of orthodox doctrine, in order to compensate for a theological culture which prior to his election as bishop he lacked, Ambrose consistently chose the more traditional solution to problems. Jerome's explanation of the cousins of Jesus was by comparison a new idea. Scholars are still divided, often by anti-Marian prejudice, as to whether the notion of *cousin* for the *brethren* was earlier held by Hegesippus (fl. 154c-166), who would thus be the sole predecessor of Jerome¹. For the present it is sufficient to note that Ambrose dismisses the difficulty on the grounds that *brethren* may express many degrees of relationship (*gentis, generis, populi*); but for a positive solution he inclines to what in his day was the tradition: the brethren were probably Joseph's sons.

This tradition, as so many others, must have reached him through Origen², who explicitly mentions two apocryphals, the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Protoevangelium of James*, as its source³. The *Protoevangelium* dates from approximately the middle of the second century or a few decades later⁴. Between the *Protoevangelium* and Origen, the tradition

¹ For a measured statement of the affirmative view, cf. Marie-Joseph LAGRANGE, *Evangile selon saint Marc*, 2nd ed., Paris 1911, p. 84-88, where the criticism of Theodore ZAHN, *Brüder und Vettern Jesu* (Forschungen zur Geschichte des N. T. Kanons, 6:2). Leipzig 1900, p. 225-364 is weighed. Alfred DURAND, *Frères du Seigneur*, Dictionnaire d'Apologétique. Paris 1911, II, p. 133 f. and 148: summary and bibliography. Jules LEBRETON, *Jésus-Christ: sa parenté*. Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément. Paris 1949, IV, p. 986 f.: bibliography. For the negative view, cf. KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 19 f.

² *Com. in Mt.* 10:17. GCS Orig. 10 21:26-22:3. PG 13:876c-877a, where the apocryphals are mentioned. Fragment of *Com. in Joan.* 2:11. GCS Orig. 4 506:18-507:7. In the *Hom. 6 in Luc.*, which is extant only in Jerome's Latin translation, the "hi filii qui Joseph dicebantur ..." is a liberty which Jerome permitted himself with Origen's Greek, of which a fragment for this passage has been found reading οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰωσήφ without qualification. GCS Orig. 9:49:25-27 (Latin only in PG 13:1813c).

³ *Protoevangelium of James* 9:2. Edgar HENNECKE, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1st ed. Tübingen 1904, p. 57:44 f. AMANN, *Le Protévangile ...*, p. 217 f. *Protevangelium* 17:2. HENNECKE, p. 60:34. AMANN, p. 245. *Protevangelium* 18:1. HENNECKE, p. 61 f. AMANN, p. 247. — Cf. p. 106, n. 6.

English translation: M. R. JAMES, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford 1926, p. 46.

Greek text: C. de TISCHENDORF, *Evangelia apocrypha*, 2nd ed. Leipzig 1876, p. 32 ff. AMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 178-271. C. MICHEL, *Evangiles Apocryphes*, I (Textes et Documents, 13). Paris 1911, p. 35 ff.

The portion of the *Gospel of Peter* to which Origen refers in *Com. in Mt.* 10:17 (*Supra*, n. 2) is not extant. Cf. HENNECKE, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴ AMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 99 f.

was known to Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215)¹, who probably held it, as also the detail of Mary's not needing a midwife², on the authority of the *Protoevangelium*. Some scholars cite Justin (d. 165) also as an earlier witness than Clement to the apocryphal tradition, but the case is not clear³. The link, at any rate, between Origen and the *Protoevangelium* is attested, and after Origen the tradition is echoed in all parts of the Church: ambiguously by Eusebius (d. 339)⁴, as an accepted fact by Hilary (c. 315-367)⁵, clearly by the author of a homily ascribed to Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394)⁶, most probably by Ambrosiaster fl. 366-

¹ It is difficult, however, to say exactly what Clement's thought was, especially because it is preserved on this point only fragmentarily and second-hand. Once he states a view similar to that of the *Protoevangelium*: The fragment is from the *Adumbrationes in Ep. Judae*, preserved in a Latin translation known to Cassiodorus (d. 580), edited by Theodore ZAHN, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des N. T. Kanons*, III. Leipzig 1900, p. 83. PG 9:731. Cf. Cassiodorus, *De Institutione Divinarum Litterarum* 8. PL 70:1120a. In another fragment, from the *Hypotyposes*, VII, preserved in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2:1:4. GCS Eus. 2:1 104:9-20, PG 20:135ab, he indirectly contradicts his other view. On the problem thus arising cf. LAGRANGE, *Marc*, p. 87, and KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 18.

² *Stromata* 7:16:93 f. GCS Clem. 3 66:1-67:9. PG 9:529a-533a.

³ Two points are debated: a) the authenticity of the fragment, and b) the influence on it of the *Protoevangelium*.

a) The fragment in question is preserved only in Syriac, translated in ZAHN, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 308, and in LAGRANGE, *Marc*, p. 83. Its authenticity is admitted by ZAHN, *loc. cit.*, but denied by Adolph HARNACK, *Die Überlieferung der griechischen Apologeten* (TU 1:1-2). Leipzig 1882, p. 110.

b) The influence of the *Protoevangelium* is doubted mainly because of the precision that Joseph had five sons; a common source of both *Protoevangelium*, and Justin is conjured by LAGRANGE, *op. cit.*, p. 83. The influence, however, is upheld by AMANN, *Le protévangile ...*, p. 77. The hypothesis of a common source is also usually invoked to explain how Justin came to speak of Christ's birth in a cave (*Dial.* 73), a detail likewise found in the *Protoevangelium*.

⁴ The ambiguity covers two titles, *brethren of the Lord* and *sons of Joseph*. On the first, Eusebius records that certain well-known figures *were called or passed for* brothers of the Lord: *Hist. Eccl.* 1:12:5. GCS Eus. 2:1 82:15-20. PG 20:120a. *Ibid.*, 3:7:8. GCS 214:14 f. PG 236b; *ibid.*, 3:32:5. GCS 268:18. PG 284a; *ibid.*, 4:5:3. GCS 304:25. PG 309b. Simeon, once named *brother of the Lord* (*ibid.*, 3:22. GCS 236:15 f. PG 256c), is explicitly said to be a son of Mary of Cleopas, *ibid.*, 3:11:2. GCS 228:3. PG 245b and 3:32:4. GCS 268:13-16. PG 284a. Only once is James given the title *brother of the Lord* without restriction (*ibid.*, 2:23:1. GCS 164:19. PG 196b). But underlying the whole nebulous idea of *fraternity* is a no less nebulous idea of *sonship of Joseph* (particularly for James); cf. *ibid.*, 2:1:2. GCS 102:19-23. PG 133b: "James, *called* a brother of the Lord, because he was *named* son of Joseph, as Joseph (was *named*) father of Christ." Cf. LAGRANGE, *Marc*, p. 86 f., who concludes that Eusebius probably followed Origen in making James a son of Joseph. Cf. also KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 19 f.

⁵ *Com. in Mt.* 1:4. PL 9:922b.

⁶ *In Christi Resurrectionem Oratio* 2. PG 46:648b. The authenticity of the work

384)¹, unequivocally and with a flourish of detail by Epiphanius (c. 314-403)². Chrysostom (354-407)³ and Augustine (354-430)⁴ first repeated the tradition but later rallied to Jerome's idea. After Jerome, in fact, the story of the *sons of Joseph* dies out rapidly. The only great author to adhere to it is Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444)⁵. In the West writers mention it only to declare it unacceptable⁶.

It was a long-established tradition, therefore, to which Ambrose had given his adherence. And his adherence is explicit. He adds it almost gratuitously, as an alternative to an answer already sufficiently solving the difficulty; additional evidence that his notion of Saint Joseph⁷ did not counsel him, after Jerome's long disquisition, at least to remain silent on the subject. It is only to be lamented that Ambrose did not give a more explicit hint as to what he meant by the *more diligent investigation* which had led him to adhere to a tradition which was soon to die out. At any rate he did not share the low esteem that Jerome expressed for the apocryphal source of the *sons of Joseph* legend in these words:

would seem to have been rejected by SOELL, *op. cit.*, p. 432, who states that none of the Cappadocians speak either of Joseph's *sons* by a first marriage or of Christ's *cousins*, though they were influenced by Origen (*ibid.*, p. 174 f.), and knew the story of Zacharias' death (*ibid.*, p. 181 f.) which is recorded in the *Protoevangelium* 23. HENNECKE, p. 62:38-63:4. AMANN, p. 265 f. For the Zacharias legend, however, they could have depended directly on Origen (*Com. in Mt.* 10:18. GCS Orig. 10 21:5 f. PG 13:881a) who cites it on the authority of the apocryphals. The fact that they left so few exegetical works (SOELL, *op. cit.*, p. 174 f.) may explain their strange lack of the *sons of Joseph* tradition, amid borrowings from sources associated with it.

¹ *Commentaria in Ep. ad Galatas* 1:19. PL 17:344d-345a:

Hic Jacobus filius fuit Joseph, qui ideo frater Domini appellatus est, quia et Joseph pater ejus, etiam Domini pater nuncupatus est.

Cp. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2:1:2. *Supra*, n. 74. In the tenth-century codex M of the Capitol Library of Monza, this passage is replaced by another wherein James is explained, according to Jerome's system (*Adv. Helv.* 13. PL 23:195 f.) as the cousin of Jesus, being the son of Alphaeus and a sister of the Mother of Jesus. KOCH, *Adhuc Virgo*, p. 30.

² *Panar.* 78:8. GCS Epiph. 3 458:30-459:12. PG 42:709c: Joseph, father of four sons and two daughters, married Mary at an age beyond 80. *Ibid.*, 78:14. GCS 465:6 ff. PG 722b.

³ Cp. *In Mt. Hom.* 5:3, PG 57:58c with *In Ep. ad Gal. 1 in fine*. PG 61:632c.

⁴ Cp. *Quaes. XVII in Mt.* 17:1. PL 35:1374d with *In Joan. Tract.* 10:2. PL 35:1467c-1468a. *Com in Gal.* 8 (1:19). PL 35:2100bc joins the two opinions.

⁵ *In Joannis Evangelium* 4:5 (on Jn. 7:3-5). PG 73:637b.

⁶ DURAND, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁷ *Supra*, p. 89, 100, 199 f., 250 f., etc.

Quidam « fratres Domini » de alia uxore Joseph filios suspicantur, sequentes deliramenta apocryphorum....¹

Jerome was writing in 398. He had evolved his own system 15 years earlier. He had long detested the apocryphals. Five years before he had thrown Origen overboard. To hear the *sons of Joseph* story yet, therefore, must have vexed him greatly. Probably he did not think of Epiphanius, whom he respected, when he roundly denounced the apocryphals. But it is not impossible that the late bishop of Milan, for whom during life he had much more bitter words², was included among the “quidam ... sequentes deliramenta apocryphorum”.

B. Ambrose's Positive Arguments for Mary's Perpetual Virginity

Without any transition the *De Inst. Virg.* passes immediately from the rebuttal of objections to a less well ordered series of positive arguments for Mary's perpetual virginity. Ambrose is now drawing on his own personal thought about the Virgin, giving expression to themes touched on or elaborated already in his earlier writings. He sharpens the edges of most of them to render them better weapons in the polemic; but none is entirely new. Though they are strung along without plan, nine arguments, some consisting only in a sentence, can be detected.

1. Christ's Choice of a Virginal Mother

Ambrose's first positive argument is the worthiness that the Incarnate Word would demand in the woman He chose to be His mother, a worthiness necessarily including her resolve ever to preserve immaculate the *heavenly palace* in which He had resided:

An vero Dominus Jesus eam sibi matrem eligeret quae virili semine aulam posset incestare coelestem, quasi eam cui impossibile esset virginalis pudoris servare custodiam ?³

The argument needs no commentary. It had been the first to come to Ambrose's mind, as indeed to any mind, when he composed the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*:

Neque enim elegisset Dominus Jesus nasci per virginem, si eam iudicaret tam incontinentem fore, ut illud genitale Dominici corporis, illam aulam regis aeterni, concubitus humani seminis coinquinaret⁴.

¹ *Com. in Ev. Mt.* 2:12. PL 26:84d.

² *Supra*, p. 151, n. 3.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:44. PL 16:317a.

⁴ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 3. PL 16:1173c.

That Mary should keep her virginity perpetually was for Ambrose a necessary consequence of the dignity which had become hers with the virginal Incarnation of the Word. This dignity is the ultimate that God could invent:

Quae Deo secundum carnem dignior generatio quam ut immaculatus Dei Filius immaculatae generationis servaret etiam in suscipiendo corpore puritatem ? ¹

Sed ipse quoque unigenitus Filius tuus venturus in terras suscipere quod amissum est, puriorem carnis suae generationem reperire non potuit quam ut habitationi propriae coelestis aulam virginis dedicaret; in qua esset et immaculatae castitatis sacrarium et Dei templum ².

It was in an exclamation of Mary's dignity that Ambrose twice let escape from his lips the enchanting title, new to Latin ears, *Mater Dei*:

Primus discendi ardor nobilitas est magistri. Quid nobilius *dei matre* ? Quid splendidius ea quam splendor elegit, quid castius ea, quae corpus sine corporis contagione generavit ? ³

Quid aiunt, qui solent nostra ridere mysteria, cum audiunt quod virgo generavit, et impossibilem innuptae, cuius pudorem nulla viri consuetudo temerasset, existimant partum ? Impossibile putatur in *Dei matre*, quod in vulturibus possibile non negatur ? ⁴

Such nobility, says Ambrose, God would not invest in any other than a virgin who intended to remain a virgin.

2. Christ's Choice of a Model for Virgins

Ambrose's mind passes from the first positive argument on the dignity of the Mother of God to another idea no less dear to him. Would Mary have been chosen, he asks, as model of virgins if she were not to remain ever a virgin?

Cujus exemplo caeterae ad integritatis studium provocantur, ipsa ab hujusmodi quod per se caeteris propositum foret munere deviaret ? ⁵

Toward the end of the *De Inst. Virg.*, breaking into a beautiful prayer he does not fear to proclaim the generation of Christ the greatest incentive to virginity that God could devise:

Nunc ad te, decursis omnibus, Pater gratiae, vota converto, cuius

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:78. CSEL 32:4. 84:12-14. PL 15:1581b.

² *De Inst. Virg.* 17:105. PL 16:331a.

³ *De Virgs.* 2:2:7. FALLER, p. 47:9-11. PL 16:209a.

⁴ *Exam.* 5:20:65. CSEL 32:1 188:22-25. PL 14:233c.

⁵ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:44. PL 16:317ab.

pietati innumerabiles gratias agimus, quod in virginibus sacris angelorum vitam videmus in terris, quam in paradiso quondam amiseramus. Quid enim vel ad imitanda virginum studia confirmandamque virtutem vel ad concelebrandam virginitatis gloriam plus conferre potuisti, quam ut Deus ex virgine nasceretur? Amplius nobis profuit culpa, quam nocuit: in quo redemptio quidem nostra divinum munus invenit¹.

That so glorious a model as Mary should not persevere in her virginity was patently incongruous.

3. *Reward of Virgins Intended for Christ's Mother*

A third argument, likewise in the form of rhetorical question, comes to his mind: Having decreed such a bounteous reward for virgins, how could God permit that His Mother and the model of virginity – he again gives her these two titles – should fall short of that reward?

Et quae esset, cui majus quam matri Dominus meritum reponeret, praemium reservaret? Nulli enim uberiora quam virginitati deputavit munera, sicut Scriptura nos docet. Sic enim per Esaiam Dominus locutus est: « Ne dicit spado, quia ego sum lignum aridum. Haec dicit Dominus spadonibus: Quicumque custodierint praecepta mea, et elegerint quae ego volo, et amplectentur testamentum meum, dabo illis in domo mea et in muro meo locum nominatum meliorem, et filiorum et filiarum nomen aeternum dabo illis, et non deficient. » Aliis promittit ut non deficient: matrem suam deficere patiebatur? Sed non deficit Maria, non deficit virginitatis magistra....²

The argument that Christ would certainly give to His Mother what He gave to others was a favorite with Ambrose. He has been heard using it to show the absurdity of denying parthenogenesis in her case while admitting it (according to then prevailing notions) in vultures³. In a similarly strange comparison he pointed out the absurdity of asserting

¹ *Ibid.*, 17:104. PL 330d-331a. The last sentence in the citation is for many the grounds of alleging Ambrose as author of the *Exultet*. On this subject, cf. a) For authenticity: Bernard CAPELLE, *L' "Exultet" pascal, œuvre de saint Ambroise*. Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati. Romae 1946, I, p. 219-246. b) Against authenticity: B. FISCHER, *Exultant Divina Mysteria*. Zeugnis des Geistes. Gabe zum Benedictus-Jubiläum (Benediktiner Monatsschrift, Beiheft 23), Beuron 1947, and an article in the Benediktiner Monatsschrift, 24 (1948), p. 147 ff. Christine MOHRMANN, *Exultant Divina Mysteria*, Ephemerides Liturgicae, 66 (1952), p. 274-281. Hugo KOCH, *Felix Culpa*. Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums, 23 (1922), p. 138-140.

² *De Inst. Virg.* 6:45. PL 16:317b.

³ *Exam.* 5:20:65. *Supra*, n. 91.

that mothers remained virgins (according to the Jovinianists) while denying that the Mother of God remained such ¹. Later in the *De Inst. Virg.*, Ambrose sees in the fact that Christ maintains the *doors* of the Church intact, a proof that he accorded his Mother the grace of perpetual virginity:

Is igitur de quo dictum est ad Ecclesiam : « Quoniam confortavit seras portarum tuarum », suam portam confortare non potuit ? Sed confirmavit profecto, et servavit intactam. Denique non est aperta ².

The principle, “Quae esset cui majus quam matri Dominus meritum reponeret, praemium reservaret”, is the broadest that Ambrose bequeathed to Mariology. Like similar statements of other Fathers, and indeed like the dictate of sound devotion to Mary among the faithful of all ages, it sets up the filial love of the Divine Son as the criterion of her privileges. Among the most essential of these is her perpetual virginity.

4. Mary's Awareness of her Dignity

Ambrose had taken the divine viewpoint of perpetual virginity in the first three positive arguments. He had reasoned that God would surely have demanded perpetual virginity of His Mother and the model whom He proposed for the virginal life, and would have decreed that she receive the reward reserved to virgins. Now almost in the same breath he descends to Mary herself to see in her awareness of her dignity a fourth argument:

Nec fieri poterat ut quae Deum portaverat portandum hominem arbitraretur.... ³

Noblesse oblige ! No one was more aware of this than the noblest of creatures.

5. Joseph's Respect for Mary's Dignity

Joseph too knew her nobility as Mother of God, and being a just man would respect it. Such is Ambrose's fifth argument:

...nec Joseph vir justus in hanc prorupisset amentiam, ut matri Domini corporeo concubitu misceretur ⁴.

¹ *Ep.* 42:4. PL 16:1125a. *Supra*, p. 156-164.

² *De Inst. Virg.* 8:56. PL 16:320c.

³ *Ibid.*, 6:45. PL 317c.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

The Scriptural title *just man* here gives Ambrose an occasion to add a more brilliant touch to Joseph's portrait, already seen earlier in need of brighter colors ¹. It is not like the unhappy thought in the *Exp. Luc.* ², where in the interest of exploiting Joseph as a witness to his not being responsible for Mary's pregnancy, his very justice was seen prompting him to dismiss a reputedly unfaithful spouse – with no mention, moreover, of Matthew's significant "dismiss her *secretly*" ³. Here in the *De Inst. Virg.*, Joseph's justice is the mainspring of conduct which redounds to his own glory as well as proving that his spouse remained ever a virgin.

6. Mary's Virginité attested to on Calvary

Ambrose is aware that in four of the first five arguments he has defended Mary's virginity in considering the behavior of other persons: of her Son who entrusted her with her sublime role and of Joseph the *just man*. In a marked transition he now wishes to exploit Mary's own conduct as a proof that she never failed in her virginal resolve. This leads to an interesting adaptation of the frequently used Gospel passage describing Mary's presence on Calvary. Christ still bears the testimony that she had no other children than Him, that Joseph was never fully her husband – such is the common theme whenever this scene is used as a proof of her virginity. But what Ambrose added in this last version he was to give of the argument ⁴, was a distinctly Marian viewpoint of the Calvary scene. Mary becomes the center of attention when Christ addresses His memorable words to her and John. The lesson of Christ's filial piety for her, always intertwined in previous versions with the proof of her virginity, is here silenced. As elsewhere, indeed, Christ is making a last testament; but in the *Exp. Luc.* it had been simply a "testamentum vitae", which Ambrose was to repeat in the *Ep. 63*, where the scene is commented a last time without reference to Mary's virginity; here in the *De Inst. Virg.*, as in the *Ep. de Causa Bonosi* ⁵, Christ's testament to His mother is the defense He makes of her purity, the

¹ *Supra*, p. 89, 100, 199 f., 250 f., etc.

² *Exp. Luc.* 2:5. *Supra*, p. 251, n. 5.

³ For the enlightening connection between Joseph's justice and his plan to dismiss Mary secretly, cf. LAGRANGE, *Matthieu*, p. 11 f.

⁴ Cf. *supra*, p. 190.

⁵ *Ep. de Causa Bon.* 6. PL 16:1174b:

Hoc ergo testamentum filii est de matris integritate, haec Mariae locuples integri pudoris haereditas.

testimony He gives of her integrity. The sentences at times fall verbatim back on what Ambrose had written in the *Exp. Luc.*, even more than on the more recent but less developed *Ep. de Causa Bonosi*, but the view is focused now exclusively on Mary's virginity. Upon arriving at the theme of her maternal love, one of the three lessons associated with the scene, Ambrose's interpretation takes on an entirely new aspect and will be studied separately as an additional argument ¹. Her heroic love, leading her even to Calvary, is viewed as a proof of the courage characteristic of a woman who could never have failed in her virginal resolution.

This version of the argument based on Jn.19:26 f. is therefore Ambrose's last and most forceful word on the passage, inasmuch as Mary's perpetual virginity is concerned therein. Many parts of it have been commented earlier ² when the exegesis of Jn. 19:26 f. was encountered in its first form. It will suffice here to let Ambrose repeat the argument without interruption:

Sed tamen Maria suis non alienis moribus defendatur. Non defecit, ut dixi. Ipse testis est Filius Dei, qui cum esset in cruce, discipulum matri commendabat ut filium : discipulo eam tradebat ut matrem. Docuit hoc Joannes, qui mystica magis scripsit ; alii enim evangelistae scripserunt quod in passione Domini terra contremuit, sol refugit, persecutoribus venia postulata est ; iste dilectus Domini, qui e pectore ejus hauserat secreta sapientiae, et piae voluntatis arcana, ab aliis dicta praeteriens, hoc diligentius prosecutus est, ut maternae virginitatis perseverantiam suo judicio comprobaret ; quasi filius de matris pudore sollicitus, ne quis eam tanto convicio temeratae integritatis aspergeret.

Dignum quippe erat ut qui latroni veniam donabat, matrem dubio pudoris absolveret. Dicit enim ad matrem : « Mulier, ecce filius tuus. Dicit et ad discipulum : Ecce mater tua. » Ipse est discipulus, cui mater commendatur. Quomodo marito uxorem tolleret, si fuerat Maria mixta conjugio, aut usum tori conjugalís agnoverat ?

Claudite ora, impii : aperite auras, pii : audite quid Christus loquatur. Testatur de cruce Dominus Jesus, et paulisper publicam differt salutem, ne matrem inhonorem relinquat. Subscribitur Joannes testamento Christi. Legatur matri pudoris defensio, testimonium integritatis : legatur et discipulo matris custodia, pietatis gratia. « Et ex illo suscepit eam discipulus in sua. » Non utique Christus faciebat divortium, non Maria relinquebat virum. Sed cum quo virgo habitare debebat, quam cum eo quem filii haeredem, integritatis sciret esse custodem ? ³

¹ *Infra*, p. 264 ff. ² *Supra*, p. 192-198.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 7:46-48. PL 16:317c-318c.

Two sentences in the argument require comment:

1. The first has apparently little connection with the theme of virginity: "Dignum quippe erat ut qui latroni veniam donabat, matrem dubio pudoris absolveret." It is not clear why Ambrose sees a particular harmony in Christ's pardoning the thief and defending His Mother's integrity. There is no hint as to any possible contrast he saw between the two actions. Most probably he had no particular fittingness in mind, but was just being led on by what he had written earlier in the *Exp. Luc.*, which he is here following in the *De Inst. Virg.* In the *Exp. Luc.* he had justified his boldness in commenting the words of Christ to the thief before taking up those to His Mother (cp. Luc. 23:43 and John 19:26 f.):¹

Nec praeposterum judicetur quod prius latronis absolutionem quam matris appellationem scripsi ; qui enim venerat salvos facere peccatores, non absurdum si prius in meis scriptis susceptum munus in redimenda salute peccatoris implevit. Denique ipse ait : « Quae est mater mea et qui fratres mei ? » Quia non venerat vocare justos, sed peccatores. Sed ibi pro loco, hic et in cruce non inmemor matris appellat eam dicens : « Ecce filius tuus.... »²

The cryptic sentence in the *De Inst. Virg.* is merely a reminiscence of the *Exp. Luc.* with a forcing of the idea of the thief's pardon into the argument on virginity. The only possible harmony of Christ's two actions might be in the *absolution* which He gives: He absolves the thief of his sins and absolves His Mother from any doubt which men might entertain about her purity. That Ambrose wants to force *absolution* into focus seems suggested in two ways: a) The transfer of the word *absolution* from the thief in the *Exp. Luc.* ("*latronis absolutionem*") to Mary in the *De Inst. Virg.* ("*matrem dubio pudoris absolveret*"). b) The substitution in the *De Inst. Virg.* of a *parallel* in ideas ("*latroni veniam donabat, matrem dubio pudoris absolveret*") for what had been a *contrast* in the *Exp. Luc.* ("*latronis absolutionem ... matris appellationem*"). Such minutiae would not merit attention except for the skill they reveal in Ambrose of shifting his emphasis; falling back all the while on carefully carved out sentences that pleased his ear enough to warrant almost word for

¹ Ambrose felt that this boldness needed justification, since he thought himself responsible for taking up the words in that order. Tradition had not yet harmonized the Gospel accounts of the Passion to make the order of Christ's *seven last words* the accepted thing it is today, in which the word to the thief is in second place, and that to Mary and John in third.

² *Exp. Luc.* 10:131. CSEL 32:4 505:4-12. PL 15:1837b.

word repetition, he turns them to the service of a thought slightly different ¹.

2. Another example of one of his unforgettable thoughts is the second sentence to be singled out of the text for attention. Amid the excruciatingly momentous drama being played out in the last hours of His life, Christ delays the world's redemption to honor His Mother: "Paulisper publicam differt salutem, ne matrem inhonoram relinquat." The thought is sublime in its audacity. It is a variation of another formula he had coined in the *Exp. Luc.* and was to repeat verbatim in *Ep.* 63 in commenting the Calvary scene in terms of Christ's filial piety rather than of Mary's virginity. Remarking that the Evangelist John omitted Christ's word which gave paradise to the repentant thief in favor of the word that Christ addressed to His Mother, Ambrose exclaimed:

Joannes docuit quod alii non docuerunt, quemadmodum in cruce positus matrem appellaverit, *pluris putans quod victor suppliciorum pietatis officia matri exhibebat, quam quod regnum coeleste donabat* ².

The bold words recall another sentence which it also pleased Ambrose to repeat verbatim: "Maluit enim Dominus aliquos de sua generatione quam de matris pudore dubitare." ³

7. Mary's Courage on Calvary, Proof of her Virginity

As has already been observed, the rest of the interpretation of the Calvary scene is really a new argument. In the previous part the thought was familiar: Mary's virginity was testified to by her Son on the cross. Now her virginity is proved by the courage and constancy which she shows in being present for the awful death of her Son:

Stabat ante crucem mater, et fugientibus viris, stabat intrepida. Videte utrum pudorem mutare potuerit mater Jesu, quae animum non muta-

¹ For another variation of the thief-Mary contrast, where the lesson of Christ's filial piety is being drawn out of the scene, cf. *Ep.* 63:109. PL 16:1218ac.

² *Ep.* 63:109. PL 16:1218b (written in 396). The sentence is copied from the earlier *Exp. Luc.* (written 385-390) with a significant change showing how with the years Ambrose's eyes were fixed ever more on Mary in the Calvary scene. In the *Ep.* 63:109 just read, Christ's piety is centered entirely on Mary: "Pietatis officia matri exhibebat." In the *Exp. Luc.* it had been divided between Mary and John: "Pietatis officia dividebat." *Exp. Luc.* 10:130. CSEL 32:4 504:25-505:3. PL 15:1837a:

Solus ergo me docet quod alii non docuerunt, quemadmodum in cruce positus appellaverit matrem, pluris putans quod victor suppliciorum atque poenarum, victor diaboli, *pietatis officia dividebat* quam quod regnum coeleste donabat.

³ *De Inst. Virg.* 6:42, repeating *Exp. Luc.* 2:1. *Supra*, p. 83, n. 1.

vit. Spectabat piis oculis filii vulnera, per quem sciebat omnibus futuram redemptionem. Stabat non degeneri mater spectaculo, quae non metuebat peremptorem. Pendebat in cruce filius, mater se persecutoribus offerebat. Si hoc solum esset ut ante filium prosterneretur, laudandus pietatis affectus, quod superstes filio esse nolebat : sin vero ut cum filio moreretur, cum eodem gestiebat resurgere, non ignara mysterii quod genuisset resurrecturum : simul quae publico usui impendi mortem filii noverat, praestolabatur si forte etiam sua morte publico muneri aliquid adderetur. Sed Christi passio adjutorio non eguit, sicut ipse Dominus longe ante praedixit : « Et respexi, et non erat auxiliator : et attendi et nemo suscipiebat : et liberabo eos brachio meo. » Quomodo ergo extorqueri potuit integritas Mariae, quae fugientibus apostolis, supplicia non metuebat, sed ipsa se offerebat periculis ? ¹

This is not the place to study the passage above which is unfavorable to Mary's coredemptive role; in it Ambrose lets himself be carried on by what he has already written in commenting these favorite verses of John's gospel. In the *Exp. Luc.* and afterwards in *Ep. 63* he used similar words and a citation from Ps. 87:5 in the same sense as the one from Is. 63:5 just given. The idea, however, does not come up now simply by association; it helps show how gratuitous Mary's presence on Calvary was, thus throwing into relief her courage. She was there not because she was needed, but because her heroic love and constancy led her that far. The conclusion is that it led her a fortiori to live up to her virginal calling.

Only once elsewhere in his works, in the *De Obitu Valentiniani Consolatione* of the same period (September 392), did Ambrose dwell directly on Mary's constancy and fortitude in connection with her presence on Calvary. He then rendered explicit the meaning which already before he had detected in the *stabat* with which the evangelist began his pericope:

Durum quidem funus videtis ; sed stabat et sancta Maria juxta crucem Filii, et spectabat Virgo sui unigeniti passionem. Stantem illam lego, flentem non lego. Unde dixit ei Filius : « Mulier, ecce filius tuus. Et discipulo dixit : Ecce mater tua » ; haereditatem illis charitatis suae et gratiae derelinquens ².

8. Mary as Distributrix of the Grace of Virginity

The next argument represents Mary not as the heroic virgin but as the channel by which the grace of virginal integrity passed on to others,

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 7:49 f. PL 16:318c-319a.

² *De obitu Valentiniani consolatio* 39. PL 16:1371b.

and particularly to the Evangelist John who recorded the Calvary scene. The thought here attains heights most significant for Mariology:

Cujus tanta gratia, ut non solum in se virginitatis gratiam reservaret, sed etiam his quos viseret, integritatis insigne conferret. Visitavit Joannem Baptistam, et in utero matris priusquam nasceretur, exsiliavit. Ad vocem Mariae exsultavit infantulus, obsecutus antequam genitus. Nec immerito mansit integer corpore, quam tribus mensibus oleo quodam suae praesentiae et integritatis unguento Domini mater exercuit. Eademque postea Joanni evangelistae est tradita, conjugium nescienti. Unde non miror prae caeteris locutum mysteria divina, cui praesto erat aula coelestium sacramentorum ¹.

The influence of Mary's presence on two figures as closely associated to the Redeemer as His precursor and His beloved disciple! The theme is a tempting one. Ambrose has restricted himself here to viewing Mary's influence as one of passing on to these two men the grace of virginity. In the case of John the Evangelist he adds a thought already studied ² on Mary's role in handing down God's revealed word, expressing himself thereon for the first and only time here in the *De Inst. Virg.* The considerations on John the Baptist, on the other hand, had come up earlier in the bishop's works. He had taken over almost word for word a passage of one of Origen's homilies on Luke when in the *Exp. Luc.* he wrote:

Nam si primo ingressu tantus processus exstitit, ut *ad salutationem Mariae* exsultaret infans in utero, repleretur Spiritu sancto mater infantis, *quantum putamus usu tanti temporis sanctae Mariae addidisse praesentiam?* « Mansit autem Maria cum illa mensibus tribus. » Unguebatur itaque, et quasi bonus athleta exercebatur in utero matris propheta; amplissimo enim virtus ejus certamini parabatur...

Pulchre autem tempus, quo fuit in utero propheta, describitur, ne *Mariae praesentia* taceatur, sed tempus siletur infantiae, eo quod *praesentia Domini matris* in utero roboratur, qui infantiae impedimenta nescivit. Et ideo in Evangelio nihil super eo legimus nisi ortum ejus, et oraculum, exsultationem in utero, vocem in deserto. Neque enim ullam infantiae sensit aetatem qui supra naturam, supra aetatem in utero situs matris a mensura perfectae coepit aetatis plenitudinis Christi ³.

If the texts just cited from the *De Inst. Virg.* and the *Exp. Luc.* are compared to two others about to be given, a certain progress in Ambrose's concept of the role of Mary in the sanctification of Jclm. the

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 7:50. PL 16:319ab.

² *Supra*, p. 194-195.

³ *Exp. Luc.* 2:29 f. CSEL 32:4 56:16-23; 57:9-17. PL 15:1562c, 1563a. Cp. Origen, *Hom. 9 in Luc.* GCS Orig. 9 62:16-25. PG 13:1822c.

Baptist can be observed. The presence of Mary during three months is not involved in the next two texts. There is question only of her influence at the moment of meeting Elizabeth. Commenting this moment in the paragraphs before the last citation above from the *Exp. Luc.*, Ambrose divided between Mary and the Child whom she bore in her womb the effects which were produced in Elizabeth and her child. He spoke of the beneficent effect of the "presence of the *Lord*." on John, of grace occasioned by *Christ's* coming rather than by Mary's, of a good effected by *Him* and only proclaimed by His Mother. Mary is not accorded a role as complete as in the two texts quoted above:

Contuendum est enim quia superior venit ed inferiorem, ut inferior adjuvetur, Maria ad Elizabet, *Christus ad Joannem*. Denique etiam postea, ut sanctificaret baptismum Johannis, *Dominus* venit ad baptismum. Cito quoque adventus Mariae et *praesentiae dominicae* beneficia declarantur ; simul « enim ut audivit salutationem Mariae Elizabet, exsultavit infans in utero ejus. Et repleta est spiritu sancto ». Vide distinctionem, singulorumque verborum proprietates. Vocem prior Elizabet audivit, sed Johannes prior gratiam sensit : illa naturae ordine audivit, iste exsultavit ratione mysteriorum, illa Mariae *iste Domini sensit adventum*, femina mulieris et *pignus pignoris*, istae gratiam loquuntur, *illi intus operantur* pietatisque mysterium maternis adoriuntur profectibus duplicique miraculo prophetant matres spiritu parvulorum. Exsultavit infans, repleta mater est. Non prius mater repleta quam filius, sed *cum filius esset repletus* spiritu sancto, replevit et matrem ¹.

The fact that in this quotation from the *Exp. Luc.* Ambrose accords a much less influential role to Mary's presence than he does a page or so later in the same work is probably explained thus: in the more reserved of the two texts, the one just cited, he is not so much giving his thought as it had evolved by that time (389-90) as copying what he had written years before:

Vocem quidem Mariae prior Elisabeth audivit, sed Joannes prior Domini gratiam sensit. Pulchre sibi conveniunt oracula oraculis, femina mulieri, et pignus pignori. Istae gratiam loquuntur, *illi intus operantur* pietatisque mysterium maternis adoriuntur profectibus ; duplicique miraculo, licet honore diverso, prophetant matres spiritu parvulorum. Quis igitur auctor hujus miraculi ? nonne Dei Filius, qui fecit esse non natos ? ²

¹ *Exp. Luc.* 2:22 f. CSEL 32:4 53:9-25. PL 15:1560c-1561a.

² *De Fide* 4:9:114. PL 16:639b.

This extract is from the fourth book of the *De Fide*, written in 380. Comparing the four texts which have been adduced in inverse order so as to trace back Ambrose's thought to its first expression, it would seem justifiable to conclude that there was an evolution in his concept of Mary's beneficent presence in the sanctification of John the Baptist, and that this evolution carried Ambrose quite far in attributing to Mary the role of distributrix of grace. In the *De Inst. Virg.* he viewed one element above all in John's sanctification: the grace of virginity which Mary passed on because she possessed it in fullest measure.

How absurd then, runs the argument in the present polemic, that the distributrix of the grace of virginity should be thought not to have remained a virgin!

9. The "Porta Clausa" of Ezech. 44:2

Ambrose's final argument is more illustrative than convincing. It is the accommodation of the *closed door* of Ezech. 44:2, interpreted allegorically, to the Virgin's womb. This interpretation has already been studied in the chapter on the virginity in partu, the polemic of which it reflects. For only at the end of the lengthy exposition of Ezechiel's text here in the *De Inst. Virg.* does Ambrose recall that the prophet intended to exclude any opening of the door of Mary's womb by *Joseph*; up to that point one has the impression that the doctor is arguing against those who thought her virginity was lost at Christ's birth. Such were the Jovinianists.

The text needs little comment. In introducing his exposition with two verses of Ezechiel (39:25, 27) unrelated to the subject of virginity, Ambrose merely wants to bring his audience to the starting point of the prophet's description of the new city (c. 40) and its temple (c. 41 ff.). He passes immediately to Ezechiel's words about the east gate of the temple (not the city, as Ambrose says) in chapter 44. Then follows the only extended interpretation of this passage to be found in Ambrose's works:

Nunc mihi dicant qui hanc quaestionem serunt, quid est quod ait Dominus per prophetam : « Nunc revocabo captivitatem Jacob, et miserebor adhuc domus Israel ? » Et infra, « Congregabo, inquit, de gentibus eos, et congregabo illos de regionibus nationum, et sanctificabor in his in conspectu gentium ; et scient quod ego sum Dominus Deus ipsorum, dum apparebo illis inter nationes : et non avertam amplius faciem meam ab eis, pro eo quod effudi iram meam in domum Israel, dicit Dominus ».

Et infra dicit propheta vidisse se in monte alto nimis aedificationem civitatis, cujus portae plurimae significantur ; una tamen clausa describitur, de qua sic ait : « Et converti me secundum viam portae sanctorum exterioris, quae respicit ad orientem, et haec erat clausa. Et ait ad me Dominus : Porta haec clausa erit, et non aperietur, et nemo transibit per eam : quoniam Dominus Deus Israel transibit per eam. Eritque clausa, quoniam dux hic sedebat in ea, ut manducet panem in conspectu Domini. Secundum viam aelam [sic] portae intrabit, et secundum viam ejus exibat. » Quae est haec porta nisi Maria ; ideo clausa, quia virgo ? Porta igitur Maria, per quam Christus intravit in hunc mundum, quando virginali fusus est partu, et genitalia virginitatis claustra non solvit. Mansit intemeratum septum pudoris, et inviolata integritatis duravere signacula ; cum exiret ex virgine, cujus altitudinem mundus sustinere non posset.

« Haec, inquit, porta clausa erit et non aperietur. » Bona porta Maria, quae clausa erat, et non aperiebatur. Transivit per eam Christus, sed non aperuit.

Et ut doceamus quia portam habet omnis homo, per quam Christus ingreditur : « Tollite, inquit, portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales, et introibit rex gloriae. » Quanto magis ergo porta erat in Maria, in qua sedit Christus et exivit ? Est enim et porta ventris. Unde ait Job sanctus : « Intenebrescant, inquit, stellae noctis illius : quia non conclusit portas ventris matris meae. »

Est ergo et porta ventris, sed non clausa semper : verum una sola potuit manere clausa, per quam sine dispendio claustrorum genitalium virginis partus exivit. Ideo ait propheta : « Porta haec clausa erit : non aperietur et nemo transibit per eam », hoc est nemo hominum : « Quoniam Dominus, inquit, Deus Israel transibit per eam. Eritque clausa », id est, ante et post transitum Domini erit clausa : et non aperietur a quoquam, nec aperta est ; quoniam habuit semper januam suam Christum, qui dixit, « Ego sum janua », quam nemo ab ea potuit avellere.

Haec porta ad orientem aspiciebat ; quoniam verum lumen effudit, quae generavit Orientem, peperitque Solem justitiae. Audiant ergo imprudentes : Clausa, inquit, erit haec porta, quae solum recipit Deum Israel. Is igitur de quo dictum est ad Ecclesiam : « Quoniam confortavit seras portarum tuarum », suam portam confortare non potuit ? Sed confirmavit profecto, et servavit intactam. Denique non est aperta.

Audiant igitur prophetam dicentem : « Non aperietur, eritque clausa », hoc est, non aperietur ab eo cui desponsabitur ; non licebit enim ut aperiat, per quam Dominus transibit. Et post eum, inquit, « erit clausa », hoc est, non aperiet eam Joseph ; quoniam dicitur ei : « Noli timere accipere Mariam conjugem tuam : quod enim ex ea nascetur, de Spiritu Sancto est. » ¹

¹ *De Inst. Virg.* 8:51-57. PL 16:319b-320d.

These last words by which Ambrose situates his verbose exegesis in the context of a polemic on Mary's virginity post partum merit attention. They introduce a text from Mt. 1:20 with the delicate *accipere conjugem tuam* which seems to have troubled Ambrose. The words are those of the angel to Joseph in a dream. Again the turn that Ambrose gives to the angel's message is noteworthy. Ezechiel had prophesied that the door would remain closed; Joseph will not open it, says Ambrose, *because* the angel will say to him: "Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is to be born of her is of the Holy Spirit." It is clear that Ambrose here draws his reader's attention again away from the "accipere conjugem tuam" to the "quod enim ex ea nascetur de Spiritu Sancto est". In other words, the text explains Joseph's respect for Mary's virginity only inasmuch as it presupposes his respect for her having received the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Hence Ambrose again understands the command of the angel after his own fashion. Earlier he was heard to interpret it as a command not to dismiss Mary – which is at least not the nuance given it in the angel's words themselves. Here he understands it as a command to respect her virginity. As with the "accepit conjugem suam" of Mt. 1:24, nowhere does he interpret the "noli timere accipere conjugem tuam" of Mt. 1:20 in its immediate sense: a command to Joseph to *go through with the marriage ceremony* which consisted of taking Mary to his residence. The only other time that he cites the words of the angel, in a text of the *De Spiritu Sancto*, the emphasis is again on the second half of the verse ("quod enim ex ea nascetur de Spiritu Sancto est") to show that nothing lies beyond the creative power of the Holy Spirit¹.

C. Aftermath of the Bonosian Refutation

At this point in the *De Inst. Virg.* Ambrose turns from the arguments for Mary's perpetual virginity to a series of apostrophes to virginity in general (c. 9), then to a seeming digression on a Christological error (c. 10-12). Possible reasons for the latter have already been discussed². When he returns to the theme of virginity he no longer considers Bonosus deserving of further attention. The remainder of the work contains no allusion to the polemic or to Mary's virginity post partum. As the part

¹ *De Spir.* 2:5:37. PL 16:750c.

² *Supra*, p. 219 f.

preceding the chapters against Bonosus, it bears evident traces of borrowings from Hippolyte's *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* ¹.

In the four remaining years of his life Ambrose never came back on the defense of Mary's perpetual virginity. Having amply replied to Bonosus, he reverted to the rule of silence which he had offered as explanation of his reluctance to enter the dispute in the first place. The two subsequent works wherein he might have had an occasion to bring up the subject, the *Exhortatio Virginitatis* and *Ep. 63* to the Church of Vercelli, contain not the slightest allusion to the doctrine he has just been heard upholding. Having covered the subject in 15 different arguments, he had, indeed, left little further to add.

D. Absence of "Semper Virgo" in Ambrose's Works

A final curious question, nevertheless, presents itself: In view of Ambrose's stalwart defense of Mary's perpetual virginity, why is it that he never used the term *semper virgo* of Mary? He was not one to innovate a terminology, it is true, and apparently nowhere in the few Latin Fathers on whom he depends had he found the term. But most probably he had come across it in his Greek sources, for the title ἀειπαρθένος first used by Peter of Alexandria (d. 311) ², had been passed on in the Alexandrian circle. It occurs in two of Ambrose's principal sources, Athanasius (295-373) ³ and Didymus the Blind (d. 398) ⁴. A contemporary in the Greek church like Epiphanius (314-403) ⁵ echoed it. But Ambrose does not use the title, although he took over from Greek sources (in one case from Alexandria) the θεοτόκος ⁶ another term no less unfamiliar to Latin ears than would have been the ἀειπαρθένος. How explain the curious absense of *semper virgo* in Ambrose's vocabulary?

¹ Cf. G. Nathanael BONWETSCH, *Hippolyts Kommentar zum Hohenlied auf Grund von N. Marrs Ausgabe des Grusinischen Textes*, TU, 23:2, 1903. Parallel sections from Ambrose are cited in the notes.

² *Fragmenta* 7. PG 18:517b.

³ *Frag. in Lucam* (if authentic). PG 27:1393c.

⁴ *De Trin.* 1:27; cp. 3:2:20; 3:4. PG 39:406b; 793cd; 832d.

⁵ *Panar.* 78:5. GCS Epiph. 3 455:31. PG 42:705c.

⁶ *Supra*, p. 39. The first occurrence of *mater Dei* in Ambrose's works is in dependence on the *Letter to Virgins* of Athanasius, extant only in a Coptic version. Cf. Athanasius, *Lettre aux Vierges*. LEFORT (Le Muséon, 42), p. 244: "Marie, qui engendra Dieu...."

Probably the answer is that Ambrose felt no need of adding *semper* to a title that for him already described Mary's perpetual virginity completely. A term like *semper virgo* would appear to him almost a concession to his adversaries: as though it were necessary to insist that she had always remained a virgin! He despised them too much to adopt a new term to combat them. His very dependence on the Greek Fathers, moreover, had reassured him that Mary had from the beginning been called *the* Virgin. The Greek article confirmed Ambrose's concept of the Virgin par excellence; though his mother tongue did not permit him to express it with as simple a qualification as the article, he felt no need to add any qualification at all.

Virgo already said all that a full heart and clear head had to say.

SACRED SCRIPTURE INDEX

The General Index excludes references to Sacred Scripture, Ambrose's Latin terms for the Virgin Mary, and modern authors.

Numbers in *italics* indicate more intensive treatments.

Page references are for either text or footnotes, or both.

The Indices supplement the Table of Contents.

Genesis

2:22	238
2:23	239
8:7	183, 246
15:8	171
35:20	246

Exodus

13:2	109, 112, 114 ff., 151
15:1	52
15:20 ff.	51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 62, 63, 64, 182
24:14	57
32:19	57

Numbers

12	52
20:17	246

Deuteronomy

34:6	246
------	-----

Judges

9:27	57
11:34	62
21:21	57
21:23	57

Kings

I 18	117
II 3:1 ff.	129
II 8:16 ff.	129

Samuel

I 15:35	246
II 6:23	246

Judith

3:10	62
------	----

Psalms

18:6	74
23	250
23:8	249
71:7	246
87:5	265
89:2	246
109:1	188, 245
122:2	246
149:3	62
150:4	61, 62

Canticles

1:6	53
4:12	147, 149

Isaias

7:14	71, 72, 105, 109, 111, 172, 173, 175
11:1	72
41:4	245
46:4	188, 245
63:5	265

Jeremias

1:5	118
31:13	57
31:4	62

Lamentations

5:15	57
------	----

Ezechiel

39:25, 27	268
44:2	149-154, 172, 176, 218, 268-270
44:4	237

Matthew

1:18-25 85 ff., 91, 97, 242 f.
 1:18 97, 99 182, 236, *240-244*
 1:19 71, 95, 236
 1:20 71, 93, 270
 1:23 105
 1:24 85, 90, *91-100*, 214, *252*, 270
 1:25 99, 182, 183, 188, 236, *244-248*
 2:14 92, 93, 94
 12:46 236, *252 ff.*
 13:55 236, *252 ff.*
 28:20 246

Mark

3:31 236, *252 ff.*
 6:3 236, *252 ff.*

Luke

1:2 181
 1:26 71, 97
 1:27 89, 90
 1:28 213
 1:31 105
 1:34 71, 101, 102, 171, 173, 246
 1:35 116
 1:38 171, 173
 1:42-45 51
 1:42 216
 1:46 210
 1:68-79 52
 2:7 148, 247
 2:19 196, 199
 2:22 132, 133
 2:23 112 ff.
 2:43 92
 2:51 196, 199
 2:56 *113-138*
 8:19 236, *252 ff.*

John

1:13 69, 70
 1:14 70
 2:4 182, 213 ff., 236, *237-240*
 2:12 236, *252 ff.*
 7:3, 5, 10 236, *252 ff.*
 19:25 189
 19:26 71, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, *201-204*, 216, 262

Acts

1:14 236, *252 ff.*

Corinthians

I, 7:14 135
 I 7:25 46
 I 9:5 236, *252 ff.*
 I 10:3 64
 I 15:25 245, 246
 II 11:2 156

Galatians

1:19 236, *252 ff.*
 4:4 182, 213, 214, 216, 236, *237-240*

Ephesians

5:23-32 135

Hebrews

9:25 150

Apocalypse

12:1 216
 14:4 53, 156, 159

LATIN WORD INDEX

Ambrosian terms and interpretations relative to the Virgin Mary, as cited in this work.

- absolutio; absolvere 263
 accepit conjugem suam (Mt. 1:24) 252
 accipere conjugem tuam (Mt. 1:20) 270
 ante partum (Jerome) 150
 antequam convenirent (Mt. 1:18) 240-244
 aula 195, 257
- carnem assumere ex virgine 81
 carnem suscipere ex virgine 81
 chorus 56 ff.
 cognoscere (marriage) 101, 102
 conjugium 86, 90
 conjux 86, 88, 90, 92-94, 100, 188, 252
 conubium 85
 creatus ex virgine 81
- desponsata 89 ff., 94, 95, 98, 100, 187, 191
 desponsata conubio 89
 desponsata viro 82 ff., 187
 desponsatio 88
 disciplina (literary device) 36
- editus ex virgine 81
 exempla (literary device) 36
 exhortatio (literary device) 36
 exire de virgine 81
- factus ex virgine 81
 filius ex virgine 68
 filius virginis 68
 fratres domini (cf. S. S. citations, p. 236) 252-257
 fructus virginis 68
- generari; generatio 81, 158
 generationis Dominicae praerogativa 78
 generatus ex virgine 81
 grex virginitatis 59
- immaculata virgo 163
 incarnatus ex virgine 80
 immaculatus, 119 ff., 161
 immaculati partus novitas 115, 116
 inusitatus modus 78
- laudatio (literary device) 36
- mater dei 258
 Maria 68
 mater 92, 93
- mater et dux virginum 60
 mulier (Jn. 2:4, Gal. 4:4) 213 ff., 237-240
- natus; nativitas 162, 167, 168
 natus, de Spiritu 81
 natus est 69, 70
 natus ex virgine 68, 80, 170
 natus sit et renatus, de Spiritu Sancto 81
 non cognovit eam donec peperit Filium (Mt. 1:25) 244-248
 novitas naturae 78
 novum generationis mysterium 78
- omne masculinum adaperiens, vulvam sanctum... (Lc. 2:23) 113 ff., 139
 ortus ex virgine 81
- pactio conjugalitatis 85, 88, 90, 189, 198, 200, 252
 partus 110, 114, 162
 partus virginis 68, 114, 115
 pedissequa Mariarum 54
 permanere 158
 porta clausa (Ezech. 44:2) 176, 218, 268-270
 praecepta (literary device) 36
 primogenitus 116 ff., 247, 248
 prodire de virgine 81
 pudor 46
- recipere de virgine 81
- sanctum (Lc. 2:23) 113 ff.
 secundum carnem factus ex Maria 80
 secundum carnem genitus ex Maria 80
 semper virgo (term *not* used by Ambrose) 271 f.
 sordes 130
- tradita; traditio (marriage) 91
- uterus virginalis 68
 uxor (Gal. 4:4, Mt. 1:24) 214
- virga Jesse (Is. 11:1) 72
 virgines permanere 157-159
 virginitatis magistra 66
 virgo 68, 69, 183, 272
 virgo desponsata (Lc. 1:26) 71, 76, 85, 90, 97
 virgo generavit 81, 139
 virgo post partum (Jerome) 149, 150
 votum 100, 101

GENERAL INDEX

Acca, bp. 125
 Acholius of Thessalonica 226
Acta Pauli et Theclae 37, 45
Acts of Peter 108
 Aetheria 60
 Agapetae 7, 8, 16, 181, 196
 Agnes, virgin martyr 37
 Alexander of Alexandria 11, 18-19, 22, 31
 Ambrosia (daughter of Eusebius of Bologna) 236
 Ambrosiaster 255
 Amphilocius 32, 137
 Ancyra, Council of (314) 7, 26
 Anemius of Sirmium 211, 226
 ante partum virginity 5-102, 123, 150, 191, 219
 Antioch 223
 Antioch, Greek and Latin Symbols 168
 Antioch, Greek Symbol of Synod (341): first, second, third, fourth formulae 168
 Antiochos of San Saba 14, 15
Antony, The Life of (Athanasius) 47
 Anysius of Thessalonica 224, 226, 228, 234
 Apa Moses 10
Apophthegmata Patrum 32
Apostolic Constitutions, Greek Symbol of 168
 Aquileia, Council of (381) 226
 Aquileia, Symbol of 168
 Arians; semi-Arians 92, 93, 185, 186, 209
 Arius and Euzoius, Greek Symbol of 168
 Arles, Second Council of 206, 220
Ascensio Isaiae 106-109
 Athanasius 3, 9-18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 30, 31, 34, 38, 39-43, 46, 47, 57, 66, 172, 181, 202, 203, 271, 272
 Athelstan's Psalter 168
 Augustine 35, 54, 57, 78, 81, 138, 152, 160, 162, 163, 174, 175, 176, 206, 216, 222, 251, 256
 Auxentius(?) 185, 186
 Auxentius of Dorostorum 186
 Auxentius of Milan 166, 185, 186, 211
 Avitus of Vienne 220, 221

 Barbatian 143, 177
 Baronius 142, 174
 Basil of Ancyra 31
 Basil of Caesarea 31, 32, 33, 137, 210
 Basil of Seleucia 37
 Bede the Venerable 120, 121, 125

Bernardine of Siena 35
 Bonosus, bp. of Sardica 53, 91, 176, 185, 189, 190, 192, 204, 205-235, 236-257 (Ambrose opposes), 270, 271.

 Caesarea, Greek Symbol of 168
 Capua, Council of (391-392) 216, 223-225, 226, 227, 231, 233, 234
 Carthage, Council of (397) 224
 Cassiodorus 255
 Chenoute of Atripes 10-12, 17
 Cerinthus 218
 Cicero 56
 Clement of Alexandria 111, 255
 Clement, St., pope 15
Codex Laudianus, Symbol of 167
Codex Swainsonii, Symbol of 167
 Coluthus 63
 conhospitalae 7
 Constantine of Assiout 10, 11
 Constantinople, Council of (381) 225
 Constantinople, Greek Symbol of Synod (360) 168
 Constantius 166
 Cyprian, magician of Antioch, martyr 8
 Cyprian of Carthage 7-9, 59, 151
 Cyprian of Toulon, Symbol of 167
 Cyril of Alexandria 11, 196, 256
 Cyril of Jerusalem 31, 32, 245

 Damasus, pope 184, 207
Decretum Gelasianum 219, 220
Didache 107
 Didymus the Blind 271
 Docetists 105-108
 Domino (friend of Jerome) 149

 Ebion 218, 220
 Ephesus, Council of 26
 Epiphanius, Greek Symbol of 168
Epistola Apostolorum 70
 Ernaldus, abbot 200, 201
 Eunomius of Cyzicus 210, 226
 Eusebius of Bologna 236
 Eusebius of Caesarea 7, 245, 255
 Eusebius of Vercelli 34, 35, 177, 223
 Evagrius of Antioch 223, 224

 Faustus of Riez, Symbol of 167
 Flavius of Antioch 223

 Gaudentius of Brescia 138, 145, 213, 214
 Gaul 221
 Gelasius I, pope 135, 234

Gennadius of Marseilles 160, 185, 186, 206, 220
 George of Nicomedy 137
 Germinius of Sirmium 208, 211, 226
Gnomes of Nicea 19-31, 33, 44-45
 Gnostics 105, 106, 108
 Godofredus 174
Gospel of Peter 254
Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 19, 20
 Gratian, emperor 186, 225
 Gregory of Nazianzus 8, 32, 112, 148, 184, 245
 Gregory of Nyssa 32, 33, 54, 57, 79, 106, 111, 112, 148, 172, 255
 Gregory Thaumaturgus 106, 111, 112, 165, 172

 Hegesippus 254
 Helvidius 95, 143, 144, 169, 209, 214, 221-223, 247, 253
 Hilary of Poitiers 92, 112, 203, 204, 208, 213, 247
 Hippolyte 72, 73, 77, 139, 167, 271
 Horace 56

 Ignatius of Antioch 70, 84, 108, 109
 Ildefonsus of Toledo 160
 Illyria 225
 Illyria, Synod of 216
 in partu virginity 55, 71, 76, 105-178, 230, 233
 Innocent I, pope 205-207, 217, 235
 Irenaeus 70, 72, 109, 110, 137

 Jerome 3, 7, 11, 12, 15, 34, 35, 50, 58, 59, 61, 106, 110, 133, 142-148, 149-152, 153-156, 159, 160, 169, 170, 172, 184, 185, 187, 200, 203, 209, 210, 213, 214, 222, 223, 232, 238-242, 245-247, 252-257.
 Jerusalem, Greek Symbol of 168
 John the Evangelist 189 ff., 192-197
 John Chrysostom 7, 58, 79, 196, 246, 251, 256
 John of Jerusalem 184
 Joseph, St., spouse of Mary 82 ff. (betrothal, "marriage", "desponsata"), 199 f., 250 f., 260, 261, 270
 Josephus, Flavius 57, 80
 Jovinian 52, 55, 142-177, 189, 190, 216, 221-223, 229-231, 233, 268
 Julianus, Illyrian bp. 209
 Justin 70, 72, 109, 251, 255
 Justina, empress 186
 Justina, virgin martyr of Antioch 8

Lawrence the Deacon 37
 Leander, St. bp. of Seville 60

Leo the Great, pope 205
 Liberius, pope 46, 47
 Livy 135

Macedonians 209, 228
 Manichaeism 173 ff.
 Marcellina (Ambrose's sister) 35, 47
 Marcellus of Ancyra 207, 245
 Marcianus of Naissus 206
 Marion 110
 Maximus, emperor 186
 Meletian schism 223 f.
 Milan, Latin Symbol of 168
 Milan, Synod of 142, 154, 229, 231
 Methodius 9, 37, 79
 Mucianus 208

Nestorius 11, 217, 220
 Nestorians, Greek Symbol of 168
 Nicea, Council of. *see: Gnomes*
 Nicea, Greek Symbol of Synod (325) 168
 Nicetas of Remesiana 34, 59, 64, 210, 211, 234
 Nike, Greek Symbol of Synod (359) 168
 Novatian 74

Odilo of Cluny 35
 Origen 8, 48, 65, 82-84, 110, 111, 113, 115, 124-126, 130-133, 148, 151, 184, 187, 201, 204, 210, 213, 247, 254-257, 266
 Ovid 51

Pachomius 17
 Pammachius (Jerome's friend) 149, 151
 Pammachius (Roman senator) 143
 Paschasius Radbertus 121, 122, 129
 Paul of Samosate 7, 220
 Paulinus of Antioch 184, 207, 223
 Pelagia of Antioch 37
 Pelagius 174
 Peter of Alexandria 271
 Philostorgius 210
 Photinus of Sirmium 206-209, 217, 218, 220, 221, 226
 post partum virginity 169, 181-272, 230
 Priscilla, catacomb of St. 5-7, 66
 Protegenes, Illyrian bp. 208
Protoevangelium of James 20, 105, 106, 108, 109, 111, 113, 254, 255
 Pseudo-Athanasius 137
 Pseudo-Clement 13-15
 Pseudo-Cyprian 7, 196
 Pseudo-Ildefonsus 122
 Pseudo-Marius Mercator 206-208, 217, 219, 220

Ravenna, Latin Symbol of 168
 Reichenau, Symbol of 167

Rimini, Synod of (359) 166
 Roman Symbol 80, 81, 162, 165 ff, 170
 Rome, Council of (382) 223
 Rome, Greek Symbol of 168
 Rome, Synod of (380) 142, 207
 Rufinus, archbp 26, 167, 185

Sacramentarium Gallicanum
 Symbol of 167
 Sarmatio 143, 177
Sermo in Nativitatem Christi (Syriac) 111
 Severinus Binius 144
 Severus of Asmounefn 10-12, 17
 Siricius I, pope 142-147, 153-155, 157,
 205, 211, 216, 223, 226, 229
 Sirmium, Greek Symbol of Synod (359)
 168
 Sirmium, Second Synod of 166
 Sophronius of Jerusalem 37
 Soteris, virgin martyr 37
 Spain 221
Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua 206, 220
Sub tuum praesidium... 11
 subintroductae 7, 181
 Symbols 167, 168; *see also*: Roman
 Symbol
 Symmachus(?) 185, 186

Symmachus, Quintus Aurelius 185, 186
 Symmachus the Ebionite 186

 Tertullian 70, 72, 110, 111, 151, 209, 237,
 238
Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs 73
 Thecla, virgin martyr 37
 Theodoret 80, 223
 Theodosian Code 173 f.
 Theodosius, emperor 225
 Theophilus of Alexandria 224, 228
 Thomas Aquinas 122, 123
 Turin, Latin Symbol of 168

 Valens 166
 Valentinian 166, 173
 Valerius, abbot Bergidensis 60
 velatio conjugalís 6
 Vercelli 177
 Vercelli (inscription of) 59
 Victorinus of Pettau 209
 Vigilius, pope 220
 Vincent of Lerins 154
 Virgil 51
 virgin martyrs 8, 37

 Zeno of Verona 35, 112, 113, 138, 145

MODERN AUTHOR INDEX

Achelis, H. 21, 28, 30
 Agius, A. 133
 Alès, A. d' 111
 Altaner, B. 22, 47, 73
 Amann, E. 20, 106, 109, 111, 206, 254,
 255, 256
 Amelineau, E. 10, 11
 Armand, D. 33
 Aubineau, M. 12

 Badcock, F. J. 166
 Bardenhewer, O. 9
 Bardy, G. 74, 80, 216
 Batiffol, P. 25, 107
 Beelen, J. T. 15
 Beis, N. 72
 Bernard, J. H. 107
 Bihlmeyer, K. 7
 Biraghi, L. 50, 51, 56
 Blanchini, J. 92, 93, 211
 Blass, F. 69
 Boismard, M. E. 69
 Bonnet, M. 37, 108

Bonwetsch, G. N. 72, 73, 77, 139, 271
 Botte, B. 75, 79, 164, 194, 250
 Botz, R. 106, 108, 243
 Bover, J. M. 107
 Braun, F. M. 69
 Brière, M. 73
 Buechsel, F. 69
 Burn, A. E. 34, 59, 165, 208-210
 Burney, C. F. 69

 Calmet, A. 61
 Camelot, T. 36
 Campenhausen, H. 205, 207, 230
 Capelle, B. 259
 Caragliano, T. 70
 Casey, R. P. 13
 Caspar, E. 226
 Cavallera, F. 146, 148, 185, 205
 Cazzaniga, E. 81
 Ceuppens, F. 87, 88
 Charles, R. H. 107, 108, 109
 Charue, A. 69
 Connolly, R. H. 78, 107, 164, 165, 166, 250

Coustant, P. 143, 144, 157, 160, 161, 205; *see also*: Maurists
 Crum, W. E. 21, 24, 30
 Cullman, O. 69

Diehl, E. 59
 Diekamp, F. 8, 15, 17
 Diobouniotis, C. 72
 Dobschütz, E. v. 220
 Doelger, F. J. 64, 65, 114, 135
 Dreves, G. M. 56
 Dudden, F. H. 35, 37, 125, 134, 143, 153, 164, 166, 186, 191, 207, 211, 217, 223, 230, 232, 233, 239, 250, 251
 Dünsing, H. 70
 Durand, A. 254, 256

Erasmus 123

Fabricius J. A. 20
 Faller O. 35, 37, 39 ff. 47, 51, 56, 65, 66, 68, 76, 79, 80, 81, 93, 117, 162, 163, 181, 182, 194, 200
 Feder, A. 208
 Février, M. P. A. 6
 Fischer, B. 259
 Fournials, J. B. 123
 Frances, D. 8, 9
 Frévin, H. 86, 205
 Friedrich, P. 123, 134, 135, 155, 157, 170
 Funk, F. X. 70, 108

Gaechter, P. 85, 87, 243
 Garcia Villada, Z. 60
 Garcon, J. 109
 Garitte, G. 106
 Gaspari, C. P. 25
 Gasparri, P. 86
 Ghellinck, J. De 74
 Giamberardini, G. 11
 Goltz, E. v. d. 14, 250
 Goodspeed, E. J. 72, 109
 Graffin, F. 73
 Greenslade, S. L. 209, 224, 226
 Grimme, H. 107
 Grisar, H. 37
 Guerin, H. 10

Haase, F. 19, 20-31, 44, 45
 Haenel, G. 174
 Haller, W. 52, 143-146, 152, 155, 156, 157, 158, 160, 174, 175
 Hardouin, J. 143-145
 Harnack, A. 175, 255
 Harris, J. R. 106
 Harvey, W. W. 70, 72, 109, 110, 137
 Hefele, C. 21, 144
 Hennecke, E. 106-108, 254, 256

Huet, D. 131
 Huhn, J. 76, 86, 163

Izarny, R. d' 6, 90, 91, 234

Jaffé, P. 143, 205
 James, M. R. 106, 254
 Janssens, A. 46
 Jouassard, G. 13, 31, 109, 125, 153, 154, 169, 184, 186, 209, 210
 Juret, F. 50

Kattenbusch, F. 167, 168, 250
 Kelly, J. N. D. 165, 167
 Klein, M. 182
 Kleist, A. 108
 Klostermann, B. E. 106
 Kneller, C. A. 7, 189, 196, 197
 Koch, H. 4, 6, 9, 33, 70, 109-111, 123, 124, 132, 159, 243, 246, 254-256, 259
 Kroll, J. 250

Lagrange, M. J. 87, 105, 242, 251, 254, 255, 261
 Lammeyer, J. i. 24, 27, 29, 30
 Lantschoot, A. v. 17
 Laurentin, R. 111, 137
 Le Bachelet, X. 23, 29, 221
 Lebon, J. 13, 16, 159
 Lebreton, J. 254
 Leclercq, H. 21, 64
 Lefort, L. T. 3, 9-12, 14-20, 30, 39 ff., 44, 46, 66, 203, 272.
 Lehner, F. v. 123, 145, 155, 157
 Leipoldt, J. 10
 Lenormant, C. 22
 Lépiciér, A. M. 134
 Lietzmann, H. 166-168, 250
 Lightfoot, J. B. 108
 Lipsius, R. A. 37, 108
 Loisy, A. 69

Maldonatus, J. 88, 134
 Mansi, G. D. 143-145, 157, 160, 162-164, 171, 205
 Maries, L. 73
 Maurists 123, 140, 145, 158, 160, 161, 228, 251; *see also*: Coustant, P.
 Meier, G. 8
 Mercier, C. 73
 Merkle, S. 50, 51, 59, 195
 Metz, R. i. 6
 Meyer, R. T. 47
 Michel, C. 254
 Migne edition 157, 161, 163, 207
 Millar, J. 63
 Mingana, A. 107
 Mohrmann, C. 259

- Montalto, F. De 50
 Moons, M. C. 33
 Morin, G. 150

 Neubert, E. 111, 132
 Niederhuber, J. E. 155
 Niessen, J. 155

 Oehler, F. 110, 238
 Otto, J. C. T. 70

 Pagnamenta, A. 73, 154
 Palanque, J. R. 35, 153, 207
 Pamier, E. 62
 Perler, O. 106, 250
 Petavius, D. 123, 135
 Petschenig, M. 80
 Pitra, J. B. 111, 165
 Pius XII, pope 66
 Plumpe, J. C. 106, 107, 109
 Quadt, P. 7

 Quasten, J. 15, 36, 108
 Quecke, H. 106

 Rauschen, G. 35, 134, 144, 153, 205, 207, 211, 223, 24, 230
 Resch, P. 69
 Revillout, E. 23, 27, 30
 Richardson, E. C. 148, 220
 Rolando, G. 93, 246
 Roschini, G. 150, 155
 Rossi, F. 23, 26, 44

 Sabatier, P. 246
 Schanz, M. 51, 125
 Scheeben, M. J. 155
 Schenkl, H. 125, 134, 148
 Schilling, R. 6
 Schmid, J. 107

 Schmidt, C. 70
 Sixtus V, pope 50
 Smith, J. P. 110
 Soell, G. 8, 32, 33, 112, 148, 256
 Spann, A. 46
 Stamm, C. 134
 Stegmüller, O. 11
 Steier, A. 56
 Stevenson, W. B. 61
 Strycker, E. de 106

 Tadin, M. 209, 225
 Testuz, M. 106
 Thilo, J. C. 20, 135, 234
 Tillemont, L. S. N. 185, 205, 223
 Tischendorf, C. de 20, 106, 254
 Tisserant, E. 107
 Toynbee, J. 135
 Tuechle, H. 7

 Usener, H. 33

 Vagaggini, C. 110, 119, 131-133
 Vallarsi D. 144, 149
 Viller, M. 37
 Vizmanos, F. de B. 15, 34, 37
 Vloberg, M. 6

 Walford, H. 163
 Walpole, A. S. 56, 70, 79, 140, 192, 195
 Weber, S. 110
 Wenzlowsky, S. 155, 157, 158
 Wetstein, J. 14
 Weymann, C. 51, 56, 59, 60
 Wilpert, J. 5, 37, 60

 Zahn, T. 69, 254, 255
 Zeiller, J. 205, 207-209, 211, 226
 Zoega, G. 11, 22-24

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