

**ASCETICISM AND MARY:
THE FUNCTION OF MARY'S VIRGINITY
IN THE EARLY FATHERS FROM IGNATIUS TO ORIGEN**

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I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work is my own:

—

Ernest B. Manges

ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an examination of the relationship between the practice of ascetic virginity and the virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Ante-Nicene Church beginning with Ignatius of Antioch through to Origen of Alexandria. The results of this study reveal that the two virginities have no contact in these documents and writers with the exception of two figures: Tertullian and Origen. A third witness, the *Protevangelium of James*, is sometimes considered to connect the virginity of Mary with asceticism. However, the *Protevangelium* is no such witness because it is not an ascetic document.

For the most part the Ante-Nicene Church did not consider the Virgin Mary to be an imitative example for virgins and other sexual ascetics. Without a doubt Mary later on is widely perceived as a model for those who have renounced the sexual life. Augustine presents Mary as such a model, and as early as 377, Ambrose exhorts, 'Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which, as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected. From this you may take your pattern of life.' (*de virginibus* 2.2.6).

In the course of this study a new tool is applied to the analysis of the witnesses selected. This is a more nuanced definition of asceticism. Renunciation has been considered the essential element by which to identify ascetic thought. Recent reexamination of the nature of asceticism now defines it less as a rejection of the world and more as a positive assertion of the hope of the transformation of the self. A leading voice in this new perspective is Peter Brown. More pertinent to this project is a specification by Richard Valantasis: 'asceticism may be defined as performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe.' Asceticism can be analyzed in three aspects: performance, intention and novelty. All ascetic activity is a performance before the world, the church, God or oneself. Asceticism is intentional, directed towards the goal of self-transformation. Repudiation of the world is a means toward the goal of transformation, not the essence per se of asceticism. Asceticism is novel as it creates both a new individual and new groups. ('Constructions of Power in Asceticism', *JAAR* 63 (1995), 797-800).

This study has applied this newer perspective on asceticism to the examination of each of the following witnesses of the Ante-Nicene Church: Ignatius, Justin Martyr, the *Protevangelium of James*, Irenaeus, Melito, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Gospel of Philip* and Origen. Each witness has been analyzed to discover what is affirmed in two areas: concerning Mary and her virginity and regarding the practice of asceticism, especially sexual renunciation, among the faithful.

The true physical birth of Jesus from a virginal mother is universally affirmed in these witnesses. Often the real birth is asserted in reply to docetism. The virginal conception is viewed by nearly all of these witnesses as a fulfillment of OT prophecy. Mary's *in partu* virginity appears in several early apocryphal witnesses. Her *post partum* virginity is discussed by only two writers: Tertullian, who denies it, and Origen, who affirms it. A parallel between Mary and Eve is developed by Justin and Irenaeus.

Nearly all of these documents and writers are aware of and approve ascetic practice. Application of the newer perspective on asceticism has helped to outline more of the ascetic thought of figures like Irenaeus, who otherwise have little to say about renunciation. Applying this newer approach to the *Protevangelium of James* reveals that Mary is exalted in this document as an individual who enjoys a state of heightened ritual purity but she is not an ascetic figure. The Syrian church, known for asceticism, is the probable source of two witnesses: the *Odes of Solomon* and the *Protevangelium*. Both affirm the virginity *in partu* but neither employs the Virgin Mary as a model of virginity.

Tertullian is the first to present Mary as a model for virgins. As the mother who is 'at once virginal and monogamous' she is an example for both virgins and married women (*mon.* 8). Origen also sets out Mary as an example for physical virginity. But his real innovation is his use of Mary as an ascetic symbol for the spiritual ascent of the soul. The individual believer's soul is transformed as it ascends in maturity until it brings forth Christ in spirit, as Mary brought him forth in the flesh. Origen also parallels her physical virginity to a virginity (purity) of the soul. These readings are congruent with his entire approach of taking all historical events of the Bible as figures of a spiritual reality. With Origen we have moved away from earlier witnesses who confined their consideration of Mary to her role in the incarnation and a great deal closer to the emerging fourth century view of her as the paragon of virginity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations	i-iii
Acknowledgements	iv-vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Overview (1)	
1.2 Thesis (3)	
1.2 Literature Survey (11)	
Chapter 2: Early Expositions on Mary	18
2.1 Introduction (18)	
2.2 Ignatius of Antioch (18)	
2.3 Justin Martyr (23)	
2.4 Protevangelium of James (37)	
2.5 Conclusion (50)	
Chapter 3: Mary in Salvation History: Irenaeus	52
3.1 Salvation of the Flesh and Recapitulation (52)	
3.2 Irenaeus and Asceticism (67)	
3.3 Mary and Her Virginitly in Irenaeus (81)	
3.4 Conclusion (105)	
The Adam-Christ Typology in Irenaeus (107)	
Chapter 4: A Compendium of Lesser Witnesses	108
4.1 Introduction (108)	
4.2 Melito of Sardis (108)	
4.3 Clement of Alexandria (113)	
4.4 Tertullian of Carthage (122)	
4.5 Hippolytus of Rome (134)	
4.6 Cyprian of Carthage (144)	
4.7 Novatian of Rome (148)	
4.8 Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Texts (152)	
4.9 Conclusion (160)	
Chapter 5: Mary the Spiritual Model: Origen	162
5.1 Origen's Theology and Exegesis (162)	
5.2 Asceticism in Origen (171)	
5.3 Mary and her Virginitly in Origen's Thought (200)	
5.4 Conclusion (221)	
Chapter 6: Conclusion	225
Appendix: Additional Texts from Origen on Mary	249
Bibliography	256

ABBREVIATIONS

Reference Works, Critical Editions, Translations and Journals

- ACW *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. by J. Quasten and others (Westminster, Md., 1946-)
- ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. and trans. by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1864-97; repr. Grand Rapids, MI, 1979)
- BSFEM *Études Mariales, Bulletin de la Société française d'Études Mariales* (Paris, 1935-1938, 1947-)
- CCSL *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1954-)
- CMP *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, ed. by S. Alvarez Campos (Burgos, 1970)
- CPG *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, Vol. 1: *Patres Anteniceni*, ed. by M. Geerard (Brepols, 1983)
- CPL *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*, ed. by E. Dekkers, 3rd edn (Steenbrugge, 1995)
- DLNTD *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. by R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Leicester, 1997)
- EEC *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. by A. Di Berardino, trans. by A. Walford, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1992)
- EE Chr. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. by E. Ferguson, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London, 1997)
- EphMar* *Ephemerides Mariologicae* (Madrid, 1951-)
- FC *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. by R. J. Deferrari and J. Quasten (Washington, D.C., 1947-)
- GCS *Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, 1897-1941; Berlin and Leipzig, 1953; Berlin, 1954-)
- Graef H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London, 1985)
- JAAR *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Atlanta, 1965-)
- JECS *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Baltimore, 1993-)
- JEH *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1950-)
- LCC The Library of Christian Classics (London, Philadelphia, 1953-)
- MSt *Marian Studies*. Proceedings of the American Mariological Society (Washington, D.C., 1950-)
- Mariology* *Mariology*, ed. by J. Carol, 3 vols (Milwaukee, WI, 1955, 1957, 1961)
- Mary in NT* *Mary in the New Testament. A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, ed. by R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmyer, J. Reumann (New York, 1978)
- NCE *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967)
- NHLE *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. by J. M. Robinson (New York, 1977)
- NPNF *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by P. Schaff (New York: 1887-1892, reissued on CD ROM, Albany, OR: Sage Digital Library, 1996)
- NT The New Testament
- NTA *New Testament Apocrypha*, revd by W. Schneemelcher, trans. by R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991)
- ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church*, ed. by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1997)
- OT The Old Testament
- OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. by J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY, 1985)
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*, ed. by J-P. Migne, 162 vols (Paris, 1857-66)
- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, ed. by J-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris 1844-64)
- SC *Sources chrétiennes* (Paris, 1941-)
- Theotokos* M. O'Carroll, *A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Revised Edition with supplement (Wilmington, DE, 1983)
- VC *Vigiliae Christianae* (Amsterdam, 1947-)

Ancient Works

<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i> , Justin Martyr
<i>2 Apol.</i>	<i>Second Apology</i> , Justin Martyr
<i>AH</i>	<i>adversus omnes haereses</i> , Irenaeus
<i>Antichr.</i>	<i>de Christo et antichristo</i> , Hippolytus
<i>apol.</i>	<i>apologeticum</i> , Tertullian
<i>an.</i>	<i>de anima</i> , Tertullian
<i>arch.</i>	<i>peri archon</i> , Origen
<i>Asc. Isa.</i>	<i>Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah</i>
<i>AT</i>	<i>traditio apostolica</i> , Hippolytus
<i>bapt.</i>	<i>de baptismo</i> , Tertullian
<i>bene. pat.</i>	<i>de benedictionibus patriarcharum</i> , Hippolytus
<i>bon. pat.</i>	<i>de bono patientiae</i> , Cyprian
<i>bon. pud.</i>	<i>de bono pudicitiae</i> , Novatian
<i>carn. Chr.</i>	<i>de carne Christi</i> , Tertullian
<i>Cels.</i>	<i>contra Celsum</i> , Origen
<i>cib.</i>	<i>de cibis Judaicis</i> , Novatian
<i>c. Noet.</i>	<i>contra Noetum</i> , Hippolytus
<i>com. Cant.</i>	<i>commenarius in Canticum Canticorum</i> , Origen
<i>com. Dan.</i>	<i>commentarii in Daniele</i> , Hippolytus
<i>com. Io.</i>	<i>commentarii in Ioannem</i> , Origen
<i>com. Matt.</i>	<i>commentarii in Matthaem</i> , Origen
<i>com. Ps.</i>	<i>commentarii in Psalmos</i> , Origen
<i>com. Rm.</i>	<i>commentarii in epistulam ad Romanos</i> , Origen
<i>cor.</i>	<i>de corona militis</i> , Tertullian
<i>cult. fem.</i>	<i>de cultu feminarum</i> , Tertullian
<i>Dem.</i>	<i>The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching</i> , Irenaeus
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> , Justin Martyr
<i>dom. orat.</i>	<i>de dominica oratione</i> , Cyprian
<i>Ep. Apost.</i>	<i>Epistula Apostolorum</i>
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i> , Ignatius
<i>euch.</i>	<i>peri euches</i> , Origen
<i>exc.</i>	<i>Excerpta ex Theodoto</i> , Clement
<i>exh. cast.</i>	<i>de exhortatio castitatis</i> , Tertullian
<i>exh. mart.</i>	<i>exhortatione ad martyrium</i> , Origen
<i>frag. 1Cor.</i>	<i>fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam primam ad Corinthios</i> , Origen
<i>frag. Col.</i>	<i>fragmenta ex commentariis in Colossenses</i> , Origen
<i>frag. Eph.</i>	<i>fragmenta ex commentariis in Ephesios</i> , Origen
<i>frag. Gal.</i>	<i>fragmenta ex commentariis in Galatas</i> , Origen
<i>frag. Heb.</i>	<i>fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam ad Hebraeos libri</i> , Origen
<i>frag. Tit.</i>	<i>fragmenta ex commentariis in Titum</i> , Origen
<i>fuga</i>	<i>de fuga in persecutione</i> , Tertullian
<i>G. Phil.</i>	<i>The Gospel of Philip</i>
<i>G. Thom.</i>	<i>The Gospel of Thomas</i> (Nag Hammadi)
<i>hab. virg.</i>	<i>de habitu virginum</i> , Cyprian
<i>haer.</i>	<i>refutatio omnium haeresium</i> , Hippolytus
<i>HE</i>	<i>historia ecclesiastica</i> , Eusebius
<i>Heracl.</i>	<i>disputatio cum Heracleida</i> , Origen
<i>hist. eccl.</i>	<i>historia ecclesiastica</i> , Socrates
<i>hom. Cant.</i>	<i>homiliae in Canticum canticorum</i> , Origen
<i>hom. Ex.</i>	<i>homiliae in Exodum</i> , Origen
<i>hom. Ezk.</i>	<i>homiliae in Ezechielem</i> , Origen
<i>hom. Gen.</i>	<i>homiliae in Genesim</i> , Origen
<i>hom. Ier.</i>	<i>homiliae in Ieremiam</i> , Origen

<i>hom. Iesu Naue</i>	<i>homiliae in Iesu Naue, Origen</i>
<i>hom. Isa.</i>	<i>homiliae in Isaiam, Origen</i>
<i>hom. Iud.</i>	<i>homiliae in librum Iudicum, Origen</i>
<i>hom. Lev.</i>	<i>homiliae in Leviticum, Origen</i>
<i>hom. Lc.</i>	<i>homiliae in Lucam, Origen</i>
<i>hom. Num.</i>	<i>homiliae in Numeros, Origen</i>
<i>hom. Reg.</i>	<i>homiliae in I Reges, Origen</i>
<i>idol.</i>	<i>de idololatria, Tertullian</i>
<i>ieiun.</i>	<i>de ieiunio, Tertullian</i>
<i>laps.</i>	<i>de lapsis, Cyprian</i>
<i>Mag.</i>	<i>To the Magnesians, Ignatius</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>adversus Marcionem, Tertullian</i>
<i>mart.</i>	<i>ad martyras, Tertullian</i>
<i>mon.</i>	<i>de monogamia, Tertullian</i>
<i>mort.</i>	<i>de mortalitate, Cyprian</i>
<i>nat.</i>	<i>ad nationes, Tertullian</i>
<i>Odes</i>	<i>Odes of Solomon</i>
<i>orat.</i>	<i>de oratione, Tertullian</i>
<i>paed.</i>	<i>paedagogus, Clement</i>
<i>paen.</i>	<i>de paenitentia, Tertullian</i>
<i>pasch.</i>	<i>peri pascha, Origen</i>
<i>pat.</i>	<i>de patientia, Tertullian</i>
<i>Philoc.</i>	<i>Philocalia seu ecloga de operibus Origenis</i>
<i>Phld.</i>	<i>To the Philadelphians, Ignatius</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>To Polycarp, Ignatius</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>peri pascha, Melito</i>
<i>praescr.</i>	<i>de praescriptione haereticorum, Tertullian</i>
<i>Prax.</i>	<i>adversus Praxean, Tertullian</i>
<i>ProtJ</i>	<i>protevangelium Jacobi</i>
<i>protr.</i>	<i>protreptikos, Clement</i>
<i>pucl.</i>	<i>de pudicitia, Tertullian</i>
<i>quod idol.</i>	<i>Quod idola dii non sint, Cyprian</i>
<i>res.</i>	<i>de resurrectione mortuorum, Tertullian</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	<i>To the Romans, Ignatius</i>
<i>Scap.</i>	<i>ad Scapulam, Tertullian</i>
<i>scorp.</i>	<i>scorpiace, Tertullian</i>
<i>sel. Gen</i>	<i>selecta in Genesim, Origen</i>
<i>sel. Ps.</i>	<i>selecta in Psalmos, Origen</i>
<i>ser. Matt.</i>	<i>commentariorum series in Matthaem, Origen</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>Sm.</i>	<i>To the Smyrneans, Ignatius</i>
<i>spect.</i>	<i>de spectaculis, Tertullian</i>
<i>spectac.</i>	<i>de spectaculis, Novatian</i>
<i>str.</i>	<i>stromateis, Clement</i>
<i>test. an.</i>	<i>de testimonio animae, Tertullian</i>
<i>test. libri</i>	<i>testimoniorum libri, Cyprian</i>
<i>Tr.</i>	<i>To the Trallians, Ignatius</i>
<i>trin.</i>	<i>de trinitate, Novatian</i>
<i>unit.</i>	<i>de ecclesiae unitate, Cyprian</i>
<i>ux.</i>	<i>ad uxorem, Tertullian</i>
<i>Val.</i>	<i>adversus Valentinianos, Tertullian</i>
<i>virg. vel.</i>	<i>de virginibus velandis, Tertullian</i>

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

This dissertation is an examination of the function of the virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the writings of the Church Fathers beginning with Ignatius of Antioch through to Origen of Alexandria. In particular the relationship between the practice of ascetic virginity and the virginity of Mary is examined. Scholars disagree on whether these writings connect the virginity of Mary to asceticism. Among those who say such connections in the ante-Nicene Church are tenuous at best is Hans von Campenhausen, who asserts that ‘even after Origen, Mary plays a noticeably small part in the ascetic literature of the third and even the fourth century.’¹ On the other side are those who say ascetic considerations are directly connected at a very early stage to the figure of the Virgin Mary. The landmark joint project of Catholic and Protestant scholarship on Mary in the New Testament asserts that as early as the second century, ‘the growing ascetic and encratic tendencies in the churches everywhere prepared the way for a new, independent Marian emphasis. The virginal mother of Jesus became here the idealized model of the holy and perfect life of purity.’²

¹ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, Series in Historical Theology, 2, trans. by Frank Clarke (London: SCM, 1964), 63.

² Raymond Brown, Karl Donfried, Joseph Fitzmyer and John Reumann, eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 258. Marina Warner opens her chapter ‘Virgins and Martyrs’ stating that ‘Mary has always been the paragon of virginity,’ *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 68. A few lines later she cites Tertullian as an example of those who connect exhortations to chastity with Mary. More recently, Gail P. Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviors and Formative Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 189-190, argues that male church leaders constructed the Eve-Mary parallel in order to make Mary a model of purity and obedience in order to control celibate women who were demanding equality.

There is no doubt that later on Mary is widely perceived as an imitative model for those who have renounced the sexual life. Augustine preaches that ‘Christ, designing to establish virginity in the heart of the church, first preserved virginity in the body of Mary.’³ As early as 377 Ambrose explicates Mary as a major model for virgins:

Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which, as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected. From this you may take your pattern of life.⁴

This project begins with Ignatius of Antioch, the first post-Apostolic witness to theological thinking about Mary early in the second century. It ends with Origen, an important figure in the history of doctrines of Mary, and his writings at just past the mid-point of the third century.⁵ This period is significant because scholarly attention has been more attracted to events and figures surrounding the designation of Mary as *Theotokos* at the Council of Ephesus in 431.⁶ This study focuses on the consideration of Mary in the pre-Nicene Church.

³ Sermon 188.4 cited in Eamon R. Carroll, ‘The Theological Significance of Mary’s Virginity’, *MSt* 13 (1962), 132.

⁴ *de virginibus* 2.2.6 cited in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 120. The date of *de virginibus* from *Patrology: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature*, ed. by Angelo di Berardino, trans. by Placid Solari (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1994), 167. The growing influence of celibate life in the church was questioned by Jovinian and others who sought to diminish the application of Mary as a model by denying her perpetual virginity which Ambrose fiercely defends, see discussion in Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985), 1.79-80.

⁵ This time frame corresponds almost exactly with the first volume of the *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, which is the chief collection of primary sources on Mary for the early church, Sergius Alvarez Campos, ed., (Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, 1970), hereafter CMP. It is also the same interval covered by Luigi Gambero, a specialist in Mary who teaches at the Marianum in Rome and at the University of Dayton in Ohio, in Part One of his *Mary and The Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 23-94.

⁶ Since 1967 Eamon R. Carroll has issued an annual ‘Survey of Recent Mariology’ in *Marian Studies*. In these articles since 1990 eighteen studies of the 4th and 5th centuries are mentioned compared to only five studies for the 2nd and 3rd centuries, *MSt* 41 (1990) through *MSt* 49 (1998), the survey being omitted from the 1999 issue. The same imbalance can be seen in G. M. Besutti, *Bibliografia mariana*, vol. 6: 1973-1981 (Rome, 1984), which contains only six entries for studies of individuals up through Origen but 39 after Origen through Leo I.

1.2 THESIS

1.2.1 A new perspective on asceticism

Renunciation has been seen as the key element in defining asceticism. One major standard encyclopedia defines asceticism as ‘the theory that one ought on principle to deny one’s desires.’⁷ A recent reference work continues this trend when it describes the practice of celibacy in the early church as ‘a means for renouncing the prison of the earthly body.’⁸ Von Campenhausen sets out his definition of asceticism as voluntary renunciation in the three areas of possessions, food and drink, and sexual relations.⁹

However there have been some reexaminations of the nature of asceticism which have defined it less as a reaction against earthly life and society and more as a positive assertion of hope of the transformation of the self. The best-known

⁷ Carl Wellman, ‘Asceticism’ in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed. (London: Collier Macmillan, 1967), 1.171-174. Asceticism is ‘exertion, struggle and abstinence,’ Friedrich Wulf, ‘Asceticism’ in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Karl Rahner and others, eds (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1.110-116. See also Walter O. Kaelber, ‘Asceticism’ in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 1.441-445.

⁸ Michael S. Driscoll, ‘Celibacy’, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Michael Downey, ed. (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1993), 133-134.

⁹ In *Virgin Birth* (53, n. 2) he refers to a definition in his work two years previous, ‘Die Askese im Urchristentum’ in *Tradition und Leben* (1960) translated by A. V. Littledale, ‘Early Christian Asceticism’ in *Tradition and Life in the Church: Essays and Lectures in Church History*, (London: Collins, 1968), 94, reprinted in *Acts of Piety in the Early Church*, Everett Ferguson, ed., Studies in Early Christianity, 17 (London: Garland, 1993), 178-210. Henry Chadwick has a similar definition, ‘The Ascetic Ideal in the History of the Church’ in *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. by W. J. Sheils, Studies in Church History, 22 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 1-23. Renunciation is even thought to be inherent in the very character of the age, E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 35 as cited by Vincent L. Wimbush, ‘Sophrosyne: Greco-Roman Origins of a Type of Ascetic Behavior’ in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World*, J. E. Goehring and others, eds, (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1990), 90.

representative of this newer view of asceticism is Peter Brown and especially his work *The Body and Society*. He demonstrates that early Christian ascetics affirmed the human body as a vehicle of transformation:

They had set it up as a palpable blazon of the end of the 'present age.' They believed that the universe itself had shattered with the rising of Christ from the grave. By renouncing all sexual activity the human body could join in Christ's victory: it could turn back the inexorable. The body could wrench itself free from the grip of the animal world.¹⁰

More pertinent to this project is recent work by Richard Valantasis and others.¹¹ Following Geoffrey Harpham¹², Valantasis draws on theories of power to redefine asceticism as a method of empowerment.¹³ He then proposes a new definition of asceticism: 'Asceticism may be defined as performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe.' Asceticism can be analyzed in three aspects: performance, intention and novelty. All ascetic activity is a performance before the

¹⁰ Peter L. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Lectures on the History of Religions, 13 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 31-32.

¹¹ Richard Valantasis, 'Adam's Body: Uncovering Esoteric Traditions in the *Apocryphon of John* and Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides*', *Second Century*, 7 (1989-1990), 150-162; Vincent L. Wimbush, 'The Ascetic Impulse in Early Christianity: Some Methodological Challenges,' *Studia Patristica*, 25, ed. by Elizabeth A. Livingstone, Papers presented to the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 1991 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 462-478; Maureen A. Tilley, 'The Ascetic Body and the (Un)Making of the World of the Martyr *JAAR* 59 (1991), 467-479; Richard Valantasis, 'Daemons and the Perfecting of the Monk's Body: Monastic Anthropology, Daemonology, and Asceticism' *Semeia*, 58 (1992), 47-79; Susanna Elm, '*Virgins of God*' *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 13-14; Richard Valantasis, 'The Stranger Within, The Stranger Without: Ascetical Withdrawal and the Second Letter of Basil the Great' in *Christianity and the Stranger: Historical Essays*, ed. F. W. Nichols (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 64-81; idem, 'Is the *Gospel of Thomas* Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory', *J ECS* 7 (1999), 55-81.

¹² Geoffrey G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3-66, who while working in a broader arena than P. Brown, shows that asceticism cannot be merely defined as a repression or denial of desire but rather it appropriates desire in order to gain spiritual perfection.

¹³ Richard Valantasis, 'Constructions of Power in Asceticism' *JAAR* 63 (1995), 775-821, especially 792-795. He adds a corrective to Harpham by emphasizing that asceticism is more than just cultural, it is ultimately an activity centered upon the individual, R. Valantasis, 'A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism' in *Asceticism*, ed. by Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 546-7.

world, the religious community, God or oneself. Asceticism is intentional, directed towards the goal of transformation of the self. Rejection of the dominant society is only a means to this end, not the essence of asceticism. Asceticism is novel in that it is a harbinger of the new age.¹⁴ Thus the early Fathers can speak of virgins already living the life of angels while still on earth. This new perspective of asceticism describes it less in terms of practices of abnegation and more as a process one undertakes in order to allow oneself to be spiritually and even physically transformed. This more positive view sees asceticism as affirming the higher potentials of the physical human body in contrast to a negative understanding which defines it almost entirely in terms of circumscription of bodily activity, renunciation and denial. The ascetic self ‘masters the behaviors that enable it at once to deconstruct the old self and to construct the new.’¹⁵ The newer definition is a more ‘body-positive’ view of ascetic thought and behavior, perceiving the body as a liminal conveyance for transformation. This dissertation shall refer to this theory of asceticism, represented especially in the work of Valantasis, as the ‘newer theory/perspective,’ or the ‘body-positive view,’ or ‘transformative asceticism.’ The approach to asceticism followed in this project will help to accurately define which documents are ascetic, and within the various writings, to see features of church life as ascetic which might previously have been overlooked.

1.2.2 Purpose of this project

Does the ante-Nicene Church employ the virginity of Mary as a model for believers to follow? In the texts that mention her virginity is there any connection between the ascetic concerns of the Church and the views held about the virginity of Mary? In his seminal work that first appeared in 1962, Hans von Campenhausen asserts that there is little connection between ascetic virginity and renunciation of marriage as practiced in the pre-Nicene church and the virginity of Mary which was mainly set

¹⁴ ‘Constructions of Power,’ 797-800.

¹⁵ ‘Social Function of Asceticism,’ 547.

forth in a Christological context.¹⁶ It is now time to reconsider this assertion in the light of more recent work especially in the area of the study of asceticism in late antiquity. The purpose of this dissertation is to apply this newer perspective of transformative asceticism to the question of what if any are the points of contact between the virginity of Mary and ascetic practice in the ante-Nicene Church. Is Mary employed in any of these writings as an imitative model for ascetic life?

The method of this dissertation is survey and analysis of the sources and documents selected from this period. The witnesses selected are only those which at some point consider Mary the mother of Jesus.¹⁷ Each source under examination is analyzed for what it affirms in two areas:

1. Mary and her virginity, and,
2. Ascetic practices in the Church, particularly sexual renunciation.

A judgement is then made as to what if any connection exists between any ascetic thought and the virginity of Mary. Special attention will be given to whether Mary is employed as an imitative model for the practice of sexual asceticism in the churches of the time.¹⁸

Chapters two through five will contain this analysis and the conclusions for each witness. Chapter two addresses three significant early witnesses, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and the *Protevangelium Jacobi*. Chapter three examines Irenaeus of Lyons. Chapter four brings together various sources which individually do not represent a large amount of material on Mary. These include Melito of

¹⁶ *Die Jungfrauengeburt in der Theologie der alten Kirche* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962), translated by Frank Clarke, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* (London: SCM, 1964). He has three exceptions: the *Protevangelium Jacobi* (54), Justin Martyr (57), and Origen (57-58). He also mentions Methodius (63) who despite his 'excessive praise of virginity, makes virtually no use of Mary as a symbol,' cf. *Symposium* 11.290.

¹⁷ While good collections of patristic Marian texts are available, each document has been examined in its entirety and each writer throughout his extant corpus of authentic works to locate and identify all Marian texts. There is no assumption that the compendia of Marian texts have found all relevant passages. The two chief collections are CMP and *Enchiridion Marianum Biblicum Patristicum*, Dominici Casagrande, ed. (Rome, 1974).

¹⁸ The stimulus for this project was my reading of von Campenhausen's *Virgin Birth*. But this project is not strictly speaking addressed to that treatise, rather it is an attempt at a fresh analysis of the primary sources in light of more recent patristic scholarship and especially the newer perspective on asceticism.

Sardis, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian of Carthage, Novatian of Rome and some works lying outside the mainstream of the 'Great Church,' the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, *Odes of Solomon* and a gnostic work, the *Gospel of Philip*. Works of lesser significance are also considered, usually in the notes. Chapter five turns to Origen. Chapter six will render the conclusion to this study.

The witnesses which are the subject of this project are found in the wider context of late antiquity and, of course, of early Christianity. Therefore a very brief survey of asceticism in these settings is in order as well as a summation of what the earliest Christian documents have to say about Mary. Asceticism¹⁹ is not by any means an invention of the Christian church. Various forms of asceticism, including sexual renunciation, are found in both Greek and Roman religion and society.²⁰ However the general tendency of society was not towards rigid limits on sexual behavior. Greek legend and myth are full of erotic content.²¹ While marriage and procreation were affirmed there was no stigma attached to seeking sexual satisfaction outside of marriage. So Xenophon states, 'Surely you do not suppose that it is for sexual satisfaction that men and women breed children, since the streets are full of people who will satisfy that appetite.'²²

At the same time another stream of teaching urged that various pleasures,

¹⁹ A broad bibliography covering both pagan and Christian asceticism is yet another of the contributions made by Peter Brown, *Body and Society* 449-493. A study with a focus later than that of this project but with valuable references to earlier pagan asceticism is Anthony Meredith, 'Asceticism-Christian and Greek', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 27 (1976), 313-332.

²⁰ James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 182, n. 1, who provides the caution that pagan society knew of and mistrusted ascetics well before Christianity appeared. Leif Vaage has broadened our understanding of asceticism to include acts of public shamelessness intentionally performed by some Cynics, 'Like Dogs Barking: Cynic *parresia* and shameless asceticism', *Semeia* 57 (1992), 25-39, a key article to which Francis does not refer.

²¹ Hans Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), 227.

²² *Memorabilia* 2.2.4, cited in W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 110. For homosexual practice see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

including sexual ones, must be restrained if one is to grow into wisdom.²³ It is not accurate to portray the Greco-Roman pagan world as one of ‘unfettered sexuality’ in contrast to the Christians.²⁴ Consideration of matters sexual among late antique pagans is often found in discussions not about morality but about fitness: ‘an active sex life was good for a person’s health.’²⁵ Sexual renunciation was not a live option for most people, being considered appropriate for priests and priestesses of certain cults, the most famous the Vestal Virgins in Rome. But even their virginity was limited to active service after which they could and did marry.²⁶ For the Romans sexuality was a matter more practical than moral, more to do with decorum than with decadence.²⁷ Therefore sexual abnegation outside of certain cultic settings was regarded by most of pagan society with high suspicion.²⁸ So we find a distinct difference of opinion between pagans and Christians of the second and third centuries. For instance, the view that sexual activity in marriage ought to be reserved for procreation alone is common in the Church but rare outside of it.²⁹

In even the earliest Christian documents we encounter a different

²³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 64D, 66C cited in John M. Dillon, ‘Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonist Asceticism’ in *Asceticism*, ed. by Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80-87, who asserts that Plato may not have been as negative towards the body as his later interpreters.

²⁴ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1986), 345, *pace* many examples, one of which is Margaret A. Farley, ‘Sources of Sexual Inequality in the History of Christian Thought’, *Journal of Religion*, 56 (1976), 174: ‘Greek and Roman civilizations . . . were essentially affirmative toward human bodiliness and non-repressive in relation to sexuality.’

²⁵ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 350, cf. Richard Price, ‘The Distinctiveness of Early Christian Sexual Ethics’, *Heythrop Journal*, 31 (1990), 265.

²⁶ For a concise summary of pagan virginity see Lane Fox 340-351. On vestal virgins also T. Cato Worsfold, *The History of the Vestal Virgins of Rome* (London: Rider, 1934). They were ‘glaring anomalies’ in a society that had little value for widespread virginity, P. Brown, *Body and Society* 9. For the place of women see Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

²⁷ P. Brown, *Body and Society* 17-25.

²⁸ One of the targets of Lucian’s satire is extreme asceticism, Francis, *Subversive Virtue* 53-81.

²⁹ An exception that proves the rule: Musonius Rufus (d. circa 101 AD), *On Askesis* 12.86, cited by Francis 14, who cautions us to not accept at face value the testimony of the Christian apologists that moral behavior among believers was always higher than that of their pagan neighbors, 153, n. 69.

atmosphere. Sexual asceticism is set side by side with marriage as an option for believers. The affirmation of marriage comes from the OT which not only viewed procreation as a good result of marriage but took marital companionship for an image of God's love for Israel.³⁰ The joy of married love is celebrated in the Song of Solomon. Complete intolerance of sexual activity outside of marriage is found throughout both the OT and NT. But the NT references to sexual renunciation are something new, distinctively Christian.³¹ Chief among these is the comment from Jesus:

Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.

But much broader is the caution against the corrosive power of lust in the heart.³² This is reinforced by Paul who presents the body as a battleground between the powers of the flesh and spirit. The Christian body is a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' which must not allow any sexual sins to pollute it.³³ However he did not recommend sexual renunciation as a panacea to this problem, but rather a life filled with the Spirit.³⁴ Indeed the early Church is warned against those who forbid marriage. But Jesus himself set the parameters by declaring that the institution of matrimony would

³⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965), 86, cf. Hosea 2.14-23, Isaiah 54.5-8, Ephesians 5.22-33.

³¹ The extent of celibacy among the Essenes and of the community represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls is a matter of some debate. In any event it was not typical of Judaism and probably was taken up by a minority even in their own groups. See P. Brown, *Body and Society* 37-40 and 'Asceticism' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 68-69. Still less do we know of the Therapeutae, a Jewish ascetic community mentioned only by Philo in his *de vita contemplativa*. Eusebius repeats this with his own mistaken view that it was a Christian group, *HE* 2.17.

³² Matthew 19.11-12, *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984) and 1 Corinthians 7.8-40, Acts 21.9 and others. Matthew 5.27-30.

³³ Romans 7.7-25, 1 Corinthians 6.19, following P. Brown, *Body and Society* 46-57.

³⁴ Romans 8.1-17, Galatians 5.16-25. For later developments in the NT see D. F. Wright, 'Sexuality, Sexual Ethics' *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 1088-1090.

not cross the eschatological barrier into the next age. The brief glimpse of the angelic life in chapter 22 of Matthew was to prove to be a magnetic pole by which Christian ascetics in the centuries to come would orient themselves.³⁵

The earliest reference to Mary in Christian literature is in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he simply asserts that Jesus is 'born of a woman.'³⁶ Mark mentions her only as the mother of the adult Jesus whose family deeply misunderstood his ministry.³⁷ She appears as a main character in the infancy narratives of Luke and Matthew. Both gospels agree on certain elements which seem to be from an earlier source: God reveals that a child will be born to a virgin, Mary, who is betrothed to Joseph, a descendent of David. He will be the Savior, conceived through the Holy Spirit. He is to be named Jesus and will be born in Bethlehem in the reign of Herod.³⁸ Mary is 'pledged' (μνηστευθείσης) to be married when the annunciation occurs.³⁹ The account in Luke contains the famous angelic greeting χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ. Mary is a recipient of divine grace; blessed because of this election.⁴⁰ Luke presents Mary as one who assents to the divine will as a faithful disciple, a pattern that continued in her life past the death of her son.⁴¹ Mary appears twice in John, first at Cana where she is gently reprimanded for her

³⁵ 1 Timothy 4.3, Matthew 22.30.

³⁶ Galatians 4.4. The material in this paragraph is drawn from Ernest Manges, 'Mary' in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, InterVarsity, 2000). The definitive study is *Mary in the New Testament*, ed. by R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmeyer, J. Reumann. See also the detailed commentary by Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, revised edn (New York: Doubleday, 1993). An alternative reading of the NT on Mary is found in Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

³⁷ Mark 3.20-21, 3.31-35, 6.3-6.

³⁸ Matthew 1-2, Luke 1-2.

³⁹ Luke 2.5, Matthew 1.18. This means the couple had exchanged public vows but was not yet living together. Yet from this point it is considered a true marriage, thus Mary is Joseph's wife (γυνή) in Matthew 1.20, 24, cf. Brown, *Birth*, 123-124.

⁴⁰ Luke 1.28, 48. It is widely agreed that the Vulgate *gratia plena* is a mistranslation, R. Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, trans. by Charles Neumann (Washington, NJ: AMI, 1991), 20 and D. F. Wright, 'Mary in the New Testament' in *Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, D. F. Wright, ed. (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 25-26.

⁴¹ Luke 1.38, 42-45, and Acts 1.14. She is not characterized as an unbeliever, unlike other family members, Mark 6.4-6, John 7.5.

unrealistic expectations that run against the priorities of the mission of her son, and then at the foot of the cross. The words of Jesus in John 19 to Mary show not only the care of a son for his mother but are also an acknowledgment of her place in the believing community.⁴² In regard to Mary's virginity, her *ante partum* virginity is asserted by both Matthew and Luke.⁴³ The NT displays no interest in a virginity *in partu* or *post partum*.⁴⁴

1.3 LITERATURE SURVEY

The number of books and articles on Mary is so vast that no one could possibly read it all.⁴⁵ With such an immense pool of literature it is no surprise that there is a wide variety of genre, ranging from devotional literature to news articles to polemical pamphlets to scholarly works.⁴⁶

Most studies of Mary can spare only a few paragraphs or pages to the Ante-Nicene Church, if that. There are some works which do devote significant attention to perceptions of Mary in the Church of the second and third centuries.⁴⁷ In Carol's

⁴² John 2.1-11, 19.26-27.

⁴³ Matthew 1.18, 20, Luke 1.35. R. Brown notes the language is explicitly non-sexual, *Birth* 124-125, 290-291. See also David Crump, 'The Virgin Birth in New Testament Theology' in *Chosen By God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, D. F. Wright, ed. (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 65-92.

⁴⁴ If the 'brothers of Jesus' are not also Mary's children this is nowhere indicated in the texts: Matthew 12.46-47, 13.55, Mark 3.31, 6.3, Luke 8.19-20, John 2.12, 7.5, Acts 1.14, Galatians 1.19.

⁴⁵ Von Campenhausen estimated the number to be near 100,000 in 1959, *Virgin Birth*, 8, n. 1. The monumental *Bibliografia Mariana* of Giuseppe M. Besutti (Rome: Marianum, 1950-1994) ran to over 50,000 entries, Eamon R. Carroll, 'A Survey of Mariology' *MSt* 46 (1995), 145-146. The Marian Library at the University of Dayton, Ohio is the world's largest single collection on Mary with some 90,000 items.

⁴⁶ Mary makes periodic appearances on front covers of major news magazines: *Newsweek*, 25 August 1997 and *Time*, 30 December 1991.

⁴⁷ For works which specialize on one Father or document, see the relevant section of the dissertation, chapters 2-5.

Mariology we have two lengthy articles by Walter Burghardt which have yielded valuable insights to the author of this dissertation. Nevertheless these two studies have a different focus from my project. Burghardt wishes to trace the entire development of five Catholic Marian doctrines across seven centuries. These five doctrines are defined in terms of ‘contemporary Catholic theology’ and are: ‘the Second Eve, Mary’s perpetual virginity, her divine Maternity, her holiness, and the corporeal Assumption.’⁴⁸ Tracing connections to asceticism simply lies well outside the center of his aim. Hilda Graef’s foundational work is well balanced and willing to criticize even canonized saints who have exaggerated Mary’s role. But given the broad parameters of her excellent work, extending across twenty centuries, she is unable to devote more than a page or two to figures like Justin and Irenaeus.⁴⁹ And while Mary’s function as a model does crop up occasionally, it is only one of many Marian doctrines she addresses in succinct and adroit synopses of each figure. This work remains a standard survey of the history of Marian thought. A more recent study by Luigi Gambero covers the first eight centuries. It is however not intended to be a technical work but a general survey. While very occasionally Father Gambero allows his confessional background to color his historical judgement, the work is very useful in providing helpful summaries of nearly every important figure and document of the second and third centuries in the first part of his work. Especially appreciated are the extended excerpts of original texts reproduced and translated.⁵⁰ For quick reference the best work is Michael O’Carroll’s encyclopedia

⁴⁸ Walter J. Burghardt, ‘Mary in Western Patristic Thought’ in *Mariology*, vol. 1, Juniper B. Carol, ed. (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1955), 109-155, 110. Idem, ‘Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought’ in *Mariology*, vol. 2, Juniper B. Carol, ed. (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1957), 88-153. The third volume, published in 1961, deals with Marian devotion and prayers of the modern era, *Mariology*, vol. 3, Juniper B. Carol, ed. (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1961). Also helpful is the 1949 article by G. Jouassard, ‘Marie à travers la patristique: Maternité divine, virginité, sainteté’, in *Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, ed. by H. du Manoir, 8 vols. (Paris, Beauchesne 1949-1971), 1.69-157, but this value is limited by the fact that only 13 pages of the total 88 are devoted to the Ante-Nicene Church.

⁴⁹ The second and third centuries are covered in pp. 32-48. The work was originally issued in two parts in 1963 and 1965. It was reissued in 1985 as one volume: *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985).

⁵⁰ This work originally appeared as *Maria nel pensiero dei padri della Chiesa* (Milan: Edizione Paoline, 1991). It is now available in a translation by one of Fr. Gambero’s students, Thomas Buffer, as *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Mary in Patristic Thought* (San

Theotokos not just for the usually very accurate summations on each figure or document but also for the bibliographical references in the notes attached to each entry. The work does need to be updated, especially in light of advances in studies relating to the Apocrypha, Gnosticism and asceticism.⁵¹ I have also profited from the short but reliable summaries found in the article on Mary in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, especially the section on the Fathers by Domiciano Fernández.⁵² For readings of current thought on Mary in the Catholic Church I have often consulted with benefit *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* by René Laurentin.⁵³

Studies by non-Catholics are rarer. A collection of fine essays from a conservative Protestant viewpoint can be found in a work which sadly is out of print and should be re-issued, *Chosen By God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective*. The insights of its contributors have often saved me from a wrong conclusion. There is no separate essay which addresses the Ante-Nicene Church as a whole.⁵⁴ Most welcome is J. N. D. Kelly's sharply written but all too short chapter at the end of the fifth edition of his indispensable *Early Christian Doctrines*.⁵⁵ Stephen Benko argues that ancient pagan religions deeply influenced the Church's view of Mary from the NT on. But showing parallels does not constitute proof of influence.⁵⁶ More recent is Jaroslav Pelikan's *Mary Through the Centuries* which is not a rigorous study of

Francisco: Ignatius, 1999). For an example of judgements as discussed above, see his section on Tertullian, 60-66.

⁵¹ *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, revised edn with supplement (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983). For instance discussions of the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Ascension of Isaiah* and even the *Protevangelium Jacobi* are all relegated to one article on the Apocrypha.

⁵² This article is in vol. 10, published in 1980: 'Marie (Sante Vierge), II. La spiritualité mariale chez Pères de l'Église' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité: Ascétique et mystique doctrine et histoire*, M. Viller and others, eds. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1937-1995), 10.423-440.

⁵³ It originally appeared as *Court Traité sur la Vierge Marie* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1968) and has been translated by Charles Neumann (Washington, NJ: AMI Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ ed. by D. F. Wright (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989).

⁵⁵ *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th edn (London: Longmans, 1978), 490-499.

⁵⁶ *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology*, Nomen bookseries, 59 (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

primary sources but a compendium of observations of Mary's place in culture.⁵⁷

John Macquarrie's *Mary for All Christians* is not an historical or theological study as much as a proposal for an ecumenical approach to Marian devotion.⁵⁸ The Princeton NT scholar Beverly R. Gaventa has a fine study of the *Protevangelium Jacobi* in her *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*.⁵⁹ The polemical nature of Giovanni Miegge's book has limited its usefulness to me; more helpful is the historical survey provided by Heiko Oberman.⁶⁰

Mary has also attracted attention from social scientists like Michael Carroll⁶¹ and historians of gender and culture like Marina Warner.⁶² While some pertinent insights can be gleaned from such studies, often the entire patristic period is relegated to one or two paragraphs. Of these two probably Warner has had the greater impact. Her thesis is that Mary as an ideal for women has resulted in their suppression. Her historical analysis needs to be tested in detail, but that is outwith

⁵⁷ *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996). Chronological logic is not observed, for example in his discussion of Irenaeus (42-47) appear a contemporary German sculptor, John Milton, Tolstoy and Augustine. Important details are omitted: he seems unaware that Irenaeus drew his Eve-Mary parallel from Justin, 43, cf. 104.

⁵⁸ *Mary for All Christians* (London: Collins, 1990).

⁵⁹ (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), reprinted (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

⁶⁰ Giovanni Miegge, *The Virgin Mary: The Roman Catholic Marian Doctrine*, trans. and revised by Waldo Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955). Heiko A. Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁶¹ *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). His analysis of history has been criticized by P. Brown (*Body and Society* 445, n. 65) and Eamon Duffy, 'Madonnas That Maim? Christianity and the Cult of the Virgin', Aquinas Lecture, Glasgow, January 1999 (Glasgow: Blackfriars, 1999), 3 and 19.

⁶² *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. Warner has not proven her thesis according to Ann L. Loizos, 'The Virgin Mary and Marina Warner's Feminism', in *Religious Regimes and State-Formation: Perspectives from European Ethnology*, Eric R. Wolf, ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 221-236. Works such as Rosemary R. Ruether's *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1979) are not really scholarly studies but manifestos for ecclesiastical and social change. Feminist scholarship has now filtered down into interesting places. For instance a theologically conservative work intended for the lay person by Jacques Bur cites the tradition of Mary's painless birth as matching the modern woman's aspiration to childbirth free from discomfort, accomplished through medical science, *How to Understand the Virgin Mary*, trans. by John Bowden and Margaret Lydamore (London: SCM Press, 1994), 30.

the remit of this project since the broad application of the ideal of Mary to women is a development that occurs well beyond the time frame of this study. The area of gender studies is not exempt from the occasional lapse into hot polemics. One example will suffice: Mary Daly on the annunciation: ‘the male-angel Gabriel brings poor Mary the news that she is to be impregnated by and with god. Like all rape victims in male myths, she submits joyously to this unspeakable degradation.’⁶³

Turning to asceticism, we note that the study of pre-Nicene Christian asceticism has also suffered from some neglect:

Very little attention has been paid to asceticism by those scholars who deal with the earliest texts and periods: it is as though the phenomenon did not exist in the first three centuries of the common era.⁶⁴

The most significant work of recent years in studies of asceticism is certainly Peter Brown’s *Body and Society*. It has contributed greatly to a more sympathetic understanding of the entire ascetic movement in the first Christian centuries. But it shares a limitation common to all broad surveys: it cannot devote too much attention to any single issue. This is acknowledged in his introduction, ‘this is a book where the cult of the Virgin Mary emerges only toward the end.’⁶⁵ James Francis has done us a service by helping us to see through the eyes of an early critic of Christianity why its ascetical aspects were so distasteful, recalling as they did to someone like Celsus the flagrancys of Peregrinus and Alexander. But despite his extensive discussion of Origen, he says nothing about Mary’s role in Origen’s ascetical

⁶³ *Pure Lust. Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 74, cited in George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 253. Tavard’s book is akin to Macquarrie’s, a call for an ecumenical agreement on Mary. Another work oriented to a present-day agenda is that of the Sri Lankan Tissa Balasuriya. His original work, influenced by liberation theology, and a number of documents showing the response by Catholic authorities which resulted in his excommunication in 1997 are now available in one volume which is an interesting case study in ecclesiastical politics: Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation: The Story and the Text*, Helen Stanton, ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

⁶⁴ V. L. Wimbush, ‘Ascetic Impulse’ 462.

⁶⁵ *Body and Society*, xv. This proves to be the case: his index contains a mere five references to Mary, only one of which fits within the time-frame of this dissertation.

thought.⁶⁶ A dissertation on virginity in the early Fathers by Heshmat Keroloss is valuable for insights into how these writers perceived and applied the ideal of virginity in the early church. However Mary enters his discussion only occasionally.⁶⁷ Geoffrey Harpham's book has a much larger remit. His view is that ascetic thought is much wider than Christianity or even religion, it is in fact the 'MS-DOS of cultures, a fundamental operating ground on which the particular culture . . . is overlaid.' He can say this because he defines asceticism as any resistance we employ against desires. In some sense all human activity has an ascetic element.⁶⁸ I am not competent to judge his larger conclusions about critical theory but his analysis of early Christian asceticism, mostly in the fourth century, has enhanced my appreciation of the influence of ascetic thought upon the early Church. However his definition of asceticism may prove too broad to be useful.

This study is intended to contribute significantly to our vision of Christianity in the second and third centuries by applying a new tool to an old problem. The old problem is to understand the ascent of Mary in the mind of the Church from the young maiden of Luke and Matthew to the *gloriosa Domina* of Venantius Fortunatus and beyond.⁶⁹ This work seeks to explore one segment of that trajectory and to find if any boost was provided by the engine of asceticism. Virginity, already a notable characteristic of Christians in the days of Justin, becomes a dominant theme in the writers of the fifth century and beyond. Despite isolated pagan examples it is a novel development.⁷⁰ The new tool employed is the refined and nuanced theory of

⁶⁶ *Subversive Asceticism*, 131-179.

⁶⁷ 'Virginity in the Early Church: The Meanings and Motives of Sexual Renunciation in the First Four Centuries' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, 1996). His thesis (p. 3) is that the thought of the Fathers 'about virginity is in perfect harmony with the New Testament teaching on virginity, regardless of any philosophical notions or any anti-biblical ideas on sexuality and marriage that could be found in some of their writings.' I do not believe this can be established given the variety of patristic views on the practice of ascetic virginity and the undeniable influence of culture and philosophy upon them, e.g., Clement of Alexandria.

⁶⁸ *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, xi, and his discussion of temptation and resistance, 45-66.

⁶⁹ From his hymn, c. 600, still used today, *Quem terra, pontus, aethera*, PL 88.265 cited in Graef 1.130.

⁷⁰ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 373.

asceticism provided by Valantasis and others. A leading Mariologist, Luigi Gambero, has commented that a study of the possible relationship between ascetic virginity and the virginity of Mary before the fourth century is needed.⁷¹ There have been several calls by scholars in the fields of both asceticism and the study of Mary for more attention to be paid to the period we consider here.⁷²

⁷¹ In a private letter to me, 9 July 2000.

⁷² Asceticism of the first three Christian centuries has received less interest than later eras: 'the bulk of the literature on asceticism comes from scholars whose expertise is in the fourth centuries and beyond,' V. L. Wimbush, 'The Ascetic Impulse' 462. An important collection has only two entries before 300, from Origen and the Acts of Thomas, *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, V. L. Wimbush, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). J. A. Francis (*Subversive Virtue* xiv-xv) comments, 'Few have recognized the central importance of asceticism or the watershed significance of the second century . . . Scholarship on this period has given attention to the related issues of prophecy, miracle working, charismatic leadership, marriage and sexuality, and the role of women, among both pagans and Christians. . . [these social roles] are found together in one person: the ascetic.' On Mary see the article in the most recent issue of *Marian Studies* where Johann Roten, director of the International Marian Research Institute (Dayton OH) calls for patristic scholarship to be applied afresh to the study of Marian doctrinal history. He also encourages genuine research by those outside of the Catholic Church, 'Marian Studies-Doctrine' *MSt* 50 (1999), 163-170. Another specialist in Mariology asks for more study in the period before the 11th century, Eamon R. Carroll, 'Mary in Ecumenical Perspective' *Ecumenical Trends*, 26 (1997), 68. John Wenham says, 'when one looks for modern Evangelicals of this sort who have given themselves to the study of the mother of our Lord, the tally is small,' *Modern Evangelical Views of the Virgin Mary*, a paper delivered to the Oxford branch of the Society, 27 October 1987 (Wallington, Surrey: Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1988), 2.

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY EXPOSITIONS ON MARY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

References to Mary the mother of Jesus are few and far between in the generation following the close of the apostolic period. This is not surprising since all that has survived from this era is small enough to fit in one slim volume. In this chapter, we will consider three witnesses who are among the earliest to speak of Mary. Each is important not only for being near the beginning of the process of Christian thinking on the mother of Jesus but also for setting patterns that remain well beyond their time.

Two of these witnesses are writers who are considered part of what later is viewed as 'orthodoxy.' These are Ignatius of Antioch, possibly the earliest church writer to speak of Mary, and Justin Martyr, who gives us the first extant depiction of the Eve-Mary parallel. The third is a document which seems to stand alone, presenting a view of Mary as a holy being who herself was born in a way providentially planned and who is almost unrecognizable as the young woman of Luke and Matthew. This is the *Protevangelium of James*.

2.2 IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

2.2.1 His life and theology

In the opening years of the second century Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, was arrested and transported to Rome. On the journey he produced the letters we now

have which provide us with a fascinating picture both of church life and thought a generation later than the Apostles and of the man himself, especially in his attitude towards his imprisonment and impending martyrdom.¹ The date of his martyrdom is not certain, but falls somewhere between 108 and 118.²

Ignatius anticipates the dual nature christology in his description of Christ as 'both fleshly and spiritual.'³ The several texts that tie together the flesh and the spirit are an apologetic against the docetism which was creeping into the church,⁴ denying the sufferings⁵ and the birth of Christ.⁶ In response Ignatius affirms God is 'revealed as human' and is descended from David.⁷ He underwent real suffering, death and resurrection.⁸ Those who say he suffered only 'in appearance' (τὸ δοκεῖν) are atheists.⁹

Unity is paramount in Ignatian thought: 'Give thought to unity, than which

¹ There exist at least three recensions of his letters. The 'middle recension' has been shown to be authentic by both T. Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien* (Gotha: Perthes, 1873) and J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: *S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1889), both cited by W. R. Schoedel who also accepts the middle recension, *A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 3-7. Also see C. Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 29 (Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 9-15, and J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3 vols (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1983), 1.73-74. All citations here are from the text and translation by Schoedel.

² S. AbouZayd, *Ihidayutha: A Study of the Life of Singleness in the Syrian Orient. From Ignatius of Antioch to Chalcedon 451 A.D.*, ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies (Oxford: The Oriental Institute, 1993), 4. The date of 108 is given by Eusebius. If this is incorrect then Ignatius may have been arrested in reaction to an earthquake in Antioch in December 116, W. S. McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 18.

³ *Eph.* 7.2, *Sm.* 3.3, in Schoedel, 20. Ignatius uses an archaic title for Jesus, 'the Beloved' (ἡγαπημένος); the same usage is found in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, but no dependence can be established between these two works. See J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman, 1964), 40-41, cf. *Sm.* inscr.

⁴ *Eph.* 8.2, 10.3, *Mag.* 1.2, 13.1, 13.2, *Tr.* inscr., 12.1, *Rom.* inscr., *Sm.* 1.1, 3.2, 12.2, *Pol.* 1.2, 2.2.

⁵ *Mag.* 9.1, 11, *Tr.* 9.1, 10.1.

⁶ *Tr.* 9.1.

⁷ *Eph.* 19.3, Schoedel 87. *Eph.* 20.2, *Rom.* 7.3. It is blasphemy not to confess that the Lord is 'the bearer of flesh (σαρκοφόρος)', *Sm.* 5.2.

⁸ *Eph.* 20.1, *Tr.* 9.1-2, *Sm.* 2.1. After the resurrection he is still flesh, *Sm.* 3.1-2.

⁹ *Tr.* 10.1, cf. *Sm.* 2.1, 4.2. False teachers are guilty of a sort of spiritual adultery and so will be punished, *Eph.* 16.1-2, *Sm.* 5.1-2.

nothing is more sweet.¹⁰ Indeed God himself is union and so cannot coexist with division.¹¹ Ignatius believes the structure and unity of the local congregation ought to reflect the sublime unity of heaven.¹² So the bishop is like God to the church and to deceive him is really to cheat God. Proper unity among believers can even defeat the powers of Satan.¹³ The spirituality of Ignatius is driven by a desire to imitate God. As we do so, the unity between God and his church is demonstrated.¹⁴

2.2.2 Ascetic references

Ignatius gives warnings to both the married and the continent. The married are to remain satisfied with their mates 'in flesh and spirit.' To those abstaining from marriage he exhorts, 'If anyone is able to remain continent to the honor of the Lord's flesh, let him remain (so) without boasting; if he boasts, he is lost; and if it is known beyond the bishop, he is destroyed.'¹⁵ We may deduce from this passage that some sexual ascetics were elevating themselves on the basis of their continence -- a practice Ignatius sees as divisive.¹⁶ The entire Christian community is separated from the world to such an extent that they may be called bearers of God and of Christ.¹⁷

There is no favoritism of ascetic over married life. The married and the sexually continent are both under the supervision of the bishop.¹⁸ Both virgins and

¹⁰ *Pol.* 1.2, cf. *Eph.* 2.2, 14.1, 20.2, *Tr.* 7.1-2, *Phld.* 3.1-4.1, *Phld.* 7.2, *Pol.* 6.1.

¹¹ *Tr.* 11.2 and *Phld.* 8.1.

¹² *Eph.* 3.2, 4.1-2, 6.1, *Mag.* 6.1-2, 7.1-2, *Phld.* 4.1, *Pol.* 6.1. Even love must be orderly, *Mag.* 1.1.

¹³ *Mag.* 6.1, *Tr.* 3.1, *Sm.* 8.1. *Mag.* 3.2. *Eph.* 13.1-2.

¹⁴ Quasten, *Patrology* 1.71 and AbouZayd, *Ihidayutha* 5; cf. *Eph.* 8.2, *Phld.* 7.2, *Rom.* 6.3.

¹⁵ *Pol.* 5.1-2, Schoedel 272. Behind the reference to abide 'in all purity and sobriety' may be an exhortation of tolerance towards pagan spouses, Schoedel 69, n 4.

¹⁶ P. Brown, *Body and Society*, 58. Schoedel notes that the 'tendency for Ignatius to see the union of flesh and spirit as the special mark of life in the church provides one reason for his cautious attitude in this section on celibacy.' Schoedel 272, cf. *Eph.* 8.2.

¹⁷ *Eph.* 9.2 as cited in Schoedel 67, who also notes that these -φορος compounds tie in with his own second name, Theophoros. On the distinctiveness of Christians, see also *Eph.* 15.3, *Mag.* 5.2.

¹⁸ *Pol.* 5.2, the earliest witness to church marriage, and *Pol.* 4.1.

widows are found in the Ignatian church, and it is a sign of heresy to neglect care for the widows.¹⁹ In his letter to the church at Smyrna he gives a farewell greeting to ‘the virgins called widows’ (τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας).²⁰ This curious phrase may indicate a nascent form of the ideal of virginity.²¹ To abstain from sexual expression is to ‘the honor of the Lord’s flesh,’ an allusion to Christ as the model for all who have renounced marriage.²²

Ignatius’s unflinching determination to die as a martyr is ‘motivated by the desire to die to the world, to be transformed into another, purer mode of being.’²³ His language of being ground up as wheat for the pure bread of God is likely to have more to do with a view that martyrdom is a means of transformation rather than some sort of image drawn from the Eucharist.²⁴ He views his death as a kind of birth into a new life.²⁵

2.2.3 Mary in Ignatius

It is widely recognized that Ignatius is one of the earliest to speak of Mary after the Apostles.²⁶ Five texts refer directly to Mary, three in the letter to the Ephesians and one each in the letters to the churches at Tralles and Smyrna.²⁷ His chief purpose in these texts is to ‘safeguard the actuality of the incarnation’ against a docetic

¹⁹ *Sm.* 13.1, 6.2.

²⁰ *Sm.* 13.1, Schoedel 247. C. Methuen, ‘The “Virgin Widow”: A Problematic Social Role for the Early Church?’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 90 (1997) 289, following A. Louth, *Early Christian Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 105, believes this meant some enrolled as widows had actually never been married.

²¹ Schoedel, 252, n 26, cf. AbouZayad 49.

²² *Pol.* 5.2, Schoedel 272.

²³ Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* 15, cf *Rom.* 2.2, 4.1-2.

²⁴ Schoedel 176, *pace* R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 437.

²⁵ *Rom.* 6.1-2.

²⁶ H. von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* 29, R. Bauckham, ‘The Origins and Growth of Western Mariology’, in *Chosen By God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, ed. by D. F. Wright (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 142, *Mary in NT* 253, *Theotokos* ‘Ignatius of Antioch.’

²⁷ *Eph.* 7.2, CMP 2; *Eph.* 18.1-2, CMP 3; *Eph.* 19.1, CMP 4; *Tr.* 9.1, CMP 1; *Sm.* 1.1, CMP 5.

teaching.²⁸ Some of his statements on Mary appear to have been drawn from credal material.²⁹

The physician who has the cure for the deadly infection of false teaching is none other than Jesus Christ who is ‘God come in flesh, in death true life, both of Mary and of God’ (ἐν σαρκὶ γενόμενος Θεός, ἐν θανάτῳ ζωὴ ἀληθινή, καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ Θεοῦ).³⁰ God and Mary are set in parallel here in his description of the human origin of Jesus. Ignatius gives a grave warning against heeding those who deny the reality of the flesh, suffering and resurrection of Jesus who is of the human family of David and was ‘truly born’ of Mary (ὁς ἀληθῶς ἐγεννήθη).³¹ The same term ‘he was born’ (ἐγεννήθη) occurs in the letter to the Ephesians where Ignatius expands it by use of another phrase, ‘he was carried in the womb of Mary’ (ἐκκοφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας), expressing the completely natural and human character of his flesh, both pre- and post-natal, ‘so that there should be no doubt that she bore him as any human mother bears her child.’³² The intent here is to assert the human birth of Jesus as part of the divine plan which culminated in his death on the cross.³³ Again employing the anti-docetic term ‘truly,’ Ignatius commends the orthodoxy of the Smyrneans. He affirms in ‘semi-credal’ language that Jesus is the ‘Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin’ (Υἱὸν

²⁸ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 492, also Trevett, *Ignatius* 155-157. M. Goulder (‘Ignatius’ ‘Docetists’ *VC* 53 (1999), 16-30) argues that the opponents of Ignatius are Jewish Christians rather than docetists, but this is not established. Ignatius ‘uses the verb dokein’ in reporting the teaching of his opponents, *Sm.* 2.1, 4.2, *Tr.* 10.1, D. F. Wright, ‘Docetism’, *DLNTD*, 306-309. If his foes were Jewish Christian ‘Ebonites’ he would likely use the argument that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy, which he does not do. He is aware of Judaizers in the church but his main points are not addressed to them, *Mag.* 8.1, 9.1, 10.1-3, *Phld.* 6.1, 9.1-2, this despite his reference to the OT prophets in *Phld.* 5.2, *Sm.* 5.1, cf. Justin *Martyr I Apol.* 31-33.

²⁹ ‘In formal, almost confessional language,’ von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth*, 19, also 29-30. Kelly adduces three as evidence of single-clause confessions: *Eph.* 18.2, *Tr.* 9.1 and *Sm.* 1.1-2, *Early Christian Creeds*, (London: Longman, 1972), 68-69. Gambero, *Mary and The Fathers of the Church* 30

³⁰ *Eph.* 7.2, Schoedel 59, CMP 2.

³¹ *Tr.* 9.1, Schoedel 152, CMP 1.

³² *Eph.* 18.2, CMP 3. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* 34. The phrase is traditional as it occurs nowhere else in Ignatius, Schoedel 84.

³³ *Eph.* 18.1-2.

Θεοῦ κατὰ θέλημα καὶ δύναμιν Θεοῦ, γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου).³⁴

The preceding four texts affirm the virginal conception and real human birth of Jesus. The fifth and final text introduces a new element, that of concealment. There are three mysteries which were hidden from the prince of the world, namely the virginity of Mary along with her giving birth and the death of the Lord.³⁵

Ignatius presents himself to the church at large as one engaged on a ‘triumphant march’ towards martyrdom. In this respect he engages in transformative language, which is ascetic.³⁶ But at no point does he tie Mary to this or any other ascetic consideration. For Ignatius Mary is part of the divine plan to accomplish salvation through the true life, sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2.3 JUSTIN MARTYR

2.3.1 His life and theology

Justin Martyr (c. 100 - c. 165) is the first important Apologist of the Church. He was born in Samaria at Flavia Neapolis and his education was Greek. His quest for truth first began by investigating various philosophies, including the Stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagorean and Platonic schools.³⁷ An encounter with an unnamed ‘old man’

³⁴ *Sm.* 1.1, Schoedel 220, CMP 5, *contra* Goulter, ‘Ignatius’ “Docetists.”

³⁵ *Eph.* 19.1, CMP 4. This is the only place Ignatius speaks of the ‘virginity of Mary’ (παρθενία Μαρίας). Ignatius may have drawn this theme of hiddenness from the same tradition as did the *Asc. Isa.* (11.11-17), J. Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One: The Christology, Social Setting and Theological Context of the Ascension of Isaiah*, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* Supplement Series, 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 67, n. 211.

³⁶ See Schoedel’s discussion of the careful planning that went into the letters and visits arranged well ahead of time, ‘Introduction’ 11-12.

³⁷ ODCC, ‘Justin Martyr’; EEC, ‘Justin.’ Barnard claims that his upbringing in Samaria would have provided him some knowledge of Judaism in his youth, L. W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 5, 52.

introduced him to the beliefs of Christianity though he had already been impressed by the heroic manner in which Christians faced death in public executions he had witnessed:

For I myself, too when I was delighting in the teachings of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless of death, and of all other things which are counted fearful, saw that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure.³⁸

His surviving writings are three: the *First* and *Second Apologies* and his extended discussion with Judaism, the *Dialogue with Trypho*. All three of these were probably written between 151 and 160 A.D. His apologetic works are not just legal pleas to the Roman authorities, they are written for a wider audience as missionary tracts defending Christianity and challenging paganism.³⁹ A major debate has centered on the question of Justin's sources.⁴⁰ From where did he derive

³⁸ 2 *Apol.* 12, ACW 56.82. Justin was brought to faith by witnessing the martyrdom of Christians, not by the arguments of the old man, J. C. M. van Winden, *An Early Christian Philosopher: Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho Chapters One to Nine*, *Philosophia Patrum*, 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971) 110.

³⁹ J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. by John Austin Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) 13. The first *Apology* was written between 151 and 155 and the *Dialogue* around 160, Barnard 19, 23. W. H. Wagner says the *Apology* and *Dialogue* were 'not intended for the audiences to which they were formally addressed but were in-school models prepared by the master teacher for use by his students.' However he offers no proof for this odd assertion. *After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 159. In contrast, O. Skarsaune offers evidence that Justin meant his works to be read as missionary literature, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile*, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 56 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987) 258-259, 433-434.

⁴⁰ Erwin R. Goodenough is a major proponent of the view that Justin drew much from the middle Platonism of Philo, though he did not really understand it. He drew from Philo and others what he considered to be compatible with Christianity. *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena: Verlag Frommannsche Buchhandlung (Walter Biedermann), 1923) 70-73, 173-175. Barnard (8) accepts the thesis of C. Andresen who claims Justin criticizes all the philosophic schools from a standpoint of Middle Platonism. 'Justin und der mittlere Platonismus', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 44 (1952-3), 157-195. Barnard criticizes Goodenough, saying Justin drew his thinking from the Old Testament rather than from Philo. Justin is not a strict Platonist nor Stoic. Barnard 34-37, 92-96. Osborn concurs with Barnard: 'While there is little evidence for Justin's direct acquaintance with Philo, he may well have been acquainted with traditions stemming from that source.' 'If Justin knew anything of Philo, he does not show it. His use of the scriptures is different. Perhaps Justin deliberately ignored Philo, because he did not consider philosophy was the way to talk to Jews.' Eric Francis Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie*, 47 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1973), 30, 73.

his ideas? He readily admits that he draws from various pagan philosophies, especially Stoicism and Plato. However, the highest authority for him is the 'apostolic exposition of the Scripture, and this apostolic exegesis of the OT ultimately derives from Christ's own instruction of the apostles after his resurrection.'⁴¹ So while Justin does consider himself a philosopher, it is as a *Christian* philosopher that he approaches all other schools of thought.⁴²

Christianity is the oldest of all philosophies.⁴³ There is truth to be found in the pagan philosophers, but it is not complete. The same Logos which inspired the prophets of the Old Testament also provided partial truths to figures such as Plato, the Stoics and even the pagan poets through functioning as a 'seed' (σπέρμα του Λόγου).⁴⁴ In the end, truths Justin found in pagan writings and truths from the Christian Scriptures are all from the same source.⁴⁵ The divine Logos is at the center of Justin's theology. The Logos is not just the abstract thought of God, but the Word, active and personal. Since Justin's God is completely transcendent, the Logos is necessary as God's instrument in the world.⁴⁶

Christians faced three serious charges: atheism because they would not participate in the pagan cult, disloyalty because they talked of a future kingdom, and immorality in their secret ceremonies. Using these false charges as a pretext,

⁴¹ Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy* 11.

⁴² *Dial.* 1 and 2.

⁴³ Wagner, *After the Apostles* 169, cf. *1 Apol.* 23, ACW 56.39, *1 Apol.* 44, ACW 56.54, *Dial.* 7, ANF 1.198: 'There existed, long before this time, certain men more ancient than all those who are esteemed philosophers, both righteous and beloved by God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit...They are called prophets.'

⁴⁴ *2 Apol.* 8.1, *Iustini Martyris Apologiae Pro Christianis*, ed. by Miroslav Marcovich, *Patristische Texte und Studien*, 38 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994) 149 = ACW 56.79: 'And those of the Stoic school, since they were honorable at least in their ethical teaching, as were also the poets in some particulars, on account of a seed of logos implanted in every race of men and women.' Also *1 Apol.* 44, 57, 59, 60.

⁴⁵ Osborn, *Justin* 17.

⁴⁶ *2 Apol.* 13. Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 44, 158, 345. For God's transcendence in Justin, see also Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 20-22 and Barnard, *Justin* 83-84: 'Justin had no real theory of divine immanence to complement his emphasis on divine transcendence. His doctrine of the logos...in fact kept the supreme Deity at a safe distance from intercourse with men and left the Platonic transcendence in all its bareness. God for Justin operated through the logos whose existence alone bridged the gulf which would have otherwise proved impassable.'

demons have incited pagan officials to persecute Christians unjustly.⁴⁷ Since this persecution will only grow worse, Justin feels an urgency to make a case against this injustice.⁴⁸

So Justin calls for a detailed investigation of Christian behavior and ethics. He firmly believes such an examination will vindicate Christians as innocent and unjustly persecuted. This shows an interesting faith in the ultimate justice of the Roman legal system.⁴⁹

In making a case for Christianity to the pagans in the *Apology* and to Jews in the *Dialogue*, Justin relies heavily on fulfilled prophecy demonstrating the divinity and Messiahship of Jesus. Prophecy is not determined by fate, but by the foreknowledge of God (προγνώστου τοῦ θεοῦ).⁵⁰ Fulfilled prophecy, authored by the Logos, is a proof of the truth of Christianity. ‘The prophets are to be believed because of the fulfillment of the events which they have foretold. The events compel (ἐξαναγκάζει) one to accept what they have said. Authenticity is proved from truth of prediction. Particular truths of prophecy imply the ultimate truth of their source.’⁵¹ Miracles are of little apologetic use to Justin since wonder-workers were commonplace. Fulfilled prophecy will validate even the miracles of Jesus.⁵²

A second key element in Justin’s apologetic system is ethical witness. After demanding that pagans examine the moral behavior of believers, he sets out such behavior in detail in order to refute the charges of immorality set against the Church. High ethics is so identified with being a Christian that one who does not live up to

⁴⁷ *1 Apol.* 5, 11, 15 and *2 Apol.* 1.

⁴⁸ *Dial.* 39 and 110, cited by Barnard, *Justin* 153.

⁴⁹ Elaine Pagels proposes that though Justin ‘had come to appreciate the government’s role in preserving public order’ his actual intention was to ‘attack the whole basis of Roman imperial power, denouncing its divine patrons as demons, and its rulers--even those most distinguished for their wise and tolerant reigns--as unwitting agents of demonic tyranny.’ ‘Christian Apologists and “The Fall of the Angels”: An Attack on Roman Imperial Power?’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 78:3-4 (1985), 309, 312.

⁵⁰ *1 Apol.* 44.11, Marcovich, *Apologiae Pro Christianis* 95. This is a bit of polemic against Stoic fatalism.

⁵¹ Osborn, *Justin* 72. *1 Apol.* 33.6 as cited by Osborn 89.

⁵² Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* 203, citing *1 Apol.* 30.1.

such standards cannot be a true Christian.⁵³ Heretics, inspired by demons, may or may not act immorally but are distinguished from true believers because they are not persecuted by the Romans.⁵⁴

Justin ‘presented Christianity to them as a religion distinguished from all others by the stringency of the sexual codes observed’ by the believers.⁵⁵ The elevated morals of Christians serve as a rebuke to pagan society,⁵⁶ riddled as it is with depraved practices such as adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution of their own children. Unbelievers follow the immoral behavior of their gods as set out in the myths which in turn are inspired by demons.⁵⁷ Justin neatly turns pagan charges against Christians back onto the accusers by sarcastically noting that if Christians were guilty of immorality all they need do is cite as justification the very myths revered by their denouncers.⁵⁸ Daniélou says Justin ‘breaks new ground’ in his refutation of charges of immorality by being the first to give a detailed description of Christian worship.⁵⁹

Paramount among behaviors that demonstrate the moral superiority of Christians is their ‘remarkable sexual purity.’⁶⁰ Justin takes pains to demonstrate the ethical purity of sexual behavior of church members who ‘follow the only begotten God through His Son. Those who formerly delighted in fornication, now embrace chastity alone; those who formerly made use of magical arts have dedicated

⁵³ *1 Apol.* 3 and 16. Justin betrays a social bias when he attempts to discount testimony elicited from οικήτας τῶν ἡμετέρων ἢ παίδας ἢ γυναῖα (Marcovich, *Apologiae Pro Christianis* 155) ‘our slaves, either children or weak women’ who ‘by dreadful torments’ admit such charges, *2 Apol.* 12, ACW 56.82. Surely such succumbing was not limited only to female house servants.

⁵⁴ *1 Apol.* 26, *Dial.* 82. Nevertheless, high moral behavior is not just a distinguishing mark of the true Church, it is itself a protection against falling prey to false teachings, *1 Apol.* 58.

⁵⁵ P. Brown, *Body and Society* 34.

⁵⁶ *2 Apol.* 2 as cited by Barnard, *Justin* 153.

⁵⁷ *1 Apol.* 5, 25, 27 and 57.

⁵⁸ ‘And imitating Jupiter and the other gods in sodomy and shameless intercourse with women, might we not bring as our apology the writings of Epicurus and the poets?’ *2 Apol.* 12, ACW 56.83.

⁵⁹ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 30. He also points out that Justin’s challenge to pagan religion is very broad, including idolatry and ‘every aspect of the heathen cultus,’ *ibid.* 18.

⁶⁰ Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* 270.

themselves to the good and unbegotten God.’ This high standard of sexual behavior derives, according to Justin, directly from the apostolic witness to the teachings of Jesus.⁶¹ In his *First Apology* Justin records a fascinating anecdote. A young Christian, wishing to take a public stand against the false charges of sexual license against the Church, approached Felix, the prefect of Egypt, for permission to be castrated. Though his request was denied, he and his companions still marked the incident a success as a public testimony to the sexual continence regularly practiced by Christians: ἠρκέσθη τῇ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν ὁμογνωμόνων συνειδήσει.⁶² The testimony was public because of his approach to a government official. His request was testimony in favor of the high morality of the Christians.⁶³

Strict sexual conduct is in accordance with ‘right reason’ (λόγου ὀρθοῦ).⁶⁴ Justin’s doctrine of free moral choice over against Stoic fatalism is consistent with his emphasis on sexual morality: ‘But neither do we affirm that it is by fate that people do what they do, or suffer what they suffer, but that each by free choice acts rightly or sins.’⁶⁵ Justin also affirms that ‘purity of life is a prerequisite for salvation, not a result of it.’⁶⁶

⁶¹ *1 Apol.* 14, ACW 56.31 and *1 Apol.* 15.

⁶² *1 Apol.* 29, ACW 56.43: ‘was satisfied with the testimony of his own conscience and that of his fellow-believers.’ Cf. A.W.F. Blunt, ed., *The Apologies of Justin Martyr*, Cambridge Patristic Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 47 and n. 11. Felix was Praefectus Augustalis in Egypt from 150 to 154 A.D., Marcovich, *Apologiae Pro Christianis* 75.

⁶³ This passage does not demonstrate that castration was a common practice among Christians, merely that one group of youths made their witness in this way, though it may have been more common than previously thought, see D. F. Caner, ‘The Practice and Prohibition of Self-Castration in Early Christianity’ *VC* 51 (1997) 396-415.

⁶⁴ *2 Apol.* 2. Blunt (*Apologies of Justin Martyr* 106, n. 10) calls this a ‘Platonic phrase.’ The phrase also appears in *2 Apol.* 7 and 9. See Marcovich, *Apologiae Pro Christianis* 137 for specific references to Plato’s use of this term.

⁶⁵ *2 Apol.* 7, ACW 56.78. See also *Dial.* 88 and 102. The wicked were not created so by God, though he does foreknow their evil, *Dial.* 141.

⁶⁶ Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* 250-251. This is confirmed by Story, citing *Dial.* 116: ‘Justin’s meaning is definite. Jesus has rescued Christians from sins, stripped them of their old garments. He will one day clothe them with prepared garments on condition that (ἐάν) Christians keep his commandments until he come.’ C. I. K. Story, *The Nature of Truth in “The Gospel of Truth” and in the Writings of Justin Martyr*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, 25 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) 176, italics are his.

2.3.2 Sexual morality and asceticism in Justin

Marriage for Justin is for procreation only and should be monogamous: 'But whether we marry, it is only that we may bring up children; or whether we renounce marriage we live in perfect continence.'⁶⁷ It will be eliminated in eternity, but not in the millennium which precedes the final consummation according to Justin's reading of Revelation. Divorce is permitted, but without the right of remarriage. Seriously misunderstanding Jewish practice, Justin accuses them of allowing polygamy.⁶⁸

Justin knows some who have made a life-long renunciation of sexual contact. These virgins may be found in a broad cross-section of the Church: 'And many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples from childhood, have preserved their purity at the age of sixty or seventy years; and I am proud that I could produce such from every race of men and women.'⁶⁹ Yet Justin does not classify widows as a separate order of ascetics but rather as one among several groups of persons in need.⁷⁰ This may mean that widows as a separate ascetic order did not exist in the churches familiar to Justin, or that he is not interested in providing details of internal church structure to a readership outwith the Church. Justin views both women and men as equally capable of doing righteousness: 'For God has made that sex capable of performing all the duties of justice and righteousness.'⁷¹ There is no hint in Justin of the later doctrine that the very presence of women is dangerous by tempting men

⁶⁷ *1 Apol.* 29, ACW 56.42, *2 Apol.* 4. Most church members are married, *Dial.* 110.

⁶⁸ *Dial.* 81, *2 Apol.* 2, *1 Apol.* 15, *Dial.* 134 and 141. To Justin the polygamous marriages in the Old Testament are prophetic types, not normative examples.

⁶⁹ *1 Apol.* 15, ACW 56.32.

⁷⁰ *1 Apol.* 67.

⁷¹ *Dial.* 23, G. J. Davie, ed. and trans., *The Works Now Extant of S. Justin the Martyr, translated, with notes and indices*, A Library of Fathers, vol. 40 (Oxford: Parker, 1861), 99. Both sexes possess spiritual gifts, *Dial.* 88, cf. 83. McNamara attempts to use *Dial.* 88 to claim Justin knew of churches where women 'were still recognized as orthodox preachers', but this places too much weight on a certain interpretation of what Justin means here by spiritual gifts. Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries*, *Women & History*, 6/7 (New York: Haworth Press, 1983), 77.

to sexual sin.⁷²

Justin's asceticism is expressed in terms of performance⁷³ and witness before the world. He also speaks of the transformation of immoral pagans absorbed in the occult now changed into dedicated followers of the good God.⁷⁴ The high morality of Christians serves to draw the contrast between the faith of pagans and that of the Church and to highlight the radical difference between the morality inherent in the two systems.⁷⁵ It also clearly testifies to the injustice of persecuting Christians.

2.3.3 Mary in Justin

Several scholars point out that Justin is the first Church father we know of to draw a parallel between Eve and Mary.⁷⁶ This is a new theological application of Mary in a

⁷² His exegesis of the 'watcher' angels passage of Genesis 6 is more anti-pagan than anti-women. The angels fell because they were 'captivated by love of women', but Justin assigns no specific blame to the women involved, unlike Tertullian (cf. *virg. vel.* 16, ANF 4.37, where all men are 'imperilled' (*periclitantur*) by the presence and beauty of virgins. See also *virg. vel.* 12, 13, and 15). Justin's emphasis is on the resulting offspring: the demons that now plague all human kind, *2 Apol.* 5.

⁷³ Performance before both God and the world: *1 Apol.* 15, ACW 56.32: 'not only our deeds but also our thoughts are open before God.' He goes on to describe the amazing picture of life-long sexual continents who are displayed before the world. Also the story of the youth who sought castration, *1 Apol.* 29. See Valantatis, 'Constructions of Power in Asceticism' *JAAR*, 63 (1995), 775-821.

⁷⁴ *1 Apol.* 14 and 16, where the transformation is from anger and violence and swearing. See P. Brown, *Body and Society* 60-61.

⁷⁵ *1 Apol.* 14. Other ascetic practices he mentions include the practice of fasting before baptism in *1 Apol.* 61. R. M. Grant overstates the case in claiming that the *2 Apology* was written in an atmosphere of 'ascetic rigor,' 'A Woman of Rome: The Matron in Justin, *2 Apology* 2.1-9', *Church History*, 54 (1985), 464. Justin is no ascetic extremist. On this basis I agree with the judgement of the fragments of *On the Resurrection* as 'dubia,' CPG 1.1081. References to 'lawless' (non-procreative) marriage and extended discussions on the heavenly functions of the sexual organs (*Res.* 3) may be consistent with Justin's view of marriage (see above), but they are too ascetic in tone as compared to his confirmed works, the *1* and *2 Apology* and the *Dialogue*. In *On the Resurrection* 5 'Justin' apologizes to his Christian readers for using arguments that are 'secular' ἔξωθεν and 'physical' κοσμικῶν. We find nothing of this in his *Apology*, also addressed to unbelievers, nor in the *Dialogue*, addressed to Jews. This is another point in favor of rejecting the authenticity of these fragments. Barnard (14), Quasten and Altaner all agree against the authenticity of *On the Resurrection*: Quasten, *Patrology* 1.205, and B. Altaner, *Patrology*, trans. by Hilda C. Graef (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1960). For the opposing view, see Osborn, *Justin* 73, but even he will only use *Res.* with caution.

⁷⁶ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 205; Story 103; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 493-494 and *Theotokos* 'Justin Martyr'. Osborn, *Justin* 164, n. 73, observes that the only possibility for an earlier parallel is the *Gospel of Philip*. Von Campenhausen notes that Justin's parallel is 'more highly

context separate from the nativity. This comparison is not mentioned in either *Apology*, which is understandable, both being directed to Gentile readers. In his exegesis of the account of the fall of the human race, Eve was deceived by the serpent, but Justin assigns the major portion of blame to the serpent rather than to Eve.⁷⁷ The key text for Justin's parallel of Eve and Mary is in *Dial.* 100:

[Christ] became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent (τὸν λόγον τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφραως συλλαβοῦσα), brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, "Be it unto me according to thy word."⁷⁸

The parallel revolves around the idea of conception of a logos. Eve received the 'logos' of the serpent and conceived disobedience and death. Mary received the divine Logos and conceived the Son of God. Both virgins allowed entrance of a 'logos,' but with radically different results. In both cases a 'logos' enters the woman to bring forth a result that will affect the entire race. The resulting fruits of these two conceptions are not worked out in detail,⁷⁹ but the idea that both women were key figures in salvation history is clear. 'God is said to have terminated (καταλύει) the work of the serpent whose word of disobedience Eve conceived.'⁸⁰ Another text using parallels is:

Moreover, the prophecy, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son," was uttered respecting Him. . . . For if He also were to be

allegorical' than that of Irenaeus (*Virgin Birth* 41).

⁷⁷ *Dial.* 79 and 124. Adam also was deceived, *Dial.* 124, cited by Barnard, *Justin* 108. The Fall is significant for Justin but it is not the unmitigated disaster which it is for other fathers like Tertullian who hold to a doctrine of original sin. Justin had no such doctrine: Osborn, *Justin* 179; Barnard 115; and Goodenough 227.

⁷⁸ *Dial.* 100, ANF 1.249, CMP 34, 35.

⁷⁹ Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* 234.

⁸⁰ Story 103.

begotten of sexual intercourse, like all other first-born sons, why did God say that He would give a sign which is not common to all the first-born sons? But that which is truly a sign, and which was to be made trustworthy to mankind,--namely, that the first-begotten of all creation should become incarnate by the Virgin's womb. . . in order that, . . . it might be known as the operation of the power and will of the Maker of all things; just as Eve was made from one of Adam's ribs, and as all living beings were created in the beginning by the word of God.⁸¹

However, this parallel is not strictly between Mary and Eve, but rather between Christ and Eve, both becoming flesh through an extraordinary process: Christ through the virginal conception and Eve through the rib of Adam. Both of these are direct operations of the power of God. So the focus of this parallel is on the power and will (δυνάμει καὶ βουλῇ) of God the Creator.⁸²

The incarnation of Christ is central to Justin's theology. It wrought the destruction of demonic powers, though Justin does not clearly elucidate how this was done.⁸³ The incarnation brings about salvation through the blood of Christ: 'He became man of a virgin according to the will of the Father (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Πατρὸς βουλήν) for the salvation of those who believe in Him.'⁸⁴ Christ's humanity is real and complete.⁸⁵ Yet sometimes Justin 'gives the impression that Jesus, in his incarnate life, had no real blood relationship with the human race. He was ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀνθρώποις rather than ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων.'⁸⁶

The virginal conception is part of a creedal tradition which Justin cites. He also quotes from the Synoptic Gospel tradition of this doctrine.⁸⁷ Though Justin is

⁸¹ *Dial.* 84, ANF 1.241, CMP 30, 31.

⁸² CMP 30.

⁸³ *2 Apol.* 6, *Dial.* 100.

⁸⁴ *1 Apol.* 63, ACW 56.69, CMP 16. *1 Apol.* 50, *Dial.* 111.

⁸⁵ *Dial.* 48, 84, 87, 100, 101, 103, 105, 113.

⁸⁶ Barnard, *Justin* 120 citing *1 Apol.* 23 and *Dial.* 76. This is likely an indication of undeveloped Christology in Justin rather than an implicit docetism.

⁸⁷ *1 Apol.* 46 seems to follow a creedal tradition rather than the Synoptics. *Dial.* 85 may indicate that mention of the Virgin is included in an exorcism formula: 'For every demon, when exorcised in the name of this very Son of God--who is the First-born of every creature, who became man by the

aware of some Christians who deny the virginal conception,⁸⁸ to him it and the physical birth of Christ are vital to establish the real humanity of Christ and to fix the miracle of his incarnation in history. The incarnation, being a unique event, inaugurates a new dispensation in salvation history.⁸⁹

Justin must establish the credibility of the virginal conception to two disparate groups: to the Jews in the *Dialogue* and to pagans in his *Apologies*, meeting different objections with each. Trypho challenges the doctrine of the incarnation saying God does not share with another his glory.⁹⁰ He also attacks the virginal conception. His accusation is two-fold; the Christians misread Isa 7.14 and the virginal conception of Jesus is merely another rendition of pagan myth:

Trypho answered, "The Scripture has not, 'Behold the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,' but, 'Behold, the young woman shall conceive and bear a son,' and so on, as you [Justin] quoted. But the whole prophecy refers to Hezekiah, and it is proved that it was fulfilled in him, according to the terms of this prophecy. Moreover, in the fables of those who are called Greeks, it is written that Perseus was begotten of Danae, who was a virgin; he who was called among them Zeus having descended on her in the form of a golden shower. And you ought to feel ashamed when you make assertions similar to theirs, and rather [should] say that this Jesus was born man of men. . . . You endeavor to prove an incredible and well-nigh impossible thing; [namely], that God endured to be born and become man."⁹¹

Justin dismisses the myth of Perseus as a diabolical plot to deceive.⁹² He contends that the conception and birth of Jesus are fulfillments of prophecies in the Old

Virgin,' ANF 1.241, cf. Osborn, *Justin* 184. Justin also cites from the Synoptics, including *Dial.* 78 and 105. These citations fly in the face of assertions that he did not know the Synoptics (T. Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 31). Boslooper does not take into account that differences between Justin and the Synoptics may be because he also drew from other local traditions familiar to him from his upbringing in Samaria. See Barnard, *Justin* 55-60 for discussion.

⁸⁸ *Dial.* 48, which seems to 'refer to Ebionite Christians,' Barnard, *Justin* 122.

⁸⁹ *Dial.* 43, 66 and 120. He notes that details of the life of Christ come from the records of the Apostles and their followers, referred to repeatedly, eg. ten times in five chapters, *Dial.* 103-107. The incarnation is according to the plan of God: *1 Apol.* 63; *2 Apol.* 6; *Dial.* 23, 63, 75, 84, 87, 127; to which the Son submitted: *Dial.* 50 and 100.

⁹⁰ *Dial.* 65.

⁹¹ *Dial.* 67, 68, ANF 1.231-232, cf. *Dial.* 43, 57, 67, 68 and 71.

⁹² *Dial.* 69-70.

Testament,⁹³ especially Isa. 7.14 which Justin insists refers to Christ rather than to Hezekiah.⁹⁴ The Isaiah prophecy can only find fulfillment in the son born of the Virgin Mary:

For if He also were to be begotten of sexual intercourse, like all other first-born sons, why did God say that He would give a sign which is not common to all the first-born sons? But that which is truly a sign, and which was to be made trustworthy to mankind,--namely, that the first-begotten of all creation should become incarnate by the Virgin's womb, and be a child,--this he anticipated by the Spirit of prophecy, and predicted it.⁹⁵

Justin asserts that Jesus is descended from the Jewish patriarchs through Mary:

We know Him to be the first-begotten of God, and to be before all creatures; likewise to be the Son of the patriarchs, since He assumed flesh by the Virgin of their family, . . . He was the Son of man, either because of His birth by the Virgin, who was, as I said, of the family of David, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham; or because Adam was the father both of Himself and of those who have been first enumerated from whom Mary derives her descent.⁹⁶

In the *Apologies*, Justin is more defensive. He again argues that the virginal conception is not just another story like that of Perseus. He begins by asking his readers not to dismiss the story of Jesus as that would be inconsistent, seeing how virginal conceptions were not uncommon in pagan myths. Yet there is a limit to similarities. The pagan myths are actually demonic imitations designed to cast doubt on the true incarnation of the Logos.⁹⁷ The major difference between the myths and the story of Jesus is that the sexual contact of deity with a human woman which was the common feature of the pagan accounts is not found in the Christian reports.

⁹³ Von Campenhausen (*Virgin Birth* 33) says Justin uses the virgin birth only to authenticate prophecies. However, in passages like *Dial.* 43, it seems clear that Justin is also defending the virgin birth by citing prophecies.

⁹⁴ *Dial.* 71-78, also 43, 66, 68. Other texts include Psalm 21 which predicts the flight to Egypt, *Dial.* 102.

⁹⁵ *Dial.* 84, ANF 1.241.

⁹⁶ *Dial.* 100, ANF 1.249, see also *Dial.* 43 and 45. Here Justin deviates from the Synoptic tradition in asserting that Mary is a descendent of David.

⁹⁷ *1 Apol.* 21-22, 54.

Justin clearly asserts that God did not use intercourse in the virginal conception of Mary:

But lest some, not understanding the prophecy referred to, should bring against us the reproach we have been bringing against the poets who say that Zeus came upon women through lust, we will attempt to explain clearly the words. This then, "Behold the virgin shall conceive" signifies that the virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with anyone, she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin overshadowed her, and caused her to conceive while still a virgin. οὐ συνουσιασθεῖσαν ... ἀλλὰ δύναμις θεοῦ ἐπελθοῦσα τῇ Παρθένῳ ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτήν, καὶ κυοφορῆσαι παρθένον οὔσαν πεποίηκε.⁹⁸

This is a distancing not from the nature of sexuality itself, but rather from the immoral antics of the gods.⁹⁹ The non-coital nature of the conception is a direct fulfillment of prophecy, which Justin summons as a witness to the pagans of the truth of the account of the birth of Jesus.¹⁰⁰

The active agent in the virginal conception is the power (δύναμις) of God. This power is actually the pre-incarnate Logos itself: 'The prophetic Spirit said that He should be born as we noted before. The Spirit and the Power from God cannot therefore be understood as anything else than the Word, who is the First-begotten of God.'¹⁰¹ Why does Justin wish to assert the non-sexual nature of the virginal conception? Is it as Goodenough says, that he views sexual contact as a transmitter of sin? No, because Justin has no doctrine of original sin.¹⁰² Justin wishes to sharply distinguish between pagan and Christian versions of virginal conception. One of the

⁹⁸ *1 Apol.* 33, ACW 56.46, CMP 11.

⁹⁹ Von Campenhausen's view that Justin's 'judgement of the virgin birth is determined by a radically ascetic sentiment' (*Virgin Birth* 57) is incorrect because it is based entirely on fragments from the treatise *On the Resurrection*, which are not genuine (CPG 1.1081, also note attached to CMP 42). The fragment is valuable as a witness to an anti-sex interpretation of the virgin birth from sometime around the latter half of the second century.

¹⁰⁰ *1 Apol.* 31-33.

¹⁰¹ *1 Apol.* 33.6, ACW 56.46, cited by Barnard, *Justin* 104.

¹⁰² Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* 238, who recognizes that Justin does not teach original sin, 227 along with Osborn, *Justin* 179 and Barnard, *Justin* 115.

key differences is that in the Christian account, there is no sexual contact between God and Mary. Justin cannot imagine the God of the Bible engaging in sex with his own creatures. The Father is so transcendent for Justin that it is not he but the pre-incarnate Logos who appeared in the theophanies of the Old Testament. 'God is unbegotten, without beginning or end. He is changeless and eternal.'¹⁰³ This transcendence is central to Justin's concept of the Father.¹⁰⁴ Thus, he could not have impregnated Mary directly.

In his efforts to root the incarnation in real history, Justin provides a detail of the nativity story which comes from sources other than the New Testament. This is his reference to the cave where Mary gave birth, near Bethlehem. Recalling that Justin was born in Samaria, we can believe that he received this detail from some local tradition.¹⁰⁵

Justin is extremely interested in describing the sexual standards of Christians, but not in order to denigrate sexuality. He has no doctrine of original sin nor any idea that sexuality, in itself, is dangerous. Drawing from the New Testament, Justin asserts the high standards of sexual conduct as a distinctive sign and display of the Church and as an indication of the injustice of charges of immorality levelled against them by pagan society. He is outraged by the depraved sexual conduct of the pagan myths and of pagan society. This is not ascetic extremism but rather consistency with his Biblical sources.

¹⁰³ *1 Apol.* 13.4, cited by Osborn, *Justin* 20. On the Logos in the OT theophanies, see Story, *The Nature of Truth* 87, Osborn 34, and Barnard, *Justin* 88-89.

¹⁰⁴ 'Justin Martyr' in NCE 8.94-95. Osborn (*Justin Martyr*, 36) claims that Justin subordinates the Logos to the Father because of his anti-Marcion polemic. It is clear that the Logos is subordinate to the Father, Barnard, *Justin* 91. Justin changes the tradition from the Synoptics where the Holy Spirit is the active agent of the incarnation. Goodenough says Justin made the Logos the agent of his own incarnation so as to not give the Spirit a 'parental role' over the Logos, since, in Justin's mind, the Spirit was subordinate to the Logos even as the Logos was to the Father, 235-237.

¹⁰⁵ *Dial.* 78. This detail is also present in the *Protevangelium of James*. However there was a 'strong independent local tradition' in Palestine from which Justin and the *Protevangelium* both drew. Thus, the *Protevangelium*, which is likely later than Justin, was not his source, Osborn, *Justin* 133-134. The *Protevangelium* 'cannot have been written before 150,' O. Cullmann, 'Introduction' to the *Protevangelium of James*, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, rev. and trans. by R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), 1.423. See J. E. Taylor, *Christians and Holy Places, the Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 99-103, 107-108, 112.

Justin seems to be interested in Mary for three reasons: to show that the ancestry of Jesus goes back to David and Abraham, second, to demonstrate the miraculous nature of his incarnation by virginal conception and finally to set Mary's conception of the Logos in parallel with Eve's belief in the logos of the serpent. This is a significant move forward in theological thought on Mary. He is an early witness for the titular use of 'virgin,' calling her 'Mary the Virgin.'¹⁰⁶ However he does not refer at all to her virginity in an ascetic context. Her virginal status is never lifted up as a model for believers, despite Justin's familiarity with life-long virgins in the churches. The importance of Mary for Justin is that she provides historicity to the account of the incarnation of the Logos. He is not interested in her part in providing the actual humanity of Jesus.¹⁰⁷ Placing Jesus in real history is vital for Justin's arguments of fulfilled prophecy. Thus his emphasis on Mary and her role in the birth of Jesus.

2.4 THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

2.4.1 The character of the document

The *Protevangelium Jacobi*¹⁰⁸ is surely one of the more curious works of the early

¹⁰⁶ Μαρία ἡ Παρθένος, *Dial.* 100, CMP 35; cf. *Dial.* 120, CMP 40; *Dial.* 23, CMP 17; and τῆς Παρθένου in *Dial.* 48, CMP 21; *Dial.* 57, CMP 23; *Dial.* 105, CMP 38; cf. *1 Apol.* 33, CMP 12.

¹⁰⁷ Justin emphasizes the divine power active in the conception of Jesus without addressing the role Mary had in providing him with human flesh. Justin's relative silence concerning Mary's contribution may be due to his focus, which has more to do with setting the conception of Jesus in contrast to the pagan myths, and less to do with constructing a coherent doctrine of incarnation. See *1 Apol.* 32, ACW 56.45: 'And what is spoken of as the blood of the grape signifies that He who was to appear would have blood, though not from human seed but by divine power. And the first power after God the Father and Master of all is the Word, who is also Son; and of Him, in what follows, we will tell how He took flesh and became man. For as man did not make the blood of the grape, but God, so it was intimated that [His] blood should not be from human seed, but of divine power.'

¹⁰⁸ Hereafter *ProtJ*. This traditional title for this work will be used rather than the more cumbersome 'Infancy Gospel of James' or 'Birth of Mary'. There simply is no title which satisfies all parties. For a discussion see R. F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1995), 4. All citations from the *ProtJ* will be from Hock and will follow his enumeration. His Greek

church. While its main characters and much of its content are drawn from familiar sources (the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke) it introduces both new figures and whole new episodes into the history of Jesus. Its most striking characteristic is the preponderance of attention given to just one figure, Mary. For this project the *ProtJ* is valuable as early evidence for what popular piety made of Mary and how that piety was interested so early on in expanding the rather limited canonical references to her life.

Whilst the author explicitly identifies himself as James the brother of Jesus (25.1-2), the internal evidence is conclusive that not only is James not the author but that it was not written by anyone familiar with the world of James. Quasten's evaluation that the work 'shows an astonishing ignorance of the geography of Palestine' is widely accepted.¹⁰⁹ Other internal evidence against the purported authorship includes a number of inaccurate details relating to first-century Judaism. There are several references to some sort of order of virgins: the 'undefiled daughters of the Hebrews' and the 'true virgins'¹¹⁰ This is very likely a reading back into Jewish practice of the existence of widows or virgins as a distinct group in the Christian church of the mid second-century. There are other elements incompatible with first-century Judaism. Among them is the depiction of the young girl Mary being taken by her parents to the Temple where she lives until puberty.¹¹¹

The *ProtJ* was composed much later than the canonical Gospels from which it draws so much and so often. This dependence is shown in many details of narration. For instance much of the annunciation story in *ProtJ* 11 is adapted from Luke 1 as is the visit to Elizabeth in the next chapter. The recurring reference to

text is based on the standard critical edition which is É. de Strycker, ed. and trans., *La Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961). See Hock 28-30 for more on the history of the text.

¹⁰⁹ *Patrology*, 1.121. This is the almost universal view of scholarship: Altaner, *Patrology* 68; Hock 12-13; H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, (London: SCM, 1990), 310; R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* 33; von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 54 and A. Rush, 'Mary in the Apocrypha of the New Testament', in *Mariology* 1.157. O. Cullmann even considers the probability that it was composed by a Gentile, *NTA*, 1.423-424.

¹¹⁰ *ProtJ* 6.5, Hock 43; 7.4, Hock 45; 10.2, Hock 51; Also see 13.3; 15.6; 16.1.

¹¹¹ *ProtJ* 7.9, 8.2, 15.10, 19.8.

Mary's *ante-partum* virginity is also from the canonical accounts. The writer turns to Matthew 2:1-16 for his story of the astrologers and Herod in chapter 21. It is not just the NT that is utilized. The work is 'steeped in the language of the Septuagint.'¹¹² However there are significant deviations from the canonical narratives. Joseph seems strangely confused over his relation to Mary in 17.2-3 and 19.6-9. Mary also has an odd lapse of memory in 12.6; she has forgotten all about the annunciation. *ProtJ* 17.11 places the birth of Jesus outside of Bethlehem in direct contradiction to the NT. Both the cave and the midwife are additions to Matthew and Luke. Most notably the entire episode with Salome is extra-canonical.¹¹³

It is unclear where this apocryphon was composed. One recent proposal is that it was written in an Encratite setting since it has a preoccupation with the virginity of Mary and the earliest extant manuscript has a Syrian connection.¹¹⁴ However the question of provenance is quite unsettled with proposals ranging all across the Empire.¹¹⁵ The work is not to be associated with Gnosticism.¹¹⁶ The issue of dating is somewhat more defined than that of place of origin. Origen is familiar

¹¹² R. Cameron, *The Other Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 108. Also Hock 21-27.

¹¹³ *ProtJ* 18.1; 21.10 and all of *ProtJ* 19 - 20. There is independent early attestation to a cave being the site of the birth in Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 78). See Taylor, *Holy Places*, 101-107, 112. See the discussion below on dating of the *ProtJ*.

¹¹⁴ D. G. Hunter, 'Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome', *JECS* 1 (1993), 63, cf. Smid, *Commentary*, 175-176 and M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* 32. The Bodmer V papyrus was uncovered in Egypt, ODCC, 'Bodmer Papyri.' We shall consider the emphasis on virginity in section 2.4.2 below.

¹¹⁵ So Cameron, *Other Gospels* 108-109, 'Syria is perhaps most plausible . . . but a location in Asia Minor, Rome, or even Egypt is not at all impossible.' É. de Strycker, 'Le Protévangile de Jacques. Problèmes critiques et exégétiques' in *Studia Evangelica III*, F. L. Cross, ed., Papers presented to the Second International Congress on New Testament Studies, Oxford 1961 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 339-359, esp. 353-354, argues for an Egyptian origin.

¹¹⁶ This work has none of the following elements common to many Gnostic documents: secret salvific knowledge, predeterminism, denigration of marriage, women or the physical body, descent of Jesus from the pleroma, symbolism or allegorical reading of historical events. Pace G. Miegge (*The Virgin Mary* 50-51), who seems to intimate such a connection. In three major monographs on Gnosticism, there is no specific reference to the *ProtJ*. See K. Rudolph, *Gnosis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984), A. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), and G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). It is not a docetic work as shown by D. Hannah, 'The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christology' *VC* 53 (1999), 165-196, 183-184.

with a version of this work and Clement draws from it the story of the midwife's examination to show a wide though not universal belief in Mary's virginity *in partu*.¹¹⁷ Justin's knowledge of the cave as the birthplace of Jesus is probably drawn from an older tradition than the *ProtJ* which may have used the same source. So the *ProtJ* is not necessarily older than the *Dialogue with Trypho* but certainly had been composed and circulated by the time of Clement's *Stromata*, setting a terminus ante quem of around 200 A.D.¹¹⁸ The consensus is that the *ProtJ* was composed sometime in the second half of the second century.¹¹⁹

The overriding purpose of this work is to describe the exceptional holiness and purity of Mary. The work was composed in order to glorify the purity of Mary. All other characters, even Jesus himself, are peripheral to Mary.¹²⁰ Koester calls it 'perhaps the earliest hagiographical book of Christianity'.¹²¹ The motivation behind this elevation of Mary's purity may be a desire to supplement and expand the canonical accounts in relation to the life of Jesus. This is the view of Schneemelcher who posits a situation in which the *ProtJ* might have been created: 'the traditional writings of the NT and other early writings were no longer considered sufficient because much was lacking in them that one longed to know. . . we may perhaps

¹¹⁷ *com. Matt.* 10.17 and *str.* 7.16.93.

¹¹⁸ *Dial.* 78. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 133-134, makes a case for Justin knowing this independently from the *ProtJ*; however see G. Zervos, 'Dating the Protevangelium of James: the Justin Martyr Connection,' in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, ed. by E. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 415-434 for the argument that Justin's source is the *ProtJ*. Origen's source for this detail (*Cels.* 1.51) is probably the *ProtJ* but it could be Justin or even the earlier tradition.

¹¹⁹ A summary of this discussion is found in Hock 11-12. If one accepts that the chief reason for this book is to answer the calumnies of Celsus, then the earliest date would be closer to 178 rather than 150. This is the argument of P. van Stempvoort, 'The Protevangelium Jacobi, the Sources of its Theme and Style and their Bearing on its Date' in *Studia Evangelica III*, F. L. Cross, ed., Papers presented to the Second International Congress on New Testament Studies, Oxford 1961 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 410-426, esp. 413-415 and in a new form in J. L. Allen, 'The "Protevangelium of James" as an "Historia": The Insufficiency of the "Infancy Gospel" Category' in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers*, E. H. Lovering, ed. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 508-517. But see Hock 15-20 for a valid challenge to the view of the *ProtJ* as apologetic response to Celsus.

¹²⁰ Mary displaces Joseph as well. In Matthew he receives in a dream the warning of Herod's plot. But in the *ProtJ* it is Mary who hears of the plot and takes immediate action (22.1-4).

¹²¹ Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* 310

speak briefly of a motive of supplementation.¹²² But what was it that needed a supplement? What gaps in the canonical gospels would cry out to be filled? In the case of the *ProtJ* we may have an attempt to explain the presence on earth of the holy being Jesus. If he is to be worshipped as divine, how could such a being have appeared in the world? Questions such as this may have elicited the *ProtJ* as a pious response. Such a pure and holy being as Jesus was must have an unusually pure and uncontaminated origin.

In this sense we may see behind the exaltation of Mary's purity the intention to explain the appearance of the holy person of Jesus. His mother's exceptional purity helps readers to understand how Jesus came into this corrupt world and yet remained pure and free from sin. But this motive is never anywhere explicit in the document.¹²³

A case has been made that the orientation of this work is towards those outside the church rather than for internal consumption. This view makes out the work to be an apologetic reply, specifically a straightforward defense against the calumnies of Celsus. Details such as the two tests of Mary's purity and the odd inclusion of Mary's spinning are cited as replies to details in the *True Doctrine* of Celsus.¹²⁴ But this need not be the case. These charges were in circulation before Celsus and the elements deemed apologetic may also be explained if the target readership is within the church for the purposes of supplementing the history of the Savior by expanding on his most pure and holy birth. For instance both tests which Mary undergoes serve well the theme of establishing her purity. Hock concludes that the document 'follows closely the instructions for writing an encomium, and

¹²² 'General Introduction,' NTA, 1.62 Vorster prefers to describe the intent as a 'retelling of the birth story of Jesus from the perspective of his mother' (51-52, cited in R. Brown, *Birth*, 606, n. 95), but this does not address elements in the *ProtJ* which elevate Mary's purity and are not found in the canonical accounts.

¹²³ The plot of the *ProtJ* does shift away from a focus on Mary after the birth in ch 19. See section 2.4.2 below for details.

¹²⁴ *ProtJ* 10.1-8, 11.3, 12.1-2; 16.1-8 and 19.19-20.12. The charges brought by Celsus centered on an accusation that Jesus was the child of an illegitimate liaison between Mary and a soldier named Panthera. For the reply, see Origen, *Cels.* 1.28-29, 32-33. Van Stempvoort, 'Protevangelium Jacobi' 413-423 and Rush, 'Mary in the Apocrypha' 157.

those instructions will provide us with clear signals to the author's intent, mainly, to praise his subject, Mary.¹²⁵

This work has enjoyed a wide circulation and influence which is striking as it fell under suspicion from at least the mid-point of the third century and by the sixth century was declared to be a book to be avoided.¹²⁶ Origen cites it in his discussion of the issue of the brothers of Jesus. Yet he is clearly uncomfortable in building his case solely on the testimony of the *ProtJ* and so immediately shifts to the grounds of logic and propriety in arguing for the perpetual virginity of Mary. His caution is further confirmed since he does not utilize the clear witness of this work to the virginity *in partu*.¹²⁷ This utilization was known in Alexandria. Clement draws from the story of the midwife in the *ProtJ* as evidence of a widely held view of the preservation of Mary's physical virginity during the birth process.¹²⁸ Later the more objectionable elements of the book were excised and the rest transmitted into documents like *pseudo-Matthew* and then into the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*.¹²⁹

The work can be divided into five narrative sections. The first section (ch 1 -

¹²⁵ Hock 15-20. There is no evidence of a Gnostic denial of the virginity *in partu* which is proposed by Plumpe as the reason for this graphic description in the *ProtJ*, 'Some Little-Known Early Witnesses to Mary's *virginitas in partu*', *Theological Studies*, 9 (1948), 572.

¹²⁶ This influence is aptly summarized by Hock 27-28 and Quasten, *Patrology* 1.121-122. The *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* which excludes the *ProtJ* from canonical status, dates from the early 6th century, Schneemelcher, 'Introduction' NTA 1.46-49.

¹²⁷ *Com. Matt.* 10.17: 'They thought, then, that He was the son of Joseph and Mary. But some say, basing it on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter, as it is entitled, or "The Book of James," that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that that body of hers [. . .] might not know intercourse with a man after that the Holy Ghost came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first-fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity.' *CMP* 267, trans. J. Patrick, ANF 10.747, ellipsis is mine. On Origen's view of the virginity *in partu*, see chapter 5, section 5.3.3. M. Warner (*Alone of All Her Sex* 29) is rather imprecise in saying Origen cites the *ProtJ* 'in support of the virgin birth.'

¹²⁸ *str.* 7.16.93, LCC 154: 'But, just as most people even now believe, as it seems, that Mary ceased to be a virgin through the birth of her child, though this was not really the case--for some say that she was found by the midwife to be a virgin after her delivery.'

¹²⁹ *Pseudo-Matthew* composed in the 8th or 9th century. *The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* is of the Middle Ages. Both have omitted the especially objectionable story of the physical examination by the midwife of the integrity of the virginity of Mary. *The Gospel of the Nativity* has also omitted all mention of a previous marriage of Joseph, following influence of Jerome, NTA 1.406.

6) describes the holy origins of Mary. Her birth follows the prayers of her righteous but barren parents. They take intentional steps to insure her continued purity as an infant and small child. The second section (ch 7 - 10) sets out how Mary's purity is sustained through puberty and into her young adulthood when she comes under the care of Joseph. The third section (ch 11 - 16) continues this theme of purity by showing how it is preserved in the divine conception of Jesus. The fourth section (ch 17 - 20) shows that the purity of Mary is maintained during the birth of her son, Jesus. The final section (ch 21 - 24) deals with how the holy offspring of Mary and Elizabeth are protected from Herod. The last chapter (25) is a postscript identifying the author as James.

Despite its common identification as a 'gospel' the *ProtJ* contains very little about Jesus and nothing about him that is not in association with his mother.¹³⁰ It contains no discussion of his adult life, ministry, passion or resurrection. In comparison with other documents of the period, both canonical and ex-canonical, it is striking how central a role Mary is given in the *ProtJ*.¹³¹ Indeed it is likely the 'gospel' designation is late. The earliest extant manuscript, the Papyrus Bodmer V, has the title 'The birth of Mary, the revelation of James'.¹³² While this title is also disputed¹³³ it does seem more congruent to the contents of the work for Mary is the center of all that takes place in the narrative.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Koester argues for a very wide definition of the term. Certainly the large majority of writings Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels* 1-48) accepts as belonging to 'the corpus of gospel literature' have in common a central focus on Jesus; either his life and sayings or his death and resurrection. The *ProtJ* deviates from this in its focus on Mary. Koester explicitly includes the *ProtJ* as one of the apocryphal documents which has suffered prejudice under more narrow definitions of 'gospel' (43-47). N. Roddy ('The Form and Function of the Protevangelium of James' *Coptic Church Review*, 14 (1993), 37) believes the proclamatory element justifies us calling the *ProtJ* a 'gospel.'

¹³¹ Hunter ('Helvidius' 64) notes 'it is unique even among the apocrypha because of its intense focus on Mary's perpetual virginity,' and 'is preoccupied entirely with Mary.'

¹³² Hock 32: Γένεσις Μαρίας, Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰακώβ. The title 'Protevangelium Jacobi' can only be traced back to G. Postel's edition of 1552, Hock 4.

¹³³ de Strycker believes only the first half is original, 'Le Protévangile' 208-216, cited in Hock 4.

¹³⁴ Allen ('Historia' 515) argues that the *ProtJ* is an 'historia.' This is refined by Hock (13-20) who holds it to be 'an ἱστορία which has the structure and purpose of an ἐγκώμιον.'

2.4.2 Mary and her virginity in the Protevangelium

The virginity and purity of Mary are constant themes throughout this work. Her virginal state is firmly established in episode after episode. What is the significance of this well-attested virginity? Is it to create a model for those in the church striving to live in a like manner? Or is there another meaning?

Virginity is not relegated only to the category of asceticism. In the ancient pagan world virginity often had more to do with cultic purity than it did with ascetic concerns.¹³⁵ The most famous example is the Vestal Virgins. Their celibacy was temporary, not life-long, and related directly to their status as sacred 'daughters' of the Roman nation, and not as an expression of asceticism.¹³⁶ The 'undefiled daughters of the Hebrews,' the 'true virgins' and Mary's life as a young virgin in the Temple area may be echoes of this very Greco-Roman perception especially as there is no such precedent in the Jewish literature.¹³⁷

The virginity of Mary is an expression of the purity and sacredness of her person. This theme is present at every stage in her life. It begins with the description of her parents as upright. Even in the midst of the Temple rituals no sin is found in them.¹³⁸ The narrative makes a point of Anna's purification before

¹³⁵ See R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 346-348 for a delineation of the pagan practice of sexual renunciation.

¹³⁶ In Roman families the duty to maintain the sacred hearth-fire fell to a daughter. The Vestal Virgins were thought of as 'daughters' keeping a hearth flame for the entire nation. Their virginity is not a depreciation of sexuality per se but rather an essential element of their 'daughter' status. This is borne out by the fact that the term *incestus* applies to a Vestal who broke her vow of celibacy. See T. C. Worsfold, *The History of the Vestal Virgins of Rome* 63; J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1962), 238-240 and H. J. W. Drijvers, 'Virginity' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by M. Eliade (London: Macmillan, 1987), 15.279-281.

¹³⁷ *ProtJ* 6.5, Hock 43; 7.4, Hock 45; 10.2, Hock 51; Also see 13.3; 15.6; 16.1. M. Warner (*Alone of All Her Sex* 32) holds that this theme in the *ProtJ* of virgins living within the precincts of the temple comes from Greco-Roman sources. She observes that this virginity was not ascetic but ritually driven. Even W. J. Burghardt ('Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought' *Mariology*, 2.127) admits Mary's purity here is 'physical and legal.'

¹³⁸ *ProtJ* 1-2; 5.1-2.

feeding the infant Mary.¹³⁹ The child's precocious ability to walk reflects her unusual status. Her mother takes steps to keep her from contamination by preventing her from walking again until her feet touch the sacred space of the Temple. In fact the space where Mary resides until old enough to enter the Temple is called a 'sanctuary' (ἁγίασμα).¹⁴⁰

At her first birthday Mary receives God's highest blessing, but this is after her purity is already well attested.¹⁴¹ At the age of three she is brought to the Temple, her purity protected along the way, and presented to live in this most holy of sites in all Israel. In response to her purity, the priest acknowledges her exalted status. As she is placed on the third step of the altar, a place which she can occupy precisely because of her purity, God himself showers grace on her.¹⁴² Her dedication to God is so complete she does not even bid her parents farewell. She is fed by no ordinary means but by an angel of heaven.¹⁴³ At the onset of puberty, arrangements are made to prevent her from polluting the Temple. Joseph is divinely selected to take Mary, 'the virgin of the Lord,' into his care.¹⁴⁴ Mary's purity is assured as Joseph is depicted here as an elderly man with grown children who could not possibly have any sexual interest in Mary; so much so that mocking, not scandal is the worst he can envisage if he takes her in.¹⁴⁵ After receiving her into his home he departs and gives the care of Mary over to God himself, again emphasizing that

¹³⁹ 'Even from her mother's breast, Mary lived a life of purity.' B. R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* 112.

¹⁴⁰ *ProtJ* 6.1-3, 10, 14. The word is used of the Temple in 8.4.

¹⁴¹ *ProtJ* 6.6-9.

¹⁴² *ProtJ* 7.4-10. S. Benko's dismissal of the dancing as pagan, not Jewish, based on his view that no Jew would dance after the disasters of 70 and 135 AD is more psychoanalysis than serious history, *The Virgin Goddess* 202.

¹⁴³ *ProtJ* 8.1-2, cf 13.7. This 'underscores her continuing purity,' Hock 47. She is placed in the same category as Elijah, also fed by direct action of God, 1 Kings 17.1-5.

¹⁴⁴ *ProtJ* 8.3-8 and 9.7, Hock 48: τὴν παρθένον κυρίου. This is the first designation of Mary as a virgin. Gaventa (*Glimpses* 114) notes that the *ProtJ* is careful to separate the ritual impurity of Mary's menstruation from her overriding and continuous sacred purity.

¹⁴⁵ *ProtJ* 9.8. Hock (49) contrasts the Joseph of the *ProtJ* with that of the canonical accounts and ascribes the change to a motive to promote the purity of Mary.

there is no possibility of contamination.¹⁴⁶ Living in the house of Joseph in no way jeopardizes Mary's purity as she is included among the 'true virgins' who will spin for the Temple veil. Not only does her purity remain intact, but she turns out to be the purest of the pure among this group and is chosen to spin the royal threads of purple and scarlet.¹⁴⁷

The opening saying in the annunciation section is drawn directly from Luke 1, emphasizing as it does Mary's high privilege as a recipient of God's grace.¹⁴⁸ But the *ProtJ* deviates from the NT in inserting the delay when Mary returns home to spin and even more in her question to the angel which presupposes the virginity *in partu*.¹⁴⁹ As befits such a pure person, Mary's offspring will be born holy. Indeed the need to explain the exalted holiness of Jesus may have been the original impetus for this document.¹⁵⁰ Joseph's distress at discovering Mary's pregnancy underscores the heightened state of her purity and the seriousness such a violation represented. In fact Mary's innocence can be compared to the pre-lapsarian state of Adam and Eve. But Mary's own testimony is clear: she is pure from any such defilement.¹⁵¹ Her purity is questioned again by the High Priest who is astounded that such a pure person as Mary has fallen so low.¹⁵² Mary again explicitly asserts her purity is intact and Joseph adds his testimony as well.¹⁵³ Her innocence is put to the test in an ordeal which she and Joseph pass, providing yet another opportunity for the narrative

¹⁴⁶ *ProtJ* 9.11-12. Holiness is an underlying theme of the narrative in Numbers 16 which is cited as a warning to Joseph in *ProtJ* 9.9. The author reflects here knowledge of the Septuagint apart from the canonical Gospels, Gaventa, *Glimpses* 107.

¹⁴⁷ *ProtJ* 10.1-10; cf 12.1-2. Mary is identified with the tribe of David in 10.4; another contradiction of the NT.

¹⁴⁸ *ProtJ* 11.2.

¹⁴⁹ *ProtJ* 11.4 and 6.

¹⁵⁰ *ProtJ* 11.7 from Lk 1.35; also *ProtJ* 14.3.

¹⁵¹ *ProtJ* 13.1-5; 13.8-10. Mary's curious lapse of memory is yet another serious deviation from the canonical gospels. G. P. Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation* 181, sees here a 'variant of the Eve/Mary typology.'

¹⁵² The exact phrase is used by Joseph and the High Priest to describe Mary's exalted state: she had been raised in the holy of holies and fed by angels: 13.7 and 15.11, cf 19.8.

¹⁵³ *ProtJ* 15.13-15.

to establish Mary's undeniable purity.¹⁵⁴ On the journey to Bethlehem the time for the birth arrives.

At this point in the *ProtJ* we come upon the strange episode of the suspension of the passage of time. The focus of the narrative from this point on shifts from Mary to her child, Jesus. In the face of such a holy event as the birth of the son of the Most High all the activity of the universe and even time itself comes to a halt.¹⁵⁵ The birth itself takes place outside the view of the witnesses; this has less to do with modesty and propriety and more to do with the fact that this is a divine act; the bringing forth of this most pure and holy child.¹⁵⁶ The physical sign of Mary's purity is her intact hymen. Here again the author does not fail to provide detailed testimony to this element of holiness.¹⁵⁷ The audacity of Salome's challenge of the purity of this birth is quickly and severely punished, but just as swiftly and fully rectified. The locus of the healing power is the infant Jesus, not Mary. This supports a view that the author's ultimate interest is not a glorification of Mary per se, but an explanation of the origin of the holy child Jesus.¹⁵⁸ At chapter 21 the plot shifts again to a theme of the extraordinary lengths God himself takes to protect the holy offspring of this holy mother. The star of 'exceptional brilliance' is an indicator of the exalted holiness and purity of Jesus.¹⁵⁹ The infant John who later becomes the

¹⁵⁴ *ProtJ* 16.3-8. This is very loosely drawn from Numbers 5.

¹⁵⁵ *ProtJ* 18.1-11.

¹⁵⁶ *ProtJ* 19.12-17.

¹⁵⁷ *ProtJ* 19.19-20.2. This explicit gynecological detail was omitted from later versions of this story: *Pseudo Matthew* and *The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*.

¹⁵⁸ *ProtJ* 20.1-11. See the discussion of purpose above. This may also help to explain why Salome was judged so severely for questioning the miraculous purity of the birth and earlier in ch 15-16 the high priest did not suffer such a fate. In terms of the narrative Jesus has much more to do with the story of his own birth than he does several months earlier when Mary is found by the authorities to be pregnant. As Jesus appears on the scene there is a heightened sense of the holy as shown in the instant judgement against the doubting Salome.

¹⁵⁹ *ProtJ* 21.8, again a shift away from Mary's purity to that of her son. Note that in 21.11 Mary has receded to the background and Joseph has faded from sight altogether. She displaces him again in 22.3 where she is the one who hears of Herod's plot and takes steps to protect him. In Mt 2.13 Joseph is warned in a dream of the danger to his son.

herald of the ministry of Jesus is included in this providential protection.¹⁶⁰

The *ProtJ* is often considered an example of extreme ascetic thought. Koester says this work extolls ‘ascetic dedication.’ Von Campenhausen says it describes Mary ‘as the unsullied image of ascetic perfection,’ and Hunter calls it ‘radically ascetic.’¹⁶¹ Yet there is no application of the purity of Mary to the believer in the church. Keroloss rightly does not include a discussion of the *ProtJ* in his work on virginity.¹⁶² If this work arose in Encratite circles¹⁶³, it is difficult to explain why the virginity of Mary is not presented as ascetic, as a rejection of marriage.¹⁶⁴ Her virginity signifies not an abnegation of sexual relations but rather her sustained purity.¹⁶⁵ We also find positive depictions of the desire to have children. Childlessness is a cause for mourning and is considered a divine curse.¹⁶⁶ Both Joachim and Anna pray for children and celebrate when they know they will have

¹⁶⁰ The author has conflated John’s father with a different Zechariah mentioned in Mt 23.35. Origen also confused the two in *ser. Matt. 25* (CMP 265) but the differences are significant enough that it is likely Origen is not using the *ProtJ* as his source. Origen’s Zechariah is killed by religious authorities for allowing Mary to stand in the ‘place of virgins’ in the Temple. Here in *ProtJ* 23 he is killed by agents of Herod for failing to produce his son John and the temple priests are not only innocent but shocked by the murder (24.6-8).

¹⁶¹ Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* 311, von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 54, Hunter, ‘Helvidius’ 63. Mary is a ‘hyperascetical’ figure according to J. F. Craghan, ‘The Virginal Wife and the Married Virgin: The Problematic of Mary’s Vow of Virginity’ Th.D. dissertation, University of Munich, 1967, 107. Also A. Lane, ‘The Rationale and Significance of the Virgin Birth’, in *Chosen By God*, ed. Wright, 110-112, who mentions this work as an example of the ‘ascetic application’ of the virgin birth, and D. F. Wright, ‘Sexuality, Sexual Ethics,’ in DLNTD 1090, who includes it as example of the ‘prevalence of asceticism.’

¹⁶² H. Keroloss, ‘Virginity in the Early Church.’

¹⁶³ Hunter (‘Helvidius’ 63): ‘It reflects the radically ascetic, possibly Encratite, environment of early Syrian Christianity.’

¹⁶⁴ Mary is called the ‘wife’ of Joseph, *ProtJ* 8.8, though this is contradicted by 15.6, 17.3, 19.6-8. Marriage is also affirmed in 2.7.

¹⁶⁵ Her purity is conveyed in various ways: her parents are free of sin as she is conceived, *ProtJ* 5.2-3; Mary is kept from contamination with the world, 6.2-3; her bedroom is a ‘sanctuary,’ 6.4, 10, 14; she dwells in the holiest location in all Israel, 7.9-10, 8.2, 15.11; she is fed like a holy prophet, 8.2, 15.11; she is called ‘pure in God’s eyes,’ 10.4; her own child is holy, 11.7; her purity is proven by trial, 16.3-8; and finally the intact hymen is a sign of her pure state, 12.7-8, 20.1-12.

¹⁶⁶ *ProtJ* 2.1, 6.11. *ProtJ* 3.3 where Anna’s childlessness excludes her from the Temple.

one.¹⁶⁷ Offspring are a sign of righteousness and divine blessing.¹⁶⁸ Procreation is part of God's creation order.¹⁶⁹

Mary is mostly a passive figure in the *ProtJ*.¹⁷⁰ Although there is a version of her 'fiat' in the narrative this is a confirmation of her life-long preparation which was set in motion by her parents and confirmed in her own adult life by divine guidance.¹⁷¹ She is not depicted as addressing other ascetics, indeed she hardly speaks at all.¹⁷² She is portrayed as 'a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space.'¹⁷³ Gaventa makes a good case that the concern of this work is not moral asceticism but rather 'sacred purity'. Her virginity is a sign of ritual rather than moral purity. 'The Protevangelium demonstrates little interest in ethical exhortation of any kind.'¹⁷⁴ It is incorrect to assert that the author of the *ProtJ* depicts Mary as 'the honored model of the pure virginal life which he extols as the will of God for his hearers.'¹⁷⁵

The virginity of Mary in the *ProtJ* depicts ritual purity not ascetic renunciation. We need not choose only between defining this work as a document of ascetic promotion or one that is a glorification of Mary. The *ProtJ* is neither. It is in fact an attempt to explain the appearance of the holy Jesus by showing that his origin

¹⁶⁷ *ProtJ* 1.10, 2.9, 4.5-7, 6.6-8. The message that a child is to be born is conveyed by angels, 4.1, 4.4, 12.5, 14.5-6. A child is a gift that can be offered back to God, 4.2.

¹⁶⁸ *ProtJ* 1.7, 4.9, 5.2-4, 5.8, 6.11.

¹⁶⁹ *ProtJ* 3.4-8. Anna nurses Mary in the 'sanctuary' of their home, 6.10.

¹⁷⁰ E. Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins* (Paris, 1910), 23, cited in Craghan, 'Virginal Wife' 114.

¹⁷¹ 11.9. Divine guidance: *ProtJ* 4.1, 7.7-10, 8.1 where she does not look back at her parents, 8.8-9.7, 10.6-8, 12.2 and the various visits by angels, 11.5-9, 14.5-6.

¹⁷² Other ascetics are present in the narrative, the 'undefiled daughters of the Hebrews,' *ProtJ* 6.5, 7.4; and 'true virgins,' 10.2-3, cf. 13.3.

¹⁷³ P. Brown, *Body and Society* 273.

¹⁷⁴ Gaventa, *Glimpses* 122, and for the full case, 109-122.

¹⁷⁵ *Mary in the NT* 258, also Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation* 180: 'it places a high value on virginity and especially upon female virginity, such that Mary becomes the model for Christian virgins.' Pace also R. Bauckham, 'Western Mariology' 142 and D. Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995), 86, where the *ProtJ* is an example of documents which present Mary as 'a very prominent example of a godly woman both in character and actions.'

from his mother was without contamination and completely pure. This work is unique in its flavor, neither standing in the mainstream of the 'Great Church' nor to be identified with any of the groups considered heterodox by the former, for instance the Gnostics.¹⁷⁶ It represents a popular theology and is an early witness to a preoccupation with Mary and her holiness.

2.5 CONCLUSION

We have seen that Mary and her virginity are indeed topics of interest to all three witnesses examined here. All three witnesses draw the virginal conception from the canonical Gospel accounts. According to Ignatius this is part of the manifold mystery of the incarnation held secret from the devil. Justin draws a firm and solid line between the miracle of the virginal conception and the sexual antics of the pagan gods. Christians are known for remarkable sexual purity and so it is unthinkable for the conception of Jesus to have a sexual element. Mary figures in Justin's polemic with the Jews in three ways. The virginal conception, being non-sexual, cuts the ground out from under Trypho's charge that Christians believe a pagan myth about the origin of Jesus. Her pregnancy while a virgin is a clear fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy and she is a key figure in salvation history, set in contrast to Eve. Both bring forth fruit that affects the entire human race from conception through a logos. Eve produces disobedience and death while Mary bears the Son of God. The physical reality of the birth of Jesus from a real mother is emphasized by Ignatius against docetism, a concern not in view in Justin or the *ProtJ*.

The *ProtJ* is witness to a desire to fill in the gaps of the canonical Gospels and to explain in detail how such a holy being as Jesus came to live on this earth. This work also attests to the virginal conception but adds a new element, the virginity *in partu*. While the virginity of Mary is certainly a major theme of this

¹⁷⁶ Corrington (*Her Image of Salvation* 179) characterizes the work as 'an alternative to the Gnostic and orthodox Christian interpretation of Mary.'

work, it is not based on renunciative or transformational considerations. Mary herself is mostly a passive figure and her virginity is not seen as part of a process, it simply is.

Mary and her virginity warrant attention in all three witnesses, but in none is it prompted in any way by ascetic thought. While ascetic praxis is already a notable feature of church life such that it can be cited as a key element of its testimony to the world, it has not been connected to the Virgin Mary. She is the Virgin because of the miraculous conception of her son, Jesus.



CHAPTER THREE

MARY IN SALVATION HISTORY: IRENAEUS

3.1 SALVATION OF THE FLESH AND RECAPITULATION

Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 202) is often considered the first systematic theologian of the Church.¹ This reputation rests on the two works which have come down to us, the *Against Heresies* and the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. In his lengthy work *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus first sets out and then refutes various gnostic teachings. In doing so, he constructs an argument which requires him to explicate a wide number of dogmatic points. The shorter work, the *Demonstration*, is systematic in its conception, probably it is a summary of the faith for catechumens and their instructors.²

The *Against Heresies* was composed over a period of years. We do not know the precise dates of its composition, but as Eleutherius is the last Roman bishop mentioned in the list Irenaeus provides in *AH* 3.3.3, at least Book 3 must have been written before the end of his episcopate, 188 or 189. The *Demonstration* was written sometime after the completion of his *Against Heresies* as it refers to that work.³

¹ His birth year is based on his claim (*AH* 3.3.4, ANF 1.416) to have heard Polycarp. The date of his death is a conjecture, although references to his martyrdom under Septimius Severus are quite late (Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, 1.27). Quasten, *Patrology* 1.288 and DiBerardino, 'Irenaeus' in *EEC*. First systematic theologian: Quasten, *Patrology* 1.294. For a survey of literature, see Mary Ann Donovan, 'Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship', *Second Century*, 4 (1984), 219-241. A summation of evidence on his life is found in Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 7-10.

² D. F. Wright, 'Irenaeus' in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Douglas, ed., 516-517. Everett Ferguson argues that the primary purpose of the *Proof* is catechetical, and its apologetic intent, while present, is secondary, 'Irenaeus' *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* and Early Catechetical Instruction', *Studia Patristica*, 18,3 (1989), 119-140.

³ Irenaeus sent off each of the five books to be read by friend, possibly a bishop, who was battling Valentinianism. This took time. *AH* 1 Prf. 2; 1.9.1; 1.31.4; 3 Prf.; 4 Prf. 1; 5 Prf. D. Unger, 'Introduction', in *Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book One*, D. J. Unger, ed., ACW 55 (New York: Paulist, 1992), 4-5. *Dem.* 99.

This chapter begins with an overview of the incarnation according to Irenaeus. This is in two parts: first a survey of his refutation of what he considered false views of the incarnation and then an examination of his recapitulation scheme which is fundamental not only to his view of this particular doctrine but to all of his theology. We then peruse his views on gender roles and asceticism, again visiting his refutation of heresy in these areas and then proceeding to his own positive assertions on asceticism. The third section addresses the place of Mary in his theology. Since Irenaeus takes time to refute various heretical views of her, these are surveyed. His own statements on Mary and especially her virginity are then scrutinized. This includes a detailed unpacking of recapitulation as it is expressed in his parallel between Mary and Eve, and how this applies to the issue of ascetic virginity.

3.1.1 Irenaeus refutes Gnostic doctrine

We will begin, as Irenaeus himself does, with a consideration of his opponents since their teachings set the agenda for the first book of the *Against Heresies*. He describes in some detail the teachings of the Valentinians, then goes on to mention other Gnostics, including Marcus, Basilides, Carpocrates, the Ebionites, the Nicolaitans, Marcion, Tatian and the Encratites.⁴ Irenaeus's representations of the Gnostics has recently been called into question. He is charged with a lack of direct knowledge about the Gnostics.⁵ Yet Irenaeus himself was sensitive to charges of

⁴ Quasten, *Patrology* 1.289. For a summary of various gnostic figures, see Quasten *Patrology* 1.256-277. The most useful introduction to Gnosticism is now *A History of Gnosticism* by G. Filoramo who also wrote the article 'Gnosis' in EEC 352-354. Other standard works include: K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, A. H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* and Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

⁵ Among those who doubt the accuracy of Irenaeus: Frederick Wisse, 'The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists', *VC* 25 (1971), 205-223 and Elaine Pagels, 'Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. the Excerpts of Theodotus', *Harvard Theological Review*, 67 (1974), 35-53. This negative assessment has been questioned by PHEME PERKINS, 'Irenaeus and the Gnostics: Rhetoric and Composition in *Adversus Haereses* book one' *VC* 30 (1976), 193-200 and by D. Unger, *ACW* 55.5-6 and 130, n. 1.

bias and took pains to directly consult gnostic documents and sources in his study:

And so, after chancing upon the commentaries of the disciples of Valentinus--as they style themselves--and after conversing with some of them and becoming acquainted with their doctrine... To the best of our ability we will give you a concise and clear report on the doctrine of these people who are at present spreading false teaching.⁶

Since our focus here is the function of Mary's virginity in Irenaeus, time spent surveying the various gnostic views shall necessarily be brief. Our primary purpose in discussing his opponents' doctrines is to obtain a sharper image of the views held by the heresiologist. Since the root problem of all the various gnostic systems is considered to be docetism and a denial of the incarnation, Irenaeus's description of heresy and his refutation of it should provide us with insights into his own views of the incarnation and especially of the place Mary and her virginal status hold in his theology.⁷

Book One of *Against Heresies* lays out the gnostic doctrines as Irenaeus found them. He proceeds in the following four books to provide a refutation of the Gnostic heresies. We do not have the space to outline in detail this refutation,⁸ but it will be useful to touch on some lines he sets out which intersect with our concerns. His main line of attack is one he believes is common to all the different heresies. The 'complete disjunction between the creator God of the Old Testament and the God revealed by Jesus' provides the underlying theme to his refutation of the various heretical teachers.⁹ Irenaeus wishes to establish the absolute unity of God over against the speculative multiplicity of divine Aeons of the various Gnostic and

⁶ AH 1 Prf. 2, ACW 55.21-22. Scholarship is now not so skeptical of the presentation of the Gnostics in Irenaeus as it once was, especially if we read him in line with his own method of approach. A good summary of the debate and a positive judgement on Irenaeus as a witness to the Gnostics he deals with is found in M. Donovan, *One Right Reading?* in an appendix, 'The Question of Irenaeus's Reliability,' 175-177.

⁷ AH 1.7.2, 1.24.3, 3.10.4, and especially AH 3.11.3.

⁸ See Donovan, *One Right Reading?*.

⁹ D. Minns, *Irenaeus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 21, cf. AH 2.31.1. For an analysis of Irenaeus's arguments against the Gnostics, see Minns 10-22 and Gérard Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), 9-40.

related systems he had encountered. He wishes to refute what he sees as a pernicious isolation of the Father from his creation. On the other hand, he rejects the continuity between God and creation.¹⁰

The social behavior of these groups also provides Irenaeus with ammunition. Those heretics who live licentious lives ‘proclaim themselves superior to that God who made and adorned the heavens, and the earth...maintain that they themselves are spiritual, while they are in fact shamefully carnal on account of their so great impiety’.¹¹ Their immoral lives are an attempt to set themselves on a higher plane of moral authority than the creator God, while in fact they have debased themselves by their manner of life. Those who justify their actions on the basis that they are obliged to experience all of material existence in order to be freed from it are dismissed as inconsistent since they do not seek to experience all areas of life, omitting various arts, trades and skills, but instead turning to ‘voluptuousness’, ‘lust’ and ‘abominable actions’, which in themselves condemn the heretics to the fires of damnation.¹²

In addition to the inherent perverseness of their actions, the heretics stand convicted because their doctrines are not derived from the Scriptures and tradition. This tradition is true because it has been transmitted from Christ and the apostles and is affirmed by its universal acceptance in the orthodox churches throughout the world:

I have pointed out the truth, and shown the preaching of the church, which the prophets proclaimed (as I have already demonstrated), but

¹⁰ Irenaeus applies this refutation first to the Valentinians, who are his primary target, and then also to Marcion, Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, and ‘the rest of the Gnostics who express similar opinions’, ie detaching the Father from his creation. *AH* 2.31.1, ANF 1.407 = SC 294.326: ‘adversus . . . reliquos Gnosticorum qui eadem similiter dicunt idem dicitur.’ Ultimately the Gnostics held God and matter to ‘stand in the same continuum, the same chain of being’ despite the vast distance. This continuity of God with the world Irenaeus also vehemently rejects (Minns 32-33). So he stands opposed to the relative dissociation between God and this world which was taught by the doctrine of the gnostic Demiurge, yet he also affirms that there is a real separation between God and his creation, a separation blurred by the Gnostics in their manifold layers of divine emanation. For Irenaeus the way to affirm both of these doctrines is to affirm the unity of God.

¹¹ *AH* 2.30.1, ANF 1.403.

¹² *AH* 2.32.2, ANF 1.408 = SC 294.336: ‘ad voluptates autem et libidinem et turpia’. Their pursuit of lust is in direct violation to the teaching of the very Jesus they claim as their own, *AH* 2.31.1.

which Christ brought to perfection, and the apostles have handed down, from whom the church, receiving [these truths], and throughout all the world alone preserving them in their integrity, has transmitted them to her sons.¹³

The heretics are heretical precisely because they do not consent to Scripture nor to tradition. They hold the words of Jesus and the Apostles to be a mixed bag, sometimes spoken from the Demiurge, at other times from the higher levels of the Pleroma. Only the Gnostics, they claim, can separate out the truth. Irenaeus finds this arrogant and blasphemous. Moreover, ‘all the Gnostics’ and especially the Valentinians go further to effect a ‘perversion of the sense’ of the Scriptures.¹⁴

The dualistic cosmology of Irenaeus’s opponents carries through to their Christology. A number of these groups held that that which was born of Mary was the ‘dispensational Jesus’, a man who at his baptism received the Savior Christ from the pleromic powers.¹⁵ Irenaeus challenges this Christology with his strongly expressed assertions that human flesh is good because it is a creation of the Father.

¹³ *AH* 5. Preface ANF 1.526 = SC 153.10: ‘et veritate ostensa, et manifestato praeconio Ecclesiae, quod prophetae quidem praeconaverunt, quemadmodum demonstravimus, perfecit autem Christus, Apostoli vero tradiderunt, a quibus Ecclesia accipiens per universum mundum sola bene custodiens tradit filiis suis.’ Irenaeus identifies himself as orthodox (recte), *AH* 5.31.1, SC 153.388. The Scriptures are the accurate record of Apostolic teaching, *AH* 3.1.1.

¹⁴ *AH* 3.2.2, SC 211.28: ‘neque Scripturis iam neque traditioni consentire eos.’ Irenaeus distinguishes between the openly expressed teachings of Marcion and the more subtle twistings of the Valentinians. The difference he may have in mind is their uses of the New Testament. Where Marcion overtly denied large portions of the New Testament, the Valentinians attempted to substantiate their doctrines from it, finding many symbolic meanings behind historical events that ‘proved’ their system (eg, *AH* 1.1.3, where the thirty years of silence before the public ministry of Jesus refers to the thirty levels of Aeons). *AH* 5.26.2, SC 153.332, 334: ‘Qui ergo blasphemant Demiurgum--vel ipsis verbis et manifeste quemadmodum qui a Marcione sunt, vel secundum eversionem sententiae quemadmodum qui a Valentino sunt et omnes qui falso dicuntur esse Gnostici-- , organa Satanae ab omnibus Deum colentibus cognoscantur esse’. It is interesting that here Irenaeus does distinguish between Marcion and ‘all the Gnostics’. The heretics are wrong because their speculations do not conform to the ‘plot’ of Scripture which is self evident to any reader, Richard A. Norris, ‘Theology and Language in Irenaeus of Lyon’, *Anglican Theological Review*, 76 (1994), 288-291.

¹⁵ *AH* 3.10.4, ANF 1.425 = SC 211.126: *dispositio Iesus*. This is a sort of nascent adoptionism. Also *AH* 3.16.6. Marcion held a similar view, but it was not as completely docetic.

One and the same Creator ‘both fashioned the womb and created the sun’.¹⁶

Excluding the flesh from salvation is a blasphemy:

they blaspheme the Creator, and disallow the salvation of God’s workmanship, which the flesh truly is; on behalf of which I have proved, in a variety of ways, that the Son of God accomplished the whole dispensation [of mercy]¹⁷

Irenaeus contrasts the gnostic Soter of their cosmological myths, who ‘put on an ensouled body’, with the Word of God of the apostle John, who took up that very flesh of Adam, the flesh that is the ‘handiwork of God’.¹⁸ Because Christ’s salvific work was accomplished in human flesh, that flesh is now included in salvation. Therefore salvation of the spirit alone is denied and the inclusion of the flesh in the resurrection is affirmed.¹⁹

3.1.2 Recapitulation

Recapitulation (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) is a theological construct by which Irenaeus

¹⁶ AH 2.28.1, ANF 1.399 = SC 294.270: ‘unus autem et idem Demiurgus qui et uulvam plasmavit et solem creavit.’ Behind the translation ‘plasma’ may stand the verb πλάσσω referring to the creation of flesh. See also *Dem.* 11, SC 406.98: ‘hominem autem propriis plasmavit manibus’. Irenaeus uses the words ‘plasma’ and ‘plasmatio’ to refer to human flesh created by God’s active power (from many examples, see AH 1.9.3, SC 264.144; 3.16.6, SC 211.312; 3.18.7, SC 211.370; 3.21.10, SC 211.430; 3.22.1, SC 211.432; 4.Pref.4, SC 1002.390; 5.1.3, SC 153.26; 5.14.2, SC 153.188, etc.) God is ‘our Maker and Fashioner’ = ‘Factor et Plasmator noster’, AH 5.17.1, ANF 1.544 = SC 153.220. Minns says the words ‘plasma’ and ‘plasmatio’ emphasize the image of something modelled by God directly (Minns 57). Irenaeus also stresses the direct creative action of God upon this world by his reference to the ‘two hands of God’, the Son and the Spirit, AH 4.20.1 (123-124, 132 and G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), 91).

¹⁷ AH 4, Pref. 4, ANF 1.463 = SC 100².390: ‘ut blasphemant Fabricatorem et contradicant saluti plasmatis Dei, quod quidem est caro: propter quam omnem dispositionem fecisse Filium Dei multis modis ostendimus.’

¹⁸ AH 1.9.3, ACW 55.47 = SC 264.145: Λέγουσι γὰρ τὸν Σωτῆρα ἐδύσασθαι σῶμα ψυχικὸν... Σὰρξ δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχαία ἐκ τοῦ χοῦ κατὰ τὸν Ἀδὰμ [ἡ] γεγонуῖα πλάσις ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἣν ἀληθῶς γεγονέναι τὸν Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐμήνυσεν ὁ Ἰωάννης.

¹⁹ AH 5.2.2 and 2.29.2. Irenaeus takes pains to show that the pre-existence of Christ the Son of God does not mean Christ and Jesus are separate persons. He establishes this by citing how the Gospels and Paul see Christ being made flesh as a fulfillment of prophecy and how the Son of God being made Son of man is not teaching two persons, but one, as our salvation is dependent on identifying with the Son of God alone. AH 3.16.3.

explains the mechanics and the necessity of the incarnation for the accomplishment of salvation. Founded on Paul's depiction of Christ as the second Adam²⁰, it suspends all of salvation history on the two points: Adam and Christ. Adam's creation and fall is set over against the birth, life, and death of Christ.²¹ The events of the first episode are mirrored by those of the second. The effects of the primal history of Adam are canceled by the actions of the Savior Christ. The fall of the human race in Adam is recapitulated or summed up in Christ, who by his sacrificial death restores women and men to a state of salvation akin to that before Adam's rebellion. Recapitulation cancels the effects of sin by a re-enactment and a restoration.²²

Christ as the second Adam must recapitulate the first. The incarnation is the means by which Christ takes on the same flesh as that of Adam and so restores it to

²⁰ Romans 5.12-15, 1 Corinthians 15.22, 45-49 and Eph. 1.10. At AH 4.6.2, Irenaeus cites from Justin Martyr's lost work *λόγοι κατὰ Μαρκίωνα*. It seems that Justin had a primitive sort of recapitulation theory. Wingren warns against attempting to reconstruct Justin's theory from a fragment from a lost work (Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, trans. by Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959), 80-81). Because Christ is the head (κεφαλή) of the Church, his saving action (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) spiritually applies to all in the Church, Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* 177. This connection between κεφαλή and ἀνακεφαλαίωσις may be etymologically incorrect (Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 173, n. 82), but it is how Irenaeus understands things: AH 5.18.2, ANF 1.546: 'The Father is indeed above all, and He is the Head of Christ; but the Word is through all things, and is Himself the Head of the Church; while the Spirit is in us all, and He is the living water, which the Lord grants to those who rightly believe in Him, and love Him' = SC 153.240: 'Super omnia quidem Pater, et ipse est caput Christi; per omnia autem Verbum, et ipse est caput Ecclesiae; in omnibus autem nobis Spiritus, et ipse est aqua viva, quam praestat Dominus in se recte credentibus et diligentibus se.' Also see AH 5.20.2.

²¹ Of the four principal covenants (καθολικὰ) of human history, the fourth, signaled by the birth of Christ, is the one which renovates people, raising them into the kingdom of heaven. AH 3.11.8, SC 211.168: 'Et propter hoc quattuor data sunt testamenta humano generi'. The other three are those commencing with Adam, Noah, and Moses. The four-fold division of history is patterned after the four-fold Gospel and the four living creatures of heaven.

²² AH 5.17.1, ANF 1.544: 'the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become "the Mediator between God and men;" propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and canceling (consolatus) our disobedience by His own obedience;' = SC 153.220, 222: 'in amicitiam restituit nos Dominus per suam incarnationem, "mediator Dei et hominum" factus, propitiatus quidem pro nobis Patrem in quem peccaveramus et nostram inobaudientiam per suam obaudientiam consolatus.' Recapitulation is an expression of the final harmony of the created order of God, 'an insistence on the essential harmony of the true soteriological task, that of bringing humanity from its Edenic state of infancy to the true maturity of God-likeness,' Christopher R. Smith, 'Chiliasm and Recapitulation in the Theology of Irenaeus', *VC* 48 (1994), 329.

glory. Christ must ‘fulfill every condition of human nature’. So he must be born of a human mother.²³ Irenaeus goes so far as to assert that Christ’s physical life must have extended into old age so that his days may represent each and every stage of existence of Adam’s race.²⁴

In denial of Valentinian Christology, where Christ ‘descended like a dove upon the dispensational Jesus’, Irenaeus asserts that Christ is fully human, ‘he is man, the formation of God’, and at the same time divine, thus bringing together the invisible and visible, the incomprehensible and comprehensible, that which is impassible with that which suffers, ‘the Word thus being made man, thus summing up all things in Himself’.²⁵ Irenaeus ties together that which the Valentinians separated: the higher and lower levels of the cosmos. The disjunction between higher heaven and earth is dissolved before this central doctrine for Irenaeus, the incarnation, the enfleshing of divinity with the plasma of Adam.²⁶

Since Christ recapitulates Adam, the salvation of Adam is a key doctrinal point for Irenaeus. If Adam is not saved, then no one is saved. Salvation would not be complete if it did not include Adam, who is the ‘protoplast’ (protoplastus) of the

²³ *AH* 3.17.4, ANF 1.445 = SC 211.338: ‘et omnem secundum hominem dispositionem implente,’ and *AH* 3.21.10, ANF 1.454: ‘so did He who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth, enabling Him to gather up Adam [into Himself], from Mary, who was as yet a virgin.’ = SC 211.428: ‘ita recapitulans in se Adam ipse Verbum existens, ex Maria quae adhuc erat Virgo, recte accipiebat generationem Adae recapitulationis.’

²⁴ He recapitulates Adam and all human generations: *AH* 3.22.3-4 and 3.18.7. Thus, Jesus must have survived into his fourth decade, regarded as old age by Irenaeus’s society: *AH* 2.22.5.

²⁵ *AH* 3.11.2-3, ANF 1.426-7 = SC 211.146: ‘descendisse autem quasi columbam in eum Iesum qui factus est ex dispositione’. *AH* 3.16.6, ANF 1.443 = SC 211.312, 314: ‘est et homo plasmatio Dei; et hominem ergo in semetipso recapitulatus est, inuisibilis uisibilis factus, et incomprehensibilis factus comprehensibilis, et impassibilis passibilis, et Verbum homo, uniuersa in semetipsum recapitulans.’. The flesh of Christ must come from the same Father Creator as that of Adam, *AH* 5.21.1-2.

²⁶ Christ recapitulates Adam directly and the rest of humankind only indirectly. Christ was ‘recapitulating Adam in Himself’, *AH* 3.21.10, ANF 1.454 = SC 211.428: ‘recapitulans in se Adam.’ Therefore, even though Irenaeus does not explicate this, it is logically congruent for Christ to have no human father, just as Adam did not. Christ’s earthly life mirrors that of Adam rather than that of people in general. The closest Irenaeus gets to this is later in this same text (*AH* 3.21.10), where he states that if Adam had an earthly father, then Christ would have had one as well. It may be that Irenaeus is being proactive here by countering any use of his recapitulation theory to demand that Christ have a human father and thus deny the virginal conception. The main point of this section is the parallel between the ‘virgin’ source of Adam, the untilled earth, and Christ, born of the Virgin Mary. See section 3.3.2 below.

entire race. Adam must be the first and most significant inclusion in the atonement. Tatian and his Encratite followers denied salvation to Adam since he was representative of the old man in contrast to Christ, the archtypical new man.²⁷

It is essential for Christ's flesh and Adam's to be directly linked. Christ cannot save (recap) the human race if his humanity is directly created by God. Therefore, Christ cannot mirror Adam exactly. For Christ's human flesh must be of the same 'formation' as that of other humans, that is, of Adam's formation. The savior of humankind must then be directly linked to the race by the mechanism of a completely natural human birth of a human mother. To save our flesh, he must be of our same flesh.

Why then, did not God again take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should [require to] be saved, but that the very same formation should be summed up [in Christ as had existed in Adam], the analogy having been preserved.²⁸

A docetic Christ cannot effect salvation of the 'ancient formation', that is, the flesh of Adam's race.²⁹ Irenaeus goes so far as to claim that the very flesh and blood of Christ are the active agents in recapitulating and therefore saving all human flesh:

²⁷ AH 3.21.10, SC 211.429: *πρωτόπλαστος*. Tatian: AH 1.28.2 and AH 3.23.8. See also AH 3.23.2. Adam was completely incapable of effecting his own salvation, and so requires a savior, like all others, AH 3.18.2.

²⁸ AH 3.21.10, ANF 1.454 = SC 211.430: 'Quare igitur non iterum sumpsit limum Deus, sed ex Maria operatus est plasmationem fieri? Vt non alia plasmatio fieret neque alia esset plasmatio quae saluaretur, sed eadem ipsa recapitularetur, seruata similitudine.' Christ takes on Adam's flesh, so Adam is the archetype of Christ's human nature. Yet on a higher level, Christ is the archetype, since Adam was created after Christ's image and likeness, AH 3.22.1, ANF 1.454: 'But everyone will allow that we are [composed of] a body taken from the earth, and a soul receiving spirit from God. This, therefore, the Word of God was made, recapitulating in Himself His own handiwork; and on this account does He confess Himself the Son of man,' = SC 211.432: 'Hoc itaque factum est Verbum Dei, suum plasma in semetipsum recapitulans; et propter hoc Filium hominis se confitetur,' also see AH 3.23.1 and 5.16.2.

²⁹ AH 3.18.7, ANF 1.448: 'But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work is not a true one. God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.' = SC 211.370: 'Si autem non factus caro parebat quasi caro, non erat uerum opus eius. Quod autem parebat, hoc et erat, Deus hominis antiquam plasmationem in se recapitulans, ut occideret quidem peccatum, euacuaret autem mortem et uiuificaret hominem: et propter hoc uera opera eius.' Also AH 5.1.3.

But the thing which had perished possessed flesh and blood. For the Lord, taking dust from the earth, moulded man; and it was upon his behalf that all the dispensation of the Lord's advent took place. He had Himself, therefore, flesh and blood, recapitulating in Himself not a certain other, but that original handiwork of the Father, seeking out that thing which had perished.³⁰

Christ became flesh because it was mortal flesh that both needed and was capable of being saved and restored to the pre-fall state. The seriousness of docetism for Irenaeus becomes evident: it denies the very possibility of salvation for human beings. Even the Eucharist becomes a sham.

Irenaeus's recapitulation theory holds that God replicates significant elements from the primal history of the human race, beginning with the creation of Adam. These are replicated in the history of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The counterpart elements reverse the effects of the original components. To show this Irenaeus construes various couplets of corresponding elements in salvation history, where the prior part is set in contrast to the counterpart.

The overriding couplet of type and anti-type is that of Adam and Christ.³¹ All other pairs stem from this fundamental axis. Adam the disobedient is set over against Christ the obedient. Adam is the first man, and the first of all who die, while Christ is the first of those who live. The flesh of Adam produces death and the flesh of Christ yields redemption. Adam is the vanquished man even as Christ is the victorious man. Adam's origin from the untilled, virgin earth is parallel to Christ's origin (as a human) from the flesh of the virgin Mary. The tree in the garden, the site of Adam's disobedience is contrasted with the tree of the Cross, the locus of supreme obedience. Both Adam and Christ died on the sixth day, the day before the Sabbath, Adam spiritually and Christ physically. Irenaeus even has a couplet

³⁰ AH 5.14.2, ANF 1.541 = SC 153.186, 188: 'Quod autem perierat sanguinem et carnem habebat. Limum enim de terra accipiens Deus plasmavit hominem, et propter hunc omnis dispositio adventus Domini. Habuit ergo et ipse carnem et sanguinem, non alteram quandam, sed illam principalem Patris plasmationem in se recapitulans, exquirens id quod perierat.' See also AH 5.14.1; 5.2.1; and *Dem.* 31; and in an anti-docetic polemic context, AH 5.2.2.

³¹ See the tabular summary at the end of this chapter. This parallelism between Adam and Christ may be drawn from 'an early Judaeo-Christian tradition', Minns, *Irenaeus* 93.

comparing the opposite effects of food between the history of Adam and Christ: Satan was able to use food to provide the occasion for the first temptation and sin, but was unsuccessful in his attempt to use it against Christ in the desert.³²

Satan is the subject of several other couplets. His cunning in the garden is counterbalanced by the harmless dove of Christ's baptism.³³ His deceptive word to Eve is laid against the word of truth spoken to Mary by the angel. Satan the angel mirrors the angel of the Annunciation. Satan employed the woman Eve as a tool to gain advantage over Adam, while God used the woman Mary to effect the incarnation.

Irenaeus is the first to fully develop a direct typological relationship between Eve and Mary.³⁴ There are several points of parallel. Both women are virgins, both betrothed but not yet married when they come to their respective tests of compliance.³⁵ This obedience is the overriding element of the typology:

In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." [Lk 1.38] But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin.³⁶

³² Disobedient Adam - obedient Christ, *AH* 3.21.10; 5.19.1 and 5.21.2. First to die - first to live, *AH* 3.22.4. Flesh of Adam - of Christ, *Dem.* 31. Vanquished Adam - victorious Christ, *AH* 5.21.1. Virgin earth - virgin Mary, *AH* 3.18.7; 3.21.1 0; *Dem.* 32. Tree - cross, *AH* 5.16.3; 5.17.3; 5.17.4; 5.19.1; *Dem.* 34. Both died on a Friday, *AH* 5.23.2. Food, *AH* 5.21.2. Taking the word typos in its literal sense of an impression made in wax by a seal, Irenaeus holds that Adam is a type of Christ. So Adam 'does not simply prefigure Christ, but bears in his own body the lineaments of the incarnate Son of God. Adam's humanity bears the stamp of Christ; it is shaped and defined by the shape and definition of Christ's humanity.' (Minns 86, also see F. Altermath, 'The Purpose of the Incarnation according to Irenaeus', *Studia Patristica*, 13,3 (1975), 67.)

³³ The dove (columba) probably refers to the baptism of Jesus, but Irenaeus does not explicitly say so, *AH* 5.19.1, SC 153.250. The deceptive word - word of truth, *AH* 5.19.1. The angel Satan - angel of the Annunciation, *AH* 5.21.1. Eve used by Satan - Mary by God, *AH* 5.21.1. Note the passive roles for both Eve and Mary here.

³⁴ Justin Martyr is most likely Irenaeus's source. Justin's parallel, much more limited than that of Irenaeus, centers on the role of a logos in the history of each woman. Eve received the logos of the serpent which produced disobedience and death. Mary received the divine logos and so conceived the Son of God. *Dial.* 100, ANF 1.249 = CMP 1.34, 35. The Eve-Mary parallel is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (section 3.3.2).

³⁵ *AH* 3.22.4.

³⁶ *AH* 3.22.4, ANF 1.455 = SC 211.438, 440: 'Consequenter autem et Maria Virgo obaudiens inuenitur dicens: "Ecce ancilla tua, Domine, fiat mihi secundum uerbum tuum." Eua uero inobaudiens: non obaudiuit enim adhuc cum esset uirgo.'

Virginal disobedience is exactly matched with virginal obedience and thus the effects of Eve's sin are done away.³⁷ The obedience of Mary is her response in faith to her part in the plan of the incarnation as announced to her by the angel. This is set over against the unbelief of Eve: 'the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief; this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.'³⁸

Irenaeus' Eve-Mary typology functions as a subsidiary couplet to the antithetical parallel between Adam and Christ. For it is here that the center of his recapitulation theory lies. However, this parallel between Adam and Christ cannot be mathematically true (where parallel lines never intersect) because there must be a connection between the first man and his savior. Adam's salvation depends upon Christ being of the same flesh. Mary's role in salvation history is thus set in context. Her maternity is necessary to provide Christ with the direct link between his flesh and that of Adam's race he is to save.³⁹

The physical birth of Christ has no typological counterpart in Adam. As we expect in a typology rather than an allegory, Adam and Christ are not true mirror images of one another. While Christ experienced each stage of physical life,

³⁷ 'aequa lance disposita virginali inobaudientia per virginalem obaudientiam,' *AH* 5.19.1 SC 153.250. Mary as the 'advocata' of Eve appears here and in *Dem.* 33. While this term sets Mary as a counterpart to Eve, whereby Mary's acceptance of the word of God and obedience is an exact balance to Eve's acceptance of Satan's deceptive word and disobedience, it cannot be pushed beyond the context to refer to any prayerful intercession on the part of Mary toward Eve and certainly not for the human race in general, contra T. Koehler, "'Blessed" from Generation to Generation: Mary in Patristics and in the History of the Church', *Seminarium*, 3 (1975), 581-582.

³⁸ *AH* 3.22.4, ANF 1.455 = SC 211.442, 444: 'Sic autem et Euae inobaudientiae nodus solutionem accepit per obaudientiam Mariae. Quod enim adligavit uirgo Eua per incredulitatem, hoc Virgo Maria soluit per fidem.'

³⁹ *AH* 3.21.10. The virginal conception is the antitype to Adam's miraculous creation from the dust of the virgin earth. The fall of Adam is countered in the death of Christ on the cross, *AH* 5.16.3 and 5.17.3. Christ's humanity is derived from Adam through Mary. However, Adam himself was created in the likeness (similitudo) of God, which is Christ. Thus Christ's incarnation is an enfleshing of his own likeness (*AH* 3.22.3 and 5.16.2). Quasten notes that Irenaeus sees the *imago Dei* as inherently residing in the immaterial soul of people, and the *similitudo Dei* as something received from God by the Spirit, *Patrology* 1.311. See section 3.3.1 below for a fuller discussion of Mary's role in the incarnation.

surviving into old age, Adam fell from grace before he achieved full adulthood.⁴⁰ Christ's origin as a human does not exactly repeat Adam's creation directly from dust. The closest Irenaeus can get to setting the origin of these two in parallel is to consider the dust of the earth as virginal in comparison with the virginal flesh of Mary.⁴¹ If Christ were specially created from dust, then his flesh would be of a 'different formation' than that of the rest of the human race. But Christ's incarnation unites the Word and Spirit of God with the 'ancient substance of Adam's formation' thus enabling human flesh to receive that same Word and Spirit to salvation:

The Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural [Adam] we all were dead, so in the spiritual we may all be made alive.⁴²

By Adam, death gained the victory. In Christ, the victory goes to all. The anger which was directed against sinful men God now has turned against the original enemy, Satan. This was accomplished in the incarnation, where Christ's taking flesh allows the Genesis curse to be recapitulated into one man: 'And the Lord summed up in Himself this enmity, when He was made man from a woman, and trod upon his head'⁴³

⁴⁰ *AH* 4.38.2, *Dem.* 12, *ACW* 16.55: 'But the man was a little one, and his discretion still undeveloped, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver.' = *SC* 406.100: 'Homo vero puer erat nondum perfectum habens consilium (βουλή), propter quod et facile a seductore deceptus est.' As proof for the immature state of both Adam and Eve, Irenaeus adduces the fact that their mutual nakedness did not lead to sexual arousal but was instead without shame, *Dem.* 14. Theophilus, a contemporary of Irenaeus, also held that Adam was a child, *Ad Autolyicum*, 2.25.

⁴¹ *AH* 3.18.7, 3.21.10, and *Dem.* 32. See my discussion of this interesting parallel above.

⁴² *AH* 5.1.3, *ANF* 1.527 = *SC* 153.26: 'Verbum Patris et Spiritus Dei adunitus antiquae substantiae plasmationis Adae viventem et perfectum effecit hominem, capientem perfectum Patrem, ut, quemadmodum in animali omnes mortui sumus, sic in spiritali omnes vivificemur.' The 'nova generatio' referred to earlier is discussing the virginal conception, denied by the Ebionites.

⁴³ *AH* 4.40.3, *ANF* 1.524 = *SC* 100².982: 'Et inimicitiam hanc Dominus in semetipsum recapitulavit, "de muliere factus" homo et calcans ejus caput,' Interestingly, Irenaeus does not mention Christ's death here as the means by which God's enmity against men is turned aside. However, in *AH* 5.23.2, the day of Christ's death is paralleled with the day Adam fell. See also *AH* 5.21.1 and 3.18.2.

Recapitulation⁴⁴ sets redemptive history, which culminates in Christ, over against the history of sin beginning with Adam. The Eve-Mary parallel is a subset of this larger pairing. In this way Irenaeus ties the entire history of the human race into a unified structure. This counters the great division that the Gnostics and others like Marcion set between the age of the Demiurge and that of the Eternal Father. Recapitulation also ties together the Old Testament and the New, rejecting the deep suspicion or outright hostility the Old Testament elicited from Marcion and the Gnostics. At a deeper level, Irenaeus is using his recapitulation theory to demonstrate the unity of God himself, again in reaction to the manifold divisions of God in the Pleroma and in Marcion's cosmological dualism.⁴⁵

Recapitulation gathers up all of the history of sinful humans in order to restore them to the state Adam enjoyed before the fall, and even to a state better than that enjoyed by the innocent Adam. This is accomplished in the fourth covenantal epoch of human history, which 'renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly

⁴⁴ Irenaeus uses the word recapitulation in other contexts not directly related to this redemptive typology. However, even in these other usages, the underlying theme is present: a summary, a gathering up of diverse elements into a unity of some sort: *AH* 4.Preface.2, SC 100².384; *AH* 4.2.1, SC 100².396; *AH* 5.29.2, SC 153.366; *AH* 5.30.1, SC 153.372. D'Alès refers to this second use of recapitulation as 'cosmic' (cosmique) over against the typological use, which he calls 'logical' (logique), Adhémar d'Alès, 'La doctrine de la Récapitulation en Saint Irénée', *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 6 (1916), 189.

⁴⁵ This unity comes through loud and clear in his summary of the faith in three articles in *Dem.* 6. There is one God who is creator of all, there is Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and there is the Holy Spirit, who inspired both the prophets of the Old Testament era and now is poured upon men, renewing them to God, ACW 16.51. He does not tie these statements of unity here directly to his anti-heretical polemic since that is beyond the purpose of the *Demonstration*. However, it is clear that these themes of unity are similar to those in the *Against Heresies*, e.g., *AH* 5.16.1 and 5.17.1. Daniélou adds that while Irenaeus affirms the unity of God, he also understands the complexity of his workings in human history (*Gospel Message* 171), cf. *AH* 4.9.3, ANF 1.473: 'For there is one salvation and one God; but the precepts which form the man are numerous, and the steps which lead man to God are not a few.' = SC 100².486: 'Una enim salus et unus Deus; quae autem formant hominem praecepta multa, et non pauci gradus qui adducunt hominem ad Deum.'

kingdom.⁴⁶ This is done by uniting mortal human beings to the divine Spirit.⁴⁷ The object is to restore to mankind the likeness of God lost in the sin of Eden. This is made possible by the incarnation, where the Son, the prototypical pattern by which Adam was originally created, now takes on that pattern himself and so joins it to God, thus making it possible for mortal men also to be united with the Father:

And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.⁴⁸

Though he does not dwell upon it at length, Irenaeus does recognize the role of propitiation in making this restoration possible:

And therefore in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become “the Mediator between God and men;” propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and canceling (consolatus) our disobedience by

⁴⁶ AH 3.11.8, ANF 1.429 = SC 211..170: ‘quartum uero quod renouat hominem et recapitulat in se omnia, quod est per Euangelium, eleuans et pennigerans homines in caeleste regnum.’ Recapitulation is the process of restoring fallen humankind to the state of innocence before the fall: ‘le mot de *récapitulation* désigne ce travail de reconstitution et de restauration de l’humanité selon le plan primitif de Dieu,’ d’Alès, ‘La doctrine de la Récapitulation’ 189.

⁴⁷ AH 5.20.2 and *Dem.* 57.

⁴⁸ AH 3.19.1 and 5.16.2, ANF 1.544 = SC 153.216: ‘Tunc autem hoc verum ostensum est, quando homo Verbum Dei factum est, semetipsum homini et hominem sibimetipsi assimilans, ut per eam quae est ad Filium similitudinem pretiosus homo fiat Patri. In praeteritis enim temporibus, dicebatur quidem secundum imaginem Dei factum esse hominem, non autem ostendebatur: adhuc enim invisible erat Verbum, cuius secundum imaginem homo factus fuerat; propter hoc autem et similitudinem facile amisit. Quando autem caro Verbum Dei factum est, utraque confirmavit: et imaginem enim ostendit veram, ipse hoc fiens quod erat imago ejus, et similitudinem firmans restituit, consimilem faciens hominem invisibli Patri per visibile Verbum.’ The image of God in humans is, for Irenaeus, in the flesh, not the spirit. Thus the necessity of the incarnation which is the method by which the invisible God is made visible and therefore is applied to the salvation of humans, M. A. Donovan, ‘Alive to the Glory of God: A Key Insight in St. Irenaeus’, *Theological Studies*, 49 (1988), 294 and 289.

His own obedience; conferring also upon us the gift of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker.⁴⁹

However the life-long obedience of Christ, which includes his submitting to crucifixion, is more significant for Irenaeus than the atoning death. Indeed the cross is most often mentioned in the context of Christ's obedience.⁵⁰

Recapitulation, then, is a summing up of all of sinful humankind so that one act of one person, the Son of God, can save all people. It also expresses the prediction and fulfillment dynamic which ties together the God of the Old Testament prophets and the Father of the Son.⁵¹ Since the incarnation is the only way that human flesh can be saved, it is vital to demonstrate the connection between the flesh of Adam's race and that of Christ. This indicates the significance of Mary as the link between the flesh of Adam and that of Christ.

3.2 IRENAEUS AND ASCETICISM

3.2.1 Women, men and sexuality in Irenaeus

Some scrutiny has been directed to Irenaeus and his depiction of the roles of men and women.⁵² Issues like the ministry of women in the church and sexual asceticism

⁴⁹ AH 5.17.1, ANF 1.544 = SC 153.220, 222: 'Et propter hoc in novissimis temporibus in amicitiam restituit nos Dominus per suam incarnationem, "mediator Dei et hominum" factus, propitiis quidem pro nobis Patrem in quem peccaveramus et nostram inobaudientiam per suam obaudientiam consolatus, nobis autem donans eam quae est ad Factorem nostrum conversationem et subjectionem.' The editors of the ANF insert the word 'consolatus' into their translation text, thus acknowledging the usage as unusual. Adelin Rousseau's reconstruction has παρακαλέσας (SC 153.223).

⁵⁰ AH 3.18.2; 3.21.16; 5.16.3; 5.17.1; 5.23.2.

⁵¹ AH 4.20.8, cf. Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 174-175.

⁵² Most often scholarly regard has been directed to Irenaeus in order to uncover Gnostic attitudes towards women. See the discussion later in this chapter (note 74) of the attempt by E. Pagels and others to characterize Irenaeus as a representative of a reactionary orthodoxy which wished to severely restrict women while at the same time his Gnostic opponents were much more open to women in roles of authority in the ecclesial community. This attempt has been effectively challenged by Burrus, Hoffman and others. See below in section 3.2.2. Scholarship dealing with Irenaeus's view of women and men in general is less common: it is not even a category discussed in Donovan's survey

are addressed by Irenaeus only as they bear on his chief concerns. Unlike Tertullian and Clement, no separate treatises or even sections of his extant works directly address these issues.⁵³

The story of the fall into sin is a fundamental element of Christian theology. Thus, Eve is one of the few women in the Bible discussed by a wide variety of theologians. In the case of nearly every writer in the early church whose work has survived to any significant extent, her role in the garden is addressed, and so her treatment at the hands of these writers serves as a valuable indicator of views held concerning the nature and characteristics of women. Irenaeus, of course, often refers to the first chapters of Genesis in order to establish the ground for his doctrine of recapitulation.

Unlike his younger contemporary Tertullian, Irenaeus does not single out Eve for any special blame in the episode in the garden. Several times both Adam and Eve are mentioned with equal culpability. God questions Adam who blames Eve. He then questions Eve ‘that she might convey the blame to the serpent.’ But ‘He put no question to the serpent; for He knew that he had been the prime mover in the guilty deed.’⁵⁴ In two texts, Eve figures without Adam. Yet in both places the onus is laid on the serpent, not on Eve, who is portrayed as being lured into sin: ‘as the

article, ‘Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship’, 220-241.

⁵³ See Quasten, *Patrology* 1.293 for a list of works now lost or preserved only in small fragments. Most of these are spurious or to be assigned to others, CPG 1.1306-1317.

⁵⁴ *AH* 3.23.5, ANF 1.457 = SC 211.460: ‘sciebat enim eum principem transgressionis factum.’ Both Adam and Eve took on a ‘bridle of continence’ in repentance. *AH* 5.23.1, ANF 1.551: ‘they did eat in disobedience and disobedience to God entails death’. D. Ramos-Lissón (‘Le rôle de la femme dans la théologie de saint Irénée’, *Studia Patristica*, 21 (1989), 174) advances the curious and completely unfounded view that Irenaeus believes that Eve tempted Adam into premature sexual relations: ‘La “soumission au mari” qui apparaît dans la sentence divine, semble pouvoir être en consonnance avec l’initiative d’Ève de provoquer l’usage du mariage avant le moment prévu.’ E. Pagels correctly observes that Irenaeus and Clement both see the fall initiated by ‘Adam’s misuse of free will’, cf. *AH* 4.37.1 not by sexual activity, ‘Adam and Eve, Christ and the Church: A Survey of Second Century Controversies Concerning Marriage’ in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. by A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 170. Irenaeus does not conceive of marriage and life in paradise as incompatible, T. H. C. van Eijk, ‘Marriage and Virginité. Death and Virginité’, in *Epektasis, Melanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal J. Daniélou*, ed. by J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1972), 224, n 49.

serpent beguiled Eve, by promising her what he had not himself.⁵⁵ This is consistent with texts where Adam stands alone: again the serpent bears the brunt of the blame, since the primal couple were too immature to stand against his temptations.⁵⁶

Irenaeus does not devote space directly to the question of the place of women in church ministry. However, as he deals with his opponents, some clues may be gathered concerning his views on this issue. The church life of the followers of Marcus is described in some detail. Marcus targets women, especially wealthy women, to dupe with his false teachings. Yet a number of men have also been led astray. The heretic uses sleight-of-hand in a eucharistic ceremony to deceive his followers into believing he has the ability to invoke higher powers. Irenaeus notes that some of those officiating over this sham eucharist are women.⁵⁷ Marcus also manipulates women so that they appear to prophesy. Irenaeus challenges this as false ministry by explaining that it is God, not Marcus who sends forth the gift of prophecy. If one of the great contrasts between Irenaeus and his opponents was over the place of women in the church and especially in ministry, then we might expect the bishop to raise that issue against Marcus and his disciples. In other words, if Irenaeus represents a narrow, restrictive view of the place of women in ministry over against a Gnostic practice that gave women a wider place in church service, surely that difference would be brought to bear at this point.⁵⁸ However this is not the case, as the theology of Irenaeus clearly includes both women and men as able to receive the divine gift of prophecy. That his theology is so inclusive is established by his

⁵⁵ *AH* 4.Pref.4, ANF 1.462. *AH* 5.21.1, ANF 1.549: 'For it was by means of a woman that he got the advantage over man at first, setting himself up as man's opponent.' Eve's part in the fall is also discussed in the texts where her disobedience is set in parallel to Mary's obedience. Irenaeus does not intend to blame Eve more than Adam any more than in the parallel he wishes to make Mary an equal partner with Jesus in the recapitulative redemption: *AH* 3.22.4; 5.19.1; *Dem.* 33. In both cases the woman has a secondary role.

⁵⁶ *AH* 3.23.1, ANF 1.456: 'Adam became a vessel in his possession' and *AH* 3.23.5, ANF 1.457: Adam is 'beguiled by another'. Also *AH* 5.21.1 and *Dem.* 12, 14, and 31.

⁵⁷ *AH* 1.13.1-3, ACW 55.55-56.

⁵⁸ *AH* 1.13.3-4. Pace Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels* 59-60. More recent feminist scholarship is much less comfortable with a blanket characterization which places misogyny all on the orthodox side, J. A. McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* 69.

several references to Acts 2.17-18, especially *AH* 3.17.1, where Irenaeus specifically mentions both sexes as receiving the prophetic gift.⁵⁹

Irenaeus does not bear any animus towards women in general, believing that both sexes are equally susceptible to false teaching. He repeatedly expresses pastoral concern for women as well as for men who are lured into abusive relationships by Marcus and his ilk.⁶⁰ Women who had been sexually immoral were received with compassion and understanding into the fold of Irenaeus's church.⁶¹ It has been observed that Mary's role in the salvation process is an example of a positive view of women.⁶²

Does Irenaeus betray any suspicion of sexuality? He does admit its power over both men and women.⁶³ He deplores the sexual licence which he ascribes to some of his opponents. On the other hand, he also censures the ascetic renunciation extremes of other heretical groups.⁶⁴ He envisages a limit to the potency of sexuality

⁵⁹ *AH* 3.17.1, ANF 1.444: 'For [God] promised, that in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon [His] servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy' = SC 211.328, 330: 'Hunc enim promisit per prophetas effundere se in nouissimis temporibus super seruos et ancillas ut prophetent'. See also *AH* 3.12.1. Hoffman (*Status of Women and Gnosticism* 94) observes that Irenaeus 'supported a prophetic ministry in the church that explicitly included women', but he cites only *AH* 3.11.9. Emphasis is Hoffman's. Precise definitions of the place of women in Irenaeus's theology is hampered not insignificantly by the sad fact that we only have translation Latin, not his original Greek. In his preface to the *AH* he says he writes it 'that men may no longer be drawn away by the plausible system of these heretics' (*AH* 1.Pref.3). This English translation (ANF 1.316) has 'men.' The *Sources chrétiennes* editors have 'homines' with a reconstruction τῶν ἀνθρώπων (SC 264.26-7). Yet the most recent English rendering by Unger (ACW 55.22) has 'men and women.'

⁶⁰ As pointed out by Hoffman (*Status of Women and Gnosticism* 108) who observes that it is Irenaeus and his congregation who 'were the ones that esteemed, valued, and respected women and not the Gnostic Marcus,' citing *AH* 1.13.5-6.

⁶¹ *AH* 1.6.3

⁶² Hoffman, *Status of Women and Gnosticism* 96, citing the text, 'that pure womb which regenerated men unto God', *AH* 4.33.11. Hoffman is incorrect, however, in assuming that Irenaeus praises Mary's virginity apart from her role in the incarnation.

⁶³ *Dem.* 2, ACW 16.48: 'there is both bodily holiness, the safeguard of abstinence from all shameful things and all wicked deeds' and 'piety is clouded and loses its lustre by contamination, by impurity of body'. In a back-handed way, some of his Gnostic opponents also admit the power of sexuality, but only over the unspiritual. For the "ensouled" person, sexuality and its concomitant danger of concupiscence requires the restriction of continence, while for those in communion with the fullness, such strictures are no longer needed. *AH* 1.6.4, ACW 55.38.

⁶⁴ *AH* Book 1, 6.2-3; 13.4-6; 23.2; 23.4; 24.3-5; 26.3; 28.2; and 31.2. Ascetic extremists: *AH* 1.24.2; 1.28.1.

even in this life as such temptations are overcome in the church. The power of sexuality among the faithful can be completely subjugated because of the direct fellowship with the Father.⁶⁵

3.2.2 Heretical views of asceticism and sexuality

The theology of Irenaeus 'did not arise spontaneously, but in opposition to the heterodox.'⁶⁶ The work that represents the bulk of his corpus is his *Against Heresies*. It should not be surprising, then, that most of the comments he makes about the practice of sexual asceticism are in a polemical context where he is condemning the extremism of his opponents. So an overview is in order of what he says about the Gnostics and their views of sexuality and asceticism.

Sexual images were often employed by gnostic teachers to set forth their cosmogony. The Valentinians projected this imagery even back to the highest levels of deity, to their 'First-Being', the 'Profundity':

Along with him there existed Thought, whom they also name Grace and Silence. At one time this Profundity decided to emit from himself the Beginning of all things. This emission would be as a "seed" which he decided to emit and deposit as it were in the womb of Silence, who coexisted with him. After she had received this "seed" and had become pregnant, she gave birth to Mind.⁶⁷

The unity of these divine pairs, or syzygies, is what is lacking among human men

⁶⁵ *Dem.* 96, ACW 16.106: 'For no more shall the law say: "Thou shalt not commit adultery"', to him who has not even conceived the desire of another's wife'. This is possible because of the joining together of human flesh and divinity, *Dem.* 97. Those who are even now spiritual walk according to reason and are not enslaved by lusts of the flesh, *AH* 5.8.2.

⁶⁶ A. Orbe, 'Irenaeus' in EEC 413-416.

⁶⁷ *AH* 1.1.1, ACW 55. 23. For other sexual unions in the Pleroma, see *AH* 1.7.1, ACW 55.38, where Achamoth receives the entity known as Savior as her spouse, 'that the conjugal union between Savior and Wisdom, that is, Achamoth, may take place. These are the bridegroom and the bride, but the bridal chamber is the entire Fulness.' and 1.29.4, ACW 55, where the Holy Spirit is also known as Prouneikos, a name connected with lewdness and fornication, ACW 55.260, n. 11. Irenaeus points out the inconsistency of the Gnostics in this regard: 'For they hold that sometimes Father emits with Silence as consort, then again he is above both male and female.' *AH* 1.2.4, ACW 55.26. Hoffman (*Status of Women and Gnosticism* 27) points out that 'only one strand within Valentinianism clearly believed that the supreme God was a Dyad.'

and women. The fundamental gender distinction in the human race is the result of sin and must be overcome by use of various rites.⁶⁸

Irenaeus does not paint all Gnostics with the same brush. He carefully notes differences among them. Some Gnostics hesitated to assign sexual activity to the highest levels of divinity, teaching that the supreme God, Profundity, was 'without conjugal consort, being neither male nor female, nor anything at all.' Others provided him with one or more consorts. Thus Irenaeus is sensitive to the differences among his opponents.⁶⁹

These conjugal unions between male and female entities are the mechanism by which the hierarchy of the Pleroma is established. Each succeeding level emits the next lower level of beings through connection of the masculine and feminine elements. So, Profundity joins with Silence and these two emit Mind and Truth, whose union produces Word and Life, whose union brings forth Man and Church, and so on down to the Demiurge, who creates this world of matter.⁷⁰

Irenaeus himself uses feminine imagery for God in *AH* 4.38.1, where he describes God as a mother and Christ as the milk given to nourish the Church. However, this is quite different from the ascription of sexual activity to divine beings. Irenaeus has no hesitation in assigning feminine characteristics to God the Father, but he vehemently opposes what he considers to be spurious sexual speculations spun by various heretical teachers. He is appalled by the baseless ascription of sexual activity to the divine, even if couched in spiritual terms. He is also repelled by the multiplying of layers between the Creator and his creation.⁷¹

⁶⁸ A. Hamman, 'Valentinus', *EEC* 859.

⁶⁹ *AH* 1.11.5, *ACW* 55.53; *AH* 1.12.1, *ACW* 55.53-4.

⁷⁰ *AH* 1.1.1-2, *ACW* 55.23-4; 1.2.3, *ACW* 55.26. Paul's use of marriage as a representation of the union between Christ and the Church is one of the authorities the Gnostics cite from the New Testament to justify their placing conjugal unions within the divine Pleroma. *AH* 1.8.4, *ACW* 55.44. Another is the thirty years of silence before Jesus began his ministry: these represent the thirty levels of Aeons in the Pleroma. *AH* 1.1.3, *ACW* 55.24.

⁷¹ *AH* 4.38.1. The Valentinian system is 'malicious' and 'specious', *AH* 1.31.3, *ACW* 55.103. For a summary condemnation, see *AH* 5.26.2, *ANF* 1.555: 'Let those persons, therefore, who blaspheme the Creator, either by openly expressed words, such as the disciples of Marcion, or by a perversion of the sense [of Scripture], as those of Valentinus and all the Gnostics falsely so called, be recognized as agents of Satan by all those who worship God.' Irenaeus's distaste for speculation is indebted to

Some have supposed that the extensive gnostic use of sexual imagery signals a more positive attitude by the Gnostics toward the feminine. This positive attitude is then extrapolated into their social behavior. The Gnostics are considered to have given their female adherents greater freedom and expression than did those traditionally considered orthodox.⁷² The difficulty is that we simply know very little about gnostic social practices.⁷³ Whatever was their behavior in their own groups, their cosmogony cannot be cited as a positive description of femininity.⁷⁴ In fact, female elements in the Pleroma are almost without exception characterized as defective in comparison with the male elements. A brief overview of some key texts cited by Irenaeus will suffice to demonstrate this.

Intention, or Achamoth is an Aeon five levels down from Profundity. This entity is also known as Wisdom or the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵ This entity was restricted in her

Empiric method and Scepticism according to W. R. Schoedel, 'Theological Method in Irenaeus (Adversus Haereses 2.25-28)', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 35 (1984), 31-49.

⁷² Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* 48-57.

⁷³ James E. Goehring, 'Libertine or Liberated: Women in the So-called Libertine Gnostic Communities' in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, ed. by Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 332-334.

⁷⁴ For thorough refutations of Pagels, see R. Joseph Hoffmann, 'De Statu Feminarum: The Correlation Between Gnostic Theory and Social Practice', *Église et Théologie*, 14 (1983), 293-304; D. L. Hoffman, *Status of Women and Gnosticism* 23-49 and Virginia Burrus, who also criticizes E. S. Fiorenza on the same point: that their characterization of second century orthodoxy as anti-women is not supported. Burrus points out that Irenaeus drew his model of authority from the teacher-student relationship rather than from the relationship between rulers and subjects, 'Hierarchalization and Genderization of Leadership in the Writings of Irenaeus', *Studia Patristica*, 21 (1989), 42-48. Frederik Wisse believes 'antifemininity is at home in gnostic texts' and sees an overlap of gnosticism and encratism, 'Flee Femininity: Antifemininity in Gnostic Texts and the Question of Social Milieu', in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, ed. by Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 306-307.

⁷⁵ In some of the sources Irenaeus cites, Wisdom is the parent of Achamoth (AH 1.2.4), in others, Wisdom is another name for Achamoth (AH 1.4.2). This is evidence either for a confusion in the convoluted systems of the Gnostics, or, more likely, for a variance among the Gnostics as to cosmological details. Irenaeus attempts to harmonize this in 1.4.1: 'she too is given two names: Wisdom patronomically, for her parent is called Wisdom; and Holy Spirit, after the Spirit of Christ.' Unger (ACW 55.152, n. 2) notes that the name Achamoth may be derived from the Hebrew *hokmah*, wisdom. The name *prouneikos* is also associated with Wisdom in AH 1.29.4; 1.30.3; 1.30.7; 1.30.9. This 'Sophia Prouneikos' separates from the Pleroma in an 'audacious exit' and proceeds to cause the material world, Anne Pasquier, 'Prouneikos. A Colorful Expression to Designate Wisdom in Gnostic Texts', in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, ed. by Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 47-66.

access to the higher levels of the Pleroma ‘because she was completely involved in passion and had been left outside alone, she fell into every kind of varied and different passions that exist.’ This passion excluded her from close association with higher beings and led to ‘the origin and substance of matter from which this world was constituted’, a great tragedy according to the gnostic world-view. Her tears are the source of all earthly moisture and from her ‘grief and consternation’ came the ‘corporeal elements of the world.’ Achamoth, also called the Mother, has a corrupt origin, ‘having been begotten without a father, that is, without God, a female from a female, that is, corruption from error.’ Therefore, she is a ‘weak and feminine fruit.’⁷⁶ Her emissions reflect her unclean nature: she produced ‘female offspring, weak, infirm, unformed, and ineffective’ because she attempted to search into the greatness of the Father.⁷⁷ The Gnostic Marcus states that the Tetrad came to him in the guise of a woman because ‘the world could not have endured her masculine nature.’ Marcus here reveals a view that the feminine aspects of the divine entities are lower, closer to this world, than the masculine, which is higher and therefore more pure.⁷⁸

There are indications that among some gnostic groups certain cultic activities had a sexual nature, being sympathetic reenactments of cosmological events.

Some of them prepare a bridal chamber and complete the mystic teaching with invocations on those who are being initiated. What was performed by them, they assert, is a spiritual marriage, after the

⁷⁶ AH 3.25.6, ANF 1.460; AH 1.4.1-2, ACW 55.30-31; 1.2.4, ACW 55.26.

⁷⁷ AH 2.20.3, ANF 1.388. This negative view of the female Aeons is not confined to passages selected by Irenaeus, but comes through loud and clear in various gnostic texts themselves. It is found in some of the Nag Hammadi texts: Zostrianos, the Dialogue of the Savior, the first Apocalypse of James, the Tripartite Tractate, the Book of Thomas the Contender, and, most famous (or infamous), the Logion 114 of the Gospel of Thomas. See Wisse, ‘Flee Femininity’ 299-305. This logion is not a later addition but consistent with the entire Gospel, M. Meyer, ‘Making Mary Male: The Categories ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in the Gospel of Thomas, *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 554-570.

⁷⁸ AH 1.14.1, ACW 55.59. Virginia Burrus (‘Hierarchalization and Genderization’ 46) points out that there is no indication that women in Marcus’s group ‘exercise any sacramental or prophetic functions’. Further, Irenaeus does not condemn Marcus for the place women have in his group, rather, his concern is that these women (and men) are being duped. This contravenes the depiction by Pagels of the Marcus group as an example of egalitarian behavior among Gnostics.

likeness of the conjugal unions on high.⁷⁹

This rite of the bridal chamber is tied up with initiation into the group. Either the same rite or a similar one is described in the Valentinian Gospel of Philip.⁸⁰ The ceremony of spiritual marriage celebrated the ‘original androgynous unity’ of humankind, which achievement is the goal of the Gnostic’s salvation. Further, this union reflects the union of divine entities in Valentinian eschatology.⁸¹

This practice of spiritual marriage was expressed, at least sometimes, in a physical manner.⁸² The Gnostics described themselves as spiritual beings over against the rest of the race who were earthly. Some extrapolated from this a view that no action of their earthly bodies mattered in the true reality of the spirit.

The spiritual, which they maintain they constitute, cannot take on corruption, regardless of what practices they may have engaged in. By way of illustration, gold when deposited in mud does not lose its beauty, but preserves its own nature, since mud can in no way injure gold.

Irenaeus cites this indifference to the physical body as the justification for some, who claim to be the most perfected, to ‘shamelessly do all the forbidden things’ such as eating unclean food, attending heathen festivals and the blood shows.⁸³

Some who overtly identified with sexual asceticism were secretly using the

⁷⁹ *AH* 1.21.3, ACW 55.78. The group led by Marcus has such an initiation rite as Irenaeus describes in *AH* 1.13.3, ACW 55.56. Robert Grant (‘The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip’, *VC* 15 (1961), 133) cautions that what Irenaeus describes may be ‘isolated cases of abuse rather than the ordinary rite.’

⁸⁰ *Gospel of Philip* 69.1-4, NHLE 151. I discuss this work in Chapter 4, section 4.8.4.

⁸¹ R. Grant, ‘The Mystery of Marriage’ 134 and 137. For this Gospel’s Valentinian provenance, see Grant 138 and the ‘Introduction’, p. 139 by Wesley W. Isenberg, in NHLE 139-160. Pagels states, ‘Valentinian Christians, like the orthodox, may have expressed a wide range of views and tolerated a wide variety of practices’ in relation to marriage, ‘Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the Hypostasis of the Archons and the Gospel of Philip’, in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, ed. by Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 204.

⁸² So R. Grant indicated early on, ‘The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip’ 139.

⁸³ *AH* 1.6.2-3, ACW 55. 37. According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians acquired their antinomianism from outside sources: ‘their ... indifference of [eating of] meats and other actions, and as to their thinking that, from the nobility of their nature, they can in no degree at all contract pollution, whatever they eat or perform, they have derived it from the Cynics.’ *AH* 2.14.5, ANF 1.377.

practice of *virgines subintroductae* to lure and seduce women. They ‘in the beginning feigned to dwell chastely with them as sisters, were exposed as time went on when the “sister” became pregnant by the “brother.”’ The sham does not matter, they say, as it is only a carnal thing, and ‘carnal things...must be given to the carnal and spiritual to the spiritual’.⁸⁴

Certain gnostic groups operated at the extremes of social behavior, either exercising asceticism or sexual license. The practice of sexual license among some Gnostics was justified, according to the heresiologist, in two quite separate ways. Sexual behavior was proclaimed to be of no significance because nothing of this physical world really matters. In addition, some felt an actual obligation to experience all human activities, including all manners of sexual expression, in order to facilitate total redemption from this material world.

Among the groups who assign a degree of insignificance to sexual activity we find those founded by Basilides and Carpocrates. Basilides is a proponent of extreme docetism, asserting that Christ appeared as a man, and played a ruse upon all by assuming the identity of Simon of Cyrene, forcing him onto the cross by transforming Simon into a semblance of himself. Sexual license is permitted among the disciples of Basilides because it is a matter of indifference what the physical body does. Followers of Carpocrates and of Basilides ‘introduced promiscuity and plurality of marriages...their excuse is that God is not much concerned about such things.’ Another group, the Nicolaitans, ‘assert that there is no difference between committing fornication and eating food sacrificed to idols.’⁸⁵

An additional rationale is given by the Carpocratians for their sexual behavior. Claiming that sexual mores are mere matters of human opinion, they saw engagement in all kinds of sexual acts as part of the process of liberation from the entire realm of physical bodies. So, if one did not experience a certain act, one would be required to return in a new body after death to perform that act and so fulfill their complete liberation. So the school of Carpocrates justified its excesses

⁸⁴ *AH* 1.6.3, ACW 55.37.

⁸⁵ *AH* 1.24.4-5, ACW 55.86; 1.28.2, ACW 55.93; 1.26.3, ACW 55.90-91.

by saying people transmigrated from one body to another to experience every experience before total liberation. Each person

will always transmigrate from one body to another until he has had experience in absolutely every kind of action that exists in the world. And when nothing is wanting to him, his soul, having been liberated, escapes to the God who is above the Angels, the makers of the world. In this manner all souls are saved

A similar view was espoused by the Cainites, who held that

they cannot be saved except they pass through all things. At everyone of the sins and impure actions, they say, an Angel assists, and the one who acts, ventures impudence, and imputes the impurity to the name of the Angel which is present for the action, and says: "O Angel, I do your work. O Power, I perform your action!"⁸⁶

Extreme asceticism characterized another segment of the Gnostic movement.

We know this not just from the polemic writings of Irenaeus and other heresiologists, but from gnostic documents themselves which have survived.

Irenaeus highlights four gnostic groups which advocated a pattern of renunciation: those founded by Saturninus, Tatian, and Marcion⁸⁷, and the Encratites.

⁸⁶ AH 1.25.4, ACW 55.88; 1.25.4, ACW 55.89 = SC 264.340: 'sed sit transcorporatus semper, quoadusque in omni omnino operatione quae in mundo est fiat; et cum nihil defuerit ei, tum liberatam eius animam eliberari ad illum Deum qui est supra Angelos mundi fabricatores; sic quoque saluari et omnes animas.' AH 1.31.2, ACW 55.103 = SC 264.386: 'Nec enim aliter saluari eos nisi per omnia eant, [...] Et in unoquoque peccatorum et turpium operationum Angelum adsistere, et operantem audere audaciam et immunditiam inferre, id quod inest ei operationi, Angeli nomine dicere: "O tu, Angele, abutor opere tuo; o tu, illa Potestas, perficio tuam operationem."' Other sexually amoral groups mentioned by Irenaeus include Simon Magus and his followers. Simon traveled about with a woman, Helen. He said she was the first Thought of his mind, the Mother of all things, but that due to jealousy of her offspring, the Angels and Powers, she was imprisoned in a series of woman's bodies, finally ending up imprisoned in this body of Helen the prostitute. His followers, the 'Simonians' were known for their licentious lives. AH 1.23.2, ACW 55.82-83; 1.23.4, ACW 55.84. Of course the preserved Latin is that of a translator, at least one step removed from the Greek of Irenaeus. See Unger's discussion, where it is emphasized that the translation is quite literal, thus preserving the Greek syntax much more than if the translator had been more competent in Latin. AH 4 and 5, extant in Armenian, 'prove that the Latin is in general a faithful reproduction of the Greek original,' 'Introduction' in ACW 55.14-15, 121 n. 70.

⁸⁷ Marcion is not precisely a Gnostic, but his doctrine is closely aligned with the Gnostic movement. His 'dualistic and ditheistic ideas are unthinkable without a historical framework of reference like gnosticism.' G. Filoramo, 'Gnosis', in EEC 353. In contrast, Minns (*Irenaeus* 18) says 'the similarities between Marcion's teaching and those of the gnostics are superficial and the differences fundamental. Irenaeus used the label 'Gnosticos' as a blanket term for heresy in general.

Saturninus taught abstention from animal food and marriage. To marry and procreate promotes the cause of Satan. A docetic Christ was sent to earth to destroy the Jewish God, who is one of the Angels, one level below the unknown Father. The human race is divided into two camps, evil and good. Salvation is only for those who are among the good, and these must abstain from earthly appetites.⁸⁸

Marcion's system is laid out in greater detail. His Christ, also docetic, was also sent from the higher levels of the Pleroma to earth to defeat the works of the Jewish God. To justify this teaching Marcion did some rather severe editing of the New Testament, eliminating anything that he believed connected Christ to the Father. This resulted in a reverse reading of Old Testament history, with, for instance, Cain, the Sodomites and Egyptians being saved rather than Abel, Enoch or Noah or other worshipers of the Jewish God.⁸⁹ To Marcion, everything in this world was corrupted by evil because it is matter. Thus Irenaeus's summary of Marcion on the body: 'The body...since it was taken from the earth, is incapable of sharing in salvation.'⁹⁰ A vow of continence is likely to have been a requirement for baptism in the Marcionite church. Marcion's anticosmism led him to hold that procreation and marriage was cooperation with the Demiurge, the evil God.

The Encratites (continentes)⁹¹ are derived from Saturninus and Marcion,

See Minns 14. He also thought they had appropriated the term under false pretenses, as their 'knowledge' was really nothing but empty speculation, not based upon divine revelation. Thus from time to time he refers to them as Gnostics, falsely called, *AH* 3.10.4; 5.26.2, etc.

⁸⁸ *AH* 1.24.2, ACW 55.85.

⁸⁹ Unger, following Blackman, notes that Marcion's docetism was not absolute as he considered Christ's death on the cross to be necessary for redemption. This redemption is fulfilled in the netherworld, where even those who followed the Jewish God on earth were to be given a chance to repent. ACW 55.252, n. 6, cf. E.C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London, 1948), 68, 99-100, 107. The detail of Marcion's doctrine provided by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Epiphanius may be due to the fact that the Marcionite movement was more widespread and better organized than any of the Gnostics, and so was better able to preserve the system of its founder. Minns (*Irenaeus* 26) notes a distinction between the cosmogonies of Marcion and the Gnostics. Marcion, unlike the Gnostics, did not address the issue of the origin of the creator god, or exactly how he was related to the God of the Christ. 'He simply insisted that there was absolutely no relationship between the two: rather there existed a vast, impassable gulf between them.'

⁹⁰ *AH* 1.27.3, ACW 55.92 = SC 264.350, 352: 'corpus autem, uidelicet quoniam a terra sit sumptum, impossibile esse participare salutem.'

⁹¹ ἐγκρατεῖς.

according to Irenaeus. They also taught abstinence from marriage and meat as ways to separate from the works of this evil world and its creator god. Tatian, the disciple of Justin, also denounced marriage as ‘corruption and fornication.’⁹²

Irenaeus rejects all of these views. He is equally horrified by those who portray God as a sexually active being, those who promote sexual expression without limits and those whose rejection of the Creator God cause them to denigrate marriage and procreation.

3.2.3 Asceticism in the Church

Irenaeus has few texts which directly address renunciation.⁹³ Yet as we apply the newer approach to asceticism as outlined by Valantasis, we begin to see the ascetic thought of Irenaeus emerge.⁹⁴ The performance of the Christian life must be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, which includes chastity.⁹⁵ This quality is displayed even by illiterate believers who live outside of the Empire.⁹⁶ Adam performed a display of true repentance before himself, his wife and God. He sought out the most irritating leaves he could find to wear as a covering, ‘he girded a bridle of continence upon himself and his wife.’⁹⁷ As the church of Irenaeus engages in fasting and prayer it can even perform the raising of the dead and this display of power is in stark contrast to the inability of the heretics, thus proving their doctrine

⁹² *AH* 1.28.1, *ACW* 55.93 and *AH* 3.23.8. According to Clement of Alexandria (*str.* 3.12.81.1, *FC* 85.306), Tatian’s treatise *Περὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Σωτήρα καθαρτισμοῦ* advocated Christ as a model for the virginal life as opposed to Adam, representative of the old man, given to marriage. While some have questioned assigning Tatian to a gnostic category (L. W. Barnard, ‘The Heresy of Tatian-Once Again’, *JEH* 19 (1968), 1-10), it is acknowledged that his theology drew from gnostic sources, R. M. Grant, ‘The Heresy of Tatian’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 5 (1954): 62-68, and Bolgiani, ‘Tatian’ in *ECC*, 815.

⁹³ Keroloss (‘Virginité in the Early Church’) has no discussion of Irenaeus.

⁹⁴ R. Valantasis, ‘Constructions of Power in Asceticism’ *JAAR* 63 (1995), 775-821.

⁹⁵ *AH* 5.11.1, *SC* 153.134-5, where he lists ten rather than nine elements of the fruit of Galatians 5.22-23, adding the term *castitas* (ἀγνεΐα), following a minority reading, cf. Unger: ‘Irenaeus’s Bible text seems to have been substantially that of the Western family,’ ‘Introduction,’ in *ACW* 55.9-11.

⁹⁶ *AH* 3.4.2.

⁹⁷ *AH* 3.23.5, *ANF* 1.457.

demonic and ratifying the teachings of the church.⁹⁸

Achievement of such power is an intentional activity, indeed one must seize the kingdom of heaven with force, it is a 'struggle for immortality.'⁹⁹ Ascetic practice is urged upon the catechumens, Irenaeus reminding them that salvation involves both the body and the soul: 'both bodily holiness, the safeguard of abstinence from all shameful things and all wicked deeds, and holiness of soul, the preservation in its integrity of faith in God.'¹⁰⁰ As this process continues the flesh of the Christian can begin to partake of heaven itself.¹⁰¹ Irenaeus contravenes the Gnostic view that the physical body has no part to play in salvation. Rather, he insists 'the Word set free the soul, and taught that through it the body should be purified.'¹⁰² Since it is human flesh that is being saved in the recapitulation, a spiritual person does not become so 'by a casting away of the flesh, but by the impartation of the Spirit.'¹⁰³ The soul and body work together like a musician playing an instrument.¹⁰⁴ Those who are spiritual are different, new. They are still in the flesh but are now so changed that even powerful sexual enticements have little sway over them.¹⁰⁵ This process of change will culminate in a transformation so complete that virgins can rejoice together with young men in the eschaton.¹⁰⁶

Irenaeus does not give a blanket approval to all asceticism, recognizing that it has its limits, especially when based on faulty theology that denigrates the role of the

⁹⁸ *AH* 2.31.2-3.

⁹⁹ *AH* 4.37.7, ANF 1.520, this in opposition to Gnostic determinism, *AH* 4.37.6. The 'progress' of heretics is nothing more than shifting from one god to another and another, never finding the true God, *AH* 4.9.3.

¹⁰⁰ *Dem.* 2, ACW 16.48.

¹⁰¹ *AH* 5.3.3.

¹⁰² *AH* 4.13.2, ANF 1.477, also *AH* 3.17.2. The heretics deny salvation to the body, *AH* 1.11.4, 1.24.5, 1.27.3, and some deny it even to the soul, *AH* 5.19.2.

¹⁰³ *AH* 5.8.1, ANF 1.533 = SC 153.94: 'hoc autem non secundum jacturam carnis sed secundum communionem Spiritus fit'. Believers are 'spiritual even now'. The resurrection of the body is fundamental to Irenaeus: *AH* 5.5 through 5.7, 5.15.1, 5.31.2, 3.17.2, etc.

¹⁰⁴ *AH* 2.33.4.

¹⁰⁵ *Dem.* 96, ACW 16.106: 'For no more shall the law say: "Thou shalt not commit adultery", to him who has not even conceived the desire of another's wife', cf. *Dem.* 97, *AH* 5.8.2.

¹⁰⁶ *AH* 5.34.3.

body:

For what is the use of knowing the truth in word, while defiling the body and accomplishing the works of evil? Or what real good at all can bodily holiness do, if truth be not in the soul?¹⁰⁷

He consistently criticizes those who abstain from food for the wrong reasons and asserts that food and drink are good because they are part of God's good creation, for the benefit of humankind.¹⁰⁸ He acknowledges Satan's use of the desire to eat to tempt both Adam and Christ, but tempers this a little later with the admonition that 'He taught by His commandment that we who have been set free should, when hungry, take that food which is given by God.'¹⁰⁹ Concerning those who have renounced sexual relations among his own group of churches, he says very little apart from the polemical contexts set out in the previous section of this project. He does acknowledge the presence of virgins in the 'orthodox' church, and he mentions both continence and chastity as evidence of the truly spiritual believer.¹¹⁰

3.3 MARY AND HER VIRGINITY IN IRENAEUS

Irenaeus discusses virginity almost exclusively in response to the christology of his opponents. More specifically, he is refuting heretical views of the incarnation. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the views of the Bishop of Lyons concerning Mary and her virginity, it is necessary to examine in some detail the descriptions he gives of the views of Mary and of the birth of Jesus held by his opponents.

¹⁰⁷ *Dem.* 2, ACW 16.48.

¹⁰⁸ *AH* 5.29.1. Criticizing the Gnostic ascetics: *AH* 1.24.2 and 1.28.1. Other positive statements on food: *AH* 3.11.5; 3.12.9; 4.8.3. Meat was only allowed after the flood, *Dem.* 22.

¹⁰⁹ *AH* 5.21.2 and *AH* 5.22.2, ANF 1.550.

¹¹⁰ He refers to the 1 Corinthians 7 passage on virgins, *AH* 4.15.2, and in *AH* 5.34.3 acknowledges that virgins in the church will have a part in the millennium.

3.3.1 Mary's virginity in salvation history

Irenaeus observes a variety of views among his opponents concerning Mary and the nativity. The one who descends from the Pleroma is identified by some as the Christ and by others as the 'dispensational Jesus'. The terrestrial entity who receives the pleromic spirit is also variously identified in the several theories. He is either the dispensational Jesus or a son of the Demiurge, or even the physical son of the sexual union of Joseph and Mary. Mary's virginity is not in view here, except where it is denied by those who claim Jesus was born of a normal marital relationship. The one opinion common to all these heretics is their rejection of the incarnation of the divine Word of God.¹¹¹ As the Gnostic Christ descends, he takes onto himself various attributes from each layer of being, excepting only the final layer, that of this world. He 'did not take on any material element, since material substance is incapable of receiving salvation.'¹¹² This docetism plays out in the withdrawal of the pleromic Christ from the human body of Jesus before the passion.

The nativity and the role of Mary and her virginal status have little significance for much of this docetic Christology.¹¹³ Irenaeus never mentions any of his opponents as employing the virginity of Mary to support ascetic practice. While

¹¹¹ AH 3.11.3. The identity of the Gnostic Savior is 'perhaps the most difficult, delicate and complex problem in the entire Gnostic dossier' for which there is 'no comprehensive treatment', G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* 102, and 224, n. 10.

¹¹² AH 1.6.1, ACW 55.36.

¹¹³ Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393-c. 466) discerned two views among the Gnostics on the role of Mary. Among those who completely denied the incarnation and therefore any nativity were: Simon, Menander and Cerdo. Those who conceded that the Christ was born of Mary, but took nothing from her, merely passing through her like water through a channel were: Valentinus, Basilides, Bardesanes and others, as noted by Unger, ACW 55.170, n. 8, cf. Theodoret *Ep.* 146 (145), SC 111.180. Some Valentinians (AH 1.7.2) propose a Christ with as many as four elements: one from Achamoth, one from the Demiurge, one from Economy, and the fourth, Savior, who descended at the baptism. The Gnostic Savior figure is not precisely docetic since a number of Gnostic texts affirm the suffering of Jesus in the Passion. However, the Savior withdrew from the human Jesus before the Passion. From the viewpoint of Irenaeus, this was a denial of the true monistic humanity of the Savior, and therefore to him, docetic. See Filoramo, *History of Gnosticism* 122 and E. H. Pagels, 'Gnostic and Orthodox Views of Christ's Passion: Paradigms for the Christian's response to Persecution?', in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*. Vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. by B. Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 1.262-283.

this would not be likely among those who held Jesus to be the natural son of Joseph and Mary¹¹⁴ it might have been expected from those who promoted asceticism from a dualistic viewpoint. The Virgin Mary would have been a convenient figure for those who vociferously opposed marriage. The absence of such usage is striking.¹¹⁵

The Valentinians and other Gnostics face a significant problem. If they ascribe any pleromic origin to the terrestrial Christ, then they have the difficulty of maintaining the absolute separation between the higher realms and this world. The very presence of a Pleromic visitor upon this earth presents a dilemma for these cosmological dualists. Some attempt to address this by using a curious image of the nativity, an image which Irenaeus cites. The Pleromic Christ was indeed born, or at least appeared to be born of Mary. But in undergoing physical birth, he merely passed through his mother as water does through a pipe (per Mariam). In his descent from the highest Aeons, he took nothing of her material nature from her. This very passive role for Mary in their docetic Christology is able to maintain that fundamental disjunction between the Fullness and the corrupt material earth:

There are those who say that Demiurge produced even Christ as his own son but also of an ensouled nature, and that he spoke of him [Christ] through the prophets. Moreover, this is he who passed through Mary just as water passes through a tube. It was on him [Christ] that Savior, who belonged to the Fullness and was made from all the Aeons, descended in the shape of a dove at his baptism.¹¹⁶

While some heretical teachers held that Jesus passed through Mary, others denied any divine element to the nativity. In other words, the man Jesus was the natural son

¹¹⁴ The Ebionites, and those associated with Carpocrates, Cerinthus, Theodotus of Ephesus and Aquila of Pontus.

¹¹⁵ The Valentinians, Encratites and those associated with Saturninus, and Marcion. Tatian does use Christ as a model for ascetic virginity, cf. Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 3.12.81.1.

¹¹⁶ *AH* 1.7.2, ACW 55.39. See also on the Valentinians in general, *AH* 3.16.1 and on Marcus, *AH* 1.15.3 and also Marcion who also apparently used this water in a tube image, according to Hippolytus, *haer.* 7.31.5-8 and 10.19.3-4. Filoramo (*History of Gnosticism* 121) points out that the entrance of the Savior figure into the material world was an incarnation of sorts for the Gnostics. They even adopted the traditional terms like flesh (σὰρξ) in reference to Christ's state on earth, but this was not an affirmation of orthodox doctrine, it meant he had a sort of body which was visible to others.

of both Mary and of Joseph. This opinion was held by certain figures in the East such as Theodotus of Ephesus and Aquila of Pontus, both converts to the gnosis from a Jewish provenance. It was also maintained by the Ebionites.¹¹⁷ Their Jewish background may have lent impetus to their rejection of the virginal conception.¹¹⁸ The virginal conception is denied also by the gnostic schools of Carpocrates and Cerinthus. Jesus was then merely a human, albeit one of superior character.¹¹⁹

Irenaeus responds with vigor to these attacks on the incarnation. He defends the virginal conception on the grounds that it was prophesied in the Old Testament and that it was a foundational apostolic teaching. It is part of the orthodox rule of faith. He applies it to a polemic against docetism and claims it is necessary for proper understanding of recapitulation and the incarnation.

The prophecies of the Old Testament serve a dual purpose for Irenaeus. On the one hand they establish the unity of authorship between the Old and the New Testaments. In other words, the same God who is revealed in Jesus Christ must have revealed the prophecies in the Old Testament which were so accurately fulfilled in the birth, life and death of the Savior. On the other hand, the fulfillments of the prophecies are a sure sign of God's working, a certain indication that the fulfillment is a work of the Father.

Unity is the motif underlying the structure of Irenaeus's arguments in *AH* 4.33. The unity of the creator God with the God who effected the incarnation is asserted against Marcion's absolute dualism which led to his rejection of the Old Testament.¹²⁰ The speculation of the Valentinians, who stand accused of the fallacious belief that the creator was the 'fruit of an apostasy or defect', is

¹¹⁷ The Ebionites are of course not Gnostics, but a heterodox Jewish sect. Their two principles of good and evil are from the Essenes. Daniélou distinguishes between the Ebionites and other heterodox Jewish sects such as the Nazarenes. For a good summary of what we know of the Ebionites, see J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* 55-64. Epiphanius also cites the Ebionite belief that Jesus was 'begotten of human seed' (*Panarion* 20.16, cited in Daniélou 56).

¹¹⁸ See *AH* 3.21.1 for Theodotus and Aquila and for the Ebionites *AH* 1.26.2 and *AH* 5.1.3. In *AH* 3.21.1, Irenaeus defends the messianic interpretation of Isaiah 7.14 against Theodotus, Aquila, the Ebionites and the Jews.

¹¹⁹ *AH* 1.25.1, ACW 55.87 and 1.26.1, ACW 55.90. See also *AH* 5.19.2.

¹²⁰ *AH* 4.33.2

challenged. Irenaeus criticizes their system for appearing to be unified while in reality it denies unity:

And clearly their tongues alone yield their true opinion and perception regarding unity, which in their study of the profundities, fall away from unity and fall into a multiform judgement of God.¹²¹

The prophets are the connecting link between the Old and the New Testaments. The unity of the Testaments is demonstrated by these prophets whose predictions are fulfilled in Christ. Irenaeus even calls them ‘members of Christ’.¹²²

Therefore there is one and the same God, who was proclaimed by the prophets and announced by the Gospel; and His Son, who was of the fruit of David’s body, that is, of the virgin of [the house of] David, and Emmanuel.¹²³

Because the prophecies and fulfillments are so vital to his argument for the unity of the Testaments and ultimately, to his argument for the unity of God himself, Irenaeus vigorously defends the messianic nature of the text of Isaiah 7.14. First he counters the view that the text may be read as ‘young woman’: ‘For what great thing or what sign should have been in this, that a young woman conceiving by a man should bring forth,—a thing which happens to all women that produce offspring?’ He continues by asserting the necessity of the virginal conception. In order for the sign to be miraculous, it must be a virgin who gives birth: ‘But since an unlooked-for salvation was to be provided for men through the help of God, so also was the unlooked-for birth from a virgin accomplished’.¹²⁴ The very implausibility of birth from a virgin makes it all the more a significant fulfillment. The virginal conception

¹²¹ AH 4.33.3, my translation of SC 100².808: ‘Linguas itaque horum videlicet solas in unitatem cecidisse, sententiam vero eorum et sensum, quae profunda sunt scrutari decidentem ab unitate, incidere in multiforme Dei iudicium.’ The last phrase is probably ironic: their multiplying of gods will earn for them a multiplied judgement from the one true God. Irenaeus even refutes their theories of the manifold origin of the Savior with a citation from Homer which Irenaeus applies to the argument for unity. Others who deny unity include the Ebionites, who in denying the incarnation deny the unity of God’s working in the recapitulation of all people in Christ, AH 4.33.4; and the absolute docetics who deny any integration at all between Christ and the material world, AH 4.33.5.

¹²² AH 4.33.10, ANF 1.509 = SC 100².824: ‘Cum enim et ipsi membra essent Christi.’

¹²³ AH 3.9.2, ANF 1.422.

¹²⁴ AH 3.21.6, ANF 1.453.

is very likely also referred to in *AH* 3.5, where the Psalm text, ‘Truth has sprung out of the earth’ is applied as a prophecy to the nativity: ‘As also David says, prophesying His birth from a virgin, and the resurrection from the dead, “Truth has sprung out of the earth.”’¹²⁵

Another significant Old Testament text is Genesis 3.15. The primary prophetic significance of this verse for Irenaeus is the entire process of recapitulation and salvation. However, in the reference to the woman Eve, there is a view forward to the incarnation and to the antitype of Eve, the Virgin Mary:

He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampling upon his head, as thou canst perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall be on the watch for thy head, and thou on the watch for His heel.” For from that time, He who should be born of a woman, [namely] from the Virgin, after the likeness of Adam, was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent.¹²⁶

Mary figures in another set of prophecies which deal with the ancestry of Christ. Her descent from Abraham gives Irenaeus ground to consider her child as a fulfillment of the promise to the patriarch. However the point of the prophecy is the descent of Christ, not his virginal conception.¹²⁷ In order to fulfill the role of the prophesied Messiah Jesus must also be descended from David. So a case is made for Mary as a direct descendent of David, thus placing Jesus as the culmination of the royal line. Irenaeus employs Psalm 132 to this effect:

¹²⁵ *AH* 3.5.1, ANF 1.417 = SC 211.52, 54: ‘Quemadmodum et David eam quae est ex Virgine generationem eius et eam quae est ex mortuis resurrectionem prophetans ait: “Veritas de terra orta est.”’, cf. Psalm 85.11. It is probable Irenaeus has in mind here his image of the ‘virgin earth’ from which Adam sprang, *AH* 3.18.7; 3.21.10; and *Dem.* 32. His exegesis of Isa. 7.14 assumes a biological understanding of virginity in Mary, ie, that she had never had physical intercourse with a man. However, there is no hint in Irenaeus’s discussions of this key prophetic text of an ascetic dimension to this virginity. The necessity of the virginal conception is prophetic, not ascetic.

¹²⁶ *AH* 5.21.1, ANF 1.548. Also *AH* 4.40.3.

¹²⁷ *Dem.* 35, cf. Genesis 15.5. The actual fulfillment is in the birth of Jesus, who is a seed of Abraham. It is only the physical birth from Mary that is in view here. The virginal conception is not considered.

David likewise speaks of Him who, from the virgin, is Emmanuel: "Turn not away the face of Thine anointed. The Lord hath sworn a truth to David, and will not turn from him. Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon my seat."¹²⁸

Jesus was born of the 'womb of the fruit' of David, that is, from the womb of Mary who is descended from, or 'fruit' of David, thus fulfilling the promise made to David in 2 Samuel:

And this king is Christ the Son of God, made Son of man, that is to say, made fruitfulness from the Virgin, who came of the seed of David; and therefore the promise was in the form "from the fruit of the bowels," which is birth taken separately and specially of conception by a woman.¹²⁹

Even Joseph's exclusion from the process of the conception is foreshadowed in the Old Testament image of a stone cut without hands, signifying that the conception took place without human intervention. Mary's part here is passive, merely co-operating with the plan and power of God.¹³⁰ Irenaeus rules out any descent from Joseph since he holds that Joseph's ancestors, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (father and son) were disinherited by God from royal ascension rights as recorded by Jeremiah.¹³¹ Irenaeus's interest in the exclusion of Joseph does not imply that he believed there was any sort of sexual renunciation on the part of the couple, Joseph and Mary. His interest lies in emphasizing the divine intervention, the working of divine power at the very beginning of the incarnation of the Savior. This is evident in his refutation of the Ebionites, who deny the virginal conception, a

¹²⁸ AH 3.9.2, ANF 1.422.

¹²⁹ Dem. 36, ACW 16.71, cf 2 Samuel 7.12. For the rendering 'womb of the fruit' see ACW 16.175, n. 181. For other places where Irenaeus establishes the descent of Jesus, see AH 3.21.9, Dem. 59; 62, and 63, ACW 16.89: 'But Bethlehem is also David's country, so that He is of the seed of David not only through the Virgin, who bore Him, but also by the fact that He was born in David's country, Bethlehem.' The translation of the *Proof* from the Armenian by Joseph P. Smith is still highly regarded. As recently as 1995, Adelin Rousseau said, 'La traduction de J. Smith représente, sans conteste, l'effort le plus considérable entrepris pour élucider les difficultés soulevées par le texte arménien.', 'Introduction' in SC 406.13.

¹³⁰ AH 3.21.7, ANF 1.453: 'So, then, we understand that His advent in human nature was not by the will of a man, but by the will of God.' Cf. Daniel 2.34 and Isaiah 28.16.

¹³¹ AH 3.21.9, cf. Jeremiah 22.24-25; 36.30-31 and Matthew 1.12-16.

denial, according to Irenaeus, of the powerful working of the Spirit, and so a denial of the unique and holy character of the entire incarnation:

Vain also are the Ebionites...who remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth, and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her: wherefore also what was generated is a holy thing, and the Son of the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the incarnation of this being, and showed forth a new [kind of] generation.¹³²

As in *Against the Heresies*, so also in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* Irenaeus concludes that the birth of Christ from a virginal conception from a woman of the Davidic royal line is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic declarations:

Thus, then, did the prophets announce that the Son of God was to be born, and by what manner of birth, and where He was to be born, and that He is the Christ, the sole eternal king.¹³³

So Irenaeus lays out the main thesis of his *Proof*; that the very same Messianic figure predicted in the laws of Moses and in the proclamations of the prophets is also the Christ: 'He came into Judaea, begotten by God through the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, of her who was of the seed of David and Abraham: Jesus, God's anointed'. The link of identity between the God who sent Jesus and the Almighty creator of the Pentateuch is securely authenticated.¹³⁴

The doctrine of the virginal conception is not just a polemical device employed against the docetism of the Gnostics. The Bishop of Lyons sees the conception of Mary by the Spirit as a fundamental tenet of the faith. This becomes clear when we find that he refers to the virginal conception some seventeen times in the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, a document which has as its *raison d'être* instruction of catechumens. Most of these references occur in a non-polemical context and thus serve as a control sample in comparison with the references in

¹³² AH 5.1.3, ANF 1.527.

¹³³ Dem. 66, ACW 16.90.

¹³⁴ Dem. 40, ACW 16.73.

Against the Heresies which are dominated by polemical concerns. The virginal conception held a central position in our writer's theology, not just in his polemics.¹³⁵

In his third book of the *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus states that he shall now 'adduce proofs from the Scriptures' to refute the Valentinians.¹³⁶ Even though they 'consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition', Irenaeus applies these against the heretics since he believes the unbroken succession of bishops in the Church has accurately preserved the apostolic doctrine. Having thus established the accuracy of the statements of the Lord preserved in the Scriptures, he proceeds to assert that neither the Lord nor the apostles preached anything other than one God alone. It is interesting that the only part of the tradition concerning the life of Christ that he cites at this point is in fact his birth from the virgin. For Irenaeus, the miracle of this birth is a fundamental doctrine which is established by fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. To question it is to call into doubt the entire truthfulness of the apostolic tradition. It also is important for him because the incarnation, like fulfilled prophecy, are both links between the creator God and the Father of the Lord. Thus the birth from the virgin is a lynchpin in his polemic against the gnostic doctrines of disunity of the divine. It is an essential element of his argument for the unity of God.¹³⁷

Irenaeus returns to this theme in the middle of Book III when he provides various summaries of apostolic testimony to the nativity, from Matthew and Luke.

¹³⁵ References to the virginal conception of Christ in the *Proof* where the concern is impartation of the faith to catechumens are found in: *Dem.* 32, 35, 36, 37, 40, 53 twice, 54, 57 twice, 59, 63, and 66. *Dem.* 51 is not a direct reference, but an allusion to the same doctrine. Even catechumens must be warned against various heretics who "despise the dispensation of his incarnation" (*Dem.* 99 and 100). So there is some polemical content in three further references to the virginal conception, in *Dem.* 33, 38 and 39.

¹³⁶ *AH* 3.Pref., ANF 1.414 = SC 211.16: 'ex Scripturis inferemus ostensiones'. Book I describes the Gnostic system, Book II, on philosophical grounds, is 'intended to show its lack of internal cohesion' and in Book III he comes to his 'scriptural/theological' arguments against the Gnostics. To Irenaeus these latter arguments are more weighty as he has followed the 'common rhetorical technique' of 'Hellenistic schools of the second century', whereby the stronger refutations are saved for the end, according to G. Valleé, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics* 12-13, cf. W. R. Schoedel, 'Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Adversus Haereses* of Irenaeus', *VC*, 13 (1959), 22-32.

¹³⁷ *AH* 3.2.2, ANF 1.415 = SC 211.28: 'neque Scripturis iam neque traditioni consentire eos.' *AH* 3.3.1-4 and *AH* 3.5.1 where his main point is that Christ and the apostles taught only one God. If one rejects the birth from the virgin, then one cannot accept the resurrection from the dead, *Dem.* 38.

The Valentinians and followers of Marcion have cut the nativity narrative, and Irenaeus counters by citing from Luke several elements of the story including ‘the coming of the angel to Mary, the exclamation of Elisabeth, the descent of the angels to the shepherds’.¹³⁸

Matthew’s Gospel provides a rich depository of traditions on the nativity. This gospel testifies to the fulfilled prophecy of the birth from the virgin. The gospel text contradicts the attempt by some gnostics to separate Jesus and the Christ. The birth of Jesus is also the birth of the Christ. This is established by the fact that the birth is a fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy and by Matthew’s reference to it as the ‘birth of Christ’ rather than the ‘birth of Jesus’. So:

the promise made to the fathers had been accomplished, that the Son of God was born of a virgin, and that He Himself was Christ the Saviour whom the prophets had foretold; not, as these men assert, that Jesus was He who was born of Mary, but that Christ was He who descended from above.¹³⁹

Since these doctrines are firmly attested to in the apostolic tradition, the birth from the virgin and the virginal conception then must be accepted as part of the ‘rule of truth’ of orthodoxy:

The Church, indeed, though disseminated throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was enfleshed for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets preached the Economies, the coming, the birth from a Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, and His coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to recapitulate all things, and to raise up all flesh of the whole

¹³⁸ *AH* 3.14.3, *ANF* 1.438. The Ebionites, who reject Paul, should also reject Luke to be consistent, *AH* 3.15.1.

¹³⁹ *AH* 3.16.2, *ANF* 1.440. He also cites Paul’s testimony to the physical birth of Jesus Christ from Mary (*AH* 3.16.3) although of course he cannot cite him in reference to Mary’s virginal state as Paul never mentions it.

human race¹⁴⁰

Even illiterate believers living in non-Greek-speaking regions adhere to the apostolic standard. To demonstrate this Irenaeus provides a selection of those tenets held by the ‘barbarians’. One of the few foundational doctrines mentioned in that short list is the belief that Christ Jesus ‘condescended to be born of the virgin.’¹⁴¹

The miraculous nature of the virginal conception and consequent birth from a virginal mother are vital elements in Irenaeus’s assertion that the same God has worked in both the old and the new dispensations. On the other hand, the fact of Christ’s physical birth is also used as a key weapon against heretical doctrines of differentiation in the divine, a separation of Jesus and the Christ. The apostolic tradition clearly teaches that the same Christ who was born from a human mother was the one who ministered as an adult and died on the cross. There was no additional power that entered into the son of Mary:

Now this is He who was born of Mary; for He says: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected, and crucified, and on the third day rise again.” The Gospel, therefore, knew no other son of man but Him who was of Mary, who also suffered; and no Christ who flew away from Jesus before the passion; but Him who was born it knew as Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that this same suffered and rose again.¹⁴²

Gnostic attempts to separate the Jesus of this present economy from the pleromic Christ are refuted by the bald fact of the birth from Mary:

The falsely-called Gnostics...are again in error, when saying that the

¹⁴⁰ *AH* 1.10.1, ACW 55.48-49. Several elements of this summary of the apostolic rule are distinct to Irenaeus, designed to thwart the Valentinian system, ACW 55.183-4, n 1. Other summaries of apostolic doctrine in *AH* are: 1.22.1, 3.4.1, 4.33.8, and 5.Perf. The ‘rule of truth’ for Irenaeus is simply the ‘plot’ of the apostolic Scriptures, which becomes obvious as one simply reads them, just as the plot of Homer is self-evident. See R. Norris, ‘Theology and Language in Irenaeus’ 288-291, cf. *AH* 1.9.4-5, ACW 55.47-48, where the example from Homer is adduced. A doctrinal synopsis, possibly memorized by catechumens, is also found in *Dem.* 40.

¹⁴¹ *AH* 3.4.2, ANF 1.417 = SC 211.46: ‘quae esset ex Virgine generationem sustinuit’. *ibid.*, ‘Those who, in the absence of written documents, have believed this faith, are barbarians, so far as regards our language; but as regards doctrine, manner, and tenor of life, they are, because of faith, very wise indeed.’

¹⁴² *AH* 3.16.5, ANF 1.442.

Christ and Saviour from above was not born, but that also, after the baptism of the dispensational Jesus, he [the Christ of the Pleroma,] descended upon him as a dove. . . For neither was Christ nor the Saviour born at that time, by their account; but it was he, the dispensational Jesus, who is of the framer of the world, the [Demiurge], and upon whom, after his baptism, that is, after [the lapse of] thirty years, they maintain the Saviour from above descended.¹⁴³

So ‘neither shall we look for another Christ and Son of God, but Him who [was born] of the Virgin Mary’. No separation of the Christ from Jesus is possible in light of the evidence from the apostolic sources.¹⁴⁴ Irenaeus reflects the broad acceptance of the virginal conception in his use of “the Virgin” as a title in a number of texts including several which we have in Greek.¹⁴⁵

It is not only the virginal conception but also the physical birth which is vital to the Irenaean system because it provides the direct link between human flesh and the flesh of Christ. A docetic Christ has no connection with real human flesh. If Christ did not take on the very ‘plasmatio’ of Adam, he could not save any of Adam’s race:

And I have proved already, that it is the same thing to say that He appeared merely to outward seeming, and [to affirm] that He received nothing from Mary. For He would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood, by which He redeemed us, unless He had summed up in Himself the ancient formation of Adam. Vain therefore are the disciples of Valentinus who put forth this opinion in order that they may exclude the flesh from savation, and cast aside what God has

¹⁴³ AH 3.10.3, ANF 1.425. That which descended upon the Savior at the baptism is the Holy Spirit, not the Christ, AH 3.17.1. Those who deny this are ‘Antichrist’, AH 3.16.5.

¹⁴⁴ AH 4.9.2.

¹⁴⁵ τῆς παρθένου in AH 3.21.1, CMP 66, SC 34.348-350; AH 3.22.1, CMP 82, SC 34.372-374; AH 4.33.4, CMP 77, SC 100.810-812; AH 4.33.11, CMP 78, SC 100.831. She is “virgo Maria” (the virgin Mary) in some texts, all which only survive in translation Latin: AH 3.22.4, CMP 85 (twice); AH 5.19.1, CMP 90 (twice); *Dem.* 40, CMP 100. Other texts which exhibit titular use (all in Latin): AH 1.15.3, CMP 46; 1.30.12, CMP 49; 3.4.2, CMP 50; 3.9.2, CMP 52; 3.10.2, CMP 53; 3.16.2, CMP 57; 3.18.3, CMP 62; 3.19.2, CMP 63; 3.20.2, CMP 65; 3.21.4, CMP 67; and in the *Proof: Dem.* 33, CMP 95; 36, CMP 97; 37, CMP 98; 39, CMP 99; 54, CMP 102; 57, CMP 103; 59, CMP 104; 63, CMP 105. He does not have a titular use in his discussion of Mary at Cana, where it would be both anachronistic and not supported by the Biblical text, AH 3.16.7, CMP 61.

fashioned.¹⁴⁶

Recapitulation involves not only a progress towards full salvation, but also a restoration, a 'going back as well as forward'.¹⁴⁷ So Christ takes on the flesh of Adam in order to save Adam's race. His flesh and blood must be truly human to accomplish this: 'the Word of God was made flesh through the instrumentality of the Virgin, to undo death and work life in man'.¹⁴⁸ Christ's flesh cannot be of a completely new type, it must connect with all human flesh.

The question arises: precisely what does Irenaeus mean when he calls Mary 'virgin'? Does he have in view any element of the *semper virgo* or the *virginitas in partu*? He is adamant on the virginity *ante partum* as we have shown above. It is much less clear what he thought about the actual physical act of Mary giving birth to Jesus. He does not delve into gynecological details like some later writers (eg, Origen). His citation of Isaiah 66.7 seems to indicate a belief that Mary escaped some of the physical pain of childbirth, but it is reading too much into the citation to claim it as a basis for a full *virginitas in partu* in Irenaeian thought. He cites this prophetic text to affirm the miraculous power of God which intervenes to accomplish the incarnation, not to bring forth any teaching on Mary.¹⁴⁹ One may

¹⁴⁶ AH 5.1.2, ANF 1.527. The key phrase 'nisi antiquam plasmationem Adae in semetipsum recapitulasset' is reconstructed as εἰ μὴ τὴν ἀρχαίαν πλάσιν τοῦ Ἀδὰμ εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀνεκεφαλαιώσατο, SC 153.24. Also see AH 5.1.3. See Dem. 99, ACW 16.108 for a summary condemnation of all who 'despise the coming of the Son of God and the dispensation of His incarnation' = SC 218: 'adventum Filli Dei et dispositionem (οἰκονομία) incarnationis eius contemnunt'. In summing up Adam, Christ effectively sums up all of Adam's race. As the second Adam, Christ also has no human father, but sprung from a virginal source: AH 3.21.10.

¹⁴⁷ R. M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, ed. by Carol Harrison, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1997), 53.

¹⁴⁸ Dem. 37, ACW 16.71. See also AH 4.40.3 and 5.2.1.

¹⁴⁹ Dem. 54. If Irenaeus wished to affirm the virginity *in partu*, this would be a logical place to do so, but he does not. The topic of this paragraph is Christ, not Mary. It is very much going beyond the evidence to say, 'Irenaeus spoke of the virginity *in partu* as of an accepted belief', E. Neubert, *Mary in Doctrine*, (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1954), 175. This distinction between Mary's suffering in childbirth and the actual rupture of her hymen is recognized by Mariologists: R. Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* 326. Even some with the greatest interest in establishing Irenaeus as an early witness to this doctrine express reservations: Irenaeus is 'all but explicit in stating Mary's virginity *in partu*' but it 'cannot be apodictically proven', N. Moholy, 'Saint Irenaeus: The Father of Mariology' in *Studia Mariana* 7 (Burlington, WI: Franciscan National Marian Council, 1952), 148-9. Irenaeus may 'intimate and presuppose' the *in partu* view, but it is an argument 'ex silentio', J. C.

assert that he was hesitant in overtly declaring a doctrine that would lend weight to his docetic opponents, but this also is an argument from omission.¹⁵⁰ There is simply no interest here or elsewhere in Irenaeus in establishing Mary's virginity beyond the point of conception.¹⁵¹

Thus the virginity *post partum* is also completely absent from his theology.¹⁵² The only text that can even remotely be considered as a citation in its favor is the famous one on her purity, *AH* 4.33.11:

Those [prophets] who proclaimed Him as Immanuel, [born] of the Virgin, exhibited the union of the Word of God with His own workmanship, [declaring] that the Word should become flesh, and the Son of God the Son of man (the pure One opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto God, and which He Himself made pure); and having become this which we also are, He [nevertheless] is the Mighty God, and possesses a generation which cannot be

Plumpe, 'Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in Partu*' 567. Weaker is the assertion that he simply 'never found occasion' to express the doctrine, W. J. Burghardt, 'Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought', in *Mariology* 2.105. Among those who judiciously maintain silence on this issue of locating the *in partu* virginity in Irenaeus are H. Graef 1.38-40 and D. Fernández, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité: Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et histoire*, ed. by Marcel Viller and others, 20 vols (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1937 - 1994), 10.424-425. Others are more explicit in their doubt: J. Galot, 'La virginité de Marie et la naissance de Jésus', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 82 (1960), 456-458, and especially H. Koch, *Virgo Eva - Virgo Maria: Neue Untersuchungen über die Lehre von der Jungfrauschaft und der Ehe Mariens in der Ältesten Kirche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1937), 17-41.

¹⁵⁰ *pace* Plumpe, 'Early Witnesses' 568 and Burghardt, 'Mary in Western Patristic Thought' 120.

¹⁵¹ Admitted by Burghardt ('Mary in Western Patristic Thought' 122): There is 'no interest on Irenaeus' part in any aspect of Mary's virginity save the virginal conception.' Irenaeus's use of the verb *aperio* in *AH* 4.33.11 at the very least indicates a lack of concern on his part to use language that would support the virginity during childbirth: 'purus pure puram aperiens vulvam eam', SC 100².830, contra Burghardt. It is more likely, however, that this language reflects a complete lack of place in his theology for the virginity *in partu*. A. Houssiau ('The Virginal Birth of Christ', in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. by Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 115) describes this usage as 'more the entrance of the Word to create the new man, rather than the forthcoming of the new born', but this ignores the context which clearly is discussing the flesh and physical birth of Christ.

¹⁵² Again those with a theological interest in locating the *post partum* virginity in Irenaeus can only state, with perhaps some embarrassment, that he is silent: 'there are no decisive texts' says P. J. Donnelly, 'The Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God', in *Mariology* 2.266; and Jouassard, who holds out the hope that perhaps such a declaration would have been found, if only we had more than just translations of Irenaeus: 'Ainsi ne voit-on pas à travers ces simples traductions si l'évêque de Lyon estimait que Marie est demeurée vierge après l'Annonciation et jusqu'à la fin de ses jours.', G. Jouassard, 'Marie à travers la patristique' 75. Moholy's odd assertion ('Father of Mariology' 151, n. 157) that Irenaeus 'rather suggests silently that Mary preserved her virginity forever intact' only points out too well the weakness of attempts to unearth this doctrine in Irenaeus. Those who flatly deny that it can be found are: Koch, 17-41 and H. von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 48.

declared.¹⁵³

This text occurs in a context which associates purity not only with Mary, but also with martyrdom. The ‘purity’ of Mary is not a characteristic that Irenaeus reserves to her alone. The church also is pure: ‘For the church alone sustains with purity the reproach of those who suffer persecution.’¹⁵⁴

His underlying concern in this section (*AH* 4.33) is to demonstrate the unity of God. That is, to show that it is the same God who inspired the prophets and who brought forth the incarnation. He who is born of the Virgin is pure not because of any inherent value of purity ascribed to Mary or to her virginity, but rather because he is conceived by intervention of the one true pure God.

Her virginal status, her vital role in the incarnational process, and her purity do not entail for Irenaeus a Mary without fault. The ‘purity’ ascribed to Mary by Irenaeus in *AH* 4.33.11 cannot mean moral perfection. This is shown in Irenaeus’s exegesis of the Cana passage where Mary exhibited an ‘untimely haste’ (*eius intempestiuam festinationem*) in her desire to drink from the eucharistic cup before the right time, a desire that required a rebuke from her son.¹⁵⁵

This text (*AH* 4.33.11) does demonstrate how pivotal a role is given to Mary in the incarnational and thus in the salvific process. It is understandable, given the

¹⁵³ *AH* 4.33.11, ANF 1.509 = ‘qui eum ex Virgine Emmanuel praedicabant adunitionem Verbi Dei ad plasma ejus manifestabant; quoniam Verbum caro erit et Filius Dei Filius hominis, purus pure puram aperiens vulvam eam quae regenerat homines in Deum, quam ipse puram fecit; et hoc factus quod et nos, Deus fortis, et inenarrabile habet genus.’ The first part of this text is preserved in the Greek in Theodoret: τὸν ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου Ἐμμανουὴλ κηρύσσοντες, τὴν ἔνωσιν τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς τὸ πλάσμα αὐτοῦ ἐδήλουν. The SC editors reconstruct the remainder as: ὅτι ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ Υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, ὁ καθαρὸς καθαρῶς τὴν καθαρὰν ἀνοιξάσας μήτραν τὴν ἀναγεννώσαν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἰς Θεόν, ἣν αὐτὸς καθαρὰν πεποίηκε, καὶ τοῦτο γενόμενος ὅπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς, <<Θεὸς ἰσχυρὸς>>, καὶ ἀδιήγητον ἔχει τὴν γενεάν, SC 100².830-831.

¹⁵⁴ The positive adverb ‘purely’ (καθαρῶς) being used in both places: *AH* 4.33.11, SC 100².830-1 and *AH* 4.33.9, ANF 1.508 = SC 100².822-3: ‘Opprobrium enim eorum qui persecutionem patiuntur...sola Ecclesia pure (καθαρῶς) sustinet.’ This contrasts the character of the orthodox martyrs with the heretics, who have mostly avoided martyrdom.

¹⁵⁵ *AH* 3.16.7, ANF 1.443 = SC 211.314: ‘Propter hoc properante Maria ad admirabile uini signum et ante tempus uolente participare compendii poculo, Dominus repellens eius intempestiuam festinationem dixit.’ On the significance of the cup here as the eucharist, see ANF 1.443, n. 2: the cup ‘which recapitulates the suffering of Christ, and which, as Harvey thinks, refers to the symbolical character of the Eucharist.’

language of this passage, how it could be, in isolation from the rest of Irenaeus, read as supporting an Irenaean notion of Mary's sinlessness.¹⁵⁶ This is Irenaeus at his most 'Mariological' point. Mary's womb regenerates all because it bears the One who regenerates. However the Son of God who is also the Son of Man is the ultimate source of the regeneration and of the purity of Mary's womb.¹⁵⁷ The purity of Mary is due not to sinlessness (*AH* 3.16.7) nor to an unnatural preservation of the hymen during birth, both concepts completely foreign to Irenaeus, but due to the part divinely assigned to her in the incarnation.

Attempts to ascribe the virginity *in partu* and *post partum* to Irenaeus have no basis in the evidence. While he does say that Mary's womb regenerates all, this is due to her unique place in the incarnational process, not to any inherent 'purity'.

3.3.2 The Eve-Mary parallel

The soteriology of Irenaeus is grounded on his theory of recapitulation. The center of recapitulation is the concept that elements from the primal history of the race are replicated in the history of salvation, namely in the history of Jesus Christ. This replication cancels the effects of the fall of Adam. The axis of this typological parallel runs from Adam to Christ. All other parallels and contrasts are subsidiary to this relationship between the first man and the Savior. This includes the notable parallel between Eve and Mary.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ O'Carroll ('Irenaeus' in Theotokos) notes the fault ascribed to Mary by Irenaeus. But see Moholy ('Father of Mariology' 175) who argues that the idea of a sinless Mary is implicit in Irenaeus, and Burghardt ('Mary in Western Patristic Thought' 138) who regrets that Irenaeus is silent about 'the state of her soul prior to her *fiat*.'

¹⁵⁷ This text is sometimes cited as a basis for claiming that Irenaeus taught a divine maternity of Mary toward all believers: 'Irenaeus presents Mary not only as the mother of a physical Jesus, but as the one who gives birth to all who will receive salvation through Him.' D. L. Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism* 97. Yet the focus in this passage is entirely Christological, with Mary's role completely subservient to divine action. So agrees Houssiau, 'Virginal Birth' 115. Moholy ('Father of Mariology' 160, n. 193) hesitates to claim a fully explicit divine maternity here.

¹⁵⁸ This has been recognized: 'The obedience of the Blessed Virgin Mary is in fact a subsidiary recapitulating action, exactly analogous to the obedience of Christ.', J. Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 151. T. Lane's view ('Rationale' 110) that the parallel between the two women was the result of an 'innocent search for parallels', misses the

One indication of the place of the Eve-Mary parallel is the language our writer uses. Irenaeus draws at least a slight distinction between the parallel of Adam-Christ and the parallel of Eve-Mary. Rousseau notes that ‘dans *l’Adversus haereses*, Irénée distinguait la “récapitulation” (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) d’Adam dans le Christ et le “retournement” (ἀνακύκλησις) opéré d’Ève à Marie (cf. *A.H.*, III, 22, 3-4).’¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Irenaeus does not apply the term ‘recapitulation’ to the relationship between Eve and Mary. This word is reserved for the Adam-Christ parallel. Instead Irenaeus talks of ‘recirculation’, as we have noted, and of Eve being ‘restored’ in Mary’s actions.¹⁶⁰

In two instances he also describes Mary as the ‘advocata’ of Eve. The first is in the *Against Heresies*:

For just as the former was led astray by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed His word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain God, being obedient to His word. And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness (*advocata*) of the virgin Eve.¹⁶¹

The second ‘advocata’ text is in the *Proof*:

And just as it was through a virgin who disobeyed that man was stricken and fell and died, so too it was through the Virgin, who obeyed the word of God, that man resuscitated by life received life. For the Lord came to seek back the lost sheep, and it was man who was lost; and therefore He did not become some other formation, but He likewise, of her that was descended from Adam, preserved the likeness of formation; for Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and

importance of Mary’s role in recapitulation. It is more than just an embellishment.

¹⁵⁹ SC 406.271. Noted also by Moholy, 133, 154 and 184-185.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Restored’, *Dem.* 33, ACW 16.69.

¹⁶¹ *AH* 5.19.1, ANF 1.547, the word *advocata* is reconstructed as *παράκλητος*, SC 153.248-9.

destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.¹⁶²

Some point to this description of Mary as the ‘advocate’ of Eve as providing her with a very active and prominent role in redemption.¹⁶³ This reading of Mary as an intercessor for Eve in some salvific way, goes well beyond Irenaeus thought in general and this text in particular, the word ‘advocata’ being passive.¹⁶⁴ The concept of saintly intercession is foreign to Irenaeus. Latin Irenaeus uses the words ‘advocatus’ and ‘advoco’ most often in the sense of calling or summoning. It is most likely that when Mary is described as the advocate of Eve, the idea is that the mother of the Lord, by her obedience, in effect is made as a counterweight to the detrimental actions of Eve with the result of cancelling them in the context of recapitulation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² *Dem.* 33, ACW 16.69 = SC 406.130: ‘Quemadmodum a virgine non obediens percussus est homo et decidit et mortuus est, ita propter virginem obsequentem verbo Dei homo iterum genitus per vitam recepit vitam. Dominus enim venit quaesivit ovem quae perierat, hominem videlicet. Si autem ipse non sibi aliam carnem fecit quamlibet, sed si per illam quae a stirpe Adami veniebat similitudinem servavit huius carnis creatae, ideo accidit quia oportebat Adamum restauratum esse in Christo, ut qui mortalis erat absorberetur ab immortalitate et voraretur, et Eva restauraretur in Maria. Ut virgo se reddens advocatam virginis destrueret delereturque inobedientiam virginis per obedientiam virginis.’

¹⁶³ *AH* 5.19.1 and *Dem.* 33. e.g. J. A. de Aldama, ‘“Sibi Causa Facta Est Salutis”’, *EphMar* 16 (1966), 320-321 and Orbe, who believes this term makes Mary ‘the conscious intercessor’ ‘on behalf of the virginal sin of Eve’, A. Orbe, ‘La virgen María abogada de la virgen Eva (En torno a s. Ireneo, *adv. haer.* V,19,1)’, *Gregorianum*, 63 (1982), 504. Koehler (‘“Blessed” From Generation to Generation’ 582) says this word means ‘a power of intercession’, though he does admit Irenaeus does not explicate this into Mary praying. See also M. Jourjon, ‘Marie, adocate d’Eve, selon saint Irénée’, in *De Fundamentis Scripturasticis Et Dogmatico-Liturgicis Cultus Mariani* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1970), 2.143-148.

¹⁶⁴ A leading patristic Mariologist concurs: Irenaeus ‘does not in any way appear to mean that Mary made intercession or offered her merits on Eve’s behalf. She simply did the opposite of what Eve had done; that is, she obeyed.’ L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* 56.

¹⁶⁵ Irenaeus’s translator employs the verb *advoco* for παρακαλέω, according to the reconstruction of the editors of *Sources Chrétiennes*, at *AH* 3.9.3, SC 211.110-111 in the sense of calling, summoning (‘Advocabat autem omnes homines plangentes’) and at *AH* 5.15.1, SC 153.196-197 in the sense of comforting (‘Ego vos advocabo, et in Hierusalem advocabimini’), a citation from Isaiah 66. *AH* 3.20.3, SC 311.394-395, a citation from Isaiah 35, is also has the reconstructed παρακαλέω, from the Latin ‘confortamini.’ The use of *advoco* has been reconstructed as other verbs as well: carrying the meaning of call in *AH* 4.7.3, SC 100².460-461; 4.33.2, SC 100².806-807; 5.18.3, 153.246-247, where the reconstructed Greek is προσκαλέομαι; and in *AH* 4.8.2, SC 100².468-469 and 5.15.4, SC 153.212-213, reconstructed as ἀνακαλούμενος. *Advoco* is used in the sense of ‘promote’ in *AH* 4.34.4, SC 100².854-5 (συνηγоргῶν). Latin Irenaeus uses the nominal form Paracletus / Παράκλησις to refer to the Holy Spirit twice in *AH* 3.17.3 (SC 211.337). The verb *advocare* carries the notion of ‘calling someone to oneself’ according to E. Löfstedt, *Late Latin* (Oslo:

Mary is an essential element of the recapitulation of Adam in Christ, where the virginal earth source of the first man is summed up in the birth of Christ from a virginal mother (*AH* 3.21.10). The parallel here between the two virginal sources is again secondary to the main line between Adam and Christ. For Irenaeus the only agent who recapitulates is Christ. All other elements, including Mary, are significant, to be sure, but in the end they are satellites in the system of salvation history which revolves around Christ. The central theme of the ancillary parallel between Eve and Mary is obedience. Both women faced the choice of obeying or disobeying the divine word.¹⁶⁶ Eve's disobedience is in some sense the 'cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race'. On the other hand, Mary's obedient assent to the will of God annuls the sin of Eve: 'as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience.'¹⁶⁷ The central text which sets out this parallel is *AH* 3.22.4:

In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin (for in Paradise "they were both naked, and were not ashamed," inasmuch as they, having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward), having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race. And on this account does the law term a woman betrothed to a man, the wife of him who had betrothed her, although

H. Aschehoug, 1959), 103, who cites *AH* 3.9.3 as an example. In these citations, it is wise to remember that we have only the Latin translation, and the Greek behind it is reconstructed, so we cannot be sure which word stands behind each use in Latin Irenaeus of *advoco/advocatus*. The Greek preserved in citations by Epiphanius, Hippolytus, Eusebius and others may not have escaped alteration.

¹⁶⁶ On Irenaeus and the freedom to choose, see *AH* 4.4.3 and 4.37.1-2.

¹⁶⁷ *AH* 5.19.1, ANF 1.455. Mary cooperates with God's plan: 'Maria cooperante dispositioni,' *AH* 3.21.7, SC 211.420.

she was as yet a virgin; thus indicating the back-reference from Mary to Eve, because what is joined together could not otherwise be put asunder than by inversion of the process by which these bonds of union had arisen; so that the former ties be cancelled by the latter, that the latter may set the former again at liberty. And it has, in fact, happened that the first compact looses from the second tie, but that the second tie takes the position of the first which has been cancelled. For this reason did the Lord declare that the first should in truth be last, and the last first. . . . And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.¹⁶⁸

Virginity is an important theme in the correlation between Eve and Mary. Both women are virgins at the moment of their active participation in the history of salvation, the divine 'economy'.¹⁶⁹ What is stressed by Irenaeus is not the virginity of the two women, which only serves to set up the contrast, but their response to the Word of God. The obedience of Mary is set over against the disobedience of Eve, and actually cancels it. The virginity is not central to the contrasting parallelism, but the obedience certainly is. We can gauge the relative importance of virginity in the parallelism as we consider that in Eve's life it is held to be an interval, not an ongoing centrally identifying characteristic. Irenaeus fully expected Eve to engage in sexual intercourse with her husband Adam once they grew to full maturity. Having been created with 'no understanding of the procreation of children', the first couple would have come to a point of mature sexual activity in the normal course of

¹⁶⁸ AH 3.22.4, ANF 1.455.

¹⁶⁹ The plan of accomplishing salvation in the world. The term is employed on numerous occasions by Irenaeus: AH 1.10.3: 'dispositionem Dei' reconstructed as οἰκονομίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, SC 264.162, also AH 3.12.12; 21.1; 24.1; SC 211.234-5, 398-9, 470-3; AH 4.1.1; 11.3; SC 100².394-5; 506-7; AH 5.2.2; 13.2; 19.2; SC 153.30-1, 168-9, 250-1. Similar constructions containing dispositio / οἰκονομος are found: AH 3.10.5; 13.1; 17.4; 23.1; SC 211.134-5, 252-3, 338, 444-5; AH 4.Pref.4; 20.6; 33.10; 33.15; SC 100².390-1, 642, 824-5, 844-5; AH 5.2.3; 14.2; 18.1; 20.1; 20.2; 23.2; SC 153.34-5, 186-9, 234-5, 254-5; 260-1, 290-1. The same term is found in contexts relating to Mary, most notably AH 3.21.7: 'Maria cooperante dispositioni,' SC 211.420. Other texts are AH 3.16.3; 21.1; SC 211.300-1, 398-9; AH 4.23.1, SC 100².694-5. D. Minns (*Irenaeus* 56-7) indicates the possibility that this use of the term 'economy' may be original with Irenaeus. It is wise to recall Unger's caution (ACW 55.164): 'when the Greek text is not extant, one cannot always be sure that these words [dispensatio and dispositio] stand for *oikonomia*, because they also translate *diathesis* and *pragmateia*.'

events. But before they could grow to maturity they were caught unawares in their naivete, fell victim to the lies of the devil and through disobedience incurred the penalty of sin. Immaturity was a contributing factor towards their falling into sin: ‘the man was a little one, and his discretion still undeveloped, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver.’¹⁷⁰

The thoughts of both Adam and Eve ‘were innocent and childlike.’ Adam had ‘lost his natural disposition and child-like mind, and had come to the knowledge of evil things,’ The Adam of Irenaeus is too immature to receive the full blessing of God.¹⁷¹ Lawson argues that the immaturity of Adam which led to his fall into sin is useful to Irenaeus in refuting his opponents who claimed the first man was created with moral imperfection.¹⁷² If so, then Eve’s virginity is significant only as an element of her immaturity and has little to do with any ascetical view. She fell into sin despite being a virgin.

It cannot be maintained that the recapitulation structure, which sets Mary in parallel to Eve, demands that Mary retain virginity during childbirth and after. Irenaeus believes the primal couple would have proceeded to sexual activity for procreation even if the fall into sin had not intervened, as the citation from *AH* 3.22.4 above demonstrates.¹⁷³ This is acknowledged by Jean Plagnieux, a defender of the *in partu* and *post partum* virginities in Irenaeus, who says the ‘parallel of the virgins Eve and Mary does not extend into a common non-virginal state’.¹⁷⁴

Even if the Eve-Mary parallel did not originate with Irenaeus,¹⁷⁵ his detailed explication and application of this typological relationship is the foundation upon

¹⁷⁰ *Dem.* 12, ACW 16.55.

¹⁷¹ *Dem.* 14, ACW 16.56; *AH* 3.23.5, ANF 1.457; *AH* 5.23.1-2 and 4.38.2.

¹⁷² Lawson, *Biblical Theology of Irenaeus* 218.

¹⁷³ *pace* Moholy, ‘The Father of Mariology’ 149, who argues for a rigid consistency of Irenaeus parallelism.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Le rapprochement d’Eve et Marie vierges ne se prolonge pas en quelque état commun non virginal,’ J. Plagnieux, ‘La doctrine mariale de saint Irénée’, *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 44 (1970), 182. Irenaeus does not maintain a complete consistency in his recapitulation theory. But at the very least the theory cannot be used to extrapolate in Irenaeus a view of Mary’s virginity beyond the conception and birth.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 100.

which so many later build.¹⁷⁶ For the Bishop himself, the parallel was vital to his recapitulation theory, lending support to the central axis between the first and second Adam. Irenaeus does not hesitate to employ any parallel he can conceive to bolster his idea of ἀνακεφαλαιώσις. So in *AH* 5.21.1 he sets up contrasts which run against the usual grain: God used Christ born of Mary in contrast to the use by the serpent of Eve who was formed from Adam. Eve, the tool of the adversary, had her source in Adam. Christ, sent by God, had the source of his humanity in Mary. The overriding parallel in this passage is actually between the enemy and God. But underlying that main comparison are two other parallels which are not as explicitly expressed: the contrasting parallel between Mary and Adam, both ‘sources’ and also between Eve and Christ, both figures who were employed to great effect and both in some sense derived from their sources.¹⁷⁷

The governing axis in recapitulation is between Adam and Christ. The line drawn from Eve to Mary is supplemental to the main axis. Both women, however important, are only supportive players in the grand drama that extends from the original creation of Adam by the hand of God, proceeding on to the fall into sin and then the redemption in Christ, culminating in a future more glorious than what was lost in Eden. The very language of Irenaeus indicates this: only Christ is the recapitulator and Mary is Eve’s advocate in the sense of calling up to cancel the evil effects of disobedience in the garden. Obedience, not virginity is the defining color of the contrast between the two women.

¹⁷⁶ Irenaeus, more than Justin or Tertullian, ‘stamped the idea on the mind of Christendom’, O’Carroll, ‘Eve and Mary’ in *Theotokos* 139-141.

¹⁷⁷ It might seem asymmetrical for Christ as a derived being to recap Adam, a directly created being: the Son of man : ‘comprising in Himself that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned (ex quo ea quae secundum mulierem est plasmatio facta est),’ (*AH* 5.21.1, ANF 1.548-9 cf. SC 153.260-263). We cannot expect a complete symmetry from the recapitulation structure. However here Irenaeus may be consistent: Christ’s incarnation is not only derived in the sense of being dependent upon Mary, but the virginal conception was also a direct working of God, as was Adam’s creation. Note also that *AH* 5.19.1 is not strictly a parallel between Eve and Mary but rather between the deception the evil angel employed to lead Eve astray and the truth announced by the angel to Mary. Moholy’s view (‘The Father of Mariology’ 171) that Irenaeus draws a parallel between the two pairs: Adam-Eve and Christ-Mary, making Christ and Mary ‘the first pair in the supernatural order’ -- goes well beyond language that Irenaeus uses, who never draws this parallel. In fact, in *AH* 3.33.3-4 he distinguishes between the recapitulation of Adam-Christ and the recirculation of Eve-Mary.

In addition to the typological line between Eve and Mary, we also should examine briefly how Irenaeus perceives the relationship between Mary and Jesus, specifically what the connection is between the manner of his birth from Mary and his status as the incarnate one, the one who joins together humanity and divinity.¹⁷⁸ Also we need to make a short visit to the debate concerning Mary's place in the redemption work accomplished by her son.

The virginal conception and natural birth from Mary testify to both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. Minns aptly summarizes how Irenaeus sets forth Mary as proof of the real humanity of Jesus:

For she, and she alone, is the guarantor of Christ's humanity: Christ is a human being (*anthrōpos*) because he derives his flesh from the first human being (*anthrōpos*) by way of the human being (*anthrōpos*) who is his mother.¹⁷⁹

The hand of God fashioned Adam from the earth and Christ's flesh from Mary. This preserves the link between Adam's flesh and Christ's - a direct contradiction to those opponents who 'allege that He took nothing from the Virgin'.¹⁸⁰

Wingren rightly points out that Irenaeus resorts to the birth of Christ to testify primarily to the connection between Adam and Christ, thus establishing his true human nature.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Irenaeus does connect the miracle of the virginal conception and the divinity of Jesus. Irenaeus condemns those who relegate Jesus to being a 'mere man', the natural son of Joseph. They are those 'who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God'. His 'pre-eminent birth' is the ground by which it may be claimed that Jesus was not just a man born by man's will. This birth, a

¹⁷⁸ Minns, *Irenaeus* 94, cf. *AH* 3.19.3.

¹⁷⁹ Minns, *Irenaeus* 58. *AH* 3.19.3: 'quae et ipsa erat homo' which is reconstructed as τῆς καὶ αὐτῆς οὐσης ἀνθρώπου, SC 211.380-1. 'It is plain from the Latin that Mary was here described as *anthrōpos*,' Minns 58, n. 3.

¹⁸⁰ *AH* 3.22.1, ANF 1.454. See also *AH* 3.222.2 and in the *Proof: Dem.* 62 and 63. The Davidic ancestry of Jesus is vividly portrayed in terms of Jesse, David's father, conceiving Christ, *Dem.* 59, ACW 16.87, though the translation of the 'rod' as Mary is uncertain, ACW 16.195.

¹⁸¹ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 96.

demonstration of God's power, establishes that 'He is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, and Lord, and King eternal, and the Incarnate Word'.¹⁸² Later on in the same book, Irenaeus takes care to show that the faithful must assert both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. The prophecy of Isaiah 7.10-17 points to a fulfillment in a person fully human, who grew from childhood and who eats real food. Yet this same child born of the virgin 'we should not understand that He is a mere man only, nor, on the other hand, from the name Emmanuel, should suspect Him to be God without flesh.'¹⁸³

Irenaeus is often cited in the debate about Mary's place in the redemption.¹⁸⁴ Certainly his language goes well beyond anything yet seen in the early church: Mary 'obaudiens, et sibi et uniuerso generi humano causa facta est salutis.'¹⁸⁵ This description of Mary is set in parallel to an earlier phrase describing Eve as the cause of death to the entire race. Just as Eve stood with Adam in the fall into sin, so Mary stands with Jesus in the reversal of that fall. In that sense Mary is an essential element of redemption. However Irenaeus does not consider her actions salvific on their own - they only contribute to the great drama of recapitulation and redemption which he always insists revolves around Christ. Irenaeus does depict Mary as cooperating in an active sense in the virginal conception. This is essential in order to preserve her standing as a moral agent. Yet this does not permit us to credit Irenaeus with making her a partner with God in the redemptive process.¹⁸⁶ While Irenaeus

¹⁸² AH 3.19.1, ANF 1.448. AH 3.19.2.

¹⁸³ AH 3.21.4, ANF 1.452. See also AH 4.33.4.

¹⁸⁴ Moholy, 'The Father of Mariology' 170-172; Plagnieux, 'La doctrine mariale de saint Irénée' 188; de Aldama, "'Sibi Causa Facta Est Salutis'" 319-321; Fernandez, 'La spiritualité mariale chez Pères' 10.424; E. Neubert, *Marie dans l'Église anténicéenne* (Paris: Gabalda, 1908), 241-244; G. P. Corrington, 'The Milk of Salvation: Redemption by the Mother in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review*, 82 (1989), 411.

¹⁸⁵ AH 3.22.4 reconstructed as ὑπακούσασα ἑαυτῇ τε καὶ τῇ πάσῃ ἀνθρωπότητι αἰτία ἐγένετο σωτηρίας, SC 211.440-441 = 'she became through her obedience the cause of salvation for herself and the entire human race.'

¹⁸⁶ Freedom of choice is a part of our likeness of God and a challenge to Gnostic ideas of determinism, Donovan, 'Alive to the Glory of God' 294, cf. AH 4.37.1-4. Moholy ('The Father of Mariology' 174) reads far too much into the phrase 'sola Maria cooperante dispositioni' (AH 3.21.7), calling her 'singularly elected' alongside her Son for the work of salvation. However, what Irenaeus

sees Mary has having a vital role in the redemptive drama, this has no bearing on an ongoing salvific or intercessory role.

3.4 CONCLUSION

We have seen in this analysis of Irenaeus that while he certainly recognizes the positive role that asceticism in general and sexual renunciation in particular can play in the life of the church, this is not a preoccupation with him, at least in his extant corpus. His concerns lie elsewhere, in refuting the false views of his opponents. Here he does address sexual renunciation, but only to dismiss it as wrong-headed, for it is based on speculation and error. He also abhors the sexual license which he believes was rampant among some of the heretics.

The two virginities in the garden also carry no ascetic value for Irenaeus. Eve's virginal status is a balance to Mary's virginity: virginal disobedience being undone by virginal obedience. However Eve's virginity is due to immaturity, not to any idea of sex being excluded from the garden since Irenaeus fully expected the primal couple to engage in sexual contact once they had matured, but their sin of disobedience intervened and they proceeded to sexual relations before they were fully prepared. Certainly he has no notion that her virginal state made her more holy and less susceptible to fall into sin. The other primal virginity is that of the untilled earth out of which Adam was made. To maintain the recapitulative symmetry, Irenaeus sets this virgin earth in parallel with Mary the virgin, the source of the humanity of the Savior.

Virginity arises most often in discussions of Mary. Mary's virginity *ante partum* fulfills Old Testament prophecy, thus affirming the unity of God against

has in mind here is only the virginal conception and the exclusion of Joseph from any role in it. Von Campenhausen cautions against reading modern theological ideas into the language of Irenaeus, *Virgin Birth*, 39, n 2. In *AH* 4.33.4 Christ, not Mary is the active agent of regeneration, contra Burghardt, "Mary in Western Patristic Thought", 1.116, n 19.

Gnostic dissociations of the God of the Hebrews from the God of Jesus. The virginal conception of Mary's son also testifies to both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. She is the means by which Christ takes on human flesh. Indeed salvation could not proceed apart from this because Christ must be of human flesh to effect the recapitulation and salvation of Adam's descendants. So the heretical views that Christ merely passed through Mary or took nothing from her are refuted, because to accept them is to deny the incarnation and thus salvation. The unique circumstances surrounding his birth point to his deity. In addition, the miracle of the virginal conception itself is testimony to his divinity. The virginal conception is an essential point of the rule of faith because it is attested to by the Apostles.

None of these aspects of Mary's virginity carries any significant ascetic weight for Irenaeus. He never cites any heretical reference to Mary's virginity as a support for asceticism, even among those who hold marriage to be an evil. While not conclusive in itself, this silence hints at a strong possibility that he knew of no such usage of Mary's virginity among his opponents.

For Irenaeus the virginity of Eve is a simple matter of her age. He never praises or even refers to Mary's virginity apart from its place in the incarnation. Her status as a virgin *per se* simply does not interest him. Mary's virginity as an ascetic model and ideal has no place in Irenaeus.

THE ADAM-CHRIST TYPOLOGY IN IRENAEUS

ADAM	CHRIST	REFERENCES
First of those who die	First of those who live	<i>AH</i> 3.22.4
Vanquished	Victorious	<i>AH</i> 5.21.1
Disobedient	Obedient	<i>AH</i> 3.21.10, 5.21.2
His flesh gives death	His flesh redeems	<i>Dem.</i> 31
From the virgin earth (passive)	From Mary's virgin flesh (passive)	<i>AH</i> 3.18.7, 3.21.10, <i>Dem.</i> 32
Produces sin	Produces correction to the sin	<i>AH</i> 5.19.1
Tree in Eden (site of disobedience)	Tree of Calvary (site of obedience)	<i>AH</i> 5.16.3, 5.17.3, 5.17.4, 5.19.1, <i>Dem.</i> 34
Died on sixth day of week	Died on sixth day of week	<i>AH</i> 5.23.2
Serpent's cunning	Dove's harmlessness (baptism?)	<i>AH</i> 5.19.1
Satan tempts with food, successfully	Satan tempts with food, unsuccessfully	<i>AH</i> 5.21.2
Satan used a woman, Eve (passive)	God used a woman, Mary (passive)	<i>AH</i> 5.21.1
Satan an angel who deceived	God sent an angel who spoke from God	<i>AH</i> 5.19.1
Deceit of Satan spoken to Eve	Truth of God spoken to Mary	<i>AH</i> 5.19.1
Eve, a virgin betrothed to a man	Mary, a virgin betrothed to a man	<i>AH</i> 3.22.4
Eve responds by unbelief	Mary responds in faith	<i>AH</i> 3.22.4
Eve disobedient	Mary obedient	<i>AH</i> 3.22.4, 5.19.1, <i>Dem.</i> 33

CHAPTER FOUR

A COMPENDIUM OF LESSER WITNESSES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

We have examined three early witnesses, Ignatius, Justin and the *Protevangelium of James*, and the first writer we know of who developed a significant place for Mary in his theology, Irenaeus. Before we come to Origen, we must first consider a number of writers and documents which refer to Mary, albeit most of them briefly. The ten witnesses in this chapter comprise less than a third of all Marian texts collected by Alvarez Campos. Most of these witnesses have less than five texts in that collection.¹

4.2 MELITO OF SARDIS

4.2.1 His life and theology

Very little is known of Melito's life. Our main source is Eusebius who calls him 'bishop of Sardis' though there is some doubt to the accuracy of this title.²

¹ 132 texts out of a total of 452 in CMP volume 1, which runs to the end of the Ante-Nicene era. Tertullian alone represents more than half of the Marian texts addressed in this chapter. Melito: CMP 110-112; Clement of Alexandria: CMP 116-121; Tertullian: CMP 369-435; Hippolytus: CMP 122-157; Cyprian: CMP 442-448; Novatian: CMP 450-451; *Ascension of Isaiah*: CMP 312; *Sibylline Oracles*: CMP 354-357; *Odes of Solomon*: CMP 358-360; *Gospel of Philip*: CMP 342-344.

² *HE* 4.13. The doubt arises from the failure of Polycrates (*HE* 5.24) to use the episcopal title for Melito despite naming him as a witness to bolster his case on the issue of the date of Easter. S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), xii, judges it 'odd that Polycrates omitted to state' Melito's episcopal status.

Elsewhere he is known as a ‘eunuch who lived entirely in the Holy Spirit.’ He receives this designation in the Paschal controversy of the late second century when he is cited as a late witness favorable to the Quartodeciman practice in a letter of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus to Victor, bishop of Rome.³ In yet another document cited by Eusebius he is included in a list of those who hold to a right view of Christology, proclaiming him as God and man.⁴ He wrote an apology to Marcus Aurelius which has survived only in one fragment. This portion is sufficient to assign a probable date of the work as sometime later than 169 but before 177.⁵ He traveled to the Holy Land to verify the canon of the Old Testament and his list is one of the earliest we have.⁶

Our chief source for his theology is Melito’s only major work extant, the *περὶ πάσχα*.⁷ It has been characterized as ‘one of the most ancient monuments of Christian preaching extant.’⁸ This means it could be significant as an early witness to preaching and liturgy, but there is still debate about its purpose.⁹ Melito has a reputation of orthodoxy; he is known as one who ‘proclaim(s) Christ as God and man.’¹⁰ However his orthodoxy has been challenged, specifically his view of the relationship between the Father and the Son.¹¹ His ascription of deity to Christ is so strong that any distinction between the Father and the Son is obscured if not lost. The most glaring instance is, ‘the God has been murdered.’¹² Passages such as this

³ *HE* 5.24, *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. by G. A. Williamson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), 231 who notes the alternative translation ‘celibate.’

⁴ *HE* 5.28 where he is cited by the unknown writer in opposition to the nascent adoptionism of Paul of Samosata in a document later known as the *Little Labyrinth*.

⁵ Again preserved by Eusebius, *HE* 4.26. See discussion of the date in Hall xii.

⁶ Frag. 3, preserved in Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.

⁷ It was lost until 1936 when C. Bonner identified it in a fifth century papyrus codex. See Hall xvii-xix.

⁸ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 234.

⁹ Hall xxiii-xxviii provides a number of cautions about concluding too much from the *PP*.

¹⁰ Fragment from the *Little Labyrinth*, in Eusebius, *HE* 5.28, Williamson 235-236

¹¹ Hall xliii-xliv.

¹² *PP* 96: ὁ θεὸς πεφόνευται, Hall 54-55. Quasten notes his title ‘Father’ for Christ in *PP* 9.58, *Patrology* 1.244.

prompted Bonner to accuse Melito of a 'naïve modalism.'¹³ Quasten postulates that the tendency of Melito to identify Christ with the Godhead 'could be interpreted in favor of the monarchian modalism of a later period' which would then explain why much of his work was lost.¹⁴

Other aspects of his view of Christ seem in alignment with that of others considered to be in the mainstream of the church. The human birth of Jesus is found in a number of places.¹⁵ He clearly affirms the humanity of Christ several times: the 'man Christ' and the 'man God.'¹⁶ He alludes to the preexistence of Christ in several places.¹⁷ The death of Christ is a repeated theme, as one would expect from a paschal message.¹⁸

4.2.2 Asceticism and Mary in Melito

Melito is known as 'the eunuch' or 'the celibate' by Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus who cites him in the Paschal controversy as one of the 'great luminaries.'¹⁹ There is no other indication that he was an ascetic, so we cannot make much of this title apart from the fact that Polycrates considered it one of the most significant items of his life. He has no discussion of ascetic practice and never mentions any ascetic group such as widows or virgins. As was standard for nearly all Christian writers of the time, sexual sins feature prominently in his lists of transgressions: promiscuity

¹³ Bonner, 27-28, cited in Hall, xliii. For a contrary view see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 145.

¹⁴ Quasten *Patrology* 1.244. A list of his works is provided in Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.

¹⁵ *PP* 8.49, 66.453-454, Frag. 13.3, 15.29, New Frag. 2.4.36, 2.6.49, 2.14.136, 2.20.214.

¹⁶ *PP* 5.35, Hall 5; 7.48, Hall 5. Also *PP* 66.453, Frag 4, 13.4, 13.34, 14.4-10, 15.28-29, New Frag. 2.4.1-39, 2.5.40-57, 2.14.136-144, 2.17.167, 2.20.214-216, 2.22.232-233.

¹⁷ *PP* 82.594, Hall 45; Frag 1, Hall 65, from Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.11; Frag 15.5, Hall 82. Another preexistence reference is found at Frag. 6.30. This fragment also contains such Christological phrases as, 'his godhead hidden in flesh,' 'one being at once God and perfect Man,' etc. Hall xxx-xxxi, judges this entire fragment to be much later than Melito as it frames the preexistence in a manner uncharacteristic of the *PP* and the entire language of the fragment is too advanced, 'Melito could not have been first with so many things in so short a passage.'

¹⁸ Though there is no idea of the death as a sacrifice or of substitutionary atonement, as Hall rightly observes, xliv.

¹⁹ Eusebius, *HE* 5.24.

(πορνεία) instead of chastity (ἀγνεία) is the first in a list of inheritances from the sin of Adam.²⁰ The first two sins as a result of the fall are adultery (μοιχεία) and promiscuity (πορνεία).²¹

What we have of Melito contains few references to Mary.²² Where he does mention her, his language revolves around the incarnation. Christ came from heaven to earth by ‘clothing himself’ as a man ‘through a virgin’s womb.’²³ A variation of this is found in *PP* 70, where Christ is the one who ‘was enfleshed in a virgin’ (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐν παρθένῳ σαρκωθεῖς), and *PP* 104.²⁴ He ‘put on a body from a virgin’ and is the ‘son of a virgin.’²⁵ Melito draws a comparison between Mary and her son based on his role as the lamb who was slain.²⁶ He designates her a ‘lovely ewe-lamb’ (τῆς καλῆς ἀμνάδος).²⁷ Christ is ‘carried in the womb by Mary and clothed with his Father.’²⁸

Certain Marian passages attributed to Melito are not his. An account of the

²⁰ *PP* 49, Hall 26.

²¹ *PP* 50, Hall 26, cf *PP* 53.

²² Graef has no discussion of Melito and there is no entry under his name in O’Carroll’s *Theotokos*. S. Alvarez Campos (CMP 110-112) provides six Marian texts, three of which he lists with no separate paragraph number. I have designated those following CMP 112 as α, β, γ. Other references not found in CMP are: Frag. 16b.3, Hall 85; and in those texts designated by Hall as the ‘New Fragments’ the following: New Frag. 2.4.27, 35, Hall 87; 2.6.49, 52, Hall 88; 2.14.1, Hall 91; 2.18.180, Hall 93; 2.20.214, Hall 94.

²³ *PP* 66.452, Hall 35, CMP 110. Cf *PP* 100.748, Hall 57 and New Frag 2.14.1, Hall 91 where his birth as a man is mentioned but without reference to Mary.

²⁴ *PP* 70.489, Hall 36, CMP 111 and *PP* 104.784, Hall 58, CMP 112 and in Frag. 16b.3, Hall 85, not in CMP. The same terminology (σαρκώω) may have been present in Frags 13 and 15. Frag 13.3: ‘incarnatus esset in utero Virginis’ (CMP 112 α), for which we do not have the original Greek may be a portion of what Hall reproduces in English translation (from M. van Esbroeck’s Latin rendering of the Georgian text) as New Fragment 2.4.35, Hall 87; see his discussion, xxxiv-xxxvii, cf. M. van Esbroeck, ‘Nouveau fragments de Méliton de Sardes,’ *Analecta Bollandiana*, 90 (1972), 63-99. Frag 15.28: ‘in virgine incarnatus est’ (CMP 112 γ) is possibly authentic Melito despite also appearing under the name Irenaeus, Hall xxxvii-xxxviii.

²⁵ New Frag. 2.4.27, Hall 87, cf. New Frag. 2.6.49, 52, Hall 88, 2.20.214, Hall 94; and New Frag. 2.18.180, Hall 93.

²⁶ Cf. Jn 1.29, Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* 49.

²⁷ *PP* 71.496, Hall 38, CMP 111.

²⁸ Frag 14.7, CMP 112 β: ‘a Maria portatus et Patre suo indutus.’ Some doubt attaches to parts of the fragment but not to this particular line: Hall xxxvii and 81, n. 58, especially since similar language is used in *PP* 105.802.

death and assumption of Mary, *De Transitu Beatae Mariae Virginis*, is wrongly attributed to Melito, being fourth century in origin.²⁹ Preserved in a fragment is a portion of an initiation liturgy which seems to indicate that Mary was set forth as a model for women undertaking vows of virginity. This fragment, which begins with these intriguing lines: ‘Hymn the Father, you holy ones; sing to your Mother, virgins,’ is also not Melitian.³⁰

It is interesting to first consider what is absent in Melito’s discussions of Mary. He has no hint of the Eve-Mary parallel.³¹ We have no citation of Mary as the fulfillment of prophecy.³² He provides no direct citations from the canonical Gospels regarding the virginal conception or the birth of Jesus.³³ If the *PP* is a homily for the Easter season the content would fit, being ‘predominantly christological.’³⁴ Mary functions as the human mother who bore Jesus, providing him with humanity that he might save the human race. She is clearly called a virgin in several texts, but this can only refer to her *ante-partum* virginity.³⁵ Other than being called, ‘the virgin’ there is no significance attached to her virginal status.

²⁹ Quasten, *Patrology* 1.247. It is listed as spurious in CPG 1, § 1096. See also discussion in *Theotokos*, ‘Assumption Apocrypha.’ A summary is found in R. L. P. Milburn, ‘Appendix: The Historical Background of the Doctrine of the Assumption’ in *Women in Early Christianity*, D. M. Scholer, ed. (London: Garland, 1993), 55-86, 62-65.

³⁰ Frag 17.1-2, Hall 85, not in CMP. The possibility that this is from Melito is small and so it is dismissed by Hall xxxviii-xxxix. Melito has been proposed as author of a treatise on the resurrection, of which a fragment remains. In this work the virgin birth is seen as a negation of all procreation. However since the discovery of the *PP*, this ascription to Melito is discredited: von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth*, 56, n. 5, cf. K. Holl, *Fragmente vornicänischer Kirchenväter in den Sacra Parallela* (1899).

³¹ David F. Wright has commented to me that this omission is interesting given Melito’s strong parallelistic style and his use of a comparison between Adam and Christ.

³² If the *PP* is a homily the apologetic use of Isaiah 7.14 would hardly be expected. Note that Melito does draw a parallel between the tree in Eden and the cross: New Frag. 3.4.21-23. He also does refer to the prophets foretelling the suffering of Christ, Frag. 15.27.

³³ Unlike Justin: *Dial.* 78 and 105. Hall includes no texts from the canonical infancy narratives in his ‘Index of Passages,’ 97-99.

³⁴ Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* 48.

³⁵ *PP* 66.452, 70.489, 104.784, Frag. 13.3, Frag. 15.28, Frag. 16b.3, New Frag. 2.4.27 and 35, New Frag. 2.6.49, New Frag. 2.18.180.

These texts on Mary have no tendency to expand on her significance.³⁶ The one innovation is noted by Hall who draws attention to Melito's usage of the verb σαρκόω ('to enflesh') as a distinct 'advance in Christological terminology.'³⁷

Apart from the one mention of Melito as a notable continent, there is no indication in his own work that he has any interest in asceticism. He never refers to any practice of asceticism in the church.³⁸ He has no language of the process of transformation, indeed, he hardly speaks of the ongoing Christian life in any respect. There is no setting apart of some who have rejected the ways of society to seek a higher level of holiness. Mary and her virginity have no connection with any ascetic concerns; she is merely 'the virgin.' This may signify that by the last third of the second century this title has become widely used for Mary. In that regard Melito serves as an early witness of how the church spoke of Mary. He approaches the subject of Mary entirely on dogmatic rather than spiritual grounds.

4.3 CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

4.3.1 His life and theology

Clement (*c.* 150-*c.* 215) was born at the midpoint of the second century, possibly in Athens. After his conversion he sought out the best Christian teachers, finally settling in Alexandria under the tutelage of Pantaenus whom he succeeded as head of the catechetical school there.³⁹

The Church, faced with the great crisis of Gnosticism, responded in a number

³⁶ In Melito only 'quasi-credal references to the virgin birth are met with,' von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth*, 56, n. 5.

³⁷ Hall xlv, cf. *PP* 70.489, *PP* 104.784, Frag. 16b.3. The same usage may have been in the original Greek of Frag. 13.3: 'incarnatus esset in utero Virginis' (CMP 112 α) and Frag 15.28: 'in virgine incarnatus est' (CMP 112 γ) and New Frag. 2.4.35, Hall 87.

³⁸ In what has survived there is no discussion of church polity at all.

³⁹ Quasten, *Patrology* 2.5.

of ways. While a figure such as Irenaeus was greatly suspicious of the gnostic character of the surrounding culture and sought to build a bulwark of tradition in defense, his younger contemporary Clement proposed to construct a bridge to adapt that culture into service for the Kingdom of God. In building this bridge, Clement draws on many sources. The Scriptures he regards as his highest authority. However he also draws from pagan sources such as the Stoics and Middle Platonism.⁴⁰ His use of philosophy is evident in his discussions of the dangers of passion, including sexual pleasure.⁴¹ Clement wishes to propose a Christian Gnosticism in place of the heretical gnostic systems. To this end he constructs a picture of the fully mature Christian believer, the true gnostic. The faith of the 'truly Gnostic human being' is firmly rooted in Jesus Christ the savior. This faith produces self-control (*enkrateia*), which is the central virtue in Clement's ethical system.⁴² This self-control responds with a complete indifference or *apatheia* to the raging desires and lusts of human existence on this earth. To achieve this is to follow the 'likeness of the Savior,' who was sinless precisely because he was without passion.⁴³

4.3.2 Asceticism in Clement

Proper gnostic asceticism does not repudiate creation. Clement criticizes the gnostic heretics, who will not thank God for his good creation.⁴⁴ Clement does not preach a

⁴⁰ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 107-127; S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and P. Brown, *Body and Society* 126-139.

⁴¹ Clement criticizes heretics who 'twist the Scriptures,' even to the point that they 'alter some of the accents and punctuation marks' *str.* 3.4.39.2, FC 85.279. See also Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 237, 255 and H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 1.112-125.

⁴² *str.* 3.10.69.3-4, FC 85.299. Though in another place he calls continence the 'foundation of the virtues,' 2.20.105.1, FC 85.227. For the classic Stoic position, see J.M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 14, 52.

⁴³ *str.* 3.7.59.2, FC 85.292; 3.10.69.3-4; *paed.* 1.2.4, FC 23.5-6. This is done only by God's grace, *str.* 3.7.57.2, FC 85.291. To achieve *apatheia* is the highest goal of the believer, Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria* 84-106.

⁴⁴ Biblical ascetics such as John the Baptist, Elijah and Isaiah can thank God for creation. The Carpocratians and others cannot, *str.* 3.6.52-53, FC 85.288-289.

total renunciation of sexual relations for the believer any more than he promotes a total denial of food. Heretics who have completely renounced sexual relations are mistaken, thinking themselves to have ‘attained the state of resurrection.’⁴⁵ Though, of course one difference is that while food, clothing and money may be held in common by the believing community, sexual partners may not.⁴⁶

Clement sees himself as standing in the middle between two extremes, both of which extend beyond the limit of orthodoxy, in opposite directions: ‘Either they teach a way of life which makes no distinction between right and wrong or ... they acclaim asceticism out of a spirit of irreligious quarrelsomeness.’⁴⁷ He quickly refutes the licentious gnostics who practice a ‘lawless communism in women’ which is a ‘fellowship of immorality.’⁴⁸ On the other end of the continuum are Basilides and other extreme ascetics who denigrate the creation. Their rejection of proper marriage makes them ‘antichrists.’ Julius Cassian calling the differences between the two sexes to be a divine mistake is a ‘godless opinion’ according to Clement.⁴⁹ His homily on wealth is an argument against ascetic extremism.⁵⁰

The problem is, of course, that Clement himself is suspicious of things that give pleasure such as good food, laughter and sexual relations. The danger is from pleasure and desire, which to Clement is the path to irrationality, to sin.⁵¹ A man ‘swollen with lust...actually becomes a wild beast.’ The irrational state which arises from giving in to passions sets up a barrier between the human and God. ‘It is impossible for those who are still under the direction of their passions to receive true knowledge of God.’ ‘A passion is an overwhelming impulse, one that exceeds the

⁴⁵ *str.* 3.6.48.1, FC 85.285. Clement sarcastically urges these heretics to be consistent and stop eating and drinking. Also *paed.*, 2.1.1-2, and 9-11.

⁴⁶ *str.* 3.4.27, FC 85.272-273.

⁴⁷ *str.* 3.5.40, FC 85.280.

⁴⁸ Carpocrates, Epiphanes and others: *str.* 3.2.6-7, FC 85.259-261; 3.4.29.2, 3.4.25.5, 3.6.54.1. On his reliability as witness to these licentious heresies, see Filoramo, *Gnosticism* 185-186.

⁴⁹ *str.* 3.12.80.3, 3.3.12.1-2, 3.6.45.2, and 3.13.92.1, FC 85.314.

⁵⁰ J. W. Trigg, *Origen: the Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM, 1985), 58.

⁵¹ *str.* 3.7.60.1. Sin, in general, is against reason: *paed.* 1.2.5, 1.11.96-97, 1.13.101.

bounds of reason.’ So the true ‘Christian Gnostic’ will have ‘mastered pleasure’ in the process of his spiritual growth,⁵² since desire and pleasure are not inherent to the physical body on earth. In his defense of God’s creation of the sexual organs, Clement cites Plato to say that desire, while expressed in the physical body, does not come from the body. ‘Pleasure is ... certainly not a part of us. It entered our life as a support.’⁵³

What of marriage, then? Clement is a strong advocate of marriage and procreation; his commitment to the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments allows him no other view: ‘How can marriage in the past be a mere invention of the Law, and marriage as ordained by our Lord be different, when it is the same God whom we worship?’ He will not call marriage fornication or sin, rather, it is holy. ‘If anyone goes so far as to call marriage fornication (*porneia*) he is once more reverting to blasphemous slander upon the Law and the Lord.’⁵⁴

Yet God’s creation of sexuality is no excuse for indiscriminate sexual behavior. Marriage must be exercised responsibly. There are three major limits to marriage for Clement: it is for procreation only, second marriages are strongly discouraged, and even within lawful marriage the sexual act must be carried out in a state of controlled *apatheia*. While the first limitation on marriage refers to duty to society and God, and thus is a positive limitation in that it promotes marriage for the sake of children,⁵⁵ the second and third limitations are placed against the danger of pleasure and desire. The desire for remarriage can lead to promiscuity.⁵⁶ The third limitation is the ‘chastity of the marriage bed.’ The true, Christian Gnostic will exercise self control even here because ‘pleasure sought for its own sake, even

⁵² *str.* 3.17.102.3, FC 85.321; 3.5.43.1, FC 85.282; 2.13.59.6, FC 85.199; 2.20.125.4, FC 85.239.

⁵³ *str.* 3.4.34, FC 85.276, citing Plato, *Philebus* 35 C. See also *paed.* 2.8.68, 3.17.103.3-4. *str.* 2.20.119.2, FC 85.235. Yet in 3.2.8.3 and 3.2.9.3 he says God implanted strong sexual desire in men to ‘sustain the process of birth,’ FC 85.261-262.

⁵⁴ *str.* 3.12.83.3, FC 85.308. The same Educator who is ‘the holy God, Jesus,’ is the very same who spoke to Abraham and Moses. *paed.* 1.7.55-56, FC 23.51. *str.* 3.12.89.1, FC 85.312.

⁵⁵ *str.* 2.23.137-142 has several reasons, all revolving around the need for offspring. Also 2.18.88.3, 2.19.99.1, 3.12.90.1.

⁵⁶ *str.* 3.1.2.2, 3.1.4.3, 3.12.89.1, 3.18.108.1.

within the marriage bonds, is a sin and contrary both to law and to reason.’ So sexual desire even for one’s wife is a sin. Rather, one engages in sexual intercourse ‘by a reverent, disciplined act of will.’⁵⁷ Marital sex for pleasure only transforms a good thing, marriage, into fornication.⁵⁸

Following the teaching of Jesus, Clement holds that marriage applies only to this earthly life.⁵⁹ There will be a transformation in the resurrection, from our earthly female and male natures, to a fully ‘human’ one. Sexual relations and their inherent lusts are done away with as the very sexuality of believers falls away at the entrance into heaven. In that world to come we will be a kind of celestial, sexless being:

The Scripture says: ‘For in this world, they marry and are given in marriage,’ for this world is the only place in which the female is distinguished from the male, ‘but in that other world, no longer.’ [Luke 20.34] There, the rewards of this life, lived in the holy union of wedlock, await not man or woman as such, but the human person, freed from the lust that in this life had made it either male or female.⁶⁰

One way to accomplish this is by life-long abstinence from sexual relations, i.e., virginity. Clement does not draw models for virginity from the usual sources. The celibate state of Jesus is not really a model for believers as the Lord ‘was not a common man...further, he did not have an obligation to produce children.’ Paul and the other apostles are models of marital continence rather than virginity according to Clement.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *paed.* 2.10.97, FC 23.174; 2.10.92, p. 170. He cites the example of Old Testament believers who ‘married and produced children without loss of self-control.’ *str.* 3.6.52.1, FC 85.288 and 3.7.58.2. Desire (epithumia) of itself is not to be completely destroyed but rather ordered properly under reason (logismos), a Middle Platonic view, D. G. Hunter, ‘The Language of Desire: Clement of Alexandria’s Transformation of Ascetic Discourse’ *Semeia*, 57 (1992), 95-111.

⁵⁸ *paed.* 2.10.99 and 2.10.90. See P. Brown, *Body and Society* 132-135.

⁵⁹ *str.* 3.6.47.3, FC 85.285, citing Matthew 22.30 and Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6.13: the stomach also will not carry over into the resurrection.

⁶⁰ *paed.*, 1.4.10, FC 23.12. Physical birth and sexuality are tolerated by Clement because they are temporary creations of God; in the eschaton they will cease to be: *str.* 3.9.63.4, 3.12.87.2.

⁶¹ *str.* 3.6.49.3, FC 85.286 and 3.6.53.1-3, FC 85.289. The humanity of Jesus is so different from ours that Clement approvingly cites Valentinus who held that the Lord’s self control extended to his not ‘excreting his food’ because such a physical act shows ‘corruption,’ *str.* 3.7.59.3, FC 85.293. Though we are cautioned that Clement is not a docetist, he has little practical application for the human soul of Christ, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 154. See the discussion of *str.* 6.9.71 in

Virginité holds no inherent value for Clement. He knows of heretics and even pagans who practice total sexual renunciation, but this does not make them holy. Heretics who abstain from sexual relations have a self control that is ‘irrational.’⁶² The ‘true eunuch’ is one who abstains for the sake of the Kingdom of God, following the path of the Logos. It is a rational choice made not to gratify the passions.⁶³ Thus, the ‘choice of celibacy or wedlock is in our power and not a matter of the absolute constraint of a commandment.’ Both the one who chooses marriage and the one who chooses virginité should do ‘each, as he has been called, making his choice in maturity and firmness.’⁶⁴

There is in Clement scant detail of how virgins and widows fit into the congregation. Widows are reckoned among the officers of the church that include priests and bishops, and he seems to be aware of a public vow that virgin men and perhaps women take who commit themselves to a life of sexual abstinence.⁶⁵ He does not reserve the highest plane of the Christian life for the virgin. He believes that married believers, even in the very act of procreative sex, can exist on the level of the true Gnostic, in a state of *apatheia*.⁶⁶

To be married or a life-long virgin is a matter of rational choice.⁶⁷ ‘Both are holy in the Lord, one as a wife, the other as a virgin.’ ‘One man may make himself celibate; another may join in marriage in order to have children.’ Both ought to have

Hannah, ‘The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity’ 177, who also agrees Clement is no docetist.

⁶² Pagan athletes, musicians and even philosophers abstain to improve their performance: *str.* 3.60.50.4, FC 85.287; 1.15.72.3, FC 85.77; 3.7.60.1, FC 85.293.

⁶³ *str.* 3.1.1.3-4, FC 85.256: ‘Those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the eternal kingdom are making a choice of reasoned principle.’ These true eunuchs are contrasted with heretics ‘who are not eunuchs for any rational cause,’ *paed.* 3.4.26, FC 85.221.

⁶⁴ *str.* 3.9.66.3, FC 85.297 and 3.12.86.1, FC 85.310.

⁶⁵ *paed.* 3.12.97, FC 23.273. Clement mentions such vows for men: *str.* 3.15.97.4, FC 85.317. In *paed.* 2.10.109 he refers to adult women, wives and virgins without explicit mention of a vow.

⁶⁶ *str.* 3.12.81.4, FC 85.306: ‘The harmony of responsible marriage occupies a middle position.’ *str.* 3.1.4.3, FC 85.258: ‘We bless abstention from sexual intercourse...we admire monogamy.’ *str.* 3.12.79.5-6, FC 85.305: ‘Celibacy and marriage have their distinctive services of the Lord, their different ministries.’ Bishops should be appointed from among the married, not the celibate men, cf. 1 Tim. 3:4-5.

⁶⁷ *str.* 3.9.66.3, 3.12.86.1, 3.18.105.1.

the end in view of remaining firmly opposed to any lower standard.⁶⁸ Both marriage and celibacy are temporary states, connected to our physical bodies here on earth, to our sexuality. Both will pass away as this world passes away into the next.

Celibacy, then, is 'the product of creation.' Yet, the true Gnostic, whether married or virginal, is on the boundary between this world and the next. She or he is still plagued by this body with its physical demands, but is being 'trained by continence under the guidance of reason to keep them few.' This prepares the Gnostic for the next life, where the Lord does not reject marriage, but supersedes it, 'purging the expectation of physical desire in the resurrection.' The resurrection state will free one not only from lust, but from one's very sexuality as male or female.⁶⁹

Clement's asceticism fits well into the theory proposed by Valantasis.⁷⁰ He uses language of training and transformation to describe how the believer must reconstruct himself into the true gnostic, whose body yet feels physical needs but 'he has been trained by continence under the guidance of reason to keep them few.'⁷¹

The gnostic Christian can approach an angelic mode of life:

He, then, who has first moderated his passions and trained himself for impassibility, and developed to the beneficence of gnostic perfection, is here equal to the angels. Luminous already, and like the sun shining in the exercise of beneficence, he speeds by righteous knowledge through the love of God to the sacred abode, like as the apostles.⁷²

4.3.3 Mary in Clement

The text most relevant to Mary in Clement is found in the *Paidagogos*. But Mary the mother of Jesus is mentioned only in passing: Jesus is 'the fruit of a Virgin.'

⁶⁸ *str.* 3.12.88.3, FC 85.312 and 3.12.79.3, FC 85.304.

⁶⁹ *str.* 3.18.105.1, FC 85.323, 2.18.81.2, FC 85.212, 3.12.87.2, FC 85.311. *paed.* 1.4.10, FC 23.12.

⁷⁰ 'Constructions of Power in Asceticism' *JARR* 63 (1995), 775-821.

⁷¹ *str.* 1.18.81, FC 85.212. Passion for money can be overcome through training, *quis dives* 3, 14. Lilla (*Clement of Alexandria* 66) provides many passages on the theme of training, a few are: *str.* 1.31.5, 1.34.1, 1.38.4, 2.75.2, 4.124.1, 4.95.5, 4.96.3, 7.19.3, 7.64.6, 7.98.5.

⁷² *str.* 6.13, ANF 2.504 cf. *paed.* 1.4.10, *str.* 2.18.81.

Clement goes on, but not to develop a Mariological point. In a section where he ‘stacked one image upon another’⁷³ Clement speaks of the lactating Father whose milk nourishes the believers. This milk is administered through the agency of the *Ekklēsia*, who is a virgin mother. His reflection on Mary’s virginal maternity sets off this string of typologies which proceeds through the image of the Church as mother (‘the virgin Mother’), though God through the Logos-Jesus also is mother.⁷⁴ This use of a strong image demonstrates Clement gave some consideration to Mary, even though she is hardly mentioned in what remains of his work. In his extant corpus there is little interest in Mary apart from the miracle of the virgin birth, which marks Jesus as divine.

It was not the breasts of women that were blessed by the Lord the Christ, the fruit of the Virgin, or named as the true nourishment. No, because now that the loving and kind Father has rained down the Word, it is He Himself who has become the spiritual nourishment of the saints. O mystic wonder! The Father of all is one, the Word who belongs to all is one, the Holy Spirit is one and the same for all. And one alone, too, is the virgin Mother. I like to call her the Church. She alone, although a mother, had no milk because she alone never became a wife. She is at once virgin and mother: as virgin, undefiled; as mother, full of love. Calling her children about her, she nourishes them with milk that is holy: the Infant Word. That is why she has no milk, because this Son of hers, beautiful and all hers, the Body of Christ, is milk. The new people she fosters on the Word, for the Lord Himself begot them in throes of His flesh and wrapped them in the swaddling clothes of His precious blood. What a holy begetting! What holy swaddling clothes! The Word is everything to His little one, both father and mother, educator and nurse.⁷⁵

⁷³ W. Wagner, ‘Divine Femaleness: Two Second Century Contributions’ *Journal of Religious Studies*, 17 (1992), 19-43, 29-30, who cites this text as an example of how Clement viewed God as having both male and female elements.

⁷⁴ *paed.*, 1.6.41-42, FC 23.40. Wagner (‘Divine Femaleness’ 35): ‘The two virgin-spouses, *Logos* and *Ekklēsia*, nourished the children begotten from *Logos*’s incarnation and passion.’ This is not strictly a parallel between Mary and the Church, contra O’Carroll, *Theotokos*, ‘Clement of Alexandria.’ More egregious is M. M. Rule’s reading of this text: ‘As Clement of Alexandria says: ‘There is only one Virgin Mary, and I delight in calling her the Church,’ ‘Mary, Mother of God, Virgin and Ever-Virgin’ *EphMar* 44 (1994), 207-219, 207.

⁷⁵ *paed.* 1.6.42-43, the translation slightly altered from FC 23.40 = SC 70.186, 188: ὁ δὲ κύριος ὁ Χριστός, ὁ τῆς παρθένου καρπός οὐκ ἐμακάρισεν τοὺς γυναικείους μαστοὺς οὐδὲ ἔκρινεν αὐτοὺς τροφεῖς, ἀλλὰ τοῦ φιλοστόργου καὶ φιλανθρώπου πατρὸς ἐπομβρήσαντος τὸν λόγον, αὐτὸς ἤδη τροφή γέγονεν πνευματικῇ τοῖς σώφροσιν. Ὡ θαύματος μυστικου. εἰς

Reference to Mary is made elsewhere to establish the physical reality of the birth of Jesus. For instance, Mary is described as ‘the virgin who gave him birth’ against the docetism of Julius Cassian.⁷⁶ We see that Clement accepts not only the tangible physical nature of the birth of Jesus, but also the virginal conception. Mary is cited as the one who ‘ceased to be a virgin through the birth of her child, though this was not really the case--for some say that she was found by the midwife to be a virgin after her delivery.’ Clement affirms here a belief in the *virginitas in partu*.⁷⁷

While Clement is a strong advocate of life-long virginity and of sexual renunciation, he is also an equally strong defender of marriage. He sees no special status for the sexually continent over those who participate in sexual behavior, as long as passions and lusts are not aroused. Clement is suspicious of any extreme positions because these tend to arouse the passions: ‘Extremes, in fact, are dangerous, but the mean is good and all that avoids dire need is a mean.’⁷⁸ The virginity of Mary is acknowledged, even to include her virginity *in partu*. But she is never utilized as a model for sexual continence for church members. Her virginity is strictly connected to Christology. It is striking that he does not extend his imagery of the virgin-mother to Mary.⁷⁹

μὲν ὁ τῶν ὄλων πατήρ, εἰς δὲ καὶ ὁ τῶν ὄλων λόγος, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πανταχοῦ, μία δὲ μόνη γίνεται μήτηρ παρθένος· ἐκκλησίαν ἐμοὶ φίλον αὐτὴν καλεῖν. Γάλα οὐκ ἔσχεν ἡ μήτηρ αὕτη μόνη, ὅτι μόνη μὴ γέγονεν γυνή, παρθένος δὲ ἅμα καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν, ἀκήρατος μὲν ὡς παρθένος, ἀγαπητικὴ δὲ ὡς μήτηρ, καὶ τὰ αὐτῆς παιδία προσκαλουμένη ἅγιω τιθηνεῖται γάλακτι, τῷ βρεφῶδει λόγῳ. Διὸ οὐκ ἔσχε γάλα, ὅτι γάλα ἦν τὸ παιδίον τοῦτο καλὸν καὶ οἰκείον, τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴν νεολαίαν ὑποτροφοῦσα τῷ λόγῳ, ἣν αὐτὸς ἐκύησεν ὁ κύριος ὠδίῳ σαρκικῇ, ἣν αὐτὸς ἐσπαργάνωσεν ὁ κύριος αἵματι τιμίῳ. Ὡ τῶν ἁγίων λοχυμάτων, ὦ τῶν ἁγίων σπαργάνων· ὁ λόγος τὰ πάντα τῷ νηπίῳ, καὶ πατήρ καὶ μήτηρ καὶ παιδαγωγὸς καὶ τροφεύς.

⁷⁶ *str.* 3.17.102.1, FC 85.320. Also 6.15, ANF 2.509.

⁷⁷ *str.* 7.16.93, LCC 154. His source is the *Protevangelium of James*. The *in partu* may be implied in his description of the Church in the text cited earlier, *paed.* 1.6.42: ‘She alone, although a mother, had no milk because she alone never became a wife.’

⁷⁸ *paed.* 2.1.16, FC 23.108, cf. Seneca, Ep. 5. See also *str.* 3.12.81.4, FC 85.306: ‘responsible marriage occupies a middle position.’

⁷⁹ Cf. his outburst of images centered on the theme of virginal motherhood found in *paed.* 1.6.42-43.

4.4 TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE

4.4.1 His life and Theology

Tertullian of Carthage is the first significant Latin theologian of the Church. He received a good education and after conversion, probably in his youth,⁸⁰ he gained a position of some responsibility in the church at Carthage, though he was probably not ordained.⁸¹ Toward the end of his writing career he was drawn to a more rigorous group within the Church. It is not correct to characterize him as a heretic or even a schismatic: 'Tertullian never left the Catholic church, but rather continued his fight for a more vigorous and disciplined Christian discipleship from within'.⁸²

Tertullian places himself under the authority of the Scriptures and the *regula fidei*. Both originate from the apostolic ministry ordained directly by the Lord.⁸³ Tertullian does draw from other sources for his theological ideas, including secular philosophy, though he is highly suspicious of it, in contrast to Clement. In his later career Tertullian places the new revelations of the Spirit over Scripture, holding that such prophecies complete the parainesis of the Apostles.⁸⁴ He is most noted for his

⁸⁰ The *Ad uxorem* assumes he married in the faith; his wife is 'dilectissima mihi in domino conserua' *ux.* 1.1, CCSL 1.373.

⁸¹ Jerome's assertion (*de viris illustribus* 53) but this has been questioned by Barnes, *Tertullian* 1-29. He did instruct catechumens, Quasten, *Patrology* 2.293, 296.

⁸² D. Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28. See his finely nuanced discussion, 27-51, as well as C. Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66-76, and T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 130-142. Even Catholic scholars cannot accept Jerome's dismissal of Tertullian's Marian views: 'he was not a man of the Church' (*Ad Helvidium* 19), criticized in Burghardt, 'Mary in Western Patristic Thought' 127-8. Jerome uses Tertullian on other topics, usually without credit, J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 64, 183 n. 21, 184.

⁸³ Quasten, *Patrology* 2.271.

⁸⁴ *virg. vel.* 2.1, ANF 4.28 and *mon.* 14, ACW 13.102.

advances in Christological and Trinitarian thought.⁸⁵ He defines the divine unity through use of the concept of economy and so preserves the distinct identity of each person of the Trinity, a term he probably coined in Latin.⁸⁶ He gives us this milestone in Christology: ‘We see plainly the twofold state, which is not confounded, but conjoined in One Person — Jesus, God and Man.’⁸⁷

4.4.2 Asceticism in Tertullian

The foundation of Tertullian’s life is ‘the pursuit of holiness in the presence of the living God.’⁸⁸ He expresses this in his fierce defense of the one true Church against various heretics and in his burning desire for purity in the church.⁸⁹ It is also found in his promotion of asceticism, which is found in all stages of his career and in nearly every one of his works. He returns often to two ascetic topics: preparation for martyrdom and sexual renunciation. Asceticism trains believers to face martyrdom.⁹⁰ Both women and men are able to face this greatest test of one’s faith—a test that places one on the verge of heaven itself. Tertullian even calls a martyr’s death a second baptism which can expiate sins committed since one’s first baptism, in water. It leads to ‘certain salvation.’⁹¹ Tertullian held that there were several legitimate options of sexual modality. These included marriage, widowhood and

⁸⁵ See summaries in Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 109-115 and G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* 97-106.

⁸⁶ *Prax.* 2.4, CCSL 2.1161: ‘trinitas.’ The Greek ‘triad’ (τριάς) appears in Theophilus, *ad Autolyicum* 2.15 around 180 A.D., at least 28 years before *adversus Praxean* according to the revised chronology of Barnes, which I follow, *Tertullian* 328.

⁸⁷ *Prax.* 27.11, ANF 3.624 = CCSL 2.1199: ‘Videmus duplicem statum, non confusum sed coniunctum in una persona, Deum et hominem Iesum.’

⁸⁸ G. L. Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 31. Some of what follows in this section 4.4.2 is adapted from Ernest Manges, ‘Tertullian’s Understanding of Human Sexuality’ (unpublished M.A. thesis, Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL, 1975).

⁸⁹ As shown in his use of the image of the Church as virgin: *prescr.* 44.2, *fuga* 14.2, *mon.* 11.2, *pud.* 1.8 as cited in Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* 85-86.

⁹⁰ *mart.* 3. Now see M. Tilley, ‘Ascetic Body’ 471-2, citing *ieiun.* 12 and *mart.* 2, 3.

⁹¹ *mart.* 4, *bapt.* 16, *scorp.* 6.11, CCSL 2.1081: ‘certam salutem.’

life-long virginity. Chastity is one of the key identifying traits of Christians over against pagan immorality.⁹²

The Christian life is full of danger in Tertullian's view. This is not only due to the ever-present possibility of martyrdom and pervasiveness of idolatry, but also because each believer was in a life-long struggle for holiness. Baptism in water cleansed one only from sins committed prior to the ceremony.⁹³ The danger then lay in sins committed after baptism. Major sins after baptism placed one in dire danger of the fires of damnation.⁹⁴ In the first half of his career, Tertullian clearly held out a single chance to repent for major sins after baptism.⁹⁵ This second chance seems to have been withdrawn in later works such as *De pudicitia*. Penance signals an end to active sin, but not a return to communion. Tertullian limits the power of the Church, 'we reserve pardon to God alone.'⁹⁶

One locus of danger that preoccupied Tertullian was sexual temptation. Excessive behavior (*luxuria*) leads to such temptations.⁹⁷ Feminine beauty is so enticing that even the angels are vulnerable.⁹⁸ This danger of feminine beauty, which threatens the salvation of all concerned, leads Tertullian to ascribe to all

⁹² *nat.* 1.4, and *apol.* 35.

⁹³ *bapt.* 15. Thus a delay in baptism was wise, especially for the unmarried: *bapt.* 18.

⁹⁴ *bapt.* 8.

⁹⁵ *paen.* 7, ACW 28.29: God 'has permitted the door of forgiveness, although it is closed and locked by the bar of Baptism, still to stand somewhat open. He has placed in the vestibule a second penitence so that it may open the door to those who knock; only once, however, because it is already a second time; never again,' also *paen.* 9-10.

⁹⁶ *pud.* 5 and 19, ACW 28.111. This is a debated issue, as William Le Saint points out in his 'Introduction,' ACW 28.5-7. Some hold that Tertullian revoked the possibility of absolution for major sins after baptism, a possibility extended in *De paenitentia* but retracted in his later *De Pudicitia*. Others hold that *De pudicitia* did allow the Church to absolve such sins. See now Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* 149-150.

⁹⁷ Tertullian uses the word *luxuria* to indicate excessive and dangerous behavior: *cult. fem.* 2.3, CCL 1.356, *Marc.* 1.29.

⁹⁸ *virg. vel.* 7, ANF 4.32: 'So perilous a face, then, ought to be shaded, which has cast stumbling-stones even so far as heaven: that, when standing in the presence of God, at whose bar it stands accused of the driving of the angels from their (native) confines, it may blush before the other angels as well; and may repress that former evil liberty of its head.' This theme of angels seduced by human women comes from Genesis 6 and is found throughout his writings: *orat.* 22, *idol.* 9, *cult. fem.* 2.10. Male beauty is also dangerous: *cult. fem.* 2.8.

women the seductive tendencies of Eve:

You are the devil's gateway, you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man.⁹⁹

While Tertullian is concerned to encourage believers to holiness, he also defends the Gospel against heretics such as those who deny the resurrection of the body and the physical flesh of Christ. In defense of these doctrines, Tertullian says that flesh is not evil, only its abuse: 'Our contention, however, is not that the flesh of sin, but that the sin of the flesh, was brought to nought in Christ.' The flesh is good in itself since God has handled it and Christ took it on himself.¹⁰⁰ Tertullian affirms that human sexuality has a place in God's economy. It is not the avenue to deity that some of the Valentinians make it, nor is it a barrier to God as Marcion teaches.

Tertullian defends marriage against Marcion, though his defense is carefully drawn between approving marriage as good on the one hand and maintaining the superior virtue of celibacy on the other:

For we do not reject marriage, but simply refrain from it. Nor do we prescribe sanctity as the rule, but only recommend it, observing it as a good, yea, even the better state, if each man uses it carefully according to his ability; but at the same time earnestly vindicating marriage, whenever hostile attacks are made against it as a polluted thing, to the disparagement of the Creator. For He bestowed his blessing on matrimony also, as on an honorable estate, for the increase of the human race; as He did indeed on the whole of His creation, for wholesome and good uses.¹⁰¹

Sexual intercourse is not inherently evil, and in Tertullian's early stage is

⁹⁹ *cult. fem.* 1.1, ANF 4.14 = CCSL 1.343: 'Tu es diaboli ianua, tu es arboris illius resignatrix, tu es diuinae legis prima desertrix; tu es quae eum suasisti, quem diabolus aggredi non ualuit; tu imaginem dei, hominem Adam, facile elisisti.'

¹⁰⁰ *carn. Chr.* 16, Evans 57 = CCSL 2.902: 'Defendimus autem non carnem peccati euacuatam esse in Christo, sed peccatum carnis.' Also *res.* 5-7.

¹⁰¹ *Marc.* 1.29, ANF 3.294. The ANF editors attach a note to the word 'sanctity,' - 'i.e., abstinence from marriage,' ANF 3.294, n. 2. The Latin is: 'nec praescribimus, sed suademus sanctitatem,' CCSL 1.473.

even considered a blessing from God: 'It is lust, not natural usage, which has brought shame on the intercourse of the sexes. It is the excess, not the normal state, which is immodest and unchaste: the normal condition has received a blessing from God.'¹⁰² He also holds that the major purpose for marriage is for procreation, to fulfill the command of Genesis. Yet even this purpose is now waning as we approach the 'extreme boundaries of the times,' i.e., the end of the age.¹⁰³

Tertullian's writings are full of misgivings about the sexual side of life. However, his misgivings are not an expression of an anti-sexual attitude. He wishes to affirm God's creation of man as a physical being endowed with sexuality. The flesh is good. Sexuality is good.¹⁰⁴ The misuse of this gift is what disturbs him since the devil uses sexual temptation among others to lure believers away from their loyalty to the one true God. In his later period, Tertullian became much more censorious about marriage and sexuality. Marriage is a 'second degree of modesty' and has common ground with fornication, differing only in that marriage is licit and fornication is not.¹⁰⁵

Remarriage, never encouraged by Tertullian at any stage, is now deemed a 'species of fornication,' a last resort to use to prevent serious sexual sin, therefore an indulgence to weakness.¹⁰⁶ Formerly Tertullian placed himself between the two extremes of those who deny marriage altogether and those who are sexually indiscriminate. In his later writings, Tertullian redefines one pole of sexually illicit behavior. He narrows the range of proper behavior considerably, moving the second

¹⁰² *an.* 27, ANF 3.208 = CCSL 2.823: 'Natura ueneranda est, non erubescenda. Concubitus libido, non condicio foedat. Excessus, non status est impudicus, siquidem benedictus status apud deum.' *Libido* always means excessive desire or lust for Tertullian, *res.* 61, *Marc.* 5.15, *mon.* 16, and *ieiun.* 1.

¹⁰³ *exh. cast.* 6, ANF 4.53 = CCSL 2.1023: 'extremitatibus temporum compressit.'

¹⁰⁴ *carn. Chr.* 16, *an.* 27, *res.* 5-7.

¹⁰⁵ *virg. vel.* 17, ANF 4.37 = CCSL 2.1225: 'alterius pudicitiae mulieres, quae in nuptias incidistis.' *exh. cast.* 9.3, CCSL 2.1028: 'At leges uidentur matrimonii et stupri differentiam facere. Per diuersitatem inliciti <scilicet et liciti>, non per condicionem rei ipsius.'

¹⁰⁶ *exh. cast.* 9, ANF 4.55 = CCSL 2.1027: 'secundum matrimonium quam quasi species stupri.' *exh. cast.* 1 and 8.

pole closer, excluding those who tolerate remarriage.¹⁰⁷

Like Clement, Tertullian expects even married couples to severely limit sexual behavior to procreation only. Among several types of virgins, he mentions those ‘who in wedlock abstain, by mutual consent, from the use of marriage.’¹⁰⁸ Among those services we may offer to God in the flesh (thus showing its good) is continence in marriage: ‘the secret continent dissimulation of matrimony.’¹⁰⁹

One objection the heretics apparently made was that the body cannot be raised as we will have no need of certain parts (i.e., the sexual organs) in the afterlife. Tertullian responds with the assertion that it is necessary for those organs to be present in the judgement, otherwise those actions, both good and bad, which we perform in the flesh on earth, will have no relation to the ultimate reality of the coming life. Excluding those organs from the afterlife renders continence meaningless.¹¹⁰

Eschatological urgency, ‘the extreme end of time,’ has led some to renounce the sexual life.¹¹¹ This asceticism occurs in three forms: virginity, widowhood, and continence in marriage; all three pleasing to God. Sexual renunciation of any type is superior to marriage. This is because the procreative purpose of marriage is no longer valid, given the fulness of the earth and the end of the age.¹¹² ‘The life a widow leads is the more difficult,’ as compared to that of a life-long virgin, ‘since it is easy not to desire that of which you are ignorant.’ Widows living a pure life (and not all did) already have one foot in the eschatological new age: ‘remaining unmarried, they are reckoned, even while still on earth, as belonging to the

¹⁰⁷ *mon.* 1-2. Yet as early as *Ad uxorem* he forbids digamists from holding church office, *ux.* 1.7, ACW 13.20.

¹⁰⁸ *ux.* 1.6, ACW 13.18 and *Marc.* 1.29.

¹⁰⁹ *res.* 8.4, Evans 25, 27, CCSL 2.931: ‘modesta in occulto matrimonii dissimulatio... de bonis carnis deo adulantur.’

¹¹⁰ *res.* 60-61.

¹¹¹ *cult. fem.* 2.9.8, FC 40.142 = CCSL 1.364: ‘in extimatione [sic] temporali.’

¹¹² *res.* 8, *ux.* 1.3, *an.* 30. So Le Saint (ACW 13.139, n. 42) ‘It is possible that Tertullian’s views on the proximity of the parousia were influenced to some extent by a conviction that in his day the world’s population had reached a saturation point.’

household of the angels.’ In not seeking remarriage, young widows ‘choose to be wedded to God. They are God’s fair ones.’¹¹³

Tertullian’s asceticism has elements corresponding to all three features of the definition of asceticism delineated by Richard Valantasis.¹¹⁴ The feature of ‘displayed actions’ and ‘performance’ may be seen in his frequent exhortations to believers to live morally pure lives before the world that they might be converted. Martyrs by their manner of death attract pagan attention and admiration.¹¹⁵ The Christian must prepare through self control and abstinence to die in the right manner in order to provide the the ultimate testimony. So the prison is a school for training (*palaestra*).¹¹⁶ This act of dying is a contest viewed not only by the world but also by God.¹¹⁷ Secondly the feature of intention to transform oneself is also evident. In death Christians are to ‘be changed to the state of holy angels.’¹¹⁸ But this transformation begins even in this life. Tertullian cites a saying from the prophetess Prisca which describes the sharpened spiritual sensitivity of those who renounce sexual relations: ‘For continence effects harmony of soul, and the pure see visions and, bowing down, hear voices speaking clearly words salutary and secret.’¹¹⁹ The feature of novelty is found in his insistence that the world has entered the third and final stage of history, the age of the Spirit. This new era calls for higher moral

¹¹³ *ux.* 1.8, ACW 13.21, *ux.* 1.4, ACW 13.15. Tertullian considers widows to be of higher rank than virgins, Methuen, ‘The Virgin Widow.’

¹¹⁴ ‘Constructions of Power in Asceticism,’ *JAAR* 63 (1995), 775-821.

¹¹⁵ *nat.* 1.1, *spect.* 24, *idol.* 13, 14, *cult. fem.* 2.11, *ux.* 2.6, *scorp.* 8, *res.* 8, *fuga* 9, *Scap.* 5. Avoiding pagan worship, theatre and festivals is part of a Christian’s witness: *spect.* 2, *apol.* 35, *cor.* 6.

¹¹⁶ *mart.* 3.5, CCSL 1.6, and *spec.* 29, *pat.* 13, *res.* 8, 9, *cult. fem.* 2.13, *fuga* 1. See Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God* 45-47.

¹¹⁷ *Scorp.* 6.

¹¹⁸ *ux.* 1.5, ACW 13.11 = CCSL 1.374: ‘translatis scilicet in angelicam qualitatem et sanctitatem.’ also *cult. fem.* 1.2 .5. Despite his insistence that the sexual organs will be present in the resurrection, Tertullian seems to propose that believers will be transformed from women and men into an angel-like nature which is neither female nor male: ‘I am despoiled of my sex, I am classed with angels--not a male angel, nor a female one,’ *Val.* 32, ANF 3.519, *cf. res.* 60 where sexual organs will have in heaven some function which is now unknown.

¹¹⁹ *exh. cast.* 10.5, ACW 13.59 = CCSL 2.1030: ‘Purificancia cum cor dat, et uisiones uident et ponentes faciem deorsum etiam uoces audiunt salutare, tam manifestas quam et occultas.’ Also *pat.* 13. On Prisca (Priscilla) see Trevett, *Montanism* 159-163.

discipline, revealed by the Paraclete to the church.¹²⁰

4.4.3 Mary in Tertullian

Most of what Tertullian says about Mary is found in two works, both dealing with docetic heresy, *Adversus Marcionem* and *De carne Christi*.¹²¹ Therefore it should not be surprising that the two doctrines most emphasized are the virginal conception and the reality of the flesh of Christ as born of his mother. The physical reality of the birth of Jesus as well as the virginal conception are elements of the *regula fidei*: ‘this Word is called his Son. . . was brought down by the Spirit and Power of God the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, was born of her and lived as Jesus Christ.’¹²²

Over against the docetism of Marcion and others Tertullian employs Mary as a proof of the humanity of Jesus.¹²³ Tertullian believes Jesus is descended from David through Mary. This is important because of the Scriptural prophecies and because it is a further sign of the complete physical humanity of the Lord: ‘Christ is reckoned to spring from David by carnal descent, by reason of His birth of the Virgin Mary.’¹²⁴ Christ must be born of a human mother in order to have human flesh. Yet he also must be born of a virgin as a sign of his divinity and for fulfillment of the

¹²⁰ *virg. vel.* 1, *mon.* 2-3, *Prax.* 30. So now second marriages are prohibited, new and more rigorous fasts are introduced and certain serious sins are no longer to be pardoned by ecclesiastical authorities, *mon.* 14, *ieiun.* 2, *pud.* 21. Eschatological urgency is also found in earlier works: *cult. fem.* 2.9, *ux.* 1.3 and 1.5, *Marc.* 5.7.

¹²¹ CMP has 24 texts from *carn. Chr.* and 22 from *Marc.* which is 69 percent of the total of 67 texts.

¹²² *praescr.* 13.1-3, LCC 5.40, also 36.3-5, *Prax.* 2.1, *Marc.* 4.2.2, 3.13.3-5. Tertullian sharply distinguishes between the birth from Mary of Jesus and the stories of pagan gods getting offspring from mortal women, *apol.* 21.9.

¹²³ *Marc.* 3.11.2-3, 3.20.6-8, 4.10.6-15.

¹²⁴ *Marc.* 3.20.6, ANF 3.338, CCSL 1.535: ‘Atquin hinc magis Christum intellegere debetis ex Dauid deputatum carnali genere ob Mariae uirginis censum.’ Also *Marc.* 3.20.7-8, 4.36.9, 5.1.6, 5.8.4, *carn. Chr.* 22. This view is much older than Tertullian: *Asc. Isa.* 11.2, *ProtJ* 10.4, Justin, *Dial.* 45 and 100, Irenaeus *AH* 3.9.2, 3.16.3, 3.21.5. See *Mary in NT* 260.

prophecy.¹²⁵ He mocks Marcion, who accepts the death of Christ but not his birth.¹²⁶ His is one of the early expressions that later led to describing Mary as the mother of God, ‘Nasci se deus patitur: in utero matris [et] expectat et natus adolescere sustinet.’¹²⁷

The Valentinians¹²⁸ held that Mary was a ‘way’ for Jesus to come to earth, but that this did not entail physical birth. Tertullian is very clear that Mary contributed to the human nature of Jesus:

But if the Word was made flesh out of himself, and not out of what the womb contributed, how did a womb which had wrought nothing, performed nothing, experienced nothing, decant its fountain into those breasts in which it causes change only by the process of giving birth? It cannot have possessed blood for the supply of milk without also having reasons for the blood itself, namely the tearing away of flesh which was its own.¹²⁹

Tertullian probably knew the comparison in Irenaeus between Eve and Mary¹³⁰ but his own work only uses it once, in a contrast between Eve’s belief in the serpent’s words and Mary’s belief in those of Gabriel: ‘The sin which the former committed by believing, the latter by believing blotted out.’ He gives no part to Mary beyond that of bearing the Savior. She is an instrument of salvation, but God is the cause: ‘God brought down into the womb his own Word ... for the salvation of man Christ must needs come forth from that organ into which man already under

¹²⁵ *carn. Chr.* 17.2.

¹²⁶ *carn. Chr.* 5.1, CCSL 2.880: ‘Quid enim indignius deo, quid magis erubescendum, nasci an mori? Carnem gestare an crucem?’

¹²⁷ *pat.* 3.2, CCSL 1.300 = FC 40.195 (amended): ‘God suffering himself to be born in the womb of a mother. He awaits [the time of birth] and after His birth suffers Himself to grow into manhood.’ With such expressions it is surprising that we must wait until Constantine to find the first use of the phrase ‘mother of God,’ preserved in Greek, D. F. Wright, ‘Mother of God’ in *Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, D. F. Wright, ed. (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 126-127.

¹²⁸ This is the view of the ‘Italian’ school, Rudolf, *Gnosis* 166-167, also Filoramo, *Gnosticism* 120-123, 166-167.

¹²⁹ *carn. Chr.* 20, Evans 69; cf. *carn. Chr.* 19.4-5, *Val.* 27.1.

¹³⁰ G. Jouassard, ‘La Nouvelle Ève chez les Pères Anténicéens’, *BSFEM* 12 (1954), 40, cf. Irenaeus, *AH* 3.22.4, 5.19.1, *Dem.* 33.

condemnation had entered.¹³¹ Since he is not constructing an intricate system of recapitulation his need for an Eve-Mary parallel is much less than in Irenaeus. His concern is to establish the true human flesh of Christ against denials from Marcion and others.¹³² Mary's *ante partum* virginity is part of the novelty of the birth of Christ:

What novelty there was in Christ, in his being born of a virgin, is plain: namely this and nothing else, that he was born of a virgin according to the rationale we have given, to the further intent that our regeneration should be virginal in a spiritual sense, sanctified from all defilements through Christ, who himself was a virgin even in the flesh, as he was born of the flesh of a virgin.¹³³

Otten explains this text: 'Christ's new birth forebodes the renewal of all of humanity. By physically taking flesh from a virgin, Christ . . . inaugurates nothing less than the virginal regeneration of humanity in a spiritual sense.'¹³⁴

Against those who deny the reality of Christ's flesh Tertullian maintains the reality of his birth from a real mother, even to the extent of giving a detailed picture of life *in utero*.¹³⁵ His emphasis on a real birth leads him to a denial of the *virginitas in partu*: Mary was

a virgin as regards her husband, not a virgin as regards child-bearing . . . She bore which did bear: and if as a virgin she conceived, in her child-bearing she became a wife. For she became a wife by that same law of the opened body, in which it made no difference whether the

¹³¹ *carn. Chr.* 17.6, Evans, 61. Earlier he compares Mary to the virgin earth (*carn. Chr.* 17.4, cf 16.5), also from Irenaeus, *AH* 3.18.7, 3.21.10, *Dem.* 32. E. Evans (*Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956), 154) notes that much of his argument in *carn. Chr.* 17-18 is borrowed from Irenaeus.

¹³² So Burghardt ('Mary in Western Patristic Thought' 113) characterizes the parallel in Tertullian as a 'secondary argument.'

¹³³ *carn. Chr.* 20.7, Evans 68 = CCSL 2.910: 'Quid fuerit nouitatis in Christo ex uirgine nascenti, palam est, solum hoc scilicet, quod ex uirgine secundum rationem quam edidimus et *** , uti uirgo est et regeneratio nostra spiritaliter, ab omnibus inquinamentis sanctificata per Christum, uirginem et ipsum, etiam carnaliter, ut ex uirginis carne.'

¹³⁴ W. Otten, 'Christ's Birth of a Virgin who became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian's *de carne Christi*,' *VC* 51 (1997), 255. Tertullian's deep suspicion of sexuality cannot be relegated to his later years: *spect.* 1, 13, *cult. fem.* 2.1, 2.13, *mart.* 3, *bapt.* 18, *ux.* 1.1, *praescr.* 40, *Val.* 32, *res.* 4, 9, cf. chronology in Barnes, *Tertullian* 55.

¹³⁵ *carn. Chr.* 4.1-2.

violence was of the male let in or let out: the same sex performed that unsealing.¹³⁶

Otten argues that Tertullian sets up the paradox of affirming the virginity *ante partum* while denying the virginity *in partu* in order to demonstrate the truth of the incarnation.¹³⁷

The *virginitas post partum* is also clearly rejected so that Mary may serve as a model for both virgins and married women:

It was a virgin who gave birth to Christ and she was to marry only once, after she brought Him forth. The reason for this was that both types of chastity might be exalted in the birth of Christ, born as He was of a mother who was at once virginal and monogamous.¹³⁸

Mary's perpetual virginity is also denied in his argument against Marcion who cites Mt. 12.48, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?' to show Jesus had no knowledge of a real birth or family. Tertullian responds by firmly asserting that Jesus indeed had a real mother and real siblings.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *carn. Chr.* 23.2-4, Evans 76-77: 'et virgo quantum a viro, non virgo quantum a partu--' . . . 'peperit quae peperit, et 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.'

¹³⁷ 'As the sign of Christ's birth is fraught with contradiction . . . endowing it instead with a new persuasiveness,' Otten, 'A Virgin who became a Wife' 256. See also Plumpe, 'Early Witnesses' 568-569.

¹³⁸ *mon.* 8, ACW 13.86 and *pud.* 6.16 where the use of the participle of *resignare* in reference to Mary and the gerundive in reference to Jesus is to be noted: 'At ubi sermo Dei descendit in carnem ne nuptiis quidem resignatam et sermo caro factus est ne nuptiis quidem resignanda.' CCSL 2.1291 = ACW 28.67: 'But when the Word of God descended into flesh which not even marriage had unsealed, and when the Word was made flesh which not even marriage was ever to unseal.' There is consensus that Tertullian denies the virginity *post partum*: Graef 1.42, Gambero *Mary and The Fathers of the Church* 65-66, O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, 'Tertullian' and W. Le Saint, ACW 13.159-160, n. 104, who complains, 'Tertullian's Mariology is far from orthodox' and adds it is 'defective' in his article 'Tertullian,' NCE 12.1019-1022.

¹³⁹ *Marc.* 4.19.6-13, cf. 3.11.2-3. He ironically references his 'little work' against Marcion in *carn. Chr.* 7 where again the reality of Christ's brothers is affirmed, indeed his argument hinges on their being true siblings of the flesh. J. McHugh's attempt to have Tertullian say these are relatives but not siblings does not follow, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 448-450. Others accept Tertullian's denial of the perpetual virginity and proceed to castigate him for non-conformity to later Catholic views: he has a 'fiery tongue' which 'was eventually to sever his last connection with the Church of Rome,' R. Meskunas, 'Some Patristic Exegesis on Mary's Sanctity,' *EphMar*, 13 (1963), 124, and more recently, he was 'rich in genius as he was sometimes lacking in a sense of balance' making 'gratuitous statements,' Gambero, *Mary and The Fathers of the*

Virginity is also a characteristic of the church. For Tertullian this virginity signifies the purity of the church as the bride of Christ. Elsewhere the virginity stands for correct doctrine.¹⁴⁰ The church is also the ‘true mother of the living’ in a passage that makes Eve, not Mary, a type of the church.¹⁴¹

Tertullian’s writings often turn to matters of sexual renunciation. While he cites a number of different figures as models, it is Christ as the second Adam who is the chief exemplar for the life of virginity and secondarily, for monogamy:

The Second Adam, Christ, was wholly disengaged from marriage, even as was the first before his exile. This more perfect Adam, Christ - more perfect because more pure - having come in the flesh to set your infirmity an example, presents Himself to you in the flesh, if you will but receive Him, as a man entirely virginal. If, however, you are not equal to this perfection, He presents Himself to you in the spirit as a model of monogamy: He has one spouse, the Church, as prefigured by Adam and Eve.¹⁴²

His mother Mary appears later as a subordinate model. This is the earliest known use of Mary as a model for ascetic life in the Church.¹⁴³

It was a virgin who gave birth to Christ and she was to marry only once, after she brought Him forth. The reason for this was that both types of chastity might be exalted in the birth of Christ, born as He

Church 62.

¹⁴⁰ *mon.* 11.2, *puđ.* 1.8 and *praescr.* 44.2 cited by Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* 85-86.

¹⁴¹ Eve, who comes from the wound in Adam’s side, is a type of the mother church, *an.* 43.10: ‘ut de iniuria perinde lateris eius uera mater uiuentium figuraretur ecclesia,’ CCSL 2.847. In *Marc.* 2.4.4 he mentions that both Mary and the Church are feminine, but this is not a direct parallel between the two but between the two and Eve, *contra* H. Holstein, ‘Marie et l’Église chez les Pères anté-nicéens,’ *BSFEM* 9 (1951), 11-12, 19. The church as mother is also found in *orat.* 2, *praescr.* 42.10, *bapt.* 20.5, *carn. Chr.* 7, *mon.* 7.9, 16.4, *puđ.* 5.14 and other references as compiled by Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1943), 45-62. Now also Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* 78-83.

¹⁴² *mon.* 5.5-7, ACW 13.80 = CCSL 2.1235: ‘quando nouissimus Adam, id est Christus, innuptus in totum, quod etiam primus Adam ante exilium. Sed donato infirmitati tuae carnis suae exemplo perfectior Adam, id est Christus, eo quoque nomine perfectior qua integrior, uolenti quidem tibi spado occurrit in carne. Si uero non sufficis, monogamus occurrit in spiritu, unam habens ecclesiam sponsam, secundum Adam et Euae figuram.’ Other examples follow: Abraham before he fell into polygamy, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachary, John, and then we come to Mary, *mon.* 6-8. In *exh. cast.* 13 he adduces examples of monogamy from within the church and from paganism, but not Mary.

¹⁴³ *contra* von Campenhausen (*Virgin Birth* 48): ‘There is in his writings no suspicion of any ascetic elucidation of the “virgin.”’ This text predates Origen’s *com. Matt.* 10.17 by a generation. See chapter 5, section 5.3.4.2.

was of a mother who was at once both virginal and monogamous.¹⁴⁴

This is the only Marian text in Tertullian where she is employed as a model of any sort.¹⁴⁵ Otherwise, as with Clement, we see that Tertullian's view of Mary is shaped almost entirely by his concern to define and defend a proper understanding of Christ. His interest in Mary's virginity goes no further than this: she is the virgin who miraculously conceived by the power of the Spirit and who as a true mother gave birth. Her life after she brought forth her son is only of note as one who maintained a monogamous marriage.¹⁴⁶ Tertullian sees no contradiction in portraying her as both a model virgin and as a model wife and mother.

4.5 HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME

4.5.1 His life and theology

The writer known to tradition as Hippolytus flourished as a theologian, exegete and church leader in the church at Rome during the first third of the third century.¹⁴⁷ He was influenced by Irenaeus and had an impact on Origen among others.¹⁴⁸ He openly disagreed with four successive bishops of Rome to the extent that during the reign of

¹⁴⁴ *mon.* 8.2, ACW 13.86, CCSL 2.1239: 'Et Christum quidem uirgo enixa est, semel nuptura post partum, ut uterque titulus sanctitatis in Christi censu dispungeretur, per matrem et uirginem et uniuiram.'

¹⁴⁵ He never connects Mary as a wife to the virgins in the church who are wedded to God, cf. *ux.* 1.4, *res.* 60-61, *exh. cast.* 13.

¹⁴⁶ It may be he considered that marriage as one of continence, but he never makes this explicit, despite his exhortations to married couples to live in this way, *ux.* 1.6, *cult. fem.* 2.9.6, *res.* 8.4. It is also of note that he never assigns to Mary the higher status of 'widow' though it is probable she outlived Joseph and that this would be known to the early church. This may indicate a further lack of interest in her later life. The widow had a higher status for Tertullian than a virgin or wife, both titles which he does give to her. See Methuen, 'Virgin Widow' 290-293.

¹⁴⁷ Summaries of his life in Quasten, *Patrology* 2.163-165, ODCC and now, A. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

¹⁴⁸ Origen may have heard a sermon of Hippolytus in Rome in 212, an incident recorded by Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 61. On the influence of Irenaeus, see K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 13 and G. Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics* 46-47, 56-62.

Callistus he may have put himself forward as a rival to the see of Rome. He was exiled during the persecution of Maximin (235-238) and may have died a martyr. Major works of his which have survived include the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*, commentaries on Daniel and the Song of Songs, a treatise against Noetus and his most famous work the *Refutation of All Heresies*.¹⁴⁹ Much has not survived and it is proposed that his divisive career may have contributed to this loss.¹⁵⁰ Hippolytus may have been called a 'holy bishop and martyr' two centuries after his death,¹⁵¹ but in his own lifetime, he was a center of controversy.

His theology of God is revealed in his discourse against Noetus who held a patripassianist heresy that 'Christ was the Father in person, and that the Father in person had been born and had suffered and died.'¹⁵² In other words Noetus had diminished to nil the distinction between the Father and the Son, and Hippolytus must counter this while not falling into the error of ditheism. He teaches that there is only one God, but within 'the economy' (τὴν οἰκονομίαν).¹⁵³ This economy is actually a 'mystery' which he sees uncovered in the statement in Isaiah:

'in thee is God' [45.14] revealed the mystery of the economy -- that once the Word had taken flesh and was among men, the Father was in the Son and the Son in the Father, while the Son was living among men. So this, brethren, is what was being pointed out -- that the

¹⁴⁹ Exactly which of these and other works are genuinely his has engendered lively discussion. See M. Marcovich, ed., *Hippolytus: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 8-17, who holds for Hippolytus as author of the *Elenchos*, also CPG 1, § 1870, 1899; Quasten, *Patrology* 2.165-198. R. Butterworth, *Hippolytus of Rome, Contra Noetum* (London: Heythrop, 1977), 7-33 and Vallée, *Anti-Gnostic Polemics*, 41-47. The general consensus is that the works mentioned specifically above are likely to be by Hippolytus or a school associated with him, though the debate continues, for which see A. Brent, *Hippolytus*, 197-198 who assigns only the shorter *Syntagma* to Hippolytus himself. For the sake of simplicity we will use the name 'Hippolytus' to include the school.

¹⁵⁰ Along with the fact that his Greek soon became unintelligible to most in the western church, ODC, 'Hippolytus.' Brent (*Hippolytus* 416-420) argues that the term 'antipope' is anachronistic when applied in the early third century to Hippolytus.

¹⁵¹ Theodoret of Cyrhus, *Dialogue 2; Compendium of Heretical Fables* 3.1.

¹⁵² *c. Noet* 1.2, Butterworth 42. Apart from Hippolytus we know little of Noetus, a native of Smyrna and probably the originator of Patripassianism.

¹⁵³ *c. Noet* 3.4, Butterworth 48, cf. 4.5. He has taken this term from Irenaeus (Kelly *Early Christian Doctrines*, 110). Cf. Irenaeus *AH* 1.10.3: 'dispositionem Dei' reconstructed as οἰκονομίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, SC 264.162, also *AH* 3.12.12; 21.1; 24.1; SC 211.234-5, 398-9, 470-3; *AH* 4.1.1; 11.3; SC 100².394-5; 506-7; *AH* 5.2.2; 13.2; 19.2; SC 153.30-1, 168-9, 250-1.

mystery of the economy really was this very Word who fashioned from the Holy Spirit and the virgin an only Son for God.¹⁵⁴

The mystery here is not the incarnation, which Noetus accepted, but the fact that the incarnate Son ‘while distinct from God the Father, nevertheless was one with God.’ So Hippolytus holds that ‘there is one God; but so far as regards the economy, His manifestation is threefold.’¹⁵⁵ This distinction existed before the incarnation and continues after the ascension.¹⁵⁶ He does present the redemption as being accomplished by the expiatory sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, on the cross.¹⁵⁷

He is one of the earliest systematic exegetes in the Church. His high view of Scripture led him to devote energies to a number of texts he considered important, including his vanguard commentary on the Song of Songs which influenced later writers such as Origen, Ambrose and Gregory of Nyssa. His approach to Scripture is typological rather than allegorical, which he considered dangerous.¹⁵⁸ According to Daniélou the analogies Hippolytus constructs in his exposition of the Bible reflect his view that God remains constant in all stages of salvation-history. The same God who saved Adam also aided Daniel in the lion’s den, the three young men, Jonah and all the children of Israel in the crossing of the Red sea.¹⁵⁹ ‘He shows the solid consistency of texture in God’s activity. . . . Scripture is to serve as a touchstone for eliminating every tradition that is of merely human origin.’¹⁶⁰ Scripture then is the final authority in matters of doctrine and belief.¹⁶¹ The errors of heresy are obvious as they are compared to the truth of the Bible, which is our only source of knowledge

¹⁵⁴ *c. Noet.* 4.7-8, Butterworth 52, cf 8.2.

¹⁵⁵ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 110, 106; cf. *c. Noet.* 8.1.

¹⁵⁶ Hippolytus along with Tertullian and Methodius hold not only that Jesus took on flesh in the incarnation but that he took it to heaven in the ascension, thus maintaining the distinction between the Father and Son, C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 100.

¹⁵⁷ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 188, cf. *com. Dan.* 4.30-31.

¹⁵⁸ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 257-271.

¹⁵⁹ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 269-70, cf. *com. Dan.* 2.19, 35, 36.

¹⁶⁰ A. d’Alès, *La théologie de saint Hippolyte* (Paris, 1906), 120, cited in Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 270.

¹⁶¹ *c. Noet.* 2.4, Butterworth 46 and 3.3, Butterworth 48.

about God.¹⁶²

4.5.2 Asceticism in Hippolytus

Both widows and virgins are part of the church life in the *Apostolic Tradition*. The Hippolytan community¹⁶³ as represented by this document is careful to delineate how they fit in relation to other groups. Widows are appointed but not ordained like bishops, presbyters and deacons:

When a widow (χήρα) is appointed (καθιστάναι) she is not ordained (χειροτονεῖν) but she shall be chosen by name. . . . But she shall not be ordained, because she does not offer the oblation (προσφορά) nor has she a <liturgical> ministry (λειτουργία).¹⁶⁴

Virgins seem to have a lower status than widows as they are not even appointed but are only self-designated: ‘A Virgin (παρθένος) does not have an imposition of hands, for personal choice (προαίρεσις) alone is that which makes a virgin.’¹⁶⁵

Widows are recipients of regulated charity.¹⁶⁶ Widows and virgins have the

¹⁶² *c. Noet.* 3.1 and 9.1. In the *Refutation of All Heresies* he takes a different tack, demonstrating the pagan source of heresy is sufficient to the point he does not feel the need for Biblical refutation, Vallée, *Anti-Gnostic Polemics*, 48-62.

¹⁶³ There is a lot of uncertainty concerning even basic issues surrounding the AT; date, provenance, unity, but here it will be treated as a whole, representing a third-century perspective in the Roman church, if not that of the individual Hippolytus, see Brent, *Hippolytus* 184-197.

¹⁶⁴ AT 1.11.1, 4, G. Dix, *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition*, rev. by H. Chadwick (London: SPCK, 1968), 20.

¹⁶⁵ AT 1.13, Dix and Chadwick 21. Methuen (‘Virgin Widow’ 285-298) cautions against a firm and continued distinction between widows and virgins, especially as we proceed further into the third century. She also notes (295) that the specific prohibition in the *Apostolic Tradition* of the ordination of widows and virgins is an indirect witness that there must have been some congregations where these women did have clerical status.

¹⁶⁶ R. Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), 22-24, cf. AT 3.27.1-2. This is congruent with the testimony some twenty years later in the letter from Bishop Cornelius of Rome to Bishop Fabius of Antioch where he mentions the Roman congregation was supporting ‘more than fifteen hundred widows and distressed persons,’ Eusebius, *HE* 6.43.11, Williamson 282. Methuen (‘Virgin Widow’ 292-294) shows that not all widows were poor or of low status.

functions of prayer and fasting.¹⁶⁷ Although not explicitly discussed, certainly the very presence of these groups in the church indicated a high value placed on the renunciation of marriage and sexual expression.¹⁶⁸ But marriage is also approved and sexual contact within marriage does not defile one for prayer: 'He who has used marriage (γάμος) is not defiled; for those who are washed have no need to wash again, for they are pure.'¹⁶⁹ Hippolytus himself engages in a severe disagreement with leaders in Rome over the issue of marriage. Christian women of noble birth had difficulty finding suitable men of equal rank for marriage. A practice arose allowing these women to enter into informal relationships with men of a lower social status. This is bitterly opposed by Hippolytus who sees the issue as one challenging the sanctity of marriage.¹⁷⁰ Ascetic concerns do not arise in the anti-heretical literature. Hippolytus does 'complain of excessive respect for Priscilla and Maximilla' of the New Prophecy movement but without condemning the group as heretical.¹⁷¹ There is no extended discussion of asceticism in any surviving work.¹⁷²

4.5.3 Mary in Hippolytus

Mary appears in a clause of the baptismal confession recorded in the *Apostolic Tradition*: 'Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, Who was born of Holy

¹⁶⁷ AT 1.11.5, 3.25.1. This document is not one of extreme asceticism: widows may partake of wine, 3.27.2.

¹⁶⁸ 'The terms virgin and widow thus carry a shared connotation: that of living a sexually chaste life,' Methuen, 'Virgin Widow' 287.

¹⁶⁹ AT 2.16.6-7 and 3.36.10, Dix and Chadwick 65.

¹⁷⁰ P. Brown, *Body and Society* 147, cf. *haer.* 9.7 where the situation is exacerbated by the practice of these noble women aborting children produced from these informal unions since such offspring would endanger their standing in society.

¹⁷¹ Trevett, *Montanism* 61, cf. *haer.* 8.19 and *com. Dan.* 4.20. It is overstatement then to call Hippolytus a 'bitter foe' of Montanism: K. J. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 29. In his catalog of Gnostic errors Hippolytus includes the teaching of the Naassenes who practiced sexual asceticism and taught that in order to reach the house of God one must be remade male through the 'virgin spirit.' (Rudolph, *Gnosis* 272, cf. *haer.* 5.8.44 and 5.9.10-11).

¹⁷² None of the works now known to be lost seem to address ascetic concerns, see Quasten, *Patrology* 2.195-198. One text which calls 'hermits' pillars of the church, *Fragm. on Prov.* 9.1, is not authentic to Hippolytus, CPG 1883, n. (e).

Spirit and the Virgin Mary?’¹⁷³ While we cannot take this as the official creed of the Roman church,¹⁷⁴ it is probable that it was one of ‘several semi-official creeds or symbols for the Roman Church at the time.’¹⁷⁵ As such it is a further witness that the virginal conception appeared very early in creedal statements in the West.

In several places Hippolytus asserts that Jesus took his humanity, necessary for his salvific mission, from Mary. Among these texts is one which contains a use of ‘the holy virgin Mary’ (τὴν ἁγίαν παρθένον Μαρίαν) as a title:

God the Word came down from the heavens into the holy virgin Mary, so that once he had taken flesh out of her, and taken also a soul of the human kind -- a rational one, I mean . . . he might save fallen Adam.¹⁷⁶

He views Christ as having both a human and a divine nature. The divine nature he speaks of as ‘Spirit’ and the human aspect as ‘flesh.’ This is a ‘Spirit Christology.’

177

Where Mary does appear in apologetic passages against various heretics the issue is not her identity but that of her son Jesus.¹⁷⁸ Hippolytus acknowledges that most of the heretics accept that there was a Mary who bore Jesus. So the issue he addresses again and again is who exactly was the one born of Mary. Some, he says,

¹⁷³ Credis in Christum Iesum filium Di, qui natus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria uirgine, *AT* 2.21.15, Dix and Chadwick, 36. This text does not appear in CMP.

¹⁷⁴ Kelly cautions us that this cannot be taken as an official creed of the Roman church so early, but it certainly was a ‘formal, fixed creed’ which was ‘in use at Rome in his [Hippolytus]’ day and earlier’, *Early Christian Creeds* 90-95. Kelly also argues for the alternative reading, ‘through the Holy Spirit and from Mary the Virgin.’ (de Spiritu sancto ex Maria uirgine), *Creeds*, 91. Pace A. C. Clark who refers to this clause as a standard confession for all candidates for baptism without any of Kelly’s cautions, ‘Born of the Virgin Mary’ *The Way*, Supplement, 25 (1975), 34-45, 34.

¹⁷⁵ F. Jelly, ‘Mary’s Virginité in the Symbols and Councils’ *MSI* 21 (1970), 79, cf. *c. Noet.* 17.2.

¹⁷⁶ *c. Noet.* 17.2, Butterworth 84, Greek text in Butterworth 85, which is more complete than CMP 132: ὅτι Θεὸς Λόγος ἀπ’ οὐρανῶν κατήλθεν εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν παρθένον Μαρίαν, ἵνα σαρκωθεῖς ἐξ αὐτῆς, λαβὼν δὲ καὶ ψυχὴν τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν, λογικὴν δὲ λέγω, . . . σῶση τὸν πεπτωκότα Ἀδὰμ. Also *c. Noet.* 4.8, 10; *antichristo* 4; *AT* 1.4.4; *Fragm. on Prov* 9.1; *haer.* 10.29.

¹⁷⁷ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 144, 149-150, cf. *AT* 1.4.4-6; *c. Noet.* 4.7; 18.1-9.

¹⁷⁸ Most of these heresies were no longer a major threat to the church in his day. Vallée (*Anti-Gnostic Polemics* 61-62) believes he connects views of certain of his contemporaries with these now inactive heresies in order to discredit those he opposes in the church. Rudolf (*Gnosis* 165, 310) notes that Hippolytus at times deviates in details from Irenaeus’ descriptions of the same Gnostic figure, eg, Basilides, *haer.* 7.20-27 and Irenaeus, *AH* 1.24.3-7.

hold that a divine emanation entered into Mary.¹⁷⁹ In one particular heresy Mary herself is seen as an emanation from the pleroma.¹⁸⁰ Others assert that Jesus is the natural son of both Joseph and Mary. Hippolytus cites those who teach an adoptionist descent of the Christ into the man Jesus, usually at his baptism.¹⁸¹ A docetic Christ is found in Hippolytan readings of the 'oriental' school of Valentinus.¹⁸² Other Valentinians hold to three Christs, of whom only one was born of Mary.¹⁸³ Another figure says only the ignorant believe that the son of Man was born of a woman.¹⁸⁴ Hippolytus charges his rival Callistus with a form of monarchianism whereby the Son and the Father are both the same person who is incarnated in the virgin.¹⁸⁵ In one instance he actually commends a heretic for following the Gospel accounts in confessing Christ was born of a virgin and the Spirit.¹⁸⁶ Finally Hippolytus sets forth what he regards as the truth: 'This Logos we know to have received a body from a virgin, and to have remodeled the old man by a new creation.'¹⁸⁷

Mary figures in the fulfillment of a type of Christ. Jacob's dream where the

¹⁷⁹ Valentinus: Jesus is a union of Sophia and the Demiurge, *haer.* 6.35.3-7; Basilides: the Christ descends from the Hebdomad into Jesus son of Mary, *haer.* 7.26.8; 10.10; the Sethians, *haer.* 10.7.

¹⁸⁰ Marcus: the 'virgin' takes the place of 'Ecclesia' though Mary did give birth to Jesus, *haer.* 6.51.1.

¹⁸¹ Natural son: the Jews, *haer.* 9.20.7; Carpocrates, *haer.* 7.32.1. Descent during baptism taught by Theodotus, *haer.* 7.35.1-2, 10.23.1-2. Cerinthus also held that the Christ descended into Jesus at his baptism according to Irenaeus (*AH* 1.26.1), but this is not noted by Hippolytus, *haer.* 7.33.1. Justin in his 'book of Baruch' asserted that Baruch descends into the twelve year old Jesus who was the natural son of both Joseph and Mary, *haer.* 5.24, 10.15.1.

¹⁸² The body Mary bore was spiritual, *haer.* 6.35.7. The group that styled themselves the 'Doketai' are mentioned by Hippolytus but without any reference to a docetic Christology, *haer.* 8.8.2; 8.11.1, Wright, 'Docetism' in DLNTD 306.

¹⁸³ *haer.* 6.36.4.

¹⁸⁴ Monoimus, *haer.* 8.12.1-13.4. Other views of Mary include that of Apelles, a disciple of Marcion who held that Mary is not the source of the flesh of Christ, *haer.* 7.26, 10.20.1.

¹⁸⁵ *haer.* 9.12.17; the same charge is laid against Noetus, *haer.* 9.5. The link between the Father and Son for Callistus is the spirit which was made flesh in the virgin, R. E. Heine, 'The Christology of Callistus' *JTS*, n.s. 49 (1998), 56-91, 64. In his separate work against Noetus he rebukes those who inquire into the pre-incarnate origins of the Son: if only two of the Gospels contain details of his earthly birth how much less likely is it that anyone can know what took place beforehand, *c. Noet.* 16.4-7.

¹⁸⁶ The painter Hermogenes, who is condemned for various other opinions, *haer.* 8.17.2.

¹⁸⁷ *haer.* 10.29.

sun, moon and eleven stars bow to him is a type of the adoration rendered to Christ on the Mount of Olives by the eleven apostles, Joseph and Mary.¹⁸⁸ However Hippolytus does not employ the Eve-Mary parallel.¹⁸⁹ This does not mean he has no antithesis for Eve. In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* he contrasts Eve with those women who are the early witnesses to the risen Lord: ‘so that women too may become apostles, and make manifest the fault of the first Eve’s disobedience by present rectifying obedience.’¹⁹⁰ Elsewhere Mary Magdalene is presented as the new Eve.¹⁹¹ In the *Commentary on Daniel*, the rescued Susanna is not only a fulfilment of the new Eve, but serves as a type for the Church who is delivered by Christ from Satan.¹⁹² His lack of an Eve-Mary antithesis is ‘all the more worthy of notice as his Adam-Christ typology brings in the virgin birth.’¹⁹³ Though Mary is mentioned twice in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Hippolytus does not use her in any typology and there is no hint of later readings of these texts as mariological.¹⁹⁴ The title Θεοτόκος cannot be positively attributed to Hippolytus.¹⁹⁵

Mary is an essential part of the mystery of the economy of the godhead. She is the agency by which Jesus gains human flesh. The process of incarnation, properly understood, refutes the patripassian heresy of Noetus. It shows how there

¹⁸⁸ *bene. pat.* 1, CMP 122, cf. Gen. 37.9.

¹⁸⁹ Acknowledged by Joussard, (‘La Nouvelle Ève’, 42): ‘L’antithèse Marie-Ève au contraire, n’a jamais été signalée chez lui dans aucun des écrits revenus au jour sous son nom.’

¹⁹⁰ *Cant.* 15 on 3.1-4, cited in von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 45, n. 2. Extended discussion in Joussard, ‘La Nouvelle Ève’ 43-45.

¹⁹¹ *Cant.* 25.2-6, cited in Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 267-268.

¹⁹² Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 268, cf. *com. Dan.* 1.17-18.

¹⁹³ von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 50, cf. *Scholia on Daniel* 7.14, c. *Noet.* 17.2-4.

¹⁹⁴ Crouzel notes that in contrast to Origen’s individualized understanding of the Song, Hippolytus only has the collective and ecclesial interpretation, ‘Mariologie d’Origèn,’ SC 87.35.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Joseph betroths Mary to himself and becomes a trustworthy witness to the Mother of God (Θεοτόκου),’ *De benedictionibus patriarcharum* 1.7, cited in Burghardt, ‘Mary in Western Patristic Thought’ 134 who warns that there is no support in the Georgian text, but only in a later Greek translation. Campos does not include it in his text, CMP 122. It is an interpolation according to O’Carroll, *Theotokos*, ‘Theotokos’ and is rejected by Joussard, ‘Marie à travers la patristique’ 86; pace M. Schmaus, ‘Mariology’ in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, A. Darlap, gen. ed. (London: Burns and Oates, 1969) and Hugo Rahner, ‘Hippolyt von Rom als Zeuge für den Ausdruck Θεοτόκος,’ *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 59 (1935), 73-81.

can be both a divine Son on earth and a divine Father in heaven.¹⁹⁶ Hippolytus has a penchant for extended typology.¹⁹⁷ He uses the craft of weaving to illustrate the Incarnation. It is significant that he assigns no role to Mary in this analogy, despite specifically mentioning her in his introduction:

For whereas the Word of God was without flesh, He took upon Himself the holy flesh by the holy Virgin, and prepared a robe which He wove for Himself, like a bridegroom in the sufferings of the cross, in order that by uniting His own power with our mortal body, and by mixing (μιξας) the incorruptible with the corruptible, and the strong with the weak, He might save perishing man. The web-beam, therefore, is the passion of the Lord upon the cross, and the warp on it is the power of the Holy Spirit, and the woof is the holy flesh wrought (woven) by the Spirit, and the thread is the grace which by the love of Christ binds and unites the two in one, and the combs or (rods) are the Word; and the workers are the patriarchs and prophets who weave the fair, long, perfect tunic for Christ; and the Word passing through these, like combs or (rods), completes through them that which His Father willeth.¹⁹⁸

There are a few instances where Hippolytus styles Mary as ‘holy.’¹⁹⁹ It is unlikely that this carries any meaning beyond an ascription of dignity and respect. She is also addressed as ‘O blessed Mary’ (ὦ μακαρία Μαρία) in a fragment preserved by Theodoret. This is a rhetorical device and cannot be taken as evidence of intercession to Mary. There is no indication anywhere in Hippolytus of any awareness of devotion to Mary though he does apply honorific epithets to her. He explicitly depicts Mary actively worshipping her son Jesus.²⁰⁰

In his *Refutation* the person of Mary is adduced in order to establish that the

¹⁹⁶ *c. Noet.* 4.8.

¹⁹⁷ Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 262-271.

¹⁹⁸ *Antichr.* 4, ANF 5.205.

¹⁹⁹ *Antichr.* 4, CMP 126; *c. Noet.* 17.2, CMP 132. Burghardt, ‘Mary in Western Patristic Thought’ 138-139.

²⁰⁰ *In Elcana et Anna*, in Theodoret, *Dial.* 1, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff, (New York, 1887-1892, reissued on CD ROM, Albany, OR: Sage Digital Library, 1996), 3.355. Alvarez Campos places this text under the heading of ‘Rhetorica ad Mariam invocatio,’ CMP 135. There is no other place where Hippolytus addresses Mary. However he is explicit in depicting Mary as worshipping her son Jesus, *de benedictionibus patriarcharum* 1, CMP 122.

flesh of Christ is also the flesh of Adam and thus salvation can be accomplished. This recapitulative theory is drawn from the more fully developed system in Irenaeus.²⁰¹ Also Hippolytus wishes to show the unity of the Godhead while maintaining the distinction between the Father and the Son. This is his overarching theological point: the Son and the Father have the same relationship before, during and after the incarnation, they are ‘distinct, though co-inherent.’²⁰² Mary then is the instrument by which the pre-incarnate Son obtains flesh while remaining God. She was ‘literally pregnant with the Word of God, with God’s Son.’²⁰³

Hippolytus has no discussion of the virginity of Mary apart from calling her ‘virgin’ in line with the apostolic testimony to her virginity *ante partum*.²⁰⁴ She certainly never appears in any connection with ascetic practice nor is she held up as a model for believers in any sense. Jesus as the ‘firstborn man’ is more likely to refer to his parallel with Adam than to any nascent doctrine of Mary’s universal maternity of all believers.²⁰⁵ There is no justification in calling Hippolytus a ‘Mariologist.’²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ *c. Noet.* 17.2, *com. Dan.* 4.11 on 7.14, *haer.* 10.29, *Fragm. in magnum Canticum*, in Theodoret, *Dial.* 2, *Fragm. in Proverbs*, cf. Irenaeus, *AH* 3.21.10, 4.40.3, 5.1.2; *Dem.* 37.

²⁰² Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* 111.

²⁰³ Burghardt, ‘Western’ 134-135, cf. *De benedictionibus patriarcharum* 27, CMP 125, *Antichr.* 45, *c. Noet.* 4.8, 17.2.

²⁰⁴ P. J. Donnelly (‘Perpetual Virginity’ 2.272, n. 154) says it is ‘unfortunate’ that no Hippolytan text can be produced in favor of the *post partum* virginity. He admits even the fragment preserved in Theodoret on Ps 23 (22) is not clear enough, CMP 137: ‘Ο δὲ Κύριος ἀναμάρτητος ἦν, ἐκ τῶν ἀσῆπτων ξύλων τὸ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

²⁰⁵ *In Elcana et Anna*, in Theodoret, *Dial.* 1, CMP 135; *pace* O’Carroll, *Theotokos*, ‘Hippolytus.’ Gambero (*Mary and the Fathers of the Church* 88) is more cautious: ‘it was still too early for a reflection of this kind.’

²⁰⁶ *Pace* Hugo Rahner, ‘Hippolyt von Rom als Zeuge für den Ausdruck Θεοτόκος,’ *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 59 (1935), 73-81, cited and challenged in von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 50.

4.6 CYPRIAN

4.6.1 His life and Theology

The ecclesiastical career of Cyprian fits in the span of a single decade. He was elected bishop of Carthage in 249 and was martyred in 258. During his episcopate he dealt with serious divisions within the African church, including the issues of rebaptism of those baptized in schism and how to deal with those who had lapsed in persecution. We see him standing up to schismatics and resisting the attempts by Stephen, bishop of Rome, to assert the primacy of the Roman church.²⁰⁷ His letters reveal a man deeply touched by the suffering of his fellow Christians at the hands of the State.²⁰⁸ His highest values are loyalty to Christ and His Church. These are expressed in his ardent fervor for unity.

The center of his thought is the Church; its nature and unity.²⁰⁹ There is no salvation outside of the Church.²¹⁰ In his battles against schismatics he affirmed his grand theme of unity of the church. However since many of these schismatics were as orthodox as Cyprian himself, he was forced to ground his arguments for unity on something other than doctrinal content.²¹¹ The unity of the church 'is to be found in the consensus of the collective episcopate.'²¹² This unity is then displayed in many ways, including corporate prayer.²¹³ He is well known for his declaration, 'He

²⁰⁷ Summaries of his life in EEC and Quasten, *Patrology* 2.340-345, and on the persecution, G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage, Vol. 1: Letters 1-27*, ACW 43 (New York: Newman, 1984), 12-44.

²⁰⁸ Eg, Ep. 62 and 76.

²⁰⁹ Quasten, *Patrology* 2.373.

²¹⁰ Ep. 73.21: 'salus extra ecclesiam non est,' cited in Quasten 2.373.

²¹¹ Eg, Novatian, Ep 69.7-11.

²¹² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 204, 206, cf. Ep. 33.1, 66.8.

²¹³ *unit.* 12, FC 36.107; *dom. orat.* 8.

cannot have God as a father who does not have the Church as a mother.²¹⁴

4.6.2 Asceticism in Cyprian

Much of Cyprian's ascetic thought is found in the *De habitu virginum*.²¹⁵ Those who have 'renounced the concupiscences of the flesh' are now 'the flower of the tree that is the Church.'²¹⁶ Virginity is not commanded but encouraged and is a matter of individual choice.²¹⁷ The treatise addresses various practical matters. Virgins are to dress modestly and to avoid visiting the public baths and even weddings.²¹⁸ Another problem was the practice of *subintroductae*, which Cyprian rejects as inherently dangerous. Female virgins who succumb to temptation have committed adultery not against a husband but Christ.²¹⁹ On the other hand, virgins captured by barbarians must be ransomed to save their 'honor of continence.'²²⁰ Cyprian does not only contemplate single young women as ascetics. A bishop is commended for his 'virginal continence.' Widows are part of the church, which owes them a duty of care.²²¹ Providing penance for adulterers does not diminish the 'vigor of continency'.²²² Widows and virgins were among those who suffered for their

²¹⁴ *unit.* 6, FC 36.100, cf. Ep. 74.7, FC 51.290. The church is 'mater' some thirty times in Cyprian according to J. C. Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia* 81, cf. *unit.* 5, 6, 19, 23; *hab. virg.* 3, Ep. 10.1, 10.4, 44.3, 45.1, 46.2, 47, 73.19.

²¹⁵ Keenan, in the introduction to her translation of this treatise, notes that it is mostly a 'composite of extracts' from the Scriptures and the ascetic works of Tertullian, mainly his *De cultu feminarum*, FC 36.28.

²¹⁶ *hab. virg.* 4 and 3.

²¹⁷ *hab. virg.* 23. Keroloss ('Virginity in the Early Church' 268) notes there is no sign of a public vow for virginity in Cyprian.

²¹⁸ *hab. virg.* 8-16, 18-19. Cyprian has in mind pagan wedding ceremonies.

²¹⁹ Some virgins claimed innocence after physical examination but Cyprian counters by saying virginity is more than mere intactness of the hymen, Ep 4.3. Ep 4.4.

²²⁰ Ep 62.2, FC 51.201.

²²¹ Ep 55.8, FC 51.138; Ep. 7.

²²² Ep 55.20, FoC 51.146, 'continentiae uigor,' G. F. Diercks, ed., *St. Cypriani Episcopi Epistularium*, CCSL IIIB (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1994), 279.

faith.²²³ Cyprian does recognize the patience required not only for virgins and widows to live rightly, but also for husbands and wives.²²⁴

The three elements of asceticism identified by Valantasis, performance, intention and novelty/rejection,²²⁵ are found in Cyprian. Both the sexually continent and those suffering for their faith are observed by both God and men. This element of performance is found in his advice to virgins on clothing that they may be 'known and considered' as virgins because they bear the image of Christ, who is angry when they fail to keep their chastity intact.²²⁶ A martyr 'displays' himself and is a 'spectacle of the Lord . . . acceptable to the eyes of God.'²²⁷ Martyrs are models for others in the church: 'You have made your martyrdoms examples.'²²⁸

The life of sexual renunciation is one of intentionally cutting away at fleshly desires to obtain a heavenly reward.²²⁹ This life is a difficult ascent towards a reward second only to that of martyrs.²³⁰ The labor and hardship of the mines stain and wear down the physical body while at the same the inner person is 'spiritually cleansed.'²³¹ In less extreme circumstances, full participation in church life, including communion, prepares one for the contest to come.²³²

The ascetic must live a life that is strikingly novel, no longer having 'desires of the flesh and of the body'.²³³ The virgin is transformed even while still on earth: 'The glory of the resurrection you already have in this world; you pass through the

²²³ Ep 66.7, *laps.* 2.

²²⁴ *bon. pat.* 20.

²²⁵ Valantasis, 'Constructions of Power in Asceticism,' *JAAR* 63 (1995), 775-821.

²²⁶ *hab. virg.* 4, 5, FC 36.34-35; *hab. virg.* 23; Ep 4.3.

²²⁷ *unit.* 14; Ep. 10.2, FC 51.25. Also Ep 10.1, 37.3, 58.8, 60.2, 76.4.

²²⁸ Ep. 37.4, FC 51.97, 'martyria uestra exempla fecistis,' Diercks *St. Cypriani Episcopi Epistularium*, 182; also Ep 76.6.

²²⁹ *hab. virg.* 23, also 5 and 21.

²³⁰ *hab. virg.* 21. Virgins who undergo persecution add to their sixtyfold reward the hundredfold of martyrdom, Ep. 76.6.

²³¹ Ep 76.2, FC 51.315.

²³² Ep 58.1-11.

²³³ *hab. virg.* 23, FC 36.51.

world without the pollution of the world; while you remain chaste and virgins, you are equal to the angels of God.²³⁴ This implies a rejection of the old ways so complete that virgins ought not even attend weddings.²³⁵ The punishment inflicted upon martyrs and confessors will ‘be changed . . . as ‘the Lord will refashion the body of our lowliness’ [Phil 3.21].²³⁶ This is fully realized in heaven where crowned martyrs and victorious virgins stand alongside apostles, prophets and all the faithful in the true native land of the believer.²³⁷

4.6.3 Mary in Cyprian

Apart from Biblical quotations²³⁸ we only have two texts where Cyprian mentions Mary in his own words.²³⁹ She figures in his grand theme of unity in the church. In two places he cites Acts 1.14 and argues that the corporate prayer of the early church, which included, among others, Mary, is a powerful testimony to unity.²⁴⁰ He is the first to connect the Genesis 3.14-15 text with that of Isaiah 7.14, ‘God had foretold as proceeding from the woman this seed that should trample on the head of the devil.’²⁴¹ We also know from his letters that some Christian families named their

²³⁴ *hab. virg.* 22, FC 36.50, cf. *test. libri* 3.32, *pace* Brown, *Body and Society* 195.

²³⁵ *hab. virg.* 18.

²³⁶ Ep 76.2, 51.315-6. The burning of a Christian wife and mother is rather thought of as her preservation, Ep. 40, FC 51.103.

²³⁷ *mort.* 26, FC 36.220.

²³⁸ He cites from the Isaiah 7 prophecy in *Ep.* 10.4.2, CMP 443 and *test. libri* 2.9, CMP 446; from the Gospel of Luke in *test. libri* 2.10, CMP 447; *test. libri* 2.11, CMP 448; and *test. libri* 2.8, not in CMP; from the Gospel of Matthew in *test. libri* 2.7, CMP 445. He twice cites Acts 1.14 in *unit.* 25 and *dom. orat.* 8, both not in CMP.

²³⁹ *De idolorum vanitate* 11, CMP 442 and Ep. 73.5.2, CMP 444.

²⁴⁰ *unit.* 25 and *dom. orat.* 8. Neither of these is to be found in CMP.

²⁴¹ *test. libri* 2.9, thanks to D. F. Wright for this translation. It is clear in Cyprian that the one treading on the devil’s head is the seed, not the woman: ‘Hoc semen praedixerat Deus de muliere procedere quod calcaret caput diaboli.’ (CMP 446) Irenaeus had earlier connected Christ with this seed, *AH* 5.21.1.

girls in honor of Mary.²⁴² Cyprian affirms his belief in the virginal conception as part of the incarnation of the Son of God: ‘He is the power of God; He is the reason; He is His wisdom and glory; He enters into a virgin; the Holy Spirit put on flesh; God mingles with man. This is our God; this our Christ.’²⁴³ Heretics like Marcion are not of the true faith because they fail to recognize the Christ who was ‘born of the Virgin Mary.’²⁴⁴

Cyprian often turns to ascetic concerns in his writings. His treatise on the practice of virginity is one of the first in the history of the church. Christ is, for him, the paramount example for all who have renounced sexual activity: ‘Continenence follows Christ.’ Mary is not adduced as a model for these virgins.²⁴⁵ ‘Cyprian’s disregard of Mary is particularly striking because he himself was not only an ascetic, but, especially in the writings for “virgins”, also a zealous champion of ascetic ideals.’²⁴⁶

4.7 NOVATIAN

4.7.1 His life and theology

Novatian was a presbyter of the church at Rome who died during the persecution of Valerian, c. 258. Like Hippolytus in the previous generation, Novatian was involved in controversy and was elected by a minority party as bishop of Rome. He was

²⁴² Ep. 21.4, 22.3.

²⁴³ *Quod idola* 11, FC 36.357-8. The prophesied virginal conception is a key element of the heavenly struggle for salvation. This celestial battle is reflected in the combat of the martyr, Ep. 10.4.

²⁴⁴ Ep. 73.5. Marcion’s Christ was not born of Mary but was a ‘bodily manifestation’ of the supreme god, G. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage, Vol. 4: Letters 67-82*, ACW 47 (NY: Newman, 1989), 226. Cyprian has no hint of a virginity *post partum* or *in partu*.

²⁴⁵ *hab. virg.* 5, FC 36.35, PL 4.456: ‘Quod si Christum continentia sequitur,’ cf. *hab. virg.* 7. Virgins are to bear the image of the second man, Christ, who stands in contrast to Adam, the first man, *hab. virg.* 23. Mary is not mentioned anywhere in this work. Christ is also the model for martyrs, Ep. 58.1-2.

²⁴⁶ von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 51.

excommunicated in 251 by a synod in Rome.²⁴⁷ His *De trinitate* is the earliest Latin theological treatise surviving from the church in Rome²⁴⁸ and is entirely orthodox. It was preserved despite his schismatic reputation by inclusion among the works of Tertullian.²⁴⁹ It is a commentary on the rule of faith and a large portion (ch 12-28) sets out proofs of the divinity of Christ.²⁵⁰ He makes a distinction between Christ's two natures, the 'Son of God' and the 'Son of man' which are united, 'Man is joined to God, and God is coupled to Man.'²⁵¹ He advances theology with his description of Christ as 'Verbum Dei incarnatum.'²⁵² He turns tables on the docetics who disparage marriage by asking why their Christ would assume the appearance of one born in marriage.²⁵³

Novatian takes a rigorist stance on the issue of the lapsed. He argues that those who merely paid a bribe to secure a libellus are as guilty as those who actually sacrificed; both equally dishonor Christ. The lapsed should knock at the door of the church but not break it down in seeking restoration, which should be offered only at the end of their lives.²⁵⁴ After his questionable election as bishop his views harden to the extent that he calls for the excommunication of the lapsed and considers penance 'shameful evidence of sins committed.'²⁵⁵

²⁴⁷ Eusebius, *HE* 6.42, cited in DeSimone, *Novatian*, FC 67 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1972), 6. Socrates records his martyrdom, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.28. For a summary of his life and influence, see Quasten, *Patrology* 2.212-216.

²⁴⁸ It was written 'well before 250,' Quasten, *Patrology* 2.217.

²⁴⁹ ODCC, 'Novatianism.' The word 'trinitas' does not occur in the treatise and was probably added sometime after Nicaea, DeSimone, FC 67.23, n. 1. His works *de Spectaculis* and *de bono pudicitiae* survived under Cyprian's name.

²⁵⁰ DeSimone, FC 67.14.

²⁵¹ He uses these terms: permixtio, connexio, concordia, concretum and confibulatio, A. Grillmeier *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd edn (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 1.131, citing *trin.* 24. Also *trin.* 15.4, FC 67.58.

²⁵² *trin.* 24 in Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 1.132.

²⁵³ *trin.* 10.5, FC 67.45.

²⁵⁴ In Cyprian, *Ep.* 30.3, FC 51.74 and *Ep.* 30.6,8, FC 51.77-78.

²⁵⁵ *bon. pud.* 13.4, cited in EEC, 'Novatian.'

4.7.2 Asceticism in Novatian

He treats asceticism in several places, including the treatises *de bono pudicitiae* and *de cibis iudaicis*. His rigorism is based on his ideal of a pure church. He may have lived as a hermit for a time.²⁵⁶ He urges sexual purity for the sake of clarity of parentage of children. He sees the practice of sexual asceticism in three levels: ‘Purity holds first place among virgins, second place among those who exercise continence, third place among the married,’ but is glorious in all three degrees.²⁵⁷ He describes the virgin as already living the life of the afterlife, equal to the angels.²⁵⁸ Ascetic practice gives one mastery over desires which results in victory over pleasure and fear and gains peace and freedom.²⁵⁹ Novatian does not demand extreme dietary asceticism, indeed those who do are only giving a ‘show of religion because the body is treated severely.’²⁶⁰ In his treatise *de spectaculis* he argues that Christians must shun the pagan shows and turn to the only appropriate ‘spectacles’ which include contemplation of the beauty of the world and the heavens and the stories in the Scriptures. The ultimate spectacle is the vision of one’s own salvation.²⁶¹ Those suffering for their faith are to keep this salvation in mind. He commends Cyprian for stirring up the confessors ‘to a much more ardent longing for heavenly glory.’²⁶²

Novatian adduces only two models of purity: Joseph and Susanna. For men the example is the resistance by Joseph of the seductions of Potiphar’s wife. For women the model is Susanna who was falsely accused by the lustful elders. He

²⁵⁶ ‘Novatian,’ EEC.

²⁵⁷ *bon. pud.* 3.1, 4 and 4.1, FC 67.168.

²⁵⁸ *bon. pud.* 7.2-4, FC 67.170.

²⁵⁹ *bon. pud.* 11.4-5.

²⁶⁰ *cib.* 5.18, FC 67.153.

²⁶¹ *spectac.* 2, using Platonic categories for which he was criticized by Cyprian, Ep. 60.3, cited in R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 542, and *spectac.* 9-10.

²⁶² Preserved in Cyprian, Ep. 30.5, FC 51.75 and FC 67.191.

states these two are sufficient to establish the case for purity.²⁶³

4.7.3 Mary in Novatian

In what is extant of Novatian we have only five references to Mary, all in his treatise *de trinitate*.²⁶⁴ Three²⁶⁵ are just passing references to the prophecies of the Christ in Isaiah which establishes that the same Son predicted in the OT is manifested in the NT.²⁶⁶ Novatian takes to task docetic heretics who hold that Christ ‘took nothing from Mary’ (*ex Maria nihil accepit*), thus rendering salvation ineffective.²⁶⁷

Novatian utilizes the image of a husband joining with his bride to illustrate the union of the two natures in Christ at his nativity.²⁶⁸ This is not a union of two distinct Sons but in his comments on Lk 1.35 he does seem to distinguish between the ‘holy thing’ born of Mary which is the man Jesus and the divine spirit who comes upon her, and by assuming the Son of Man makes him to be the Son of God:

Scripture clearly shows that this holy thing that is born of her--that is, that substance of flesh and body--is not primarily but subsequently and secondarily (*sed consequenter et in secundo loco*) the Son of God. Primarily, however (*principaliter autem*), the Son of God is the Word of God, incarnate through that Spirit of whom the angel relates, ‘The spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.’²⁶⁹

²⁶³ *bon. pud.* 8-9, and 9.6, FC 67.172.

²⁶⁴ CMP has two: *trin.* 10.6, CMP 450 and *trin.* 24.4-7, CMP 451.

²⁶⁵ These three are not in CMP: *trin.* 9.6, 12.3, and 28.7-8. Two others are not strictly Marian references, mentioning his birth in passing, *trin.* 11.8 and 13.3-4. In another place he lambasts Christians for knowing the pedigree of racing horses better than the names of Christ’s parents, *spectac.* 5.4.

²⁶⁶ *trin.* 9.6, cf. 12.3.

²⁶⁷ *trin.* 10.6, CMP 450.

²⁶⁸ *trin.* 13.4 citing Ps 18(19).6-7. DeSimone (FC 67.53, n. 11) believes the ‘bridal chamber’ is a distinct reference to the womb of Mary. This is unlikely. Kelly (*Early Christian Doctrines* 152) takes this passage as describing the incarnation in terms of sexual union in marriage. Justin applies the same Psalm text to explicate the identity of the one born of the virgin as the Son of God, *1Apol.* 54.

²⁶⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 153, *trin.* 24.4-7, FC 67.87 = CMP 451.

Novatian's few references to Mary are all without ascetic content. She is the fulfillment of prophecy and the way the Son of God gains a human body. His models for sexual purity are Joseph, Susanna, and the Church, the bride of Christ. The church 'herself is given in marriage as a virgin bride' to Christ and so stands as a model for individual Christian purity. Mary is not a model for purity or for any other behavior.²⁷⁰

4.8 APOCRYPHAL AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHAL TEXTS

We turn now to some references to Mary found in various apocryphal and pseudepigraphal works. These are extracanonical writings which either claim authorship by or devote narrative to biblical figures, mostly of the NT.²⁷¹

4.8.1 The Ascension of Isaiah

This apocalyptic work was composed in Greek in Syria, probably between 112 and 138 A D.²⁷² Written in response to the local state persecution discussed in the letters between Pliny and Trajan²⁷³, it tells of two visions given to the prophet Isaiah and of his martyrdom. These visions describe the descent, incarnation, life, death and ascent to God of the 'beloved one,' the name given to Christ.

Church practices are not directly discussed but a flavor of asceticism is detected in the depiction of Isaiah founding an ascetic community and the prediction that the faithful will take to the desert during the reign of Beliar.²⁷⁴ The community

²⁷⁰ *bon. pud.* 8-9 and 2.2, FC 67.166.

²⁷¹ Following the definition of R. Bauckham, 'Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Writings,' DLNTD 68-73. For the *Protevangelium of James* see chapter 2, section 2.4.

²⁷² J. Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One: The Christology, Social Setting and Theological Context of the Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 21, 33.

²⁷³ Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 205-212.

²⁷⁴ *Asc. Isa.* 2.9-11 and 4.13-14 as discussed in Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 43.

of the author displays itself apart from the larger church which has abandoned the 'teaching of the twelve apostles, and their faith, and their love, and their purity,' showing elements of performance and rejection.²⁷⁵ Isaiah 'spurns the destruction of his flesh' when facing martyrdom.²⁷⁶ The second vision has a utopian character which indicates the community's desire for transformation.²⁷⁷

The second vision (ch. 6-11) sets out details of the descent of the Beloved One from heaven to earth culminating in ch. 11 where he is born from Mary as a human child. Mary is of the family of David, and while betrothed to Joseph and still a virgin 'she was found to be pregnant.'²⁷⁸ The birth of Jesus was far from normal: Mary gives birth before she is aware of what is happening, she has no attending midwife and no birth pains. The lack of pain and this description in verse 9: 'her womb was found as (it was) at first, before she conceived' comprise the earliest witness to Mary's virginity *in partu*.²⁷⁹ The true nature of the incarnation is hidden from the world at large even in the fact that Jesus takes Mary's breast 'as was customary, that he might not be recognized.'²⁸⁰ These unusual features surrounding the birth have led some to accuse the *Asc. Isa.* of a kind of docetism²⁸¹ though it is not a full denial of the humanity of Jesus.²⁸² Others have ascribed the lack of pain

²⁷⁵ *Asc. Isa.* 3.21, cited in Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 46. Cf. Valantasis, 'Constructions of Power' 797, 799. The criticism of the institutional church and its leaders continues to 3.31.

²⁷⁶ Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 54, cf. 5.9-10.

²⁷⁷ Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 266-267.

²⁷⁸ *Asc. Isa.* 11.3, all translations cited are by M. A. Knibb in OTP, Charlesworth, ed., 2.174-5.

²⁷⁹ *Asc. Isa.* 11.8-14. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* 33, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 492 and Burghardt, 'Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought' 102.

²⁸⁰ *Asc. Isa.* 11.17. Knight (*Disciples of the Beloved One* 67, n. 211) argues that the hiddenness theme (hidden descent) is from a tradition used by both the *Asc. Isa.* and Ignatius, *Eph.* 19.1 The Gnostic descent of the Redeemer is quite different, Knight 171-182. He also argues this theme of hidden descent comes to the author of *Asc. Isa.* from Jewish angelology, Knight 146-9, following Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* 206-210.

²⁸¹ Graef 1.34 and Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 89, 148: 'naïvely docetic.' Hannah denies it by narrowing his definition of doceticism, 'The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christology' *VC* 53 (1999), 165-196, also Plumpe, 'Early Witnesses' 572-574.

²⁸² Both the birth and death (3.13) of Jesus are real in the *Asc. Isa.*, so this work cannot be among the docetic opponents of Ignatius, *Tr.* 10.1, *Sm.* 2.1-2, Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 203.

and the state of Mary's womb to asceticism, but we find no such connection.²⁸³

Rather the depiction of these birth events follows the broader theme of mystery and mysticism that colors the entire process of descent and reascent of the Beloved One.

4.8.2 The Sibylline Oracles

The Christian Sibylline Oracles were thought to testify to pagan and Jewish prophecies of Christ.²⁸⁴ The portions of interest here, Books 1 and 8, are to be dated in the decades before 180 A.D.²⁸⁵ A form of logos christology is evident: 'A word flew to her womb. In time it was made flesh and came to life in the womb, and was fashioned in mortal form and became a boy by virgin birth;' and in a Christian insertion into an earlier Jewish passage: 'the maid (δάμαλις) shall give birth to the Logos of God Most High.'²⁸⁶ Gabriel informs the Virgin Mary, 'Receive God, Virgin, in your immaculate bosom,' at the least a reference to her *ante partum* virginity and when taken with the next line, possibly a reference to her virginity *in partu*: 'Thus speaking, he breathed in the grace of God, even to one who was always a maiden.'²⁸⁷

While 'martyrs and virgins are singled out for special honor,' so also are

²⁸³ *Pace Mary in NT 278.*

²⁸⁴ For pre-Christian background of the Sibyl, see A. Kurfess, NTA, 2.703-709 and J. Collins, OTP, 1.317-320. The collection we now have is a 'maze of voices of many centuries, of pagans, Jews and Christians, of orthodox and heretics, who speak through one another and against one another' Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 1.59.

²⁸⁵ A. Kurfess, NTA, and J. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement*, Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series, 7S (Scholars Press, 1981), 185; ODCC, 'Sibylline Oracles.'

²⁸⁶ *Sib. Or.* 8.469-472, trans. By J. Collins in OTP, 1.428 and 1.323 a, trans. by A. Kurfess in NTA, 1.709 (= CMP 354). Grillmeier (*Christ in Christian Tradition* 63) characterizes the latter as a 'formula of the Logos christology which is not far distant from the title Theotokos' and dates it to about 150 AD, also O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, 'Theotokos.' But some doubt it is a Marian reference at all, *Mary in NT 272.*

²⁸⁷ *Sib. Or.* 8.461-462, trans. Collins, 1.428, cf. B. Bagatti, 'La verginità di Maria negli apocriphi del II-III secolo,' *Marianum*, 33 (1971), 281-292. The Virgin intercedes for penitents in a passage that appears twice: 2.311-2 and 8.357-8, CMP 356.

married believers;²⁸⁸ there is no emphasis on asceticism. Various sins, including sexual offenses are condemned, but this is eschatological not ascetic exhortation.²⁸⁹ There is therefore no ascetic application to the figure of Mary even while her virginity both before and possibly after the birth of Jesus is indicated.

4.8.3 The Odes of Solomon

The Odes of Solomon is a collection of hymnic and poetic material which comes from the early Syrian church.²⁹⁰ While most scholars place the date of composition of the Odes in the second century, there is a case to be made for a later date possibly extending into the early third century.²⁹¹ The Odes have numerous references to baptism which may indicate the purpose of the work.²⁹² The theological themes of the Odes include God as Creator, the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son, the activity of the Holy Spirit and the division of humankind into two classes,

²⁸⁸ J. Collins, 'Sibylline Oracles' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. F. Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6.5, cf. *Sib. Or.* 2.46-48, 53. See also the exhortation to moderation in eating and drinking, 2.95 and 142-145, cf. 131.

²⁸⁹ OTP, 1.323, *contra* 'the oracles specifically attack idolatry and sexuality,' 'Sibylline Oracles' in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3. The sexual polemic is not found in Book 8, OTP 1.417.

²⁹⁰ The consensus is that the original language was the Aramaic dialect Syriac, see AbouZayd, *Ihdayutha: A Study of the Life of Singleness in the Syrian Orient* 14-15; P. Cameron, 'The Crux in Ode of Solomon 19:6: A New Solution' *JTS* n.s. 42 (1991), 588-596; H. Drijvers, 'The 19th Ode of Solomon: Its Interpretation and Place in Syrian Christianity', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 31 (1980), 337-355; and J. Charlesworth, OTP, 2.726. The work is not Gnostic as has been conclusively shown by J. Charlesworth, 'The Odes of Solomon - Not Gnostic' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 31 (1969), 357-369 and E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 91-94, now see Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* 8, *contra* Rudolph, *Gnosis* 29, 65, 221-222 and von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 55 n. 2. Late: Gnosticism does cite *Ode 19: Pistis Sophia* 1.59, *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, ed. by C. Schmidt, trans. by V. Macdermot (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 116-117.

²⁹¹ H. Drijvers makes a strong case for the earliest date being A.D. 200, 'The 19th Ode' 337-355. Among other arguments he shows that the Odist follows the precise order of scriptural testimonia as the *Diatessaron* of Tatian (p. 351). For those accepting a second century date, see AbouZayd, *Ihdayutha* 14, Quasten, *Patrology* 1.161, Altaner, *Patrology* 63 and ODCC. Charlesworth (OTP, 2.725) estimates a date of about A.D. 100 based on a view that Ignatius used the Odes as a source, but this is questioned by Drijvers, 351-352. Some provide a range as wide as from the late first century to the early third, R. Bauckham, DLNTD 73.

²⁹² AbouZayd, *Ihdayutha* 15, Quasten, *Patrology* 1.161.

those who believe and those who do not.²⁹³ Apart from the use of the image of the Church as Virgin in Ode 33, there is little else that is connected to asceticism.²⁹⁴ Ode 19 is the only passage which refers to Mary.²⁹⁵ This Ode begins with ‘explicitly sexual imagery’ which serves to set the process of incarnation apart from all ‘normal activity of human procreation.’²⁹⁶ All three persons of the Godhead work together to provide the salvation found in Christ. The Son issues from the Father by the agency of the Holy Spirit:

- 1 A cup of milk was offered to me,
and I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord’s kindness.
- 2 The Son is the cup,
and the Father is he who was milked;
and the Holy Spirit is she who milked him;
- 3 Because his breasts were full,
and it was undesirable that his milk should be released without
purpose.
- 4 The Holy Spirit opened her bosom,
and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.
- 5 Then she gave the mixture to the generation without their knowing,
and those who have received (it) are in the perfection of the right
hand.²⁹⁷

Now the Odist proceeds to the incarnation where the Virgin Mary has an essential part:

²⁹³ Charlesworth, OTP, 2.728-730, *pace* Quasten who sees ‘no traces of theological or speculative thought,’ *Patrology* 1.162.

²⁹⁴ Ode 33.1-13. W. S. McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam* 33, contra J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* 32-33 and Keroloss, ‘Virginity in the Early Church’ 168, n. 122. AbouZayd makes no mention of any ascetic concerns in the Odes, *Ihdayutha* 14-15 and 46-48.

²⁹⁵ Ode 19.1-11, CMP 358-359. For translations see Charlesworth, OTP, 2.735-771 and Drijvers, ‘The 19th Ode’ 339-340. Alvarez Campos includes Ode 33.1-9 (CMP 360) but the context indicates it is the Church, not Mary which is in view, see especially 33.13, ‘my elect ones have walked with me’ translated by Charlesworth, OTP, 2.764. The lack of Marian material is reflected in the minimal mention made of the Odes in Gambero (*Mary and the Fathers of the Church* 34), Graef (1.35) and O’Carroll, *Theotokos*, ‘Apocrypha.’

²⁹⁶ J. Lagrand, ‘How was the Virgin Mary “Like a Man”?’ *Novum Testamentum*, 22 (1980), 97-107, 103.

²⁹⁷ Ode 19.1-5, Charlesworth, OTP 2.752. A similar image is employed by Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1.6.35, 42-43, 45-46, and 49, cited in Drijvers, ‘The 19th Ode’ 344.

- 6 The womb of the Virgin took (it),
and she received conception and gave birth.
- 7 So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies.
- 8 And she labored and bore the Son but without pain,
because it did not occur without purpose.
- 9 And she did not seek a midwife,
because he caused her to give life.
- 10 She bore as a strong man with desire,
and she bore according to the manifestation,
and possessed with great power.
- 11 And she loved with salvation,
and guarded with kindness,
and declared with greatness.²⁹⁸

An alternative translation for verse 6 has been proposed: ‘The womb of the Virgin blossomed, and she conceived and gave birth.’²⁹⁹ In any case what stands out is the clear affirmation of the virginal conception by divine agency and the references to the lack of pain in birth and the absence of a midwife. The latter two items seem to indicate the Odists held to a virginity *in partu* as well as *ante partum*. Both are indications of God’s direct power in bringing about the birth of his Son through Mary.³⁰⁰

The Odes are a witness to the virginity *in partu* in the Syrian church in the late second or early third century, but apart from any ascetic application.³⁰¹ This work lends no support, even implicitly, to any veneration of Mary.³⁰² The focus of Ode 19 is not on Mary but on the divine power which accomplished the incarnation, a process in which Mary actively cooperates. The explicit absence of a midwife in

²⁹⁸ Ode 19.6-11, Charlesworth, OTP, 2.752-3.

²⁹⁹ Cameron, ‘The Crux in Ode of Solomon 19:6,’ 595.

³⁰⁰ Drijvers, ‘The 19th Ode’ 347: ‘God’s delivering of Mary functions as His life-giving to the world, for this life is in His and Mary’s Son.’ This is congruent with J. Lagrand’s reading of verse 10, which shows Mary’s ‘decisive obedience’ which is in line with God’s plan, ‘How was the Virgin Mary ‘Like a Man’?’ 104. The power is God’s not Mary’s, *contra* Graef 1.35.

³⁰¹ This is congruent with another work in which we find the *in partu* virginity in a setting which is non-Gnostic, probably Syrian and also non-ascetic, the *Protevangelium of James*, see chapter 2, section 2.4.1.

³⁰² Pace P. F. Buck, ‘Are the ‘Ascension of Isaiah’ and the ‘Odes of Solomon’ Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary?’ in *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani: Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani in Lusitania Anno 1967 Celebrati* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1970), 4.371-399.

the birth indicates that the Odes are drawing from different traditions than the *Protevangelium of James*.

4.8.4 The Gospel of Philip and other references

4.8.4.1 The Gospel of Philip

The Gospel of Philip, one of the documents found near Nag Hammadi, is of gnostic provenance, possibly Valentinian.³⁰³ It was written sometime in the third century. It is not a life of Jesus, but rather a loose collection of sayings attributed to him.³⁰⁴

Rejection of the physical world and the body demonstrate the gnostic character of this document. This world is a mistake, created by one who is not imperishable. The human body is ‘contemptible,’ fit only to be destroyed.³⁰⁵ ‘According to this gospel the existential malady of humanity results from the differentiation of the sexes.’³⁰⁶ The fall is described as a separation of the original human into male and female: ‘‘When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being. If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more.’³⁰⁷

Sexual intercourse between men and women is evil: ‘Indeed every act of sexual intercourse which has occurred between those unlike one another is adultery.’ Instead, each believer must seek spiritual union with his heavenly counterpart. This is done in a ceremony involving a ‘bridal chamber’: ‘Indeed those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam

³⁰³ The document has both Valentinian and Sethian elements, D. Scholer, ‘Gnosis, Gnosticism,’ DLNTD, 410.

³⁰⁴ G. Filoramo, ‘Nag Hammadi Writings’ in EEC 570, and Harold W. Attridge, ‘Gospel of Philip’ EE Chr. 1.477-478. Despite its title it is a loose compendium of sayings of Jesus, not a proper Gospel, H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* 47.

³⁰⁵ *Gospel of Philip*, trans. by Wesley W. Isenberg, in NHLE, 75.2-3, p. 154. 56.24-26, p. 144 and 82.26-29, p. 158: ‘When Abraham...[circumcised] the flesh of the foreskin, teaching it that it is proper to destroy the flesh.’

³⁰⁶ W. Isenberg, ‘Introduction to the Gospel of Philip’, NHLE 140.

³⁰⁷ 68.22-26, NHLE 150.

because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united with him.’ This is the ‘undefiled marriage’ which is ‘a true mystery.’³⁰⁸

The virginal conception of Mary is upheld, but in a curious way. Since in the Valentinian system the Holy Spirit is female, Mary could not have conceived under the Spirit’s power. ‘Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled.’ Christ was born of a virgin, just as Adam was born of the virgin earth and spirit.³⁰⁹ In another passage the ‘virgin’ (probably Mary) unites with the ‘Father of All.’ This may reflect a double conception of Jesus; he has both an earthly and a heavenly mother and father.³¹⁰ The NT texts are reinterpreted in the light of higher authority specific to Gnosticism.³¹¹

4.8.4.2 Other references

We know there was speculation about the birth of Christ beginning as early as the first third of the second century. Mary becomes a heavenly power who also is incarnated on earth, like her son in the the Gnostic *Gospel of the Hebrews*.³¹² Less extreme but still imaginative is the anti-docetic *Epistula Apostolorum* where we find a theme of hidden descent expressed through a ‘speculative exegesis of the Matthean infancy narrative which identifies Christ with Gabriel.’³¹³

I appeared in the form of the archangel Gabriel to [the virgin] Mary, and spoke with her, and her heart received me; she believed, and laughed: and I, the Word, went into her and became flesh; and I myself was servant for myself, and in the form of an image of an

³⁰⁸ 61.10-12, NHLE 146. 69.1-4, NHLE 151 and 70.19-22, NHLE 151-152. 82.5-6, NHLE 158.

³⁰⁹ 55.23-28, NHLE 143; 71.16-21, NHLE 152; 59.5-11, NHLE 145. J. Buckley, “‘The Holy Spirit is a Double Name’: Holy Spirit, Mary, and Sophia in the Gospel of Philip’ in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 211-227, at 213.

³¹⁰ J. Buckley and D. J. Good, ‘Sacramental Language and Verbs of Generating, Creating and Begetting in the Gospel of Philip’ *J ECS* 5 (1997), 9, 16-17. This contradiction stems from the composite nature of the document.

³¹¹ E. Segelberg, ‘The Gospel of Philip and the New Testament’ in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn, eds (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 204-212.

³¹² NTA 1.158-163, where it is dated in the first half of the second century.

³¹³ Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One* 164.

angel.³¹⁴

4.9 CONCLUSION

These ten witnesses unanimously affirm the virginal conception. Tertullian and Novatian specifically link it to the prophecy in Isaiah. Tertullian sees the virginity *ante partum* as a sign of the dawning of the new age of redemption. Hippolytus cites this doctrine against some adoptionists. Mary's virginity in conception is an element of a rather unusual image of the Father producing milk for the sake of the salvation of the world in both Clement and *Ode of Solomon* 19. But in both cases she is incidental to the main point, the generation of the Son. The *Gospel of Philip* has what seems to be a double conception of Jesus: he has a father and mother in both heaven and on earth.

Mary figures in anti-docetic polemic in several of these authors. She is the mother-virgin who bore Jesus according to Clement. She was pregnant with the very Word of God says Hippolytus. Most emphatic, not surprisingly, is Tertullian, who insists Christ is born of a real mother so that he can be of the same flesh he redeems. To challenge docetic views he goes inside the womb of Mary to describe in detail the messy reality of Christ's birth. He also comes closest of any of our witnesses to calling Mary the mother of God, 'God allows himself to become incarnate: in His mother's womb.'³¹⁵ The Eve-Mary parallel which we met in Justin and saw Irenaeus develop at great length does not appear in Melito, Clement, Hippolytus, Novatian, Cyprian, nor in any of the apocryphal witnesses here. Some, like Hippolytus, contrast Eve with various other Biblical women, but not with Mary. Tertullian does use the parallel of Eve-Mary, but sparingly. More important for him is Eve as a type

³¹⁴ *Epistula Apostolorum* 25, trans. in NTA 1.199, CMP 348. This document is dated between 140-160 AD, Quasten, *Patrology* 1.150 and ODCC, 'Testament of Our Lord in Galilee.' Christ takes form of angel Gabriel also in *Pistis Sophia* 1.62. 'Mary' in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas is most likely Magdalene, M. Meyer, 'Making Mary Male' *NTS* 31 (1985), 562.

³¹⁵ *pat.* 3.2.

of the Church. A theme we first met in Ignatius, that of concealment appears here in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Epistula Apostolorum*.

The *in partu* virginity must have had widespread support for it appears in two versions among these witnesses. Clement draws it from the *Protevangelium of James* but in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Odes* it appears in a form which has no midwife, a significant difference indicating two separate streams of tradition on this doctrine. The only author to specifically deny it is Tertullian who does it in order to sustain the reality of the birth. He also is the only witness to discuss the *post partum* virginity, which he repudiates at length.

Nearly all of these witnesses show some familiarity with the practice of sexual asceticism in the church. But apart from one exception none connect this with the Virgin Mary. Models for virgins vary; in Cyprian it is Christ himself, in Novatian it is Joseph and Susanna. But again Tertullian stands out. Asceticism is fundamental to his life of holiness as well as a testimony against the immorality of the pagan world. His chief model for virginity is Christ, but Mary appears in the same context as a secondary model. But she serves not only as a model for virgins, but since he denies both the *in partu* and *post partum* virginities he is able to cite her as a model for married Christian women as well. This is the first instance we know of where Mary is a model for ascetic virginity.

These sources demonstrate that reflection on Mary is still for the most part controlled by dogmatic considerations centering around the incarnation. The *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *ProtJ*, the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the *Gospel of Philip* stand out precisely because their depictions of Mary do extend beyond the parameters of NT history.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARY THE SPIRITUAL MODEL: ORIGEN

5.1 ORIGEN'S THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS

Origen is one of the most original and problematic figures of the early Church. 'To overestimate Origen and his importance for the history of Christian thought is all but impossible.'¹ His contemporaries acknowledged his almost divine facility in Biblical studies. It was his broad command of the Scriptures and of philosophy which made his views impossible to ignore in the centuries after his death. One of his most significant gifts to the church, accomplished by the sheer weight and force of his exegesis, was to establish the Old Testament as a properly Christian set of texts.² In addition to his foundational contributions to Biblical and textual studies, he also was an apologist who insisted on the rationality of the Christian faith.³ 'The greatest theologians of East and West have consistently recognised him as a master, a dangerous but a real one.'⁴

Origen, born about 185, was the product of a Christian upbringing in Alexandria which culminated in the arrest and martyrdom of his father, an event that

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The von Balthasar Reader*, trans. by R. J. Daly and F. Lawrence (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997), 384.

² B. F. Westcott, 'Origenes' in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 4 vols, ed. by W. Smith and H. Wace, (London: John Murray, 1887), 4.133.

³ R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians 520*: 'a godlike master.' 'The Church owes it to Origen, first and foremost, that, whenever Christianity is true to itself, it is a rational faith': G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, (London: SPCK, 1963), 64.

⁴ R. Williams, 'Ascetic Enthusiasm: Origen and the Early Church', *History Today*, 39 (1989), 37.

at age seventeen ‘probably sealed Origen’s loyalty to the Church.’⁵ He first pursued a career of teaching literature but soon turned entirely to catechetical instruction. His persuasion brought back into the church a former follower of Valentinianism, Ambrose, who thereafter sponsored Origen’s ministry. He began writing sometime in his thirties and by the end of his life had written exegetical studies of nearly every portion of the Bible. He produced a complex work on the text of the OT, the *Hexapla*. Much of his work is lost but what remains still inspires awe.⁶ The 300 some homilies which remain are a vital witness to the homeletical thought of the early church. We have large portions of his commentaries on the Song of Songs, John, Matthew and Romans, although much of this only in Latin translations. His are the earliest surviving commentaries on Scripture.⁷ Several topical treatises have survived, among them ones on prayer, martyrdom, and the Passover. Two apologetic works still extant are a dialogue with Heraclides and the pivotal *Against Celsus*. One scholar believes ‘he may well have been the most prolific writer of the ancient world.’⁸ The sheer creative force of his thinking has meant there is no period since in which he can be ignored.⁹

⁵ J. W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM, 1985), 30. Concerning Origen’s chronology, I am following the ‘tableau récapitulatif’ of P. Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 409-412. On his life, see H. Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. by A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 1-58; J. Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. by Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 1-26; also Nautin and Trigg. The chief sources for biographical details are Eusebius, *HE* 6; the panegyric of one of his students, identified as Gregory Thaumaturgus; and Jerome, one of his chief translators, in various places, especially *De viris illustribus* 54.

⁶ To grasp the amazing productivity of Origen one may well consider that the *Hexapla* alone would be equivalent to about 6,500 pages: M. F. Wiles, ‘Origen as Biblical Scholar’ in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, P. Ackroyd and C. Evans, eds (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 458.

⁷ Heracleon’s Commentary on John has not survived and the *Commentary on Daniel* by Hippolytus did not treat the entire book: M. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 40; cf. Quasten, *Patrology* 2.171-176.

⁸ Crouzel, *Origen* 37. Useful summaries of his work are found in Crouzel, *Origen* 41-49; Quasten, *Patrology* 2.43-74 and Westcott, ‘Origenes’ 96-142, still helpful in its details.

⁹ The collection by Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, the *Philocalia*, shows how much his thought was valued over a century after his death: R. A. Greer, ‘Introduction’ in *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers* (London: SPCK, 1979), 29.

Origen's views have been bones of contention right from the start. Continuing controversies over his writings may well have contributed to the demise of much of his output. He undertook a brave attempt to tie together the best of current Greek philosophy to the Bible and doctrines of the church in his *On First Principles*. This work, more than any other, has attracted criticism down through the centuries. This is despite his own repeated warnings in the work itself when he ventured off into speculation.¹⁰

His two bases of operation were first Alexandria then Caesarea, a move made necessary by the opposition he faced from Egyptian church authorities. But he also traveled to Athens, Arabia, Nicomedia, Cappadocia, and several times to Rome. There is evidence that he was invited to the imperial court at Antioch to present the Christian faith to the mother of the emperor Alexander Severus. Origen was arrested during the persecution which arose under the emperor Decius. He resisted despite tortures and was released after the emperor's death in battle. Origen died at the advanced age of sixty-nine, around the year 254.¹¹

A summation of topics addressed in this chapter is in order here. We begin with a section on Origen's exegetical method which is for him the foundation of all his thought. This includes an overview of his views on the multiple meanings of

¹⁰ 'Now we ourselves speak on these subjects with great fear and caution, discussing and investigating rather than laying down fixed and certain conclusions. For we have previously pointed out what are the subjects are on which clear doctrinal statements must be made, and such statements we made, I think, to the best of our ability, when speaking of the Trinity. Now, however, we are dealing, as well as we can, with subjects that call for discussion rather than for definition,' *arch.* 1.6.1, trans. G. W. Butterworth, (New York: Harper, 1966), 52. Previously (*arch.* 1.Pref.3-10) he provides a summary of what he considers the normative doctrines, based on apostolic tradition. Here he clearly warns the reader that he is proceeding into what Crouzel calls his 'research theology' (*Origen* 163-169). Similar warnings occur elsewhere: *arch.* 1.8.4; 2.8.4. As the *peri Archon* was written early on in his career, before his move to Caesarea (Nautin, *Origène* 410), we ought to give greater weight to later writings such as his homilies. Origen himself expressed frustration at having views ascribed to him which he did not hold, *hom. Lc.* 25.6. He actually never intended the work to be indiscriminately available to a wide audience, as he said in correspondence to the bishop Firmilian of Caesarea Mazaca, cited in Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 208. Works of Origen are cited following the system in Crouzel, *Origen*: exegetical works are cited with the abbreviation of the Biblical book preceded by: *com.* for Commentary, *hom.* for Homily, *ser.* for Commentariorum series, *frag.* for Fragments. Standard translations are used except where noted.

¹¹ H. Crouzel, 'Origen' in EEC 619-623. See also the relevant articles in the ODCC, EE Chr. and NCE.

Scripture. Next we turn to his notion on the pre-existence of the soul and how that intersects with his view of the incarnation. The second section begins with an exploration of his concept of the spiritual growth or ascent of the soul and the place ascetic practice plays in this process. This leads to a survey of his views about the body, sexuality and marriage. His advocacy of sexual asceticism is examined with a particular focus on his teaching on the practice of virginity. This sets the stage for the third section of this chapter, Origen's views of Mary. Here we first scrutinize the role Origen assigns to Mary in the history of NT events and especially how that history reveals Mary to be a spiritually ascended figure. We examine his beliefs concerning Mary's physical virginity, noting his assertion of her virginity *post partum*. We then encounter Origen's employment of Mary as a spiritual symbol. A study is made of his use of both her maternity and her virginity as symbols of the spiritual transformation of the individual believer's soul. This leads to a consideration of his use of Mary as a model of ascetic virginity.

5.1.1 Exegesis and theological approach

We have no systematic theology from Origen's hand, so we must proceed with care in constructing broad theological structures from the present state of his work, which now exists only in magnificent wreckage.¹² A distorted view of Origen's theology results from drawing too much and too often from his more speculative and apologetic works like *peri Archon* and *contra Celsum* while tending to pass over his exegetical works.¹³ His study of Scriptures is at the heart of all his thought. He is interested in the finest details of the Biblical text and is a bold pioneer in applying to

¹² The closest to a system is his work *peri Archon*, which is more a 'mature theological vision', than a *summa theologica*: Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 91, also Crouzel, *Origen* 168, *contra Daniélou*, *Origen* 203.

¹³ Crouzel, *Origen* 48-49, 163-169, and R. Lawson, 'Introduction', *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ACW 26 (London: Longman and Green, 1957), 17.

those texts the most advanced techniques of the grammarians.¹⁴ He is ‘the first scientific exegete of the Catholic Church.’¹⁵ We must follow de Lubac’s advice to ‘observe Origen at work’ not only to understand his exegesis, but also his theology.¹⁶ We must also keep in mind that certain Origenist texts which have drawn criticism may not be genuine.¹⁷

Many know Origen as the allegorist *par excellence*. Yet we find in Origen an attention to most minute details of the text as is most vividly demonstrated by his *Hexapla*, in which his labor to establish the correct Biblical text is entirely consistent with his view that inspiration extends to each letter of each word.¹⁸ To dismiss him as merely an allegorist is to ignore his deep conviction of the real presence of the Logos in the very words of Scripture: ‘The wisdom of God has permeated the whole of Scripture even to the individual letter.’¹⁹

Since the earthly is a reflection of heavenly reality every historical event in

¹⁴ Daniélou, *Origen* 135: ‘The obelus and the asterisk were the critical signs used by the grammarians at Alexandria in their editions of Homer. Origen was thus taking the bold step of subjecting the text of Scripture to the critical method of the day.’

¹⁵ Quasten, *Patrology* 2.45

¹⁶ H. de Lubac, *Historie et Esprit*, (Paris, 1950), 34, cited by J. T. Lienhard, ‘Origen as Homilist’ in *Preaching in the Patristic Age* ed. by D. G. Hunter (New York: Paulist, 1989), 41.

¹⁷ The chief example is *arch.* 2.10.8 which is the key text for Origen’s doctrine of apokatastasis. Both the critical edition of Koetschau and the translation of Butterworth (146) included Origenist statements that explicitly allow for the ultimate salvation of demons. This inclusion is criticized by the *Sources chrétiennes* editors H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (SC 252.392-395). See the useful summary by F. W. Norris, ‘Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus’ in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 42-54, where he observes that the witness for this statement is Justinian, a sixth century opponent of Origen. Norris concludes Origen did not teach universalism.

¹⁸ *sel. Ps.* in *Philoc.* 2.4. The reader is likened to a spiritual botanist culling each detail from the text, *frag. hom. Ier.* 39, *Philoc.* 10. ‘The minutest detail is important, but it is the detail spiritually understood that counts’: Wiles, ‘Origen as Biblical Scholar’, 475. Holmes cautions us to not ascribe to Origen a modern view of inerrancy, which he would only extend to the spiritual sense of Scripture: ‘Origen and the Inerrancy of Scripture’ *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 24 (1981), 221-231. Also useful is G. Watson, ‘Origen and the Literal Interpretation of Scripture’ in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit*, ed by T. Finan and V. Twomey, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 75-84.

¹⁹ *com. Ps.* 1-25, Preface, 4, trans. J. W. Trigg, *Origen*, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1998), 71. *com. Matt.* 15.3: the Word ‘is as it were incarnate in the Bible,’ cited in R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* (London: SCM, 1959), 194. Also H. von Balthasar, ‘Introduction’ in *Origen, Spirit and Fire*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 10. Origen works to uncover the author’s intention in Paul, *Cels.* 3.19.

Scripture has a higher meaning which must be uncovered. The literal reading on its own will only confuse, it is necessary to dig for the hidden moral or spiritual meanings in the text.²⁰ One must ascend from an accurate reading of Scripture to Jesus himself.²¹ At the literal level Scripture is often difficult to understand or to harmonize with other texts, according to Origen. Scripture's literal level is valid but incomplete.²² Thus there is danger in reading the Bible with a rigid adherence to the letter alone.²³ This extends even to the Gospels which Origen holds are not completely accurate in each historical detail.²⁴ The task of the exegete is to translate the text perceptible to the senses into a spiritual meaning since truth is found in full only when one progresses from the literal to the spiritual, stripping away the skin of

²⁰ *arch.* 4.2.4, also *hom. Lev.* 5.5.3. *frag. com. Iose in Philoc.* 8.1. Origen's understanding of human nature as tripartite points to three levels of meaning in Scripture: the literal, the moral and the spiritual. Origen eschews harmonization or emendation in favor of seeking a deeper meaning when the text is suspect. This demonstrates at the same time both his respect for the letter and his allegorical solution to difficulties encountered at the literal level. These three levels were not drawn from Philo according to Hanson, *Allegory and Event* 236, contra Daniélou, *Origen* 188-189.

²¹ Origen rarely employs three levels, preferring to move from the literal/historical directly to the spiritual, *com. Io.* 13.30, 37. He typically deals with two levels only, but is not consistent in his names for them, Lienhard, 'Origen as Homilist' 47 and R. E. Heine, 'Introduction' in *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 1-10*, FC 80 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 11. He does not deny the historicity of the Bible, but does relegate considerations of history to the initial stages of determining the meaning and application of the text for his fellow believers. See the chapter on 'Historicity' in Hanson, *Allegory and Event* 259-288, affirmed by A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 1.168. Also Holmes, 'Origen and Inerrancy' 227-231.

²² *hom. Ezk.* 1.3, trans. J. W. Trigg, in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. by V. L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 52. Sometimes even the history is not certain, *Cels.* 1.42. Crouzel carefully notes that the literal content for Origen is the 'raw matter' of the words, not authorial intent: *Origen* 62.

²³ 'Unless we take all these words in a sense other than the literal text shows, as we already said often, when they are read in the Church, they will present more an obstacle and ruin of the Christian religion than an exhortation and edification,' *hom. Lev.* 5.1.2, FC 83.88. Also 7.5.5, FC 83.146. R. Daly notes three groups which have erred this way: Jews, Gnostics and the simple faithful: *Origen, Treatise on the Passover*, ACW 54 (New York: Paulist, 1992), 90, n. 49. See also *euch.* 29.10; *com. Cant.* 3.9; and *hom. Lev.* 1.1.3. At times the literal reading seems to promote immorality, as in the case of various OT figures but even with some actions of Jesus, *Cels.* 4.44; *hom. Gen.* 6.1 and 6.3; *hom. Reg.* 28.2.1; *Cels.* 7.22. King David's sins must be spiritualized: *frag. com. Ps.* 50 in *Philoc.* 1.29. The cleansing of the Temple cannot be historical since it is not becoming of Jesus: *com. Io.* 10.147-148.

²⁴ *com. Io.* 10.18-20 (5), cited in Holmes, 'Origen and Inerrancy' 228. Hanson lists some incidents in the Gospels which Origen did not accept as historical: *Allegory and Event* 267-268.

the literal to uncover the spiritual meat.²⁵ In this way the Old Testament shows Christ.²⁶ This process does not negate the validity of the historical level in which Origen often shows great interest. Yet the recorded event is only a starting point for him, on the way to a deeper spiritual truth. So, in at least one instance, the task of spiritualizing is applied even to historical details concerning Mary.²⁷

5.1.2 The pre-existence of the soul and the incarnation

One of the most distinctive features of Origen's theology is his theory of the pre-existence of souls. It is well summarized by Crouzel:

So all the rational creatures, those which would later become angels, men, demons, were created together and absolutely equal. They were absorbed in the contemplation of God and formed the Church of the pre-existence.²⁸

²⁵ *hom. Gen.* 15.1, FC 71.203: 'Nor is Scripture devoted so much to historical narratives as to things and ideas which are mystical.' *hom. Lev.* 1.4.2. Some details are unworthy of allegory, so Genesis omits the disposition of excrement generated in the Ark, *hom. Gen.* 2.1. This emphasizes Origen's view that nearly everything in the text must be spiritualized. Hanson (*Allegory and Event* 245-247) shows how Origen's insistence on allegorizing even small details actually obliterates the metaphors in the text; in effect, his extreme literalism destroyed the original authorial intent.

²⁶ *com. Io.* 1.45. *ser. Matt.* 27, cf. *ser. Matt.* 15.

²⁷ The divine overshadowing of Mary represents the shadows of the present age which point to eschatological fulfillment. *hom. Iesu Naue* 8.6, cf. 20.5. The historical context of the virginal conception is discussed at length in *hom. Lev.* 8.2.1-2 with no spiritualizing. See also *com. Io.* 10.18-20. Even at his most speculative, Origen says most texts are historically true: *arch.* 4.3.4. So he must spiritualize even history that does not edify, patriarchal polygamy, for instance. Spiritualizing difficult passages is allowed by the apostle Paul when he says 'the Law is spiritual.' Origen cites Rom. 7.14 to justify turning Abraham's second marriage into an illustration of the mortification of the flesh: *hom. Gen.* 11.1. Paul's allegory in Gal 4 is mentioned in *Cels.* 4.44. Immediately following this Origen softens the story of Lot's daughters not through allegory but by citing their motive of preserving the race. He readily admits this is a Stoic argument: *Cels.* 4.45. The curse of childlessness in the Old Testament does not transfer to virgins in the church who have spiritual children, and Solomon's concubines are read as pagan philosophies, *hom. Gen.* 11.1-2.

²⁸ Crouzel, *Origen* 206. See 205-218 for his excellent analysis of this doctrine, which I follow here. Origen drew from Platonism to develop this theory which allows for an exercise of free will before birth. That exercise then determines the person's condition at birth. He thus counters both Marcionite charges that the demiurge was unjust to create people in varying social and physical conditions and the Valentinian denial of free will. The church had no defined view on the origin of souls (*arch.* 1.Pref.7), so it is unfair to label Origen's theory heretical, *pace* Quasten, *Patrology* 2.42. On the pre-existence as theodicy, see *Cels.* 4.8; 3.38. On free will: *arch.* 1.5.3; 1.8.1; 2.9.6-7. Origen earlier had argued against Valentinian determinism in his *Dialogue with Candidus*, a work of which we only have the summary of Jerome, *Apology against Rufinus* 2.19. His language is tentative in

Some intelligences cooled into souls as they moved, of their own will, away from the warmth of direct contemplation of God. The descent of certain souls into physical bodies is a temporary corrective measure.²⁹ It is observed that for Origen ‘the body was not the cause of sin, but rather sin that was the cause of bodies.’³⁰ Of course the soul of Jesus, which was part of the pre-existence, was exempt from this fall.³¹

The incarnation, motivated by God’s love, makes visible what is invisible.³² Since Origen asserts that the Lord assumed all three parts of human nature, the whole human being can be saved.³³ The physical body, an unfortunate result of the sin of the pre-existent souls, is raised in honor by virtue of the birth of Jesus.³⁴

In the process of incarnation, the Savior assumed both a human body and a human soul. The soul of Jesus participated, like all souls, in the pre-existent fellowship, but without falling into sin. It was necessary for Jesus to take on this soul because ‘it was not possible for the nature of God to mingle with a body apart from some medium’.³⁵ In taking on a human soul, Jesus of his own free will

setting out this theory, especially in the exegetical works: *com. Io.* 2.182: ‘Now if the general theory concerning the soul prevails, that is, that it has not been sown with the body but exists before it...’ FC 80.144. C. P. Hammond-Bammel notes Origen adopts a more cautious tone about the pre-existence in the *Commentary on Romans* than in the earlier *peri Archon: Römerbrieftext*, 52 cited by T. Schenk, trans., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (unpublished), *ComRom* 3.1.10, n. 11, p. 4. Also *com. Cant.* 2.7, ACW 26.149. See J. W. Trigg, ‘Origen’s Modesty’, *Studia Patristica* 21, ed. by E. A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 349-355.

²⁹ As the similarity of the words ψυχή and ψυχός implies, *arch.* 2.8.3, trans. Butterworth 124, who notes this originally is from Aristotle, *de Anima* 1.2.405b. *ComRom* 7.4.9-10; also *arch.* 2.3.2. The soul suffers while in the body: *ser. Matt.* 73; *com. Io.* 6.270.

³⁰ J. A. McGuckin, ‘Christian Asceticism and the Early School of Alexandria’, in *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. by W. J. Sheils, *Studies in Church History*, 22 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 35.

³¹ *arch.* 4.4.5. Despite this text’s reference to Mary, it is not included in the CMP, S. Alvarez Campos, ed. Also see *com. Io.* 1.236, CMP 190.

³² *hom. Ezk.* 6.6; *frag. com. Ps.* 117.27.

³³ *Heracl.* 7.1-8. Or four elements: *hom. Ezk.* 1.4 and *com. Cant.* 1.3.

³⁴ *ser. Matt.* 50, CMP 258. When Origen discusses the incarnate Word, he can mean the pre-existent Logos, or the Christ born of Mary who lived and died; or the Word incarnate in the words of Scripture, or the Word who indwells each believer, R. J. Daly, ‘Foreword’ in *Spirit and Fire*, xiv. Origen himself draws various meanings of the Logos from Plato in *Cels.* 6.9.

³⁵ *arch.* 2.6.3, Butterworth 110, cf. 2.8.4. *Cels.* 3.29; *Cels.* 4.15; *hom. Lc.* 19.1; *hom. Ier.* 15.4.1; *arch.* 2.8.2. On sinlessness of the pre-existent soul: *hom. Lc.* 19.1.

accepted the limitations of humanity. The human body of Jesus is as dung compared to his heavenly existence.³⁶ God descended by power into human life, completely assuming a human nature.³⁷ Jesus is a sort of composite being: both human and divine, but this is a matter best restricted to Christians, lest pagans misunderstand.³⁸

Those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh speak the devil's words. A docetic Jesus cannot provide salvation. So his body is made of real, earthly substance, as his birth in the Davidic line shows.³⁹ Yet occasionally Origen reverts to more ambivalent language: Jesus is 'supposedly human.'⁴⁰ His humanity is unique because of the virginal conception and the pre-existent sinlessness of his soul.⁴¹ Being conceived through the Holy Spirit rather than by the seed of a human male, Jesus is pure of any sin. Yet he did take on the contamination of human flesh,

³⁶ *Cels.* 4.18 and *hom. Lev.* 2.3.4.

³⁷ *Cels.* 4.5, Chadwick 187; *arch.* 4.2.7, Butterworth 283. *hom. Lc.* 29.5, 34.7. J. N. Rowe has argued that Origen's distinction between the pre-existent Christ and the incarnate Jesus is so strong that he falls into a type of Nestorianism: *Origen's Doctrine of Subordination: A Study in Origen's Christology* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1987), 29, 107, 199-219. Crouzel specifically criticizes this work in 'The Literature on Origen 1970-1988', *Theological Studies*, 49 (1988), 510. He cautions us to not force Origen into later theological categories which he could not foresee (*Origen*, 188-198). Greer admits the ambiguity of Origen's handling of the Christological union, but nevertheless insists that he did not relegate the Incarnation to a diminished doctrinal level: 'Introduction', 15-16. Daniélou (*Origen* 262 and 269) concurs and is critical of de Faye, (who is cited with approval by Rowe), cf. E. de Faye, *Origène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Paris, 1923-1928), 3.224. Grillmeier (*Christ in Christian Tradition* 168) says Origen holds the incarnation to have 'true saving significance' despite his symbolism and his doctrine of spiritual ascent.

³⁸ *Cels.* 1.60; 1.66; 2.16.

³⁹ *hom. Ex.* 3.2; *com. Io.* 10.24-26; *hom. Lc.* 14.4; *frag. com. Gal.*, PG 14.1295 BC. His comment that Jesus was 'born half like other men' is in the context of contrasting the virginal conception with pagan myths: *Cels.* 1.37, Chadwick 36.

⁴⁰ In dialogue with paganism, *Cels.* 2.25, 3.62, but also in exegetical works: *com. Matt.* 15.24; *com. Io.* 20.12, cited in an article which reconstructs Origen's doctrine of the resurrection, as much as one can without his lost work on this topic: H. Chadwick, 'Origen, Celsus and the Resurrection of the Body', *Harvard Theological Review*, 41 (1948), 100, n. 30. Greer also remarks on Origen's ambiguity: 'Introduction', 15. So Grillmeier (*Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1.171) can say Origen 'exposed himself to the charge that his system [sic] left no room for a full appreciation of the humanity of the Lord.'

⁴¹ R. E. Heine, 'Introduction' in *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 13-32*, FC 89 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 36, citing *com. Io.* 20.128; 20.419; 32.191 and 20.277. See also *Cels.* 1.32-33.

according to a prophecy of Zechariah, so the docetics are refuted.⁴² This contamination is an inherent quality of being in a physical body, a state which derived from the fall in the pre-existence. So while the soul of Jesus did not participate in that fall, when it took up a human body from Mary⁴³ it took on all the attributes of physicality, which include the coarseness that stems from the primal sin in the pre-existence. Thus Origen can explain why the infant Jesus underwent purification along with his mother. Scripture teaches that no one is uncontaminated from birth, all are stained by virtue of being in a body. So Jesus, in assuming a full human nature, also had this stain, a stain which Origen is careful to differentiate from actual sin. This is why we can say, according to Origen, that Jesus entered so completely into the corruption of physical existence that he suffered from the ‘woes of earthly foulness’.⁴⁴

5.2 ASCETICISM IN ORIGEN

Origen is a key figure in the development of ascetic doctrine. Eusebius presents him as an ascetic hero and Origen himself frequently turns to ascetic theory and practice, holding asceticism to be essential for spiritual growth of the Christian.⁴⁵ Origen never promotes asceticism for its own sake. The ‘dominant note in Origen’s asceticism

⁴² *hom. Lev.* 9.2.3. Origen reads ‘Joshua’ in Zechariah 3.3 as Jesus in *hom. Lc.* 14.4.

⁴³ *com. Io.* 20.162 (19), cf. 2.163.

⁴⁴ *hom. Lc.* 14.8, CMP 174: ‘terrenae faecis patiebatur angustias,’ my translation. This contamination is the basis for the necessity of infant baptism, *hom. Lc.* 14.5. See also *ComRom* 5.9.11; 5.2.11; *hom. Lev.* 8.3.5 and *Cels.* 7.50.

⁴⁵ Two works on asceticism survive: the homilies on Ezekiel 1 and Numbers 27. Others are lost, including those on fasting and monogamy mentioned by Jerome (*Ep.* 33) and those on 2 Corinthians. Grimm believes Origen’s status as ascetic model was chiefly a creation of Eusebius (*H.E.* 6.3) and not an accurate portrayal of Origen himself, V. E. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting, the Evolution of a Sin* (London: Routledge, 1996), 150-156, following P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). Certainly Eusebius did shape his portrait of Origen to suit his own agenda (see discussion of R. Heine, ‘Introduction’, FC 89.10-11). Yet as I show below (section 5.2) asceticism is of more than passing interest to Origen. It is of note for now to recall that his writings did color ‘all future traditions of ascetic guidance in the Greek and Near Eastern worlds’: P. Brown, *Body and Society* 166. Also see Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 25, 30.

was the ascent to spiritual wisdom through mastery of our disordered bodily desires, so that man's soul was enabled to assume hegemony over his life and accelerate its return to spiritual union with the Logos. For Origen this was the only true motive and unique reason for Christian asceticism.⁴⁶ His own life and especially his death after having faced up to torture is consistent with his abiding interest in spiritual exercise. He does deserve the title of martyr.⁴⁷

5.2.1 The ascent of the soul

Origen often speaks of ascent and his concept that believers must progress in their spiritual life. He mines each text of Scripture for applications in this regard.⁴⁸ So the history and geography of Exodus depicts for him the journey of the soul:

the escape from Egypt also signifies . . . the soul's abandoning the darkness of this world and taking its journey toward another world, sometimes referred to as 'Abraham's bosom', sometimes as Paradise, sometimes by names known only to God, all of which, however, denote places or dwellings which give passage to the soul which believes in God to enable it to reach the river which makes glad the city of God and to enter into possession of the inheritance promised to the Fathers.⁴⁹

Some have ascended higher than others and so enjoy a more direct contemplation of

⁴⁶ McGuckin, 'Christian Asceticism' 35. S. Bettencourt (*Doctrina Ascetica Origenis* (Vatican City: Libreria Vaticana, 1945), 88, n. 156) states the ultimate goal of the ascent of the soul is to be absorbed into the divine nature itself, cf. *com. Io.* 32.25; *Cels.* 3.41 and *hom. Ier.* 15.6.1, where Jesus ascended is the 'first-fruit of all men who change into a god': J. C. Smith, *Origen: Homilies on Jeremiah, Homily on 1 Kings 28*, FC 97 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 164. Also see *Cels.* 3.28, where Origen states that the incarnation which weaves divinity together with humanity will ultimately divinize all human nature. J. Behr ('Shifting Sands: Foucault, Brown and the Framework of Christian Asceticism', *Heythrop Journal*, 34 (1993), 18) urges us to read early ascetics like Origen in the context of their own world-views where 'Christian asceticism is, thus, not man's attempt at a divine mode of life, but is the very life of God lived by man.'

⁴⁷ Greer, 'Introduction', 5.

⁴⁸ 'There is nothing in which he does not see ethical influences': Westcott, 'Origenes' DCB 4.139.

⁴⁹ *hom. Num.* 26.4, cited by J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 467.

the divine. This is why one finds varying levels of spirituality in the church.⁵⁰ This progression is a 'drama of the soul's struggle to return to God' and could be considered the center of his theology.⁵¹

Both the mind and the will must engage in spiritual progress. The mind ascends by contemplating the divine. In order to do so, one must first believe the truth as given in Scripture and to begin with, one must affirm the true humanity of Jesus. In a homily on Numbers he says the first stage of ascent is to accept by faith the testimony that the Virgin gave birth to Christ.⁵² In reference to the will and the body, Origen describes the process of ascension as freely choosing to turn from temptations to the practice of virtues.⁵³ This is a 'training of the soul in virtues' which leads to higher enlightenment and ultimately to direct knowledge of the Father.⁵⁴ It is spiritual combat whereby facing and winning over temptations leads to higher spiritual levels. Virtues

should be sought after by means of constant practice and constant training and vigilant effort. And for this reason it is certain that this does not come to pass in those who are lazy and inactive, but rather in those who are gradually making progress, who at first sin only a little, then later even less, and ultimately, if they are able to attain it, who no longer sin at all.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *com. Io.* 13.225; *ser. Matt.* 35; *euch.* 9.2; *com. Io.* 20.232; *hom. Gen.* 1.7; *com. Cant.* 2.4. Origen takes descriptions of physical elevation to signify the ascent of the soul, e.g., the geography of the Exodus: *hom. Ex.* 5.3; *hom. Num.* 27.3-5, 9-12 and the internal structure of the Ark: *hom. Gen.* 2.3.

⁵¹ Greer, 'Introduction' 17. His Christology is read through his mystical interests according to Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 164-171.

⁵² *com. Io.* 19.35; 32.359; *Cels.* 4.64; and 6.59, where his dependence on Plato is noted: Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* 375, n. 2, cf. *Phaedrus* 247C. Belief in humanity and birth: *hom. Num.* 27.3, cf. *com. Io.* 19.35-38. K. J. Torjesen's comment (*Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 116) on the *hom. Num.* text is helpful: 'Origen conceives the incarnation as a way. The distance between being in the Father and being in the flesh is a graded distance, an ontological gradient which can be ascended and descended.'

⁵³ Turning from evil: *com. Io.* 13.274-278, *Cels.* 3.71; practice of virtues: *Cels.* 6.54 and 7.3, where demons attempt to hinder; by free will: *hom. Ezk.* 1.3, *Cels.* 4.3.

⁵⁴ *hom. Num.* 27.6, Greer 253.

⁵⁵ *com. Rm.* 6.11.2, trans. Schenk 6.30; cf. *com. Rm.* 4.5.11. *hom. Num.* 27.12; *hom. Lc.* 20.7; *hom. Ex.* 1.4; *euch.* 25.2. While one chooses virtue, the work of perfection is God's alone, *com. Io.* 1.268 and *arch.* 3.1.19. There are those who descend: *ComRom* 1.18.5; *Tr on Ps* 4 in *Philoc.* 26.7. A general study of virtue in Origen is found in B. J. M. Bradley, 'APETH as a Christian Concept: The Structural Elements of Origen's Doctrine' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of

So we can concur with the judgement that Origen did not give such priority to the contemplative life that he encouraged passivity. 'From one point of view the active life is purgative and prepares the soul for the contemplation of God. But from another point of view contemplation bestows upon the soul the vision that enables it to act.'⁵⁶

The soul's ascent ultimately will bring full knowledge of God. This will only be fully realized in the eschatological age, since as long as we are in physical bodies, our ability to directly contemplate God is severely limited.⁵⁷ This life is but a shadow compared to the true life we will enjoy with receipt of our spiritual bodies.⁵⁸ Jesus himself, by dint of ascension, will shed not only his physical body, but in effect, his humanity. Through his incarnation he leads those he calls from that base state of physicality into the likeness of the Logos, in effect, deification.⁵⁹ This process of ascension is grounded on the firm base of being counted righteous by God, i.e., justification.⁶⁰ Even after the resurrection there will remain some need for purification before entry into the full blessing of full fellowship with God.⁶¹

So asceticism for Origen is primarily a spiritual, not a physical activity. Since sin restrains our ability to see God, we must renounce it in order to allow the

Cambridge, 1976).

⁵⁶ Greer, 'Introduction', 27. This is of course borne out by his frequent exhortations to virtuous living.

⁵⁷ *com. Io.* 13.86-87; 20.46-48, cf. 13.113; *com. Cant.* 1.3. Pains of hell also are more direct to the naked soul stripped of the body: *com. Ps.* 6.

⁵⁸ *Heracl.* 28.4-24; cf. *com. Ps.* 118.25.

⁵⁹ *hom. Ier.* 15.6.1; *com. Matt.* 15.24; *Cels.* 6.68; *com. Rm.* 4.5.11. Greer ('Introduction' 25) considers Origen a mystic, but in a qualified sense. Possession of this likeness is the ultimate goal of the process: 'The 'image' is an inchoate participation in the Son's divinity and the 'likeness' is the perfection of such participation in Him': Bradley, 'APETH' 190.

⁶⁰ This is in contrast to Augustine, who sees justification as a process in itself, rather than as the beginning of a process: C. P. [Hammond] Bammel, 'Justification by Faith in Augustine and Origen' *JEH* 47 (1996), 234.

⁶¹ *hom. Lc.* 14.6. J. T. Lienhard provides other references on purification after death: *hom. Lc.* 3.3; *hom. Num.* 25.4; *hom. Lev.* 8.4.1; *arch.* 2.10 and *com. Matt.* 15.23; *Origen: Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke*, FC 94 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 59, n. 25.

soul to engage in its distinctive activity of contemplation.⁶² Each soul has a differing capacity to see God, and this is directly tied to how much that soul has allowed God to burn off the inferior material in the soul, the impure desires. The more pure is one's life, the more one may see God.⁶³ The progression towards fuller contemplation continues throughout life, but direct contemplation, as enjoyed by the angels, can only occur apart from life in the present physical body, when our souls are completely reconstructed by the Logos.⁶⁴

Since the soul only ascends as it turns from low desires, asceticism is essential for purification. As long as we are in this body, abstinence and chastisement are necessary to curb passions.⁶⁵ The soul must move upwards, always making progress: 'And by ascending through certain steps it makes progress, as we have said, from virtue to virtue, and uses these progressions as states.'⁶⁶ While yet in the physical body, the soul must actively seek virtues like piety, wisdom and chastity:

these things should be sought after by means of constant practice and constant training and vigilant effort. And for this reason it is certain that this does not come to pass in those who are lazy and inactive, but rather in those who are gradually making progress.⁶⁷

Origen certainly describes life on earth as a battle against the vices of the flesh⁶⁸, but more must be said. His conception of progress makes asceticism a positive rather than a negative process, not just a turning away from the bad, but a progression, a

⁶² *com. Io.* 28.72; *frag. hom. Lc.* 186 on Luke 11.33-34.

⁶³ *ser. Matt.* 35; *com. Io.* 13.138; *com. Ps.* 118.55; *com. Cant.* 3.14; *Cels.* 7.45.

⁶⁴ *com. Io.* 13.41; *hom. Gen.* 1.13 and 15.6; *Cels.* 6.59, 7.33 and 8.72.

⁶⁵ *hom. Num.* 9.7 and 27.9; *hom. Iesu Naue* 22.4; *com. Cant.* 3.13; *Cels.* 8.73; *arch.* 3.3.3.

⁶⁶ *hom. Num.* 27.6, trans. Greer, 253. Origen goes on to describe even higher levels of ascension that take place after the resurrection.

⁶⁷ *com. Rm.* 6.11.2, trans. Schenk, 6.30, cf. *com. Rm.* 6.14.5.

⁶⁸ And against the devil: *com. Rm.* 4.8.4 also *hom. Lev.* 16.6.4; *hom. Num.* 10.2; *hom. Iesu Naue* 5.2 and 11; *hom. Iud.* 9.1; *com. Cant.* 3.14; *ser. Matt.* 35; *arch.* 3.2.1-4; *Cels.* 7.3.

growing, towards the good.⁶⁹ This good is the soul's increasing capacity to contemplate God. The soul enters voluntarily into this program, choosing either to ascend or to descend: 'For the soul has freedom of choice and the option of moving in whatever direction it wants'.⁷⁰ And so even those at the highest levels can slip backwards.⁷¹

Prominent among the virtues are chastity and virginity. Longing to be freed from the storms of flesh and blood, one prepares for the heavenly life by abstention from this life's pleasures.⁷² This is a process whereby the believer allows himself to be reconstructed into a new person.⁷³ Therefore renunciation of pleasures, including sexual ones, prepares the soul for heaven, where it will enjoy a sexless climate, similar to that in the pre-existence.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the dangers of sexual temptation persist along with those from other attractions of the flesh.⁷⁵

If we apply the newer perspective of asceticism to Origen we find all three aspects described by Valantasis.⁷⁶ Performance and display are seen in comments

⁶⁹ *hom. Iesu Naue* 5.1; *euch.* 25.2. Pure behavior reflects a pure heart: *ser. Matt.* 33. This good must not just be external action, but internal also: *Cels.* 6.54, following Platonic categories (Chadwick 371, n. 2). The Word is taken into the soul as a purifying agent: *com. Io.* 2.129. Daniélou (*Origen* 298) observes that in broader terms, Origen's asceticism is not Platonic. Though her study centers on the fourth century, Elm's definition of asceticism ('*Virgins of God*' 13-14) is congruent with Origen: 'As method or discipline, asceticism is not an end in itself, but aspires to a higher goal: namely, to transform the practitioner into a pure vessel of divine will, and so to create the possibility for communication with the divine through some form of *unio mystica*.'

⁷⁰ *hom. Num.* 20.3, trans. Daly, §112, *Spirit and Fire* 67. This choice is rooted in the power of reason implanted by God: *com. Rm.* 3.6.2. The angels enjoy the same freedom: *hom. Ezk.* 1.3. Judas chose wrongly: *com. Cant.* 3.16. To attain virtue 'requires a vigorous and sustained effort' which would be blunted if we knew beforehand our ultimate fate: *frag. com. Gen.* 3.10 in *Philocalia*, trans. Trigg, *Origen*, 95.

⁷¹ Through pride, *Tr on Ps* 4 in *Philoc.* 26.7. Also *com. Io.* 10.132. This possibility of backsliding and further cleansing persists even into the next life: *euch.* 29.14.

⁷² *exh. mart.* 47 and *Cels.* 8.22; *com. Rm.* 8.8.13; 10.1.4.

⁷³ R. Valantasis, 'A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism' in *Asceticism*, ed. by V. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 547.

⁷⁴ *frag. com. Matt.* 161. H. Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 26-27 and P. Brown, *Body and Society* 167-170.

⁷⁵ *hom. Lev.* 3.3.2; *hom. Num.* 27.12; *hom. Ier.* 20.7.5, including the attractions of family life: *exh. mart.* 11.

⁷⁶ 'Constructions of Power' *JAAR* 63 (1995), 775-821.

Origen makes about pagans taking note of the self-controlled life of the spiritually ascended Christian.⁷⁷ Christians contribute to the community by praying for the peace of the Empire with prayers strengthened through asceticism.⁷⁸ In the church married believers can profit from observing the display of virgins who serve on a higher level.⁷⁹ The believer who suffers for his faith is not only under the gaze of God and the angels but even in death serves as an instructor to the catechumens.⁸⁰

Ascetic activity is intentional and directed toward a specific goal: the spiritual growth or progress of the soul, a transformational theme running throughout Origen's thought.⁸¹ The object is to purify natural impulses, not to eradicate them.⁸² The goal is to achieve as high a state of purity of the soul as possible, a virginity of the soul.⁸³ In so doing one may approach a condition of sinlessness.⁸⁴ The Christian accomplishes this through physical asceticism which yields spiritual benefit: 'since he is always making himself ready for the true life and abstaining from the pleasures of this life which deceive the multitude, and since he does not nourish 'the mind of the flesh' but buffets his body and makes it his slave [Rom 8.6-7, 1Cor 9.27], he is always observing the Preparation.'⁸⁵ The 'true life' is heaven, a place of such purity that one needs to be transformed to be fit for it⁸⁶ through a life-long process of great

⁷⁷ *Cels.* 1.27, 3.29, 7.44. He urges comparison between Christians and pagans with high morals, *com. Rm.* 3.2, 12.

⁷⁸ *Cels.* 8.73.

⁷⁹ *com. Rm.* 6.5.8.

⁸⁰ *exh. mart.* 12, 18, *hom. Ier.* 4.3.2.

⁸¹ *hom. Lc.* 11.2, *frag. com. Matt.* 12.48, *com. Io.* 13.51-52, *com. Cant.* 1.3, *Cels.* 4.29, 6.68, *hom. Ier.* 11.5.2, *hom. Gen.* 1.13.

⁸² *hom. Ios.* 22.4.

⁸³ *com. Cant.* 2.5, cf. *hom. Cant.* 1.5 and *com. Matt.* 12.7.

⁸⁴ *com. Rm.* 6.11.2, *hom. Lc.* 2.1-2, *frag. hom. Lc.* 186 on Lk 11.33-34, *com. Io.* 32.178 expressed in Stoic terms, Heine, FC 89.376, n. 162. Ultimate perfection will come only in heaven, *com. Io.* 13.87.

⁸⁵ *Cels.* 8.22, Chadwick 468. Also *hom. Num.* 24.2, *hom. Lc.* 11.3, *com. Rm.* 4.6.7, *hom. Ex.* 1.4, *Cels.* 7.52, *arch.* 3.3.3. In other places Origen views suffering as a corrective, a perspective taken from Plato, as noted by Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford University Press, 1913), 102, cited in Schenk (7.12, n. 12) in his note attached to *com. Rm.* 7.5.10. See also *com. Io.* 13.138.

⁸⁶ *com. Rm.* 4.8.10, 7.4.3, 10.1.3-4, *com. Io.* 1.227, 13.85, 19.146, *Cels.* 8.22, *Heracl.* 28.4-24. Also see S. Bettencourt, *Doctrina Ascetica Origenis*, 88, n. 156.

difficulty.⁸⁷ Origen uses the figure of Mary as a type of the soul which is so transformed that it bears Christ:

If you become as pure in mind as you are holy in body, if you become spotless in your deeds, you can even produce Christ . . . Who then shall be a mother of Jesus if not the one whose womb is dead in this way so that only then she might afterward bring forth sons of chastity.⁸⁸

As the believer is transformed through ascetic practice he can begin to live the life of heaven while still on earth:

And if in the eyes of God we are not regarded as earth, but already as heaven, let us ask that on earth, that is to say, among those who are of the lower kind, as in heaven, the will of God may be accomplished, in order that the earth may, so to speak, be made into heaven, and thus one day there will be no more earth but everything will have become heaven.⁸⁹

The third element of asceticism as defined by Valantasis is novelty. Origen holds that the new self can be reconstructed through asceticism to such a degree that even the most powerful temptations no longer have effect, though he warns that not all ascetics are there yet:

For instance, when a woman displays herself before a man who has determined to remain chaste and to abstain from sexual intercourse and invites him to act contrary to his purpose, she does not become the absolute cause of the abandonment of that purpose. The truth is that he is first entirely delighted with the sensation and lure of the pleasure and has no wish to resist it nor to strengthen his previous determination; and then he commits the licentious act. On the other hand the same experiences may happen to one who has undergone more instruction and discipline; that is, the sensations and incitements are there, but his reason, having been strengthened to a higher degree and trained by practice and confirmed towards the good by right doctrines, or at any rate being near to such confirmation, repels the incitements and gradually weakens the desire.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *hom. Ex.* 5.3, *exh. mart.* 2, *com. Rm.* 6.11.2, 6.14.5.

⁸⁸ *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, trans. Schenk, 4.23, also *com. Rm.* 7.7.4, *com. Ps.* 105.3, *frag. com. Matt.* 12.48, *hom. Ier. frag.* 10, FC 97.283.

⁸⁹ *euch.* 26.6, ACW 19.91, cf. 26.5: 'He is no longer of the earth,' ACW 19.90. Even Christ's human soul was transformed by habitual choosing the good, *arch.* 2.6.5.

⁹⁰ *arch.* 3.1.4, Butterworth 161-162.

Those who have progressed begin to emerge as a distinct group within the church.⁹¹

5.2.2 The body and sexuality

Origen exhibits a ‘profound ambivalence about the human body’ according to Peter Brown. So we ought to take on board a caveat provided by Henri Crouzel: ‘La doctrine origénienne du corps est complexe et nuancée, difficile à saisir dans sa totalité. Dire qu’elle manifeste un pessimisme à l’égard de la chair est vrai, mais incomplet.’⁹² Origen’s seeming equivocation about the body may well stem from his view that the body is impermanent, a creation of God which came as a result of sin, not a cause of sin. The sin in question occurred in the pre-existence.⁹³ The pre-existent intelligences had no sexual aspect to their nature.⁹⁴ How is it, then, that man, created in God’s image, is made male and female? In his homily on Genesis 1.27-28 Origen explains that this genderizing arises from the distinction between the soul and the spirit. The soul is essentially female and the spirit, male. The soul is the seat of a person’s free will while the spirit is the seat of the divine presence.⁹⁵

It follows that sexuality is a creation of God, but a secondary creation in that it is only to be found in this world, which was created after the world of the pre-existence.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the body is clearly a divine creation, and therefore good.⁹⁷

⁹¹ *com. Io.* 13.109, 13.359-362, 20.232, *hom. Ezk.* 1.11. Also *com. Cant.* 2.4, *com. Io.* 10.300, *hom. Num.* 2.1. These distinctions will extend into heaven itself, *hom. Num.* 28.2.

⁹² P. Brown, *Body and Society* 165; Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 44.

⁹³ Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 44-45 and Chadwick, ‘Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection’ 86-87. *arch.* 4.4.8: identified as a fragment of Origen preserved in Justinian: Butterworth, 325, n. 3.

⁹⁴ Crouzel, *Origen* 218; *Virginité et mariage* 26-27.

⁹⁵ *hom. Gen.* 1.14-15. See Crouzel, *Origen* 87-89.

⁹⁶ For this concept of two creations, see Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 134-135. P. Brown concurs that Origen saw sexuality as a passing phase: *Body and Society* 167-168.

⁹⁷ *com. Io.* 13.280-283; *Cels.* 3.42 where Chadwick (157, n. 1) notes that Origen adopts the Stoic idea of the body as morally neutral. Resurrection: *Cels.* 4.29; 5.18-19; 5.22-23; 7.32; 8.49-50; *com. Rm.* 2.13.36; *arch.* 2.10.1-3.

Since he believes the body to be an instrument,⁹⁸ for the ultimate healing of the soul,⁹⁸ Origen's affirmations of the body tend to occur in contexts of defending the doctrine of resurrection. The present physical body is constantly changing but maintains a recognizable form. This form is the point of continuity between the corporeal body on earth and the spiritual body of the resurrection.⁹⁹

Despite this, it cannot be maintained that Origen held a 'deep personal revulsion against the human sexual nature'.¹⁰⁰ Each part of the body has its proper use as given by the Creator, even if that use is not immediately apparent. Sexual reproduction is divinely ordained and blessed.¹⁰¹ Origen tempers the command to make no provision for the flesh, saying that Paul 'does not assert that provision for the flesh is to be refused in every respect absolutely.' The necessities of life must be provided. The prohibition applies to seeking pleasure for the sake of lust.¹⁰² The necessities include the duty of procreation as long as this is done in 'determined and lawful times for the sake of posterity alone.'¹⁰³ The Alexandrian goes even further, asserting that sexual desire arises from normal human development and cannot be

⁹⁸ P. Brown, *Body and Society* 164-5.

⁹⁹ 'God will one day claim the flesh. But it will be flesh no more, though the features which once existed in the flesh will remain the same features in the spiritual body': *sel. Ps.*, C. H. E. Lommatsch (Berlin, 1831-1848), 25 vols, 11.384-391, trans. by R. B. Tollinton, *Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen* (London: SPCK, 1929), § LXXXVIII, 233. Also *com. Matt.* 17.29. See H. Crouzel, 'L'anthropologie d'Origène dans la perspective du combat spirituel', *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, 31 (1955), 377-378.

¹⁰⁰ Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting* 144, cf. 153. M. L. del Mastro ('Denial of the Flesh in Origen and Subsequent Implications', *Mystics Quarterly*, 14 (1988), 81) goes even further, accusing Origen of 'flesh-hating.'

¹⁰¹ *frag. hom. Ier.* 39 in *Philocalia* 10; *hom. Gen.* 1.14. Origen uses the word 'body' (σῶμα or in translation, corpus) in reference not only to the physical body on earth, but sometimes to the spiritual bodies given to the pre-existent intelligences: Crouzel, *Origen* 90.

¹⁰² *com. Rm.* 9.34.1, trans. Schenk, 9.28, cf. *Rom* 13.14. Crouzel lists terms Origen often employs for sexual sins, drawn from various exegetical texts: fornication: πορνεία, adultery: μοιχεία, pederasty: ἀρσενοκοίτης, φιλοπαίς and παιδοφθορία, effeminate behavior: μαλακός and μαλακότης, and general impurity: ἀκαθαρσία, from *com. Io.* 20.22; *com. Matt.* 10.24; 13.30; 14.10; and *frag. com. Eph.* 24, cited in *Virginité et mariage* 181-182.

¹⁰³ *hom. Gen.* 3.6, trans. R. E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FC 71 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 98. *com. Rm.* 2.13.31; *hom. Gen.* 5.4 and *hom. Lc.* 6.1 where Elizabeth's sexual activity is shameful because of her age, she is doing what is normal among those much younger.

characterized as being caused by the devil. If this desire is exercised within strict limits, it is not sinful to do so:

The flesh has natural appetites for food and drink which are kept within certain limits of satisfaction. But if someone, prompted by sin, should exceed these limits, the flesh is no longer longing after food and drink which suffice nature, but instead after excess and drunkenness. In a similar way there exists in the flesh a natural drive by which it demands to be united with a woman for the sake of procuring offspring. But if sin should seize this occasion to turn it aside from the law and from the impulse of nature, desire may be roused to do illicit things.¹⁰⁴

All of life on earth is contaminated since the physical body itself is a consequence of the fall which occurred among the intelligences in the pre-existence. Certain of these intelligences were assigned bodies for the purpose of correction and purification, a ‘merciful chastisement, a prelude to the Redemption.’¹⁰⁵ Sexuality also bears this primeval taint, acquired from the very moment of conception. Origen cites this impurity as the basis for the practice of baptizing infants, since all which has arisen from acts of generation needs purification.¹⁰⁶ Believers ought to mourn the sad necessity of being born into a physical body to the extent of cursing the very day of their birth.¹⁰⁷

Origen does not hesitate to follow through the implication this has for the incarnate Christ. He describes the incarnation as putting on the dung of the physical body.¹⁰⁸ Even *in utero* Jesus ‘saw in the womb of his mother the uncleanness of

¹⁰⁴ *com. Rm.* 5.7.4, trans. Schenk, 5.33. Also see *arch.* 3.2.2-3 where the wider context is his defense of free will against Gnostic determinism. Moral failure cannot be ascribed to demons but rather to ‘the sluggishness of the soul and the lust and pleasure of the body . . . the soul, by its own carelessness, subjects itself to this’: *hom. Gen.* 16.2, trans. Heine, FC 71.215-216. In *Cels.* 2.20 he refutes fatalism with an illustration that begetting a child is rooted in the individual’s decision to engage in sexual intercourse. Divine foreknowledge does not imply determinism: *frag. com. Gen.* 3.8 in *Philocalia*.

¹⁰⁵ Crouzel, *Origen* 215, and his excellent summation of this entire subject, 209-218.

¹⁰⁶ *com. Rm.* 5.9.11; 5.2.11; *hom. Lc.* 14.5; *hom. Lev.* 8.3.1-5; 8.4.1; 12.4.1; *com. Matt.* 15.22-23; 17.35 and *Cels.* 7.50. *hom. Jer.* 11.5.2.

¹⁰⁷ *hom. Lev.* 8.3.2-5.

¹⁰⁸ *hom. Lev.* 2.3.4; cf. *hom. Lev.* 12.4.1, a text which asserts Jesus was not contaminated by his mother. The context of this homily is a discussion of the complete exclusion of Joseph from the conception of Jesus. It may be that Origen was not completely consistent in his preaching on this

bodies, surrounded on both sides by her innards, he suffered the woes of earthly foulness'.¹⁰⁹ Assertions that Jesus had a pure body are made in the context of the virginal conception: 'his birth was purer than all other births in that he was born not of sexual intercourse but of a virgin.'¹¹⁰

Those souls which have been relegated to life on earth require the clothing of a physical body.¹¹¹ The lightness of the soul is weighed down with the body, the soul suffering from the pollutions of the body.¹¹² In congruence with his theory of sin occurring in the realm of intelligences, the pre-existence, where there were no physical bodies, Origen holds that the soul has certain sins of its own, sins that are rooted not in corporeality but in the soul itself.¹¹³

Origen is deeply suspicious of passions of the flesh and specifically, of sexual desire, which can draw one away from God. While the soul is in the body and subject to fleshly desires, it is limited in its ability to know God.¹¹⁴ Sexual lust represents all sensual things harmful to the spirit which is why Christ had no sexual

issue of contamination, and that Rufinus failed to catch this contradiction. See G. W. Barkley, 'Introduction' in *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus 1-16*, FC 83 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 20-21, cf. R. Heine, 'Introduction', FC 71.34-35.

¹⁰⁹ *hom. Lc.* 14.3, CMP 174, my translation. The text is: 'Videbat in matris utero immunditiam corporum, visceribus eius hinc inde vallatus terrenae faecis patiebatur angustias.' in *Origène, Homélie sur s. Luc, Texte Latin et Fragments Grecs de M. Rauer, Introduction, Traduction et Notes* by Henri Crouzel, François Fournier and Pierre Périchon, SC 87, 2nd revised edn (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 226, 228.

¹¹⁰ *Cels.* 2.69, trans. Chadwick 119. Also *hom. Lev.* 9.2.3. Both references are omitted by CMP and by D. Vagaggini, ed., 'Corpus Mariologicum ex operibus Origenis excerptum' in *Maria nelle opere di Origene* (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1942), 176-220. See section 5.3.1 below.

¹¹¹ *Cels.* 7.32; *arch.* 1.1.6; 2.3.2; 4.2.7. Origen did not deny the bodily resurrection, see Butterworth, 'Introduction' xxxvi-xxvii and Chadwick, 'Origen, Celsus and the Resurrection.'

¹¹² 'weighed down' follows Wisdom 9.15: *ComRom* 7.4.10; *com. Io.* 6.270; *Cels.* 7.5. 'suffers': *ser. Matt.* 73, trans. Daly, §796, *Spirit and Fire*, 283; *com. Ps.* 118.55, §577, *Spirit and Fire*, 228; *hom. Lev.* 3.3.2. The image of God is in the soul: *Cels.* 6.63, cf. 7.66. But the complete image is in the Logos alone: A. Hobbel, 'The *Imago Dei* in the Writings of Origen', *Studia Patristica*, 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 303, cf. *com. Io.* 2.3; 6.49; *Cels.* 4.85; 6.63.

¹¹³ *hom. Lev.* 7.1.6-7; *hom. Num.* 8.1. The soul is inferior to the spirit, which is the divine presence in a person, but superior to the flesh: *com. Rm.* 9.25.1. Damned souls are stripped of the spirit (πνευμα): *com. Rm.* 2.9.4; *ser. Matt.* 62, cited in Crouzel, *Origen* 92.

¹¹⁴ *hom. Jer.* 14.10.1; *frag. com. Matt.* 86B as cited in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 185. *Cels.* 4.26; *arch.* 1.1.5; *com. Cant.* 3.12; *Cels.* 7.42; *hom. Gen.* 7.3; *hom. Lc.* 30.1.

passion. Sexuality has the power to coarsen a soul to the point where it cannot perceive higher things.¹¹⁵ The marriage bed is no place for praying since sexual practice and prayer are incompatible.¹¹⁶ Because sexual temptations are endemic to life in a physical body, and are actually necessary to endure for purification, it is essential for the believer to exercise discipline to keep the passions of sexuality in check.¹¹⁷ Spiritual disaster awaits those who fail in this. Thus Origen's application of the Matthew text, 'Let the dead bury their own dead' which he takes to apply to fornication itself, 'All that (πορνεῖα) died: reject it far from you, cut it off like dead flesh which infects the entire body.'¹¹⁸ Such discipline is training for the life in heaven:

That we might be transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit by means of constant training and preparation which takes place through the contemplation of the divine glory during our days on earth in the flesh, and it makes us more prepared to receive that true future glory.¹¹⁹

The sexual immorality which permeates pagan religion and mythology is therefore disgusting to Origen.¹²⁰ He draws a sharp contrast between the entrance of the Pythian spirit into the prophetess and the conception by the Holy Spirit of the

¹¹⁵ *com. Io.* 10.204; *hom. Lev.* 3.5; *com. Rm.* 6.9.10. *Cels.* 3.38: those abused sexually from childhood are unable to look to higher things.

¹¹⁶ *hom. Ex.* 11.7; *euch.* 31.4 and the discussion in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 56-57. Also before taking the Eucharist, *pasch.* 36.1-20. What is healthy for the flesh is not so for the spirit, *hom. Ps.* 37.1.2 (cited in Crouzel, *ibid.* 119). These restrictions 'probably reflect conventional practices of pious Christians in his day': Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 158.

¹¹⁷ *euch.* 29.1-2; 29.9 and *arch.* 3.2.1-4, where Origen states that sexual desires are not diabolical per se, but are inherent to a physical body. Cf. *pasch.* 35.20-25: sexual appetite is one of the devil's most effective tools; and *com. Cant.* 2.6: evil spirits in alliance with evil people do stir these desires up to attack believers. Necessity of temptation: *exh. mart.* 2; *hom. Num.* 27.12; *com. Rm.* 4.9.9; *hom. Lc.* 26.4-5. Exercise discipline: *hom. Ex.* 13.5; *hom. Ezk.* 1.3; *com. Rm.* 6.9.9.

¹¹⁸ *frag. com. Matt.* as cited in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 119, cf. GSC 12/3.80. Disaster: *hom. Cant.* 2.12; *com. Cant.* 3.7; *com. Rm.* 5.7.3 and 9.5.1; *Cels.* 8.19. Even those with years of chastity may fall: *hom. Lc.* 38.4. But it is not only sexual sins that can bring downfall: *Heracl.* 10.1-15.

¹¹⁹ *com. Rm.* 4.8.10, trans. Schenk, 4. 31, cf. *com. Rm.* 8.8.13. Also *Cels.* 8.22.

¹²⁰ In the myths and literature: *Cels.* 1.17; 3.22-23; 3.57-58; 4.48; 5.37; 8.66. In religious rites and general life: *Cels.* 3.25, see below, and *Cels.* 3.36, where he takes a swipe at the homosexual lover of the Emperor Hadrian, safely dead a century. Also *Cels.* 3.38; 3.77; 6.80; 7.49; 8.23; *com. Rm.* 9.33.1. See section 5.2.3 below concerning Origen's view of pagan sexual renunciation.

virgin Mary:

Worst of all, the oracular spirit, Apollo, set free from any earthly body, passes into the so-called prophetess seated at the Pythian cave through her genitals. But we hold no such opinion about Jesus and his power; the body born of a virgin consisted of human substance, capable of suffering wounds and death like other men.¹²¹

He dismisses as mockery the charge of Celsus that Mary was impregnated by sexual intercourse with God:

I do not think it worth while to combat an argument which he [Celsus] does not put forward seriously, but only as mockery: 'Then was the mother of Jesus beautiful? And because she was beautiful did God have sexual intercourse with her . . .' What is the difference between this and vulgar abuse at street corners?¹²²

Even more repugnant are the false charges raised by critics like Celsus against Christians, whereby they are accused of sexual license and perversion.¹²³ Not only are these charges baseless, but the sexual abstinence and purity of Christians are testimonies to God's power. It is especially significant to Origen that among Christians even the uneducated can practice a rational self-control known to few pagan philosophers.¹²⁴ Believers who fail in this area are exceptions that do not support the charges. They are Christian in name only. Such people may repent and after a time be restored to the fellowship.¹²⁵

¹²¹ *Cels.* 3.25, Chadwick 143-144, cf. *Cels.* 7.3-6.

¹²² *Cels.* 1.39, Chadwick 37-38.

¹²³ *Cels.* 6.27; 6.34-35; 6.40. Origen sometimes judges stories of sexual misconduct in Scripture as of no value on the level of history, but only to be read for spiritual application: *hom. Reg.* 28.2.1; and *com. Io.* 13.68-74, where he passes over the fornication of the Samaritan woman of Jn 4 without comment. He may think there is only meaning at the spiritual level in this text, in the same way he dismissed as unhistorical the anger of Jesus in the cleansing of the temple: *com. Io.* 10.147-148 (see section 5.1.1 above).

¹²⁴ *Cels.* 1.27; 3.56-58; 4.5; 7.48. *Cels.* 2.79.

¹²⁵ Church leaders must not teach chastity while burning with fires of hidden lust: *com. Rm.* 2.11.9. In the next section (2.11.10) he warns that these leaders also must not misuse church funds. Restoration of the incestuous man of 1 Cor 5: *com. Rm.* Pref. 5 and *ser. Matt.* 117, where limits set on penitential discipline thwart the devil. Also *hom. Lev.* 11.2.4-6 and *hom. Jer.* 20.9.1-3.

5.2.2.1 women and men

While Origen certainly differentiates between women and men in their roles in society and in the fellowship, all that he says about gender must be placed in the broad context of spiritual fall and ascent. Marriage, procreation and gender are tied to the physical body, which is not permanent. What is paramount to Origen is not one's gender but one's spiritual status:

There is before God no distinction of sex, but it is according to the quality of the heart that one is named man or woman. How many who are women in sex are reckoned by God among the strong men, or how many men are placed among the weak and languid women!¹²⁶

Women are as much a part of the church as are men. Origen has no hesitation in commending the prayers of women as models for all believers, naming Hannah first in a list of those with especially spiritual prayers.¹²⁷ When Celsus dismisses the resurrection on the basis that the central eyewitness, Mary Magdalene, was a hysterical female, Origen defends her as reliable and stable. He observes that during the earthly ministry of Jesus he attracted many, including women who had to overcome various social expectations to follow him.¹²⁸ He commends the women who had a vital role in salvation history of proclamation and testimony:

Here, then, a woman proclaims Christ to the Samaritans, and at the end of the Gospels also the woman who saw him before all the others tells the apostles of the Resurrection of the Savior.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *hom. Iesu Naue* 9.9, trans. by Crouzel (*Virginité et mariage* 138): 'Il n'y a devant Dieu aucune distinction de sexe, mais c'est selon la qualité de l'âme qu'on est nommé homme ou femme. Combien de femmes par le sexe sont comptées par Dieu parmi les hommes forts, combien d'hommes sont placés parmi les femmes faibles et languissantes.' The occurrence of the word 'woman' in Scripture is the occasion for Origen, like Philo, to render it a symbol of the lower senses: Hanson, *Allegory and Event* 48 and 247.

¹²⁷ *euch.* 2.5; 4.1; 13.2. Origen dedicated this treatise to two people, one a woman: 2.1 and 34.

¹²⁸ *Cels.* 2.59-60; 5.56. When Celsus charges Christianity as being only for slaves, women and little children, Origen does not deny the presence of such people in the church, but rather counters with the assertion that even unlettered and ignorant people may practice wisdom: *Cels.* 3.44; cf. 7.41. Women 'disregarding their feminine weakness and outward propriety' followed Jesus: *Cels.* 3.10, trans. Chadwick, 134. Both women and men were persecuted by Paul: *com. Rm.* 7.19.9.

¹²⁹ The Samaritan woman 'benevolently preached Christ to her fellow-citizens,' *com. Io.* 13.176 and 179, FC 89.106, (SC 222.130, 132), cf. Jn 4.28-29.

We are provided a tantalizingly brief glimpse of the social make-up of a congregation to which Origen preached when he gives this exhortation: 'I wish that the eyes of all (of catechumens and faithful, of women, men and children) . . . would gaze upon Jesus.'¹³⁰ Among the women whom he personally dealt with was Juliana, who donated to Origen significant source material which he incorporated into his masterly *Hexapla*.¹³¹ His comment on Rom 16.1 is an affirmation of the place of women not only in the church, but even in ministry:

This passage teaches with apostolic authority that women as well are appointed to ministry in the church. . . . As we have said, women are to be received as servants in the church, namely those ought to be received in ministry who have assisted many and have become worthy through their good services to attain to apostolic praise.¹³²

Biological sexual identity is less significant for Origen than spirituality. He often employs terms of gender in a spiritual sense: the soul that is overcoming vices and passions is firm, male and the soul that is yet mired in sin is effeminate, female.¹³³ A key text in this regard is his comment on Genesis 1.27. First he deals with the historical level: God created two sexes for the purpose of procreation. He then proceeds to a spiritual interpretation, reading allegorically that the soul is female and the spirit male. Those dominated by their spirit are spiritually fruitful. Those controlled by the soul may be led astray by carnal pleasures.¹³⁴ Even male

¹³⁰ *hom. Lc.* 32.5, FC 94.133.

¹³¹ The translation of the OT by Symmachus, according to Eusebius, *HE* 6.17, cited in P. Brown, *Body and Society* 152 n. 54.

¹³² *com. Rm.* 10.17.2, trans. Schenk, 10.25-26; cf. 10.20. This contravenes an intemperate comment that Origen 'had the Eastern contempt for women as a sex': A. Agius, 'The Problem of Mary's Holiness in the First Christian Centuries', *MSt*, 14 (1963), 44.

¹³³ *hom. Lev.* 1.2.8; 4.8.4; 8.4.1; *hom. Gen.* 4.4; *hom. Ex.* 2.1-2; 13.6; *frag. com. Eph.* 29 on Eph 5.22-23; *Cels.* 8.52. 'For Christ is a perfect being, since there is nothing lacking or deficient in him. Male indicates his firmness and courage': *pasch.* 22, trans. Daly, ACW 54.39. Origen exhibits an ongoing interest in medical science, often drawing biological illustrations: *Cels.* 8.60; *com. Io.* 20.35-36; *PsSel* 37.1; *frag. hom. Ier.* 39 in *Philoc.* 10; *Philoc.* 27.9. Reproduction and sexuality: *Cels.* 1.37; 5.36; *arch.* 3.2.2; *com. Io.* 20.3; *com. Cant.* 2.2.

¹³⁴ *hom. Gen.* 1.14-15.

church leaders can lose their spiritual ‘maleness’ if they preach corruptly.¹³⁵ Yet not all references to the feminine in Origen are negative. His entire concept of mystical marriage is built on an understanding of the human soul as feminine in relation to God, and therefore fertile for spiritual growth: ‘The soul becomes sterile when God abandons it; but becomes a mother when he is at work in it.’¹³⁶ He also uses feminine imagery to describe divine activity. The Word of God nourishes the soul like mother’s milk feeds an infant.¹³⁷ It is rare for him to mention Eve’s sin apart from that of Adam.¹³⁸ A chaste male who falls into sexual sin cannot place the primary burden of blame onto the woman who tempted him since this is a denial of his own free will.¹³⁹ Even Lot’s daughters are partially excused for the seduction of their father.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there are texts in Origen which have a tinge of

¹³⁵ ‘there is nothing manly, nothing strong, nothing worthy of God, in the men who preach according to the pleasures of their hearers’: *hom. Ezk.* 3.3, trans. Tollinton, §LXIX, p. 177.

¹³⁶ *com. Ps.* 112.9, trans. Daly, *Spirit and Fire*, §742, p. 268; also *frag. Lc.* 113 on Lk 7.37. The bulk of what we have on this survives in the *Commentary* and *Homilies* on the Song of Songs, but it is not uncommon elsewhere. Christ is male in relation to the female church: *com. Matt.* 14.17. See below in the section on marriage (5.2.2.2), and the summaries in Crouzel: *Origen* 121-126 and *Virginité et mariage* 15-39.

¹³⁷ *Cels.* 4.18.

¹³⁸ Both are culpable: *hom. Ier.* 20.3.4; *hom. Ezk.* 1.3; *com. Io.* 20.221; *com. Rm.* 4.4.4; *Cels.* 4.40; 7.39; *arch.* 2.3.4; 3.2.1; *euch.* 23.3. Adam is mentioned without Eve (but most often Adam refers to both): *hom. Ex.* 11.5; *hom. Lev.* 9.5.3; *hom. Ier.* 16.4.4; *frag. com.* ‘Osee in *Philoc.* 8.2; *com. Rm.* 5.2.10; 5.5.9; 10.14.7; *Cels.* 7.28. Eve’s seduction is usually connected to the actions of Adam as well: *com. Cant.* 2.3 and *arch.* 3.2.1; *com. Io.* 1.121. A homily on Jeremiah (20.7.4) does blame Eve for befriending the Serpent. Cf. *com. Cant.* 3.12; *euch.* 29.18. How is it that Paul says sin entered by Adam when in fact Eve sinned first? Origen’s explanation is that since all inheritance and heredity comes through the man alone (reflecting the genetic understanding of his time), it is through Adam, not the serpent or Eve that the example of sin came into the human race: *com. Rm.* 5.1.12-14, cf. 1Tim 2.14. Crouzel (*Origen* 218) rightly observes that the lost commentary on Genesis may well have clarified how Origen understood the story of the fall of Adam: whether only allegorically, reflecting the pre-existent fall, or also historically. It would be consistent with his strong defense of free will for Origen not to hold to original sin from Adam. Adam affects the race through example, not imputed guilt: *com. Rm.* 5.5.9: ‘Adam set an example (dedit formam) for sinners through his disobedience’ trans. Schenk, 5.21. See also *com. Rm.* 5.2.10. It is ‘agreed that inherited guilt is foreign to Origen’s thought’ according to Schenk (comments on *com. Rm.* 5.1.14, 5.7, n. 19). Origen had no doctrine of original sin, according to G. Teichtweier, *Die Sündenlehre des Origenes* (Regensburg, 1958), 92-101, cited in SC 87.223, n. 2, cf. *hom. Lc.* 14.5. Also see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 181, and others.

¹³⁹ *arch.* 3.1.4-5. It is the man alone whose gaze is lustful and curious towards women, *hom. Gen.* 3.6. Contrast this with Tertullian, *cult. fem.* 1.1, CCSL 1.343 and *virg. vel.* 16, CCSL 2.1225.

¹⁴⁰ *hom. Gen.* 5.4, where Heine observes that Origen follows Jewish exegesis: FC 71.116, n. 22.

misogyny. Abraham's wife is commended 'since womanish things had ceased to function in Sarah. For in her there was none of that weakness associated with feminine lasciviousness or the dissoluteness of incontinence.'¹⁴¹ Women are weak and incomplete.¹⁴² He will not permit women, even virgins who are unattached to any husband, to speak out a prophecy in church.¹⁴³

5.2.2.2 marriage

Marriage has a dual identity for Origen. On earth it is a legitimate relationship ordained by God for procreation. Following Paul, he also considers it representative of spiritual realities - especially as an allegorical symbol of the bond between the soul and Christ. Earthly physical marriage is part of the second creation which involves all things corporeal.¹⁴⁴ As such, it will not survive into the next age, just as there was none in the pre-existence.¹⁴⁵ So when Origen does affirm physical marriage, he does it with hesitation as befits an institution so intimately tied to the

¹⁴¹ *com. Rm.* 4.6.7, trans. Schenk, 4.22; cf. *euch.* 2.1, ACW 19.16, where Origen dedicates the work to his sponsor Ambrose and to a woman Tatiana, to whom he addresses this wish: 'I pray that as it had ceased to be with Sara after the manner of women [Gen 18.11] so it may have ceased to be with you.' This is merely a reference to Tatinana being beyond the age of childbearing rather than a denial of ontological equality. Gould proposes a middle ground: it is a reversion to traditional rhetoric: 'Women in the Writings of the Fathers: Language, Belief, and Reality' in *Women in the Church*, ed. by W. J. Sheils and D. Woods (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 4-5.

¹⁴² *hom. Num.* 1.1. Crouzel provides various texts where Origen affirms spiritually mature women, including Mary. He warns us that most of Origen's comments which seem misogynistic are where he discusses spiritual rather than historical reality (Crouzel, 'La misogynie d'Origène' in *Virginité et mariage* 135-139). He observes (*ibid.* 140) that Origen considers sexual sins of that husband equally as grave as those of the wife. Origen does not censure women as a class: 'we do not censure all [women] equally': *hom. Gen.* 5.4, FC 71.117. Origen, unlike Tertullian, does not read Genesis 6 in a misogynistic manner. The blame for the fall of the 'sons of God' is entirely their own: *Cels.* 5.55, cf. Tertullian, *virg. vel.* 7, CCSL 2.1225 and *orat.* 21-22, CCSL 1.271. Origen is in the mainstream of Jewish and Christian tradition in accepting that women as well as men are created in God's image: M. C. Horowitz, 'The Image of God in Man: Is Woman Included [Gen 1:27]?', *Harvard Theological Review*, 72 (1979), 175-206.

¹⁴³ *frag. com. 1Cor.* 74: 'For it is not right for a woman to speak out in an assembly, no matter what she says; even if she utters marvellous things, holy things, the fact remains that all of it is only coming from the mouth of a woman,' trans by K. J. Coyle, 'The Fathers on Women and Women's Ordination', *Église et Théologie*, 9 (1978), 73-74.

¹⁴⁴ See chapter III of Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage*, 132-169. Second creation comes from 'un héritage philonien' but adapted by Origen, *ibid.* 135.

¹⁴⁵ *Treatise on Ps 4* in *Philoc.* 26.6; *exh. mart.* 16, cf. *com. Rm.* 2.13.20.

earthly body which in itself is a result of primeval sin. A good example is his comment on 1 Cor 7.28:

‘You are married,’ says the Apostle, ‘you have not sinned.’ It is not written: ‘You are married, you have done well,’ but ‘You are married, you have not sinned.’ Note the difference.¹⁴⁶

He acknowledges the marital obligation each partner owes to the other in a marriage to not withhold sexual relations.¹⁴⁷ These relations are legitimate, but also dangerous because they can lead to dishonor.¹⁴⁸ Therefore marital sexual contact must be regulated as to time, place, manner and purpose.

Sexual relations must be done in order and at the suitable time (τάξει δὲ καὶ καιρῷ).¹⁴⁹ ‘Even those who are joined in marriage do not consider every season free for intercourse.’¹⁵⁰ It is not fitting to engage in sexual intercourse before hearing the Word of God in a church service nor just before taking the Eucharist.¹⁵¹ Adam did not know his wife Eve in a sexual manner before their disobedience and ejection from the garden.¹⁵²

Place and manner are also important. Sexual activity is to take place on the marriage bed only with one’s spouse.¹⁵³ The ambiguity and potential danger of

¹⁴⁶ *frag. 39 on 1 Cor*, cited in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 60. Marriage is a divine gift, alongside celibacy: *com. Matt.* 14.16. However family life may pose a distraction to those facing martyrdom: *exh. mart.* 11; 14; 37; *hom. Iud.* 2.3.

¹⁴⁷ *com. Rm.* 1.1.2; *euch.* 28.4 and 2.2. However Origen turns around the force of the Pauline text (1 Cor 7.5), away from Paul’s intent of warning against ascetic extremes instead to restrict sexual contact in marriage.

¹⁴⁸ *hom. Cant.* 2.1; *Cels.* 1.27

¹⁴⁹ *frag. 27 on 1 Cor*, cited in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 79.

¹⁵⁰ *hom. Lc.* 6.1, FC 94.23, where Origen notes the embarrassment of Elizabeth, whose pregnancy indicated to all that she had returned to sexual activity with her husband despite her age.

¹⁵¹ *hom. Ex.* 11.7; *pasch.* 35.30-37.2. Due care must also be exercised in taking food in the right way and time: *com. Rm.* 9.42.9.

¹⁵² *frag. 29 on 1 Cor*; *com. Matt.* 14.16; *com. Rm.* 5.9.11. Based on his description of Adam’s childishness (νηπιότητα) in his love for the earth, Daly (*pasch.* 44.30-35, ACW 54.52-53, n. 57) concludes that Origen thought Adam had sinned before he had developed to sexual maturity, a view held by Irenaeus: *Dem.* 14 and *AH* 3.23.5.

¹⁵³ *hom. Gen.* 3.6.

lawful intercourse renders this location unsuitable for prayer.¹⁵⁴ A married couple may engage in the sexual act, but only in a dignified manner. This must be done in ‘order’ (τάξει) and ‘with reverence, with restraint, and without passion.’¹⁵⁵ The pleasures of sex are so dangerous that if they are not tightly controlled they may be employed by demons to drive us to a state of mad frenzy. Thus the need for the ‘reins of continence and chastity.’¹⁵⁶

Marital intercourse is allowed for only two purposes. Procreation is the primary purpose of physical marriage.¹⁵⁷ It has the secondary purpose of standing as a remedy for sexual cravings, ‘a sound remedy for those who need its remedy for their weakness.’¹⁵⁸ The sexual organ ‘serves the natural functions of coitus and procreation . . . for the sake of posterity alone’.¹⁵⁹ Non-procreative sex is such an outrage to the created order that women who lie with their husbands after they know they have conceived are in some sense more incestuous than Lot’s daughters. Yet within the limits of procreation, sexual activity can be performed to the glory of God.¹⁶⁰ Those engaged in generative activities require the very fire of God to keep their dangerous passions in check.¹⁶¹

On the other hand, Origen can employ sexual imagery in a powerfully

¹⁵⁴ *euch.* 31.4; *hom. Ex.* 11.7 Married believers, no less than virgins, are fully able to engage in prayer: *com. Rm.* 9.1.7.

¹⁵⁵ *frag. 27 on I Cor.* *euch.* 2.2, trans. by J. J. O’Meara, *Origen, Prayer and Exhortation to Martyrdom*, ACW 19 (London: Longmans, Green, 1954), 18; cf. *com. Rm.* 2.13.25.

¹⁵⁶ *com. Io.* 20.328-332, FC 89.274. *com. Rm.* 10.14.6, trans. Schenk, 10.22; cf. *hom. Lev.* 1.5.1: ‘bridle of continence,’ FC 83.37.

¹⁵⁷ Origen is in line with much of early church here: see a convenient summary in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 79, n. 9, though he notes (200) that Origen, in contrast to Clement, does not emphasize reproduction as a social duty to the state or the church. Infanticide is especially abhorrent to Origen as a denial of the divine providence that provides a marriage with children: *Cels.* 8.55.

¹⁵⁸ *hom. Ex.* 11.7, FC 71.365; *hom. Lev.* 16.2.7; *Cels.* 8.55.

¹⁵⁹ *hom. Gen.* 3.6, FC 71.97-98; *com. Rm.* 2.13.25 and 31; 5.7.4; *hom. Ex.* 8.5; *hom. Lc.* 6.1.

¹⁶⁰ *Cels.* 5.42; *hom. Gen.* 5.4. He allows second marriage after a spouse’s death, but reluctantly: *hom. Ier.* 20.4.1; *com. Rm.* 6.7.12.

¹⁶¹ *hom. Ezk.* 1.3: sexual activity, being the epitome of corporeality which is itself the result of the pre-existent fall from grace, requires God’s purifying fire. I am grateful to Tom Schenk who in private correspondence drew my attention to the significance of this text describing the need for purification.

positive way, especially in his doctrine of spiritual marriage, which is a central theme of his work on the Song of Songs, both the *Commentary*¹⁶² and the surviving *Homilies*. The concept of God as a bridegroom and his people as a bride is not new to the third century. Its roots lie in the book of Hosea and the letters of Paul. The early church picked up and developed this theme, especially in its reading of the Song of Songs.¹⁶³

Origen's chief innovation in exegesis of the Song of Songs is to add an individualistic second layer of interpretation to the mystical marriage such that the figure of the bride can be read in two ways: as the Church and as the individual soul of the believer. He also applied his cosmology to this theme. The mystical marriage of Christ is not restricted to this world, but originated in the pre-existence and extends into the age to come.¹⁶⁴ The *Homilies* reflect Origen's sensitivity to his church audience. Though he acknowledges both meanings of the 'Bride' in the first *Homily*, his main focus is on the corporate sense in both surviving sermons. On the other hand, in the *Commentary*, determined to be read by a much more select group, he tends to take the Bride to be the individual soul of the believer.¹⁶⁵ The theme of mystical marriage is not by any means restricted to his works on the Song of Songs.

¹⁶² Origen views the text as an active participant in the spiritual ascension: P. C. Miller, "Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure": Eros and Language in Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*', *JAAR*, 54 (1986), 241-253.

¹⁶³ The commentary of Hippolytus is the only surviving predecessor to Origen's. See a brief history of interpretation of the Song of Songs up to Origen in R. Murphy, *A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 11-21. Origen's commentary is 'the first great work of Christian mysticism' according to R. P. Lawson, 'Introduction', ACW 26.6. It is widely acknowledged as having great influence upon all subsequent interpretations of the Song of Songs. See S. D. Moore, 'The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality', *Church History*, 69 (2000), 328-349.

¹⁶⁴ *com. Cant.* 2.8. Cf. Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 17: 'Non limitée à cette terre, l'union a commencé dès la création des êtres *logika* et elle retrouvera sa perfection après la Résurrection.' The same author considers the two meanings of Bride to be complementary, not contradictory: the individual's soul is bride by virtue of being a member of the body which is also the bride of Christ: Crouzel, *Origen* 122.

¹⁶⁵ Lawson, 'Introduction', ACW 26.17-19. *hom. Cant.* 1.1. Also see J. Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia* 71.

Both the corporate and individual senses of Bride may be found elsewhere.¹⁶⁶

The Bride must be pure, even virginal in order to be fit to be wed to the Son of God. This applies to the church as a whole and to the individual soul.¹⁶⁷ This virginity is a purity not only of body, but even more so of the soul. A virginal soul is one which has not betrothed itself to diabolical faithlessness.¹⁶⁸ Pride, anger, envy, vain glory, and other sins ‘commit fornication with an unfaithful soul.’¹⁶⁹ Such spiritual adultery dissipates the mystical fecundity. The union of Christ and his bride, the soul, will produce spiritual fruit. The use of the Hebraic euphemism ‘to know’ is significant for Origen. In his thinking the physical sexual union is but a shadow of the spiritual reality of the union of the believer’s soul with God.¹⁷⁰

5.2.2.3 Virginity and renunciation of sexual relations

Origen is considered one of the foremost early advocates of sexual renunciation and

¹⁶⁶ *com. Matt.* 14.17, 19; *hom. Gen.* 6.3 and 10.2-3; *hom. Lev.* 12.52-3; *hom. Iud.* 8.5; *frag.* 186 on Lk 11.33-34.

¹⁶⁷ Origen is not consistent in applying this image of virginity to spiritual marriage. Christ himself is portrayed as divorced. He comes to his marriage with the Church having divorced his first wife, the synagogue, for adultery: *com. Matt.* 14.17. The individual soul is sometimes depicted as a widow, being previously married to the devil who was destroyed by Christ: *hom. Iesu Naue* 13.2. This image is also used in his exegesis of Rom 7.1-6, where at first it applies only to the Jews, but later he broadens it to all souls: *com. Rm.* 6.7.2-17. At this point Schenk notes the parallel text *com. Io.* 13.43-50. He adds (Schenk, 6.17, n. 19): ‘As R.E. Heine pointed out to me, Origen seems to have reversed the figure here. Whereas he had been stressing that it is the law, as husband, which dies, thus freeing us, the wife, to marry another, now he says that we must die to the letter of the law. In a letter to John Colet about this section Erasmus remarked, “In that passage St Paul is so slippery that he looks first one way then another, so that in explaining all this Origen works himself into a lather.” (*Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 5, Ep 825:13-16).’ On the broadening in *com. Rm.* 6, see also P. Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), 71.

¹⁶⁸ *com. Cant.* 1.1; 2.5; *hom. Lev.* 12.5.2-5. The soul must be pure in both body and spirit: *hom. Gen.* 10.4, FC 71.163-165, cf. *hom. Lev.* 2.2.2.

¹⁶⁹ *hom. Ex.* 8.5, FC 71.326.

¹⁷⁰ *com. Rm.* 7.8.3; also 8.11.8; 9.1.10; *hom. Gen.* 1.15; 6.3; *frag. com. Io.* 3.29. The physical body is the bed where the fruitful union of the Nephew (Christ) and the soul takes place: *com. Cant.* 3.2. Also *com. Cant.* 3.12; *hom. Cant.* 2.4 and *com. Matt.* 17.33. The soul’s fertility can be detrimental, when the soul accepts the seed of evil powers and brings forth evil: *hom. Ezk.* 8.1, following Romans 7.5. Souls come to an age of responsibility, a ‘puberty’ of the spirit, when they are able to fornicate: *hom. Ezk.* 6-10; cf. the mature soul which desires the breasts of the bridegroom, Christ: *com. Cant.* 1.5. Virgins also bear spiritual fruit: *hom. Gen.* 11.1, cf. 1Cor 4.15.

virginity.¹⁷¹ Since the body is a necessary but temporary vehicle for educating the soul so that it may attain its lost ability to contemplate God, bodily discipline is needful, but not an end in itself.¹⁷² Among these disciplines are those which restrain sexual behavior, including restrictions on second marriages, limitations on sexual relations within marriage, and life-long virginity.

Origen grants that even married believers may offer an acceptable sacrifice to God. Those most able to render a living sacrifice are, of course, martyrs, then virgins, then the continent. But even virgins must beware of pride.¹⁷³ Widows as well as virgins have legitimate ministry in the church as long as they minister in a worthy manner. Those who do so earn the right to be 'enrolled into ecclesiastical honor.'¹⁷⁴ He includes widows alongside bishops, presbyters and deacons as those who must maintain the dignity of their standing by not succumbing to second marriages.¹⁷⁵

Virginity, the highest form of sexual renunciation, can only be accomplished 'with great difficulty.' Joseph demonstrates a 'magnificent continence' in resisting the advances of his master's wife.¹⁷⁶ Origen seems to be familiar with some official

¹⁷¹ Origen's asceticism became a point of reference for much later debate, for instance in the Origenist controversy in the fourth and fifth centuries: see E. A. Clark, 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies' *Church History*, 59 (1990), 145-162.

¹⁷² Peter Brown has shown us how Origen's view of the body and sexuality is not inherently negative, but positive, *Body and Society* 165-177. Origen follows the view of Stoicism that the body is neutral rather than the Platonic opinion of the body as negative, according to J. A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue* 164; cf. Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 164-165. A concise summation of Origen's views of various schools is found in Crouzel, *Origen* 156-163.

¹⁷³ *com. Rm.* 9.1.7; cf. *Rom* 12.1. Similar rankings occur in *hom. Iesu Naue* 2.1: martyrs, then virgins, then widows; and *hom. Lc.* 17.1, which delineates two groups: the higher includes the man married only once, the virgin, and the one 'who perseveres in abstinence', and the second rank those who marry twice - they are saved, but not crowned: trans. Lienhard, FC 94.75. Origen deplores those who marry two, three or four times. He does allow remarriage but wishes this permission not to be widely circulated: *hom. Jer.* 20.4.1, cf. *hom. Lc.* 17.10.

¹⁷⁴ *com. Rm.* 8.10.5-6. *com. Io.* 32.131-132, trans. Heine, FC 89.367: a text that describes a process of vetting before admission.

¹⁷⁵ *hom. Lc.* 17.10, trans. Lienhard, FC 94.75: 'Anyone twice married may be neither a bishop nor a presbyter nor a deacon nor a widow.' Also see *com. Matt.* 14.22 and *hom. Isa.* 6.3.

¹⁷⁶ *frag. res.* cited in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 11; *euch.* 29.18, ACW 19.126.

church recognition of virgins and celibates, who must have a divine calling.¹⁷⁷ Since virginity is not demanded of all, it must be offered freely to God, above and beyond one's duty.¹⁷⁸ Virginity is not only in place to keep rein on the passions of the flesh, but also to prepare the soul for the heavenly life.¹⁷⁹ Some approach this heavenly life while still on earth. For instance, Anna's life-long practice of chastity and fasting made her worthy of the gift of prophecy.¹⁸⁰

Origen does not hold virginity to be a good in itself. As with all Christian behavior, the important thing is not the external action but how this action will serve the soul's progression of ascent.¹⁸¹ So physical virginity *per se* is of no benefit. Virginity practiced among the pagan religions and heretics has no value because their renunciation is from base motives.¹⁸² But even in the church biological

¹⁷⁷ *hom. Num.* 2.1; *hom. Iesu Naue* 2.1. Calling: *com. Rm.* 1.2. It is a spiritual gift: *com. Rm.* 1.12. Peter Brown injudiciously generalizes when he states that Origen's ascetical teaching and example 'at a stroke' opened up virginity as an option not only for middle-aged but now especially for young people (*Body and Society* 170). It was widely known in the church well before Origen's time that some had been sexually continent from their youth. A few examples suffice here: Justin (*1 Apol.* 15), Tertullian (*ux.* 1.6), and Clement (*paed.* 2.10.109; 3.12.97; 3.15.97.4).

¹⁷⁸ *com. Rm.* 10.14.7; virgins abstain from that which is lawful: *hom. Gen.* 3.6. H. Crouzel concludes 'it cannot be maintained that Origen envisaged a life of total continence for the clergy: 'Celibacy and Ecclesiastical Continence in the Early Church: the Motives Involved', in *Priesthood and Celibacy*, ed. by A. M. Charve and others (Milan: Ancora, 1973), 473. He believes ('Celibacy and Ecclesiastical Continence' 463) that Gryson 'forces the text' of *hom. Lev.* 6.6.2 and wrongly makes Origen 'a precursor of clerical celibacy.' Crouzel reaffirms this view in his *Origen* (1989), 222-223. Cf. Roger Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique. Du premier au septième siècle*, Recherches et synthèses, Section d'histoire, 2 (Gembloux, 1970), 14-16. Keroloss ('Virginity in the Early Church' 234) falls into a similar error when he calls Origen an advocate of the 'virginity of the clergy' though he does acknowledge (235-236) that Origen did not make such a practice mandatory.

¹⁷⁹ *hom. Lev.* 1.5.1, FC 83.37; cf. 'reins of continence and chastity': *com. Rm.* 10.14.6, trans. Schenk, 10.22 and *hom. Ier.* 20.7.5. Preparation for heaven: *com. Rm.* 2.13.20-21; 4.6.9; 8.8.13; *Cels.* 8.22; 4.29; *com. Matt.* 12.14; *euch.* 26.5; there being no marriage in heaven: *exh. mart.* 16; *hom. Lc.* 39.1-2, cf. *frag.* 241 on Lk 20.36.

¹⁸⁰ *hom. Lc.* 17.9. Jesus fasted to mortify his flesh against temptation: *hom. Lc.* 29.2. Grimm's broad statement (*From Feasting to Fasting*, 145) that Origen does not mention fasting when discussing dietary practice needs to be tempered by texts such as the previous one and others like *hom. Lev.* 10.2.6 and *com. Rm.* 9.37.1 which describe fasting in the church as common enough an occurrence to warrant its use as an illustration. Virgins cannot be considered as cursed with barrenness since they bear spiritual children: *hom. Gen.* 11.1, cf. Deut 7.14; 25.5-10.

¹⁸¹ Origen regarded a virgin who suffered rape as still 'chaste in secret heart,' *com. Matt.* 12.7, ANF 10.454.

¹⁸² The central text is *Cels.* 7.48: some pagan virginity is accomplished by means of drugs. Others, far fewer, maintain virginity, but for base motives, unlike the Christians. Also *Cels.* 7.63; 8.66. Christians put the body aside as easily as a philosopher removes his cloak: *Cels.* 7.39; cf. *Cels.* 4.27.

virginity does not guarantee spirituality. Some Christian virgins have failed to live up to their calling. If one's spirit is impure, outward continence and virginity is not sufficient.¹⁸³ Origen provides a telling alert to virgins who have succumbed to pride and other sins of attitude:

For there are also others who offer their flesh as a whole burnt offering . . . They are indeed pure in body but are found to be impure in spirit. For either they are defiled with the concupiscence of human glory, or they are polluted with the lust of greed, or they grow filthy by the misfortune of jealousy and malice, or they are tormented by being mad with hatred and with an excess of rage. . . . Hence, the continence of the flesh alone is not able to reach to the altar of the Lord if it is lacking the remaining virtues and the priestly ministry.¹⁸⁴

Therefore true virginity is far more to Origen than the stark physical intactness of the hymen. Authentic virginity is virginity of the soul.¹⁸⁵ He draws illustrations for this from his broad experience of church life. He had apparently encountered in the church some virgins who, despite the integrity of their physical sexuality, were so bad in other ways that he considered their spirits to have been corrupted by the devil.¹⁸⁶ He sets out a dire warning: Christ will not join himself in spiritual marriage to souls which have prostituted themselves to the devil and his

Marcionite celibacy is perverse: *frag. 37 on 1 Cor*, cited in Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 92. Heretical chastity lacks true faith: *com. Rm.* 10.5.5-6; and is actually a deception of the devil to lead many astray: *hom. Ezk.* 6-10 also *ser. Matt.* 10.

¹⁸³ *com. Rm.* 1.2; 8.10.6. Virgins must be holy both in body and spirit: *hom. Ex.* 9.3 and *sel. Ps.*

¹⁸⁴ *hom. Lev.* 1.5.2, FC 83.37-38. Also *com. Rm.* 9.1.7. Chastity needs humility in order to be meritorious: *ser. Matt.* 69. Those who have renounced sexual pleasures from childhood as well as those who bear chains for Christ are entitled to a certain legitimate pride: *hom. Ier.* 12.8.1.

¹⁸⁵ *com. Matt.* 12.7. Origen sees no need to affirm Mary's virginity *in partu*, see section 5.3.3 below.

¹⁸⁶ *hom. Gen.* 10.4, making this observation with some sharpness. Origen's concern implies that virgins were held in high regard in the churches of his day. Also *hom. Lev.* 1.5.2. He criticizes as well the pride of clerics: *hom. Ezk.* 6-10 and *com. Matt.* 16.8. His comments on the lack of humility among some clerics have been more widely noticed by scholars than those Origen makes about virginal pride. This is because his criticism of clerics relates to his difficulties with Demetrius of Alexandria who did not recognize his ordination, cf. Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 130. But beyond that, he is also concerned that the visible hierarchy reflects the hierarchy of holiness, Crouzel, *Origen* 221-222. Despite his criticisms of the church, he felt himself a loyal member, especially as his father had died as a martyr, Nautin 414.

‘angels’ which are spirits of wrath or envy or pride or impurity.¹⁸⁷ In a sense such spiritual fornication is the antitype of mystical marriage.¹⁸⁸

In this life we can only attain to the ‘shadow’ of virtues. So sexual renunciation in the physical body is merely the shadow of higher, spiritual, virtue.¹⁸⁹ Physical chastity can foster spiritual chastity and both are required.¹⁹⁰ One can be chaste in the body and not have chastity of the heart. The outward manifestations of chastity in no way guarantee that the same virtue is also present in the inner man.¹⁹¹ All chastity and virginity must contribute to the ultimate goal, as Crouzel says: ‘La virginité de l’Église et la chasteté de ses membres sont intimement liées à leur union au Christ, qui en est le but.’ It is virginity which provides the contemplative life its possibility for fecundity, for spiritual fruit.¹⁹²

5.2.3 Origen’s view of asceticism and its limits

The practice of ascetic renunciation of the pleasures of the body does not render one immune from temptation.¹⁹³ Indeed some temptations are endemic to those who have ascended to a higher spiritual level.¹⁹⁴ Ascetics of long experience ought to be cautious in boasting of having attained a pure chastity while still in this body:

Who after having apprehended the purity of chastity, which does not need to combat the impulses and passions which run the risk of overturning the power of reason, would boast as a chaste man while

¹⁸⁷ *hom. Lev.* 12.7.1, FC 83.229-230. See also *hom. Num.* 20.1-2; *com. Matt.* 12.4; *hom. Ex.* 8.4 and Bettencourt, *Doctrina Ascetica Origenis* 104-105.

¹⁸⁸ ‘La fornication spirituelle avec les démons est l’antitype du mariage mystique.’: Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 43.

¹⁸⁹ *com. Rm.* 6.3.8, cf. *Lam.* 4.20.

¹⁹⁰ *hom. Num.* 24.2 and *hom. Lev.* 1.5. Virginity must be accompanied by all other virtues: Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 98.

¹⁹¹ *com. Rm.* 2.13.35.

¹⁹² Crouzel, *Virginité* 25 and 90.

¹⁹³ *hom. Lev.* 1.5.2; *hom. Gen.* 10.4; *ser. Matt.* 69; *hom. Lc.* 38.4; *com. Rm.* 9.1.7.

¹⁹⁴ *Tr on Ps.* 4 in *Philoc.* 26.7.

clothed in flesh? One must be content if one acquires the habit [ἐξῆς] of continence, which, as some of those skilled in these matters say, is less than chastity.¹⁹⁵

Origen also warns those just beginning on the journey of ascent not to throw themselves into full-blown ascetic practice since ‘immoderate self-control is dangerous at the beginning.’¹⁹⁶

Asceticism addresses the present and the future. In the present, it has educative and corrective value. It trains and disciplines the body and the soul to be able to face the rigors of life, especially during temptations and persecutions.¹⁹⁷ In reference to the future, ascetic practice prepares the believer for the life of heaven.¹⁹⁸ In this sense asceticism is not only corrective, but restorative.¹⁹⁹ Yet renunciation has meaning only within the boundaries of the present world. Physical asceticism is limited because it applies only to the present physical body:

You then, secondly, come to the protective covering of the shell in which the moral doctrine or counsel of continence is designated. These are of course necessary to protect what is contained inside, but they too are doubtless to be smashed and broken through. We would say, for example, that abstinence from food and chastisement of the body is necessary as long as we are in this body, corruptible as it is and susceptible to passion. But when it is broken and dissolved and, in the time of its resurrection, gone over from corruption into incorruption and from animal to spiritual, then it will be dominated no longer by the labor of affliction or the punishment of abstinence, but rather by its own quality and not by any bodily corruption. This is why abstinence

¹⁹⁵ *frag. on Rom.* 3.27, from the Tura papyrus (Scherer 166.16 - 167.2) cited in C. P. Hammond Bammel, ‘Philocalia IX, Jerome, Epistle 121 and Origen’s Exposition of Romans VII’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 32 (1981), 73. Mere abstention from food and wine is indifferent as even heretics and pagans are able to do this: *com. Rm.* 10.3.4.

¹⁹⁶ *hom. Num.* 27.9, Greer, 258. McGuckin notes Origen’s limitations on fasting: ‘Christian Asceticism’ 37, cf. *hom. Jer.* 2.13. Bodily punishments are not enough to cleanse adulterers, they must also repent: *hom. Lev.* 11.1.4-6. Moderation urged in fasting: *hom. Lev.* 10.2.6, and generally: *com. Rm.* 9.2.8.

¹⁹⁷ Education and correction: *hom. Jer.* 12.3.3; *Philoc.* 27.9; *com. Rm.* 4.6.7; 4.9.9; 6.11.2 and *com. Rm.* 7.5.10, where it is noted Origen follows Plato in viewing suffering as corrective: Schenk, 7.12, n. 12 citing C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* 102. Temptation: *arch.* 3.1.4; *com. Rm.* 10.3.5. The benefits of ascetic practice only come through a long process, which is represented in the *Homily 27* on Numbers by the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness.

¹⁹⁸ *com. Rm.* 2.13.20-21; 4.6.9; 8.8.13; *Cels.* 8.22; 4.29; *com. Matt.* 12.14; *euch.* 26.5.

¹⁹⁹ *hom. Ex.* 8.6, FC 71.330-331 and Heine’s note 91 on p. 331.

seems necessary now and afterwards will have no point.²⁰⁰ There is a progression from mere physical to a more complete asceticism which includes the mind and soul. Mortification of the flesh alone produces in one's soul an 'Isaac' but when one includes purifying the mind, one may be so transformed as to be able to bring forth 'Christ:'

But you also, if you mortify your members which are earthly, if you cast off all the passion of lust and keep your body dead and at the mercy of none of these vices, you as well can produce the best fruits from him: You can produce an Isaac, that is, joy; and this is the first fruit of the Spirit. Your seed, that is to say, your works, can ascend to heaven and become works of light and be conferred with the splendor and glory of the stars, so that when the day of resurrection arrives, you will stand out in brightness as one star differs from another star. I will say still more: If you become as pure in mind as you are holy in body, if you become spotless in your deeds, you can even produce Christ, in accordance with the words of the one who said: 'My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' [Gal 4:19].²⁰¹

In congruence with his general doctrine of free will, Origen warns that asceticism of all kinds must be freely chosen and freely offered to God: 'virginity is not something paid as a debt; for it is not demanded by a command. Instead it is offered as something beyond what is owed.'²⁰² Yet even ascetic choices are not completely free from considerations of relationships:

Among married persons the freedom of the partner who possesses continence can endanger the chastity of the other partner. For they are not obligated [to make use of this freedom] except by mutual consent for a time in order to be free for prayer. Then they ought to return again to normal marital relations lest Satan tempt them owing to their lack of self-control.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ *hom. Num.* 9.7, §210, *Spirit and Fire*, 103.

²⁰¹ *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, trans. Schenk, 4.23. In his *Dialogue with Heraclides* Origen's exhortation for the faithful to be transformed is founded upon an assumption that a person's nature can be radically changed, see discussion in R. Valantasis, 'Adam's Body: Uncovering Esoteric Traditions in the *Apocryphon of John* and Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides*', *Second Century* 7 (1989-1990), 156-160.

²⁰² *com. Rm.* 10.14.7, cf. 1Cor 7.25, trans. Schenk, 10.22. Fasting also is a matter of free choice: *hom. Lev.* 10.2.6. One may take a temporary church vow of fasting: *com. Rm.* 9.37.1.

²⁰³ *com. Rm.* 1.1.2, trans. Schenk, 1.7, who added the bracketed material.

Another consideration important to Origen is the pitfall of extremism. He eschews extreme asceticism which he associates with heterodoxy. Its very vigor may deceive the faithful:

so delivered themselves over to errors and deceits under malign influence of some spirit of error . . . according to the saying of the apostle, 'Following the doctrine of daemon spirits, who forbid to marry', 'to the ruin and destruction of many', and 'urging to abstain from meats', in order that by the outward show of stricter observances they may lead astray the souls of the innocent.²⁰⁴

Also in the *Commentary on Romans*:

It is even possible for someone to be wiser than he ought to be in respect to chastity. These are the ones 'who follow seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, uttering lies in their hypocrisy. They have seared consciences, they forbid marriage and abstain from foods which God has created' [1Tim 4:1-3]. They are wiser than is fitting in respect to chastity. On the other hand, excess and fornication are signs that one is less wise than he ought to be.²⁰⁵

Proper abstinence and chastity must stem from proper faith.²⁰⁶ The issue of extremism leads directly to the question concerning that act for which Origen is best known. Did he have himself castrated? The consensus is that he did.²⁰⁷ However he does repudiate such a literal application of the Gospel text later in his life.²⁰⁸ There

²⁰⁴ *arch.* 2.7.3, citing 1Tim 4.1,3 and Lk 2.34 (Vulgate), trans. Butterworth 118. The heretics are Marcion and Valentinus. *com. Rm.* 10.5.5-6 and 10.1.2, where he cautions against eating foods just to score points off Jews and Encratites whose abstention is falsely based. Also *hom. Jer.* 5.141 and *hom. Ezk.* 6-10. There must be a balance between abstention and consumption of food: *com. Rm.* 9.42.9.

²⁰⁵ *com. Rm.* 9.2.9, trans. Schenk, 9.8.

²⁰⁶ *com. Rm.* 8.1.3.

²⁰⁷ Those who consider it likely that Origen did have himself made a eunuch include R. P. C. Hanson, 'A Note on Origen's Self-Mutilation' *VC* 20 (1966), 81-82; Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 54; P. Brown, *Body and Society* 168-169; and Crouzel (*Origen* 9 and n. 32), who wryly observes that this is 'the only thing the general public usually knows about Origen.' He points out that it does not serve the purposes of Eusebius (*HE* 6.8) to report this. On the other side see H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 67-68, cited with approval by R. E. Heine, 'Introduction' *FC* 71.10-11. Also expressing doubt: J. F. Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 128-135 and Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting* 152-154.

²⁰⁸ His mind was 'youthful and immature' when he undertook this act, which occurred during his early career in Alexandria: Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.8.1-5, trans. Williamson 247. The main witness for his repudiation is *com. Matt.* 15.2 where he urges that Mt 5.27-30 be applied only spiritually; but see also

are places, such as his work on Song of Songs, where he does not make a connection that seemed natural to later Fathers.²⁰⁹

5.3 MARY AND HER VIRGINITY IN ORIGEN'S THOUGHT

On a Christmas Eve in the twelfth century a Benedictine nun received an apparition of the Virgin Mary. The nun addressed this question to the Virgin: 'My Lady, I pray, please reveal to me something about the great doctor of the church, Origen, who in so many places has sung your praises in a magnificent fashion. Tell me: is he saved or not?' Mary's reply acknowledged that despite his various errors of doctrine, which could be ascribed to his excessive fervor for study of the Scriptures, nevertheless his writings did reflect a glorious light on the Virgin, and so he, Origen, ought to be honored whenever a Marian feast be celebrated.²¹⁰

We may well have reservations in accepting Origen as a Marian doctor, despite the testimony of this apparition. Origen is significant for study of Mariology for several reasons, not the least of which is that his *Homilies on Luke* comprise one of the earliest examples of exegesis on either Infancy Narrative.²¹¹ However it must be acknowledged that Mary is not central to Origen's thought. She is mentioned often enough in what survives of Origen's work, but this reflects more his commitment to consider every detail of Scripture than it does any specific interest in

hom. Iesu Naue 7.6; *arch.* 4.3.3; *com. Io.* 20.149; *hom. Lev.* 6.3.3. Cf. *frag. com. Matt.* 161: 'All that (fornication) died: reject it far from you. Cut it off like dead flesh which infects the entire body': French. trans. by Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 119.

²⁰⁹ Origen 'bypassed discussion of asceticism in his work on Song of Songs': E. A. Clark, 'The Uses of the Song of Songs: Origen and the Later Latin Fathers', in *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith*, ed. by E. A. Clark (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 401.

²¹⁰ Summarized from H. Crouzel, 'La Théologie Mariale d'Origène', SC 87.11. This essay is an excellent exposition that has remained unchanged between its original appearance in the 1962 edition of *Sources Chrétiennes* 87 (*Origène, Homélie sur s. Luc*) and the 1998 revised edition: SC 87.11-64. A succinct summation of Origen's views on Mary is in Graef 1.43-46.

²¹¹ The next earliest work is Hilary's commentary on Matthew, written in the middle of the fourth century: Lienhard, 'Introduction', FC 94.xxiv.

Mary *per se*.²¹²

5.3.1 Mary in the history of salvation

Mary is significant to Origen because she is a key figure in the history of Jesus. He confidently asserts that some of this history is known even outside the church.

Origen can reply to Celsus that it is well known that Jesus was born of a virgin.²¹³

Like all other Biblical characters, Mary is no exception in providing rich ground for Origenist spiritual exegesis. Her journey to visit Elizabeth took place in the hill country, thus signifying that all the events connected with this episode reflect a heightened spirituality.²¹⁴ Though the historical level is essential for Origen, he notes that on its own it appears contradictory, a prime example being found in the history of Mary: the virgin who is also a mother.²¹⁵

²¹² H. von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth* 58. There are two valuable collections of Origenist Marian texts. The first is Sergio Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, Publicaciones de la Facultad de Teología del Norte de España, 23 (Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, 1970-1974), §§ 159 - 304. These 146 texts comprise nearly a third (32 percent) of all the texts in the first volume of CMP, which takes us up to the Council of Nicaea. The second collection is the appendix 'Corpus Mariologicum ex operibus Origenis excerptum' in D. C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 131 (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1942), 176-220. Thirty-two texts have escaped both editors: *hom. Ex.* 12.4; *hom. Lev.* 9.2.3; *hom. Reg.* 28.7.3; *hom. Cant.* 2.12; *hom. Jer.* 1.11; 15.4.2; *frag. com. Matt.* 281 on Mt 12.48; *hom. Lc.* 4.4; 4.5; 10.3; 11.5; 29.6; *frag.* 71 on Lk 10.30; *com. Io.* 2.87-88; 6.69; 10.150-51; 20.339; 20.419; *frag.* 1 on Jn 1.1; *com. Rm.* 10.30.1; *exh. mart.* 35; *arch.* 1.3.2; 1.7.4; 2.4.2; 2.6.7; 3.3.5; 4.1.5; 4.4.5; *Cels.* 1.66; 2.69; 5.52; 5.58. One would not expect to find *Heracle.* 2.4 to 14, ACW 54.58, part of the find at Tura, since the first critical edition of this work was not published until 1960. Marian texts are provided with the paragraph number in CMP, or failing that, the paragraph number in Vagaggini. See the Appendix for all Marian texts in Origen omitted from CMP.

²¹³ *Cels.* 1.7, CMP 285.

²¹⁴ *com. Io.* 6.256-257 (49), CMP 195. Mary's presence at Cana signifies spiritual fruitfulness: *com. Io.* 10.37-40 (8-9), CMP 196. The portion of the commentary on John which dealt with the Cana wedding has not survived.

²¹⁵ *hom. Lc.* 17.4, CMP 179 and 17.5: history appears contradictory to unbelievers. The historical level is only the beginning of exegesis: the 'raw matter' of the words: Crouzel, *Origen* 62. Cf. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* 280. Against the Ebionites Origen utilizes historical detail to show how Jesus can claim descent from Joseph, but he is a bit exasperated in having to 'respond to these people with a literal defense': *com. Rm.* 1.5.4, trans. Schenk, 1.15. Though not named, it is likely Origen has in view the Ebionites here: T. Heither, trans and ed. *Origenes: Commentarii in epistolam ad Romanos / Römerbriefkommentar*, 5 Vols., FC 2(1-5) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1990-1996), 100, n. 28., cited by Schenk, n. 36. Elsewhere he harmonizes the two genealogies by taking Matthew's record of descent as spiritual rather than physical: *arch.* 4.3.7 and note by Butterworth, 299, n. 1.

Yet Origen affirms the value of the history of Mary, even to the smallest detail.²¹⁶ Her miraculous virginal conception is a testimony to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.²¹⁷ She is a testimony to the real humanity of Jesus, against the docetic heretics. A summary of various heresies about the birth of Jesus is found in a fragment from the commentary on Titus:

But now one and the same thing is to be believed about the one who thinks anything falsely concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, whether following those who say that he was born from Joseph and Mary (for example the Ebionites and Valentinians) or whether following those who deny his being the firstborn . . . [or] those who confess he was not born of the Virgin, but appeared as a man of 30 years in Judea. Others in fact believe that he proceeded from the Virgin, but confirm that the Virgin thought she brought him forth but did not in reality bring forth. So they assert that the mystery of the supposed birth was hidden even from the Virgin.²¹⁸

Origen insists that Jesus was born from Mary, not merely through her.²¹⁹ His body is

²¹⁶ Her sacrifice for purification was that of a poor woman (*Cels.* 2.32), thus reflecting the humility of the entire advent: *hom. Lev.* 8.4.3, cf. Lk 2.23-24. Origen takes Celsus to task for an egregious misreading of the historical detail in the Gospels such that he proposes Mary had sexual relations with God: *Cels.* 1.39-40. Origen repeats the tradition that Jesus was born in a cave: *Cels.* 1.51. While he could have drawn this from the *Protevangelium of James*, a work he knew (*com. Matt.* 10.17), he also could have taken it from Justin (*Dial.* 78) who knew it independently from the *Protevangelium* according to E. F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 133-134.

²¹⁷ *Cels.* 1.34-35, CMP 291-293; also *Cels.* 3.1-2 and *arch.* 4.1.5, both of these texts are absent from CMP and Vagaggini. *Cels.* 7.11 refers to his commentary on Isaiah, which is now lost, cf. Eusebius *HE* 6.32.

²¹⁸ *frag. com. Tit.*, my translation, corrected by D. F. Wright, CMP 261: 'nunc unum atque idem credendum est etiam de eo qui de Domino nostro Iesu Christo falsi aliquid senserit, sive secundum eos qui dicunt eum ex Ioseph et Maria natum, sicut sunt Ebionitae et Valentiniani; sive secundum eos qui primogenitum eum negant . . . quique nec de Virgine natum fatentur, sed triginta annorum virum eum apparuisse in Iudaea. Alii vero ex Virgine quidem eum credunt esse progenitum, sed putasse se magis Virginem peperisse, non tamen vere peperisse confirmant. Latuisse quippe etiam Virginem putativae generationis asserunt sacramentum.' See *com. Rm.* 9.2.10, CMP 260 where heretics deny the birth from a virgin; and *hom. Lev.* 8.2.2, CMP 263 where some heretics attempt to employ Gal 4.4 to deny the virginal conception. Those who deny the reality of his birth from Mary, i.e., docetics, are deficient in faith: *com. Io.* 20.269 (30), CMP 272 and 32.191 (16), CMP 273. Origen shows the inconsistency of those who accept the passion of Jesus but balk at a real physical birth: 'It is certainly no greater scandal for Jesus to have been born than for him to have died': *hom. Ezk.* 1.4, trans. Trigg 54, CMP 242.

²¹⁹ 'factum ex muliere' instead of 'per mulierem': *com. Rm.* 3.10.5, CMP 244 and *frag. com. Gal.*, CMP 254, representing Origen's ἐκ and διὰ, Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 142, cf. *frag. 19 com. Rm.*

the same as ours, differing only in the manner of conception.²²⁰ Origen also took pains to refute various charges from paganism that denied the miracle of the virginal conception,²²¹ which is testimony to the divinity.²²² Accepting the reality of the history of the birth from Mary is a vital initial step in a Christian's spiritual ascent as it is really an affirmation of the fundamental doctrine of the humanity of Jesus.²²³

The chief contribution Mary makes to the incarnation is to supply the flesh of Jesus, though this is accomplished apart from any human work.²²⁴ He took true human flesh from his mother, indeed he enters the world as the Word of God clothed with the flesh of Mary. Just as those who are unspiritual cannot read the deeper meaning of Scripture which lies behind the literal level, so also they are not able to perceive the divinity of Jesus by mere observation of his Marian flesh.²²⁵ His bodily

²²⁰ *arch.* 1.Pref.4, CMP 280.

²²¹ Celsus claims the entire history of Mary is wrong: she was a mere spinner who fell into adultery with 'Panthera', a soldier: *Cels.* 1.28, 32-33, 69. This was a name common in the Roman military. This and other background to the name is provided by Chadwick, 31, n. 3. Origen refutes these charges and considers the story of the virginal conception to be entirely appropriate for the nativity of such a great figure as Jesus: *Cels.* 1.32, 34, 37, 67-70, CMP 288-294, 297.

²²² *com. Io.* 1.220 (31), CMP 268: ὡςπερ πλέον ἔχων παρὰ ἀνθρώπους κατὰ τὴν ἐκ παρθένου γένεσιν, trans. Heine, FC 80.77: 'he was more than man insofar as his birth from a virgin was concerned.' Also *com. Io.* 19.10 (2), CMP 303, where Origen observes that the Pharisees cited the real birth from Mary to discredit Jesus's claim of divinity.

²²³ *com. Io.* 19.38 and *hom. Num.* 27.3 (CMP 278): '[Let us] make that the first stage which He passed last of all, namely, when He was born of a Virgin. Let this be the first stage for us who wish to go out of Egypt. In it we left the adoration of idols and the worship of demons - not gods - and believed that Christ was born of the Virgin and from the Holy Spirit and that the Word made flesh came into this world. After this let us strive to go forward and to ascend one by one each of the steps of faith and the virtues.' (Greer 250). But acknowledging the history of Jesus or of Mary is insufficient for salvation without individual faith: 'For what use is it if I only say Christ came in the flesh of Mary, and yet he is not displayed in this flesh of mine?': *hom. Gen.* 3.7, my translation. Origen uses this 'what good is it to me?' device several times to emphasize personal faith. See the following collected in *Spirit and Fire*, 186-188, §452-458: *hom. Ier.* 9.1; *hom. Gen.* 9.3 and 9.2; *frag. com. 1 Cor.*; *hom. Isa.* 2.1; *hom. Gen.* 3.7; *hom. Lc.* 22.3.

²²⁴ 'One aspect of Christ, therefore, is from above; the other is received from human nature and the womb of the virgin': *hom. Gen.* 8.9, CMP 275, FC 71.145. Also *ser. Matt.* 33, CMP 257; *com. Io.* 10.263 (39), CMP 270 and *hom. Cant.* 2.12, not in CMP or Vagaggini, see Appendix § 4. The construction of Jesus in Mary's womb is done without human hands: *hom. Ex.* 6.12, CMP 243, cf. *Dan.* 2.34-35.

²²⁵ *hom. Lev.* 1.1.1, CMP 277: 'Verbum Dei ex Mariae carne vestitum processit in hunc mundum.' Just as the spiritual meaning of Scripture cannot be seen behind the literal level. Also *arch.* 2.6.2, CMP 281.

existence had a certain glory to it, but it was limited.²²⁶

5.3.2 Mary's virtues and spirituality

When Mary comes to visit Elizabeth, she shows the gracious condescension of a spiritual superior visiting someone weaker in order to impart a blessing. Mary exhibits characteristics of having ascended to a high level of spirituality.²²⁷ But Origen does not consider her unique in this regard. He ascribes enhanced spirituality to several other figures of Biblical history. And no person still in an earthly body can attain full perfection.²²⁸ In the case of Mary the source of her sanctity is the activity of the Holy Spirit in her, especially in the generative act of the virginal conception.²²⁹ Jesus her son is the only figure in the Bible who is truly in a spiritual class of his own. His soul was uniquely uncontaminated by sin in the pre-existence.²³⁰ This purity is reflected in the manner of his conception and birth from a virgin. Origen is consistent in applying this purity only to Jesus, never to Mary.²³¹

Mary's virtues and elevated spiritual state allow her to impart benefits to others. In a fascinating passage in the *Commentary on John*, Mary becomes a channel of prophetic grace to John the Baptist:

Mary's hasty journey into the hill country and entrance into Zachary's house, and the greeting with which she greets Elizabeth can now

²²⁶ *hom. Ex.* 6.1, CMP 259.

²²⁷ *hom. Lc.* 7.1, CMP 162.

²²⁸ So in the homilies on Luke: John the Baptist: 7.5; 10.5; his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth: 2.2; 9.1; 9.3. Isaac has cultivated all the virtues in his soul: *hom. Lc.* 11.2. Mary is of a higher status than Elizabeth, but this is due entirely to the difference in status of their respective sons: *hom. Lc.* 7.5, CMP 165 and *com. Io.* 2.224 (37), CMP 191, where John's leap *in utero* is a testimony to Christ, not to his mother, trans. Heine, FC 80.155. As to limits: Paul is as perfect as any other human, but not in comparison with heavenly beings: *com. Rm.* 10.14.6, trans. Schenk 10.15.

²²⁹ *hom. Lc.* 7.2, CMP 163; *com. Io.* 1.220 (31), CMP 268. This spiritual blessing from bearing the son of God is not unique to Mary. In a sense all truly ascended believers bear Jesus and so become his mother. See my discussion below about Mary's maternity as a symbol (section 5.3.4.1).

²³⁰ Jesus was sanctified even before his birth: *hom. Ier.* 1.11, FC 97.14, not in CMP, see Appendix § 5. Jesus was free of sexual passion: *hom. Lev.* 3.5 also *Cels.* 1.32-33, CMP 289-290.

²³¹ *hom. Lev.* 12.4.1, CMP 247; 8.2.1, CMP 263; 9.2.3, not in CMP, see Appendix § 2; *com. Rm.* 6.12.4, CMP 246; *com. Cant.* 3.4, not in CMP.

become clear to us. For all these things occurred that Mary might share with John, who was still in his mother's womb, some of the power she had after she conceived, and that he might share some of the prophetic grace he received with his mother.²³²

This is not, as one might suppose at first glance, an early expression of Mary as mediatrix of grace. Henri Crouzel departs from his usual sensitive accuracy when he pushes this text too far, declaring that 'Mary is therefore the one who gives the Christ and the Holy Spirit' to John and Elizabeth.²³³ In fact, it is John, serving as a channel of this same grace, who conveys it to his mother. Moreover, the source of all this grace is clearly portrayed by Origen to be the yet unborn Jesus: 'John was benefited in his formation by the infant still being formed when the Lord came to Elizabeth his mother.' The spiritual blessing flows down in this sequence: Jesus to Mary to John to Elizabeth.²³⁴

Other Origenist praises of her virtues include calling her a prophet and a student of Scripture. Due to the virginal conception Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit and thus spoke as a prophetess. Again, she is not unique as Elizabeth was sanctified similarly by her son, John.²³⁵ As a spiritual one, Mary would be intimately acquainted with Scripture. So she immediately realizes no one in Biblical history

²³² *com. Io.* 6.256 (49), FC 80.238, CMP 195.

²³³ 'La théologie mariale d'Origène', SC 87.61: 'Marie est donc celle qui donne le Christ et l'Esprit-Saint', though he has earlier tempered it with this comment: 'A travers elle c'est Jésus qui vient aider Jean.'

²³⁴ *com. Io.* 6.254 (49), FC 80.327 = CMP 194: "Ὅτι μέντοι γε εἰς τὴν μὀρφωσιν ὠφέληται ὁ Ἰωαννης ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔτι μορφουμένου τοῦ Κυρίου, γενομένου ἐν τῇ μητρὶ πρὸς τὴν Ἐλισάβετ. Mary is more advanced in the ascent of the soul than is Elizabeth, just as Jesus is in relation to John: *com. Io.* 6.259 (49), CMP 195. On the other hand, appellations of Mary found in some Origenist fragments such as ἁγία (holy), παναγία (all holy), and πάνσοφος (all wise) Crouzel concludes (SC 87.45) were added to Origen by catenists of a later era more interested in Marian devotion. Von Balthasar notes that the 'more advanced' in the church are to help the 'weaker members,' 'Introduction' *Spirit and Fire*, 9; cf. G. Hällström, *Fides Simpliciorum* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1984), 94-49. John's spirituality *in utero* derives from his standing in the pre-existence: *arch.* 3.3.5.

²³⁵ *hom. Lc.* 7.3: so she is called 'blessed Mary' = CMP 163: beata Maria. Rebecca, Elizabeth and Mary are all holy women who bore extraordinary sons: *hom. Gen.* 12.3, CMP 167.

has been addressed as the angel addresses her, ‘full of grace’.²³⁶ Unlike Irenaeus, Origen does not make much of the Eve-Mary parallel, preferring to draw a comparison between Eve and the two ‘holy women,’ Mary and Elizabeth.²³⁷ Eve also stands as a symbol for the church, which God created female.²³⁸ There has been some attempt to cite Origen as an early witness to the famed title Θεοτόκος.²³⁹ This is based on a fragment of Origen preserved in the Ecclesiastical History of Socrates but it is unlikely to be genuine.²⁴⁰

On the other hand, Origen does not hesitate to ascribe to Mary the impurity common to all who exist in a corporeal body.²⁴¹ Her faith was imperfect and needed to develop.²⁴² Moreover, the sword prophesied by Simeon is taken as a lapse of faith. Mary overtly sinned when she succumbed to shame as her son was crucified,

²³⁶ *hom. Lc.* 6.7, CMP 160. Jerome’s translation retains the Greek, SC 87.148: ‘Id enim quod ait: Ave, gratia plena, quod graece dicitur: κεχαριτωμένη, ubi in scripturis alibi legerim, non recordor.’ Note Jerome renders the greeting as ‘gratia plena’ here as well as in the Vulgate.

²³⁷ So in *hom. Lc.* 8.1, CMP 168: ‘imitarentur vitam conversationemque sanctarum.’ Crouzel (SC 87.58) says one discovers ‘quelques rares allusions au parallèle Ève-Marie’ in Origen, citing only one other example, a fragment on Lk 1.28. W. J. Burghardt points out that this is not a strictly equal parallel as Origen is not ascribing to Mary or Elizabeth the ‘same active role in the economy of salvation which he assigns to Eve’: ‘Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought’ 2.91, n. 8.

²³⁸ *com. Matt.* 14.17 as cited by Hanson, *Allegory and Event* 123. Also *arch.* 4.3.7, cf. Eph. 5.29-32.

²³⁹ P. Bowes, ‘Mary and the Early Christian Fathers’, *Epiphany* 4 (1984), 50; Crouzel, ‘Origen and Origenism’ in NCE, 10.767-774 and his more recent article, ‘Origen’ EEC, 619-623, which is a translation from the Italian original written in 1984, *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, 3 vols, ed. by A. DiBerardino (Casale Monferrato, 1983-1988), 2.2517-32.

²⁴⁰ CMP 282, Socrates *HE* 7.32: ‘Origen also in the first volume of his Commentaries on the apostle’s epistle to the Romans gives an ample exposition of the sense in which the term *Theotocos* is used’, trans. by A. C. Zenos, NPNF on CD, 2.2.398. Crouzel (SC 87.21) believes it could still be genuine to Origen, despite its omission from the translation of the *com. Rm.* by Rufinus. Others doubt it: D. F. Wright, ‘“Mother of God”?’ 126; M. O’Carroll, ‘Theotokos, God-Bearer’ in *Theotokos*, and R. Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* 290-1.

²⁴¹ Mary and Jesus both shared this need for purification from the carnal condition: *hom. Lc.* 14.3, CMP 174. Cf. the note in SC 87.219: ‘Il y a dans cette notion de souillure un mélange de judaïsme (impureté légale) et de platonisme (un certain pessimisme à l’égard du corps) . . .’ Origen carefully shows this is ‘stain’ (sordes ῥύπος) not ‘sin’ (peccatum ἁμαρτία): see J. Lienhard, ‘Christology in Origen’s Homilies on the Infancy Narrative in Luke’, in *Studia Patristica*, 26 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 289. In a later homily, he does apply ‘sin’ (peccatum) to Mary: *hom. Lc.* 17.7, CMP 179.

²⁴² *hom. Lc.* 20.4, trans. Lienhard, FC 94.85: ‘Joseph and Mary did not yet have perfect faith.’ = CMP 184: ‘Et quia necdum plenam fidem Ioseph et Maria habebant.’ Campenhausen criticizes Vagaggini for reversing the order of the names, placing Mary’s first in his citations: *Virgin Birth* 60, n. 3.

thus showing her need to be included in that redemptive death:

Why do we think that if the apostles were scandalized the mother of the Lord would be immune from the scandal? If she did not suffer scandal from the passion of the Lord, then Jesus did not die for her sins.²⁴³

5.3.3 The virginity of Mary in history

Mary the historical figure is a virgin in at least two of the three classic aspects according to Origen. He vigorously defends the historicity of the virginity *ante partum* and he is one of the very first witnesses to the perpetual, or *post partum* virginity of Mary. It cannot be established that he affirmed the miraculous preservation of virginity in the process of birth, the so-called virginity *in partu*.

The virginal conception is accepted as part of the clear testimony of Biblical history. Origen takes Lam 4.20 ('We thought that under his shadow we would live among the nations') as a prophecy of the process of the virginal conception: the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary.²⁴⁴ Jesus is begotten not of male seed but directly by the

²⁴³ *hom. Lc. 17.7*, my translation from CMP 179: 'Quid putamus quod scandalizatis apostolis Mater Domini a scandalo fuerit immunis? Si scandalum in Domini passione non passa est, non est mortuus Iesus pro peccatis eius.' = SC 87.258. Crouzel among others is scandalized at Origen's lack of Mariological correctness, accusing him of a completely gratuitous allegorical exegesis here and in *hom. Lc. 20.4* (SC 87.56). This is unjustified on Crouzel's part since both these incidents, that of Mary and Joseph questioning the boy Jesus in the temple, and that of Mary's sharp pang of doubt at the foot of the cross, are spiritualized in a manner consistent with Origen's exegesis in general. Several others, imposing on the Alexandrian doctrinal standards of a later era, express dissatisfaction with his interpretation here. It is a 'blunder' according to A. Agius, 'The Blessed Virgin in Origen and St. Ambrose', *Downside Review*, 50 (1932), 129, also in his article 'The Problem of Mary's Holiness', 43. O'Carroll says his exegesis is 'faulty', *Theotokos*, 'Origen'; and R. Meskunas ('Some Patristic Exegesis on Mary's Sanctity', *EphMar* 13 (1963), 127) calls it 'one of the most unfortunate Marian patristic texts.' Hanson (*Allegory and Event* 342, n. 2) notes that at *hom. Lc. 14* 'the shocked Migne editor complains of Origen's scandali, infidelitatis, ambiguitatisque.' Graef (1.46) is more balanced, merely noting his Mariological 'inadequacies.' Crouzel (SC 87.57) attempts to salvage Origen's Mariological credentials by citing a fragment to the effect that Mary's doubt at the foot of the cross was very short-lived. The difficulty is that this fragment is doubtfully authentic (CPG 1.1452); Campos placing it among the 'Fragmenta dubia': CMP 231, *frag. 71* on Lk 2.35. The critical edition of SC 87 includes this text among a group of fragments judged not to be genuine to Origen: 'Mais un doute subsiste sur l'authenticité de ces fragments' (SC 87.462). The editors are F. Fournier and P. Périchon along with H. Crouzel himself.

²⁴⁴ *hom. Num. 27.12*; *arch. 2.6.7*, not in CMP or Vagaggini, see Appendix § 28; *com. Cant. 3.5*, CMP 239. Crouzel (SC 87.19 and *Origen* 194) concludes this shadow is actually the pre-existent soul of Jesus. Elsewhere Origen follows precedent and takes this verse as a general prophecy of Christ's

Holy Spirit.²⁴⁵ Origen carefully distinguishes the roles of the two parents of Jesus: ‘Joseph, who arranged matters for the Lord’s birth, and Mary, who bore Jesus in childbirth.’ He calls Joseph the ‘foster-father’ of Jesus.²⁴⁶

Origen not only accepts the virginal conception, but insists on it as a basic doctrine of the church. Believing in it is, according to Origen, ‘the occasion of my salvation.’²⁴⁷ Such a miraculous conception does not negate the true humanity of Jesus, but rather raises it up onto a path towards deification:

Christ Jesus, first born of all creation, who in the final age, according to the predictions of the prophets, came into the world and assumed to himself the true nature of human flesh such that he entered birth through a virgin and took on the death of a cross and rose from death and deified the very human nature he had taken on.²⁴⁸

In fact, Origen describes the reality of the incarnation in the womb of Mary in graphic detail. Jesus ‘saw in the womb of his mother the uncleanness of bodies, surrounded on all sides by her innards, he suffered the woes of earthly foulness.’²⁴⁹ Jesus takes from Mary the taint inherent in all physical existence. But there is no

presence in both testaments: *frag.* 116 *com. Lam.*

²⁴⁵ *hom. Lev.* 9.2.3, not in CMP or Vagaggini, see Appendix § 2; *hom. Ex.* 6.12, CMP 243; *com. Rm.* 3.10.5, CMP 244; *com. Rm.* 5.9.5, CMP 245; *com. Matt.* 16.12, CMP 249.

²⁴⁶ *hom. Lc.* 13.7, CMP 252 = SC 87.214: ‘Ioseph dispensatorem ortus Dominici et Mariam, quae Iesum fudit in partum.’ *hom. Lc.* 16.1, CMP 177 = SC 87.238: ‘Ioseph, quia nutricius fuit,’ and *hom. Lc.* 18.2, SC 87.266, cf. *com. Io.* 10.169.

²⁴⁷ *hom. Lc.* 17.1, trans. Lienhard, FC 94.30, this phrase omitted by both CMP and Vagaggini. Belief in the birth of Jesus from the virgin is the occasion for salvation: *hom. Lc.* 7.5, cf. 7.3-6, CMP 163-166. Also *arch.* 1.Pref.4, CMP 280; cf. *com. Rm.* 7.19.3. The virginal conception is denied by some Ebionites, *Cels.* 5.61, CMP 300 and *com. Io.* 32.187-193 (16), CMP 273. as well as by some Gentile groups claiming to be Christian: *com. Matt.* 16.12, CMP 249, as cited by Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 22. The miraculous nature of his conception is testimony to the elevated spirituality of Jesus: *Cels.* 1.32.

²⁴⁸ *ser. Matt.* 33, my translation of Vagaggini, §35 (which includes more of the context than the excerpt in CMP 257): ‘aut de Christo Jesu primogenito universae creaturae, qui in fine saeculi, secundum praedicationem prophetarum venit in mundum, et susceptit in se veram humanae carnis naturam, ut etiam nativitatem subiret ex virgine, et mortem crucis suscepit, et surrexit a mortuis, et deificavit quam susceperat humanam naturam.’ The role of Joseph is necessary to preserve Mary’s good name: *hom. Lc.* 6.3, CMP 159. It is likely Origen cites Ignatius of Antioch here (*Eph* 19.1, CMP 4) according to Lienhard, FC 24, n. 9.

²⁴⁹ *hom. Lc.* 14.8, CMP 174: ‘Videbat in matris utero immunditiam corporum, visceribus eius hinc inde vallatus terrenae faecis patiebatur angustias.’ = SC 87.226, 228, my translation, which highlights the force of ‘faex,’ cf. ‘dregs’ in FC 94.60, trans. Lienhard.

sinfulness or dishonor in this since Jesus ‘had a pure birth from a virgin and was not the result of any immorality.’ The virginal conception preserves the birth of the Savior from any defilement apart from that which is intrinsic to all physical bodies.²⁵⁰

Origen is the first to clearly defend the doctrine of *semper virgo*, the perpetual virginity of Mary.²⁵¹ The key text for this is from the *Commentary on Matthew* which discusses the problem of the ‘brothers of Jesus.’ Origen knows that the tradition that these ‘brothers’ were sons of a former marriage of Joseph is found in two problematic documents, the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Protevangelium of James*. He cautiously acknowledges these but bases his own argument on logic and the propriety of Mary’s life-long virginity:

They thought, then, that He was the son of Joseph and Mary. But some say, basing it on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter, as it is entitled, or ‘The Book of James,’ that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that that body of hers [. . .] might not know intercourse with a man after that the Holy Ghost came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first-fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ *Cels.* 6.73, CMP 301, cf. *Cels.* 1.69-70, CMP 297; *Cels.* 2.69; *com. Cant.* 3.4, the last two texts not in CMP or Vagaggini, see Appendix § 33. *hom. Lev.* 12.4.1, CMP 247 discusses his freedom from the pollution of sin. Cf. *hom. Lev.* 2.3.4, where he is said to have taken on the ‘dung’ of the physical body, a punishment he did not deserve as his soul was sinless in the pre-existence according to *Cels.* 1.33 and *Cels.* 2.42 where Origen draws the Stoic distinction between sin and the suffering of moral evil. By means of the virginal conception Origen maintains the sinlessness of Jesus while also asserting that Jesus took on all of human nature including the taint of corporeality in his exegesis of Rom 8.3 that Jesus came ‘in the likeness of the flesh of sin’: *com. Rm.* 6.12.4, CMP 246, cf. *hom. Lev.* 8.2.1, CMP 263; *com. Rm.* 3.8.4, CMP 248 and *com. Rm.* 5.9.10, CMP 245.

²⁵¹ Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage* 84. He rightly criticizes Joussard who thinks Origen only considered the *post partum* virginity as a sort of free opinion rather than as part of church doctrine: Crouzel, SC 87.63, cf. G. Joussard, ‘Marie à travers la patristique’ 1.83. Campos places the text *ser. Matt.* 25, CMP 265 under his heading ‘De perpetua post partum virginitate’. However it is more likely that Origen has in mind her *ante partum* virginity in this text, since the chronological setting is within weeks of her giving birth. A similar argument applies to *hom. Lev.* 8.2.2-5, CMP 263.

²⁵² *com. Matt.* 10.17, ANF 10.747, ellipsis is mine, CMP 267: καὶ οἶμαι λόγον ἔχειν, ἀνδρῶν μὲν καθαρότητος τῆς ἐν ἀγνεΐᾳ ἀπαρχὴν γεγονέναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν, γυναικῶν δὲ τὴν Μαρτίαν. Οὐ γὰρ εὐφημον ἄλλη παρ’ ἐκείνην τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῆς παρθενίας ἐπιγράψασθαι. R.

This argument from reason is also found in the *Commentary on John*: ‘Mary had no son except Jesus, in accordance with those who hold a sound opinion of her.’²⁵³ Some heretics take Mt. 12.48 as indication that Mary wed Joseph and engaged in sexual relations after Jesus was born, thus provoking Jesus into rebuking her for failing to preserve her virginity. These heretics, Origen asserts, are ‘insane’. To Origen, it is inconceivable that Mary, the recipient of such grace from God in the virginal conception, would later engage in sexual activity.²⁵⁴ He prefers to interpret the brothers in a strictly spiritual sense: one becomes a brother or sister of Jesus by doing the will of the Father.²⁵⁵

Bauckham (‘Western Mariology’ 143) points out that this solution to the problem of the ‘brothers of Jesus’ is typically Eastern, the *Gospel of Peter* being of Syrian provenance. In the West the approach favored by those holding to virginity *post partum* was to consider the brothers to be sons of a sister of Mary. The extant portion of the *Gospel of Peter* has no reference to the brothers of Jesus. There is some doubt about how much access, if any, Origen had to full versions of the two documents, the *Gospel of Peter* and the *ProtJ*. A. van den Hoek believes ‘it is unlikely that he knew these writings first hand’: ‘Clement and Origen as Sources on “Noncanonical” Scriptural Traditions’ in *Origeniana Sexta: Origen and the Bible*, ed. by G. Dorival and A. Boulluc (Leuven University Press, 1995), 106.

²⁵³ sound opinion (ὕγιως), *com. Io.* 1.23 (4), CMP 264, trans. Heine, FC 80.38. Crouzel has studied Origen’s use of the words ὑγιής and ὑγιώς and concludes they are applied to doctrines confessed by the church: SC 87.36, cf. *hom. Ier.* 5.14. A fragment from the same work (*frag. com. Io.* 31, CMP 266), which says Mary maintained her virginity permanently to her death is likely to not be genuine: Burghardt, ‘Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought’, 113, n. 126.

²⁵⁴ Mt 12.48: ‘Who is my mother . . . ?’ The term ‘insane’ from Jerome’s translation, *hom. Lc.* 7.4, CMP 164: ‘nescio quis prorupit insaniae, ut assereret negatam fuisse Mariam a Salvatore eo quod post nativitatem illius iuncta fuerit Ioseph’ = ‘Someone or other gave vent to his madness and claimed that the Savior had repudiated Mary because she had been joined to Joseph after his birth’: FC 94.29. Crouzel believes it is Marcion, not Tertullian (cf. *carn. Chr.* 23.2-4, *pub.* 6.16, *Marc.* 4.19.6-13) who is Origen’s target here, SC 87.37-38, contra T. Zahn, ‘Die Predigten des Origenes über das Evangelium des Lukas’ *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 22 (1911), 262. Mary’s sexual activity as inconceivable: Crouzel, *Virginité* 126.

²⁵⁵ In his *Commentary on Matthew* Origen spiritualizes Mary’s virginity: ‘To any virginal and uncorrupted soul, having conceived by the Holy Spirit to produce the Will of the Father, [that soul] is the mother of Christ,’ *frag. com. Matt.* 281 on Mt 12.48, GCS 12/1.126, not in CMP or Vagaggini, my translation, see Appendix § 7. We will return to this text when we consider Origen’s use of Mary’s maternity and virginity in a spiritual sense (section 5.3.4). The text *frag. com. Io.* 31 cannot be relied upon, despite Crouzel’s use of it (‘Mariologie d’Origène, SC 87.36-37). The pertinent segment is of doubtful authenticity, being set off in brackets in both Vagaggini (§ 21, p. 183) and CMP 266: [Ζητεῖται παρὰ πολλοῖς περὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν Ἰησοῦ πῶς εἶχεν τούτους, τῆς Μαρίας μέχρι τελευτῆς παρθένου διαμεινάσης.] See Heine’s discussion, ‘Introduction’, FC 80.10; and his article, ‘Can the Catena Fragments of Origen’s Commentary on John be Trusted?’, *VC* 40 (1986), 118-134, where he presents a case against this particular fragment being from Origen.

Origen nowhere clearly affirms the virginity *in partu*, whereby the physical sign of female virginity, the intact hymen, is preserved miraculously, a view he knows of from the *Protevangelium of James*.²⁵⁶ In a text which affirms the *ante partum* virginity as attested by Luke, Origen seems to indicate that the actual birth itself was unexceptionally normal: ‘But the womb of the mother of the Lord was opened at that time when the child was born.’²⁵⁷ A passage in the *Homilies on Leviticus* is most often used as evidence that Origen held to the *in partu* virginity. However it does not contain anything close to a straightforward profession of this doctrine: ‘But concerning Mary, it is said that ‘a virgin’ conceived and gave birth.’ It is more likely that what Origen had in mind was Mary’s virginity before and during the conception and not her virginity during the birth. This reading is reinforced by what he says a few lines further on: that Jesus ‘had come into this world by an entrance common to us all.’²⁵⁸ Those who argue for Origen as a witness to this doctrine do not have a strong case though the slight possibility does remain that he did affirm it in one of his lost works.²⁵⁹ The renowned Origen scholar Henri

²⁵⁶ *com. Matt.* 10.17, CMP 267, cf. *ProtJ* 19-20, Hock 66-69. Origen refers to this document elsewhere: *Cels.* 1.51 and *ser. Matt.* 25.

²⁵⁷ *hom. Lc.* 14.8, my translation of CMP 174: ‘Matris vero Domini eo tempore vulva reserata est quo et partus editus.’

²⁵⁸ *hom. Lev.* 8.2.2-3, FC 83.154-155 = CMP 263: ‘De Maria autem dicitur quia virgo concepit et peperit . . . illud quod communi omnium ingressu in hunc mundum venisset, exponeret.’

²⁵⁹ Those who see the *in partu* in Origen include: Graef 1.44; J. Plumpe, ‘Some Little-Known Early Witnesses’ 569; and I. Golden, ‘Origen and Mariology’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 36 (1991), 147. Even Plumpe, whose purpose is to show ‘a formidable chain of witnesses’ between Ignatius and Origen for the virginity *in partu*, can only muster the single citation from *hom. Lev.* 8: ‘Witnesses’, 569. A second text is adduced by Golden (147-148): *ser. Matt.* 25, CMP 265: ‘quoniam digna est virginum loco cum sit adhuc virgo.’ Origen confuses the Zechariah of Mt 23.35 with the father of the Baptist whom he depicts as dying in defense of Mary’s right to stand in the place of virgins in the Temple despite her having given birth to Jesus. At best the *in partu* virginity is only implied here. See R. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah* 258. Origen is not drawing from the *ProtJ* for this story about Zechariah. The Zechariah of *ProtJ* 23.1-9 is killed by Herod’s men for failure to give up his son John while in Origen he is killed by religious authorities for permitting Mary to stand in a place reserved for virgins in the Temple. M. Warner (*Alone of All Her Sex* 29) is incorrect in saying Origen cites the *ProtJ* ‘in support of the virgin birth.’ Two Biblical texts used by later writers in support of the virginity *in partu* are read by Origen in a completely non-Mariological way: the so-called ‘closed door’ text of Ezekiel 44.2 in *hom. Ezk.* 14.2 and the locked garden in Song of Songs 4.12. See E. A. Clark, ‘The Uses of the Song of Songs’ 406-407. Some Mariologists demonstrate frustration with Origen for his failure to clearly teach this doctrine. So Agius calls him a ‘hustler’: ‘The Blessed Virgin in Origen and St. Ambrose’ 127.

Crouzel holds that since he did not connect his view of virginity strictly to biological intactness he cannot be credited as a witness to this doctrine.²⁶⁰

5.3.4 Mary a spiritual symbol for believers

Biblical history is a history of people who have encountered the Logos. Origen moves from the words of Scripture to this history of spiritual encounter and then to the deeper spiritual sense of each text. This is 'a history of the pedagogy of the Logos.' Thus these figures of Biblical history serve as models for all believers. 'The fact that the history which is reported in the literal sense is the history of an experience with the universal Logos means that it can become the model for succeeding experiences of the Logos since the pedagogy of the Logos is the same in all times.'²⁶¹ So for instance, the reader of Psalm 37 can follow the model of the Psalmist's prayer.²⁶²

The paramount model is Christ himself. In Origen's view, it was only possible for the deeply spiritual Gospel of John to be written because its author was active in his imitation of Jesus to the extent that it can be said that he reclined

²⁶⁰ Crouzel states, 'il ne voit pas dans l'intégrité corporelle de l'hymen une condition de la virginité perpétuelle,' SC 87.41, cf. 44. Others who doubt Origen held to the virginity during birth are Jouassard ('Marie à travers la patristique' 83) and D. C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene* (Rome: Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1942), 119. In his section on Origen Alvarez Campos does not provide a separate heading for the *virginitas in partu*, content to include any possibly relevant texts under the heading 'De perpetua post partum virginitate,' CMP vol. 1, p. 105. Daniélou (*Origen* 246, n. 1) glosses over the debate with a blanket statement that Origen simply followed traditional teaching on Mary. Origen does not define virginity chiefly on biological terms (*com. Matt.* 12.7, *hom. Gen.* 10.4) so it could be considered consistent for him to not affirm the *in partu* virginity and yet hold to the *post partum* virginity as defined as a lifetime abstention from sexual relations, cf. his discussion of a virgin who was raped but maintained her chaste state despite the loss of the biological sign of purity, *com. Matt.* 12.7.

²⁶¹ Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure* 140-143. Origen does not move directly from the words of the text to the spiritual meaning, but through the history which the words describe. Torjesen believes this supports the thesis of de Lubac that Origen's spiritual sense is based on the salvation history recorded by the text.

²⁶² Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure* 131: 'The prayer of the Psalmist . . . has a universal meaning, a meaning that is valid for all souls. It is in this universal significance of the soul addressed by the Logos that the hearer participates.' Cf. *com. Ps.* 37 and *hom. Jer.* 1.12.

spiritually upon the breast of the Lord.²⁶³ In turn the apostles also stand as imitative models for other believers. The apostle Peter not only reveals truth about Jesus in his confession, but his faith serves as an example for Christians:

We too become as Peter, being pronounced blessed as he was, because that the grounds on which he was pronounced blessed apply also to us, by reason of the fact that flesh and blood have not revealed to us with regard to Jesus that He is Christ, the Son of the living God, but the Father in heaven, . . . And if we too have said like Peter, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' not as if flesh and blood had revealed it unto us, but by light from the Father in heaven having shone in our heart, we become a Peter, and to us there might be said by the Word, 'Thou art Peter.'

Bishops who wish to exercise the power of the keys given to Peter must first emulate the virtues of the apostle, in effect becoming a second Peter.²⁶⁴ Anyone desiring to ascend from the limits of this life must take Jesus in his arms as Simeon did.²⁶⁵ Specific women also stand as models for believers to imitate, especially Elizabeth and Anna who appear in this role in the *Homilies on Luke*.²⁶⁶ Origen observes that the Evangelist recorded the incident of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Christ because her spiritual perception stands out as a challenge to all believers.²⁶⁷

As one of the spiritual Mary²⁶⁸ also functions as a model. God has looked on

²⁶³ I follow the interpretation of *com. Io.* 32.263-264 by P. Widdicombe, 'Knowing God: Origen and the Example of the Beloved Disciple', *Studia Patristica*, 31 (1997), 556. He sums up (558) Origen's use of John as a model: 'John is both the model, and through the text of his Gospel, the means by which we come to a knowledge of the divine Logos.' Note how the issue of historicity is subsumed into Origen's spiritualization.

²⁶⁴ *com. Matt.* 12.10, ANF 10.809 and 12.14, ANF 10.814-816. The cross reference *Cels.* 6.77 is supplied in Trigg, *Bible and Philosophy* 145. We can be an Isaac, *hom. Gen.* 7.2.

²⁶⁵ *hom. Lc.* 15.2-5. While attention is drawn to this text as one of the earliest witnesses of the devotion of the infant Jesus (so Lienhard in FC 94.63, n. 5; Crouzel and others, SC 87.234, n. 2) it is more probable that Origen simply has in mind here a closer communion with the eternal Logos which is exemplified by Simeon's words and actions.

²⁶⁶ Elizabeth: *hom. Lc.* 8.1, CMP 168 and Anna: *hom. Lc.* 17.10. In both cases the verb *imitor* appears in Jerome's translation. Also Rebecca: *hom. Gen.* 13.2, 10.2 and Sarah: *hom. Gen.* 3.3, 4.4, 7.2-3. See a discussion of Origen's use of various OT women as exempla in E. Giannareli, 'Christian Thought and Alexandrian Methodology: Origen on Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel' in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. by R. J. Daly (Leuven University Press, 1992), 125-130.

²⁶⁷ *com. Io.* 13.174, cf. Jn 4.28-29.

²⁶⁸ So the texts cited earlier: *com. Io.* 6.256-259 (49), CMP 195; *hom. Lc.* 7.3, CMP 163.

her virtues with approval. Origen applies an adapted form of the four-fold structure of cardinal virtues from Greek philosophy to Mary and then sets forth her humility as an example to the church.²⁶⁹ Origen makes homiletic use of the incident of the boy Jesus remaining in the Temple. The point of the illustration is that we must seek Jesus as earnestly as did Mary and Joseph.²⁷⁰ Mary's submissive reception of the Word in obedience to the divine plan is also worthy of notice.²⁷¹

5.3.4.1 Her maternity

A case can be made that Origen presents Mary's maternity as a model for the transformation of the self. If we define asceticism as a process of transformation, then we can say that Origen's Mary is an ascetic symbol, which would be an innovation in thought about the mother of Jesus. This is not a doctrine of Mary as mother of the church, especially given that for Origen other women also serve as maternal examples, but it is a view that her bringing forth the Savior is something that can be replicated in the soul of any believer who ascends to a high spirituality. This idea stems from his broader concept of the fecundity of the soul. Each soul is inherently generative - its fruit determined by the influences it places itself under, for, as Origen says, 'There is no time when the soul is not giving birth; it is constantly giving birth.'²⁷² The fruit of this fertility reflects the spiritual state of that soul. This fruit can be external, in other words, the display of virtue or of evil traits

²⁶⁹ *hom. Lc.* 8.4-6, CMP 170-171, cf. Lk 1.48. Origen substituting wisdom for prudence, see n. 3 in SC 87.168-169. The same four are repeated in *hom. Lc.* 35.9. He takes some time to justify humility as a legitimate virtue, see Lienhard's note, FC 94.35, n. 15. He places humility on the same level as the other virtues of righteousness, temperance, courage and wisdom: K. Demura, 'Ethical Virtues in Origen and Plotinus', in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. by R. Daly (Louvain: University Press, 1992), 299. Mary's chastity and virginity are not in view here. The humility of the apostle Paul is praised as a virtue: *com. Rm.* 4.11.3.

²⁷⁰ *hom. Lc.* 18.2-3, CMP 181, also 19.5, CMP 183.

²⁷¹ *hom. Cant.* 2.6, CMP 238. Jesus submitted to Mary and Joseph and so is a model of a spiritual superior acquiescing to inferiors. Origen applies this principle to church life where sometimes 'a lesser man is put in charge of better men': *hom. Lc.* 20.5, CMP 184. Lienhard thinks he had in mind his own rocky relationship with Bishop Demetrius of Alexandria: FC 94.86, n. 14.

²⁷² *hom. Num.* 20.2, SC 29.397 = GCS 7 (30).189: 'Numquam est ergo quando non pariat anima; anima semper parit, semper generat filios.' Cf. *ser. Matt.* 54. The Father is constantly begetting the soul of the righteous man in each good act the man performs: *hom. Jer.* 9.4, SC 232.392.

which will influence another for good or evil. So heretics give birth spiritually to those who fall into their deceptions.²⁷³ On the other hand, priests and teachers of the true faith can also beget spiritual children. Origen often cites to this effect Gal 4.19: ‘My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.’²⁷⁴

But more frequently Origen has in mind the internal fruit of virtues as applied to the individual soul. He applies the Galatians text to the soul of the believer: ‘In accordance with what Paul writes elsewhere: ‘My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you’ [Gal 4:19], he means to say that Christ is formed in those who strive for perfection.’²⁷⁵ Also in the 12th *Homily on Leviticus*: ‘Therefore the soul conceives from this seed of the word and the Word forms a fetus in it until it brings forth a spirit of the fear of God’²⁷⁶ Our soul becomes a mother when God works in it to bring forth virtues.²⁷⁷ The Holy Spirit cultivates the fertility of the soul ‘and it causes abundant fruit to be brought forth in the form of the fulness of all the virtues.’²⁷⁸ Since the epitome of all virtue is Christ himself, Origen has no hesitation in speaking of spiritual ascent in terms of giving birth to Christ in one’s soul: ‘If you become as pure in mind as you are holy in body, if you become spotless in your deeds, you can even produce

²⁷³ *hom. Ier.* 10.5.1 and 9.4.4; *euch.* 22.4.

²⁷⁴ *hom. Lev.* 6.6.3. Also *hom. Gen.* 6.3; *hom. Ex.* 1.3; 10.3; *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2; *frag.* 10 from *hom. Ier.*; *com. Io.* 1.92; *com. Rm.* 4.6.9; 7.4.14; 7.7.4; 8.10.7; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 3.15.99. Ultimately it is the Lord himself who supervises this spiritual giving birth of Christ in each ascending believer: *com. Cant.* 3.12.

²⁷⁵ *com. Rm.* 7.7.4, trans. Schenk, 7.16.

²⁷⁶ *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2, FC 83.230, also citing Gal 4.19. Daniélou (*Origen* 186) notes that Origen drew his metaphor of the soul giving birth to spiritual children which are virtues from Philo, *De Legum Allegoria* 2.4.11.

²⁷⁷ *com. Ps.* 112.9; *frag. com. Io.* 3.29: ‘Rational substance, of which the human soul is also a part, cannot of itself bring forth any good, although it is capable of receiving good. It must therefore, like a woman, generate from another what it can bring forth in the way of practical and theoretical virtues. Hence, I call it “bride.”’: §748, *Spirit and Fire*, 270. Note how Origen reflects the biological understanding of his era - the woman’s role is passive in reproduction. The wombs of the saints are blessed in bearing Christ: *frag.* 165 on Lk 10.23-24, FC 94.191.

²⁷⁸ *com. Rm.* 8.11.8, trans. Schenk, 8.31. Origen employs other images as well, for instance the hospitable soul that opens its door and offers welcome to virtues: *com. Rm.* 2.1.3.

Christ.²⁷⁹ ‘A pregnant woman is what the soul is called which has recently conceived the Word of God.’²⁸⁰ The soul brings forth Christ as it strives for perfection in this life.²⁸¹ In light of Valantasis’s definition²⁸² this journey of spiritual ascent can be considered asceticism since the intention is to be transformed to a higher spiritual plane through the application of Scripture to one’s life. Teachers of the Bible ‘bring forth the word of God in the Church’ so that ‘from this seed of the word of God which is sown Christ is born in the heart of the hearers’.²⁸³

This spiritual fertility is connected with Mary in several texts. In a fragment on Lk 10.30 Mary figures in a typology between Christ and the Good Samaritan, ‘The Samaritan is the Christ who took flesh from Mary.’²⁸⁴ Every woman can become a mother of Christ if she does God’s will.²⁸⁵ Each soul may conceive by the

²⁷⁹ *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, trans. Schenk, 4.23, ‘potes generare Isaac,’ PG 14.983. Origen establishes a progression: mere mortification of the flesh produces an ‘Isaac’. For Christ as the epitome of virtues, see *com. Rm.* 7.13.2: ‘Christ himself is said to consist in these virtues’, trans. Schenk 7.29; also *com. Rm.* 10.1.5; 1.1.3-4. Bradley comments (‘APETH’ 189): ‘In the strictest sense, *areté* means the Son of God. In man, only the *areté* of perfect participation in the Son merits the name.’

²⁸⁰ *hom. Ex.* 10.3, §748 *Spirit and Fire*, 270. The λόγος bears fruit in the holy and just soul: *hom. Ier.* 14.10.1, FC 97.144. Also *sel. Gen.*: Κατὰ δὲ τὸν πνευματικὸν νόμον ψυχῆς ἀνοίγει [Θεὸς] μήτραν, ἵνα γεννήσῃ Θεοῦ Λόγον ἢ ἐσομένη αὐτοῦ μήτηρ: PG 12.124C, cited in Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia* 72, n. 31.

²⁸¹ *com. Rm.* 7.7.4. Also *frag.* 10 in *hom. Ier.*, FC 97.283.

²⁸² ‘Constructions of Power in Asceticism’ *JARR* 63 (1995), 799.

²⁸³ *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2, trans. Barkley, FC 83.230-1: the teachers must take care only to sow the seed of the Word among those pure ‘virginal souls’ which are worthy, cf. 2 Cor 11.3. It is interesting that Origen does not link the virginity in this text to Mary. See section 5.3.4.2 below.

²⁸⁴ *frag.* 71 on Lk 10.30. The text with the preceding two sentences runs: ὁ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν νόμον. ὁ Λευίτης εἰς τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον. ὁ Σαμαρείτης εἰς Χριστόν, τὸν ἐκ Μαρίας σάρκα φορέσαντα, SC 87.520.

²⁸⁵ *com. Io.* 2.87-88, not in CMP or Vagaggini, see Appendix § 15. Some of these texts have been conveniently collected by von Balthasar, *Spirit and Fire*, §749-754, trans. Daly, 270-71. A curious text not found in CMP, Vagaggini or *Spirit and Fire* is *hom. Ier.* 15.4.2, which in passing sets in parallel the two mothers of Christ: the soul and Mary (FC 97.161): “Woe is me, mother, as what kind of man did you bear me?” [Jer. 15.10] What “mother” does he speak of? Is he not able to declare as women both soul and Mary? But if a person accepts these words: “My mother, the Holy Spirit, has recently taken me and carried me up to the great mount Tabor,” [*Gospel of Hebrews*, Fragment 4] and what follows, one is able to see his “mother”. ‘Mary’ here is the mother of Christ on the historical and physical plane. The ‘soul’ is the incorporeal mother resident inside each believer which can bring forth a spiritual ‘Christ’ as it ascends in virtue, cf. FC 97.161, n. 47. Plumpe (*Mater Ecclesia* 69-80) has gathered texts where Origen links maternal imagery to the Church (*com. Ps.* 44.10; *hom. Lev.* 12.4.2 and others). However he cites no example of Origen directly connecting the Church with Mary.

Holy Spirit and bring forth the will of the Father, thus becoming a mother of Jesus.²⁸⁶ Her physical maternity is evoked as a type for the spiritual maternity of the souls of all believers in the second homily on Song of Songs: 'The birth of Christ took its inception from the shadow; yet not in Mary only did His nativity begin with overshadowing; in you too, if you are worthy, the Word of God is born.'²⁸⁷ In order to understand the message of the Gospel, one must become as intimate with Jesus as John, who leaned on the breast of the Lord and received Mary into his care.²⁸⁸ Origen's construction of Mary is not so much as an imitative model but as a symbol of the believer's soul. We see this in a passage from the *Commentary on Romans* where Origen makes a direct connection between the Galatians 4.19 text and Mary the virgin mother of Jesus. The historical figure of Mary is spiritualized to signify the soul which has ascended to the point that as a 'virgin' it gives 'birth' to the highest virtue, a spiritualized virginal conception:

But you also, if you mortify your members which are earthly, if you cast off all the passion of lust and keep your body dead and at the mercy of none of these vices, you as well can produce the best fruits from him: You can produce an Isaac, that is, joy; and this is the first fruit of the Spirit. Your seed, that is to say, your works, can ascend to heaven and become works of light and be conferred with the splendor and glory of the stars, so that when the day of resurrection arrives, you will stand out in brightness as one star differs from another star. I will say still more: If you become as pure in mind as you are holy in body, if you become spotless in your deeds, you can even produce Christ, in accordance with the words of the one who said: 'My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' [Gal 4:19]. The Lord himself also speaks in this way

²⁸⁶ *frag. com. Matt.* 281 on Mt 12.48. This text is discussed below. Also *frag. com. Ps.* on 105.3. So Toon is incorrect in ascribing this idea that the believer who spiritually gives birth to Christ may be called 'Mary' first to Ambrose rather than Origen: 'Appreciating Mary Today' in *Chosen by God*, ed. by D. F. Wright (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1989), 225.

²⁸⁷ *hom. Cant.* 2.6, CMP 238, ACW 26.293, this being the first known instance of an application of images drawn from the Song of Songs to Mary. Again Ambrose is incorrectly given credit for a concept found in Origen (O'Carroll 'Ambrose' in *Theotokos*).

²⁸⁸ Presenting John rather than Mary as a model - he has ascended to the point of being a second Jesus: *com. Io.* 1.23 (4), CMP 264. So Crouzel is justified in his observation that Origen's interest is on Christ, not Mary and that this text cannot be used to claim Origen taught the universal maternity of Mary: SC 87.61-62; also Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene* 119; contra Quasten, *Patrology* 2.81, Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* 19, and E. R. Carroll, 'Mariology' in NCE.

concerning himself: 'Whoever should do the will of my father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother' [Mt 12:50]. Who then shall be a mother of Jesus if not the one whose womb is dead in this way so that only then she might afterward bring forth sons of chastity. As the apostle says of the woman: 'Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided she continue in faith and chastity' [1Tim 2:15]. On this account, I believe Paul has fittingly added: 'And it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' For how could righteousness fail to be reckoned to a man who has attained perfection not only by faith but by all the other virtues as well?²⁸⁹

It must be noted that Mary is not the only woman whose biological maternity has spiritual significance for Origen. He draws spiritual lessons from the wealth of historical details in the stories of the patriarchs which some might consider meaningless. Many women have been miraculously brought from infertility to producing a holy child. These miraculous offspring are spiritualized into virtues. Hannah 'has born more abundant fruit than did her body when it gave birth to Samuel' when she shows her deep devotion in her prayers. Rebecca, who was advancing in her contemplation of God, serves in her physical maternity as an example to us to also bring forth the fruit of virtues:

But if we should be such as Rebecca and should deserve to conceive from Isaac, that is, from the word of God, 'one people shall overcome the other and the elder shall serve the younger' [Gen. 25.23] even in us, for the flesh shall serve the spirit and vices shall yield to virtues.²⁹⁰

There is even one text which names the celestial Jerusalem as the 'mother' which Jesus left behind to come down to marry the earthly church.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, trans. Schenk, 4.23. Here Origen directly connects the Galatians 4.19 text with Mary.

²⁹⁰ *euch.* 16.3, trans. J. Oulton, *Alexandrian Christianity*, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 272; and *hom. Gen.* 12.3, FC 71.179.

²⁹¹ *com. Matt.* 14.17, ANF 10.912: 'For the sake of the church, the Lord - the husband- left the Father . . . left also His mother, as He was the very son of the Jerusalem which is above, and was joined to His wife who had fallen down here, and these two here became one flesh.' *GCS* 10.326: δὲ καὶ τὴν μητέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς υἱὸς ὧν τῆς ἄνω 'Ιερουσαλήμ

5.3.4.2 Her virginity

What about the virginity of Mary? If Origen applied the maternity of Mary to the life of the believer, did he also put forth her virginity as a model or symbol of ascetic renunciation of sexual behavior? Vagaggini concludes that for Origen Mary is the ‘head and model of virginal and ascetic life for women’.²⁹² In fact Origen is often considered among the first to use Mary as an ascetic model.²⁹³ These views are built on a text from the *Commentary on Matthew* which has no counterpart in anything else from Origen’s extant corpus:

And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first-fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity.²⁹⁴

If we consult the context of this passage in the *Commentary* we find that the purpose Origen has here is to define the virginity *post partum* as an indication of the divinity of Jesus. The focus of this section of the *Commentary*, which is dealing with Matthew 13.54-56, is on the person of Jesus. Yet this text does place before us both Jesus and his mother Mary as ‘firstfruit’ (ἀπαρχή) models of ascetic virginity.²⁹⁵

²⁹² In the conclusion of his study *Maria nelle opere di Origene* 173: ‘Origene dà sviluppo all’idea di Maria capo e modello di vita verginale ed ascetica per le donne, come Gesù lo è per gli uomini, idea questa che ebbe uno straordinario successo al secolo IV.’

²⁹³ Origen’s views (and especially the text *com. Matt.* 10.17 discussed below) are considered the spring from which the ascetic movement of the 4th century drew: ‘Là s’origine un courant important qui voit en Marie le modèle des vierges consacrées.’: D. Fernández, ‘La spiritualité mariale chez les pères’ 10.423. See also Kelly, ‘Mary and the Saints’, in *Early Christian Doctrines* 493; P. Donnelly, ‘The Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God’ 2.269; and the several examples cited in the next note.

²⁹⁴ *com. Matt.* 10.17, ANF 10.747 = CMP 267: καὶ οἶμαι λόγον ἔχειν, ἀνδρῶν μὲν καθαρότητος τῆς ἐν ἀγνεΐᾳ ἀπαρχὴν γεγονέναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν, γυναικῶν δὲ τὴν Μαρτίαν. Οὐ γὰρ εὐφημον ἄλλη παρ’ ἐκείνην τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῆς παρθενίας ἐπιγράψασθαι. Crouzel (*Virginité et mariage* 135, cf. 84) resorts to this text when he calls Mary a ‘modèle de la virginité,’ also in his ‘La théologie mariale d’Origène’, SC 87.35-36. But this passage cannot bear the weight placed on it by Golden (149, cf. 152) who describes it as a ‘glorification of Mary as a model of virginity.’ Laurentin (*Short Treatise* 319) selects (unwisely, in my view) only this text from all of patristic literature to illustrate the teaching of the Church that Mary is ‘the type or icon of virginity.’

²⁹⁵ Campenhausen cautions us to not place too much weight on this text: ‘It would not be right, however, to ascribe any special importance to an isolated remark of that kind’: *Virgin Birth* 63. The significance of the term ἀπαρχή which occurs twice in this text is defined as ‘supreme in virtue’: *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Lampe, ed. Elsewhere in the *Commentary* Origen uses the term to simply mean first in a series (*frag. com. Matt.* 560, GCS 12/3.230 and *ser. Matt.* 68, GCS 11/2.161; as compiled from the ‘Wortregister’ in GCS 12/3/2.66). In these texts it does not carry the meaning of first as ‘paradigm.’ In *com. Io.* 1.12-14 (2), he uses the term to mean culmination: the Gospels are the

This is one of the earliest known such texts in the history of the Church.²⁹⁶

But as we have seen above, it is the maternity rather than the virginity of Mary that Origen prefers to apply to believers. He repeatedly sets her out as an example of someone who has progressed in her soul to a heightened state of spirituality.²⁹⁷ This state can be described as spiritual virginity. Mary is a being transformed by God. In a sense it is the achievement of this virginity of the soul, its freedom from base things, that allows it to bear fruit and become a mother of the Lord like Mary. But this blessing was not reserved to Mary alone. Others may follow her example:

They who do not know the mystery of the virgin say to Jesus: ‘your brothers’ [Mk 3.32; Lk 8.20], for if they had known they would have believed in him. It is from doing the will of his Father in heaven that one becomes the brother or sister or mother of Jesus. When the wholly virginal and uncorrupted soul, although not by nature a brother, etc., to Jesus, conceives of the Holy Spirit in order to give birth to the will of the Father, it becomes the ‘mother’ of Jesus.²⁹⁸

Mary then stands as an example of one transformed. She has progressed spiritually to a state of spiritual virginity. We too, may follow her, enter into a state of spiritual purity and virginity and become so intimate with the Lord that we may be considered to bear him as a ‘mother’ of Jesus. Mary, like all others, can only attain

firstfruits of all of Scripture. See Heine’s discussion in FC 80.34, n. 17. Yet here in *com. Matt.* 10.17 it must carry some reference to Mary and Jesus as not just first in a series nor just supreme, but actual models for others to follow.

²⁹⁶ It is perhaps significant that Origen only came to this direct link between Mary and ascetic virginity at the very end of his career. Nautin assigns a date of 249 to the *com. Matt.* and it is the final entry in his chronological table, *Origène* 412. The earliest known text to use Mary as an ascetic model is Tertullian, *mon.* 8.2, dated 210/11 according to Barnes (*Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* 55). See my discussion of this text in chapter 4, section 4.4.3.

²⁹⁷ *hom. Lc.* 7.1, 7.2, 7.5, 6.7, *com. Io.* 1.220 (31), 2.224 (37), 6.256 (49), 6.259 (49).

²⁹⁸ *frag. com. Matt.* 281 on Mt 12.48, trans. Daly, §753, *Spirit and Fire*, 270-271 = GCS 12/3.126: Οἱ μὴ γινώσκοντες τὸ κατὰ τὴν παρθένον μυστήριον λέγουσιν οἱ ἀδελφοί σου τῷ Ἰησοῦ. εἰ γὰρ ἐγίνωσκον, ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ποιεῖν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς πατρὸς ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ ἢ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τις γινεται. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, οὐ φύσει ἐστὶ τις ἀδελφὸς ἢ τι τῶν λοιπῶν. ἔτι πᾶσα παρθένος καὶ ἀδιάφθορος ψυχὴ ἐξ ἀγίου πνεύματος συλλαβοῦσα, ἵνα γεννήσῃ τὸ πατρικὸν θέλημα, μήτηρ ἐστὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. On the soul as an uncorrupted virgin, see *hom. Lev.* 12.5.5.

such a high state of spirituality through steady and at times faltering growth.²⁹⁹ As a model for believers she is not unique.³⁰⁰ Texts which set out Mary as a model can now be set into the broader context of spiritual exemplars for the church.³⁰¹ Others put forward as models include Peter and Simeon. Elizabeth and Anna are both among the ‘holy women’ of Biblical history standing as exemplars of spiritual life to emulate.³⁰² Mary in no way is set apart as a special case. She is one among an entire class of highly spiritual ones who populate the pages of salvation history whose lives and virtues are examples to all in the church. Her virginity is read spiritually as a symbol of the progress and ascent of the soul. Origen does use her, among others, as an imitative model for the believer in the realm of the ascent of the soul.

5.4 CONCLUSION

While Origen knows of and even defends the physical virginity of Mary, at least before and after the birth of the Savior, his interest in Mary is fixed elsewhere. Her abstention from sexual relations is used only once in an application to believers. Her physical virginity is part of history and as such will have a deeper meaning. The virginity of Mary represents her state of heightened spirituality. For models of physical continence Origen prefers to use Biblical figures other than the mother of Jesus. He specifically cites Anna’s renunciation of marriage after her widowhood as something other women ought to imitate: ‘Women, look on Anna’s testimony and

²⁹⁹ *hom. Lc.* 20.4, CMP 184. ‘Almost all Eastern theologians . . . followed Origen in finding her guilty of human frailties’: Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 495, e.g. Basil, *Ep* 260.9; Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew* 44.2 and *Homily on John* 21.2.

³⁰⁰ Souls which are open to orthodox teaching are ‘clean’ and ‘virgins’: *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2, FC 83.230. Even though Origen describes just a line or two later how the seed of the Word generates in the soul of the believer so that ‘Christ is born in the heart of the hearers’, there is no mention of Mary, whose virginity and maternity would fit well into the exposition.

³⁰¹ Christ himself is the supreme example: *hom. Lev.* 10.2.3.

³⁰² Elizabeth: *hom. Lc.* 8.1, CMP 168, SC 87.164: ‘ut ceterae quoque mulieres, sexus fragilitate deposita, imitentur vitam conversationem sanctarum, earumque vel maxime, quae nunc in Evangelio describuntur.’ Cf. G. Jouassard, ‘La Nouvelle Ève chez les Pères Anténicéens’ 47.

imitate it!’ Similarly, as Christ partook fully of human life save for sexual intercourse, so the virgins in the church imitate him: ‘everyone who lives in chastity also imitates Christ.’³⁰³

Origen’s low level of interest in constructing a direct application from the physical virginity of Mary to the life of the church is consistent with a similar lack of interest in the history of the physical Jesus. The literal level of the Gospels is the necessary starting point to arrive at the spiritual teaching, but the application comes from the spiritual meaning, not directly from the literal recorded history.³⁰⁴ So in another incident from Mary’s life, the wedding at Cana, Origen’s attention is directed not at the historical questions of the relationship between Jesus and his mother which occupy so many later commentators, but rather at how her presence at the feast is an allegory of the growing spiritual fruitfulness of his disciples.³⁰⁵

It is correct then to say, as von Campenhausen does, that Origen ‘was the first to bring the ascetic themes in the framework of catholic ecclesiastical thought into relation with Mary’s person.’ Yet this assertion rests upon the single text in the *Commentary on Matthew*.³⁰⁶ We can now say that if we examine Origen from the more recent perspective of asceticism³⁰⁷ we find Mary emerges as an ascetic figure not just in this single text. Her virtues are displayed before God in such a way that he acknowledges her and blesses her.³⁰⁸ She has ascended to a high spiritual state,

³⁰³ Anna: *hom. Lc.* 17.10, FC 94.74. Christ: *hom. Lev.* 9.2.4, FC 83.179 = ‘Ita ergo et omnis, qui in castitate vivens imitatur Christum,’ Baehrens, GCS 29.420, the preceding lines discuss how Christ partook of all human activities save marriage and procreation. Mere physical virginity is no guarantee of spirituality. Rebecca possessed virginity of both body and of soul: *hom. Gen.* 10.4. This is a ‘sign of her total integrity’: E. Giannarelli, ‘Origen on Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel,’ in *Origeniana Quinta* 129. It is interesting that Origen goes on in *hom. Gen.* 12.3 to set out the maternity of Rebecca as a symbol of spiritual fertility.

³⁰⁴ This is noted by two students of Origen’s exegesis: Hanson, *Allegory and Event* 276 and Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure* 64-65. Origen criticizes the simple believer for attempting to draw applications directly from the literal level: Hällström, *Fides Simpliciorum* 48.

³⁰⁵ *com. Io.* 10.37-40 (9), CMP 196. It must be noted this is an aside and that the portion of the *com. Io.* which dealt with the Cana wedding has not survived.

³⁰⁶ von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 57. *com. Matt.* 10.17, CMP 267.

³⁰⁷ Valantasis, ‘Constructions of Power in Asceticism’ 797-800.

³⁰⁸ *hom. Lc.* 8.1, cf. 8.1 2. John the Baptist *in utero* also responds to her charged spirituality, *hom. I Reg.* 28.7.3.

being recreated and transformed.³⁰⁹ This is an intentional process which is far from complete even in her case -- she is not yet perfect.³¹⁰ Origen's entire appeal to his fellow Christians to bear Jesus in their souls, to become another Mary is based on a perception of her not just as an exceptionally holy person in Biblical history but as someone who stands as a 'harbinger' of a new way of life.³¹¹ This life of heightened spirituality is available to all who diligently work, and Mary, among others, points the way.

Origen, unlike Irenaeus, has no detailed explication of Mary's theological significance. There is no real innovation in his discussion of her place on the purely historical level which is set in the context of the Incarnation: she supplied the true human flesh for the descent of the Savior. Origen accepts as a foundational datum of apostolic tradition her virginal conception. The virginity *ante partum* is entirely appropriate to the status of her son. Origen does extend this sense of propriety to her perpetual virginity: it simply makes sense that she remained a virgin for the rest of her life.

Origen also affirms physical ascetic practice, but never for its own sake, warning virgins and others of the dangers of extremism and pride. Biological virginity means nothing if not accompanied by virginity of the soul. It is in that realm of true spirituality where his interest lies and it is here where he turns to the example of the historical figure of Mary. She stands, along with many others in the Bible, as a model of someone who has ascended to a high level of spirituality. Like other spiritual ones, she conveys grace to others. This is despite the fact that she bears the stain of corporeality - a stain she passed on to her son. She also is a sinner who demonstrated a faltering yet growing faith. Her corporeal virginity is affirmed and even applied in one instance to the practice of sexual renunciation. But it is her spiritual virginity and maternity which matter as they are symbols of the ascended

³⁰⁹ *com. Io.* 6.256-259, 10.37-38.

³¹⁰ *hom. Lc.* 17.6-7, 20.4.

³¹¹ *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, *frag. com. Matt.* 281, *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2, *hom. Cant.* 2.6, *com. Ps.* 105.3, cf. Valantasis 800.

life of the soul. Here is where Origen emerges as a pioneer in applying Mary to ascetic thought.³¹² Each believer may bring forth 'Jesus' and so become a mother of the Lord. Each individual soul must be purified from physical and spiritual sins and so attain to a spiritual virginity even as Mary was virginal. This spiritual application of Mary as both mother and as virgin is the chief contribution Origen makes to the church's consideration of the mother of Jesus. The Mary of Origen stands as a type and symbol for all Christians who aspire to be transformed into beings so spiritually ascended that their very souls bring forth Jesus.

³¹² We should note the wise caution of Golden ('Origen and Mariology' 142): 'To speak of Origen as a Mariologist is premature at best; it is to remove him from his context in the history of the development of doctrine.'

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 A SUMMATION OF THE WITNESSES

This section contains a summary of the findings from each of the sources scrutinized by this project. We begin with Ignatius of Antioch¹ who asserts against docetism that Jesus is truly born of Mary.² He sets the divinity and humanity of Jesus side by side in a bold phrase: καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ Θεοῦ.³ He considers the *ante partum* virginity of Mary to be part of the divine plan which was concealed from inimical forces but revealed to the faithful.⁴ At the very beginning of the second century Ignatius is familiar enough with the practice of sexual ascetics to warn them against boasting. His language may reflect awareness of a nascent ideal of virginity when he greets the ‘virgins called widows.’⁵ Both ascetics and married are under the bishop, there is no hint that one option is superior to the other.⁶ Jesus is the only model put forward for continents whose way of life is to ‘the honor of the Lord’s flesh.’⁷

The first theological consideration of Mary apart from the nativity is found in Justin Martyr⁸ who constructs the first known parallel between her and Eve. Both are virgins who take in a ‘logos’ with radically different results which affect the entire world:

¹ CMP 1-5.

² *Tr.* 9.1, *Sm.* 1.1, and *Eph.* 18.2 where he expands: ‘he was carried in the womb of Mary.’

³ *Eph.* 7.2, CMP 2.

⁴ *Eph.* 19.1.

⁵ *Pol.* 5.1-2. *Sm.* 13.1, Schoedel 247 and 252, n. 26.

⁶ *Pol.* 4.1, 5.2.

⁷ *Pol.* 5.2.

⁸ CMP 7-43.

Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent (τὸν λόγον τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφραως συλλαβοῦσα), brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God.⁹

Justin accepts the virginal conception as part of apostolic tradition¹⁰ and defends it against attacks from both Jews and pagans. In response to Trypho he lays claim to Isaiah 7.14 as a prophecy that could only have been fulfilled in the son born of the Virgin.¹¹ He is adamant that Mary's conception while a virgin is not at all like the pagan myths since there is no sexual contact between her and God; rather it is a direct act of the power of God, the pre-incarnate Logos.¹² Justin is interested in Mary for three points: to show Jesus is descended from David and Abraham, to demonstrate the divine power of his incarnation by virginal conception and to set Mary's conception of the Logos in contrast to Eve's receiving the logos of the serpent.

Justin claims that sexual behavior among Christians is so pure that it is a major feature that distinguishes them from the pagan world. Life-long renunciation of sexual contact may be found in a broad cross-section of the Church.¹³ These and

⁹ *Dial.* 100, ANF 1.249, CMP 34, 35. A second text, *Dial.* 84, is a parallel between Eve and Christ: both become flesh by the direct power and will of God.

¹⁰ *Dial.* 48.

¹¹ *Dial.* 84 and 71-78, also 66, 68, 100. In *Dial.* 43, 45 he deviates from the Synoptic tradition in asserting Mary's descent from David.

¹² *I Apol.* 33, ACW 56.46: 'But lest some, not understanding the prophecy referred to, should bring against us the reproach we have been bringing against the poets who say that Zeus came upon women through lust, we will attempt to explain clearly the words. This then, "Behold the virgin shall conceive" signifies that the virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with anyone, she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin overshadowed her, and caused her to conceive while still a virgin.'

¹³ *I Apol.* 14-15, 29. *I Apol.* 15, ACW 56.32: 'And many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples from childhood, have preserved their purity at the age of sixty or seventy years; and I am proud that I could produce such from every race of men and women.'

other ascetic activities are performed as a display before God and the world.¹⁴ But Justin is no ascetic extremist.¹⁵ He does not connect Mary with asceticism in the church, indeed her chief function in his thought is as part of the true history of the incarnation.¹⁶

The *Protevangelium Jacobi*¹⁷ is often considered a major early example of a connecting of Mary's virginity to ascetical praxis.¹⁸ She is the central figure of the narrative which describes her as a pure virgin at every stage of her life, from her own birth through her childhood, coming of age, as a young woman and even in the very act of giving birth.¹⁹ However it has been shown that her purity is not ascetic but ritualistic in this document.²⁰ The virginity of Mary is not exalted in the *ProtJ* as a standard for other virgins but rather to explain the appearance in history of the holy person of Jesus; he is holy because even his mother was holy. Mary's virginity in the *ProtJ* is presented as unusual, even unique, not as a pattern for others to follow.

Irenaeus of Lyons is first theologian to speak extensively about Mary²¹ who is, for him, a key element in the doctrine of recapitulation. Her obedient assent to the will of God annuls the disobedience of Eve: 'the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary.'²² He posits the physical reality of the maternity of

¹⁴ *1 Apol.* 15 and 29.

¹⁵ *1 Apol.* 29, ACW 56.42: 'But whether we marry, it is only that we may bring up children; or whether we renounce marriage we live in perfect continence.' Also *2 Apol.* 4. Most church members are married, *Dial.* 110.

¹⁶ D. F. Wright points out in a private communication that Justin has no 'life of Mary' apart from the incarnation so there is no basis for her to serve as model for virgins, August 2000.

¹⁷ CMP 313-337.

¹⁸ *Mary in NT* 258, Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation* 180, Bauckham, 'Western Mariology' 142.

¹⁹ *ProtJ* 4.1-5.10, 6.1-7.9, 8.3-9, 9.11-10.10, 19.12-20.4.

²⁰ The affirmation of procreation and marriage found throughout the *ProtJ* is incompatible with Encratite and other highly renunciative views: 1.7, 1.10, 2.1, 2.9, 3.4-8, 4.5-9, 5.2-4, 6.6-8, 6.11. This is significant in a document that may have a Syrian provenance.

²¹ CMP 44-109.

²² *AH* 3.22.4, ANF 1.455. Christ recapitulates (ἀνακεφαλαιώσις) Adam, Mary recirculates (ἀνακύκλησις) Eve, *AH* 3.22.3-4 and the discussion by the editor in SC 406.271. In another parallel, the virginal earth was the source of Adam and Mary the virgin brings forth the second Adam, *AH* 3.21.10.

Mary against docetics because Jesus must bear the same *plasmatio* as Adam:

It is the same thing to say that He appeared merely to outward seeming and [to affirm] that He received nothing from Mary. For He would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood by which He redeemed us, unless He had summed up in Himself the ancient formation of Adam

and

the Word of God was made flesh through the instrumentality of the Virgin to undo death and work life in man.²³

The *ante partum* virginity he accepts as part of the Apostolic tradition. The miracle of the virgin birth, predicted by OT prophecy, links together the creator God of the OT and the Father of the NT.²⁴ Irenaeus never affirms a belief in either the virginity *in partu* or *post partum*.²⁵ He refutes those Gnostics who wish to separate Jesus and the Christ:

The promise made to the fathers had been accomplished, that the Son of God was born of a virgin, and that He Himself was Christ the Saviour whom the prophets had foretold; not, as these men assert, that Jesus was He who was born of Mary, but that Christ was He who descended from above.²⁶

Mary's virginity has a two-fold significance for Irenaeus, first as a fulfillment of prophecy as mentioned above and as a characteristic that ties her to Eve who also was a virgin at the moment of her active participation in the history of salvation. But this comparison turns not on their respective virginities but rather on their contrasting responses to the Word of God.²⁷ Irenaeus acknowledges and approves of

²³ AH 5.1.2, ANF 1.527, SC 153.24, 'antiquam plasmationem Adae' reconstructed as τὴν ἀρχαίαν πλάσιν τοῦ Ἀδὰμ. *Dem.* 37, ACW 16.71.

²⁴ AH 3.5.1, also 1.10.1. He refers to the virginal conception some seventeen times in his treatise for the instruction of catechumens, *Dem.* 32, 35, 36, 37, 40, 53, 54, 57, 59, 63, 66.

²⁵ He may have thought Mary was exempt from pain in the birth of Jesus, *Dem.* 54.

²⁶ AH 3.16.2, ANF 1.441, cf. AH 3.10.4, 3.16.5, 4.9.2.

²⁷ Eve's virginity is not ascetic but due to her youth. Irenaeus expected the primal couple would have matured to the point of engaging in sexual intercourse except that their sin of disobedience intervened and they proceeded to such relations before they were ready, AH 3.22.4, 3.23.5, 5.23.1-2, *Dem.* 12, 14.

ascetic practice among Christians, but he warns it alone cannot make one holy.²⁸ He is critical of asceticism among the heretics as grounded on wrong views of God.²⁹ He establishes no contact between Mary and ascetic practice.

In other sources Mary appears briefly. For Melito of Sardis Mary is the virgin and the mother of Jesus.³⁰ Christ came to earth by ‘clothing himself’ as a man ‘through a virgin’s womb.’³¹ He has no discussion of asceticism and therefore no use of Mary as an ascetic example. The writings ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome contain several references to Mary, some in credal contexts.³² Elsewhere she appears in apologetic passages aimed at several heresies which deny the reality of the birth or that it was Christ born of her.³³ The true teaching is: ‘this Logos we know to have received a body from a virgin.’³⁴ Salvation is possible because Christ bears the same flesh as Adam, provided through Mary.³⁵ While various options of sexual renunciation appear in these Hippolytan documents, represented most especially by widows and virgins, there is no use made of the virgin Mary as a model for these continents.³⁶

Novatian³⁷ seems to distinguish between the ‘holy thing’ born of Mary and the divine spirit who comes upon her and which by assuming the Son of Man, makes him to be the Son of God: ‘this holy thing that is born of her--that is, that substance of flesh and body--is not primarily but subsequently and secondarily the Son of God.

²⁸ *AH* 4.15.2, 5.34.3. Some asceticism is based on false theology, *Dem.* 2.

²⁹ Heretical asceticism criticized: *AH* 1.6.3, 1.24.2, 1.28.1, 5.29.1.

³⁰ *CMP* 110-112.

³¹ *PP* 70.489, Hall 36.

³² *CMP* 122-157. *AT* 2.21.15, *c. Noet.* 17.2.

³³ *haer.* 6.35.3-7, 6.36.4, 6.51.1, 7.26.8, 7.32.1, 7.35.1-2, 8.12.1-13.4, 9.20.7, 10.7, 10.20.1, 10.23.1-2.

³⁴ *haer.* 10.29.

³⁵ *c. Noet.* 17.2, *com. Dan.* 4.11 on 7.14, *haer.* 10.29. There is a dependence here on Irenaeus.

³⁶ *AT* 1.11.1, 1.11.4-5, 1.13, 3.25.1, 3.27.1-2. The *AT* is not on the extremes of asceticism, see *AT* 2.16.6-7: a pure Christian is not defiled by marital sexual intercourse.

³⁷ *CMP* 450-451.

Primarily, however, the Son of God is the Word of God, incarnate through that Spirit of whom the angel relates.³⁸ Otherwise for Novatian Mary is part of prophecy fulfillment.³⁹ He exhorts the faithful with several examples of sexual purity from Scripture: Joseph, Susanna, and the Church herself who is the bride of Christ, but Mary he does not use in this way.⁴⁰

Cyprian of Carthage⁴¹ cites the example of Mary, a member of the early church, in his argument that the corporate prayer in Acts 1.14 is a sign of church unity. His reference to Mary's life after the crucifixion is highly unusual for this era and this usage of the Acts text is unique among the early Fathers.⁴² Cyprian affirms the virginal conception and true birth of Jesus against heretics.⁴³ 'Mary' is now a name given to Christian girls.⁴⁴ He is the first we know of to join the texts of Genesis 3.14-15 and Isaiah 7.14, 'This seed God had foretold would proceed from the woman that should trample on the head of the devil.'⁴⁵ Much of Cyprian's discussion of asceticism is found in one of the earliest treatises we have on virginity where he adduces Christ as the paramount example: 'continence follows Christ.'⁴⁶ Mary is not mentioned in this work.⁴⁷ Cyprian is no ascetic radical: both the married and the continent require patience to live up to their various callings.⁴⁸ The continent and martyrs serve as examples on display, a performance that encourages others to virtue.⁴⁹ The virginal life transforms one into a creature of heaven on earth: 'The glory of the resurrection you already have in this world . . . while you remain

³⁸ *trin.* 24.4-7, FC 67.87, cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 153.

³⁹ *trin.* 9.6, 12.3, 28.7-8.

⁴⁰ *bon. pud.* 8-9 and 2.2.

⁴¹ CMP 442-448.

⁴² *unit.* 25, *dom. orat.* 8.

⁴³ *quod idol.* 11, Ep. 73.5.

⁴⁴ Ep. 21.4, 22.3.

⁴⁵ *test. libri* 2.9.

⁴⁶ *hab. virg.* 5, FC 36.35, cf. *hab. virg.* 7 and 23. Christ is also the model for martyrs, Ep. 58.1-2.

⁴⁷ He does adduce older virgins as examples for those younger, *hab. virg.* 24.

⁴⁸ *bon. pat.* 20.

⁴⁹ *hab. virg.* 4, 5, 23, Ep. 4.3, 10.1-2, 37.3-4, 58.8, 60.2, 76.4 and 6, *unit.* 14.

chaste and virgins, you are equal to the angels.⁵⁰ It is ‘particularly striking’ that such a ‘zealous champion of ascetic ideals’ makes no use of Mary in this regard.⁵¹

Two figures who speak often of asceticism are Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. Clement’s reflection on Mary’s virginal maternity sets off a series of typologies which include the Church also as a virgin mother and the Logos-Jesus also as mother of believers.⁵² Mary is the true physical mother of Jesus who conceived as a virgin,⁵³ and whose virginity was preserved in birth.⁵⁴ Clement’s asceticism stems from his view that the mature believer exercises self-control to achieve an indifference (*apatheia*) towards the desires of human life. This is following the ‘likeness of the Savior’ who was sinless because he lived beyond passion.⁵⁵ While Clement warns against heretical ascetic extremism, even calling those who reject marriage ‘antichrists,’⁵⁶ he promotes life-long sexual abstinence as a way to overcome desires.⁵⁷ But even in marriage a believer can live chastely and without desire.⁵⁸ Despite his propensity towards asceticism and his holding to Mary’s virginity *in partu*, he does not perceive her as a model for virgins.⁵⁹

Tertullian of Carthage⁶⁰ most often discusses Mary in response to docetic teachings of Marcion and others. Christ must be born of a human mother to have the

⁵⁰ *hab. virg.* 22, FC 36.50, cf. *test. libri* 3.32.

⁵¹ von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* 51.

⁵² *paed.* 1.6.42-43.

⁵³ *str.* 3.17.102, 6.15.

⁵⁴ *str.* 7.16.93, cf. *paed.* 1.6.42.

⁵⁵ *str.* 3.7.59, FC 85.292, and *str.* 3.10.69, *paed.* 1.2.4.

⁵⁶ *str.* 3.3.45, 3.6.48, 3.12.83, 3.13.92, *paed.* 2.1.1-2 and 9-11. The homily on the salvation of the wealthy argues against ascetic extremism.

⁵⁷ *str.* 2.13.59, 2.20.125.

⁵⁸ *paed.* 2.10.92 and 97, also *str.* 3.6.52.

⁵⁹ Christ also cannot be a model as he was ‘not a common man . . . [and] did not have an obligation to produce children,’ *str.* 3.6.49, FC 85.286. Rather Paul and other apostles are models of continence, *str.* 3.6.53. Also OT ascetics: Elijah, Isaiah, Moses and others, *str.* 3.6.52, 57.

⁶⁰ CMP 369-435.

same flesh he saves.⁶¹ His birth of a virgin is a sign of his divinity and fulfillment of OT prophecy.⁶² Tertullian comes close to calling Mary the mother of God: 'God suffering himself to be born in the womb of a mother.'⁶³ Her virginity stands as a sign for the purity of the entire redemptive process: 'he was born of a virgin . . . to the further intent that our regeneration should be virginal in a spiritual sense, sanctified from all defilements through Christ, who himself was a virgin even in the flesh, as he was born of the flesh of a virgin.'⁶⁴ But this virginity of Mary does not survive the birth process and afterwards she has children by Joseph in the normal manner.⁶⁵ Therefore Tertullian perceives Mary as a model for both women who are virgins and women who are married. This is the first time Mary is employed as a model for ascetic virginity:

It was a virgin who gave birth to Christ and she was to marry only once, after she brought Him forth. The reason for this was that both types of chastity might be exalted in the birth of Christ, born as He was of a mother who was at once virginal and monogamous.⁶⁶

Elsewhere it is Christ who is the primary exemplar for both married and virgins:

This more perfect Adam, Christ - more perfect because more pure - having come in the flesh to set your infirmity an example, presents Himself to you in the flesh, if you will but receive Him, as a man entirely virginal. If, however, you are not equal to this perfection, He presents Himself to you in the spirit as a model of monogamy: He has one spouse, the Church, as prefigured by Adam and Eve.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *Marc.* 3.11.2-3, 3.20.6-8, *carn. Chr.* 17.2. Refuting Valentinian view that Mary was a 'way' Tertullian asserts she contributed to the human nature of Christ, *carn. Chr.* 20, cf. 19.4-5, *Val.* 27.1. He describes the reality of this birth in detail, *carn. Chr.* 4.1-2.

⁶² *carn. Chr.* 17.2.

⁶³ *pat.* 3.2 cited in D. F. Wright, 'Mother of God' in *Chosen*, 126, = CCSL 1.300: 'Nasci se deus patitur: in utero matris.'

⁶⁴ *carn. Chr.* 20.7, Evans 68. This novel birth 'inaugurates nothing less than the virginal regeneration of humanity in a spiritual sense,' Otten, 'Christ's Birth of a Virgin' 255.

⁶⁵ *carn. Chr.* 23.2-4 and *pud.* 6.16, *Marc.* 4.19.6-13, cf. 3.11.2-3.

⁶⁶ *mon.* 8, ACW 13.86.

⁶⁷ *mon.* 5.5-7, ACW 13.80.

Tertullian is well known for his rigorous views on marriage and sexuality which stem from his lifelong pursuit of holiness. Ascetic practice trains one for martyrdom.⁶⁸ Chastity is a characteristic on display before the world.⁶⁹ Since sexual sin threatened one's very salvation, it was vital for Tertullian to exhort believers to curtail any exposure to sources of temptation such as the beauty of women.⁷⁰ Life-long virginity is recommended, but not to the total denigration of marriage.⁷¹ Like Clement he urges married Christians to avoid enjoying their sexual marital duties.⁷²

Some of the earliest material on Mary is found in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts. The *Ascension of Isaiah*⁷³ depicts the descent of Christ (the 'Beloved One') from heaven to earth, being born from the still-virgin Mary. The birth is unusual: Mary delivers before she knows what is happening and there are no pains and no attending midwife: 'her womb was found as it was at first, before she conceived.'⁷⁴ This is the earliest known witness to the virginity *in partu*. The incarnation is concealed as Jesus takes his mother's breast 'as was customary, that he might not be recognized.'⁷⁵ While there are elements of asceticism in this work⁷⁶ these are not connected to Mary and her miraculous virginity. The *Sibylline Oracles*⁷⁷ also know the virginal conception and possibly the virginity *in partu*: 'Receive God, Virgin, in your immaculate bosom' and in the next line, 'thus speaking, he breathed in the grace of God, even to one who was always a maiden.'⁷⁸

⁶⁸ *mart.* 3.

⁶⁹ *nat.* 1.4, *apol.* 35.

⁷⁰ *cult. fem.* 1.1, *virg. vel.* 7.

⁷¹ *Marc.* 1.29, *an.* 27, and in his later career less positive about marriage, now the same as fornication, only licit, *virg. vel.* 17 and *exh. cast.* 9.3.

⁷² *ux.* 1.6, *Marc.* 1.29, *res.* 8.4.

⁷³ CMP 312.

⁷⁴ *Asc. Isa.* 11.3-14, OTP 2.174-175.

⁷⁵ *Asc. Isa.* 11.17, OTP 2.175.

⁷⁶ Isaiah founds an ascetic community, *Asc. Isa.* 2.9-11, 4.13-14; the community stands in display against those who have rejected the apostolic teaching, 3.21; and the entire second vision has a utopian flavor that indicates the desire of the community for transformation, ch. 6-11.

⁷⁷ CMP 354-357.

⁷⁸ *Sib. Or.* 8.461-462, OTP 1.428.

Martyrs and virgins are mentioned but there is no explicit discussion of asceticism and no application of Mary's virginity to such.⁷⁹ The *Odes of Solomon*⁸⁰ describe the incarnation using sexual images where all three persons of the Godhead cooperate, the Son is a cup of milk drawn from the Father by the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ This milk is given to Mary: 'The womb of the Virgin took it, and she received conception and gave birth. So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies and she labored and bore the Son but without pain . . . and she did not seek a midwife.'⁸² Again we have a witness to the *in partu* as well as the *ante partum* virginity. But there is little in the *Odes* that is ascetic and no contact is made between Mary and asceticism. This is notable in a document arising from the Syrian church. The *Gospel of Philip*⁸³ is probably a Valentinian work, exhibiting severe dualism and asceticism.⁸⁴ Mary cannot have conceived by the Spirit as she is female in the Valentinian system, 'Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled.'⁸⁵ There is no application of Mary's virginity to the asceticism of this work.

Origen represents the largest number of Marian texts under the remit of this project.⁸⁶ His innovation to Marian thought is in making her an ascetic symbol for the spiritual ascent of the soul. In other areas, however, he follows standard teaching on Mary. She is the virgin who gave birth to the Savior as a fulfillment of prophecy. The physical birth of Jesus did occur, according to Origen, and by it the Savior took on human flesh.⁸⁷ The virginal conception is an historical reality and a fulfillment of prophecy.⁸⁸ He also is one of the first witnesses to Mary's *post partum* virginity, but

⁷⁹ *Sib. Or.* 2.46-48, 53, 95, 142-145.

⁸⁰ CMP 358-360.

⁸¹ *Ode* 19.1-4.

⁸² *Ode* 19.6-9, OTP 2.752-753.

⁸³ CMP 342-344.

⁸⁴ The world and the body are evil mistakes, *G. Phil.* 56.24-26, 75.2-3, 82.26-29. All sexual intercourse is adultery, 61.10-12.

⁸⁵ *G. Phil.* 55.23-28.

⁸⁶ CMP 159-304 and Appendix 'Additional texts from Origen on Mary.'

⁸⁷ *hom. Gen.* 8.9, *ser. Matt.* 33, *com. Io.* 10.263, *hom. Cant.* 2.12.

⁸⁸ *hom. Num.* 27.12, *arch.* 2.6.7.

without a clear testimony to a virginity *in partu*.⁸⁹

Origen reads the Bible as an account of spiritual progression. Mary is one of several Biblical figures whose souls have ascended to spiritual maturity.⁹⁰ Her enhanced spirituality allows her to serve as a channel of blessing to others, but the ultimate source of this grace is Jesus himself.⁹¹ At the same time, she is not without fault and shares with all other humans the stain of corporeality.⁹²

The Alexandrian's original contribution to thinking about Mary comes in his likening the transfigured soul of the believer to Mary. This is based on his view that each soul is generative. He cites Galatians 4.19 as an authority for this teaching of the fecundity of the soul, and pictures the soul as a kind of mother that can bring forth Christ: 'Therefore the soul conceives from this seed of the word and the Word forms a fetus in it until it brings forth a spirit of the fear of God.'⁹³ The soul as it is transformed, as it ascends and is transformed, brings forth Christ in spirit as Mary brought him forth in the flesh:

The birth of Christ took its inception from the shadow; yet not in Mary only did His nativity begin with overshadowing; in you too, if you are worthy, the Word of God is born.

and connecting the Galatians 4 text directly with Mary:

If you become as pure in mind as you are holy in body, if you become spotless in your deeds, you can even produce Christ, in accordance with the words of the one who said: 'My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' [Gal 4:19]. The Lord himself also speaks in this way concerning himself: 'Whoever should do the will of my father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother' [Mt 12:50]. Who then shall be a mother of Jesus if not the one whose womb is dead in this way so that only then

⁸⁹ *com. Matt.* 10.17, *com. Io.* 1.23 (4), *hom. Lc.* 7.4.

⁹⁰ *hom. Lc.* 1.1-3, *com. Io.* 6.259.

⁹¹ *com. Io.* 6.254-256.

⁹² *hom. Lc.* 14.3, 17.7, 20.4.

⁹³ *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2, FC 83.230, also *hom. Ex.* 10.3 and *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, cited below. Other Biblical mothers also serve as such examples, *euch.* 16.3, *hom. Gen.* 12.3.

she might afterward bring forth sons of chastity.⁹⁴

Origen also employs the physical virginity of Mary in one text as an example for those who wish to renounce sexual relations:

And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first-fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity.⁹⁵

Mary's virginity is also read spiritually and applied to the believer's soul rather than merely to outward physical sexual renunciation. As the virgin who is also a mother she stands in Origen as a symbol for both the fruitfulness and the purity of the individual's soul:

They who do not know the mystery of the virgin say to Jesus: 'your brothers' [Mk 3.32; Lk 8.20], for if they had known they would have believed in him. It is from doing the will of his Father in heaven that one becomes the brother or sister or mother of Jesus. When the wholly virginal and uncorrupted soul, although not by nature a brother, etc., to Jesus, conceives of the Holy Spirit in order to give birth to the will of the Father, it becomes the 'mother' of Jesus.⁹⁶

For Origen Mary is an example of one who has progressed far in her own journey of transformation of the self, the ascent of the soul. As such she is a model for others. As we use a broader definition of asceticism which goes beyond renunciation to take in the entire process of the transformation of the self, we can see that Origen's use of Mary as an ascetic symbol is not merely restricted to the *com. Matt.* 10.17 text. It also emerges from those passages which spiritualize the historical data of her maternity and virginity and apply them to the believer. Each believer can give birth to Jesus in his soul and so become a mother of the Lord. Each soul should strive towards an internal purity akin to the physical purity of the

⁹⁴ *hom. Cant.* 2.6, ACW 26.293 and *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, trans. Schenk, 4.23. Also *com. Io.* 1.23 (4), 2.87-88, *hom. Ier.* 15.4.2.

⁹⁵ *com. Matt.* 10.17, ANF 10.747, however he is more emphatic in his use of Anna as an imitative model for chastity: *hom. Lc.* 17.10.

⁹⁶ *frag. com. Matt.* 281, trans. Daly, §753, *Spirit and Fire*, 270-271.

virginal Mary. Her physical virginity and maternity are taken as symbols for the purity and fecundity of the believer's soul as it ascends the heights on the map of spirituality.⁹⁷ This is a new development in the Church's consideration of the mother of Jesus.

6.2 THE FINDINGS

The witnesses under scrutiny in this project follow the testimony of Luke and Matthew in universally affirming the virginity of Mary *ante partum*.⁹⁸ Most also specifically link the virginal conception to the OT as prophecy fulfillment.⁹⁹ They often confirm the physical reality of the birth of Jesus, usually to refute docetism.¹⁰⁰ The *in partu* virginity appears early in several apocryphal witnesses but not elsewhere and it is explicitly denied by Tertullian. The fact that one set of witnesses includes a midwife while another does not seems to indicate that already by the mid-second century the *virginitas in partu* is being carried by more than one stream of tradition.¹⁰¹ Neither of these two streams connects the *in partu* virginity to ascetic practice. This is true even with as ardent an ascetic as Clement who does affirm the virginity during birth. Only two sources mention the *post partum* virginity;

⁹⁷ Spiritual geography: *com. Io.* 6.256-257 (49), cf. *hom. Num.* 26.4, 27.3-5, *hom. Ex.* 5.3.

⁹⁸ Ignatius, *Sm.* 1.1; Justin, *1 Apol.* 63; *ProtJ* 13.1-5; Irenaeus, *AH* 1.10.1 and 3.4.2; Melito, New Fragment 2.4.27, Hall 87; Clement, *str.* 3.17.102; Tertullian, *carn. Chr.* 20.7; Hippolytus, *AT* 2.21.15 and *c. Noet.* 17.2; Cyprian, *quod idola* 11; Novatian, *trin.* 9.6; *Asc. Isa.* 11.3; *Sib. Or.* 8.461-2; *Ode* 19.6; *G. Phil.* 55.23-28; Origen, *hom. Lc.* 17.1 and *hom. Lev.* 9.2.3.

⁹⁹ Justin, *Dial.* 84; Irenaeus, *AH* 3.9.2, 3.21.6 and *Dem.* 66; Tertullian, *carn. Chr.* 17.2; Cyprian, *test. libri* 2.9. Isaiah 7.14 is not the only text so used; Origen cites Lamentations 4.20, *Cels.* 1.34-35.

¹⁰⁰ Ignatius, *Tr.* 9.1, *Eph.* 18.2; Justin, *Dial.* 48, 84, 100; Irenaeus, *AH* 3.10.4, 4.9.2, 5.1.2; Melito, *PP* 66 and 70, Clement, *str.* 3.17.102; Tertullian *carn. Chr.* 4.1-2, *Marc.* 3.20.6; Hippolytus, *AT* 2.21.15, *haer.* 10.29; Cyprian, *Ep.* 73.5; Novatian, *trin.* 11.8; *Asc. Isa.* 11; *Sib. Or.* 8.469-472; Origen, *com. Rm.* 3.10.5, *hom. Lc.* 14.8.

¹⁰¹ Tertullian, *carn. Chr.* 23.2. No midwife: *Asc. Isa.* 11.8-14, *Odes* 19.8-9. Midwife present: *ProtJ* 19.19-20.2, cited by Clement, *str.* 7.16.93. Irenaeus has an allusion to a lack of pain in delivery, but not the full-blown *in partu* virginity, *Dem.* 54.

Tertullian who denies it and Origen who affirms it.¹⁰² The Eve-Mary parallel is developed first in Justin, then Irenaeus, who centers this comparison not on virginity but obedience.¹⁰³ The Eve-Mary comparison is surprisingly absent in Melito who has an affinity for typological parallels.

During the ante-Nicene period Mary is beginning to be designated by several titles. The most common appellation is the simple ‘the Virgin.’¹⁰⁴ Other permutations include ‘Mary the Virgin’ and ‘the Virgin Mary.’¹⁰⁵ Finally in one text of Hippolytus we have ‘the holy Virgin Mary.’¹⁰⁶ Usually these are merely a shorthand way to refer to her *ante-partum* virginity or her place in fulfilling the Isaiah prophecy. It would be going beyond the evidence to cite these titles as including the *in partu* or *post partum* virginities especially given the lack of explicit affirmation of such doctrines in these sources. However the fact that any titles at all are used for Mary indicates that she was the object of some theological and spiritual consideration. Her part in the emerging theologies of the ante-Nicene writers is large enough to warrant some titular reference. There is no firm evidence for a use of the title *Theotokos* in any of these ante-Nicene witnesses.

Nearly all of these witnesses recognize asceticism as part of the life of the church and several promote it. Many give specific testimony to the practice of sexual renunciation among the faithful.¹⁰⁷ Recent scholarship has sharpened our

¹⁰² *mon.* 8, *Marc.* 4.19.6-13, *pud.* 6.16; *com. Matt.* 10.17, *com. Io.* 1.23 (4). None of these sources affirm Mary to be sinless, although it may be implied in the *ProtJ.* On the other hand, certain moral faults of hers are uncovered by Irenaeus, *AH* 3.16.7 and Origen, *hom. Lc.* 17.7, 20.4.

¹⁰³ *Dial.* 100; *AH* 3.22.4, 5.21.1. Also see Tertullian’s brief use in *carn. Chr.* 17.6. Irenaeus draws a parallel between the virgin earth and Mary, *AH* 3.21.10, and Justin compares Eve with Christ, *Dial.* 84.

¹⁰⁴ Justin: *Dial.* 48, 57, 105, *I Apol.* 33; Melito: *PP* 104 and new fragment 13.3 (Hall 80); Irenaeus (Greek): *AH* 3.21.1, 3.22.1, 4.33.4, 4.33.11.

¹⁰⁵ Justin: *Dial.* 23, 100, 120; Irenaeus: *AH* 3.22.4, 5.19.1, *Dem.* 40.

¹⁰⁶ *c. Noet.* 17.2: τὴν ἁγίαν παρθένον Μαρίαν, Butterworth 85.

¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus, *Dem.* 2 and 96, *AH* 2.31.2-3 and 5.11.1; Clement, *str.* 2.13.59 and 3.17.102; Tertullian, *apol.* 35, *cult. fem.* 2.9.8 and several whole works, including *de exhortatione castitatis*, *ad martyras*, *de pudicitia*, *de virginibus velandis*; Cyprian’s entire treatise *de habitu virginum*; Novatian, *bon. pud.* 3.1, 4.1; and Origen, *hom. Num.* 9.7, *com. Rm.* 4.6.9 and his many comments on the ascent of the soul.

perception of asceticism, describing it less in terms of abnegation and more as a process one undertakes in order to (allow oneself to) be transformed spiritually and even physically. When we apply this consideration of asceticism to the sources selected, the analysis produces some findings of note. Ascetic thought becomes more discernible in certain witnesses like Irenaeus who have very little to say on the practice of ascetic virginity. Furthermore, the newer perspective on asceticism helps us to see that the mere presence in a document of sexual abstention is not sufficient to label it as ascetic, as in the case of the *Protevangelium of James*. It is also notable that two witnesses with a Eastern provenance, the *Odes of Solomon* and the *ProtJ*, both affirm the *in partu* virginity of Mary but do not display any interest in applying her virginity to church life, despite emphasis given to asceticism in the Syrian church.

The findings of this project provide some correction and refinement to the foundational work of H. von Campenhausen. His overall conclusion still stands: that the pre-Nicene Church was not interested in connecting asceticism with Mary.¹⁰⁸ This project reaffirms that finding against sometimes sweeping assertions by others that Mary served as a model for virgins throughout history.¹⁰⁹ Instead what we have found is that no known use of Mary as an imitative model for ascetic practice exists before Tertullian.¹¹⁰ This despite the fact that other figures from Biblical history are employed in such a manner.¹¹¹ The Ante-Nicene Fathers' interest in Mary centers on

¹⁰⁸ A summation of the main differences I have with von Campenhausen is appropriate here. He makes too early a connection between Mary and asceticism in Justin and the *ProtJ*. He claims (*Virgin Birth* 57) a 'radically ascetic sentiment' for Justin based on the fragments on the resurrection, which are not genuine. His analysis of the *ProtJ* is based on a judgement that it is a document characterized by 'fantasy and asceticism.' (54). While the first is true, the second cannot be sustained in light of my analysis of the portrayal of Mary and her virginity in the *ProtJ* as non-ascetic. The Mary of the *ProtJ* is not 'the unsullied image of ascetic perfection,' (*Virgin Birth* 54). He does not give enough weight to Tertullian's text (*mon.* 8.2) which does use Mary as an example to virgins (48-49).

¹⁰⁹ *Mary in NT* 258, M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* 68, G. Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation* 189-190.

¹¹⁰ The *ProtJ* is disqualified: it is not an ascetic work and it therefore has no depiction of Mary or anyone else as an imitative model.

¹¹¹ Imitative models in the Ante-Nicene Fathers for the virginal life begin with Christ himself: in Ignatius, *Pol.* 5.2; in Tertullian, *mon.* 5.5-7 and 8.2; in Tatian (according to Clement, *str.* 3.12.81.1) and in Cyprian, *hab. virg.* 5 and 23. Men who serve as model sexual ascetics include: the patriarch

her role as the prophesied virgin who conceived through the Holy Spirit and who gave of her own flesh to the son she bore: the Savior. Mary's place in the thought of even the most ardent advocates of asceticism (Clement, Tertullian, Cyprian) is predominantly in direct connection to her role as the mother of the Savior. Most of the sources we have studied have little or no consideration of the life of Mary beyond what is depicted in the canonical infancy narratives. An interesting exception occurs in Cyprian who specifically names her as one of those whose corporate prayers demonstrate unity in the early church.¹¹² His failure to employ Mary as a model of virginity is particularly significant given his interest in her life and his extended exhortation to virgins in the church. The *ProtJ* demonstrates the most intense interest possible in the life of Mary (at least up to her giving birth to Jesus) yet it makes no application of that pure virginal life to the practice of sexual asceticism. In these sources Mary's virginity and the practice of sexual renunciation run on separate tracks.

We encounter genuine innovation in thought about Mary as a moral example first in Origen and his spiritualization of her life and virtues. Like the sources before him, he begins with the data of her life, drawn from the historical narratives of the Gospels, but quickly moves beyond this to read these as symbols of spiritual reality which apply to the life of each individual believer in the church. This is a very significant step. It moves us away from the more restrained consideration of Mary, found in our earlier witnesses, which restricted itself mostly to her role in the incarnation, in the context of salvation history. With Origen we have moved a good distance in the direction of expansion, towards statements like those of Ambrose: 'This woman is the model of virginity. For such was Mary, that the life of this one

Joseph, Novatian, *bon. pud.* 8-9, 9.6. The Apostles are models of marital continence according to Clement, *str.* 3.6.49.3 and 3.6.53.1-3. Among women, Susanna is a model for virgins, Novatian, *bon. pud.* 8-9. Tertullian lists several who model monogamy: Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachary, John in Tertullian, *mon.* 6-8. Origen provides several models, both men and women, for the ascended spiritual life: Peter, *com. Matt.* 12.10, 12.14; Isaac, *hom. Gen.* 7.2; Simeon, *hom. Lc.* 15.2-5, and the apostle John, *com. Io.* 1.23, 32.263-264, and the women: Elizabeth, *hom. Lc.* 8.1; Anna, *hom. Lc.* 17.10; Rebecca, *hom. Gen.* 10.2, 13.2; and Sarah, *hom. Gen.* 3.3, 4.4, 7.2-3.

¹¹² *unit.* 25, *dom. orat.* 8, cf. Acts 1.14.

woman may be an example of all,' and Jerome: 'Take as your example blessed Mary, whose purity was so great that she merited to be the Mother of the Lord.'¹¹³

It would be useful to extend this analysis to the next century, leading up to the Council at Ephesus in 431. The seeds for a connection between Mary and asceticism are found in the earth worked over in this project. But the full flower only appears with figures like Ambrose and Jerome. This project has sifted the soil of the ante-Nicene church. Other fields nearby beckon.

During the course of my research, I have encountered several things which I did not expect to find. I provide here a summary of these unexpected discoveries, in no particular order of importance.

First, I have found that the figure of Mary is strikingly absent from key passages where one might well expect her to appear.

Cyprian does not hesitate to use Mary as an example for Christian living. Her praying together with the other members of the Church in Acts 1.14 is for him a powerful example of unity.¹¹⁴ Cyprian is a strong advocate for the virginal life in the church, so much so that he wrote what is one of the earliest treatises on the subject, his *De habitu virginum*. In that work he employs Christ as the model virgin, but not Mary. It is startling that he does not also use Mary as an example for those virgins to whom he is giving such extensive advice on how to live the continent life. For Cyprian, Mary's unifying posture of prayer is to be imitated, but not so her virginity.

Novatian, another noted advocate of sexual renunciation and a noted rigorist on ethical issues, presents a number of Biblical figures to the Church as examples of sexual purity: Joseph, Susanna, and even the virgin bride which is the Church.¹¹⁵ Yet the virgin bride Mary is never used by Novatian as a model for virginity.

Hippolytus has a strong proclivity towards using extended typologies. In a notable passage¹¹⁶, he draws on a technological skill of his day, weaving, in order to

¹¹³ Ambrose, *de virginibus* 2,15 and Jerome, *Ep.* 22.38, in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers* 191, 213.

¹¹⁴ *unit.* 25 and *dom. orat.* 8.

¹¹⁵ *bon. pud.* 8-9 and 2.2.

¹¹⁶ *Antichr.* 4.

produce a picture of the incarnation. Each element in the weaving process is assigned to an aspect or figure in the incarnation: the death of the Lord, the power of the Spirit, the grace of Christ, the Word of God, the patriarchs and prophets and the Father himself. Mary is mentioned a few lines earlier as he introduces the subject of the incarnation, but Hippolytus finds no place for her in the metaphor itself, a surprising absence.

One of the most startling omissions in all of ante-Nicene literature is found in Melito of Sardis. His only surviving complete work, the *Peri Pascha* (περὶ πάσχα), is elaborately parallelistic and typological in style. He employs a number of parallels, including the well-known comparison between Adam and Christ, but he fails to mention the Eve-Mary parallel.

These omissions signal a common reluctance on the part of various Fathers in different contexts to extrapolate thinking on Mary beyond explicit statements and descriptions in Scripture.

My second unexpected discovery has to do with that most curious of early Christian documents, the *Protevangelium of James*. I realized early on in my work that I would have to address the *ProtJ* as it is the earliest document in the history of the Church which is primarily about Mary. My initial view was that this source would pose great problems for my thesis as it seemed to break the pattern that I was uncovering elsewhere: that Mary is not used as an ascetic model among the ante-Nicene Fathers. The *ProtJ* is widely thought to be not only a highly ascetic document but also often is referred to as a work of glorification of Mary. It was surprising and gratifying when my analysis¹¹⁷ of the *ProtJ* found it to be a non-ascetic document which is using Mary as a way to say something significant about her son, Jesus. It portrays Mary as a person of superlative purity in a non-ascetic but rather ritual sense in order to set down an explanation of how the holy person of Jesus could appear on earth. The answer: he was born of the most pure and holy mother.

¹¹⁷ Building on the perceptive reading in B. R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, and R. F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*.

I came upon my third unanticipated finding in Tertullian. This North African Father is not known for taking up faint-hearted views. His opposition to the inflation of Mary's virginity is both forceful and explicit. Yet despite this rejection of theological expansion in the direction of the *virginitas in partu* and *virginitas post partum*, it emerges that he is the first we know of to strike out in a new area to apply Mary's virginity *ante partum* to believers. Despite denying the virginity during and after delivery, he holds without reservation to the view that Mary did conceive as a virgin. He sees this as being faithful to apostolic records. But it is surprising that it is in Tertullian that we find the earliest known employment of Mary's virginity as an example for those aspiring to the virginal life in the church. Of course in the same passage he also applies Mary's life after the birth of Jesus, which he saw as the normal life of a married woman, to be a model for monogamy. She is both the model virgin and the model wife.¹¹⁸

Fourthly, it is interesting to me to find that the *virginitas in partu* does not seem to arise from an ascetic context. It appears very early on but in documents which are not interested in connecting it with renunciative or transformational concerns.¹¹⁹ Clement of Alexandria is a strong advocate for the practice of sexual renunciation and the reconstruction of the self through the exercise of asceticism and he goes into great detail about this in the third book of his *Stromata*. He also affirms the virginity *in partu*, but never makes any connection to his ascetic interests.¹²⁰ Certainly this aspect of Mary's virginity was later read in an ascetic way,¹²¹ but its early expressions are surprisingly non-ascetic.

Finally my fifth unforeseen discovery is the use Origen makes of the maternity of Mary. Origen takes the historical datum of Mary the mother and applies to it his spiritualizing method. He does this in the context of his view that the

¹¹⁸ *mon.* 8.2.

¹¹⁹ *ProtJ* 19-20, *Asc. Isa.* 11.8-14, *Odes* 19.8-9. Note that this aspect of Mary's virginity is found in two separate streams of tradition: one with the presence of a midwife, reflected by the *ProtJ* and Clement of Alexandria (see below), and the second by the *Asc. Isa.* and the *Odes of Solomon*.

¹²⁰ *str.* 7.16.93.

¹²¹ Eg. Ambrose, see Graef 1.79-80.

individual soul of the Christian is fertile ground. Each soul is inherently generative and can produce fruit of varying value. Some souls are only able to attain the spiritual level of 'Rebecca' thus producing 'Isaac' while other souls press on and become a 'mother of Jesus' able to bring forth 'Christ.' He bases this on a spiritual reading of Galatians 4.19.¹²² This use that Origen makes of Mary's maternity, applying it spiritually to the individual soul of the believer, has not been widely noted before and this thesis contains the first treatment of it in any detail.

The locus of this research project is at the intersection of two specialized fields: the history of Marian thought and patristics. For the reader who is not an expert in either field, I would like to venture a summary of the significance of this project.

Mary is the object of theological and spiritual consideration from very early on. Among our earliest sources we find the Eve-Mary parallel, in the second-century witnesses Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and the extended speculation of the *ProtJ*. She has been a significant figure in the thought of the Church right from its beginning.

The Christian faith has at its roots a strong strain of asceticism. This comes out in the words of Jesus, Paul and many of the witnesses scrutinized in this project. The life of virginity and sexual continence was not only familiar among Christians themselves but became a sort of stereotypic characteristic assigned to members of the Church by those outside. Yet the manifest figure of Mary whose virginity is prominent in the most widely-used Gospel, that of Matthew, as well as in Luke, is not easily nor quickly linked up with this ascetic tendency.

Before suggesting reasons for this failure, it is worth pointing out that Mary is not generally ignored. She does have genuine significance for these writers and sources. First of all, she is the guarantee of the true humanity of her son Jesus. The bald fact that the divine Savior was born of a real mother is a powerful argument against the heretics who diminished or denied the human side of Jesus.

Secondly, she is also significant as someone who is part of the fulfillment of

¹²² *com. Rm.* 4.6.9, *cf. frag.* 71 on Lk 10.30, *com. Io.* 2.87-88, *hom. Lev.* 12.7.2 and others.

prophecy. She therefore stands as a key link between the OT and the NT. Today we assume the OT to be properly accessible to Christians but this was not always the case. This issue was debated in the early church not the least because there was a faction (the followers of Marcion) who insisted that the OT originated not from the Christian God but from an inferior deity. The oft-repeated argument of the Fathers is that it must be the same God who inspired the prophecy of Isaiah 7.14, 'the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,' and who brought about its fulfillment through the person of Mary. This was not the only OT prophecy which they understood to have been fulfilled in the life of Jesus. In fact they read several other incidents in his life also as fulfilling ancient prophecies and thus confirming the divine ordering of his life. But certainly the prophecy of the virgin is one of the most central, if not the most important to these Fathers.

The third aspect of her importance for the ante-Nicene Church is found in the discussions of the simple yet profound fact that she represents a direct intervention of God in the process of incarnation. In other words she is the locus of the miraculous virginal conception, which was seen by a number of the Fathers as a sign of the divinity of Jesus. Despite the danger of this teaching being misinterpreted as just another version of a pagan god enjoying himself with a hapless human girl, the Fathers would not yield it up. They drew hard and clear lines between the Gospel story of the virginal conception and the pagan myths, but because it is found in the apostolic teaching they cling to it and teach it to the faithful.

More than any other human figure apart from Jesus himself, Mary is, in the minds of the ante-Nicene Fathers, central to the incarnation. Yet these same fathers resist expanding her significance much beyond parameters found in the Gospels. The one extension which is found, the parallel constructed between Mary and Eve, is promoted because it is seen as an explication of what is already present in the apostolic teaching: the mother of the Savior somehow acting as a counterweight to the first mother. This parallel is allowed to develop as a subsidiary to the Christ-Adam comparison. But roles which could conveniently be assigned to Mary, such as the prototypical virgin, are resisted by nearly all of these Fathers and the most likely

reason is that they did not detect such a theme in the Scriptures. The ante-Nicene Fathers were not adverse to utilizing various figures from Biblical history as models for the Christian life and even for sexual renunciation. But they are almost uniformly reticent to apply the figure of the mother of Jesus in this manner.

The ante-Nicene church celebrated Mary for her role in the incarnation rather than for any function as an imitative model for asceticism. The witnesses scrutinized in this project span 150 years, but in that time only two texts specifically connect Mary's virginity to the practice of sexual renunciation.¹²³ In other words when attention was directed to Mary, it was her maternity and role in prophecy fulfillment that held the attention of the early Fathers.

Why is there so little appeal to Mary's virginity in these sources? We could begin to explain this by first remembering that these are the *early* Fathers. That is, they do not have the luxury of standing on a well-defined theological base; they are, in fact, defining that base.

Two overriding reasons explain why the virginity of Mary is not more prominent in the thinking of the ante-Nicene Fathers. The first is the urgency of those tasks which faced the Church. The second is the Biblical rigor which is universal among these witnesses.

Other, more pressing tasks overshadowed most opportunities to reflect at length on Mary. The first of these tasks was the urgent one of evangelism. Christianity had from its start been a missionary faith and the Church of the second and third centuries look out on an entire Empire to evangelize. The inherently public nature of this task of witness brought on the need for Christians to defend their faith against various attacks from both Jews and pagans.¹²⁴ This apologetic task occupies much of the material we have from these Fathers. The third task facing the early Church was the vital job of fending off internal assaults from heretics. Here Christology was the dominant theme. Finally, the fourth duty the Church took up

¹²³ Tertullian, *mon.* 8.2 and Origen, *com. Matt.* 10.17.

¹²⁴ These early Fathers drew a careful and forceful distinction between Christianity and paganism. This would hardly be fertile ground for the growth of any practice of worship of Mary.

was the proper instruction of new converts. The catechizing of the faithful included references to Mary, but strictly in relation to prophecy fulfillment and her part in the incarnation.

These four -- evangelism, apologetics, refutation of heresy and catechetical instruction -- represent the vast bulk of material which survives from the Church of the second and third centuries. Even when we allow for what has been lost it is very probable that the proportions we now observe are not far from what once existed.

The second major factor which held the Church back from more extensive reflection on Mary is the authority the Fathers assigned to the apostolic tradition. Faithfulness to apostolic teaching in the Scriptures and in the *regula fidei* is a constant concern expressed in nearly every witness considered in this project. The paucity of material on Mary in the early Fathers surely must in no small part stem from the relatively small amount of material about her in the NT itself. Insofar as the early Fathers allowed Scripture to set their agenda, Mary would not be expected to loom large. The singular counter-example, the *ProtJ*, is all the more glaring as an exception. The failure to connect together ascetic virginity and the Virgin Mary is significant enough that it must be due to factors of some strength. It is likely that the chief factor is the rigorous adherence among the ante-Nicene Fathers to the apostolic tradition. They resisted making an obvious connection between the Virgin and the virgins because they did not see any hint of it in their reading of the Gospels. In other words, the fact that Mary is not more magnified among these writers and documents is a testimony to their faithfulness, as they saw it, to the apostolic teaching. This fidelity was promoted in opposition to the mythological speculations and inventiveness of the gnostic gospel traditions.

What there is on Mary in the early Fathers is dominated by her part in the incarnation. Even the references to her part in prophecy fulfillment are but a subset under this larger rubric. All other considerations of Mary are overshadowed by the depiction of her as the prophesied virgin who gave birth to Jesus, the Savior. The fact that only the *ante partum* virginity has unanimous support in these sources while the virginities *in partu* and *post partum* are relegated to the margins, if discussed at

all, is a reflection of the Scriptures which gives clear attestation only to the virginity before birth.

Much contemporary discussion of Mary revolves around her role as the model disciple. She is an example if not the epitome of all faithful believers obedient to the call of God. This is largely absent from the early Fathers. Only Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian utilize aspects of her life as an example for Christian living. Her part in early church life is an example of unity for Cyprian. She is a model for monogamous wives as well as for virgins according to Tertullian. And in Origen her one use as a model virgin is eclipsed by his many uses of her as an example of a spiritually ascended person. These few exceptions serve to bring into sharp focus the want of such usage elsewhere in these sources. Again the reticence of the early Fathers to use her as a model of any sort may be traced back to the NT which has so little to say about the "life of Mary."¹²⁵

Recently the Catholic historian Eamon Duffy has urged the modern church to readjust its thinking about Mary, to move back closer to how she was perceived in the early church: to accentuate more her role as the mother of Jesus and to give less emphasis to her as the prototypical Virgin or even the model disciple.¹²⁶ In this way the early church Fathers serve as examples for us today.

¹²⁵ *Mary in NT*, 8-22.

¹²⁶ Eamon Duffy, 'Madonnas That Maim? Christianity and the Cult of the Virgin,' Aquinas Lecture, Glasgow, January 1999 (Glasgow: Blackfriars, 1999), 21-24.

APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL TEXTS FROM ORIGEN ON MARY

The most complete compilation of Origen's Marian texts is found in *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, edited by Sergio Alvarez Campos.¹ However some thirty texts are omitted from that work: they are provided in this appendix. Some of these texts are found in two less complete collections: *Corpus Mariologicum ex operibus Origenis excerptum*, D. Cipriano Vagaggini, editor, and the more recent *Enchiridion Marianum Biblicum Patristicum*, edited by Dominici Casagrande.² It is noted below when any of the texts in this appendix also appear in Vagaggini or EMBP. Quite a number of these texts appear in none of the three collections.³

§ 1 *hom. Ex.* 12.4. SC 321.366.

Quamuis enim uere ex Virgine substantiam carnis acceperit, in qua et crucem pertulit et resurrectionem initiauit

§ 2. *hom. Lev.* 9.2.3. SC 267.76.

Sanctificata namque fuit tunica carnis Christi; non enim erat ex semine viri concepta, sed ex sancto Spiritu generata [cf. Lev. 16.4].

§ 3. *hom. Reg.* 28.7.3. SC 328.196.

Νῦν μὴ νοήσαντες γὰρ τινες τὰ εἰρημένα λέγουσιν· Ἰωάννης ὁ τηλικούτος οὐκ ἦδει Χριστόν, ἀλλ' ἀπέστη ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. Καὶ ἦδει τοῦτον, ᾧ ἐμαρτύρησεν πρὸ γενέσεως καὶ ἐφ' ᾧ ἐσκίρτησεν, ἠνίκα ἦλθεν καὶ ἡ Μαρία πρὸς αὐτόν, ὡς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτῷ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ λέγουσα· [Lk 1.44].

¹ *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, vol. 1, ed. by S. Alvarez Campos (Burgos, 1970), §§ 159-304.

² 'Corpus Mariologicum ex operibus Origenis excerptum,' D. C. Vagaggini, ed., in *Maria nelle opere di Origene* (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1942), §§ 176-220 and *Enchiridion Marianum Biblicum Patristicum*, Dominici Casagrande, ed. (Rome: Cor Unum, 1974), §§ 120-168.

³ Several texts are not included in this appendix because they are doubtfully genuine to Origen. They include *hom. Gen.* 17.5, EMBP 126, cf. CPG 1.1520; *com. Ps.* 21.10, Vagaggini 77, cf. CPG 1.1426; *ad notationes in Lev.* 12.2, EMBP 163, cf. CPG 1.1415, 1505. CMP does include the fragment from Origen's *Commentary on Romans* found in Socrates, *H.E.* 7.32 (CMP 282, Vagaggini 82), but this also is now considered not genuine, see D. F. Wright, "'Mother of God'?" 126.

§ 4. *hom. Cant.* 2.12. SC 37.101.

Et quia secundum dispensationem carnis ex virgine et voluntate patris << crevi et sapientia atque aetate profeci. >>

§ 5. *hom. Jer.* 1.11. SC 232.220.

Ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτῷ ἁγιάζει τινὰς· τοῦτον οὐ περιέμεινε, ἵνα ἐλθόντα εἰς γένεσιν ἁγιάσῃ, ἀλλὰ πρὶν ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ μήτρας ἤδη ἡγίασεν [Jeremiah].
Ἐὰν ἐπὶ τὸν σωτῆρα ἀναφέρῃς, οὐ χαλεπὸν εἰπεῖν, ὅτι πρὶν ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ μήτρας ἡγίασται· ἐπὶ τὸν σωτῆρα ἐὰν ἀναφέρῃς, οὐ μόνον πρὶν ἐξελθεῖν ἡγίασται, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔτι πρότερον ἡγίασται·

§ 6. *hom. Jer.* 15.4.2. SC 238.122.

<< Οἴμοι ἐγώ, μήτηρ, ὡς τίνα με ἔτεκες; >> [Jer 15.10]. Τίνα λέγει μητέρα; Οὐκ ἐν γυναιξὶ δύναται καὶ τὴν 'ψυχὴν' λέγειν καὶ τὴν Μαρίαν· εἰ δέ τις παραδέχεται τὸ << ἄρτι ἔλαβέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, καὶ ἀνήνεγκέ με εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ μέγα τὸ Θαβῶρ >> καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς, δύναται αὐτοῦ ἰδεῖν τὴν μητέρα.

§ 7. *frag. com. Matt.* 281 on Mt 12.48. GCS 41/12/3.126. Cramer 1.99.⁴

Οἱ μὴ γινώσκοντες τὸ κατὰ τὴν παρθένον μυστήριον λέγουσιν οἱ ἀδελφοί σου τῷ Ἰησοῦ. ε [sic. εἰ] γὰρ ἐγίνωσκον, ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ποιεῖν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς πατρὸς ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ ἢ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τις γινεται. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, οὐ φύσει ἐστὶ τις ἀδελφὸς ἢ τι τῶν λοιπῶν. ἔτι πᾶσα παρθένος καὶ ἀδιάφθορος ψυχὴ ἐξ ἁγίου πνεύματος συλλαβοῦσα, ἵνα γεννήσῃ τὸ πατρικὸν θέλημα, μήτηρ ἐστὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

§ 8. *hom. Lc.* 4.4. SC 87.132.

Ioannes vero adhuc in matris utero constitutus exsultat et teneri non potest, et ad adventum matris Iesu de utero gestit erumpere.

§ 9. *hom. Lc.* 4.5. SC 87.134.

[Angelus] de quo post paululum ad Mariam dicitur: << Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi >> [Lk 1.35].

⁴ *Catena in Evangelia s. Matthaei et s. Marci, ad fidem codd. mss.*, J. A. Cramer, ed. (Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1840).

§ 10. *hom. Lc. 10.3.* SC 87.183.

Neque enim credibile est, ut qui prius viderunt diem illius et laetati sunt, postea in adventu ipsius et nativitate de virgine nihil utilitatis acceperint [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob].

§ 11. *hom. Lc. 11.5.* SC 87.194.

Quia enim minister fuit primi Salvatoris adventus et tantummodo de dispensatione carnis Dominicae loquebatur ac prophetia illius eum, qui natus fuerat ex virgine, praecinebat.

§ 12. *hom. Lc. 29.6.* SC 87.366.

Quia vero liber generationis Iesu Christi de eo in Matthaei evangelio narratur homine, qui natus fuerat ex Maria.

§ 13. *frag. 71 on Lk 10.30.* SC 87.520.

ὁ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν νόμον. ὁ Λευίτης εἰς τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον. ὁ Σαμαρείτης εἰς Χριστόν, τὸν ἐκ Μαρίας σάρκα φορέσαντα· τὸ κτήνος εἰς τὸ σῶμα Χριστοῦ·

§ 14. *frag. in Jerome, homilia de nativitate Domini.* CCSL 78.526-527, lines 100-103. Cf. Vagaggini § 62.

Aliquis dicit, Conferens in corde suo: quoniam sancta erat, et sanctas scripturas legerat, et sciebat prophetas, recordabatur quod angelus Gabrihel sibi dixerat illa, quae dicta sunt in prophetis [cf. Lk 2.19].

§ 15. *com. Io. 2.87-88.* SC 120.262.

(87) Ἐὰν δέ προσιῆται τις τό καθ' Ἑβραίους εὐαγγέλιον, ἔνθα αὐτός ὁ σωτήρ φησιν· << Ἄρτι ἔλαβέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου, τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ἐν μιᾷ τῶν τριχῶν μου καὶ ἀπήνεγκέ με εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ μέγα Θαβώρ >>, ἐπαπορήσει, πῶς << πνεῦμα ἅγιον >> εἶναι δύναται. (88) Ταῦτα δὲ καὶ τούτῳ οὐ χαλεπὸν ἐρμηνεύσαι· εἰ γὰρ ὁ ποιῶν << τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἀδελφὸς καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν >> αὐτοῦ καὶ φθάνει ἀδελφὸς Χριστοῦ >> ὄνομα οὐ μόνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τούτου θειότερα, οὐδὲν ἄτοπον ἔσται μᾶλλον πάσης χρηματιζούσης << μητρὸς Χριστοῦ >> διὰ τὸ ποιεῖν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς πατρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον εἶναι << μητέρα >>.

§ 16. *com. Io.* 6.69. SC 157.178, 180.

Ὁ αὐτός τε οὗτος ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἐρεῖ δύνασθαι μὲν τοὺς ὑπειληφότες ἕνα τῶν προφητῶν εἶναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν ἠπατήσθαι κατὰ τε τὸ προειρημένον δόγμα καὶ κατὰ τὸ ὑπολαμβάνειν αὐτὸν ἕνα τῶν προφητῶν τυγχάνειν, δύνασθαι δὲ πρὸς τῷ κατὰ τὸ νομίζειν αὐτὸν τῶν προφητῶν εἶναι ἕνα πταίειν καὶ ψευδοδοξεῖν καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἀγνοεῖν αὐτοῦ τὸν λεγόμενον πατέρα καὶ τὴν οὖσαν μητέρα, οἶεσθαι τε αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν μνημείων ἐγηγέρθαι.

§ 17. *com. Io.* 10.150-151. SC 157.476, 478.

(150) Παρατηρητέον μέντοι γε ὅτι ἐν μὲν τῷ γάμῳ ἢ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶναι λέγεται, κεκλήσθαι δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· εἰς δὲ τὴν Καφαρναοῦμ καταβεβηκέναι * * * οὐδεὶς πλὴν Ἰησοῦ κατείλεκται. (151) Φαίνονται δ' ὕστερον καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ παρόντες, εἴ γε ἐμνήσθησαν ὅτι << Ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου καταφάγεται με>> [Jn 2.17]. Καὶ τάχα ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν μαθητῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀναβαίνων εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἦν, διόπερ οὐκ εἴρηται << Ἀνέβη Ἰησοῦς εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ>>, ὥσπερ << Κατέβη εἰς Καφαρναοῦμ αὐτὸς καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ .>> [Jn 2.12]

§ 18. *com. Io.* 20.339. SC 290.322.

Καὶ καλῶς γε ὁ ἐλθόντος τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ χρόνου ἀπεσταλμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ γενέσθαι ἐκ γυναικὸς καὶ γενέσθαι ὑπὸ τὸν νόμον, ὡς ὑπὸ τὸν λέγοντα νόμον τυγχάνων τὸ << Τίμα τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα, ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται>> [Ex. 20.12], οὐδένα ἄλλον ἔχων πατέρα ἢ τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς Θεὸν φησιν· << Ἀλλὰ τιμῶ τὸν πατέρα μου.>>

§ 19. *com. Io.* 20.419. SC 290.358.

Οὐχ ὁρῶσιν δὲ ὅτι οὐ μόνον τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἀλλὰ καὶ παντὸς ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν ὁ ἐκ τῆς παρθένου γεγεννημένος, καὶ τῶν προφητῶν πάντων ὁ προφητευόμενος ὑπ' αὐτῶν, καὶ τῶν ἀποθανόντων ὁ ζωοποιήσας αὐτούς, οὐχ ἑαυτὸν ποιήσας τοιοῦτον ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς λαβών.

§ 20. *frag. 1 in Joann.* 1.1. Brooke 2.211.⁵ Cf. GCS 10/4.483.

Καὶ ἐπεὶ τινες τῆς ὀρθῆς πίστεως ἐκπεσόντες οἶονται ἀπὸ τότε αὐτὸν μόνον εἶναι ἀφ' οὗ ἐκ τῆς παρθένου ἄνθρωπος γεγονῶς προήλθεν, ὀρθότατα πρὸς τοὺς τοιοῦτους ὁ θεολόγος γράφει τό· << Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος.>> [Jn 1.1].

⁵ A. E. Brooke, ed., *The Commentary of Origen on S. John's Gospel: The Text Revised*, 2 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1896), 2.211.

§ 21. *com. Rm.* 10.30.1. PG 14.1282.

Salutate Rufum electum in Domino, et matrem ejus et meam [Rom 16:13]. . . cujus et mater tantum meriti habuit, ut eam Paulus suam nominaverit matrem, cum quo etiam ipse, sicut Jesus cum Joanne, unum partitur matris affectum [cf. Jn 19:26].

§ 22. *frag.* 1 Cor 1.27. Vagaggini § 89. Cf. Jenkins, 237.⁶

Ἡμεῖς οἱ πιστεύοντες μωροὶ ἔσμεν πρὸς τὸν κόσμον. γελῶσιν οὖν ἡμᾶς μωροὺς λέγοντες· χριστιανοὶ λέγουσιν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν καὶ ὅτι ζῶμεν μετὰ θάνατον καὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐσταύρωσαν Ἰουδαῖοι ἐκ παρθένου γεγέννηται, καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα.

§ 23. *exh. mart.* 35. GCS 2/1.32.

ὁμολογήση τὸν ὁμολογήσαντα ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς πατρὸς, ὁ δὲ γενόμενος << ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα >> καὶ διὰ τοῦτο << υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου >> τυγχάνων καὶ γενόμενος ἐκ γυναικὸς καὶ αὐτῆς οὔσης ἀνθρώπου καὶ διὰ τοῦτο χρηματίζων << υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, >> ὅσπερ νοεῖται ὁ κατὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἄνθρωπος. [cf. Rm 1.3]

§ 24. *Heracl.* 2.9-14. SC 67.56.

Ἡρακλείδης εἶπεν· << Τοῦτο μὲν σαφὲς λέγεις· ἡμεῖς δὲ λέγομεν Θεὸν εἶναι τὸν παντοκράτορα, Θεὸν ἄναρχον, ἀτελεύτητον, ἐμπεριέχοντα τὰ πάντα καὶ μὴ ἐμπεριεχόμενον, καὶ τὸν τούτου λόγον υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος, θεὸν καὶ ἄνθρωπον, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα γέγονεν, θεὸν μὲν κατὰ πνεῦμα, ἄνθρωπον δὲ καθ' ὃ γεγέννηται ἐκ τῆς Μαρίας. >>

§ 25. *arch.* 1.3.2. SC 252.144, 146.

De spiritu uero sancto quia sit, multae nos scripturae docuerunt . . . ad Mariam dicitur ab angelo: << Spiritus sanctus ueniet super te >> [Lk 1.35].

§ 26. *arch.* 1.7.4. SC 252.214, 216.

Iohannem dico tripudiantem in matris utero, et magna se exultatione iactantem pro eo quod salutationis uox Mariae ad aures Elisabeth suae matris aduenerat.

§ 27. *arch.* 2.4.2. SC 252.282.

<< Paulus seruus Iesu Christi, uocatus apostolus, segregatus in euangelium dei, quod ante promisit per prophetas suos in scripturis sanctis de filio suo. Qui factus est ei ex

⁶ Jenkins, ed., *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1908), 237.

semine Dauid secundum carnem >> [Rom 1.1-3].

§ 28. *arch.* 2.6.7. SC 252.324.

Sed et quam plurima alia in scripturis diuinis de umbrae significantia uidemus inserta, ut illud in euangelio secundum Lucam, cum dicit Gabrihel ad Mariam: << Spiritus domini ueniet super te, et uirtus altissimi ombumbrabit tibi >> [Lk 1.35].

§ 29. *arch.* 3.3.5. SC 268.194.

Illud quoque consequenter requirendum puto, ex quibus causis humana anima nunc quidem a bonis, nunc autem moueatur a malis. Cuius rei causa suspicor esse quasdam antiquiores etiam hac natiuitate corporea, sicut designat Iohannes in matris uentre tripudians et exultans, cum uox salutationis Mariae ad aures Elisabeth matris eius adlata est.

§ 30. *arch.* 4.1.5. SC 268.276. Also in *Philoc.* 1.5. SC 302.9.

Καὶ δέδοται σημεῖον τῷ οἴκῳ Δαυεῖδ· ἡ παρθένης γὰρ [ἔτεκε καὶ] ἐν γαστρὶ ἔστε καὶ ἔτεκεν υἷόν [cf. Isaiah 7.14].

§ 31. *arch.* 4.4.5. SC 268.412.

Quidam autem uolunt de ipsa anima dictum uideri, cum primum de Maria corpus adsumit, etiam illud, quod apostolus dicit: << qui cum in forma dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se aequalem deo, sed semet ipsum exinaniuit, formam serui accipiens >> [Phil. 2.6-7], quo eam sine dubio in formam dei melioribus exemplis et institutionibus repararet atque in eam plenitudinem, unde se exinaniuerat, reuocaret.

§ 32. *Cels.* 1.66. SC 132.260, 262.

Οὕτως δὲ ἔδει αὐτὸν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνατρεφόντων ἄγεσθαι, ὑπὸ θείου ἀγγέλου οικονομουμένων πρότερον μὲν λέγοντος τοῦ χρηματίζοντος· << Ἰωσήφ υἱὸς Δαυὶδ μὴ φοβηθῆς παραλαβεῖν Μαριάμ τὴν γυναῖκά σου τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου ἐστὶ >> [Mt 1.20], δεύτερον δέ· << Ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ, καὶ φεῦγε εἰς Αἴγυπτον, καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ ἕως ἂν εἶπω σοι μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό.>> [Mt 2.13]

§ 33. *Cels.* 2.69. SC 132.450. Cf. EMBP § 122.

ἴν' ὥσπερ ἡ γένεσις αὐτοῦ καθαρωτέρα πάσης γενέσεως ἦν τῷ μὴ ἀπὸ μίξεως ἀλλ' ἀπὸ παρθένου γεννηθῆναι, οὕτως καὶ ἡ ταφή ἔχοι τὴν καθαρότητα.

§ 34. *Cels.* 5.52. SC 147.146.

Ἔτι μὴν καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς Μαρίας κούσης πρὸς τὸν τέκτονα ἦκεν ἄγγελος, καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ τὸ βρέφος ἐξαρπάσαντας φυγεῖν ἄλλος ἄγγελος.

§ 35. *Cels.* 5.58. SC 147.160.

ὁ Κέλσος . . . εἶτ' οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως μετὰ ταῦτα παραρρίπτει, οὐκ οἶδα εἰς τί τῇ προθέσει αὐτοῦ χρησίμων εἶναι δοκοῦν, τὸ περὶ τῆς Μαρίας κούσης ἐληλυθέναι πρὸς τὸν Ἰωσήφ ἄγγελον.

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