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The Perpetual Virginity of Theotokos (Aeiparthene-Virgo Perpetua)

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Abstract

In the Orthodox teaching, Mother of God does not stand apart from her Son, God, she is not honored separately as a co-God, but the doctrine regarding her person is related directly or is necessarily and undeniably linked to Christology, firstly, and to anthropology. In fact, the mariological issue is a Christology one, but Mariology is not just an excuse for Christology. Orthodox mariology includes the issue of virginity of Theotokos before birth, during birth and after birth, perpetual virginity of Theotokos is confessed by the Church since ancient times. Orthodox theologians have shown the relationship between the attribute of Theotokos and virgin.

Keywords

Mother of God, perpetual virginity, super-veneration, Jesus Christ

In the Orthodox Church, Our Lady is super-venerated. Special veneration which is given is in relation to the teaching about the coming into the world of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Christology, soteriology and Mariology bundle up in Orthodoxy forming that core of doctrines of the Christian religion teaching treasure, because God, in His immeasurable love and

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kindness to mankind that fell into sin, decided to send his Son into the world, The One-Born «so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life» (John 3, 16). And for the act of our redemption He chose the Theotokos, who was able to be the Mother of God, Jesus Christ”.¹

About Theotokos, Sergei Bulgakov said: “Christianity only with Christ, without Mother of God, is a different religion than Orthodoxy, and Protestantism split from the Church not through its false teachings or by its arbitrary amputations, but particularly through the lack of sentiment for our Lady”. With these words the known Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov put on the table a concrete truth about the relationship that each Church has with the one that gave birth to the Son of God.

The doctrine of the Virgin Mary in Orthodoxy is the support that links together the teaching about the salvation of mankind. We can not speak of the Virgin Mary and not to lean on man’s salvation or cannot talk about Christ who has saved the world without speaking about mariological issue. In these conditions in the following we will analyze the doctrine of the Mother of God present in our Church, based on biblical essay first and then the testimonies of the Holy Fathers. “Mother of God is part of our theological system exactly as God is a part of it, in so far as she reveals herself as a part of God’s intentions with the world”.²

Theotokos cannot be excluded from the Christian life, the life of the Church, cannot be allowed to be out of our personal relationship with God. She is the Mother of God, and if Christ - her son - is “Head of the Church” (Ephesians 1, 22), the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ and we are members of the Body of Christ, Theotokos is in the center of the Church’s life. She cannot be ignored in the life of the Church because she was the only one worthy to bear in her womb “Christ, the Son of the living God”. (Matthew 16, 16).

Obviously the doctrine about Theotokos cannot be grasped in its totality and in detail in a simple paper work. It took centuries to settle down the doctrine of Our Lady, in ecumenical councils and lively discussions to clarify important issues, it took books and paper works to crystallize

¹ Pr. Prof. Mircea Chialda, *Îndrumări misionare*, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al B.O.R. Publishing House, București, 1986, p. 781.

² Antonie Plămădeală, *Maica Domnului în teologia și viața ortodoxă*, in B.O.R. Review, year 1978, no. 9-10, p. 1115.

the doctrine, because ultimately the issue will not be exhausted or totally resolved, but rather have become widespread, being treated in one extreme or another.

Approaching of this subject requires not only the presentation and assertion of independent realities. Theotokos does not stand apart from her son, God, she is not honored separately as a co-God, but the doctrine regarding her person is related directly or is necessarily and undeniably linked to Christology, firstly, and to anthropology. "In fact, the mariological issue is a Christology one, but Mariology is not just an excuse for Christology".³ All the elements of Christian teaching complete the global Christian message, being in a total synergy.

Theotokos is a perfect model of obedience, prayer and fulfillment of God's will. Her soul was filled with light, and her spirit dwelt in grace, blessing the Creator with joy and happiness: "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1, 46-48). Learning the way of obedience, Mother of God learned to cultivate in her heart and in her life, the Logos, Who is equally love and humility. In obedience, Theotokos conceived her spiritual life. In the conduct of Mother of God, the obedience was the central place, forming the premise in the choice for her to give birth to the Son of God.

Aware that obedience is the first requirement of our Creator, the Theotokos has replaced it with her own live. Listening does not mean cancellation of the soul, but putting it in God's hands. Due to her supernatural appropriation, obedience becomes a great mystery. The obedience of Theotokos wiped the guilt and disobedience of Adam and Eve and our as well.

"Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility. Listening is the same as martyrdom".⁴ In obedience, Virgin has reached a state of martyrdom, a state of sacrifice: "The sacrifice of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrited heart, thou will not despise" (Psalm 50, 18). Through her humility, Theotokos actually proved her great wisdom. Humility is a spiritual ladder that we climb high and continuously. Mother of

³ C. Pârvu, *Temeiuri ortodoxe ale cultului Maicii Domnului*, in „Studii Teologice” Review, year 1954, no. 3-4, p. 193.

⁴ Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, *Scara*, Filocalia IX. Translated by Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Humanitas Publishing House, București, 2007, p. 82.

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God being the most deeply humbling among men and angels, she ascended above all together.

Ascetic obedience leads man to understanding of Mysteries, to perceiving the Image of God. Theotokos opened her heart, enriched her mind and perfected her being by the new life that got into her soul through the state of spirit of obedience: the hesychast experience or the world of Light.

Prayer was the most pleasant and the most desired thing by Theotokos. She enriched herself with the ornaments of humility, of patience, of contemplation, of love and purity all the time. Virgin Mary is the archetype of prayer, because in her heart stood the Lord heart, where she said the Psalter of the Holy Spirit. "Prayer is the first gift from God, and through it we acquire all the gifts"⁵

The spiritual life of Theotokos soared under the blessing of prayer. She was constantly thirsty and hungry for prayer. Mary received in her beautiful heart, nourished with the percepts of Faith, thirsty by the words of the Prophets, firstly the ineffable prayer of the Holy Spirit, which increases the divine wisdom, like an icon of recovery from the very beginning in image and semblance. Virgin Mary reached resemblance to the Light making herself image from the Psalms light. Psalms educate us, but they also teach us the prayer. They are prayer, but they are also a prayer guide."⁶ The psalm born obedience, obedience born humility, and together they born the wisdom or love of God. Humility comes from God and the Word, who experienced the beauty of humility, gives us strength, pouring His spring of light over the tear which seals our deed.

Prayer and purity of mind brought spiritual knowledge to Theotokos.

"Christian prayer passes through the intercession of Christ but it doesn't stop at Him, it goes to Father, who send Him. Christ, Who gives Himself to us, as bread, turn us gradually into Him; He is water gushed for our thirsty. He discover Himself to lead us to the divine spring, that is to Father."⁷

Thinking at the confessional and spiritual beauty of Theotokos, our soul is renewed by the ardor of proximity to God, causing a flash repen-

⁵ Arhimandrit Arsenie Boca, *Mărgăritare Duhovnicești*, Credința Strămoșească Publishing House, Iași, 2002, p. 23.

⁶ Ieromonah Savatie Baștovoi, *Puterea duhovnicească a deznădejdiei*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba-Iulia, 2005, p. 27.

⁷ Origen, *Despre Rugăciune*, translated by Mihai Vladimirescu, Herald Publishing House, București, p. 142

tance – the methanoia (renewing of the mind), sweetened us with the taste of God. “How sweet are thy words unto my taste to me! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” (Psalm 118, 103). Theotokos lived prayer as the highest ascetic life.

Virgin Mary has subjected her body to her soul and her soul to the commandments of God, acquiring communion with Him, in contemplation, in the Holy of Holies. Human mind, which is the icon of Creator, only it becomes by grace god (the small god), knowing himself and knowing Him fully. The Most Holy Virgin deals with the continuous prayer, called mental prayer, and she gathered her mind inside her heart. Escaped by any thoughts, she distinguished a new and mysterious way to heaven, called “quiet of mind”. What happened with the Mother of God happens with deified people.

If she would let us gather in a humble bouquet some of her virtues, we say that Virgin Mary is the parable of the most useful listening of world, through humility she has laid the foundation of sanctity, she adorned with the embodied modesty, she gird her piety with infinite patience, she has spun the life chrism from the perfume of gentleness, she has blended celestial crown of its purity, she made her angelic soul scale by charity, and the pious prayer brought forth in field love. Virgin Mary understood that our ego is infinite and in that existential centre of our being, called heart, dwells God, but He only is the seal of our personality. The most beautiful gift Virgin Mary made God is that she has given herself to him, the whole being, for life. If Virgin Mary appears obedient from the Nativity to Crucifixion of the Saviour, with humble and pure image, after the glorious Resurrection of her Son and his Ascension, she appears, without denial, in glory and power in the everlasting Kingdom, as Mistress and Queen of heaven and earth.

Virgin Mary was destined as Mother of God by Providence and, then, ours. This birth of God in his creature, is actually a resurgence of men, action that was announced, prepared, and accomplished then in history at “the fullness of time”⁸

The reality of the Conception and Nativity of the Son of God in the Son of Man brought to the humanity a new generation of people, chosen

⁸ Arhim. A. Boca, *Omul, zidire de mare preț*, Credința Strămoșească Publishing House, Iași, 2002, p. 146.

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people of Jesus Christ- spiritual generation of the Saviour. „The Annunciation should mean a real elevation, not only doctrinal, to the rank of Mystery, and with results of Mystery.”⁹ Mother of God re-establishes the man receiving inside her the world Word, Who is born from the Holy Spirit. “The first re-established man is Jesus Christ- her Son, and all his disciples, so she is also Mother of Church.”¹⁰ Therefore, the meaning of our Christian existence and dignity is following Jesus, but also His Mother. The condition of creation of man by God gave him the quality of son, a quality not granted to another creature. Usurping the quality of son, man was saved through the goodwill of divine providence, who prepared the Incarnation of the Son, raising female nature through Virgin Mary to the supreme honour of Mother of God.

In Virgin Mary, female nature becomes faultless, and born through The Spirit the Word or the God Wisdom “and the Word was made flesh” (John 1, 14). Through the Son of God we met him and we know the Most Wise God. Pure Virgin, by which was embodied Christ, Son of God, the Creator and our Saviour, to give us eternal life, was (is) the scale for the descent of God to Earth, and became for us same scale to go up to heaven.

“Wisdom hath buildtded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillar” (Proverbs 9, 1). The correct interpretation is told us by Saint Bishop John Maximovitch:

“And the house where the Eternal Wisdom dwelled is exactly Theotokos. The pillars of this house are her virtues. That’s why, in icons the Wisdom of God is represented as the Son of God on the throne, as he is in a building placed on seven pillars. This imagines Theotokos. Above are seven Archangels, in both sides, are seven Prophets with scrolls of paper covered with prophecies about Mother of God, and below are the names of seven virtues. The number seven repeated several times imagines the spiritual perfection of the Most Holy Virgin.”¹¹

The fulfilment of God’s will and desire of Mother of God was accomplished at “the fullness of time” so:

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 150.

¹⁰ Arhimandrit Arsenie Boca, *Rostul Încercărilor*, Editura Credința Strămoșească, Iași, 2004, p. 67.

¹¹ Sfântul Ioan Maximovici, *Predici și îndrumări duhovnicești*, translated by Elena Dulgheru, Sophia Publishing House, București, 2001, p. 65.

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4, 4-7).

Through the adoption to sonship it's indicated the spiritual adoption, and through the law is indicated the kenosis (humbleness) of the Word.

Fullness of obedience born fullness of Christian faith Orthodoxy, fullness of Orthodoxy born the Church, and the fullness of Church is in God-Man Mystery. All the Gospel of God-Man, God Christ, is shown in a few words, in the next all-annunciation: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3, 16).

Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, christened by Apostle Paul had the happiness to see Mother of God:

„It is impossible for the human mind to grasp what I have seen not only with the eyes of my soul, but with my bodily eyes, too. I have seen with my own eyes the most beautiful and holy Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I witness by God, that besides the very God Himself, there is nothing else filled with such divine power and grace. I should have mistaken her for God Himself”¹²

According to biblical text or scripture but also to historical and Holy Tradition, Theotokos represents “The Chosen Vessel”, she who was given ever since genesis to hold the Son of incarnated God sent by God the Creator. Her life was of unique purity, natural if we consider the mission she had to fulfil. This reason and, oneself the act of the supernatural birth of the Son of God represented for the fathers of Church the premise for the statutory dogma of faith in the life lasting chastity of Mother of Lord.

When we consider Theotokos we cannot ignore the Scripture that says about her chastity.

“The miracle of Christ's birth from Mary is closely related with her life lasting chastity and, organically, the attribute of Mother of God of Holy Virgin Mary is related to another attribute that is the life lasting virginity. After the evidence of Book of Scripture

¹² *Viața, Urmarea și Psaltirea Maicii Domnului - Mama Noastră*, “Lumină din Lumină” Publishing House, București, 2005, p. 48.

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and testimony of holy tradition, the Orthodox Church always defended with same conviction the doctrine about the life lasting chastity of Mother Mary saying that she was virgin before birth, during birth and after the birth of Jesus Christ. The state of chastity accompanies Mother Mary her entire life from birth to her passing. Even if the teaching about the life lasting chastity of Mother Mary was not established until the Fifth Ecumenical Council yet it circulated in Christian Church based on revelations basis".¹³

In this regard Father Dumitru Stăniloae says:

"The Holy Spirit, working in this way, or contributing as a person to the accomplishment of the act through which the Son if God makes himself hypostasis of human nature, works also with that who makes herself through this His Mother, as God works and who is forming Himself human nature of Him also as person. But the efficiency of The Holy Spirit on someone is proportional with his or her purity or with his or her disponibility towards God. For purity means unattenuated disponibility towards God in the role of that who responds or presents oneself. Mother Mary presents herself totally to God, not only through the Word, but also by putting herself to the full to His disposition. The Holy Spirit can overwhelm the natural law of birth through her. The one that surrenders to voluptuousness is not pure, is not fully disposable to God, for the Word, is not into a spiritual lucidity and responsibility towards God [...]. Descending as hypostasis, He in Her and beginning to form his body from her with closely-working of the Holy Ghost entirely as a person, her body, held by her in the purity of her chastity until then, in the purity of her total reservation for God it's purified also from the original sin, in order for the godly Hypostasis to non-take His body from a body under this original sin and under the natural law of birth in voluptuousness".¹⁴

"A first importance of chastity is proved here: the chastity of Theotokos does so that, by giving birth to Her Son through the

¹³ Pr. Prof. Mircea Chialda, *Preacurata Fecioară Maria, Maica Domnului*, in rev. S. T., no. 5-6, 1981, p. 330.

¹⁴ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Dogmatica*, vol. II, p. 87-88.

descent of The Holy Spirit, to overpass the natural law of conceiving, through which it is inherited on, in the same time, the original sin; moreover, only God has no sin, and Jesus Christ was the only man without sin, being in the same time a real man”.¹⁵

Mircea Chialda speaks of the fact that the life lasting chastity of Mother of God was declared by the Church still from old times: “The state of chastity of Theotokos before the birth and after the birth of the Saviour is certified by the life of the Holy Virgin and by the revelation testimonials”.¹⁶

Born because of the earnest prayers of her parents, Saints Joachim and Anne, the Theotokos is brought at the beginning to the Holy Temple, where, by the vote to preserve virginity and to serve God, she will spend her life in full bodily purity and righteousness mind. But at the personal efforts of the Blessed Virgin, was added at her birth the help of God’s grace”.¹⁷ Also, “the Holy Fathers, who emphasizes so much the sanctity of life of the Blessed Virgin before the incarnation of the Son of God, speak also about a new cleaning at the Annunciation”.¹⁸ The virginity of Theotokos is confirmed by the question she puts to the angel: How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (Luke 1, 34) .

The Evangelist will testify to this fact the truth that Mary was a virgin and not known lust before conception, when he says that: “When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost”. (Matthew 1, 18) Theotokos remained a virgin after the birth of the Savior. Virginity of the Mother of God is witnessed after birth through the words of the Evangelist: “And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus” (Matthew 1, 25).¹⁹

“Christ is the Son of God in the fullest sense of the term. He is the embodied Word. He is born of the Father from eternity and

¹⁵ Pr. Michel Laroche, *Theotokos, Maica Domnului în trăirea duhovnicească a Bisericii Ortodoxe*, trad. din lb. fr. de Dora Mezdrea, Sophia Publishing , București, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁶ Pr. Prof. Mircea Chialda, *art. cit.*, in rev. S. T., no. 5-6, 1981, p. 331.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

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that is, ontologically speaking, His single origin. His hypostasis, which is the Second Person of the Trinity, has His origin in the birth from eternity with the Father's eternal act. If it is denied the virginal conception of Christ in Mary is admitted the intervention an earthly father in His birth in the flesh. Could it be the father of the Second Person of the Trinity an earthly father? To accept this, means to refuse to accept the divine origin of Christ. Or, in other words, to put into question the unity of the Person of Christ, with the person of the Son of God is the human person, born of man".²⁰ "To suppose that between Christ and His Father in heaven there is a human father means to destroy the entire message of the Gospel".²¹ "The affirmation of the conception of Jesus Christ from a virgin, has its place in the Gospel of salvation, not only because it is written in the letter of the holy books, but because it is right in the middle of the proclamation which tells us that the Son of God, Who became man without ceasing to be God, Who died and rose again, He gave power to those who believe in His name to become the sons of God, and they were born not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the human will, but of God (John 1 , 12-13)".²²

In the year 282, St. Ambrose spoke about virginity *in partu* of Mother of Christ in his work "De incarnationis Dominicae sacramento liber unus". Like Tertullian, St. Ambrose does not consider the birth of Christ as being ghostly, but real. St. Ambrose shows that Jesus was both God and man, true God and true man. Therefore, his birth should be normal and miraculous at the same time. But Ambrose carefully separates what is natural from what is supernatural in the birth of Christ in the flesh: by incarnate Himself, is God did not abolish the body, i.e. the created order, but brings the guarantee of eschatological renewal. By the birth of his Son it means that Theotokos is free from the bondage spoken of in Genesis 3, 15 and thus her virginity remained undamaged. Due to this theological discovery Ambrose could reveal the true understanding of the new creation inaugurated by the Incarnation of the Divine Word and the new birth of which

²⁰ Alexis Kniazev, *Maica Domnului în Biserica Ortodoxă*, translated by Lucreția Maria Vasilescu, Humanitas Publishing House, București, 1998, p. 97-98.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

it depends. [...] In support of virginity *in partu* of the Theotokos it can be brought arguments from Scripture. They are based on references to the great miracles like crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14). The burning bush that was burning but it was not consumed (Exodus 3), or Gideon's wool on which miraculously stood the dew (Judges 6, 36-40), or Aaron's rod that was budded (Numbers 17, 8).

“These miracles prove the link between the transcendent order, ultimately of God, and everything related to the order of things created and show that, in this connection, the created order is transfigured, perfected and subject to other laws than those usually rule in a fallen world because of sin. And these are signs of the future eschatological renewal of all nature, as it is the miracle of the inviolate virginity of Theotokos and the miracle of the birth of the divine Word, Who became flesh, miracles comparing to which the Liturgy and Holy Fathers rightly considered the Old Testament merely prefigurations.”²³

“The preserving of virginity in the birth of the Divine Child was God's gift. The rest of his life Mary has set a personal ideal to keep this divine gift, and on this road with the help of divine grace she reached the highest perfection”.²⁴ “The doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Theotokos does not only reveal us the way in which she climbed to the height of perfect holiness, but gives us the faith in the special power of prayers of the Theotokos”.²⁵

Father Dumitru Stăniloae analyzing this quality of the virginity of Mother of God highlights the relationship between the attribute of Theotokos and the one of perpetual virgin. The action of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin did not have as a result only the incarnation of Christ, but also had an effect one on the body and the person of the Theotokos. But this effect has found its purpose because of “the engaging in dialogue with God” that Mother of God initiated; otherwise this action would not have been effective.

“The purity of full availability to God of the Theotokos has a result in cleansing her from the original sin”. Because “he who will not gives himself entirely to God, in a full release of pas-

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁴ Mitropolit Serghie Stragorodski, *Venerarea Maicii Domnului după învățătura Bisericii Ortodoxe*, in „Mitropolia Banatului” Review, year 24, no. 4-6, 1974, p. 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

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sions, he cannot fully receive God as a person”.²⁶ Thus “Mary’s virginity makes, by giving birth to her Son through the descent of the Holy Spirit, to overcome the natural law of conception”.²⁷ Laroche quoting St. Ephrem the Syrian says: “He cleanses her in the Holy Spirit, to prepare her to become the Mother of God, and thus He was conceived. He cleanses her in her chastity, therefore giving birth, He let her all virgin”.²⁸

We note the paradox: Virgin and Mother at the same time.

“Jesus Christ being born of the Virgin has remained what He was from eternity, that is God, but He became what He was not, that is a man, without sin, thus becoming a divine-human person. Theotokos conceived the Son of God, and giving birth to her own son that she remained what she was before birth, i.e. a virgin, becoming what she was not, i.e. a Mother, becoming the Virgin-Mother”.²⁹

And based on this premise it is observed the link between the Incarnation and the quality of virgin of the Theotokos. Through the Incarnation the Son of God, “Christ fulfills the law and gets rid of it, as a painful result, obeying it by kenosis and thus by birth in a body subject to emotions and corruption”.³⁰

Thus “between the kenosis of the Son of God and His incarnation or the quality of the Theotokos is an internal connection, as well as between all the implications of the incarnation or the union of the two natures in one hypostasis”.³¹

Starting from these premises we continue to talk about:

- a. the virginity of Mother of God before the birth;
- b. the virginity of Mother of God during childbirth;
- c. the virginity of Mother of God after the birth of the Savior.

a. Regarding the reality of the virginity of Mother of God before birth we have a lot of evidence both from Scripture and the Holy Tradition. Thus

²⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Dogmatica*, vol. II, p. 88.

²⁷ Pr. Laroche Michel, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ Pr. Conf. Ilie Moldovan, *Învățătura Sfintei Scripturi despre Prea Curata Fecioara Maria și implicațiile ei religio-morale*, in „Ortodoxia” Review, year XXXII, no. 3, iulie-septembrie, 1980, p. 473- 474.

³⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Dogmatica*, vol. II, p. 90.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

the Prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be born of a virgin Pure and Righteous

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” Thus “the virgin of Isaiah is called *haalmah* and it means a young woman, unmarried but virgin, who gives birth. It is not called *betulah*, which was a name commonly given to virgins, but with no specifications of the age, like the other term”.³² Prophet Ezekiel says: “Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.” (Ezekiel 44: 1-2).

St. Luke the Evangelist states: “And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary”. (Luke 1, 26-27). Thus we may say that “divine motherhood entrusted in the day of the Annunciation is also because of her holiness”.³³

In addition to the testimony of Holy Scripture we also have the ones of the Holy Tradition. Thus, we witness the symbol of apostolic faith, the Nicene Creed, especially at the Council of Chalcedon. In addition to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils have testimonies and the writings of the Holy Fathers. These include Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, Ieronimus, Ambrose, Augustine, St. Cyril of Alexandria.³⁴

“Supernatural birth and virginity of the Theotokos are real because in the mystery of the Incarnation God is the One that makes possible this birth. Mary was and remained a virgin to show that Jesus Christ Who was born of her is from the Father from eternity, the Savior is not only a man or a result of men’s lust, He is God and man”.³⁵

³² Pr. Prof. Petru Rezuș, *O nouă rătăcire a papalității*, în rev. “Ortodoxia”, nr. 4, 1950, p. 53.

³³ Drd. Ierom. Chesarie Gheorghescu, *Învățătura despre Maica Domnului în Ortodoxie și catolicism*, in „Ortodoxia” Review, year XXII, no. 3, iulie - septembrie, 1970, p. 386.

³⁴ Pr. Prof. Petru Rezuș, *art. cit.*, in „Ortodoxia”, no. 4, 1950, p. 535.

³⁵ Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Sibiu, 1943, p. 153: *Dic-*

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Father Kniazev brings a number of very solid arguments in favor of virginity of Theotokos before the birth. If we deny this aspect of the virginity of Mary before the birth, we deny the divine origin of Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of God, born of the Father before all ages

“The affirmation of the conception of Jesus Christ from a virgin, has its place in the Gospel of salvation, not only because it is written in the letter of the holy books, but because it is right in the middle of the proclamation which tells us that the Son of God, Who became man without ceasing to be God, Who died and rose again, He gave power to those who believe in His name to become the sons of God, and they were born not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the human will, but of God (John 1 , 12-13)”³⁶

b. Regarding the Mother of God’s virginity during birth we speak of virginity *in partu* if we assume the burning bush, the bush that was not consumed. This archetypal image not only puts us in front of the reality of the incarnation, but also the birth. The bush is a symbol of the fact that “the Godhead fire did not burn Mary and it is a symbol of the fact that the Mother born being Virgin and remained virgin.”³⁷

In this context we have the words of Saint Ephrem’s sermon on Transfiguration:

“God the Word dwelt in the Virgin’s womb, and the fire of his divinity did not consume the members of the Virgin’s body, but protected them carefully by its nine month presence. He dwelt in the Virgin’s womb, not abhorring the unpleasant smell of nature, and God incarnate came forth from her to save us.”³⁸

c. The problem of Mary’s virginity after birth was one on which the Fathers defended with great zeal. However the thesis raises two difficult problems that opponents did not miss the opportunity to highlight: a scriptural problem and a theological problem. The scriptural problem refers to

tionaire de Theologie Catholique, t. IX, 2. col. 2341-2349; C. Pârnu, *Temeiurile ortodoxe ale cultului Maicii Domnului*, in “Studii Teologice”, XI (1951) no. 3-4, p. 194-196, apud Drd. Ierom. Chesarie Gheorghescu, *art. cit.*, in “Ortodoxia”, no. 3, 1970, p. 387.

³⁶ Alexies Kniazev, *op. cit.*, p. 98-99.

³⁷ Karl Christian Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecleziale. Înnoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane*, colecția Dogmatica, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1999, p. 143.

³⁸ Ephram der Syrer I, p. 185 apud Karl Christian Felmy, p. 143.

the words of Scripture that speak of Jesus' brothers and sisters, and other passages that speak about a possible relationship between Joseph and Mary after Christ's birth. The second issue under discussion brings to the forefront the idea of the dogmatic justification of this thesis. Regarding the first problem we can bring venerable Jerome's arguments and explanations on the sense that terms like *ante quem* and *donec* have in the Holy Scripture. Thus he cites many passages of Scripture where these phrases do not imply a sense of temporal limitation. Regarding the problem of Lord's sisters and brothers venerable Jerome brings a lot of arguments that demonstrate the true meaning of these terms in the Holy Scripture.

For the second problem the following logic was used: the uniqueness of the event and the impossibility of the existence of a prosaic relationship of the Virgin developed a unique solution to a unique situation.

"The perpetual virginity of Theotokos is connected to the same order of religious facts. Mary, Theotokos and true Mother of God, helped and guarded by the Holy Spirit, kept the true sanctuary of God away from any unclean contact." In this respect there is a strong argument, i.e. the text of Ezekiel chapter 44³⁹.

This attitude and situation of virginity *post partu* cannot be taken separately, but organically connected to the other events, namely the moment of the Annunciation, the Incarnation of Christ and His Birth. In the case of Annunciation the Holy Spirit works, as father Dumitru Stăniloae says, on her who become His Mother (Christ's) and He also works on the Word Himself, Who form His human nature of her as a person"⁴⁰. Thus, we can say that Mary's virginity after birth is a natural consequence of previous events. However there are certain objections to the "biblical" and "theological" aspects⁴¹. In the first case it is about the possible interpretation of the text in Matthew 1, 18 where it talks about the brothers and sisters of the Lord⁴².

In the case of Lord's brothers and sisters it is shown that in Hebrew these "terms" had wider significance than today. Jerome says that "God's brothers and sisters are cousins, the children of a sister of the Virgin Mary"⁴³. Another thing to consider is the moment that St. John the Evan-

³⁹ Alexis, Kniazev, *op. cit.*, p. 101-104.

⁴⁰ Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Dogmatica*, vol. II, p. 87.

⁴¹ Alexies Kniazev, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

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gelist speaks when Christ was on the cross. He entrusts His Mother to the care of the Apostle John. If we go further inference we will reach the logical conclusion that if Mary had other children thing mentioned above would not have happened⁴⁴.

Regarding the text of the Gospel of Matthew 1, 25 “situation of the terms *antequam* and *donec*” shows that “these phrases do not imply a sense of temporal limitation”⁴⁵. Thus, based on the above reasons it can be said that “Theotokos was virgin before, during and after birth. Christ was born of fleshly will or the will of man, but of God (John 1: 13)”⁴⁶.

It should be noted that I. G. Coman says:

“Mary’s virginity is a privilege that she received from and through her Son. If He were not God, He would have opened his mother’s womb just like all the sons of men do being born of mortal mothers. As the son of God, He opens this womb, but do not touch His mother’s virginity.”⁴⁷

If Tertullian does not admit a *post partu* and *in partu* virginity, St. Gregory the Wonderworker shows this reality:

“Christ is God through His nature and became man by taking another nature. Here’s what we say and truly believe, citing as proof the seals a spotless virginity to be settled that God is almighty[...] The Virgin gave birth not as she wanted it, but as the One who had to be born wanted. God did not act as a body and He did not fall under the law of the bodies, but He acted as the Lord of the bodily nature. He showed the world a wonderful birth to manifest His power.”⁴⁸

Comparing the eternal birth from the Father and that from the Virgin Mary he states that:

“The first birth (Trinitarian) is unspeakable; the second (from the Virgin) is incomprehensible. The first took place dispassionately; the second took place without impurity. Although Tertullian brings such arguments, other ecclesiastical writers and Fathers followed the tradition of the Church and defended Mary’s

⁴⁴ Mitropolitul Serghie Stagorodski, *art. cit.*, in magazine „Mitropolia Banatului”, no. 4-6, 1974, p. 202.

⁴⁵ Alexies Kniazev, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Karl, Christian Felmy, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁴⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

⁴⁸ E. Neubert, *op. cit.*, p. 186-189 apud Pr. Prof. Dr. I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

virginity before, during and after birth. Among these are Origen, Gregory the Wonderworker, St. Peter of Alexandria, St. Methodius of Olympus, St. Cyril, St. Herman.”⁴⁹

Perpetual virginity of the Mother of the Lord is described by St. Ephrem the Syrian in the images just as plastic and interesting as the scenes of birth: “In the womb the bridal chamber was placed where the heavenly Groom laid and rested; virginity closely guarded the doors.”⁵⁰

With total confidence, and with deep humility, the Virgin Mary obeys God’s will knowing she will remain virgin, but also will become the Mother of the Son of God. She lives the experience of the miracle of conception beginning. St. Ephrem the Syrian says: “Mary sensed by ear the Invisible, who came through the voice of the angel. The power that dwelt for Incarnation was made fruit of the flesh in her womb.” (from the hymns of the Nativity) or “In Mary the Light took home as in the eyes and cleansed her spirit, clarified her thinking, sanctified her feelings and set up her virginity.”

This mystery of Aeiparthene of the Virgin strikes anyone: “How was it possible that, wonder pass from the soul or amazement from the mind, or the shaking from the senses, while she giving birth remained a virgin?”⁵¹ The human nature was overcome in Virgin Mary by Son of God’s conception and birth, without hurting the keys of virginity:

“In Mary, nature has been conquered. Indeed: Mary conceived as Virgin and gave birth as Virgin.”⁵²

“Theotokos bears the Only born and keeps her virginity; she keeps her maidenlike untouched and gives Him mother’s milk.”⁵³

“Pleasant is the voice of your prayer (it is about the old Simeon): speak to be heard by the creatures and to be true witness that Virgin gave birth - preserving her virginity – to the One who descended from heaven to save the world.”⁵⁴

St. Ephrem is unrivalled in singing the Theotokos as Empress of heaven and Mother of earth. The inspiration for his beautiful hymns was the hymns from the Scripture pronounced either by Mother of God or the

⁴⁹ I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 360- 367.

⁵⁰ Hymn 12, 4, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 574-575.

⁵¹ Hymn 4, 6, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 532.

⁵² Hymn 5,1, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 534.

⁵³ Hymn 11, 3, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 568.

⁵⁴ Hymn 20, 34, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 640.

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priest Zacharias or even the old man Symeon the right. In none of the hymns St. Ephrem makes even the slightest allusion to the “Immaculate Conception”, “Ascension to heaven” or “Madonna cult”. Thus, St. Ephrem the Syrian kept the straight faith⁵⁵.

In general, virginity means ineffable delicacy but motherhood brings woman another delicacy abolishing the virginity one. However, in Theotokos self-sacrifice and delicacy of chastity were perfected and completed with the delicacy and self-sacrifice of the mother. St. Ephrem wonders before this miracle: “Nobody knows how to call your Mother, Lord, shall they call her “Virgin”? But her child stands against. “Married?” But no one knew her. If Your mother is incomprehensible, who I will comprehend You?”

Mary is a virgin before and after birth. St. Ephrem always affirms Theotokos’ virginity in images as interesting as the Nativity scenes. Through the conception above nature, Saint Mary remained a virgin:

“How would it be possible to pass from the soul, or the humiliation from mind, or conception from senses, while she remained a virgin giving birth?”⁵⁶ “In the womb the bridal chamber was placed where the heavenly Groom laid and rested; virginity closely guarded the doors.”⁵⁷ To illustrate the fact that the Virgin Mary remained a virgin after the birth, St. Ephrem uses the image of Ezekiel 44, 2-3: “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.” “She born and the maidenlike remained unharmed, she nursed and remained a virgin, she died and the maidenlike were not open.”⁵⁸ “When He wanted to go out - says St. Ephraim – the glorious Bridegroom left virginity in a deep sleep that she does not feel Him getting out.”⁵⁹ In another hymn the reality of birth and the preserving virginity of Theotokos are revealed explicitly: “Baby Jesus went the way of those who are born and the Virgin remained intact.”⁶⁰

Like He did not open grave seals by coming out of it, so He did not open the maidenlike seals coming out of the womb. Just like hell pulled Him out “even though it was sealed,” Mary’s womb conceived Him “although it was locked”. (Hymns of Nativity 10, 7)

⁵⁵ Fr. Andrei Eftimie, *art. cit.*, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Hymn 4, 6, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 532.

⁵⁷ Dr. I. Caraza, *art. cit.*, p. 460.

⁵⁸ Hymn 15, 2, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 584.

⁵⁹ Hymn 12, 4, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 574-575.

⁶⁰ Hymn 5, 2, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 534-535.

Elsewhere, Saint Ephrem affirms the truth that Holy Mary is mother and virgin at the same time: "... for His Mother is a virgin." (Hymns of Nativity 2, 2) Therefore she who begot "The Merciful who bore our pain" is worthy of glorification and praise. (Hymns of Nativity 3, 2) "Worthy of mention is the Mother who born Him; worthy of blessing is the womb that bore Him." (Hymns of Nativity 3, 7).

Theotokos remained a virgin until death. Saint Ephrem expresses this truth in his hymns:

"Mary the faithful and blessed among women breastfed the Baby in her virginal womb; wonderful thing! Who can say what it was like? Being Virgin she gave birth and kept intact the signs of virginity; by leaning she born and remained virgin; by rising she breastfed and was still a virgin; when she died her virginity signs stayed untouched."⁶¹ These words are unique in patristic hymnology.

In conclusion, all St. Ephrem's hymns on Virgin Mary contain the Orthodox teaching about her Aeiparthene.

The perpetual Virginity of Blessed Theotokos is a direct consequence of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If virginity of Mary before the birth was an exclusive consequence of her spotless life, the virginity during birth and after it was caused by the indwelling of Christ in her womb. The Fathers remark that the supernatural birth was one of the reasons of her virginity after birth. In this sense, the Fathers defended the Church's teaching on Aeiparthene to all those who deny the fact that it are closely linked to the quality of Theotokos. Through this attitude the Holy Fathers showed the close link between the three attributes of Mary, namely: Theotokos, Aeiparthene and the super-veneration.

⁶¹ Hymn 15, 2, Lamy, *op. cit.*, col. 584.