

## Marian Studies

---

Volume 52 *The Marian Dimension of Christian Spirituality, Historical Perspectives, I. The Early Period*

---

Article 7

2001

### Patristic Intuitions of Mary's Role as Mediatrix and Advocate: The Invocation of the Faithful for Her Help

Luigi Gambero

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Gambero, Luigi (2001) "Patristic Intuitions of Mary's Role as Mediatrix and Advocate: The Invocation of the Faithful for Her Help," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 52, Article 7.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol52/iss1/7](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol52/iss1/7)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

**PATRISTIC INTUITIONS OF MARY'S ROLE  
AS MEDIATRIX AND ADVOCATE:  
THE INVOCATION OF THE FAITHFUL  
FOR HER HELP**

*Luigi Gambero, S.M.\**

Faith in Mary's mediation is dependent upon the more general doctrine on the role played by the Mother of God in the economy of salvation. The origins of this belief are in the earliest attempts of the Fathers of the Church and Christian writers to reflect on the treasure of divine revelation. Mary's presence and mission were to be found in the context of the mystery of the Incarnate Word, to which she had a double relation: to the Word of God Himself (who became her Son and our Redeemer); and to us (being human like us, she shared our common lot as God's creature, called to communion with Him through grace and eternal life). The early investigators came little-by-little to the certitude that the answer given by Mary to God's call (her *fiat* at the Annunciation) was an event linked with the eternal destiny of humankind. Therefore, Mary was seen to be strictly bound to us in building up our future in God. In other words, the Virgin Mary was seen as a creature perfectly obedient to God and in complete solidarity with us.

**I. THE EVE-MARY PARALLEL**

The doctrine of Mary's mediation was first developed in the famous theme of the New Eve, which appears to be the first theological reflection on the role of the Blessed Virgin and

---

\*Father Luigi Gambero, S.M., is a professor at the Marianum (Rome) and the International Marian Research Institute (Dayton, Ohio). The author of *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* (Ignatius Press, 1999), he is also the editor of volumes 3 and 4 and co-editor of volume 5 in the series *Testi mariani del secondo millennio*.

which allows us to realize to what extent the ancient Christian authors were theologically interested in the presence of Mary in the economy of salvation. In fact, the typology of the Eve-Mary parallel is the way through which the early theologians of the Church came to clarify the role played by the Mother of God in the mystery of our salvation. This parallelism has a strictly soteriological content and, therefore, it shows that the first concern of these early theologians with Our Lady did not deal with her person, but rather with her role as the new Eve, alongside Jesus Christ, whom St. Paul described as the second Adam.

This theological perspective included an ontology which considers the second Eve, or the new Eve, in the light of her two most appropriate personal prerogatives, that is, her divine motherhood and her virginity. These very prerogatives suggested the parallelism between Eve and Mary, because both were virgin and mother.

Moreover, the topic of the new Eve took on a greater significance from the historical context in which it was conceived, namely, the first centuries of the Christian era. At that time, theological reflection identified itself almost entirely with the tradition of the Church. In fact, the tradition of the Church has always recognized in the witness of the ancient Fathers a significant expression of divine Revelation; and even though the most ancient Christian writers dedicated little reflection to doctrine on Mary, precious seeds of future Marian theology may be found in their thought.

#### A. Historical Origins of the Eve-Mary Parallelism

Until a few years ago, St. Justin was considered the earliest author who noted this parallelism; but in the light of some hypotheses recently posed by scholars, we are no longer sure about the chronological priority of St. Justin. Some people think that it is possible to find traces of this parallel in even earlier writings. Let us deal briefly with such hypotheses.

##### 1. Victorinus of Pettau

Victorinus, Bishop of Pettau (Pannonia Inferior), died as a martyr at the beginning of the fourth century. Of his treatise *De*

---

*fabrica mundi*, only a fragment is extant. It is preserved in a single, very ancient manuscript which goes back to the ninth century.<sup>1</sup> This treatise may be one of the "many other" works of Victorinus to which St. Jerome referred without specifying their titles.<sup>2</sup> The style and thought of the fragment belong to Victorinus, the first exegete who wrote in Latin. St. Jerome informs us that the bishop of Pettau was not equally as familiar with Latin as with Greek. This information does not imply that Victorinus was a Greek by birth, but it indicates that at that time in Pannonia there was a great mixture of languages.

The section of *De fabrica mundi* in which we are interested became highly significant many years ago when a scholar, John Chapman, became convinced that he had recognized in it a quotation from Papias of Hierapolis.<sup>3</sup> According to this hypothesis, the quoted text is a very early witness of the Eve-Mary parallel, going back at least to the first half of the second century. (Papias died as a martyr around 130.)

Eusebius of Cesarea did not place great value on the works of Papias, whom he thought was a man of little intelligence, someone who did not show critical judgment in selecting and interpreting his sources. Nevertheless, the great Church historian admitted that Papias was an authoritative witness to the oral teaching transmitted by the disciples of the Apostles.<sup>4</sup> From Eusebius's testimony, we may deduce that Papias's information about the teaching of the Lord is drawn not only from the written Gospels but also from the oral tradition of the Church. This conclusion is of great importance when treating the apostolic origins of the Eve-Mary parallel. The following is a quote from the fragment that Chapman attributes to Papias:

---

<sup>1</sup>The Codex Lambethanus 414 (Lambeth Library), published by W. Cave in 1688.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *De viris illustribus* 74, PL 23, 721-722.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. "Papias on the Age of Our Lord," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1907-1908): 47-53.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3, 39, PG 20, 296.

Who, then, that is learned in the law of God, who that is filled with the Holy Spirit, does not see in his heart, that on the same day on which the dragon seduced Eve, the angel Gabriel brought the glad tidings to the Virgin Mary [*euangelisato autem*].<sup>5</sup>

Chapman was convinced that this text must be attributed to Papias, and he brought forth good reasons, drawn out of the text itself, to support such a hypothesis. One point, however, looks interesting in itself, namely, the use of the so-called "Western interpolation" in Luke 1:28: Gabriel "brought the glad tidings to the Virgin Mary." In fact, the same interpolation is also present in St. Justin, in the very text where he explains the Eve-Mary parallel. Therefore, it is possible that St. Justin and, later on Victorinus of Pettau, found in Papias the inspiration for the Eve-Mary parallel.

Many scholars today accept Papias's authorship of this passage from *De fabrica mundi*, in which case this text constitutes a precious proof of the antiquity and apostolic origin of the doctrine of Mary as the new Eve. Besides, it leads us to consider Papias as the probable source of Justin and Irenaeus.

The doctrinal content of the fragment is also of great significance. The analogy between the two terms of the parallel specifically concerns the words of the serpent in the seduction of Eve in Paradise and the words of the angel Gabriel in the scene of the Annunciation. This shows that the biblical sources of the parallel are Genesis 3:1-6 and Luke 1:26-38. Besides, there are some elements in the quotations attributed to Papias which later on were developed by the Fathers of the Church in the same theological framework. Some of the similarities will be mentioned here briefly:

---

<sup>5</sup> *Quis itaque lege Dei doctus, quis plenus Spiritu Sancto, non respiciat corde ea die Gabriel angelum Mariae Virgini evangelizasse, qua die draco Evam seduxit* (PL 5, 312-313; *The Antenicene Fathers* VII, p. 343).

— The work of redemption is referred to as the work of creation. In fact, the quotation is placed in a section where the seven days of creation are paralleled by seven days of redemptive activity.

— The devil and the angel Gabriel are named next to Eve and Mary. This means that spiritual beings are influential in the destiny of human creatures.

— The good tidings brought to Mary are contrasted with the bad tidings connected with the sinful behavior of Eve.

In any case, even those who would deny that the passage from *De fabrica mundi* can be attributed to Papias, must recognize that it is a very ancient text which testifies that at the end of the third century the Eve-Mary analogy was already present in the early preaching of the Church.

## 2. *The Letter to Diognetus*

In a study on the historical origins of the Eve-Mary parallel, there is another enigmatic text which will give us a wider vision of the critical problems concerning the doctrine of the new Eve, namely, a passage of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, a work written by an unknown author. This work, a letter addressed to a pagan named Diognetus, poses two serious problems which are connected to one another: its authorship and its chronology. In spite of the numerous attempts to name the author of this letter, up to now there is no certain solution. As far as the date of composition is concerned, scholars more or less agree in accepting the middle of the second century as the most probable time of composition. The relevant text of the letter is:

When this is the tree you cultivate, and this the fruit you pluck, you will always harvest the blessings desirable in the sight of God; blessings which no serpent can touch, no deceit defile by its contact. Then Eve is not seduced; on the contrary a virgin can be trusted.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>12, SC 33bis, 82; *The Didache, . . . The Epistle to Diognetus*, tr. and annotated by J. Kleist; Ancient Christian Writers, no. 6 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1948), 147.

It is not easy to understand such a sentence and that its possible mariological meaning depends on the way it is interpreted. Some scholars are inclined to interpret the sentence in a mariological sense.<sup>7</sup> A mariological interpretation of this text is possible, but the obscurity of the statement makes it difficult to come to a final positive conclusion. Anyway we are allowed to think that at least before the middle of the third century the doctrine of Mary as the new Eve can be attested to by certain and authoritative witnesses like Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian.

### B. St. Justin the Martyr (+ ca. 165)

This Christian apologist was perhaps the first author whose writings testify to the Eve-Mary parallelism. On this parallel we find a long text in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, which is the earliest extant Christian apology against the Jews. The context in which our parallel is inserted deals with Jesus Christ's double sonship—divine and human. This context is enclosed in a wider commentary on Psalm 21 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me").<sup>8</sup> The Son of God became a son of man by the Virgin Mary, for the redemption of humanity, through His passion, death, and resurrection. The Marian text is also put in a soteriological perspective: the Incarnation is directed toward the mystery of the Redemption. I quote Justin:

He 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 virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary was filled with faith

<sup>7</sup>P. Andriessen, "L'Apologie de Quadratus conservée sous le nome d'Épître à Diognète," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* . . . (1946): 5-39, 125-149; id., "The Authorship of the *Epistula ad Diognetum*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947): 129-136; H. J. Marrou, in SC 33, 83; A. Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria* (2. überarb. Aufl.; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1955), 47; P. Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens du II et III siècles* (Paris, 1961), 170; L. Cignelli, *Maria nuova Eva nella patristica greca* (Assisi: Porziuncola, 1966), 31. But, recently, A. Orbe denied any mariological interpretation of the sentence; cf. "El pecado de Eva, signo de division," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 29 (1963): 328-329.

<sup>8</sup>PG 6, 705-724 (cols. 98-106).

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 the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied: "Be it done unto me according to thy word" (Lk 1:38). And by her the one has been born to whom we have proved so many scriptures refer and by whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like Him and delivers from death those who repent of their wickedness and believe in Him.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of this text Justin formulates a general statement which announces the plan followed by God in the work of redemption, namely, what is described as the principle of the *recirculatio*. Thereafter, he explains how this general statement finds its application in the historical reality.

— According to the principle of *recirculatio*, the pattern of human redemption had to parallel the fall. The principle, here applied to Mary, is not a mariological principal, because it has a much wider field of application. It can be extended to the entire work of redemption. In fact, St. Paul uses it in contrasting the disobedience of Adam to the obedience of Christ (cf. Rom 3:18-19) and in contrasting the resurrection of Christ, in whom all human creatures are brought to life, against the death brought to all by Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:22).

— When Justin refers to the principle in his writings, he uses the term *oikonomia* several times, either in the general meaning of the plan of salvation or in a more limited sense of some details of the plan itself. The economy in its general meaning is fulfilled in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the text quoted above it is easy to understand that Mary's presence is essential for the fulfillment of the divine plan which had to parallel in an antithetical way the plan of Satan. Such an antithetical analogy is properly the viewpoint of St. Justin and allows him to

---

<sup>9</sup> *Dialogue* 100, PG 6, 711-712; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (10 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1899-1900), 1:249.



create a perfect parallelism in which we can clearly note the following terms:

— In the Incarnation, a virgin was required so that she might act as the antitype of the virgin Eve.

— The virgin of the Incarnation, through her obedience, had to contribute to the destruction of the plan of sin which started with the disobedience of Eve.

— Eve was a virgin and undefiled when she disobeyed God. The same was true of Mary when she obeyed the word of God. (Justin says of Mary that she was a virgin; he does not repeat the adjective undefiled [*aphthoros*] used for Eve; but it is evident that the concept of being undefiled is included in the concept of virginity.)

— Eve followed the word of the serpent; Mary followed the word of the Lord, brought to her by an angel. Both cases allow us to understand the importance of language in the religious life of human beings.

— Eve operated under the influence of the serpent; Mary acted under the movement of the Holy Spirit, overshadowed by the power of the Most High.

— Eve conceived death; Mary conceived life, when she gave birth to the incarnate Son of God.

From the preceding observations we can make some concluding reflections:

— According to Justin, in the economy of salvation Mary has a role which looks analogous to the role played by Eve in the process of sin. He does not show any interest in the persons of the two women; he just insists on their respective functions.

— This text of Justin appears to be a significant testimony about the doctrine of Mary's collaboration in the divine work of our redemption through the role she played in the mystery of the Word Incarnate. Thus the trend of the Eastern Fathers of the Church to look at the Incarnation in a soteriological perspective (a trend that clearly appears in the homiletic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries) probably has its first root and expression in the Eve-Mary parallel.

---

— Besides, Justin's text on the parallelism is a positive sign that this doctrine was already present in the tradition of the Church around the middle of the second century. In fact, Justin was not a bishop, a theologian, an authorized preacher, or a kind of depositary of revelation. He was a simple layman, a philosopher, and he expressed the doctrine on salvation not according to personal ideas, but according to the common teaching of the Church.

— As far as the question of the apostolic origin of the Eve-Mary parallel is concerned, we cannot forget that it shows an undeniable analogy with the Pauline Adam-Christ parallel (cf. Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49); but we would like to add another detail. The passage from Justin makes the same point: "Eve . . . having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death."<sup>10</sup> This sentence, that expresses so well the dynamics of sin, reminds us of another sentence in the Letter of James, showing a certain terminological assonance: "Desire conceives and gives birth to sin; sin when it is committed, conceives death" (Jas 1:15).<sup>11</sup> This sentence of James, which may have inspired Justin, is a link with the apostolic tradition.

— Finally it is necessary to remark that, though the text of Justin may be interesting for Mariology, the mention of the Virgin Mary is merely fortuitous: the entire context is Christological, and Mary is placed in the shadow of her Son. As already noted, Justin does not describe the person of Mary; he stresses her role in the economy of salvation, whereas the role of the Redeemer has absolute and exclusive supremacy.

<sup>10</sup> "... ton logon ton apo tou ofewj sullabousa, parakohn kai qanaton eteke" (PG 6, 712).

<sup>11</sup> "H epiqumia sullabousa tiktei amartian, h de amartia apoteleoqeisa apokuei qanaton" (Jas 1: 15).

Justin writes to the Jews, trying to convince them that the Son of the Virgin is the one about whom Scriptures speak, and Mary is an element of his exposition. Nevertheless, the reference to Mary is significant.<sup>12</sup>

### C. Irenaeus of Lyon (+ ca. 200)

The bishop of Lyon deals with the Eve-Mary parallel within the framework of recapitulation, explaining the role of the Blessed Virgin as a specific contribution to the plan conceived by God for the salvation of humankind.

*Recapitulation* for Irenaeus means a "summing up in Christ of all things"—from the beginning of creation. In this perspective, salvation is a second creation or a new creation—a repetition of the first one, through which God rehabilitates the earlier plan of salvation suspended because of the sin committed by Adam and Eve. Since, by the fall of Adam, the whole human race was lost, God decided that his Son, eternally begotten, should become a human person so that the economy of salvation might be repaired in the same way that the damage was made to the first creation. Mary and her role are inserted in the process that parallels the fall of Eve.

We possess three famous Irenaean texts where the Eve-Mary parallel is treated rather exhaustively: two are from the *Adversus Haereses* and one is from the *Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*. Considered chronologically, they show the progressive development

---

<sup>12</sup> Among the abundant bibliography on this matter, let me select some titles: W. Staerke, "Eva-Maria. Ein Beitrag zur Denk- und Sprechweise der altkirchlichen Christologie," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 33 (1934): 97-104; M. A. Nauwelaerts, "De Maria nova Eva doctrina Patrum Antenicenorum," *Divus Thomas* 34 (1931): 480-491; H. Koch, *Virgo Eva – Virgo Maria* (Berlin, 1937); G. Jouassard, "La nouvelle Eve chez les Pères Anténicéens," *Etudes mariales* 12 (1954): 35-54; J. M. Bover, "La mediación universal de la 'segunda Eva' en la tradición patristica," *Estudios eclesiasticos* 2 (1923): 321-350; L. Cignelli, *Maria nuova Eva nella Patristica greca* (Assisi, 1966); M. Maritano, "La Vergine Madre negli scritti di Giustino Martire. Miti pagani e mistero cristiano," in *La Mariologia nella catechesi dei Padri (età prenicena)*, edited by S. Felici (Roma: LAS, 1989), 79-99.

of the thought of Irenaeus in this matter. The first text is drawn from *Adversus Haereses*:

In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, be it done 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. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin (for in Paradise they were both naked and they 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, became the cause of salvation (*causa salutis*), both to herself and to the whole human race . . .

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.<sup>13</sup>

This text shows the interest of the bishop of Lyon in the Eve-Mary parallel. He does not touch it indirectly, as Justin did; rather, he makes it the source of a theological reflection that leads him to establish a perfect parallelism between the two women. We can summarize his thought in the following statements:

- Though she had a husband, Eve was a virgin; likewise, Mary was a virgin when she was betrothed to Joseph.
- Listening to the word of the serpent, Eve disobeyed God, whereas Mary obeyed the word of God.
- Eve's disobedience became the cause of death both to herself and to the whole human race. Mary's obedience became the cause of salvation both to herself and to all of humankind.

---

<sup>13</sup> *Haer.* 3, 22, 4, PG 7, 958-960; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1: 455. For a critical edition of *Adversus Haereses*, see W. W. Harvey, *Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis libros quinque Adversus Haereses*, (2 vols.; Cambridge, 1857).

— Eve's disobedience tightened knots around the liberty of human persons; Mary's obedience set them free from these bonds.

— Eve's disobedience followed from her unbelief; Mary's obedience was caused by her faith.

In the second passage, the antithesis between Eve and Mary is set side by side with the Adam-Christ parallel:

That the Lord then was manifestly coming to his own things and was sustaining them by means of that creation which is supported by himself, and was making a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience which was exhibited by himself when he hung upon a tree, the effects also of that deception being done away with, by which that virgin Eve, who was already espoused to a man, was unhappily misled. (It was happily announced through means of the truth spoken by the angel to the Virgin Mary, who was also espoused to a man. 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 bear 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 advocate (*advocata*) of the virgin Eve. And thus, 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. For, in the same way the sin of the first created man (*prōtoplasti*) receives amendment by the correction of the First-begotten, and the coming of the serpent is conquered by the harmlessness of the dove, those bonds being unloosed by which we had been fast bound to death.<sup>14</sup>

This passage points out the correspondence of the parallels Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary:

— Adam is defined as the first-formed (*prōtoplastos*) among human creatures, whereas Jesus Christ is called the First-begotten (*primogenitus*).

---

<sup>14</sup> *Haer.* 5, 19, 1, PG 7, 1175-1176; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:547.

The ideas of creation and generation are opposed in a kind of antithetical comparison, in order to mark the different origins of the man Adam and the God-man Christ.

— The disobedience of Adam is connected to the tree of the garden of Paradise. The obedience of Christ is related to the tree of the cross (cf. Phil 2:8).

— When Eve disobeyed God and committed sin, she was espoused and a virgin as well. When Mary obeyed God, she was also an espoused virgin.

— We observe Eve's seduction into evil, and Mary's reception of the good tidings of truth.

— A fallen angel was responsible for the seduction of Eve; a faithful angel was appointed to bring the glad tidings to the Blessed Virgin.

— Having disobeyed God's word, Eve fled from his presence; obeying God's word, Mary bore God Himself.

— Because of a virgin, the human race was sentenced to death; by means of another virgin the human race was saved (*salvatur*).

From the antithesis of Jesus Christ to Adam and of Mary to Eve, it follows thus:

— The Virgin Mary became the advocate of the virgin Eve.

— The disobedience of Eve is balanced by Mary's obedience.

— The sin of Adam is amended by the correction brought by Jesus Christ.

— The guile of the serpent was overcome by the simplicity and the humility of the dove.

— Our first parents were bound by the chains of sin and death; we were set free from these chains by the obedience of Christ and Mary.

Thus Irenaeus not only puts the role of Mary in the redemptive plan of her Son, but he also clearly explains that Mary had a role connected with Christ's, as Eve had with Adam. In this second quotation we notice that the role of Mary does not only parallel the role of Eve, but that it also interferes in the plan of Eve, because Mary is

---

presented as directly overcoming the guile of the serpent with her simplicity.

The third text is taken from the *Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*, a work preserved in an Armenian version:

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 by immortality and Eve in Mary; that a Virgin became the advocate of a virgin should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.<sup>15</sup>

The parallel is established at the beginning of the passage and repeats the same statements we found in the previous texts:

— Eve's disobedience brought death to humankind; the obedience of Mary brought life.

— In the phrase: "Man resuscitated by life (= Christ)," Irenaeus puts together the role of Christ and Mary.

— The second part of the text establishes that, since the Lord took his body from the Virgin Mary, a descendant of Adam, he was not extraneous to the human race. He became with us, because the work of salvation had to be accomplished from inside of that same human race.

— That Eve was restored in Mary, and that she became the advocate of the former, seems to mean that Mary's role was positively predetermined by God.

— The text ends by presenting again Mary's obedience as an antithetical behavior to the disobedience of Eve.

The three texts, cited in chronological order, indicate a certain progressive development in the mind of the author. First of

---

<sup>15</sup>33, SC 62, 83-86; *The Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 16, p. 69. The Armenian text with English translation is found in PO 15, 5

all we have to stress once again the theological weight of the principle of *recapitulation*, completed by the principle of *ricirculatio*. According to the first principle, humankind, fallen because of its first head Adam, must be lifted again to God by another man, namely Jesus Christ, who becomes its second head or second Adam. The principle of *recirculation* says that this process of restoration fulfilled by Christ must correspond antithetically and step-by-step to the process of the fall.

Mary enters into this plan as the antitype of Eve. By this image, the bishop of Lyon shows that he views human history as one. The New Testament is the continuation of the Old Testament. The unique economy of salvation, interrupted by the sin of our ancestor Adam, with whom Eve was associated, is taken up again and achieved by Jesus Christ with whom Mary is associated.

The purpose of the author is undoubtedly confirmed by the entire context in which the Adam-Christ parallel and the Eve-Mary parallel are placed in the third book of *Adversus Haereses* (see the first text cited above), where Irenaeus develops a long argumentation against Tatian, a former disciple of St. Justin, founder of the Encratites and author of a *Diatessaron*. Against him, Irenaeus maintains that Adam and Eve, after their sin, were able to regain grace and the friendship of God. He could not accept that our ancestors might be damned; and he accused Tatian of being guilty of this heresy. The bishop of Lyon wanted to demonstrate that both Adam and Eve were saved by Jesus Christ's merits, in anticipation of his redemptive work, in which Mary had her own role to play. This conception explains the placing of the Eve-Mary parallel in a context that creates, as we noticed, a continuity between the Old Testament and the New. Such being the economy of salvation, the human race received a new progenitor who, through his obedience to God, replaced the first Adam; and since the first woman was also implicated in the fall by her disobedience, the work of salvation should also start with the obedience of a woman, that is Mary. Giving life to the new Adam, she

---



became the new Eve, the true mother of the living. Therefore the bishop of Lyon does not hesitate to call Mary *causa salutis*, as antitype of Eve who had been the *causa mortis*.

According to Irenaeus, in the economy of salvation, Mary's function as second Eve is not limited to a merely passive and physiological cooperation with the Redeemer as his virgin mother. Her collaboration involves behaviors and activities of the moral order. Her obedience to the word of God had to be conscious and free; and therefore the treatment of the Eve-Mary parallel sounds like a remembrance of the Lukan account of the Annunciation. Moreover, Mary's consent had a soteriological character, because she knew that the Incarnation of the Son of God was aimed at the redemption of humankind.

In the second passage of the *Adversus Haereses* quoted above, Irenaeus gives to Mary the title of *advocata*, and specifically the advocate of Eve. It is the first time in the history of the early Christian literature that this term is attributed to the Virgin Mary. Unfortunately, we only have the Latin translation of the text and do not know the Greek word used by Irenaeus. The Armenian version seems to indicate that the word might have been *parakletos*, whose meaning is "defender, comforter, advocate." In fact, in another passage the author applies the title *parakletos* to the Holy Spirit with a meaning that seems to be in opposition to the term "prosecutor": *Et ubi accusatorem habemus, illic habeamus et paracletum*.<sup>16</sup> But in what sense can Mary be termed advocate of Eve? We have no support for thinking that Irenaeus may have thought of any direct action in favor of the person of Eve. He says that Mary is the advocate of Eve, but he adds "by means of her obedience." Therefore, according to him, the Blessed Virgin neither interceded nor put her merits forward in favor of Eve. She only

---

<sup>16</sup>*Haer.* 3, 17, 3, PG 7, 930.

did the opposite of what Eve did, namely, she obeyed, and by this she removed the lamentable effects of the disobedience of Eve. So Eve should no longer be condemned as responsible for the ruin of humankind, because this ruin was removed by means of Mary's obedience.<sup>17</sup>

The third text underlines even more the negative effects of Eve's disobedience and the soteriological effects of Mary's obedience. It also stresses the two titles, already given to the Virgin Mary, which are *advocata Evae* and *causa salutis*.

To conclude with St. Irenaeus, it is possible to affirm that the future doctrine of Mary's universal mediation and cooperation in the mystery of redemption has its more ancient roots in these texts of the bishop of Lyon. Many years ago, J. M. Bover had already seen in Irenaeus a clear precursor of the doctrine of Marian mediation.<sup>18</sup> More recently other scholars have come to the same conclusion.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the terms *mediatio* and *mediatrix* do not appear in the writings of Irenaeus. Nevertheless, their content in relation to Mary seems clearly taught by the bishop of Lyon.

Let me repeat a reflection I have already made elsewhere. Today we are careful in using certain terms for the person and mission of Mary for ecumenical reasons. Irenaeus seems to show much more courage. He calls the Blessed Virgin *causa salutis*, *advocata*, probably using the term *parakletos*, a term that sounds very strong and that in the New Testament is attributed only to the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16 and 26; 15:26; 16:7) and to Jesus Christ

<sup>17</sup> Cf. E. Neubert, *Marie dans l'Église anténicéenne* (Paris: V. Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1908), 264.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. "La mediación universal de la 'segunda Eva' en la tradición patristica," *Estudios eclesiásticos* 2 (1923): 321-350.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. W. Delius, *Geschichte der Marienverehrung* (München-Basel, 1963), S. 63; J. A. de Aldama, *Marta en la patristica de los siglos I y II* (Madrid: BAC, 1970), 292-293; L. Cignelli, *Maria, nuova Eva nella patristica greca* (Assisi: Porziuncola, 1966), 32-33; I. Ortiz de Urbina, "Mediatio Mariae estne exclusiva ab unico mediatore Christo?," in *De mariologia et oecumenismo*, edited by C. Balic (Roma: PAMI, 1962), 154-155.

(1 Jn 2:1). Should ecumenical sensibility prompt us to put aside the most ancient and precious sources of our Christian tradition?<sup>20</sup>

#### D. Tertullian of Carthage (+ after 200)

Though Tertullian was for a time a Montanist, he must be considered the greatest writer in Latin Christianity next to St. Augustine. Tertullian also developed the Eve-Mary parallel (in a chapter of his work, *De carne Christi*). His text should be studied, because he very probably knew Irenaeus and his doctrine on this matter. However, even if he depends on the bishop of Lyon, he shows a clear independence from his source.<sup>21</sup> We will place the passage in its context, where Tertullian explains why—according to Isaiah 7:14—the Son of God had to be born of a virgin. The reason he gives is that Christ should be born in a new manner, so that he might be the sign of a new birth of humanity in God. Tertullian explains this with one of his terse statements: “Homo nascitur in Deo, ex quo in homine Deus natus est.”<sup>22</sup>

This means that we are being born in God because God was born from a human creature. Such a newness was prefigured by the birth of the first man from a virgin earth. The earth was still virgin, namely not yet cultivated and ready for planting. Starting from this premise, Tertullian developed the Adam-Christ parallel in order to introduce the Eve-Mary parallel:

As then the first Adam (*primus Adam*) is thus introduced to us, it is a just inference that the second Adam (*sequens vel novissimus Adam*) likewise, as the Apostle has told us, was formed by God into a quickening spirit out of the ground; in other words: out of a flesh which was unstained as yet by any human generation. But that I

---

<sup>20</sup>Cf. L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 56.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. G. Jouassard, “La nouvelle Eve chez les Pères anténicéens,” *Études mariales* 12 (1954): 40.

<sup>22</sup>*De carne Christi*, 17, PL 2, 827.

may lose no opportunity of supporting my argument from the name of Adam, why is Christ called Adam by the Apostle, unless it be that, as man, he was of that earthly origin? And even reason here maintains the same conclusion, because it was by just the contrary operation that God recovered his own image and likeness, of which he had been robbed by the devil.

For it was while Eve was yet a virgin, that the ensnaring word had crept into her ear which was to build the edifice of death. Into a virgin's soul in like manner must be introduced that word of God which was to raise the fabric of life; so that what had been reduced to ruin by this sex, might by the selfsame sex be recovered to salvation. As Eve had believed the serpent, so Mary believed the angel. The delinquency which the one occasioned by believing, the other by believing effaced.

But it will be said, Eve did not at the devil's word conceive in her womb. Well, she at all events conceived; for the devil's word afterwards became as seed to her that she should conceive as an outcast, and bring forth in sorrow. Indeed she gave birth to a fratricidal devil; whilst Mary on the contrary bore one who was one day to secure salvation to Israel, his own brother after the flesh, and the murderer of himself.

God therefore sent down into the Virgin's womb his Word as the good brother who should blot out the memory of the evil brother. Hence it was necessary that Christ should come forth for the salvation of man, in that condition of flesh into which man entered ever since his condemnation.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Igitur si primus Adam ita traditur, merito sequens vel novissimus Adam, ut Apostolus dixit, proinde de terra, id est carne, nondum generationi resignata in spiritum vivificantem a Deo est prolatus. Et tamen, ne misi vacet incursus nominis Adae: unde Christus Adam ab Apostolo dictus est, si terreni non fuit census homo eius? Sed et hic ratio defendit: quod Deus imaginem et similitudinem suam a diabolo captam aemula operatione recuperavit. In virginem enim adhuc Evam irrepserrat verbum aedificatorium mortis, in virginem aequae introducendum erat Dei verbum structorium vitae, ut quod per eius modi sexum abierat in perditionem, per eundem sexum redigeretur in salutem. Crediderat Eva serpenti; credidit Maria Gabrieli. Quod illa credendo deliquit, ista credendo correxit. "Sed Eva nihil tunc concepit in utero ex diaboli verbo." Immo concepit. Nam exinde ut abiecta pareret et in doloribus pareret, verbum diaboli semen illi fuit. Enixa est denique diabolum fratricidam. Contra Maria eum edidit qui carnalem fratrem Israel, interemptorem suum, salvum quandoque praestaret. In vulvam ergo Deus Verbum suum detulit bonum fratrem, ut memoria mali fratris evaderet. Inde prodeundum fuit Christo ad salutem hominis quo homo iam damnatus intraverat. (Ibid. 17, PL 2, 827-828)

Though taking inspiration from Irenaeus, Tertullian gives another orientation to the Eve-Mary parallel, more in the direction of Justin's *Dialogus cum Triphone*, where the parallelism is merely casual, as we have seen. Tertullian shows little interest in the parallelism itself, but he uses it to justify the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. However, Irenaeus provides the inspiration to make some strong statements, almost like excrescences, in a theological context which is poorer than Irenaeus's context.

As is his wont, Tertullian does not draw out theological developments, but only plastic images. On the personal qualities of Eve and Mary, he makes a brief allusion to the disobedience of Eve and to the obedience of Mary. He attributes to the Mother of God a lesser influence in salvation's work than Irenaeus does.

As far as we know, from a text in the treatise *Adversus Marcionem*, Tertullian puts Eve in relationship with the Church. In fact, trying to demonstrate the goodness shown by God in the work of creation and speaking of the woman, Tertullian adds:

Eadem bonitas et adiutorium prospexit ne quid non boni. "Non est, inquit, bonum solum esse hominem" (Gn 2:18). Sciebat illi sexum Mariae et deinceps Ecclesiae profuturum.<sup>24</sup>

These two sentences are rather tricky. The first one could be translated in this way: "The selfsame Goodness also provided a helpmate for him, so that there might be nothing in his lot that was not good. For, he said, it is not good that the man be alone." Two interpretations are possible for the second sentence:

— The femininity of Mary and of the Church will help him (Adam).

— The femininity of Mary will help him (Adam) and the Church.

The French patrologist George Jouassard sees in this text the presence of the Eve-Mary parallel, whatever the translation may be. Of course, the parallelism is not explicitly formulated but only

---

<sup>24</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3, 4, PL 2, 288-289.

implied. He understands the text as saying that Eve ruined humankind and that Mary, on the contrary, would be a blessing for the human race. It is a sign and prophecy that Eve's influence on humanity would be reversed by Mary's good influence.<sup>25</sup>

The passage contains an allusion to the Church, beside which Mary is placed. Perhaps here is the earliest example of the trinomial Eve-Mary-Church that appears more frequently in the subsequent centuries.

### E. Conclusion

The intuitions of Justin and Tertullian, but especially the theological developments of Irenaeus, brought an essential contribution to the understanding of the analogy between Eve's behavior and Mary's behavior in the history of salvation. The idea of Mary's cooperation in the redeeming work of Christ soon entered into the Church's way of thinking. Hugo Koch<sup>26</sup> and Ernest Evans<sup>27</sup> do not exclude the probability that at the time of Tertullian many ideas expressed by Irenaeus had already entered the standard exposition of Christian doctrine in the Church. Especially relevant in this regard are those passages of the bishop of Lyon which brought the affirmation of the soteriological and social aspects emerging from the Eve-Mary parallel to a certain climax. In the following centuries both the Eastern and Western Fathers of the Church were able to add explanations and developments to Irenaeus's doctrine on the Eve-Mary parallelism, but they never equaled the value of the synthesis of Irenaeus on this matter.

We said that the Adam-Christ parallel led the early Fathers to contrast Mary to Eve. Mary's attitude repairs the behavior of the first woman. In this way, Mary is pictured not as a merely

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. his "La nouvelle Eve chez les Pères anténicéens," *Études mariales* 12 (1954): 41-42.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. his *Virgo Eva—Virgo Maria, Neue Untersuchungen über die Lehre von der Jungfrauschaft und der Ehe Mariens in der ältesten Kirche* (Berlin-Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1937), S. 80.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. his *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956), 154-159.

passive instrument for the achievement of the mystery of the Incarnation. The active aspect of her cooperation in Christ's redemptive work, which was already foreseen by Justin Martyr, was pointed out by Irenaeus in such terms that his doctrine was peacefully accepted by future Christian generations.

## II. MARY'S INVOCATION

If Christians were aware of Mary's cooperation in the work of our redemption and her mediating role with her Son, it would follow that they might have had recourse to her in order to obtain graces and help. Though the lack of an explicit historical documentation in the first three centuries makes it difficult to support such an hypothesis, there are indirect indications that the Mother of God was called upon and invoked by the people of God from the beginning of Christian history.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is not until the third century that we find some clear evidence of an explicit reference to the Blessed Virgin in the liturgical prayer of the Church and of a personal invocation addressed directly to her. There is a euchological text belonging to the liturgy of the Western Church and an invocation directly addressed to Mary and coming from Eastern Christianity: the anaphora of Hippolytus of Rome and the prayer *Sub tuum praesidium* ("Under your mercy").

### A. The Anaphora of Hippolytus

This anaphora is included in the *Traditio apostolica*, a work that exercised a powerful influence in the liturgical tradition of the East. I quote the text with its mention of the Virgin Mary:

We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Son Jesus Christ, whom in these last days you have sent to us as Savior and Redeemer and as the angel of your will; He that is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all things, and who is well-pleasing to you;

---

<sup>28</sup>Cf. E. Lodi, "Preghiera mariana," in *Nuovo dizionario di mariologia*, edited by S. De Fiores and S. Meo (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1985), 1141.

whom you sent from heaven into the womb of a Virgin, and who, dwelling within her, was made flesh and was manifested as your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin.<sup>29</sup>

Here the Virgin Mary is related to the mystery of the Incarnation, in one of the earliest references to Mary in a liturgical prayer. This case seems to introduce the idea that Mary has to be associated to her Son in giving thanks to God.

### B. The Earliest Marian Prayer

This prayer usually is known in its Latin version, namely, the *Sub tuum praesidium*. It spread throughout Western Christianity during the time of the Middle Ages; however, it had a much more ancient origin.

The Greek text of this kind of troparion was discovered by M. C. H. Roberts in a papyrus of the third century, belonging to the collection of the John Rylands Library of Manchester. The text, full of gaps, was not easy to reconstruct. Attempts were made first by Roberts himself<sup>30</sup>; then later on by the Benedictine scholar F. Mercenier<sup>31</sup> and finally by the Italian Franciscan scholar Gabriele Giamberardini,<sup>32</sup> who added a detailed analysis and an exhaustive commentary on the troparion. We prefer the reconstruction made by Giamberardini who, taking into consideration the results of the attempts by Roberts and Mercenier, was able to offer an excellent critical text.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Gratias tibi referimus, Deus, per dilectum puerum tuum Jesum Christum, quem in ultimis temporibus misisti nobis salvatorem et redemptorem et angelum voluntatis tuae; qui est Verbum tuum inseparabile, per quem omnia fecisti et beneplacitum tibi fuit; misisti de coelo in matricem Virginis quique in utero habitus incarnatus est et Filius tibi ostensus est ex Spiritu Sancto et Virgine natus est.* (4, SC 11bis, 31).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library*, Theological and Literary Texts, vol. 3 (Manchester 1938), 46-48.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. "L'antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne," *Le Muséon* 52 (1939): 229-233.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Il culto mariano in Egitto* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1974-78), 1: 69-97.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 74.



The prayer begins by affirming faith in Mary's divine maternity by using the famous term *Theotokos* and showing as well trust in her motherly mercy and help ("Under your mercy we fly for refuge"). Then the prayer continues, asking the Mother of God that she not despise our petitions in the difficult circumstances of our life ("despise not our petitions in our necessities"), and addresses to her a petition analogous to the one included in the Lord's Prayer, namely, that she deliver us from danger ("deliver us always from all dangers"). The end is an explicit acknowledgement of Mary's purity which fits her uniquely and therefore has to be identified with her virginity and holiness ("You are the only chaste one"). Consequently, Mary deserves a beatitude which is unique ("You are the only blessed").

It is easy to understand the theological, devotional, and historical value of this troparion, which is the earliest extant invocation to the Blessed Virgin. It testifies to the high level of devotion the ancient Christians fostered towards the Mother of God from the earliest days of Christianity.

The discovery of the Manchester papyrus made the scholars change their historical evaluation of the phenomenon of Marian devotion in the earliest centuries. The first historian of Marian doctrine in the Antenicene period, Emile Neubert, at the beginning of the twentieth century, wrote that it was impossible to quote one witness from the early period testifying that the faithful had prayed to the Mother of the Lord.<sup>34</sup> Now we think differently, because of the *Sub tuum praesidium* prayer, which even today is able to interpret the feelings of veneration, trust, and love Christians never cease to nourish towards the admirable *Theotokos*, who is also Our heavenly Mother and Our Mediatrix near her divine Son and Redeemer.

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. his *Marie dans l'Eglise anténicénienne*, 275.