

# Marian Studies

---

Volume 30 *Proceedings of the Thirtieth  
National Convention of the Mariological Society  
of America held in Tampa, FLA*

---

Article 10

1979

## The Mariology of Nicholas Cabasilas

Constantine N. Tsirpanlis

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

Tsirpanlis, Constantine N. (1979) "The Mariology of Nicholas Cabasilas," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 30, Article 10.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol30/iss1/10](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol30/iss1/10)

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).

# THE MARIOLOGY OF NICHOLAS CABASILAS

## PROLEGOMENA

Initially, it must be pointed out that there was no "Mariology" developed by the Eastern Church Fathers as a separate and independent chapter in their doctrinal writings.

The Orthodox Church's teaching about the Theotokos is not independent and autonomous "Mariology" or anthropology having Mary at its center, but is in essence and in its entire content Christology. I hope to show that this is not so much a specific "cult of Mary," as an optimistic message and source of power, blessing and joy to anyone who struggles for *theosis* or divinization, i.e. restoration of the original human nature and its union with God.

Nicholas Cabasilas (1322-1396/7), an eminent lay theologian, great mystic and prolific author of the 14th-century Greek Church,<sup>1</sup> is perhaps the strongest advocate and the best representative of the aforementioned attitude toward Mary among all theologians of Byzantine Christianity. Of course, Gregory Palamas as well as Theophanes Nicaenus of the 14th century join Cabasilas' excellence in establishing the new Golden Age, since the 5th century, of Mariocentric humanism and anthropocentric Christology.

Ironically enough, however, Cabasilas did not attract the serious attention of theologians and remained quite a *terra incognita* even to our days! The fact that his three homilies on the Nativity, the Annunciation and the Dormition of Virgin Mary, all published in 1925 for the first time with a Latin translation by M. Jugie in *Patrologia Orientalis*,<sup>2</sup> have never

<sup>1</sup> For an up-to-date account of Cabasilas' career and writings, see my forthcoming article in *Byzantion* (the first issue of 1979).

<sup>2</sup> M. Jugie, *PO* 19 (1925) 465-510.

since been republished or translated in any other modern language,<sup>3</sup> has perhaps contributed to the scarcity of studies on Cabasilas' "Mariology." As a matter of fact, besides the short articles of M. Jugie,<sup>4</sup> M. Gordillo,<sup>5</sup> G. Eldarov,<sup>6</sup> and a doctoral dissertation of E. Toniolo,<sup>7</sup> which were all written in Italian and French, there is no study in English or any other language on Cabasilas' "Mariology" and theology.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to study as thoroughly, broadly and objectively as possible for an occasional address of very limited time, the views of Cabasilas' Mariological homilies. His passages and references will be used and understood in their context, in order that the progressive develop-

<sup>3</sup> Only recently P. Nellas has republished Jugie's text of the three homilies of Cabasilas with introduction, notes, and modern Greek translation: Nellas, P., Ed., *Theomētōr: Three Mariological Homilies of Nicholas Cabasilas* (2nd edition—Athens, 1974), No. 2 of the *Apostolikē Diakonia* of the Church of Greece in the series of "Selected Patristic Sources." (Hereafter abbreviated as N.)

<sup>4</sup> M. Jugie, *La doctrine mariale de Nicolas Cabasilas*, in *EO* 18 (1919) 375-388. This article, somewhat revised and expanded significantly, was republished in his book, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Écriture Sainte et dans la Tradition Orientale* (Rome, 1952) 246-263.

<sup>5</sup> M. Gordillo, *Mariologia Orientalis* (Rome, 1954): *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, No. 141, 124-126. Gordillo repeats, more or less, Jugie's views and defends the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the aforementioned work as well as in his study on *L'Immacolata Concezione e lo stato di giustizia originale nella Mariologia dei Palamiti*, in *Vgl* 4 (1955) 170-184, esp. 179-182.

<sup>6</sup> G. Eldarov, *La dottrina dell'Immacolata nei maestri Francescani e nei teologi Palamiti dei secoli XIV-XV*, in *Vgl* 4 (1955) 185ff.

<sup>7</sup> E. M. Toniolo, *La Mariologia di Nicola Cabasila* (Vicenza: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1955).

<sup>8</sup> The only book in English on Cabasilas' theology is by C. N. Tsirpanlis, *The Liturgical and Mystical Theology of Nicolas Cabasilas* (Athens, 1976). Second reprint, January, 1979. P. Nellas' studies in Greek on Cabasilas' soteriology and "Mariology" are also noteworthy: *Kleronomia* 2 (1970) 293-322; 3 (1971) 111-124. His doctoral dissertation, *Nicholas Cabasilas' Doctrine of Salvation* (in Greek: Pireus, 1975), accepted by the Divinity School of Athens University, should also be mentioned.

ment of his thought might become relevant and so we will be able to comprehend their true meaning. In the first part of this study, such concepts as Mary's personal sanctity, original human nature and "synergy" will be examined. In the second part, the concepts of *procatharsis*, *debitum peccati*, divine motherhood, virginity, election and predestination, the cosmic impact and the significance of her divinized nature will be dealt with.

### PART I

#### *Mary's Sanctity—Original Human Nature—"Synergy"*

It must be emphasized from the very beginning that Nicholas Cabasilas seems to be the one most influenced by the humanistic ideas of his age among the 14th- and 15th-century Byzantine theologians. Hence, his great emphasis, throughout his three homilies, on the personal sanctity and the importance of the "synergy" of Mary in the Incarnation and the divine plan of salvation. Actually, this emphasis constitutes the greatest and original contribution of Fourteenth-Century Greek thought to the "Theotokos Doctrine" of Ephesus (431).

The fundamental concept of Cabasilas' Mariology, which is the major theme of his homily on the Nativity, can be stated as follows:

The Blessed Virgin is the *par excellence* first man (in the sense of ideal and original manhood) since she alone fully realized the divine ideal in human nature.<sup>9</sup> "She did not create man, but she found him being lost; she did not give us the human nature, but she preserved it; nor did she form us, but she helped the Creator to recreate us in the same manner as the statue cooperates with the sculptor."<sup>10</sup> "She revealed to this world, as to paradise (before) the pure and integral man, such as he was originally created and such as he ought to remain and such as he would be after creation

<sup>9</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 4 (N., 56. PO 19, 469); 18 (N., 110).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 (N., 108. PO 19, 482).

if he had struggled to become perfect (to be ultimately united with the divine nature).<sup>11</sup> "The Virgin alone revealed the (true) human nature . . . which met God's expectations and standards for His incarnation."<sup>12</sup> The Blessed Virgin recreated, in her person, by her own effort and free will, the pre-fallen man, whereas Christ made man capable of realizing his ultimate purpose, *theosis*, and introduced him to the splendor of Holy Trinity.<sup>13</sup>

At this point, it must be mentioned that according to certain Eastern Church Fathers (Athanasius, Maximus, John of Damascus) the Incarnation was not necessitated by the Fall, but it was God's eternal will independent from the human fall.<sup>14</sup> This view was introduced to Western thought by John Scotus Eriugena and is contrary to the legalistic thought of Thomas Aquinas.

A logical consequence of this view is that the Incarnate Word and His Mother as well are the universal mediators between God and all other creatures—angels as well as men—and are the highest sources of microcosmic and macrocosmic perfection and dominion.<sup>15</sup> This perfection was the true destiny and privilege of man's creation. By his fall, however, man missed that goal and reduced himself to the dominion and enslavement of Satan, although the original power of resistance to sin and the beauty of the divine image was not taken from him altogether. On the contrary, man, even after his fall, continues to possess that original power and free will which, when used to live a God-centered life become sources of eternal perfection, immortality and bodily incorruptibility.<sup>16</sup> Now, Mary

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 (N., 104-106. PO 19, 481).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 (N., 106. PO 19, 481). Cp. *Homily on the Annunciation*, 9 (N., 154-157. PO 19, 493).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> A similar idea is implied in one of Cabasilas' passages: *Homily on the Annunciation*, 9 (N., 156).

<sup>15</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 7 (N., 148, 150).

<sup>16</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 5 (N., 56-64. PO 19, 470).

... "was not given anything more than that which Adam and his descendents had received from God, nor did she descend from Heaven, nor was she born from Heavenly bodies. On the contrary, she came from the earth, from the fallen human race that had given her her own nature in the same way as every human being, but she proved herself to be the only one among all men of all ages who overcame all evils from the beginning to the end. Thus, she gave back to God spotless the beauty which He granted to our nature, and she alone utilized all the weapons (potentialities) and all the power with which He endowed us (the "image of God" in man's creation). With her love for God, the strength of her thought, the God-centered will, and with her admirable prudence, she liquidated every sin and triumphantly defeated Satan. In this way, she uncovered the true human nature as it was originally created as well as God's ineffable wisdom and limitless philanthropy. Thus, the One whom she brought into this world and to Whom she gave a human body visible to all men, she had previously depicted and actualized in her own self with her own actions. Therefore, she became the only mediator among all creatures, through whom we are enabled to "be acquainted truly with the Creator" (cp. Solomon, 13,1) ... Because she was and will be the only human being who preserved the image of God entirely spotless and embodied the ideal humanity...<sup>17</sup> And this precisely surpasses any miracle and astonishes, not only human creatures but even the angels themselves, and goes beyond any oratorical exaggeration: namely how the Virgin alone could escape the common disease, being just human and without receiving anything more than other men.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> There is a similar, but stronger and more beautiful passage in Theophanes Nicaenus: "Let us praise the clearest mirror of virginity, made by God, in which the image of the invisible God is reflected most brightly, that genuine and loveable beauty of the lover, as well as of the loved one, I mean the dearest and most loveable mother of the most worthily loveable (son)." (M. Jugie, *Theophanes Nicaenus, Sermo in sanctissimam Deiparam*, in *Lit* 1 (1925, N.S.) 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 6 (N., 64-68. *PO* 19, 472). It must be noted here that M. Jugie, in his Latin translation of this last passage, puts a period after the word "exaggeration," so arguing that Cabasilas accepts the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as miracle. However, this is not accurate because in the original Greek text, there

This basic concept of and belief in Mary's personal sanctity and ideal humanity as a result primarily of her own effort and struggle, is further elaborated by Cabasilas in the seventh paragraph of his homily on the Nativity. The following passage especially dispels any intentional or unintentional misinterpretation of Cabasilas' thought, since it explicitly rejects the Immaculate Conception and the idea of Mary's impeccability by nature (*kata physin*). He writes:

What, then, was the cause of the Virgin's victory since she did not live before all men were created, so that she could assume a nature foreign to all evils, nor did she (become holy) after the coming of the new Man (Christ) and His giving of the new tendency and power to men? Of course, it would not be strange at all if Adam had defeated sin . . . having been given a life free from toil, a body foreign to corruptibility, and a soul inexperienced as yet of any sin. Further, Adam's forefather was not man but God himself, being related with Him directly. . . .<sup>19</sup>

On the contrary, the Blessed Virgin preserved her soul pure and clean of any evil and realized in herself the ideal humanity without the assistance of anyone, since all men were affected by the sinful disease of the fall, and even within an environment of climbing evils (*en mesembria kakōn*) and deadly corruption of everything.<sup>20</sup> The most astonishing point is, perhaps, that even before the coming to earth of the Author of Peace, Mary, by herself, abolished in her own self the enmity that existed in human nature against God, opening the gates of Heaven by attracting His grace with her victorious struggle

is no period after the word "exaggeration" but a comma, which means that the word "miracle" for Cabasilas refers to the idea that, although the Virgin was a human being like all men and had inherited nothing more than an ordinary man, yet she was able to escape the "common disease" (i.e. mortality as the result of the original sin).

<sup>19</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 7 (N., 70-71. PO 19, 473).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 (N., 72. PO 19, 473).

against sin. Furthermore, despite the enmity of human nature, and the wall which divided all of mankind from God, Mary was united with Him by her free will (*proairesis*) and her soul's readiness (*prothymia*).<sup>21</sup>

It is Cabasilas' profound conviction that God did not give to Mary any special privilege, natural sinlessness and freedom from original sin by birth or by nature. The statement which concludes paragraph seven gives more than clear and explicit evidence. It reads as follows:

For, it is certain that God did not create Her (Mary) in such a way that she had to live a totally immaculate life, nor did He grant to her greater help than to all other men . . . On the contrary, she won that unique and wonderful victory solely by using her own ability and the same challenges to virtuous life given equally to everyone.<sup>22</sup>

Cabasilas is not hesitant to proclaim that "normal" man, i.e. the one created in Christ, is saved by himself, since human nature is good *per se* as God's creation. Virtue and man's perfection, however, are not given as special privileges to anyone but are acquired and earned with personal effort and struggle rooted in and sprung from free will. Man's real freedom, however, lies in the conformity of his will with God's will and freedom, which is limited, freely though, by man's freedom; whereas God's love in the end (by His Cross) overcomes the freedom of man without violating it. To clarify further the relationship between man's free will and divine grace, Cabasilas devotes the entire eighth paragraph of his homily on the Nativity.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, Cabasilas' anthropocentric Mariology and Christology is not completely understood by Jugie, nor by Gor-

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 (N., 74. PO 19, 473).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 (N., 74-78. PO 19, 474). Cp. *De Vita in Christo*—PG 150, 657C, and *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*—PG 150, 456A.



dillo either. Thus, Jugie attributes to Cabasilas semi-pelagianism or even pelagianism and blames him for lack of coherence of thought and for contradictions.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Jugie and Gordillo, in their attempts to defend the Immaculate Conception, do not refrain from using most of the passages of Cabasilas out of context.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, there are several rhetorical passages in these homilies of Cabasilas which, because of their rhetorical and pious exaggeration, can cause a kind of contradiction and be easily misunderstood or, when used out of context, can be employed as argument in support of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>26</sup>

## PART II

### *Procatharsis—Debitum Peccati—Divine Motherhood— Microcosmic and Macrocosmic Perfection*

It seems that Cabasilas' strong and continuous emphasis on Mary's personal sanctity and her realization of the "first man" or ideal-humanity contributed to a gross misunderstanding of his anthropocentric Mariology. In addition to this, there are eleven basic passages<sup>27</sup> in the homilies of Cabasilas which, if

<sup>24</sup> M. Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Ecriture Sainte et dans la Tradition Orientale* (Rome, 1952) 249.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 247, 249, 250, 255, 257. M. Gordillo, *L'Immacolata Concezione e lo stato di giustizia originale nella Mariologia dei Palamiti*, in *Vgl* 4 (1955) 180, 181, 182. Cf. *idem*, *Mariologia Orientalis* (Rome, 1954) 124, 125, 126.

<sup>26</sup> Especially these passages: *Homily on the Nativity*, 4 (N., 56. *PO* 19, 469); 6 (N., 66, 68. *PO* 19, 471-472); 10 (N., 82, 84. *PO* 19, 476-477); 11 (N., 90. *PO* 19, 477); 13 (N., 96); 16 (N., 104-106. *PO* 19, 482); 18 (N., 112). *Homily on the Annunciation*, 3 (N., 124, 126. *PO* 19, 486); 7 (N., 148. *PO* 19, 492). *Homily on the Dormition*, 4 (N., 176, 180. *PO* 19, 498, 499); 6 (N., 188, 190. *PO* 19, 500-502); 8 (N., 196. *PO* 19, 504); 10 (N., 204, 206. *PO* 19, 506).

<sup>27</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 4 (N., 56. *PO* 19, 469); 6 (N., 68. *PO* 19, 472); 10 (N., 82, 84. *PO* 19, 476-477); 11 (N., 90. *PO* 19, 477); 16 (N., 104. *PO* 19, 482). *Homily on the Annunciation*, 3 (N., 124,

taken out of context, can be used as arguments in support of the Immaculate Conception and of the view that Mary was free from the "Debt of Sin" or *Debitum Peccati* or even from her personal sins (*concupiscentia*) and consequently not in need of Christ's redemption but, rather, was co-redeemer by nature or by birth! This is precisely the case with Jugie and Gordillo.

The major difficulties caused by these passages lie in some expressions of oratorical and pious exaggeration such as: "God alone was able to create the immaculate Virgin, *ignoring nature's laws* in a *direct* manner, just as He did in the creation of the *first* man (Adam). He was entirely the author of Mary's birth and *not nature at all*."<sup>28</sup> This passage from the homily on the Nativity has been utilized by both Gordillo<sup>29</sup> and Jugie<sup>30</sup> as the basic ground and foundation of their effort to present Cabasilas as pro-Roman Catholic, a supporter of the Immaculate Conception and the Roman Catholic view that Mary was totally free from the debt of all sins, being created co-redeemer or having no need of Christ's redemption! However, this passage has been misinterpreted, especially by Gordillo, taken out of its context and isolated from what precedes and follows it. It is not accidental that more than the first half of the homily on the Nativity is devoted to Mary's parents. On the contrary, Cabasilas tried to show the human origins of Mary by his long talk on Joachim and Anna, indicating that they were not sterile in their prayer, fidelity and virtue—but that the power of their prayer resulted from their virtuous life and their faithful devotion to God.<sup>31</sup> True, God intervened because of their physical sterility, yet Joachim and Anna were able to have normal sexual intercourse.

126. PO 19, 486); 7 (N., 148. PO 19, 492). *Homily on the Dormition*, 3 (N., 170, 172. PO 19, 497); 4 (N., 176. PO 19, 498); 6 (N., 188, 190. PO 19, 502); 10 (N., 204, 206, 208. PO 19, 506-507).

<sup>28</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 4 (N., 56. PO 19, 469).

<sup>29</sup> M. Gordillo, *op. cit.*, Vgl 4 (1955) 180.

<sup>30</sup> M. Jugie, *op. cit.*, 248.

<sup>31</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 2 (N., 48. PO 19, 467).

Certainly, the aged parents of Mary did not consummate their marriage because of sexual desire, but *only* out of their faithful obedience to God. This means that the manner of Mary's conception was holy and immaculate in its motivation, but the act of her parents was itself natural and normal, excluding Mary's "virgin birth." Consequently, Mary was born with the original sin, even though she was the gift, the reward, to her parents' faithful obedience and virtuous life.<sup>32</sup> It is Cabasilas' own idea that Mary's "synergy" or cooperation with God's grace and economy of salvation began with the virtuous life of her parents even before her conception.<sup>33</sup> Mary herself was the peak of the Old Testament holiness, the consummation of human preparation; the creature "par excellence" in whom heaven and earth were united; the *anakrasis*, the link of the created and uncreated world; the "new heaven" and the "new earth"; the recapitulation (*anakephalaiosis*) of the entire cosmos.<sup>34</sup> This central position and function of Mary in God's economy of salvation, however, was not a special privilege of absolute predestination, since God is not partial nor capricious.<sup>35</sup> Mary's "synergy" in Salvation History is emphasized in almost every page of the Cabasilian homilies.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (N., 46ff.). *Homily on the Dormition*, 8 (N., 194). It is interesting to note that St. John of Damascus calls the sperm of Mary's parents, "σπέρμα πανάμωμον": *Homily on the Nativity, Sources Chrétiennes*, 80, 48.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (N., 46. *PO* 19, 467).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (N., 44, 46); 3 (N., 50. *PO* 19, 468); 4 (N., 54, 56. *PO* 19, 469); 6 (N., 66); 9 (N., 80. *PO* 19, 475); 12 (N., 92, 94). *Homily on the Dormition*, 2 (N., 168; 3 (N., 170ff.); 4 (N., 176, 178, 180); 6 (N., 184); 12 (N., 214, 216).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (N., 48); *Homily on the Annunciation*, 5 (N., 134, 136, 138, 140); 6 (N., 142); 7 (N., 146, 148); 8 (N., 150); 9 (N., 154).

<sup>36</sup> The most important references of Mary's "synergy" are: *Homily on the Nativity*, 2 (N., 46, 48); 3 (N., 50, 52); 4 (N., 56); 5 (N., 58, 64); 6 (N., 64, 66, 68); 7 (N., 70, 72, 74); 8 (N., 78); 9 (N., 78, 80). *Homily on the Annunciation*, 4 (N., 134); 5 (N., 134, 136). *Homily on the Dormition*, 5 (N., 182, 184. *PO* 19, 500); 6 (N., 186. *PO* 19, 501); 8 (N., 194. *PO* 19, 503).

Cabasilas, following the Patristic tradition, views Mary as the goal of Old Testament history, which began with the children of Eve. The election of the Virgin Mary is, therefore, the culminating point of Israel's progress toward reconciliation with God. In her personal sanctity and in her absolute loyalty to His will, God found the ideal human representative and response to His love call.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, "He set her apart from all men for Himself, preferring her from the entire mankind to be His Temple."<sup>38</sup> However, such a selection and preference was based on Mary's own merit, spiritual struggle and unconditional cooperation with the divine grace. She herself actualized the power with which God endowed human nature in order to overcome sin. Hence, she was rewarded with the ability always to remain steadfast in virtue. Accordingly, the Virgin Mary stayed holy and sinless throughout her life. Holy, because of her unceasing spiritual struggle, total dedication to God and a steadfast will. Sinless, because of the grace of her Son.<sup>39</sup> Mary's sinlessness, of course, is not to be understood in the same sense as Christ's "Theanthropic" sinlessness and absolute perfection, since Christ is not only perfect man but also perfect God. Therefore, Christ is sinless "by nature," *physei*, even in respect to His human nature. Whereas Mary is sinless only "by grace," *kata charin*.

The principle of Mary's "synergy" and cooperative or representative role in the economy of salvation especially occupies the thought of Cabasilas throughout his homily on the Nativity. Such a strong emphasis, easily felt in almost every page of all his homilies under consideration, does not support the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and *De-*

<sup>37</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 14 (N., 98, 100); *Homily on the Annunciation*, 7 (N., 148).

<sup>38</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 15 (N., 100, 102. PO 19, 480).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 (N., 102, 104, 106. PO 19, 480-481); 17 (N., 108). Cp. *Homily on the Dormition*, 6 (N., 184, 186); 7 (N., 194ff.).

*bitum Peccati*. Cabasilas himself corroborates our conclusion by declaring that:

The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father and of His Virtue and His Spirit, it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the all-pure one and the cooperation of her faith, this design would have been as unrealizable as it would have been without the intervention of the three Divine Persons themselves. Only after teaching and persuading her does God take her for his Mother and receive from her the flesh which she wills to offer to him . . . Just as he voluntarily became Incarnate, so he willed that His Mother should bear him freely, with her own full and free consent. Furthermore, in order that she might not be a passive instrument in the (divine) economy, she ought to offer herself as an active contributor to and collaborator of God in His loving care for mankind, so that she might share with Him and participate in the glory resulting from this philanthropy.<sup>40</sup>

From this cardinal passage and from the previous ones, it is clear that Mary was not exempted from the lot of the rest of fallen humanity, nor was she ransomed before the redemptive work, by virtue of the future merits of her Son. It is not in virtue of a privilege received by her parents at the moment of her conception that the Greek Fathers venerate Mary more than any other created being. She was holy and pure from her mother's womb, but not with a sanctity which places her outside the rest of humanity—before Christ. She was not in a state analogous to that of Eve before the fall at the moment of the Annunciation.<sup>41</sup> On the contrary, Mary was in the state of fallen humanity. She was born under the law of original sin, which in the Eastern Patristic thought means *inherited*

<sup>40</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 4-5 (N., 134, 136. PO 19, 487); *Homily on the Dormition*, 6 (N., 188. PO 19, 501).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 (N., 132, 134. PO 19, 487). Cp. *Homily on the Nativity*, 15 (N., 102. PO 19, 480).

mortality, not guilt. But sin never could become actual in her person; the sinful heritage of the fall had no mastery over her right will. The sanctity of the Mother of God is the fruit of free will and grace.<sup>42</sup> That is, although the Virgin Mary, having inherited Adam's nature, was under original sin, she was able to halt this nature's tendency towards sin and become "the treasure or the source of all men's sanctity,"<sup>43</sup> "more holy than the saints."<sup>44</sup> She never sinned, even though she was capable of sinning."<sup>45</sup>

Two other cardinal passages of Cabasilas must be clarified at this point. The one refers to Mary's *pre-purification* or *pro-catharsis*, namely that she was cleansed by the Holy Spirit before the Annunciation.<sup>46</sup> The other refers to her *absolute holiness* and *perfection* at the moment of the Annunciation.<sup>47</sup> Essentially, the one compliments the other and both illuminate the concept of Divine Motherhood. Both these passages, however, gave rise to a controversy and were misinterpreted by Jugie<sup>48</sup> and by Gordillo.<sup>49</sup>

In the light of what has been said about the "synergy" and voluntary cooperation of Mary in the divine economy of salvation, it is not difficult to understand the *procatharsis* passage of Cabasilas. This passage reads as follows: "While Gabriel mentioned the Spirit and the might of the Highest (God),

<sup>42</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 15 (N., 100, 102); 16 (N., 104).

<sup>43</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 6 (N., 186). Cf. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Dormition*, B, 16, 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 8 (N., 196); 10 (N., 206). *Homily on the Nativity*, 10 (N., 86. PO 19, 477). Cf. Andrew of Crete, *Oration on the Dormition of the All-Holy Theotokos*, PG 97, 1108B.

<sup>45</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 6-7 (N., 188, 190); *Homily on the Nativity*, 14 (N., 100). Cp. *Homily on the Annunciation*, 7 (N., 148. PO 19, 492).

<sup>46</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 10 (N., 82, 84. PO 19, 476-477).

<sup>47</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 7 (N., 148. PO 19, 492).

<sup>48</sup> M. Jugie, *op.cit.*, 254-256.

<sup>49</sup> M. Gordillo, *op.cit.*, Vgl 4 (1955) 180; especially in his *Mariologia Orientalis*, 124-126.

he did not speak, however, of any deliverance from offenses (crimes) nor of forgiveness of sins at all. Actually, she (Mary) badly needed such a preparation, more than any other preparation (before the Annunciation)."<sup>50</sup> This statement which does not really support the Immaculate Conception nor the *Debitum Peccati*, as Gordillo and Jugie think, is completed by another fundamental point of Cabasilas that Mary, although she had no knowledge of her future and her special function in Salvation History, still prepared herself with such a progressive and climbing spiritual struggle and personal virtue that her holiness had reached the highest point of any humanly possible perfect sanctity by the time of the Annunciation.<sup>51</sup> Cabasilas, however, seems elsewhere to believe that Mary knew of her special mission and function in the economy of salvation, even before the Annunciation.<sup>52</sup>

Certainly, this idea of Cabasilas is not an innovation. Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>53</sup> as well as John of Damascus,<sup>54</sup> many centuries before Cabasilas, taught that at the Annunciation the Holy Spirit entered Mary's soul and body and cleansed both of them *only* after her free consent.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the deeper meaning of *gratia plena* is that Mary, only through the Son of God, could attain the perfection and the highest possible sanctity reserved for those who should bear the image of the Heavenly Man.<sup>56</sup> Because it is in the Son of God, her Son, that the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily.<sup>57</sup> This is the reason why Mary's holiness reached its peak at the time of the Annunciation and why, according to Cabasilas, after the Annunciation

<sup>50</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 10 (N., 84. PO 19, 476).

<sup>51</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 7 (N., 146, 148. PO 19, 492. Cf. *Homily on the Dormition*, 8 (N., 196. PO 19, 503).

<sup>52</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 5 (N., 136, 138).

<sup>53</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus: PG 36, 633; 37, 462A.

<sup>54</sup> John of Damascus: PG 94, 985.

<sup>55</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 10 (N., 158).

<sup>56</sup> 1 Cor. 15:49.

<sup>57</sup> Col. 2:9.

her holiness could not decrease or increase.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, according to his *procatarsis* view, which is traditional Eastern Patristic doctrine, the purification of Mary by the Holy Spirit before Christ's conception means for her an addition or augmentation of graces and perfection of sanctification, rather than an immaculate conception or freedom from the *Debitum Peccati*.<sup>59</sup>

It seems to me that Cabasilas does not reject the *Debitum Peccati* (Mary's debt of original sin). Those who assert<sup>60</sup> that he does base their argument on two principal passages of Cabasilas.<sup>61</sup> According to the one, Mary was "the sole person who reconciled God with herself before the common reconciliation of men or, rather, she never needed it at all, being the first and the head, from the beginning, of the group of God's friends."<sup>62</sup> Some words of this text, especially the phrase: "she never needed it, at all," can be misleading and ambiguous. The continuation of the same passage, however, stresses the point that her reconciliation stemmed primarily from her personal virtuous life.<sup>63</sup> The principle of "synergy," which animates the entire thought of Cabasilas, also occupies the central place in these passages.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the ratio of those passages<sup>65</sup> in the three homilies of Cabasilas which seem *prima facie* to reject all *Debitum Peccati* or imply the Immaculate Conception is two to ten for the contrary. In any case, Caba-

<sup>58</sup> Homily on the Nativity, 15 (N., 102. PO 19, 481); 16 (N., 104, 106. PO 19, 482). Homily on the Annunciation, 7 (N., 148. PO 19, 492). Homily on the Dormition, 6 (N., 186, 188); 7 (N., 194); 10 (N., 206, 208).

<sup>59</sup> Homily on the Nativity, 10 (N., 84. PO 19, 477).

<sup>60</sup> J. B. Carol, *The Blessed Virgin and the "Debitum Peccati": A Bibliographical Conspectus*, in MS 28 (1977) 190.

<sup>61</sup> Homily on the Annunciation, 3 (N., 126. PO 19, 486), Homily on the Nativity, 6 (N., 68. PO 19, 473).

<sup>62</sup> Homily on the Annunciation, 3 (N., 126. PO 19, 486).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 3 (N., 126, 128, 130).

<sup>64</sup> Cp. page 5 and note 18 of this study.

<sup>65</sup> See note 27 of this study.



silas does not favor all *Debitum Peccati* absolutely. Mary did not depend on the physical and moral headship of Adam nor did she depend on Adam for her grace. Actually, it was the other way around since the Incarnation was to take place even if Adam and Eve would not fall. Consequently, Mary's election was an absolute and eternal election, but not unconditional—for it was conditioned by and related to the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>66</sup> Mary holds her unique position and has a "category of her own" not merely as virgin, but as the Virgin-Mother, *Parthenometer*, as the predestined Mother of the Lord, since the Incarnation was God's eternal and immutable decree.<sup>67</sup> Toniolo<sup>68</sup> finds a sort of contradiction in Cabasilian thought with its emphasis on Mary's "synergy" or personal merits, on the one hand, and on her eternal election, on the other hand.<sup>69</sup> He feels that in the three homilies of Cabasilas under consideration, there are "molti punti errati o poco esatti."<sup>70</sup> Cabasilas' deep conviction is, however, that the "privileges" of the divine Motherhood do not depend upon a "freedom from original sin."<sup>71</sup> The fullness of grace was truly bestowed upon the Blessed Virgin, and her personal purity was preserved by the perpetual assistance of the Spirit. But this was not an abolition of sin. Sin was not destroyed even by the Incarnation itself, although the Incarnation was the true inauguration of the New Creation. The Incarnation was but the basis and the starting point of the redemptive work of our Lord. And the "Second Adam"<sup>72</sup> himself enters into his full glory through the gate of death and resurrection.

<sup>66</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 8 (N., 150); 9 (N., 156).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 (N., 150, 152. PO 19, 492); 9 (N., 154, 156. PO 19, 493). Cp. *Homily on the Nativity*, 14 (N., 100. PO 19, 480).

<sup>68</sup> E. M. Toniolo, *op.cit.*, 9, n. 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 3 (N., 126. PO 19, 486).

<sup>70</sup> E. M. Toniolo, *op.cit.*, 9, n. 10.

<sup>71</sup> *Homily on the Annunciation*, 5 (N., 134. PO 19, 487); 9 (N., 156. PO 19, 493).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 (N., 132. PO 19, 487).

Mary had the grace of the Incarnation as the Mother of the Incarnate, but this was not yet the *complete* grace, since the Redemption had not yet been accomplished.<sup>73</sup> Sin was destroyed only on the tree of the Cross, and no "exemption" was possible.<sup>74</sup>

True, Mary's sanctity and virginity were an undisturbed orientation of her whole personal life towards God, a complete self-dedication, sinlessness; but they were not yet "perfection" nor freedom from temptations. Our Lady, perhaps, had her temptations too, since even our Lord himself was actually tempted by Satan in the wilderness; but she overcame them in her steady faithfulness to God's calling. It is remarkable that the greatest of early patristic authorities, Saint John Chrysostom, found it possible to ascribe to Mary not only "original sin" but also "agitation," "trouble," and even "love of honor."<sup>75</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the fundamental ideas and convictions of Cabasilas: In the created person of the Blessed Virgin, *theosis* or divinization, which is man's true destiny, is accomplished for the first time. Mary's divinization was the result of her free will and consent to be one with Christ's enhypostasized divinity and humanity. In the very words of Cabasilas, "Mary's blood became God's blood,"<sup>76</sup> by the ineffable *communicatio idiomatum* and by her personal effort to raise fallen humanity to its original purity and perfection.<sup>77</sup> Even more so, she recreated earth and heaven and united them—angels and men—by showing to them, more directly and more clearly than ever before, the "enhypostasized wisdom and love of God," the very God and their Savior Himself.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 13 (N., 218); 8 (N., 198).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 (N., 186. PO 19, 501).

<sup>75</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 44 in Matthew*, PG 57, 464; *Homily 21 in John 2*, PG 59, 131.

<sup>76</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 7 (N., 194. PO 19, 503).

<sup>77</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 6 (N., 66, 68).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 (N., 202. PO 19, 504); 3 (N., 174. PO 19, 497). Cf. *Homily*

She is, therefore, the very first and last created human being who represents microcosmic and macrocosmic perfection, having fulfilled God's purpose of creation: the original and ideal humanity perfectly united with His love and will.<sup>79</sup> This is extremely significant, and a source of optimism and power for the life of the faithful. It is, furthermore, the source of the greatest and eternal joy to man struggling for his salvation, because the Blessed Virgin is the fullness of love accepting the coming of God to us—giving life to Him Who is the Life of the world. The whole of creation rejoices in her, because it recognizes in her that the end and fulfillment of all life, of all love, *is to accept Christ*, to give Him life in ourselves, to become His "temple." And this is possible for any human being, because our Lady is the first "divinized" human creature, making all men able to rise to deification by the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup> The destiny of man and the world has already been reached potentially, not only in the uncreated person of the Son of God, but also in the created person of His Mother. That is why Gregory Palamas calls the Mother of God "the boundary between the created and the uncreated,"<sup>81</sup> and Nicholas Cabasilas calls her the "treasure or source of men's sanctity,"<sup>82</sup> "saint of saints and more than that,"<sup>83</sup> "the new

*on the Annunciation*, 10 (N., 158, 160); *Homily on the Dormition*, 3 (N., 172. PO 19, 497).

<sup>79</sup> *Homily on the Nativity*, 9 (N., 80. PO 19, 475); 14 (N., 100. PO 19, 479); 15 (N., 102, 104. PO 19, 480); 16 (N., 104, 106. PO 19, 482). *Homily on the Annunciation*, 8 (N., 150); 9 (N., 154, 156); 10 (N., 158, 160). *Homily on the Dormition*, 2 (N., 168. PO 19, 496); 3 (N., 170, 172, 174. PO 19, 497); 6 (N., 184, 186, 188. PO 19, 502); 12 (N., 214, 216. PO 19, 509).

<sup>80</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 6 (N., 186, 188. PO 19, 502).

<sup>81</sup> Gregory Palamas, *Homily on the Presentation*, 6-7; Ed. Oikonomos (Athens, 1861), 126-127. PG 151, 461. Cp. Nicholas Cabasilas, *Homily on the Dormition*, 8 (N., 196, 198. PO 19, 503).

<sup>82</sup> *Homily on the Dormition*, 6 (N., 186. PO 19, 501).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 (N., 196, 198. PO 19, 503).

earth and the new heaven."<sup>84</sup>

CONSTANTINE N. TSIRPANLIS, Ph.D., Th.D.  
*Professor of Church History & Patristics*  
*U.T.S., Barrytown, New York*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 (N., 176. PO 19, 498).