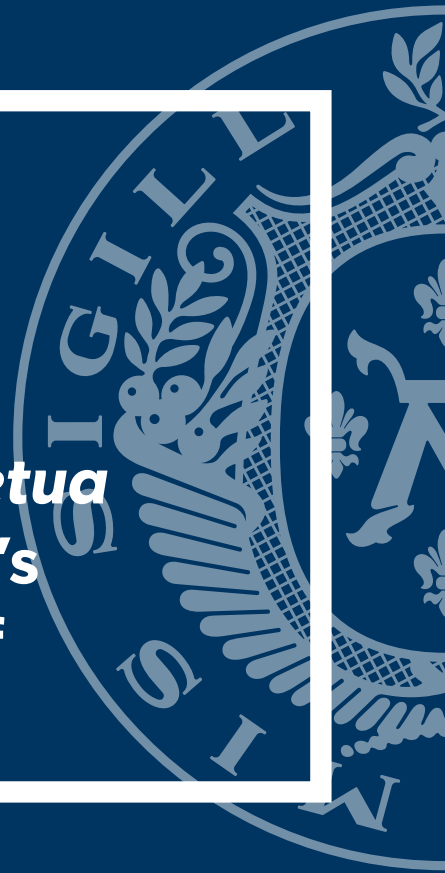


Daniel Wihlborg

***Mariae virginitas perpetua*
— the Concept of Mary's
Virginity in Ambrose of
Milan's Pastoral Care**





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Cover picture: One of the two medieval church bells in Horred, with the inscription HELP MARIA. Photo: Camilla Dotevall.

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Daniel Wihlborg

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Mulierem fortem quis inveniet?
Proverbs 31:10

Dixit autem Maria: Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.
Luke 1:38

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Thanks to the One who has given me the power and ability to do this work.

Horred, October 2020

Daniel Wihlborg

Sammanfattning på svenska

Syftet med denna avhandling är att presentera hur Ambrosius av Milano (339–397) använder Jesu mor Marias ständiga jungfrulighet (*Mariae virginitas perpetua*) i sin själavård.

Jag har läst och behandlat Ambrosius texter som avsedda för ett konkret pastoralt sammanhang. I enlighet med gängse kristen senantik tradition uppfattade Ambrosius Jesu mor Maria som jungfru i tre avseenden. Hon hade en jungfrulighet före födseln (*virginitas ante partum*), genom förlossningen (*in partu*) och i ett livslångt celibat (*post partum*). I analysen av Ambrosius texter har jag definierat själavård som att med den kristna trosbekännelsen som verktyg vägleda och stadfästa människor i tro, hopp, kärlek och tålamod, och att den sker i ett visst kulturellt sammanhang. Detta pastorala perspektiv har ofta åsidosatts i Ambrosiusforskningen, till förmån för mer dogmatiska och kyrko-historiska perspektiv.

Min avhandling har tre huvudkapitel, kapitel 3–5. I dessa visar jag hur jungfru Marias tre aspekter av jungfrulighet kan förstås inom ramen för Ambrosius utläggningar av trosbekännelsens tre huvudstycken, tron på Fadern, Sonen och Anden, som skapare, försonare och fulländare. En del i dessa tre kapitel är en kartläggning av den senantika förståelsen av naturlig sexualitet, konception, graviditet och födsel.

Avhandlingens kapitel ser ut som följer. Först kommer ett inledande introduktionskapitel, där en bakgrund till förståelsen av Maria inom olika traditioner och samfund, syfte, metod, frågeställningar samt tidigare forskning redovisas. I andra kapitlet tecknas grunddragen i Ambrosius mariologi. I en tidig text, *De virginibus*, finns en utförlig beskrivning av jungfru Maria (*De virginibus* II 2.6–18). Detta textavsnitt sammanfattar allt Ambrosius genom sitt liv skulle komma att predika om henne. I avsnittet om Maria i *De virginibus* återfinns tre mariologiska byggstenar: Mariologin är influerad av östlig teologi, främst Athanasius av Alexandria. Maria presenteras som ett exempel enligt senantik modell för biografi. Slutligen förstås Marias jungfrulighet, i tanke, ord och gärning, som ett fundamentalt karaktärsdrag hos henne.

I tredje kapitlet placerar jag Ambrosius förståelse av Marias jungfrulighet inom ramen för protologin, läran om skapelse och syndafall. Enligt 1 Mosebok 3:16 påverkade fallet kvinnans förlossning: *Med smärta skall du föda dina barn*. I protologin, utlagd som själavård, kan vi förstå läran om Marias jungfrulighet *in partu*. Hon är den andra Eva, som föder utan normalt värkarbete och smärta. Dock verkar inte Ambrosius varit främmande för att födelsen i Betlehem samtidigt var en, i någon mening, naturlig förlossning där Marias moderliv öppnades. Ambrosius ser i Kristi

födelse en upprättelse av moderskap och förlossning, bland annat med hänvisning till 1 Timoteusbrevet 2:15: *hon skall bli räddad genom sitt moderskap.*

I fjärde kapitlet placerar jag Ambrosius förkunnelse om Marias jungfrulighet vid Jesu konception inom ramen för kristologin. Allt som en man bidrar med vid en konception förstod Ambrosius som frånvarande vid konceptionen av Jesus. Jesu tillblivelse var ett under, en ny skapelse verkad av Den helige Ande. Detta skulle verka förundran och tro hos åhörarna. Tillväxten i Marias livmoder beskriver Ambrosius på ett sätt som ligger i linje med hans senantika syn på hur ett barn utvecklas under en graviditet. Maria bidrog, helt avgörande, på det sättet till Jesu mänsklighet.

I femte kapitlet placerar jag Ambrosius tanke om Marias ständiga jungfrulighet inom ramen för eskatologin. Ambrosius ägnade mycket möda åt att trösta sin församling i en tid när döden var påtagligt närvarande i den mänskliga vardagen. Dopet var ett eskatologiskt skeende, där den döpte ansågs dö från denna förgängliga värld för att uppstå till ett nytt, oförstörbart liv. Det gjorde varje kristens liv till ett liv för himmlandet. I detta perspektiv ska också Ambrosius starka uppmuntran till jungfrulighet och celibat förstås. Den vigda jungfrun var ett eskatologiskt tecken. Maria beskrivs av Ambrosius som en Kyrkans urbild (*typus ecclesiae*) och ständigt förblivande jungfru, för att uppmuntra församlingen till hopp och längtan efter den himmelska härligheten.

I sjätte kapitlet drar jag ihop trådarna och besvarar avhandlingens vetenskapliga frågor om hur Ambrosius pastoralt använder Marias ständiga jungfrulighet i sin förkunnelse. Det han presenterar för sina åhörare är det kristna dogmat och det ljuder i ett kulturellt sammanhang med en viss förståelse av sexualitet, konception, graviditet och födsel. I detta område, mellan dogma och kultur, presenterar Ambrosius Maria, i alla hennes tre aspekter av jungfrulighet, som ett exempel och en kvinna att identifiera sig med.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Overture

The topic of the present study is the perpetual virginity of Mary (*Maria semper virgo/Mariae virginitas perpetua*)¹ through the lens of Ambrose of Milan's (339–397) work as a pastoral theologian. In his pastoral care, Ambrose used, on the one hand, the Creed, with its content of Protology, Christology, and Eschatology, and, on the other hand, he addressed the congregation in a specific cultural context. This is, in short, the content and structure of my study.

There are two Mariological dogmas which count as Late Antique: Mary as birth-giver of God (*Theotokos/Dei Genitrix, Mater Dei*)² and Mary as ever a virgin (*aeiparthenos/ semper virgo*).³ Ambrose decisively contributed to the Latin formulation of both. In his theological thinking, we are at the source of a distinct Western Mariology. English Catholic theologian Tina Beattie (1955–) writes:

[...] the most significant early Latin writings on Mary are those of Ambrose (339–97), Bishop of Milan, who had studied the Greek Fathers and had a formative influence on the development of Western Mariology, including being the first to associate Mary with the Church.⁴

More examples of scholars demonstrating this are the German Church historian, Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930),⁵ the German-English theologian, Hilda Graef (1907–1970),⁶ the Yale professor in Church

¹ For discussion and definitions of *semper virgo* and *virginitas perpetua*, see Chapter 1.9: *Definitions of terms*.

² Trans. *Theotokos* as Birthgiver of God, Peltomaa 2000, 38.

³ *Maria semper virgo* and *Theotokos* are the two Late Antique Mariological dogmas. The celebration of *Assumptio Mariae* has its roots in Late Antiquity. It was dogmatized in the Catholic Church in 1950. For a historical investigation of *Assumptio Mariae*, see Shoemaker 2016. Also, it might be possible to trace the roots of the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception, *Conceptio immaculata*, to Late Antiquity, see Chapter 5.4.2: *Mary as an Eschatological Sign* of the present study. Mary was among the patristic theologians in Late Antiquity called immaculate, but it is unclear from which moment in her life this originated. *Conceptio immaculata* was dogmatized in the Catholic Church in 1854.

⁴ Beattie 2007, 79.

⁵ Von Harnack writes in his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*: "Speziell Ambrosius, der auf Augustin so stark eingewirkt hat, ist als Patron der Marienverehrung zu nennen". Harnack 1888, 451.

⁶ In Graef's influential book on Mariology *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Ambrose is described as being (for the Western part of the Church) "a Doctor of the Church who gave its Mariology its decisive direction". Graef 2009, 60.

History, Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006),⁷ and the Italian Catholic Marianist priest, Luigi Gambero (1930–2013).⁸ The ideas Ambrose implemented in the Latin theology were Mary as a type of the Church (*typus ecclesiae*), Mary as a subject of cult (at least in the hymns), a stress on her perpetual virginity, the title *Mater Dei*, and a new accent on her as a symbol and an example of a life devoted to God.

There are two basic academic areas met in this study: Mariology and Ambrose of Milan's life and work. Both areas are academically extensive, to say the least. Mariology, in terms of the width of discussion and the plethora of volumes written on it, is unmanageable and impossible for anyone to fully embrace. It is equally difficult to master in full the volumes written on Ambrose and his times. Nonetheless, I hope my study will be a valuable contribution to both Mariological and Ambrosian research.

The structure of the first chapter is as follows. Firstly, in Chapter 1.2: *The perpetual virginity of Mary: A survey on confessional views*, I give a general overview of different confessional views on the concept of Mary's virginity. In the next section, Chapter 1.3: *Ambrose: Bishop in Milan*, I introduce Ambrose as bishop and pastoral theologian. The section which follows, Chapter 1.4: *Previous research*, is a presentation of the current state of research. Only after that quite lengthy introduction do I present the purpose and method of my own study, starting in Chapter 1.5: *More precise definition of the task*. If the reader would like to read the purpose and method of the study immediately, therefore, he or she must refer to Chapter 1.5 and start reading from there. In Chapter 1.6: *Methodological considerations*, I present the method used in the study, while Ambrose's main writings, on which this study is built, are presented in Chapter 1.7: Finally, Chapter 1.8: *Disposition* is a presentation of the disposition of the whole study, and the most important terms in the study are subsequently defined in 1.9: *Definitions of terms*.

1.2. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary: A Survey on Confessional Views

I studied for one year at Eberhart Karls Universität, Tübingen, in 2005–06, and attended professor Christoph Schwöbel's (1955–) lectures *Dogmatik im Grundriß*. Schwöbel pointed at three arenas which the

⁷ Pelikan writes in his book *Mary Through the Centuries*: "Ambrose of Milan, [...] was, more than Augustine, a genuine *Doctor Marianus*, at least partly because of his strong dependence on the Greek Christian tradition". Pelikan 1996, 119.

⁸ In his collection of and commentary on patristic writings on Mary, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, Gambero writes: "In the writings of St. Ambrose, we find the first important Marian doctrine within Western Christianity". Gambero 1999, 189.

academic Systematic theology addresses: Academy (“Akademie”), Church (“Kirche”), and Society (“Gesellschaft”). The purpose of the present study is not only to offer an academic contribution to historical knowledge and perspectives but also address the Church, of different confessions, and society. In the section that follows, I will map the confessional views on Mary’s virginity. The purpose of this is to raise awareness of both the similarities and the differences which exist between the Christian traditions.

In his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint*, John Paul II lists the teaching about Mary as one area in need of fuller study before a consensus of faith can be achieved.⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan presents the question “What is the legitimate role of postbiblical tradition in Christian teaching?”¹⁰ Answers to this question differentiate traditions. A belief in the authority of post-biblical developments and definitions are presupposed in both Orthodox and Catholic Mariology.¹¹ In the present study I have found that Ambrose both offers common building stones for contemporary Mariology and also has an ecumenical potential. In his own times and after his death, Ambrose has functioned as a bridge between the East and the West.¹² Also, the growth of Marian interest in the twentieth century and an openness to reconsider certain Mariological aspects are ecumenically promising, and I will return to this subject in Chapter 6 *Conclusion*.¹³

⁹ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* 79. He writes about “areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved” and counts as the fifth “the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ’s disciples and for all humanity.”

¹⁰ Pelikan 1996, 4.

¹¹ Pius XII, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 46, 1954, 678. Pope Pius XII (1876–1958) declared that “those will err from the truth, who think they can adequately define and correctly explain the Blessed Virgin’s great dignity and sublimity from the Sacred Scriptures alone. It is only possible to explain the sacred words when considering the Catholic tradition and the teaching authority of the Church.” *At vehementer a veritate deerrat, qui se ex Sacris Scripturis tantummodo Beatissimae Virginis dignitatem ac sublimitatem plene definire recteque explicare posse censet, vel qui easdem Sacras Litteras apte explanari posse arbitratus “Traditionis” catholicae et Magisterii sacri non satis habita ratione.* The passage I have found thanks to Olivia Bengtsson.

¹² Chapter 2.2: *Ambrose’s Mariology of Eastern Origin*.

¹³ Mapping the contemporary ecumenical discussions on Virgin Mary is a subject I am not able to do justice in the present study. I will mention a few important works on Mary and Ecumenism. Exegetically, *Mary in the New Testament*, ed. R. E. Brown et al. 1978, is a noteworthy achievement. Protestant and Catholic New Testament scholars together have written in order to find common starting points. Another book is *Mary: Mother of God* which includes articles written by scholars of different denominations, ed. by R. W. Jenson and C. E. Braaten 2004. The Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has come a long way in establishing common Mariological ground, as shown, for example, in the document *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, 2004. This document points at paths for other Protestant denominations as well.

The tradition of Mary as perpetual virgin is very old.¹⁴ It was defended not only by Ambrose, but also by Origen (185–254), Athanasius (295–373), Gregory of Nyssa (335–394), Jerome (345–420), Augustine (354–430), and other Church Fathers. In the ecumenical Council of Constantinople of 553, the bishops declared it as correct to call Mary “ever a virgin” and “holy mother of God”.¹⁵ In 649, at the Lateran synod under pope Martin I, *Maria semper virgo* was explained as a dogma.¹⁶ In the fifth session, the synod defined Mary as virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus:

Chapter 3. If anyone does not acknowledge in accordance with the holy fathers, properly and truly, the holy, ever-virgin and immaculate Mary to be Theotokos, as having properly and truly at the end of the ages conceived from the Holy Spirit without seed and borne incorruptibly God the Word, born from God the Father before all ages, while her virginity remained intact even after the birth, let him stand condemned.¹⁷

The Latin terms ascribed to Mary in this passage are *semper virgo*, *immaculata*, and *Theotokos/Dei genitrix*. The conception is said to have occurred without seed (*absque semine*); the delivery without corruption (*incorruptibiliter eam genuisse*); and Mary’s whole life in celibacy is expressed as an indissoluble virginity (*indissolubilis virginitas*). These formulas from 649 are conciliar definitions of what was commonly believed in most Christian traditions at least up until the Enlightenment. The patristic formulas for Mary’s perpetual virginity created a common understanding about Mary which was followed long after the Reformation. Officially today, a belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity is a binding truth in the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, but amongst the Protestants it is rather ambivalently viewed. In the following section I

¹⁴ Exegetically the question of Mary’s lifelong virginity is an open question. The Greek word *adelphos* (Mark 3:31; 6:3 et al.) with its female equivalent *adelphē* (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:56) means not only biologically brother and sister, but also kinsman and relative. However, that statement does not prove the perpetual virginity of Mary. There are also passages in the infancy stories of Matthew and Luke that might point at Mary having more children than Jesus, e.g. Matthew 1:25 and Luke 2:7, which have been classical passages of objection against *Mariae virginitas perpetua*. All these passages were debated in the Ancient Church.

¹⁵ The terms *Maria semper virgo* and *Dei genitrix* occur both in the *Sententia adversus “Tria Capitula”*, and in the *Anathematismi adversus “Tria capitula”* 2, 6, 14. Text and trans. COD, 107–122.

¹⁶ The Lateran synod of 649 was a major occurrence in the monothelite controversy of the seventh century. The bishops gathered at the synod were in large part Italian, together with several Greek bishops. Most influential at the synod was Maximus Confessor, the leading dyothelete theologian. The original language of the synodal texts is most probably Greek. Price 2016 offers a translation of all the acts of the synod, accompanied with a thorough scholarly exposition and commentary of the context and content.

¹⁷ Lateran synod 649, Session V. Trans., notably from the Greek text, Price 2016, 377. The Latin and Greek texts and trans. are also to be found in DH 503.

briefly present how the perpetual virginity of Mary has been confessed, taught, and believed to be important in different Christian traditions.

1.2.1. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary in Catholic¹⁸ Tradition

The heritage of the Church Fathers is fundamental for the Catholic tradition, and in the Middle Ages Mary's perpetual virginity was regarded as a self-evident truth. The Reformation did not question the idea of *semper virgo*, and during the Reformation era, there were no strenuous efforts among the Catholic theologians to defend the dogma. In the papal constitution *Cum quorundam hominum* by Paul IV (1476–1559) in 1555, Mary is explained to have been a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus.¹⁹ Some years later, the Catechism of Trent was published. It presents the Catholic answer to the Reformation. Concerning the Virgin Mary, it states:

IV. As soon as the Blessed Virgin, assenting to the words of the angel [...] the most sacred body of Christ was immediately formed, and to it was united a soul actually enjoying the use of reason; and thus, in the same instant of time, he was perfect God and perfect man. [...] Christ was formed of the most pure blood of the immaculate Virgin, without any aid of man.²⁰ VII. [...] Jesus was not only conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, but was also brought forth and "born of the Virgin Mary".²¹ VIII. [...] Christ come forth from his mother's womb, without any injury to her maternal virginity, which, immaculate and perpetual, we celebrate with most just praises. This was the work of the Holy Ghost, who, in the conception and birth of the Son, so favoured the Mother, as to have imparted to her fecundity, and persevered her perpetual virginity.²²

During the twentieth century, many of the popes oriented themselves towards Mary. Pope Pius XII (1876–1958), in an apostolic constitution in 1950, defended the assumption of Mary to heaven (*assumptio Mariae*).²³ He also proclaimed one of his years in the pontificate, 1954, as a Marian year to commemorate the dogma of the Immaculate Conception from 1854. In 1967 Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) published the apostolic exhortation *Signum magnum* to commemorate the vision of Mary at Fatima, Portugal. Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) had *Totus tuus*, which

¹⁸ I use here the term Catholic as a definition for the Church under authoritative supervision of the pope in Rome. The term is difficult: Not only the Roman-Catholics define themselves as Catholic. Another difficulty is that in the Roman-Catholic Church, the Roman is the largest, but not the only rite among the Churches in communion with Rome. Examples of Eastern Catholics in communion with the pope are Chaldeans and Maronites.

¹⁹ Pius V, *Cum quorundam hominum*, quoted in DH 1880. *Semper in virginitatis integritate, ante partum scilicet, in partu, et perpetuo post partum.*

²⁰ *Catechismus Romanus ex decreto concilii Tridentini*. I.IV. Quaestio IV.

²¹ *Catechismus Romanus ex decreto concilii Tridentini*. I.IV. Quaestio VII.

²² *Catechismus Romanus ex decreto concilii Tridentini*. I.IV. Quaestio VIII.

²³ DH 3900–3904.

was a consecration to the Virgin Mary, as apostolic motto, and in 1987 he proclaimed a second Marian year. He emphasised the dogmatic truth of the perpetual virginity of Mary.²⁴ John Paul II also initiated an up-to-date catechism of the contemporary Catholic Church, which appeared in 1992.

In that catechism, Mary is believed as having a

real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it."²⁵ [...] And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as Aeiparthenos, the "Ever-virgin".²⁶

In the catechism, the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Bible are explained as "sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ."²⁷ In the conclusion of the passage on Mary, a Christmas sermon of Augustine is quoted: "she remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin".²⁸

Noteworthy is the way in which Joseph Ratzinger/ later pope Benedict XVI (1927–) explains the virgin birth. In the first edition of his *Einführung in das Christentum*, published in 1968, Ratzinger writes that Jesus divine sonship does not in itself exclude an origin in a normal marriage.

Die Lehre vom Gottsein Jesu würde nicht angetastet, wenn Jesus aus einer normalen menschlichen Ehe hervorgegangen wäre. Denn die Gottesohnschaft [...] ist kein biologisches, sondern ein ontologisches Faktum.²⁹

This has been cited as a possible denial of a biological interpretation of the virginal birth.³⁰ In a later treatise, in an English translation entitled *Daughter Zion: Meditations of the Church's Marian Beliefs*, Ratzinger refutes this interpretation:

I wanted only to emphasize very clearly the distinction of biological and ontological levels of thought and to clarify that the ontological statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon are not as such identical with the statements about the virgin birth.³¹

²⁴ John Paul II emphasised that Christology must be regarded as starting point for Mariology. The virginity of Mary is derived from the divinity of the Son, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 85, 1993, quoted in Hauke 2005, 125.

²⁵ This quotation is taken from *De ecclesia* VIII.57 in the *Concilium Vaticanum II*. Text and trans. COD. As supporting text Ambrose's *De institutione virginis* is mentioned in a note.

²⁶ *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae secundum SS Ioannem Paulum II*, 499.

²⁷ *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae secundum SS Ioannem Paulum II*, 500.

²⁸ *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae secundum SS Ioannem Paulum II*, 510. The quotation from Augustine is in the original: *Concipiens virgo, pariens virgo, virgo gravida, virgo feta, virgo perpetua*, *Sermo* 186, PL 38.

²⁹ Ratzinger 1968, 225.

³⁰ Emmenegger, 2014, 257–258, has not noticed that Ratzinger later modified his text from 1968.

³¹ Ratzinger 1983, 51. The German original was published 1977, nine years after *Einführung in das Christentum*.

In the same context, Ratzinger argues against theologians, even Catholic ones, who contest and abandon the biology and the historicity of the virginal birth.³² Ratzinger lists three reasons why the virginal birth is dogmatically important: 1) God is in Christ the working power, it states a new beginning. 2) It shows that Jesus is more than a prophet, the “Son”, whose being as such is the fruit of the Spirit. 3) Christ, who as the Son, has an intimate relation to the divine Father, could not possibly have had a second, human father.³³

Gerhard Ludwig Müller (1947–), a Roman-Catholic cardinal and former prefect of the Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, has published a Catholic dogmatic treatise, *Katholische Dogmatik*, where he writes:

Zu dieser Aussage der Jungfräulichkeit vor der Geburt (virginitas ante partum) kommt die Lehre hinzu, daß Maria als Jungfrau ihren Sohn geboren hat (virginitas in partu) und auch nach dem Geburt Christi bis zum Ende ihres Lebens jungfräulich gelebt hat (virginitas post partum).³⁴

According to Müller, the concepts of virginity and “Mother of God” are not merely biographical notes about what happened to Mary in her life, but also include a specific relation to God, the very form of her life. He cites two biblical quotations, Matthew 19:12 and 1 Corinthians 7:25–38, to show that a life of virginity along with marriage is a biblical way of living a genuine Christian life. He writes:

Der Einzigartigkeit dieser Empfängnis und Geburt entspricht auch die Einzigartigkeit der Beziehung Marias auf Gott. Die jungfräuliche Gottesmutterchaft ist somit die personale Mitte dieser Gottesbeziehung und der Realisierung ihres Lebens. [...] Basis der Argumentation ist nicht eine leibfeindliche Askese, sondern der Gedanke der ganzheitlichen Inanspruchnahme Marias für das Reich Gottes. Hier zeigt sich, daß die christliche Gestalt jungfräulichen Lebens nicht im Gegensatz steht zum christlichen Verständnis der Ehe oder gar einer schöpfungfeindlichen gnostisch-manichäischen Askese verfallen ist, die vom Motiv einer Befreiung des höheren geistigen Lebens aus den niederen Mächten der Materie und der Sexualität gespeist wird. Christlichen Jungfräulichkeit erwächst vielmehr aus einem ganzheitlich personalen Akt des Glaubens und der Liebe sowie der Hingabebereitschaft zum Dienst. [...] Ihre Jungfräulichkeit prägt die Gestalt ihrer Ehe mit Josef.³⁵

As is clear from this quotation, and it is an example of a greater tendency, Müller as a Catholic theologian in the twentieth century, distances himself from diminishing the value of matrimony in relation to virginity. Müller

³² Ratzinger 1983, 52.

³³ Ratzinger 1983, 47–52.

³⁴ Müller 2005, 479–480.

³⁵ Müller 2005, 500.

understands the meaning of Mary's perpetual virginity as a consecration for God alone.

In the twentieth century, the interpretation of *virgo in partu* was debated among Catholic theologians.³⁶ Renowned and famous theologians such as Karl Rahner (1904–1984) and Walter Kasper (1933–) problematised and re-interpreted the doctrine. Rahner writes in a short treatise that the Catholic Church must teach a virginity *in partu* but should not try to explain in detail what is meant. He pleads in the same text for a holistic understanding of Mary:

Die active Geburt [...] ist [...] ein *ganzmenschlicher* Akt, der darum in der weise, in der er gesetzt, erlitten und erfahren wird, die Ganzheit der betreffenden menschlichen Person aussagt. [...] die aktive Geburt entspricht bei Maria ihrem Wesen.³⁷

Kasper, also interested in re-interpreting the virginity during the birth, writes in an article that:

It was not the physiological event of birth that was different; rather, the Virgin Birth was a sign of man's being saved and healed through a personal cooperation.³⁸

Lastly, a fair review of Catholic belief in *semper virgo* must also include some notions from the liturgy. In the daily prayers of the Catholic Church (*Liturgia horarum*) the Virgin Mary is named every day, and her *Magnificat* is sung at every Vesper. Examples of titles given to Mary include *virgo gloriosa*, *beata Maria*, and *virgo beata*. Calls for her intercession are also included in the prayers, as found for example in the hymns *Sub tuum praesidium* and *Salve, Regina*.³⁹ In the Catholic mass Mary is also frequently mentioned with terms such as *immaculata*, *intacta*, *purissima*, and *virgo virginum*,⁴⁰ reminding the believer of Mary's virginity. A private devotional prayer is saying the Rosary, a practice which is widely spread throughout the Catholic world. The Rosary gives Mary a permanent presence in the everyday life of the user.⁴¹

³⁶ For an overview of the twentieth century discussions in the Catholic Church about *virgo in partu*, with more names and deeper analysis, see the article of Hauke 2007.

³⁷ Rahner 1966, 196–197.

³⁸ Kasper 1988, 265.

³⁹ For a complete index of Mary in the *Liturgia horarum*: Nebel 2007, 195–207.

⁴⁰ Nebel 2007, 218.

⁴¹ *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.* Another beloved Mariological prayer/poem is *Stabat mater*. It is a meditation on the compassionate Mary. Its origin is uncertain, but was probably written in the 13th century. It has been an attractive text for many composers, for example Pergolesi, Haydn, and Verdi. Pelikan treats the *Stabat mater* in Pelikan 1996, 125–136.

1.2.2. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary in Orthodox⁴² Tradition

Even if it is perhaps expressed in too simple terms, Orthodox theology is less dogmatic and more liturgic than the Catholic.⁴³ Professor Mary Cunningham clarifies in her book *Gateway of Life* that Orthodox teaching is generally to be found in the liturgical texts by “means of poetic imagery and typology”.⁴⁴ She writes that modern Orthodox Marian studies, as opposed to Western dogmatic or historical approaches, “are usually framed in a devotional, rather than systematic, form of discourse”.⁴⁵ Such manner of expressing dogmatic truths is characteristic of the Orthodox tradition. A search for the Orthodox dogma must consequently be done in the hymns and prayers of the Orthodox worship, mostly composed by the Fathers of the Church.⁴⁶

The belief in Mary as ever a virgin is not a subject of dispute in the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy shares the same testimony of the fathers (*testimonium patrum*) as the Western Church, a testimony which by the time of the great division 1054 unanimously supported the eternal virginity of Mary. Cunningham writes that the Orthodox veneration of Mary is based on two aspects belonging to the incarnation: 1) “God entered the world as the Incarnate Son with the assent and cooperation of this young girl”, and 2) “he also took his human flesh, or physical nature, from her alone.”⁴⁷ One difference compared to the Catholic tradition is that the Orthodox tradition has, other than accepting the title *Theotokos* at the council of Ephesus 431, and Mary as ever a virgin in Constantinople 533, not made any dogmatic statements about the Virgin Mary.⁴⁸ According to the Orthodox theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907–2005), the Orthodox Church “prefers to teach and initiate the faithful progressively to this mystery by using the images and symbols of liturgical poetry rather than the restricting conceptual approach”.⁴⁹

⁴² The term Orthodox is, similarly as the term Catholic, difficult. For example, the Lutheran tradition in the seventeenth century is called the Lutheran Orthodoxy. Today there are several Church bodies named Orthodox, such as Russian- Greek- Romanian- etc.- Orthodox. I here simply define Orthodox as a term for those in communion with any of the East-Orthodox patriarchs.

⁴³ Jaroslav Pelikan writes about the Eastern Orthodox tradition in comparison to the Western Catholic, that it “makes a recurring address to Mary the Mother of God a more integral component of the central Eucharistic Liturgy itself”, Pelikan 2004, 3.

⁴⁴ Cunningham 2015, 125.

⁴⁵ Cunningham 2015, 154.

⁴⁶ Pelikan deals grammatically in an article with the Virgin Mary *Theotokos* in the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom. The title of his article is a fine polemic against Protestant theology: ‘Most Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Liturgy’, Pelikan 2004, 1–18.

⁴⁷ Cunningham 2015, 149.

⁴⁸ Behr-Sigel 1991, 209–216; Cunningham 2015, 173.

⁴⁹ Behr-Sigel 1991, 214.

The theme of the holy Virgin Mary who gave birth to God is returned to again and again in the Orthodox liturgy. In the different hymns and prayers, she is called “All-Holy Virgin” and “Mother of God”. An influential and beloved hymn, *The Akathistos hymn* (from the Greek word *akathistos* “not sitting”), is a poem that is sometimes ascribed to Romanos Melodos (d. 560).⁵⁰ Whoever the original author was, the hymn is an important witness to Orthodox Mariology, and is sung in the Greek Church on the fifth Sunday of Lent.⁵¹ According to the Finnish scholar Leena Mari Peltomaa the poem is “generally regarded as a fundamental text of Mariology”⁵², and “a living part of the liturgical tradition of the Church”.⁵³

7. A new creation has the Creator revealed, / manifesting himself to us, his creatures. / From the seedless womb he came, / preserving it chaste as it was before, / so that, beholding the miracle, we might sing her praises, crying: / Hail, flower of incorruption; / Hail, crown of continence; / [...] Hail to you who show forth the life of the angels; / [...] Hail, bride unwedded.⁵⁴

9. Wordy orators we see dumb as the fishes / in your presence, o Theotokos. / They are at loss to say how you remained virgin / and yet had power to bear a child, / but we, marvelling at the mystery, cry aloud with faith: / Hail, vessel of the wisdom of God; / Hail, treasure of his providence;⁵⁵

In the hymn Mary is also spoken to as “O virgin Theotokos” (*ho Theotokos parthenos*), and “pillar of virginity” (*hē stēlē tēs partheneias*).⁵⁶ The chief character in the hymn is not Christ but Mary. Half of text consists of salutations to her (beginning with *chaire*), and the mystery of the virgin womb is mentioned in almost every strophe.

In the Orthodox tradition the brothers of Jesus mentioned in the Gospel are most commonly explained as Joseph’s children from an earlier marriage. The Russian Orthodox bishop Hilarion Alfeyev (1966–) writes about the Orthodox view of Mary’s virginity and explains the brothers in the following way:

The Orthodox Church glorifies the Mother of God as ever-virgin. This term was upheld by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 533 and emphasizes the virginity of the Mother of God before, during and after Christ’s birth. Christ’s ‘brothers’, mentioned in Matthew 3:3, are

⁵⁰ Graef wrote in 1963 that according to “the almost unanimous opinion of modern scholars Romanos is also the author”, Graef 2009, 99. The issue is analysed and discussed by Peltomaa. Her conclusion is that “the hymn is anonymous”, but must have been written before 451, Peltomaa 2000, 29–30.

⁵¹ Graef 2009, 100.

⁵² Peltomaa 2000, the quotation is found in the preface.

⁵³ Peltomaa 2000, 2.

⁵⁴ *The Akathistos hymn*, ikos 7. Trans. Peltomaa 2000.

⁵⁵ *The Akathistos hymn*, ikos 9. Trans. Peltomaa 2000.

⁵⁶ *The Akathistos hymn*, ikos 10. Trans. Peltomaa 2000.

regarded by the Church tradition to be the sons of Joseph from his first marriage. She is also called Most Holy, Most Pure and Immaculate.⁵⁷

The understood importance in this matter among Orthodox theologians is shown in the treatise *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, written by the Russian Orthodox Archbishop John Maximovitch (1896–1966). He found it necessary to devote some pages in this short text on refuting the fourth century Helvidius, who believed Mary had biological sons and daughters. In the context, Maximovitch also writes as self-evident that Mary had taken a vow of virginity even before the Annunciation.⁵⁸

So, why is the virgin birth considered important in Orthodox theology? The Greek Orthodox bishop Kallistos Ware (1934–) answers this question in the book *The Orthodox Way* in three points: 1) The virgin birth is a sign of the uniqueness of Christ, he is truly man but not only man, immanent and also transcendent. 2) The virgin birth shows that the incarnation was a direct work of God. 3) The virgin birth shows that the incarnation did not involve the coming of a new person, in opposition to a normal conception where a new person begins to exist.⁵⁹

Traditional iconography must also be noted in any exposition of Orthodox theology. The message of the icon is a significant part of the Orthodox faith. In Marian icons the mother of God is often depicted with three stars, or sometimes crosses. These signs symbolise Mary's virginity before, during, and after the birth.⁶⁰ This symbolism shows in all clarity the naturalness of the belief in Mary as ever a virgin in the Orthodox tradition.

Lastly, the Russian Orthodox priest and professor at Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), has written about the Orthodox veneration of Mary in polemic to the Protestants. This text also shows a liturgical approach to Mariology that is significant for the Orthodox theology:

The Orthodox church venerates the Virgin Mary as “more honorable than the cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim,” as superior to all created beings. The church sees in her the Mother of God, who, without being a substitute for the one Mediator, intercedes before her Son for all humanity. We ceaselessly pray to her to intercede for us. Love and veneration of the Virgin is the soul of Orthodox piety, its heart, that which warms and animates its entire

⁵⁷ Alfejev 2002, 109. Alfeyev has mistakenly written Matthew 3:3 as biblical example text. The passages in the Bible mentioning brothers and sisters of Jesus are Matthew 12:46–47, 13:55–56; Mark 3:31–32, 6:3; Luke 8:19–20; John 2:12, 7:3–5; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5.

⁵⁸ In Chapter 3, *Attempts of Jews and Heretics to Dishonor the Ever-Virginity of Mary*, Maximovitch 2017, 29–33.

⁵⁹ Ware 1995, 76–77.

⁶⁰ Schöldstein regards the interpretation of the cross as symbolising Mary as virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ as a “strong tradition”. Schöldstein 2011, 28–29.

body. A faith in Christ which does not include his virgin birth and the veneration of his mother is another faith, another Christianity from that of the Orthodox church. Protestantism is this other sort of Christianity, with its strange and deeply rooted lack of feeling for the Mother of God, a condition which dates from the Reformation. In this lack of veneration for the Virgin, Protestantism differs in almost equal measure from both Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Hence even the Protestant comprehension of the incarnation loses some of its fullness and power.⁶¹

1.2.3. The Perpetual Virginité of Mary in Protestant⁶² Tradition

Among Protestant theologians in the sixteenth century there was a common agreement on Mary's perpetual virginité in line with the medieval tradition. Gerhard Müller writes that the reformers embraced the patristic Mariological dogmas, and that later developments were under no debate.⁶³ Müller is not altogether accurate here. Even in the 1520s Martin Luther did endure retaining the medieval Marian feasts in the liturgical year, including the *Assumptio Mariae*, but he did so hesitantly, criticising non-scriptural Marian beliefs as being outside of our possible knowledge.⁶⁴ Luther's main Mariological remark was, in the German Protestant scholar and pastor Horst Gorski's (1957-) words, that "Maria den Blick für Christus nicht verstellen darf".⁶⁵ With regard to *Maria semper virgo* and *Theotokos*, however, Müller is right: the Reformation did not break with these dogmas. This brief overview starts in the Confessional texts of the sixteenth century. Due to this study's Finnish-Swedish context, it is delimited foremost to include Lutheran theologians.

In 1537 Martin Luther (1483–1546) published the Confessional text *Die Schmalkaldische Artikel*. In the text the term *semper virgo*, with its Marian belief, is present. *Die Schmalkaldische Artikel* is written in two versions, one in Latin and one in German, and there is a difference between the versions. The Latin explicitly says *semper virgo*, while its linguistic equivalent is not found in the German version.

Daß der Sohn sei also Mensch worden, daß er vom heiligen Geist ohn menschlich Zutun empfangen und von der reinen, heiligen Jungfrau Maria geporn sei.

⁶¹ Bulgakov 1995, 66.

⁶² The term Protestant is not a very fortunate term. In German one has the term "evangelisch", which is precise, but not possible to translate in English (the term evangelical is something else). In lack of a better term, I use the term Protestant in my text, and mean those Church denominations which track their beginnings in the sixteenth century Reformation.

⁶³ "Die Dogmen von 1854 und 1950 standen damals nicht zur Debatte." Müller 2005, 482.

⁶⁴ Luther, *Von Ordnung Gottesdienst in der Gemeinde*, 1523, quoted in Gorski 1987, 79–80. Luther's preaching on the different Marian feasts is analysed in Gorski 1987, 70–83.

⁶⁵ Gorski 1987, 80.

*Filius ita factus est homo, ut a spiritu sancto sine virile opera conciperetur et ex Maria pura, sancta, semper virgine nasceretur.*⁶⁶

Luther calls Mary pure (rein/*pura*), holy (heilig/*sancta*) and perpetual virgin (Jungfrau/ *semper virgo*). It is noteworthy that in this historical situation of confessional controversy, the passage in *Die Schmalkaldische Artikel* ends with stating that on these subjects no disagreement exists between the conflicting parts.

Another writing of Lutheran Confessional texts, *Die Konkordienformel*, also mentions the perpetual virginity of Mary. It was first written in German by a group of Lutheran scholars in 1577. It was later prepared as an official Latin translation, *Solida declaratio*, and published for a second time in 1584. Noteworthy in the following passage is that the title *Theotokos* is incorporated in the Latin version:

Welcher seine göttliche Majestat auch in Mutterleibe erzeiget, dass er von einer Jungfrauen unvorletzt ihrer Jungfrauschaft geboren; darumb sie wahrhaftig Gottes Mutter und gleichwohl eine Jungfrau geblieben ist.

*Is filius Dei etiam in utero matris divinam suam maiestatem demonstravit, quod de virgine inviolata ipsius virginitate natus est. Unde et vere Θεοτόκος, Dei genetrix, est, et tamen virgo mansit.*⁶⁷

The idea of Mary *semper virgo* is given a theological significance in the passage. The purpose of Mary's virginity is said to demonstrate the Son of God's divine majesty. Therefore, Christ is believed to have been born of a virgin, with an inviolate virginity (unvorletzt Jungfrauschaft/*virginitas inviolata*). She is both the birth-giver of God and the mother of God (Gottes Mutter/*Theotokos/Dei genetrix*), and she remained a virgin (Jungfrau geblieben ist/*virgo mansit*). These three expressions show that the Lutheran Reformers perpetuated the Latin patristic tradition. The three Marian statements reflect the above-mentioned Lateran Council 649. The terms are slightly different: At the Lateran council Mary is called *immaculata Maria, Dei genetrix* and *semper virgo*, in *Die Konkordienformel* the terms *virginitas inviolata, Theotokos/Dei genetrix* and *virgo mansit* are used. The expressions are not verbatim but nonetheless have the same content. The close correlation to the Lateran council makes a belief in *virgo in partu* probable. The sentence "he is born of a virgin who herself was inviolate regarding her virginity" (von einer Jungfrauen unvorletzt ihrer Jungfrauschaft geboren/*de virgine inviolata ipsius virginitate natus est*) in *Die Konkordienformel* might be a passing note on of the belief in a virginal birth, *virginitas in partu*. Whether it is conscious, or unconscious, is impossible to say.

In Finland and Sweden, which up to 1809 was one country, the seventeenth century was theologically characterised by Lutheran

⁶⁶ *Schmalkaldische Artikel* 1.4, BELK.

⁶⁷ *Solida declaratio VIII De persona Christi* 24, BELK.

Orthodoxy.⁶⁸ The official catechetical exposition of the Lutheran Orthodoxy for the Church of Sweden and Finland, *Swebilii katekes*, was published in 1689. Olaus Swebilius (1624–1700) was appointed archbishop in the diocese of Uppsala in 1681. In his Catechism, Mary's perpetual virginity was still a prerequisite. On the question "By whom is Christ born?" the answer was "Of Virgin Mary, who was, both before and after the begetting a virgin."⁶⁹ In 1878 *Swebilii katekes* was replaced in Sweden by the *1878 års katekesutveckling*, in which Mary's perpetual virginity was neither denied nor affirmed. It seems that in the seventeenth century the enduring virginity of Mary was still taken for granted but 200 years later on the idea had lost its significance in the Lutheran academies of Sweden.

Another example of the belief in *Maria semper virgo* in Lutheran Spirituality is found in the German pietistic theologian Johan Jakob Rambach's (1693–1735) meditations on the passion of Christ, *Das Leiden Jesu Christi*. This devotional text was translated and widely spread in Sweden. It has been reprinted many times, also in the twentieth century. In the meditations, Rambach presupposes that Jesus was Mary's only child. Meditating the word "Mother, see your son", he writes "Mary had most probably lost her husband, Joseph already. Now she faced the misery of losing her son. Without doubting she thought: Who will henceforth take care of me, poor and defenceless woman?"⁷⁰

In contemporary Protestantism different views on Mary's virginity can be found, but *semper virgo* seems often to be denied.⁷¹ There is a tension between modern Lutheran views and early Lutheranism on this issue. The belief in *Maria semper virgo* gradually lost its significance sometime between the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy and modern times.

The German American theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) represents a rather anti-Catholic Mariology in his *Systematische Theologie*.⁷² In the first volume of the work he writes that "Dem Protestanten offenbart die Jungfrau Maria nichts".⁷³ In the third volume Tillich mentions Mary three times, each time with a warning. He sees a risk of polytheism in the

⁶⁸ For a more detailed review of the Virgin Mary in Swedish liturgies, devotions, and prayers from the Reformation through the centuries, see Brodd-Härdelin 1994, 587–1043.

⁶⁹ Herbertsson, 2017, 114. English trans. mine. The original text in Swedish: "Af hwem är han född? Af Jungfru Maria, som war, både före och effter Födelsen Jungfru."

⁷⁰ Rambach 1935, 242. English trans. mine.

⁷¹ In 1929 Hugo Koch wrote: "[...] auf protestantischer Seite mit verschwindenden Ausnahmen überzeugt, daß Maria sowohl nach den Angaben des Schrift wie nach den ältesten kirchlichen Zeugnissen zum mindesten nach der Geburt Jesu in vollzogener Ehe mit Josef gelebt und ihm Söhne und Töchter geboren habe". Koch 1929, 1.

⁷² The three volumes were written and published in English in 1951, 1957 and 1963 respectively as *Systematic Theology*, but according to the front page in the German edition, the translation was corrected and in minor passages even revised by Tillich himself.

⁷³ Tillich 1956, 154.

devotion to Virgin Mary.⁷⁴ Further, he warns against every object of worship except God.⁷⁵ He turns against the Mariological development in the Catholic Church, and gives a warning of the danger of either replacing the Holy Spirit with the Virgin Mary, or as he writes, of making “die Trinität zur Quaternität”.⁷⁶ This is actually an exhaustive survey of the mentions about Mary in *Systematische Theologie*. In Tillich’s systematic theology Mary as virgin is given no theological significance.

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014) was a Lutheran theologian who had a great impact on the Lutheranism of the twentieth century. Mary plays a minor role in Pannenberg’s *Systematische Theologie*, published between 1988–1993. Seen throughout the whole work, Mary is only sparingly mentioned. Most noteworthy is that in the third volume, primarily handling ecclesiology, Mary’s name is not found at all. Mary is not ascribed a role for herself in Pannenberg’s theology, which differs from his Orthodox and Catholic colleagues. Pannenberg does not develop any thoughts about Mary’s life span, nor her virtues or character. No point is made of her virginity *per se*. In the second volume, chapters 9–11, concerning Christology, Pannenberg writes the following:

Aus der Kraft des Geistes ist er /Jesus Christus/ schon von Geburt an der Sohn Gottes. Das vor allem will die lukanische Erzählung von der Geistgeburt Jesu Christi sagen. Nur um dieser christologischen Pointe willen wendet sich die Erzählung der Gestalt Marias, der Mutter Jesu, zu. Weil Jesus Christus in Person und darum schon von Geburt an der Gottessohn ist, darum wird Maria mit Recht als “Gottesmutter” geehrt. Darum hat auch das Konzil von Ephesos 431 mit Recht in diesem Sinne entschieden (DS 251). In diesem einzigen ökumenisch verbindlich gewordene Lehraussage der Kirche über Maria galt das Interesse (im Unterschied zu den römisch-katholischen Mariendogmen von 1854 und 1950) nicht der Person Marias für sich, sondern der Sicherung des Glaubens an die Inkarnation des Gottessohnes.⁷⁷

Pannenberg understands the incarnation as a question of pneumatology, and its main character is Christ. Pannenberg quotes the reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1926–), that the incarnation is “nicht um eine Frage der Gynäkologie, sondern um ein Thema christlicher Pneumatologie”.⁷⁸ According to Pannenberg, the Biblical narrative of the virginal birth is due to its legendary character, and its meaning comes not from the historical facticity, but rather is found in what it christologically says about the Son of God in the human being Jesus.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Tillich 1966, 217.

⁷⁵ Tillich 1966, 331.

⁷⁶ Tillich 1966, 335.

⁷⁷ Pannenberg 1991, 358–359.

⁷⁸ Pannenberg 1991, 359.

⁷⁹ Pannenberg 1991, 358–360.

Robert W. Jenson (1930–2017) was an ecumenically orientated Lutheran theologian. His last academic position was at the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology at Princeton University. His *Systematic Theology* was published in two volumes in 1997–1999. This work is characterised by a toning down of Lutheran confessionalism, and an always present dialogue with Catholic and Orthodox theology. In the *Preface* of the work, Jenson emphasises that theology is the enterprise of the one and only Church of the creeds. He questions whether there can be confessional theology at all: “theology may be impossible in the situation of a divided church”.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Jenson wrote his work, but as a way of “doing theology for the one church”.⁸¹ I thus understand the addressees of the work as the future unified Church which Jenson hopes for. Thus, Jenson in some cases takes traditionally Catholic or Orthodox positions on different issues.⁸²

Jenson is the only modern Lutheran theologian here presented who treats Mariology as a subject on its own. He does so in context of Ecclesiology, probably consciously in accordance with the second Vatican Council.⁸³ The perpetual virginity of Mary is not mentioned throughout Jenson’s *Systematic Theology*, there is nothing to be found about a virginal birth of Christ (*in partu*), and nothing about the continuing relation between Joseph and Mary. Jenson is solely interested in the theological significance of Mary’s virginity before the birth of Christ. As previously mentioned, Ratzinger, Moltmann, and Pannenberg do this too, and Jenson differs between a gynaecological meaning of Mary’s virgin birth on one hand, and a theological meaning on the other. In comparison to the empty tomb after the resurrection, Jenson still “less hesitantly affirms Mary’s gynaecological virginity”.⁸⁴ Two considerations lead Jenson to state this. First, he sees it as being in line with the old creedal tradition, and second, he sees the saying of John 1:13, that Jesus was born *not by the will of man*, as decisive on the subject. Theologically, according to Jenson, the virgin birth is an event “that can be understood only within the total plot of God’s history with us”.⁸⁵ The theological significance of the virgin birth is to demonstrate that *God* is at work in Christ, and the incarnation is according to the divine will.

⁸⁰ Jenson 1997, vii.

⁸¹ Jenson 1997, viii.

⁸² One example is the question of invoking the saints. The *Apology* of the *Augsburg Confession* affirms that the saints pray for the Church but on the other hand denies the knowledge of a metaphysical connection between the living and the dead. It is a metaphysic which unables any invocation to the saints. *Apologia Confessionis Augustanae* 21, BELK. Jenson argues against the *Apology* that in the communion in Christ, that is the Church, it is possible to address him through the saints. Jenson 1999, 267–269.

⁸³ Jenson 1999, 200–204.

⁸⁴ Jenson 1999, 201.

⁸⁵ Jenson 1999, 200.

To this brief review on Protestant belief in *semper virgo* one must also mention a tendency towards a Marian return, at least in the Finnish-Swedish context. This tendency is affirmed by the headings under which the different lectures sampled in the two volumes *Maria i Sverige under tusen år* (*Mary in Sweden for thousand years*), edited by the Uppsala professors Sven-Erik Brodd (1949–) and Alf Härdelin (1927–2014) are sorted. They have gathered the first group of articles around the advent of Mary, an era beginning with the Christian mission of Ansgar in the ninth century. This is followed by an era where Marian devotion and belief thrived, i.e. in the high Middle Ages. The third era used is that of the Reformation, which resulted in a gradual decline of Marian beliefs and devotions. The last heading in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år* points to a return of the Virgin Mary in contemporary belief and practice.⁸⁶

1.3. Ambrose: Bishop of Milan

1.3.1. Ambrose's Life in Summary

I now introduce the main theologian of the present study: Ambrose Aurelius, bishop of Milan.⁸⁷ He was born in *Augusta Treverorum*,⁸⁸ modern day Trier, either in 333/334 or 339.⁸⁹ His father was prefect of Gaul, *praefectus praetorio Galliarum*, at the time of his birth. Gaul was a huge area, including modern day's Germany, Spain, and France. Trier was its provincial capital. After his father's death, Ambrose's mother and her three children moved to Rome. The family was of Roman nobility and

⁸⁶ The four headings are 1) Marias ankomst (Advent of Mary), 2) Marias blomstringstid (Thriving of Mary), 3) Marias tillbakaträngande (Retirement of Mary), 4) Marias återkomst (Return of Mary), Brodd-Härdelin 1994.

⁸⁷ The primary sources to Ambrose's life are foremost his own texts and the *Vita Ambrosii* of Paulinus. Neill McLynn regards Ambrose as a secretive author: "For all his fame, Ambrose is strangely inaccessible", McLynn 1994, xiii. Nevertheless, Ambrose reveals many notions about himself in his own writings, in his letters and other texts. Other Christian authors, such as Augustine, Jerome, and Rufinus, contribute with information. There is also information about Ambrose in the antique Church histories of Theodoret, Socrates and Sozomenos.

⁸⁸ The majority standpoint among scholars is that Ambrose was born in Trier. The birthplace has been put into doubt by some. Fischer argues that the common view is the most probable: That Ambrose was born in Trier. Fischer 1984, 132–135.

⁸⁹ There are two possible years for Ambrose's birth. In *Epistula* 49 (PL 59) Ambrose records his age as "fifty-three years in the body", and about "storms of war". That means Ambrose was fifty-three years old either at Maximus' invasion in Italy 387 or at the appointment of Eugenius with its troubles in 392. Marksches regards "weniger wahrscheinlich ist das Jahr 339", introduction to Ambrose, fid. FCh 47:1, Marksches, 9. Dassmann writes: "Die Unsicherheit über das Geburtsjahr ist zu verschmerzen, denn die Differenz sechs Jahren zwischen den beiden Daten spielt für die Beurteilung der bischöflichen Wirksamkeit des Ambrosius keine Rolle", Dassmann 2004, 11.

wealth and Ambrose received the highest possible education in philosophy, rhetoric, and literature in Rome.⁹⁰ He learned Greek fluently, which later enabled him to read the Greek Eastern theologians. After his studies, Ambrose entered state service, first as *advocatus* at the court of Sirmium (today Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia), and later as consular governor of Liguria and Aemilia with Milan as its jurisdictional seat. Bishop Auxentius of Milan died in 373 and the people of the city were gathered to search for a new bishop. Ambrose was present at this event, and suddenly the voice of a small child, a *vox infantis*, was heard: *Ambrosium episcopum* (Ambrose for bishop)! At the sound of the child, the whole gathering shouted out their wish to see Ambrose as their bishop. Ambrose was not even baptised when he accepted the election for bishop of Milan. He asked for baptism, received the ecclesiastical offices, and a week later, on the seventh of December 374, he was consecrated as bishop.⁹¹

At the time as Ambrose was ordained bishop, he was an educated rhetor, used to persuading, reasoning, and defending a subject,⁹² but he had no theological education and was, therefore, forced to undertake an educational process. Ambrose tells in *De officiis ministrorum*: “I had to teach before I had begun to learn, simultaneously I learned and taught, since I had no time to learn before”.⁹³ There was nothing extraordinary about this circumstance in his time. The church of the fourth century did not require higher education for the episcopate and was content with merely basic literacy. More attention was in fact paid to a bishop’s character than to his education.⁹⁴ Ambrose, however, was ambitious; he simultaneously read and taught, making his 23 years as bishop a time of constant learning. His guide and mentor in the theological training was Simplicianus, a priest in Milan, who introduced Ambrose to Greek theology.⁹⁵ One on-the-spot account of this learning process is from Augustine’s *Confessiones*:

⁹⁰ According to Peter Brown, Ambrose was the only one of the Church Fathers coming from a senatorial family, the highest possible Roman aristocracy. P. Brown 1971 I, 33.

⁹¹ Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 6–9. Marksches notes that this was not ecclesiastical correct: “Die Wahl eines Katechumenen beziehungsweise Neophyten zum Bischof widersprach freilich dem Kirchenrecht”, with a reference to the second canon from Nicaea 325, introduction to Ambrose, fid. FCh 47:1, Marksches, 16. Another much discussed subject concerns whether Ambrose had the chance to receive all the required ordinations in only a week, see Dassmann 2004, 33–36, for an orientation on that issue.

⁹² The choice of a high ranked civil servant for an important episcopal see was not unusual at the time. Marksches writes: “das Bischofsamt damals nicht nur quasistaatliche Aufgaben zugewiesen bekam, sondern auch quasistaatliche Würde gewann”, introduction to Ambrose, fid. FCh 47:1, Marksches, 14–15.

⁹³ Ambrose, *off.* 1.1.4.

⁹⁴ Rapp 2005, 178–179.

⁹⁵ According to Paulinus, Simplicianus was from the Eastern regions, *de partibus Orientis*, Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 49.

When he read, his eyes glanced over the pages, and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. Oftentimes, when we had come – for no one was forbidden to enter, nor was it his custom that the arrival of those who came should be announced to him – we saw him thus reading in silence, and never otherwise.⁹⁶

During the first half of the 370s North Italy was predominantly an anti-Nicene milieu. According to Paulinus, Auxentius, Ambrose's predecessor as bishop, was "a bishop of the Arian perfidy".⁹⁷ The continuing tension between Ambrose's pro-Nicene conviction and the Arian/Homoian party (predominantly represented by the imperial court) even resulted in a violent conflict. In 385, Justina, mother of Valentinian II, and some courtiers demanded that one of the churches in Milan, Basilica Portiana, should be handed over to Arian worship. Professor Marcia Colish (1937–) proposes that Portiana was chosen since it had a baptistry, which was a presupposition for enabling the Homoians to spend the baptism. Another reason might have been that Portiana had been an imperial property for a long time.⁹⁸ Ambrose, however, refused. The following year the imperial court demanded the church once again. On Palm Sunday 386 the Basilica Portiana was proclaimed as having been confiscated by the state and the military surrounded the church, Basilica Nova, where Ambrose presided. Ambrose put his ecclesial take on the situation into words: "The emperor is in the Church, but not above the Church".⁹⁹ He and his congregation refused to leave the house. They stayed in the church day and night, singing hymns and saying prayers. The imperial court was not interested in an armed conflict with the people, and the whole incident was called off days later during Holy week. A beautiful coincidence is that Augustine's mother, Monica, was present in the Basilica Portiana. Augustine writes in *Confessiones* that she was "first in anxiety and vigilance, she lived in the prayers".¹⁰⁰

Two other examples of the tension at the time between the church and state are the disputes concerning the altar of Victoria and Ambrose persuading Emperor Theodosius to submit to penance. The first situation concerned an altar dedicated to the goddess Victoria which in pre-Christian time stood in the senatorial curia in Rome but had been removed by Constantine. The altar was replaced by Julian the Apostate (emperor 361–363), it was again removed by Gratian in 382, and in the following year the *pontifex maior* Symmachus applied for it to be erected once more. Ambrose reacted harshly against Symmachus' application, arguing that

⁹⁶ Augustinus, *Confessiones* 6.3.

⁹⁷ Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 6. *Auxentius Arianae perfidiae episcopus*. Text PL.

⁹⁸ Colish 2002, 361–372.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *epist.* 75a.36 (21a PL). *Imperator enim intra ecclesiam non supra ecclesiam est*.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *Confessiones* IX 7.15. *Ibi mater mea, ancilla tua, sollicitudinis et vigiliarum primas tenens, orationibus vivebat*.

truth and error cannot exist side by side in the state. Eventually Ambrose's opinion became the official position.¹⁰¹ The background to the second episode, Ambrose's demand for Theodosius to submit to penance, was the latter's order of a massacre of several thousand citizens in Thessalonica. Ambrose heard of it and forced Theodosius to confess publicly before the bishop.¹⁰²

Ambrose's last year in life was 397. On the fourth of April that year he was taken ill and confined to bed. Ambrose prayed in bed with his hands outstretched like a cross. He received the sacrament of the body of Christ for the last time, swallowed it and breathed out his spirit. Paulinus reports:

Thus his soul, refreshed by the power of that food, rejoices now in the company of the angels, whose life he lived on earth, and in the fellowship of Elijah, because, just as Elijah, thanks to his fear of God, never hesitated to speak to kings or to any powerful people, neither did he.¹⁰³

These words are telling and summarise Ambrose's career as bishop: he was both a political actor *and* a spiritual theologian. He lived an angelic life on earth which made him unafraid to speak to kings and powerful people. His successor as bishop of Milan, appointed by Ambrose himself, was his mentor Simplicianus. The skeleton of Ambrose is still to be seen today in the crypt of the church Sant' Ambrogio Basilica.

1.3.2. Ambrose's Pastoral Duties

As a theologian, Ambrose was predominantly of the pastoral kind. His legacy consisted of sermons and hymns rather than any Systematic theology in a modern sense. Ambrose regarded himself as more of a pastoral caretaker than of a schooled systematic theologian. In the prologue to the first book of *De fide*, he writes that he prefers preaching to faith (*ad fidem*), rather than preaching about the faith (*de fide*). The former he calls "devout confession", and the latter "liable to rash presumptions".¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ The letters in which Ambrose describes this event are famous, numbered 17–18 in the CSEL, and several times have been translated into English, as NPNF2 10; FC 26; and Ramsey 1997.

¹⁰² Two famous seventeenth century paintings of when Ambrose forced the emperor Theodosius to repent were done by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641). The three examples of tension between church and state, the dispute over a basilica, the Victoria altar dispute, and Theodosius submitting penance, are perhaps the most recognised Ambrosian conflicts. For example, professor Robert Wilkens (1936–) highlights these three events in his chapter on Ambrose in the book *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 2012, 127–135.

¹⁰³ Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 47. Trans. Ramsey 1997.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *fid.* I prol. 4.

Most of the Ambrosian writings were originally prepared as sermons.¹⁰⁵ They were subsequently reworked, complemented, and edited for publication. Professor Maria Grazia Mara (1923–2019) has written a passage about Ambrose in Johannes Quasten’s *Patrology IV*, which offers a systematic and balanced overview of all Ambrose’s writings and their origin.¹⁰⁶ There is no way of knowing how much Ambrose may have edited his writings for publication.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the “Sitz im Leben” of almost all his texts, is either a ritual, liturgical, or pastoral context. Hints at the originally spoken form of the writings are found, for example, in liturgical endings (*et in saecula saeculorum, amen*), references to liturgical readings, Bible references corresponding the readings for the day, and that the listeners are addressed. Martin Biermann, in his doctoral thesis *Die Leichenreden des Ambrosius von Mailand*, writes: “Ambrosius spricht in allen seinen veröffentlichten Werken als Bischof”.¹⁰⁸

In Late Antiquity the clerical pastoral duties and spiritual guidance were formalised and self-conscious in the Christian Church. As bishop Ambrose had the responsibility of the pastoral care of his diocese. He also functioned in the administration of public affairs in the city and region of Milan. A bishop’s diverse functions opened up the possibility, due to personal suitability, to put more weight on either state affairs or pastoral concerns. During the last hundred years of scholarship on the role of a Late Antique bishop the role has been understood to be somewhere on the scale between being merely a political figure and merely a religious one. Claudia Rapp analyses the scholarly debate as:

On the whole, there is a noticeable trend, especially in the Anglophone scholarship since the late 1980s, to treat episcopal power not as an isolated social or political phenomenon, but as a complex construct of secular and religious elements that come to bear in ever-shifting constellations.¹⁰⁹

On the one hand, Ambrose’s writings reveal seriousness in pastoral duties. They bear witness to a devotional and pastoral intimacy.¹¹⁰ On the other

¹⁰⁵ *De paradiso, De Cain et Abel, De Noe, De Isaac vel anima, De paenitentia, De patriarchis*, parts of the Dogmatic writings *De fide* and *De Spiritu Sancto*, Dudden regards as originally written and not spoken, Dudden 1935, 679–704. Other scholars are less sure about the exclusively written character of these writings, see Quasten 1986, 152–179; Biermann 1995, 15–20; Colish 2005, 5–29, for an overview of the academic discussions on the matter.

¹⁰⁶ Quasten 1986, 152–179.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Graumann 1994, 1997; Biermann 1995; Colish 2005, all presuppose that the writings reflect the sermons well.

¹⁰⁸ Biermann 1995, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Rapp 2005, 15. Rapp puts the Late Antique bishop in the context of both politic and spiritual affairs in her study.

¹¹⁰ He seems to have been sensitive to the congregation’s needs and their questions; Laughton 2010 is a study on that. His interpretations on the Song of Songs, for example in *De Isaac vel anima*, show an insight into personal devotion. His influence on Augustine and

hand, history also knows him as a man of great political integrity, who for the sake of Christian values, fearlessly interfered in state affairs.¹¹¹

Ambrose, as a Late Antique bishop, lived close to the people of his congregation, and there was an intimate relationship between the bishop and his congregation in pastoral dealings.¹¹² The questions of his people, their sorrows, doubts, pains, joys, and delights influenced Ambrose's mind. Pastoral duties were many. One example of such pastoral work was the organisation of the charitable work for the poor and sick. In a world with limited social safety the Christian bishop supervised the caritative works.¹¹³ Another main duty for a bishop was preaching; Ambrose preached publicly every Sunday and at least occasionally even daily during the week.¹¹⁴ Dassmann writes:

Die Bedeutung der Wortverkündigung für die Pastoral der Gemeinde und die Missionierung der Mailänder Gesellschaft und damit das Maß an Verantwortung für den Prediger waren enorm. Die Last ruhte weitgehend auf Ambrosius. [...] Wenn hier gepredigt wird, ist es immer der Bischof, der predigt.¹¹⁵

The administration and celebration of the sacraments and the liturgy was another main concern. Ambrose met with catechumens on a regular basis, offering classes in basic Christian knowledge in preparing them for baptism.¹¹⁶ The mass was celebrated in Milan on a daily basis.¹¹⁷ Ambrose exercised spiritual authority over the priests, virgins, and widows.¹¹⁸ He had responsibility for the penitent, couples preparing for marriage, and funerals.¹¹⁹

In all this, the congregation was a conversation partner for Ambrose. Christians were used to interacting and participating with the speaker from other arenas of participatory listening, and engaged by applauding,

Monica during their stay in Milan is well documented in *Confessiones* VI–IX. The hymns meant to be sung in Church are Christian classics. These are just but a few examples of Ambrose's seriousness in piety and pastoral care.

¹¹¹ Two examples are the aforementioned paintings of Rubens (1577–1640) and van Dyck (1599–1641).

¹¹² About the relationship between Ambrose and his congregation, see Huhn 1955; Dassmann 1965 and 2004. Laughton builds her thesis on a presupposed dialogue between Ambrose and his congregation, Laughton 2010.

¹¹³ See Monachino 1973, 264–301 for a thorough overview of the caritative work in Milan.

¹¹⁴ Dudden 1935, 449, 454–474; Schmitz 1975, 352–359; Dassmann 2004, 134–137.

¹¹⁵ Dassmann 2004, 143.

¹¹⁶ Two of these classes are preserved in texts for posterity, *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*.

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *epist.* 76 (20 PL), which is a letter to his sister Marcellina about the conflict of the basilica, reveals this custom. Dudden 1935, 446–447; Dassmann 2004, 136.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose's many writings on virginity witness to his guiding activity for the virgins and widows, and *De officiis ministrorum* is a manual for priests.

¹¹⁹ *De paenitentia* is about penitence, Dooley 1948 is a study on Ambrose's view on marriage, three funeral speeches of Ambrose remain in his text corpus.

weeping, laughing and so on.¹²⁰ This seems to have been also the case during Ambrose's preaching. When he announced in church that he would never give up a church building to the Arians the people approved his position loudly.¹²¹ Sometimes this habit had to be dealt with, as when in *De virginibus* Ambrose recommends his people to adopt a meditative attitude:

The virtue of keeping silent is highly important, especially in church [...] You should let no word come from your mouth that you would wish to revoke, but you should be quite restrained in your willingness to speak [...] Is there anything more disgraceful than that the divine utterances should be drowned out, so that they go unheard, are not believed and can reveal nothing, or that the sacraments are proclaimed in the midst of a cacophony, so that the prayer which is offered for the salvation of all is impeded? [...] But you, virgin of God, abstain from "groaning, shouting, coughing and laughing" while at the mystery.¹²²

Ambrose admonishes his people to try their best to keep silent. That he at all felt obliged to bring about this admonition reflects a concrete reality. The Dominican scholar Boniface Ramsey (1945–) comments on this passage: "This remarkable passage about behavior in church paints a different picture of church manners in fourth-century Christianity than one might have imagined".¹²³ The Oxford professor Fredrick Homes Dudden (1874–1955), who has written one of the most influential books on Ambrose, puts it: "even the faithful were apt to chatter in church".¹²⁴ This was a reality throughout the Roman world. For example, both Augustine and John Chrysostom (350–407) complained about disquietude during the biblical lessons of the mass.¹²⁵ Ambrose also complained about the poor level of knowledge in his congregation, and that his people did not go to church on Sundays.¹²⁶ In *Vita Ambrosii* Paulinus pictures Ambrose's preaching as magnetic in influence. An Arian man was once in church when the bishop was preaching:

[...] and as he himself said afterwards, saw an angel speaking into the bishop's ear while he was preaching, so that the bishop seemed to be proclaiming the angel's words to the people.¹²⁷

After experiencing this, the Arian man did convert to the Nicæan faith. Augustine also was moved by Ambrose's preaching, vividly described in the sixth book of the *Confessiones*.

¹²⁰ See chapter 5, *Preaching: Variations on the Theme*, in Harrison 2013, 133–168.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *epist.* 76.3 (20 PL). *Populus reclamavit*.

¹²² Ambrose, *virg.* III 3.11,13. Trans. Ramsey 1997.

¹²³ Ramsey 1997, 223.

¹²⁴ Dudden 1935, 448.

¹²⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 19.9, more on the subject in Dassmann 2004, 135.

¹²⁶ Ambrose, *in psalm. 118* 16.45; *virginit.* 19.126. On the subject Monachino 1973, 91–163; Dassmann 2004, 134.

¹²⁷ Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 17. Trans. Ramsey.

Ambrose himself comments about what he expected to move in the minds and lives of his people.¹²⁸ First of all, the preacher of a sermon should be instructed by the Bible.¹²⁹ In *De officiis ministrorum* Ambrose writes on how a sermon should be held: “We must take care that there is no confusion. Our language should be mild and quiet, full of kindness and grace, a speech conducted without any insult”.¹³⁰ The consequences of the preacher failing could be disastrous. According to him, the preacher not only ran the risk of boring the audience, but even worse, of causing harm to their and the preacher’s own striving for salvation.¹³¹ The preaching on the holy Scriptures was to consist of “exhortation to watchfulness” and “good instruction”.¹³² The sermon was to be clear, simple, and lucid.¹³³ The Psalms reveal Biblical grace for Ambrose in a special way. Thomas Graumann, Reader in Ancient Christian History and Patristic Studies in Cambridge, writes about Ambrose’s Psalm expositions: “The Psalms thus are meant to restore man’s true delight that consists in the praise of God”.¹³⁴ The general purpose of the different activities of Ambrose’s pastoral care was to guide his congregation in Christian grace, delight, faith, and living.

In line with this, a well-known manifestation of Ambrose’s pastoral program is his hymns.¹³⁵ Ambrose made an important contribution to Western liturgy by popularising the hymns, and in Hubertus Drobner’s words “making them an established part of the liturgy”.¹³⁶ Ambrose is, therefore, called the father of Latin hymn singing.¹³⁷ Of the many hymns attributed to Ambrose, at least four should be considered authentic.¹³⁸ All

¹²⁸ In the passage *Anhang: Aussagen des Ambrosius zu seiner Tätigkeit als Prediger* Biermann offers a collection and exposition of passages where Ambrose in own words expresses his ideal of preaching and the preacher, Biermann 1995, 199–218. More on the subject in Graumann 1997, 587–600.

¹²⁹ For example, Ambrose, *off.* I 10.35. “A pious reverence is shown when the sacred Scriptures are read”, *reuerentia exhibetur cum Scripturae diuinae leguntur*. Nauroy writes about the fundamental character of the Bible in Ambrose’s pastoral care, and argues that he is the Western theologian with most Bible references in his writings. Nauroy 1985, 371–408.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *off.* I 22.99.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 1.1. *Hic damnum est audentium*.

¹³² Ambrose, *off.* I 22.100.

¹³³ Ambrose, *epist.* 36 (2 PL). The letter is written to a young bishop, Constantius. Biermann has noticed in the letter how Ambrose emphasises the importance of topic rather than style, Biermann 1995, 201–204.

¹³⁴ Graumann 1997, 597.

¹³⁵ I will return to the hymn-singing in Chapter 3.2.3.1: *Virginitas in partu Pastorally Preached*, and Chapter 4.4.5: *Christ’s Virginal Birth in Worship*.

¹³⁶ Drobner 2007, 317.

¹³⁷ Despite this rather established title, Ambrose did not invent singing in worship. Already in New Testament time the apostle Paul writes about singing in worship, Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

¹³⁸ These four hymns are translated and commented on in Ramsey 1997, 166–173.

his songs are in iambic metre, easily sung and easily remembered by ordinary people. Ambrose popularised singing and made it an integral part of the liturgy even if it was Augustine who first theorised about the art of music, and wrote a treatise about music, *De musica*.¹³⁹

1.3.3. Ambrose's Cultural Context

Pastoral care in Late Antiquity was, as in every era, located in the tension between Christian dogma and the existing culture. The tension between dogma and culture could be harmonious or disharmonious. A counsellor who gives spiritual guidance always needs to consider Christian dogma and belief on the one hand, and the everyday experiences and existing cultural assumptions of the people he or she wants to guide, on the other. The Christian community which constituted Ambrose's object of pastoral concern was shaped by the daily life in the vibrant and lively capital of Milan, not only by an enclosed Christian church and liturgy.

In 385, at the height of Ambrose's episcopal career, Milan was ranked seventh among the cities of the Roman Empire by the Latin rhetor and poet Ausonius (310–395), in his *Ordo urbium nobilium*. There were “numberless elegant mansions”¹⁴⁰ in the city, as well as the circus, the theatre, and the palace. By Ambrose's time, due to Milan's role as a capital for the emperors in the West, the population, suburbs included, had grown to an estimated 130 000–150 000 people.¹⁴¹

In the book by the Oxford professor Carol Harrison (1953–), *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, the author explores the culture of Late Antiquity as a culture of sounds. Most of the people in a common city, circa 90%, were unable to read or write. The number of literates could differ according to for example class, profession, and gender.¹⁴² The experience of Augustine when he heard, in Milan 386, a child's voice demanding *tolle, lege!* did not reflect a common experience outside the educated elite.¹⁴³ Most people did not possess the ability to open a codex and actually read it. Contrary to contemporary Western culture, a person in Late Antiquity got information and texts primarily through their ears. Their world was a world of sounds, smells, and things seen, but not one of written texts. Knowledge in the Bible was normally transmitted through the hearing of

¹³⁹ A recent study on Augustine's *De musica* is Harrison 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Ausonius, *Ordo urbium nobilium*. Quoted in Krautheimer 1983, 70–71.

¹⁴¹ Krautheimer 1983, 71.

¹⁴² An important study on literacy in Late Antiquity is Harris' *Ancient Literacy*. He argues that only 10% of the Roman population was able to read at the time of the origin of Christianity. In the most educated populations in Greek cities the literacy might have been higher. In Late Antiquity the literacy declined, paradoxically despite a growing number of Christians, who believed in the written word, Harris 1989, 22, 285–322. For more on reading in Antiquity, see Clark 1999, 45–69. Clark argues the literacy might have been higher than Harris thought.

¹⁴³ Augustine, *Confessiones* VIII 29.

words.¹⁴⁴ Harrison writes: “We need to stop thinking about early Christianity in mute mode, allow it to sound and speak, and then listen to its echoes and resonances in those who heard it”.¹⁴⁵ Later on in the same book, Harrison writes that one cannot overestimate the central and determinative role of “reading, hearing, and listening to Scripture in the formation of Christian identity, culture, and practice”.¹⁴⁶ One must note though, that only a minority was able to read such a text as the Bible. Ambrose as a preacher had as his most important instrument the sound of spoken words. It was words communicated to the minds of his listeners through their physical sense of hearing. Almost every text of Ambrose’s that has survived to today was originally a sermon, spoken loudly; a sermon heard first and only then written down.

When Ambrose preached about Christ’s birth and Mary’s virginity, he spoke in a cultural sounding board in which the listeners heard and took for granted certain things. Birth for a woman is a biological and bodily thing which also involves spiritual aspects of human existence. Mariology was (and is) a biological as well as a spiritual field. It deals with virginity and motherhood, celibacy and sexuality, theology and culture. That means that different cultural understandings of biology and psychology will shift Mariological views in regard to her virginity and motherhood.

Medicine at Ambrose’s time was the Hippocratic medicine. The American professor of Medical History, Owsei Temkin (1902–2002), spent his life working on intellectual research in Late Antique medicine. He concludes many years of studies in his book *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians*. He writes:

In spite of the differences, however, it must not be forgotten that pagans and Christians, living together, also shared some traditional ways of thought and were confronted by the same realities of life. Up to a point, pagans and Christians had a common notion of the principles of Hippocratic medicine, its relation to body and mind, and its goal regarding human health and disease. Also, both had to make use of the physician, unless they rejected secular medicine altogether.¹⁴⁷

Temkin’s conclusion is that Christianity grew in power and influence alongside with, but not over and against, the secular medicine of Late Antiquity. Among others, the Australian professor Wendy Mayer (1960–) highlights one important change. The Christian community introduced the validity of treatment for the incurably ill and impoverished aliens, and a moral meaning to illness and suffering.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Harris 1989, 305 gives the examples of Irenaeus *Contra haereses* II 27.2 and Origen *Contra Celsum* III 50.

¹⁴⁵ Harrison 2013, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Harrison 2013, 54.

¹⁴⁷ Temkin 1991, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Mayer 2015, 11. In the text Mayer gives further references to the state of research on the rise of the Christian hospital and medical care.

Most people in Milan were normal men and women who lived ordinary lives in Late Antiquity. Matters of health and illness affected them existentially. Medical considerations and knowledge about diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy were fundamental in their lives, as in every era. In the ordinary circle of life in Milan, people had to face the concrete reality of human reproduction, pregnancies, and the pain and suffering of childbirth. Ambrose, in his role as a bishop and spiritual advisor, was not ignorant of these fundamental concerns in the lives of his people. In public speeches these matters were handled with a decorous language, with different rhetorical rules to those employed in our modern culture. Nonetheless, Ambrose could address such questions. One example was at the occasion of his brother's departure, when in the sermon he said to his listeners:

You are men, you are women, not ignorant about anything that concerns the human nature. And if some of you are ignorant, you still believe that we are born of nothing. How small is the origin of our existence! And if we do not express ourselves more clearly, you will still understand what we mean, or rather what we will not say.¹⁴⁹

Another text which deals with the common experience of the mother-child is found in *Expositio in Lucam* where Ambrose talks about a child (we do not know how old) who complained about his mother. Ambrose criticises the child's complaints and says they should not behave in such a way. He imaginatively speaks to the child:

if you give your mother food, you have not done as much as she has for you. She had pain in giving your life [...] she had given you breastfeeding [...] she has been vigilant when you were crying. And you will leave her in need?¹⁵⁰

This passage reflects naturally the concrete situation of real concerns, worries and activities which mothers, fathers and children in Milan experienced at the time of Ambrose.

1.3.4. Ambrose's Audience

Who were the Christian people attending worship and listening to Ambrose's sermons? Somewhat discouraging, Ernst Dassmann writes:

Leider sind alle Angaben über die Zahl der Mailänder Christen und Gottesdienstbesucher in der zweiten Hälfte des 4. Jahrhunderts so sehr

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 60. *Viri estis, feminae estis quae humana sunt, non ignoratis: et si qui ignoratis, ex nihilo putatis esse, quod nascimur. Quam ex parvo quanti exurgimus! Et si non exprimimus, intelligitis tamen quid velimus, vel potius quid nolimus dicere.*

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, in *Luc.* VIII 75. *Et si pueris matrem, adhuc non reddidisti dolores, non reddidisti cruciatus quos pro te passa est: non reddidisti obsequia quibus te illa gestavit, non reddidisti alimenta quae tribuit tenero pietatis adfectu, inmulgens labris tuis ubera, non reddidisti famem quam pro te illa toleravit, ne quid quod tibi noxium esset, ederet, ne quid quod lacti noceret hauriret. Tibi illa ieiunavit, tibi manducavit, tibi illa quem uoluit cibum non accepit, tibi quem noluit cibum sumsit, tibi vigilavit, tibi flevit: et tu illam egere patieris?*

spekulativ, daß keine pastoralen Reaktionen aus ihnen abgeleitet werden können.¹⁵¹

The question is complicated, but many scholars have put effort into coming close to an answer. The task is to figure out the number and character of the congregation assembled for worship in Milan in Late Antiquity.¹⁵² Marcia Colish writes about Ambrose's writings and "the role they played in the ritual life of the Milanese Christian community, and the specific members of that community to which they were addressed".¹⁵³ She calls attention to the ritual character of Ambrose's writings, and accentuates that some of Ambrose's writings were originally addressed to a specific group of people. *De officiis ministrorum* was aimed at the priests, *De viduis* at the widows, *De virginibus*, *De virginitate*, *De institutione virginis*, and *Exhortatio virginitatis* at the consecrated virgins. These groups were all specialised audiences with distinctive needs for guidance. Even so, nothing in these writings excludes that other types of listeners were present, although the theme did not address their particular life situations. Another kind of writings are *Explanatio symboli*, *De mysteriis*, and *De sacramentis*, which were teachings solely addressed to the catechumens, those members of the Christian community who were to be – or just had been – baptised at Easter. Most of Ambrose's writings, however, were originally delivered to the whole Christian community, i.e. those assembled in church. Obviously, on different occasions and in different seasons, the assembled community could vary, for example, during Lent and Easter more catechumens than usual were present. Colish writes about the context of the patriarch treatises given in this particular season of the year:

His hearers were average lay Christians, adult converts to Christianity from Roman paganism. In particular, his audience consisted of those catechumens in the Milanese Christian community whom he was preparing, each Lent, for their baptism on the following Easter Sunday. During any given Easter season in late-fourth-century Milan, this audience was likely to contain a diverse mix of lay people with no special vocation except the call to become full-fledged members of the church.¹⁵⁴

Ambrose tried to preach as relevantly and as accessibly as possible for his audience. As a comparison, in *De viduis* the examples are all women, Old and New Testament widows. On the other hand, in *De Abraham*, *De Isaac vel anima*, *De Iacob*, and *De Ioseph*, Ambrose saw in the patriarchs examples for the lives of the common man. Assistant professor Jaclyn Maxwell, Ohio University, generalises about the preachers in Late

¹⁵¹ Dassmann 2004, 132.

¹⁵² Distinguished studies on this particular issue are MacMullen 1989, 1997, 2009; Mayer 1998, 2000; Colish 2005; Maxwell 2006; Harrison 2013.

¹⁵³ Colish 2005, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Colish 2005, 2.

Antiquity: “Jerome, Ambrose, Gregory of Tours, and Gregory the Great captured the attention of crowds of people, influencing their beliefs, and did so in plain, generally comprehensible language”.¹⁵⁵

Marcia Colish regards the audience as predominantly well-educated and of the upper classes, but argues that the make-up of congregation was, nevertheless, basically diverse:

They were lay people, adult converts from Roman paganism. They engaged in a range of economic activities and professions. They were both male and female, some unmarried but mostly married, with children and household slaves.¹⁵⁶

Ambrose addresses his sermons to both men and women. One example is in *De excessu fratris* where he says: “You are men, you are women”.¹⁵⁷

Emeritus professor of History at Yale University, Ramsey MacMullen (1928–) gives a more negative view of how diverse, with regard to class and gender, the worshipping congregation generally was in Late Antiquity. In an article written 1989, ‘The Preacher’s Audience (AD 350–400)’, MacMullen emphasises the difficulty in knowing the identity of the congregation. Nonetheless, he proposes that the average worshipping Christian in the church was a rich, highly educated man. He bases his idea on the language, references, and refinement of the preacher in combination with the normal size of church buildings, and offers his conclusions on the character of the listeners based on an analysis of these. MacMullen writes:

In no city was the church (or were the churches, plural) able physically to accommodate at one time any large minority of the total resident population [...] It was a selection that came to worship, just as it had always been a selection (quite tiny) that attended Roman popular assemblies. [...] They have before them the city’s leadership, the upper ranks, accompanied by their slaves [...] While women would be present, either they would be much fewer than men, or were not ordinarily to be addressed directly. More respectable artisans such as goldsmiths, really quite well-to-do, might be expected among those present; smaller landowners, likewise. Perhaps also a sprinkling of the pious poor (genuinely poor).¹⁵⁸

MacMullen does not deny that women were present, but suggests that they were present in smaller number. In his later book *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, he generalises the picture to

¹⁵⁵ Maxwell 2006, 67.

¹⁵⁶ Colish 2005, 17.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 60. *Viri estis, feminae estis.*

¹⁵⁸ MacMullen 1989, 510.

such an extent that he regards the audience as: “a tiny segment [...] namely, rich males”.¹⁵⁹

Wendy Mayer gives alternate view to that offered by MacMullen. She has studied Ambrose’s contemporary John Chrysostom, and the results can be applied to other parts of the Roman empire as well.¹⁶⁰ In her article ‘Who came to hear John Chrysostom preach?’ Mayer questions the idea that the class and manner of the preacher has to reflect the audience: “The status of the preacher does not necessarily presuppose that the audience comes from the same stratum of society”.¹⁶¹ Mayer also proposes that the poor people might very well have been able to read and to comprehend complex language to some extent. Thus, she states that the audience might very well have been “socially mixed”.¹⁶² Mayer, contrary to MacMullen, even argues that at certain times “women may even have constituted the majority of the regular attendees,”¹⁶³ but admits that this is speculative. Mayer sees three issues that must be kept in mind: 1) The composition of the audience could vary during the year, 2) different days of the week gave different opportunities for different kinds of people to attend worship, 3) different churches in a big city might well have had differently composed audiences.¹⁶⁴

On the question of the Late Antique Milanese audience, archaeological evidences from church buildings, chapels, baptisteries, and martyriums are valuable. Studying the archaeology raises questions such as: What was the size of a building? How was it structured? Could everyone see the preacher? Could everyone in a big church hear the sermon; how were the acoustics? Who was supposed to be present where, for example, who was sitting and who was standing? The scope of my study does not allow exploring these questions in detail. Here, I only point out the complexity

¹⁵⁹ MacMullen 1997, 10. In another book, *The Second Church*, published in 2009, MacMullen regards that only an exceedingly small minority of the Christian people assembled for common worship. It was an elite group of upper-class men, who MacMullen calls the first church. MacMullen tries to give a voice to the many others, the majority, often subjected to the preachers’ criticism. MacMullen calls these men and women the second church. For the section on Milan, Ambrose, and his ordinary people’s faith, see MacMullen 2009, 89–94.

¹⁶⁰ In the text ‘John Chrysostom: Extraordinary Preacher, Ordinary Audience’, published in 1998, Mayer presents the primary sources which have given her knowledge about John Chrysostom’s audience. Listed are Church orders, in Chrysostom’s case *Constitutiones apostolorum*, which refers to protocol from the churches, and other Ancient writers. The preacher’s own treatises, letters, and sermons give some hints about the audience. All must be handled carefully, as Mayer writes: “all evidence from the early centuries of the Christian church is incomplete or informed by political or rhetorical agenda.” Mayer 1998, 106.

¹⁶¹ Mayer 2000, 74.

¹⁶² Mayer 2000, 74. She develops the thought throughout the article.

¹⁶³ Mayer 2000, 76.

¹⁶⁴ Mayer 2000, 80.

of the question concerning Ambrose's audience. I do, however, offer some notes on Church buildings.¹⁶⁵ When Ambrose began his episcopal service, there were only a few churches in Milan.¹⁶⁶ There was, nevertheless, a real need for new churches to be built, in accordance with the enlarged number of inhabitants in Milan. Inside the city walls there was the cathedral, Basilica Nova, which replaced the smaller cathedral, Basilica Vetus or Minor, probably in the 350s. Basilica Nova was a huge building, 80 metres by 45, offering space for an assembled congregation of close to 3000. It had a pathway for a solemn entry by the bishop. It was a magnificent building. The German Art historian Richard Krautheimer (1897–1994) writes: "Apparently no expense was spared".¹⁶⁷ Outside the city walls, Ambrose founded at least four churches: Basilica Virginum, Basilica Apostolorum, Basilica Salvatoris, and Basilica Martyrum/Ambrosiana.¹⁶⁸ These churches encircled the Basilica Nova, respectively placed north, south, east, and west of the cathedral, and no one more than one kilometre away. All had the form of a cross, the sign of Christ's triumph, which was a symbolism dear to Ambrose. In a dedicatory inscription for Basilica Apostolorum, written by himself, one of the lines says: *Forma crucis templum est templum victoria Christi*.¹⁶⁹ Basilica Portiana, the church which played a key role in the Homoian conflict, however, was not founded by Ambrose.

So, what conclusions is it possible to draw from the present state of research as to the composition of Ambrose's audience? Scholars seem to agree that the upper classes were over-represented in church, but others attended as well, not least, there must have been many slaves accompanying their wealthy masters and mistresses. The congregation in Milan was probably a mix of men and women. It should be noted that *De virginibus*, one of the first of Ambrose's writings, is dedicated to a woman, his sister Marcellina. Further, there must have been both casual and regular visitors at the church's worship during the year. More people, of more diverse kinds, attended church at Easter and at other popular feasts. Lastly, it is no understatement to claim that Ambrose did his best to make worship available to the people. He was busy building churches in Milan throughout his twenty years as bishop; churches which created room for

¹⁶⁵ Valuable studies include Krautheimer's *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics* 1983, and *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* 1986. See also Dassmann 2004, 122–133.

¹⁶⁶ "Aufs Ganze gesehen gab es nur wenige gottesdienstliche Räume, als Ambrosius seinen kirchlichen Dienst antrat", Dassmann 2004, 128.

¹⁶⁷ Krautheimer 1983, 76.

¹⁶⁸ The church is still in use, as Basilica di Sant' Ambrogio. Ambrose's relics are located there.

¹⁶⁹ Krautheimer 1983, 146. A fragment of Ambrose's inscription was found in the 1950s.

more than just upper-class men to assemble for worship. Ambrose preferred an architecture that called attention to the triumphant Christ.

1.4. Previous Research

During the twentieth century many biographies using a modern academic standard have been written about Ambrose of Milan.¹⁷⁰ The task of this present study is, however, not to examine critically the biographical details of the life and career of Ambrose. Regarding biographical information, I try to follow the main lines of previous research as closely as possible. In the field of medical history, the already mentioned Temkin has done research both on non-Christian Antique sources, and also on how this medicine was adopted among the Christians.¹⁷¹

A series of comparative studies on the biological worldview in relation to systematic theology was made by the Catholic professor Albert Mitterer (1887–1966). He published his studies called *Wandel des Weltbildes von Thomas auf heute* in the 1930–50s. It was an attempt to investigate the theology of Thomas Aquinas in the light of his biological worldview, and juxtapose that to the modern worldview.¹⁷² Mitterer regarded the Christian dogma – for his purposes foremost the virgin birth – as irrefutable truths belonging to Christian revelation, but nevertheless he maintained that the explanation of it must be changed with a new biology. His outspoken purpose was to address the Catholic theology of his own times, which, he argued, needed correcting. Mitterer called his method a research in dogmatics and a comparison of worldviews (“Weltbildvergleichende Dogmenforschung”). He worked with two biological terms in comparison: The antique view of biology as generation (“Erzeugungsbilogie”) and the modern view of biology as development (“Entwicklungsbiologie”). Later, in the study *Die Entwicklungslehre*

¹⁷⁰ Standard works are Campenhausen 1929; Palanque 1933, Dudden 1935; Paredi 1960; Savon 1997; Moorhead 1999; Dassmann 2004.

¹⁷¹ Other works on Late Antique Gynaecology both in philosophical and biological perspective I have found useful are Demand’s *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, published in 1994; Dean-Jones’ *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, published in 1994; Flemming’s *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women*, first published in 2000; van der Eijk’s *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity* from 2005. Older but thorough works are Lach’s *Die Gynaekologie des Soranus von Ephesus* published in 1902 and *Die Gynaekologie des Galen* in 1903. Sissa has made important contributions, and her debates on the Greek view of virginity with MacLachlan and Hanson are interesting to follow, see their respective titles in the Bibliography.

¹⁷² For my study four of the books in the series are of particular interest: *Die Zeugung der Organismen, insbesondere des Menschen* published in 1947, *Elternschaft und Gattenschaft* in 1949, *Dogma und Biologie der heilige Familie* in 1952, *Die Entwicklungslehre Augustins im Vergleich mit dem Weltbild des hl. Thomas und dem der Gegenwart* in 1956.

Augustins im Vergleich mit dem Weltbild des hl. Thomas von Aquin und dem der Gegenwart, published in 1956, Mitterer also used his method to investigate Augustine in comparison to Thomas Aquinas and modern biology. The Freiburg scholar Gregor Emmenegger's (1972–) *Wie die Jungfrau zum Kind kam. Zum Einfluss antiker medizinischer und naturphilosophischer Theorien auf die Entwicklung des christlichen Dogmas*, published in 2014, is a recent study using a method similar to Mitterer's. Emmenegger reads Late Antique texts about conception and embryology. His study covers the time before Ambrose, even if he also touches on the late fourth century.

The Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) notes that contemporary knowledge has given us a different understanding of the psychology in the relationship between mother and child. This knowledge occasions a new understanding of the relationship between Mary and her son, Jesus Christ. Von Balthasar writes:

Dies geschah in der endgültigen Überwindung einer alten, aus dem griechischen Denken stammenden, aber von christlichen nicht energisch genug überwundenen Meinung, wonach beim Entstehen des Kindes nur dem Vater die aktive, der Mutter dagegen lediglich eine passive Rolle zukäme, und ferner durch die Beachtung der (im Unterschied zu den Tieren) besonders hilflosen Lage des Neugeborenen, das erst jetzt seine intra-uterine Ausbildung abschließt. Noch wesentlicher: der werdende Mensch ist (nochmals in Gegensatz zum Tier) so innerlich auf das Mitsein mit andern Menschen angelegt, daß er erst durch den Mitmenschen, normalerweise durch die Mutter, zu seinem Selbstbewußtsein erwacht.¹⁷³

Von Balthasar notes that a theologian's reception of not only the medical, but also of psychological knowledge, exerts influence on the description of the incarnation of the divine Word and Mary's role in it.

An interesting study relating to my research is Åsa Larsson's (1956–) doctoral thesis *Barnafödandets mysterium – en begrundan av vardande och vårdande* (means *The mystery of giving birth*), presented at Åbo Akademi University in 2018. The purpose of her study is an "understanding of the childbearing woman's becoming in health and suffering".¹⁷⁴ This study provides a modern up-to-date view of pregnancy and childbearing from the perspective of Caring Science. It considers both the physical and spiritual aspects of childbearing. For any mother childbirth has been, and is, on the one hand, a matter of pain, anguish, suffering, and danger, and, on the other, of happiness, joy, health, and expectations of life. This is the case in our modern society and was also the case in Late Antiquity as well.

¹⁷³ Von Balthasar in Ratzinger 2010, 90.

¹⁷⁴ Larsson 2018, 72.

This present study offers new perspectives on Ambrose's belief in *Mariae virginitas perpetua* in relation to his pastoral care. Ernst Dassmann (1931–), one of the most distinguished Ambrosian scholars in the twentieth century, calls for Ambrosian studies from a pastoral perspective:

meiner Meinung nach vor allem genauere sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen Ambrosius' Bedeutung als Seelsorger erhellen und präzisieren könnten. Das theologische und spirituelle Fundament der ambrosianischen Pastoral ist sorgfältig erforscht worden. Hier kommt es zu häufigen Wiederholungen hinreichend bekannter Tatsachen. Die Untersuchung der Lebenswirklichkeit, die seiner geistlichen Unterweisung zugrunde liegt, benötigt dagegen noch große Aufmerksamkeit.¹⁷⁵

The quotation, a concluding remark in *Pastorale Anliegen bei Ambrosius von Mailand* points to the necessity of studying Ambrose from the perspective of pastoral care. This study is an answer to this call.

There are previous studies on Ambrose's view on Mary's perpetual virginity, studies which include its contents, patterns, sources, and purposes. Early in the twentieth century, the German Roman-Catholic patristic scholar Hugo Koch (1869–1940) published two studies on Mary's virginity, *Adhuc virgo* in 1929, and *Virgo Eva – Virgo Maria* in 1937, where he questions the common notion that Christian theologians in the first 400 years were in unison regarding the teaching of Mary's virginity. According to him, Ambrose did not, for example, clearly teach *virginitas in partu* through his writings, at least not in the way in which *in partu* was defined at Koch's time.

Koch's studies were questioned by other Catholic scholars, and were followed up by two thorough studies on Ambrose's Mariology. The first response was from Joseph Huhn, professor in Catholic Theology and Patristics at Fulda Faculty of Theology, Germany. In 1954 he published the study *Das Geheimnis der Jungfrau-Mutter Maria nach dem Kirchenvater Ambrosius*. The second response was from the American Catholic priest, Charles William Neumann (1923–1997). In 1962, his doctoral thesis *The Virgin Mary in the Works of Saint Ambrose* was published. These two studies remain the basic studies on the subject today, at least in the English and German speaking context.

Huhn presents a holistic study on every aspect of Ambrose's Mariology, not only Mary's perpetual virginity, in *Das Geheimnis der Jungfrau-Mutter Maria nach dem Kirchenvater Ambrosius*. The three main chapters have the headings "Maria – Die Gottesmutter", "Die Heilsgeschichtliche Stellung Mariens", and "Das etische Marienbild". The method used by Huhn is what I would call Heresiological. His starting point is Ambrose as defender of the Nicene faith, and he reads Ambrose in light of the bishop's anti-Arian and pro-Nicene Christology. The method is revealed in the introduction to

¹⁷⁵ Dassmann 1997, 206.

the study, in which Huhn writes about the prosperity of Mariological thinking in the fourth century: it “hat seinen inneren Grund in dem heroischen Kampf, der damals gegen den Arianismus im Abendlande geführt wurde”.¹⁷⁶ Huhn also clearly writes in the context of his contemporary theological debate, as when he parallels a supposed denial of the virgin birth with a denial of Christ’s divinity: “das gilt auch für die neuen Gegner der Jungfrauengeburt unserer Tage”.¹⁷⁷

Neumann’s study *The Virgin Mary in the Works of Saint Ambrose* is descriptive, with its focus on the three aspects of Mary’s virginity. The study is divided into three main parts entitled “Virgo ante partum”, “Virgo in partu” and “Virgo post partum”. Neumann’s understanding of Ambrose’s teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary has principally guided English studies on Ambrosian Mariology up to this point.¹⁷⁸ The renowned Church historian Peter Brown (1935–) judges Neumann as “a reliable summary of Ambrose’s opinions and of those of his opponents”.¹⁷⁹

The studies of Huhn and Neumann still remain the most influential on Ambrose’s view of Mary’s perpetual virginity.¹⁸⁰ On the one hand, in regard to mapping and revealing passages about Mary in Ambrose’s writings, I hardly recognise anything to add to these studies. On the other hand, both studies contain a methodological weakness. This weakness is related to the fact that Ambrose is held as a doctor of the Church (*doctor ecclesiae*) in the Catholic Church. In the case of both Huhn and Neumann this fact makes them study a canonised corpus of authoritative texts. A parallel is how Martin Luther has traditionally been treated in the Swedish context. Professor Carl-Henric Grenholm (1945–), Uppsala, uses the Swedish Luther research as an example of an earlier theological method. Luther’s view on justification, calling, or Law and Gospel was presented in such a way that made it clear that the author shared Luther’s ideas. A finding of Luther’s view on a subject was treated as an argument on the truth of that subject. Grenholm evaluates this kind of argumentation: “Of course this is not enough”.¹⁸¹ Huhn and Neumann treat Ambrose’s texts in a similar way. They neither use textual criticism nor, using a somewhat

¹⁷⁶ Huhn 1954, 9.

¹⁷⁷ Huhn 1954, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Both Hunter and Laughton let Neumann steer their understanding of Ambrose’s Mariology, Hunter 2007 and Laughton 2010.

¹⁷⁹ P. Brown 2008, 353.

¹⁸⁰ There are more studies on details in Ambrose’s Mariology e.g. David Hunter’s (1954–) *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*, published in 2007. Hunter rewrites the Jovinian controversy and the idea of biological brothers and sisters of Jesus. Ariel Laughton’s (1976–) doctoral thesis *Virginity Discourse and Ascetic Politics in the Writings of Ambrose of Milan*, 2010, is not a study of Mariology *per se* but it does give important knowledge on how the concept of virginity developed in Ambrose’s ascetical writings.

¹⁸¹ Grenholm 2006, 313.

anachronistic term, a hermeneutic of suspicion¹⁸² in their readings. Nor do they take into methodological consideration the Late Antique Milanese listeners and the pastoral perspective in light of the cultural understanding of reproduction. This later point is a secondary result of their approach to the texts as a canonised corpus.

There are studies which deal more generally with the pastoral care exercised by Ambrose. The German scholar Christoph Marksches (1962–) proposes in *Ambrosius von Mailand und die Trinitätstheologie*, from 1995, that one needs to have the pastoral perspective in mind in order to understand Ambrose's preaching:

Erstens muß man die rhetorischen und argumentationstheoretischen Vorgaben der Predigt im Blick halten, die anders ausfallen als in einem theologischen Traktat; *zweitens* muß man den ursprünglichen Bezug auf die Hörer in der Mailänder Gemeinde berücksichtigen, die in weiten Teilen alles andere als theologische Fachleute oder auch nur Halbgebildete waren.¹⁸³

The second point of Marksches' notion is of interest for this study: It was foremost the ordinary Christian listeners who Ambrose made an effort to guide and teach in matters of faith and living. Among the scholarly works mapping and analysing Ambrose's pastoral caretaking Vincenzo Monachino's exhaustive survey *S. Ambrogio e la cura pastorale a Milano nel secolo IV* from 1973 is hitherto unsurpassed.¹⁸⁴ The American professor and classicist Marcia L. Colish has made a contribution in regard to the pastoral perspective with her study *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* 2005. In Ambrose's sermons *De Abraham*, *De Isaac vel anima*, *De Iacob* and *De Ioseph* Colish traces an ethic for the common Christians, those who for the most part married and actively lived their lives in the North Italian world. It should be noted that her study corrects the more extreme position of, for example, Peter Brown¹⁸⁵ and David

¹⁸² Both Huhn and Neumann wrote before Paul Ricoeur coined that expression.

¹⁸³ Marksches 1995, 96.

¹⁸⁴ Shorter treatises on the subject are Huhn's 'Der Kirchenvater Ambrosius im Lichte der Pfarrseelsorge', Nauroy's 'L'Écriture dans la pastorale d'Ambroise de Milan', 1985, and Dassmann's 'Pastorale Anliegen bei Ambrosius von Mailand', 1997. Dassmann's doctoral thesis from 1965, *Die Frömmigkeit des Kirchenvaters Ambrosius von Mailand. Quellen und Entfaltung*, covers many different theological fields, such as Ecclesiology, Mariology, Christology etc. Dassmann's focal point is on the piety of Ambrose, interpreting him as a bishop of pastoral concerns and not only of merely political ambitions.

¹⁸⁵ P. Brown 2008, 341–365. Brown writes for example: "every human body bore one ugly scar. This scar was unmistakable – it was the scar of sexuality" 350. I argue in my study that Ambrose actually had a rational view of sexuality, and that it had a natural and biological function. All the Ambrosian texts Brown quotes are directed towards consecrated virgins, and that explains Ambrose's statements.

Hunter¹⁸⁶ who maintain that Ambrose praises virginity as the supreme virtue for everybody.

There has been a massive amount of scholarly research on Ambrose conducted over the last hundred years or so, and even more on Mariology in general. Nonetheless, I believe I can, in this work, contribute to this wealth of research. An in-depth study on how Ambrose's Mariology fits in the Milanese bishop's dogmatical pattern of the faith, that is his teaching on Creation (Protology), Salvation (Christology), and Perfection (Eschatology) is still missing. An understanding of how Ambrose preached the perpetual virginity of Mary in his pastoral care of the congregation listening to him in the context of their everyday life is likewise absent. A study in these two perspectives, offers a complementary knowledge of Ambrose's Mariology and Late Antique pastoral care.

1.5. More Precise Definition of the Task

1.5.1. Purpose

Having presented a survey of the previous research above, together with a few proposals of what remains to be done, I can now formulate a more precise definition of the task of this study, which is to investigate how Ambrose pastorally preached Mary's perpetual virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ; that is, his teaching on *Mariae virginitas perpetua*, in the context of his pastoral care.¹⁸⁷ The purpose has been set in order to understand how Ambrose's words might have been intended to be perceived and understood in the lives of individuals, i.e. ordinary Christians, exposed to Ambrose's pastoral care.

¹⁸⁶ Hunter 2007, 197–204. Hunter writes for example: “Ambrose’s insistence on the necessary absence of sex in the economy of salvation led directly to his view that virginity was the highest form of the Christian life [...] Virginity, for Ambrose, had become the paradigm of salvation” 201–202, and “virginal integrity was the touchstone of salvation”, 204. Virginity, in fact, is not an issue in most of Ambrose’s writings.

¹⁸⁷ I have chosen to read Ambrose in this one perspective: His pastoral care. There is always more than one perspective on any human being, nobody is onesided only. Some scholars, mainly following von Campenhausen’s view, in *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* 1929, have seen Ambrose as onesidedly political. One example is Ludwig Hermann, who in 1954 in *Ambrosius von Mailand als Trinitätstheologe* regarded Ambrose as a hazy reflected pro-Nicene advocate, and that Ambrose’s sense of pastoral care and trinitarian theology was “im Schatten seiner kirchenpolitischen Betätigung”, Hermann 1954, 145. Others, such as Huhn 1955; Monachino 1973; Dassmann 1965; Marksches 1995 have seen in Ambrose a bishop of sincere pastoral ambitions. Huhn writes: “das fruchtbarste Feld seines Wirkens war seine praktische Tätigkeit für das Reich Christi [...] die Hirtensorge.” Huhn 1954, 9.

The material of the present study is Ambrose's sermons pastorally understood. Note however, that this study is not purely about homiletics and rhetoric, which were but tools in Ambrose's pastoral work.¹⁸⁸ My intention is to dig underneath the actual words and rhetorical structure of the sermons, with the aim of understanding the words as they were supposed to guide, console, and make the minds and senses of the listening congregation steadfast in grace, delight, faith, and living. Since pastoral care is an exercise in the tension between dogma and culture, the Ambrosian writings' dogmatic content will be read, mapped, and arranged together with his cultural views on reproduction. The dogma is understood as the Creed, and the culture is understood as the medical and biological philosophy which creates the common frame of reference of his time. Thus, my study is meant to position Ambrose's preaching in the pastoral intersection between Christian dogma and Late Antique cultural understanding of human reproduction.

The basic pattern for the Christian faith was the Creed, with its dogmatical perspective of God as the Creator of everything, the Redeemer of the fallen world, and the Fulfiller who makes complete the creation. The Creed in its Milanese form¹⁸⁹ was known by every member of Ambrose's congregation. To postulate that they all knew the Creed is probably to idealise the situation. Nonetheless, knowing the Creed was at least the desirable result of the pre-baptismal educational program the baptised members of the Church were required to undergo.¹⁹⁰ Mariology and Mary's virginity are subjects centred around conception, pregnancy, giving birth, and sexuality. These issues are basic matters in every human existence and culture. Mary's virginity had, in Ambrose's thinking, a threefold meaning of a virginity before, during, and after the birth of Jesus Christ. In this study, I will correlate the trisected pattern of the Creed to the trisected aspects of Mary's virginity. Additionally, I intend to place Ambrose's Christian preaching in the common cultural understanding of reproduction and birth in Late Antiquity. The Ambrosian homilies, which today are printed in well-ordered textual critical editions, were originally speech events offered as pastoral care to a concrete congregation and in a specific context. Ambrose's sermons sounded in the midst of his people's

¹⁸⁸ Ambrose sometimes is critical of rhetoric and utters himself as regarding it as a dodgy device moving people towards heterodoxy, Graumann writes: "This seems to imply that a Christian shouldn't make use of rhetoric at all", Graumann 1997, 588. But the actual content in Ambrose's writings proves the contrary. Ambrose used the ancient rhetoric to such an extent that the rhetor Augustine came to listen to his sermons out of a mere interest in eloquence, Augustine, *Confessiones* 5.23.

¹⁸⁹ The wordings of the Milanese baptismal Creed is found as an appendix of the present study, Chapter 8.1: *The Milanese Version of the Apostle's Creed*.

¹⁹⁰ Schmitz 1975, 69–76. Colish writes about the teaching of Ambrose on the Creed, which the *competentes* committed to memory "in preparation for their public recitation of the creed", Colish 2005, 15.

questions, their sorrows, doubts, pains, joys, and delights. This study is an interpretation of Ambrose's writings in relation to the echoes and resonances from that culture which belonged to those who were objects of Ambrose's pastoral concerns.

The present study intends to juxtapose the trisected credal perspective and the perpetual virginity of Mary and put it in the perspective of the Late Antique medical and biological philosophy regarding sexuality, conception, pregnancy, and giving of birth. This will give the academic society new knowledge on how Ambrose's preaching about Mary's virginity functioned as pastoral care. The study might – hopefully – be both a contribution to the academic society and give historical keys to the modern churches of any confession in formulating the virginity of Mary within a new medical and biological paradigm.

1.5.2. Hypotheses

From the purpose outlined above, I will read and categorise Ambrose's teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity according to the following hypotheses:

- As bishop, Ambrose made pastoral efforts to guide, exhort, and teach his congregation in faith, hope, and love: The Virgin Mary functions foremost in his pastoral care as an example and for identification.
- Ambrose's ultimate pattern for the seen and unseen reality is summarised in the Christian Creed, the *regula fidei*: God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, and the One who completes everything.
- Mariology is not exclusively a spiritual subject but also deals with biological and physical matters (about the Word becoming *flesh*, John 1:14), that is, Mariology is a subject also including human sexuality, conception, pregnancy, and birth in a biological understanding.

1.5.3. Question Formulations

The purpose of the study is to understand how Ambrose's preaching on Mary's perpetual virginity was intended to be perceived and understood by his Milanese congregation. In connection to the hypotheses I pose three scholarly questions for this study. Firstly, the overall question:

- How did Ambrose use the concept of Mary's virginity in his pastoral care?

In order to achieve my goal and answer the overall question, I divide the main question into two secondary questions, each respectively representing the dogma and the culture which create the tension in the pastoral care:

- How did Ambrose incorporate the concept of Mary's virginity in his overall pattern of faith?
- How must Ambrose's teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary respectively before, during, and after the birth of Christ be interpreted in the context the biological and medical assumptions of his time?

1.6. Methodological Considerations

1.6.1. A Start in the Problem

The intellectual focus of the present study is the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity in the context of Ambrose's pastoral care. The way of doing the study has been problem-based. I have selected, sorted, and arranged the material according to the questions I have intended to answer.¹⁹¹ I have selected Ambrose's texts on Protology, Christology, and Eschatology as a pattern for my study. I have put these writings in the context of his contemporary culture's understanding of conception, of giving of birth, and sexuality.

1.6.2. Close Reading

The method by which I have read the texts is a close, careful, critical, and attentive reading. I have read the texts in Latin, Ambrose's mother tongue, as well as in different translations in modern languages. An existing method for such reading is called "close reading". Close reading means to read the texts carefully and critically, and take notice of the wholeness and the details, the context and the underlying meanings. Professor Barry Brummett (1951–), in his book *Techniques of Close Reading* lists several concepts and definitions about close reading. His following points have been useful to me in this study: Consider the *meaning* of the thoughts, feelings, and associations in words and images, and attempt to understand what is socially shared about these. Identify the meanings that are *socially shared* and *plausible* in the given context. Close reading must take into

¹⁹¹ Pålsson 2019, 41–42, she uses a similar method. See also the passage *Problemet i centrum*, in Grenholm 2006, 308–311.

account *context*, and *audience perspective* in the reading.¹⁹² Brummett emphasises that the close reader must take a critical standpoint, and be aware of how a text might have functioned in a given culture, not necessarily consciously for either the writer himself or the audience.¹⁹³

The method of close reading could be used with different theoretical starting points. A theory is a certain principle which, generally, is meant to reveal, comprise, and explain certain perspectives of the reality. There are thousands of theories available for a reading. Brummett uses the map as an explanatory metaphor for theory and method. In his book he tells his reader to think of a part of a country one has never visited before. Depending on what one wants to find, different kinds of maps, theories, can come into play. If the traveller, for example, aims to hike on trails, a roadmap will be of no help. The method is how the researcher wants to get along, with what kind of vehicle. The theory is supposed to help one find what one is looking for. Continuing the metaphor, if one is aiming to camp, a map pointing out the camping sites along the way is the most adequate. In scholarship that means, for example, if a study intends to reveal a presumed historic oppression on women, one can use a feminist theory.¹⁹⁴

What I want to find in Ambrose's writings is how he exercised his pastoral care in the Mariological preaching. His texts were originally preached to Christian men and women in order to support and encourage their Christian belief and virtuousness. Most central was a belief in the Nicene faith. He intended to encourage a lifestyle of integrity, love, and generosity. Sometimes the sermons were originally said to warn against implied threats, for example against the Arians, or the Jovinianists. My starting point is the recognition that Ambrose's writings once had a pastoral context. Using pastoral caretaking as a theory, I become able to recognise how the texts once worked in Ambrose's pastoral caretaking.

1.6.3. Hearing the Silence

A fundamental datum for the present study is Carol Harrison's notion on Late Antiquity as a culture of sounds. Harrison accentuates the importance of considering the listeners in the Late Antique culture:

¹⁹² Brummett 2010, 1–26, the summary is on 25–26. Another standard work on reading texts I have found useful is Grenholm's *Att förstå religion: Metoder för teologisk forskning*. I use his notions about context, contextual analysis, and the perspective of sender – receiver of a text, especially in chapter 8, *Att analysera texter*. Grenholm 2006, 199–225.

¹⁹³ Brummett proposes four questions a close reader should ask when examining a text: 1) What should the audience think or do? 2) What does the text ask the audience to assume? 3) How does the audience know what the text claims? 4) Who is empowered or disempowered? Brummett 2010, 101.

¹⁹⁴ Brummett 2010, 27–47.

There is barely a text, then, which is not, in some manner, meant to be 'heard'; they are full of real and imaginary, heard and overheard 'voices'. If, as subsequent readers, we ignore this oral/auditory dimension, and block our ears to these voices, then I think we run the risk of being deaf to what they have to say.¹⁹⁵

In other words, we must be aware of the listening congregation. The nature of a sound is temporary and passing. The sound a person receives as information, through one's ears, is intrinsically only waves quickly passing in the air. In Late Antiquity there were no techniques to store sound, which means we are deaf to their culture. The Swedish professor in History of Philosophy, Sven-Eric Liedman (1939–), writes that one task of historiography is "to let the otherwise mute background come to the forefront and clear awareness".¹⁹⁶ At the first and superficial glance there is, due to the differences between every culture, a background which is mute to us. We must take into account the fact that we are blind and deaf to many things in Ambrose's world. Reading Ambrose's writings with a conscious awareness of the mute cultural background, and then trying to recreate its sounds, is imperative. The fundamental experiences, adaptations, and assumptions of the people of his time on conception, birth and sexual activity are mute for us – but in the late 300s they were living realities. Docent Christian Braw (1948–) makes an expressive notion when he writes: "for scholarly work is not enough to refer to texts, the task is about understanding *human beings*, in their thoughts and words".¹⁹⁷ Braw demands for understanding the human reality behind the texts.

With Carol Harrison's conviction about Ambrose's Cultural context of sounds and an awareness of the mute sounds in mind – how do we reach his world, give it a voice, and make ourselves able to listen to it? I will use a model from Dell Hymes (1927–2009), a pioneer in the field of sociolinguistics, relating language to sociological categories. In the article 'Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life' Hymes pictures a theoretical model to understand different relations in speech. Hymes encircles the fundamental problem so as "to discover and explicate the competence that enables members of a community to conduct and interpret speech".¹⁹⁸ If the researcher understands the competence of his (or her) object of study, she or he will improve their own "literary competence"¹⁹⁹. The purpose for me in using Hymes' model is to come close to the once-heard speech through the text which remains. Hymes

¹⁹⁵ Harrison 2013, 1–2.

¹⁹⁶ Liedman 1997, 20. English trans. mine. I have found Liedman's idea thanks to Dr. Dag Sandahl.

¹⁹⁷ Braw 2001, 236–237. English trans. mine.

¹⁹⁸ Hymes 1972, 52.

¹⁹⁹ I have found the term "literary competence", thanks to Prof. Antti Laato, in the book *Reading the Old Testament* written by John Barton.

categorises various kinds of areas in the communication and relation between speaker and listener. His model, shortened as the acronym SPEAKING, is: Settings, Participants, Ends, Act sequences, Keys, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genres. I will now explain the model.

The *setting* means time and place for the speech event, i.e. the physical circumstances. The setting of my study is the Late Antique Milan, and those texts which originate from the pulpit of the church as sermons in worship. The *participants* are the members of the Christian community in Milan: On the one hand there is Ambrose, a highly educated Roman bishop and former state governor, and, on the other hand, a mixed congregation of men and women, educated and non-educated, rich and poor. The *end* means expected outcomes and goals of the speech event. For Ambrose, that end was ultimately the salvation of his people. An auxiliary goal towards that end was to guide his listeners in Christian faith and living. The *act sequences* are the form, content, style, and linguistic structure of the speech act. Ambrose used his preaching as a pastoral instrument to inform, persuade, comfort, and admonish his congregation. For this purpose, he chose the styles of his sermons. Ambrose was a well-drilled rhetorician, consciously using the rhetorical palette in his sermons. *Keys* are moods, tones, and manners of communication. It could be, for example, irony or different emotions depending on what goals one wants to achieve. In Ambrose's case he is sometimes emotional, mixing prayers with mystical interpretations of the biblical texts, and sometimes informational, delivering lectures on the Nicene faith. The *instrumentalities* are meant to reveal formal or informal medium of communication. In Ambrose's case what remains is formal oral communication. The *norms* reveal how the participants were supposed to act and react in the speech event. These are rules that govern the speaking and the interactive listening. Norms of interpretation implicate the dogmatic or sociological belief system of the community. The *genres* are kinds or categories of the speech event, such as prayers, poems, lectures, orations etc. In some cases, the awareness of the genre makes a great difference in the understanding of a particular speech.

1.7. Sources

There are about 40 books – of varied length – remaining from the literary efforts of Ambrose, plus 91 letters and at least four hymns; all texts composed within the 20 years of his episcopal duties. It is not possible to consider and analyse the content of all of these texts in one study. I have selected the books which deal exclusively with the three theological *loci* of Protology, Christology, and Eschatology respectively. The fundamentals

of Ambrose's consciously belaboured Mariology are primarily found in the two texts *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18 and *De institutione virginis et sanctae Mariae virginitate perpetua*. *De virginibus* is a composition of three sermons delivered to a mixed congregation of virgins and others. It was published in 377 and dedicated to Marcellina, Ambrose's sister, who herself was a consecrated virgin. *De institutione virginis* is a sermon delivered in Milan at the veiling of a certain Ambrosia. The work is usually dated around 393. These two treatises cover and encircle almost the entirety of Ambrose's career as bishop of Milan, and they also influence each chapter of my study. A great deal of Mariological material can also be found in Ambrose's exhaustive verse-by-verse commentary of Luke, *Expositio in Lucam*, written around 390.

The first aspect of *Mariae virginitas perpetua* is the virginal conception. In the Bible Mary is presented as a virgin at the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:26–38; Matt 1:18–25). The conception of Christ is literally the incarnation (compare 1 John 4:2: *Jesus Christus in carne*) and in systematic theology belongs to the *locus* of Christology. Ambrose was one of the patristic theologians who fought for the Nicene Christology. One group of texts is particularly suitable for a study of Ambrose's Christology: *De fide libri V*, *De Spiritu Sancto libri III*, and *De sacramentis dominicae incarnatione*, all originate between 378–381 and consist of arranged sermons mixed with newly written texts as an answer to an inquiry from Emperor Gratian for an apology and explanation of the Nicene belief. These three writings have been handed down to posterity as a complete work of nine books witnessing Nicene Orthodoxy.

The second aspect of *Mariae virginitas perpetua* is virginity during the birth. Ambrose believed that Mary remained a virgin during the delivery of Christ. Reflections on the birth of Christ could be found early in the Christian thinking (Luke 2:6–7; Galatians 4:4; further 1 Timothy 2:15). The fundamental human experience of a childbirth as painful and fraught with danger is reflected on as early as Genesis 3:16. This brings us to the systematic field of Protology, and how creation is to be understood, both before and after the fall (*ante* and *post peccatum*). Essentially, two of Ambrose's texts belong to the dogmatic *locus* of the creation and the fall: *De paradiso* and *Exameron*. *De paradiso* is an early writing of Ambrose, perhaps written in 377. It is an exposition of Paradise and the doings of Adam and Eve, the only main text in my study which was originally composed as a written text. *Exameron* consists of nine sermons delivered over six days of Holy Week in the mid 380s. It is an exposition of the creation days in Genesis 1, with the material largely borrowed from the similar treatise of the Cappadocian father, Basil the Great (330–379).

The third aspect of *Mariae virginitas perpetua* is virginity after the birth. Ambrose believed that Mary never consummated her marriage with Joseph and lived in lifelong celibacy. Mary was, for Ambrose, the most

splendid example and ideal of a life turned towards the eternal realms and heaven. The dogmatic *locus* which deals with the last things and the world to come is Eschatology. In the sense of life's shortness and fragility, death and future hope, at least six of the remaining writings of Ambrose are dedicated to the subject of Eschatology, namely, three burial sermons called *De excessu fratris*, *De obitu Valentiniani*, and *De obitu Theodosii*, and also three other sermons, *De interpellatione Job et David et de hominis infirmitate*, *De fuga saeculi*, and *De bono mortis*. Satyrus was Ambrose's brother, who died in February 375. Valentinian II (died 15 May 392) and Theodosius (died 25 February 395) were both Emperors. I will use three writings to interpret Ambrose's Eschatology: *De fuga saeculi*, a sermon delivered around 390 and probably addressed to some who recently had been baptised, *De bono mortis*, which continues the treatise *De Isaac vel anima*, and consists of two sermons delivered around 390, and thirdly the second part of *De excessu fratris* which deals with the coming resurrection of the dead.

Ambrose's Latin texts quoted in this study are, in most cases, the ones critically edited in the series *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* (CSEL). The quotations from the writings on virginity are taken from Volume 14 I-II of *Sancti Ambrosii episcopi mediolanensis opera* (SAEMO). The Latin quotations of *Expositio in Lucam* (full title *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*), are taken from Volume 14 of *Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina* (CCL). In a few cases the Latin text of Migne's *Patrologia Latina, Cursus Completus* (PL) is quoted.

I rely mainly on secondary sources for the convictions, feelings, and recognitions concerning childbearing in Ambrose's contemporary culture. The primary sources I have read about the Late Antique view of sexuality, conception, and birth are foremost Galen's various works on the subject and Soranus' *Gynaekia*. Reading these texts gives a good orientation towards what possibly could have been comprehended on the subject in North Italy around the fourth century.

1.8. Disposition

In chapter 2, *De virginibus* II 2.6–18 will be presented as the summary of Ambrose's Mariological views and as containing the building stones of his Mariology. In the passage about Mary in *De virginibus* Ambrose is influenced by Athanasius, who coincidentally lived in Trier in the 330s. As newly ordained bishop, Ambrose used a letter from Athanasius for his first longer exposition on Mary in *De virginibus*. In *De virginibus* basically all materials for Ambrose's teaching of *Mariae virginitas perpetua* were already present, although these were later extended and deepened.

Chapter 3 could have been a chapter about *virginitas ante partum*, because conception comes before delivery. Instead, however, I have chosen to let the Creed steer the disposition, which means that the Protology comes first. In this chapter, I put Ambrose's preaching on Mary's virginity in the birth of Christ (*virginitas in partu*) in the context of, on one hand, his Protology, and, on the other, the emotions, experiences, and understandings that were evoked in the culture of his time when dealing with a birth. Mary's virginity during the birth could be difficult for a modern reader to understand. Since the thought might be alien to some potential reader, I will spend some extra pages in investigating the roots of the idea of a virginal birth both in apocryphal and gnostic sources as well in as the Old and New Testament. The two basic texts for this chapter are the writings *De paradiso* and *Exameron*.

In chapter 4, I expound Ambrose's teaching on Christology and Mary's perpetual virginity. In this chapter the idea of Mary's virginity in the conception of Christ (*virginitas ante partum*) is placed in the context of Ambrose's Christology on one hand, and Late Antique views on normal human conception on the other. There are three writings interpreted here: *De fide*, *De Spiritu Sancto*, and *De sacramentis dominicae incarnatione*.

In chapter 5, I expound Ambrose's view of Mary as a lifelong virgin (*virginitas post partum*) in the context of his Eschatology on one hand, and his contemporary views on sexuality and continence on the other. Ambrose clearly believed and stressed in his sermons that, after the birth of Jesus Christ, Mary lived as a virgin for the rest of her life. That belief was questioned by some theologians during Ambrose's time, most notably by Jovinian, Helvidius, and Bonosus. Ambrose regarded Mary – as well as in her succession of consecrated virgins – as a sign of a future angelic, paradisiac life. Consequently, this aspect of Mary's *virginitas post partum* relates to the Eschatology. As base for this chapter I have chosen the writings *De fuga saeculi*, *De bono mortis* and the second part of the burial speech *De excessu fratris* held a week after the actual funeral service called *De resurrectione*.

I bring my study to an end in chapter 6 with a discussion and offer a conclusion of my findings.

1.9. Definition of Terms

The Latin term for Mary's perpetual virginity Ambrose himself used was ***virginitas perpetua***. He never used today's more usual term *semper virgo*. In my study, therefore, it makes sense to use the term *virginitas perpetua*. *Virginitas* and *virgo* are two different words, but there is no difference in

meaning between the two in the sense of Mary's virginity before, during, and after the birth. There is one more reason to hold to Ambrose's usage, and it is that *virginitas* is a wider term compared to *virgo*. *Virgo* means exclusively a virginal woman. The Latin noun *virginitas* literally means maidenhood, celibacy, continence, not having had sexual intercourse, but also in a wider sense virtuousness and chastity. *Virginitas* affects even the men of the congregation. I discuss this more fully in my study, foremost about Mary's *virginitas* of the mind, which was important in Ambrose's Mariology.

That Ambrose believed Mary had given birth in a virginal way is clear. This study hopefully sheds light on how *virginitas* is to be defined in Ambrose's thinking regarding *ante partum, in partu, and post partum*. Giulia Sissa operates with a simple definition of "virginity": "Inexperience of full vaginal intercourse with a male".²⁰⁰ But Sissa's definition makes no sense in regard to the delivery of Christ (Ambrose did not define the doctrine of *virginitas in partu* to guarantee that Mary did not have any form of intercourse during the giving birth itself). Ambrose defined *virginitas ante partum, in partu and post partum* in a wider sense. Firstly, pertaining to the unhurt and intactness of the body, and secondly, in a more general meaning of virtuous harmony between the soul and body, which in *De virginibus* Ambrose calls "a virginity of the mind".²⁰¹

My study is centred around the three terms Protology, Christology and Eschatology. **Protology** is defined as the systematic expressions about the belief in God as the almighty creator of heaven and earth (so the classical expression of *regula fidei*), and the created human being before and after the fall. **Christology** is defined as the systematic expressions about Jesus Christ's person and work, particularly regarding the personal union in Christ between the divine and the human nature. **Eschatology** is defined as the systematisation about matters of the last things, both on a personal level with the biological death of every person and ideas about what happens in death, and on a universal level with the end of the world, the coming of Christ, a definite judgement, eternal rewards and punishments, and a new creation.

A final definition, essential for my study, is regarding the term **pastoral care**. The definition used in the study is: Pastoral care is communicating the Christian message, summarised in the Creed, in the tension between the Christian dogma and the existing culture, in order to make the Christian people grow in grace, delight, faith, and living. The core of the dogma is understood as the Creed, and the culture is understood as the philosophical frame of reference of a particular time. In the Milanese cultural environment, Ambrose preached his words with the intention of

²⁰⁰ Sissa 2013, 68.

²⁰¹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

guiding, consoling, and making steadfast the minds and senses of the listening congregation. A definition of pastoral care needs to be broad and include every aspect of Ambrose's efforts in strengthening the faith and life of his Christian Community in the Milanese context. Vincenzo Monachino, in his exhaustive study *S. Ambrogio e la cura pastorale a Milano nel secolo IV*, includes the Church buildings, the supervision of the clergy in Milan, the catechumenate and baptism, the liturgy, the eucharist and preaching, the singing in the congregation, the cult of saints, the guidance and consecration on marriage and virgins, the private and public penitence, the charity works, and the episcopal supervision in North Italy.²⁰² Ernst Dassmann, in his *Pastorale Anliegen bei Ambrosius von Mailand*, highlights four areas of pastoral care, which in some ways complement Monachino's study: The work among the heathen and non-baptised, the dealings with martyrs and virgins, the projects of Church buildings and hymn singing, and the pastoral work among the slaves.²⁰³ As seen, a study on the pastoral care of Ambrose could have different focal points. This present study on Late Antique pastoral care is about the pastoral duty of preaching.

²⁰² Monachino 1973.

²⁰³ Dassmann 1998.

2. *De virginibus* II 2.6–18, seen as a Mariological Summary

De virginibus II 2.6–18 contains all the building stones of Ambrose's Mariology, and should be understood as the summary of Ambrose's view of Mary's perpetual virginity. This chapter is a general introduction to Ambrose's Mariology, its contents, motives, and sources.

2.1. Introduction to the Chapter

De virginibus is the first treatise on virginity from Ambrose.¹ More, *De virginibus* II 2.6–18 is his first exposition on Virgin Mary.² The passage in *De virginibus* in which Ambrose deals with the Virgin Mary reveals three basic motives in Ambrose's Mariology:³ Firstly, it is of Eastern and Greek origin; secondly, Ambrose presents Mary as an ideal and example in his ethical instructions; and thirdly, Mary's perpetual virginity is fundamental in Ambrose's Mariology.

De virginibus is one of the first texts Ambrose published. In some of the manuscripts the treatise has the ascription *ad Marcellinam*,⁴ which is a dedication to his older sister. The text appeared at the end of 377 when Ambrose had been bishop "not even for three years".⁵ It is significant that Ambrose choose the theme of virginity for one of his first publications. This kind of asceticism was familiar to Ambrose, both in theory, as is shown in the treatise *De virginibus*, and in practice: His mother lived as a widow, and both his brother Satyrus and his sister Marcellina had chosen a life of celibacy. The idea of virginity affected Ambrose personally and emotionally. In the same year as *De virginibus* was published, he published another ascetic treatise on widows, *De viduis*, which Ernst Dassmann proposes being understood as a "Hommage an die Mutter".⁶

¹ "Le *De uirginibus* est le premier ouvrage d'Ambroise sur la virginité consacrée", Duval 1974, 9.

² For the whole passage, see Chapter 8.2: *De virginibus* II 2.6–18.

³ One can think of other models as well, as psychological and sociological explanations. These are not evident from *De virginibus* II 2.6–18 *per se* and therefore left out in this chapter of my study.

⁴ For an overview of the most important headings in the different manuscripts see Dückerts FChr 81 2009, 96.

⁵ Ambrose, *virg.* II 6.39. *Nondum triennalis sacerdos munuscula parauit*. In the first book of *De virginibus* Ambrose also quotes Jesus' parable about the fig tree in Luke 13:6–9 and asks (about himself) whether this "fig tree of ours might bear fruit after three years", *virg.* I 1.3. *Ferret post triennium fructus et nostra ficus?*

⁶ Dassmann 2004, 43.

De virginibus consists of three books, which were originally sermons given to a mixed congregation on different occasions during 377.⁷ It is possible to date the first sermon: It was given on January the 21th on the feast of the saint and martyr Agnes.⁸ The second book is about the character and manner of the life of a virgin, with example stories⁹ about the Virgin Mary, the virgin and saint Thecla who was also the patron saint of Milan, and an unknown Antiochian martyr. (There are more examples throughout *De virginibus*, including Agnes in the first book,¹⁰ and John the Baptist in the third.¹¹) The third book is composed as a reflection on, or possibly even a reproduction of, pope Liberius' (310–366) sermon given on the occasion of Marcellina's profession of virginity.¹² The event happened on a Christmas day (*natalis salvatoris*) some time when Ambrose still lived in Rome.¹³ The third book deals with questions on the theory and practice of virginity, such as reading, prayer, repentance, and fasting.

According to Peter Dückerts, the editor of the text in *Fontes Christiani*, the three sermons are arranged in the rhetorical scheme: *laudatio – exempla – praecepta*. Dückerts has given headings to each sermon: “Das Lob der Jungfräulichkeit – *laudatio*” for the first, “Die Beispiele der Jungfräulichkeit – *exempla*” for the second and “Die Ermahnung zur Jungfräulichkeit – *praecepta*” for the third.¹⁴

2.2. Ambrose's Mariology of Eastern Origin

2.2.1. Ambrose as Bridge between East and West

The old Church was primarily divided into two parts, the Greek speaking East, and the Latin speaking West.¹⁵ Even before Christ, there was a

⁷ On the homiletic background for *De virginibus*, see Palanque 1933, 493; Dudden 1935, 695; Duval 1974, 11.

⁸ Ambrose, *virg.* I, 2.5. *Hodie natalis est virginis.*

⁹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 1.2. *Exemplis potius quam praeceptis putavimus imbuendam.*

¹⁰ Ambrose, *virg.* I 2.5–9.

¹¹ Ambrose, *virg.* III 5.25–6.31.

¹² Ambrose, *virg.* III 1.1. Ambrose intends according to the introduction of the third book, to “reflect upon the precepts of Liberius, of blessed memory”, *beatae memoriae Liberii praecepta reuoluere*.

¹³ The family moved to Rome in about 340, and Ambrose carried on to Sirmium after 360. The profession of Marcellina is mentioned in Paulinus' *Vita Ambrosii* 4 and the event is said to have happened when Ambrose was still in *adulescens*. Dückerts dates the event as likely to be a Christmas between 352–355. Dückerts FChr 81 2009, 272.

¹⁴ Ambrosius, *De virginibus, Über die Jungfrauen*, Dückerts FChr 81 2009, 76–81.

¹⁵ In addition to Greek and Latin, in the Eastern parts of the Church the Syriac language should not be forgotten. Robert Louis Wilken evaluates Syriac as one of three important

divisive tension between the two. Mary T. Boatwright (1952–), professor of Ancient History at Duke University, writes about the situation in the Roman empire at the time of Augustus (he is the emperor mentioned in Luke 2:1) in a book she has written with two colleagues: “Its Latin-speaking West and Greek-speaking East were so far apart from one another that for each to split off under its own ruler was quite conceivable”.¹⁶ This is one background to the permanent split between the Eastern and the Western Church which took place in 1054. This division affects Christianity even today.

The German Church historian Berthold Altaner (1885–1964) characterised the situation in the Western part of Christianity up to the end of the fourth century as follows: “Das Gefühl der Unterlegenheit und der Abhängigkeit beherrschte die abendländische Christenheit und war offenkundig.”¹⁷ The East and West were not closed entities, however, they were connected for example in trade, military, and politics. Also, in the world of the Roman Empire, networks of theologians were in contact with each other, bishops could either travel peacefully between cities, or send one another theological treatises and letters. This intellectual exchange through conversations and texts contributed to the spread of theological ideas throughout the whole Roman empire. Theological ideas also circulated because of conflicts and involvements of the worldly power in the religious polemic, as when the Alexandrian pro-Nicene bishop Athanasius was exiled from Alexandria, Egypt to Trier and Rome in the 330–340s.

Further, even though one could argue that the central theological language of the early Church was Greek, many theologians in fact knew both languages well. Ambrose’s mother tongue was Latin, but he read and understood Greek fluently. Since Ambrose was pro-Nicene and had a Greek mind, he was, due to his language competence, an important theological bridge between the Greek East and the Latin West. As a bridge between the East and West Ambrose’s texts worked in both directions. In all Greek collections of Orthodox texts, the so called *florilegia* or *testimonia patrum*, and which contain any Latin writer, he is always represented.¹⁸ Another example of Ambrose’s reputation is found from the discussions at the fifth ecumenical council, held in Constantinople in 553. In emperor

languages, together with Greek and Latin, in the early centuries, Wilken 2012, 26. Hubertus Drobner 2007, 549–576, lists the different writings in Syriac, but also in Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Georgian.

¹⁶ Boatwright et al. 2006, 194.

¹⁷ Altaner 1967, 57.

¹⁸ “Ambrosius-texte [...] fehlen, soweit ich sehe, in keinem der Erhaltene Florilegien, wofern dort überhaupt Lateiner herangezogen werden”, Altaner 1967, 76. I have found this notion from Altaner, thanks to Dr. Johannes Börjesson.

Justinian's letter, which was read for the bishops at the council, Ambrose is listed as one of twelve fathers who should be followed in every way.¹⁹

In his own writings, Ambrose is – on almost every subject – influenced by Greek theologians. Mariology is no exception. In fact, parts of many of Ambrose's texts are Latinised Greek originals. A benevolent interpretation is that he personified a commonly held presupposition in patristic thought: Innovation is heresy and continuity with the tradition is orthodoxy.²⁰ The one who is called the "great translator of the Latin church",²¹ Jerome (about 347–419/20), was, however, not always that benevolent towards him. His opinion about Ambrose's *De Spiritu Sancto* being a mere and bad translation is well known: "bad translations exist [...] I have seen good Greek theology brought into bad Latin".²² Rufinus (about 345–410) tried to justify Ambrose's writing, saying "The saintly Ambrose wrote this book on the Holy Spirit not in words only but with his blood".²³ Despite Rufinus' vindication of *De Spiritu Sancto*, the opinion of the Milanese bishop as a plagiarist has continued throughout the centuries. Indeed, one of the focal interests in the scholarly work of the twentieth century has been detecting dependence and plagiarism by means of investigating and analysing the terminology, ideas, and motives in Ambrose's writings. The Swedish professor in classics, Harald Hagendahl (1889–1986), University of Gothenburg, followed the line of Jerome and said that Ambrose's own writings "are largely compilations, being derived from Greek authorities",²⁴ and that in relation to classical writers Ambrose was "an unscrupulous plagiarist".²⁵ During the twentieth century many scholars, mainly French, have put much effort into investigating and mapping out both a creative and theological independent use of Greek authors in Ambrose's writings.²⁶ The German

¹⁹ Justinian's letter to the Council 553 is translated in NPNF2 14. The letter was taken over in the *Professio fidei* at the Council. The relevant passage of the profession reads: "In addition we also follow (*sequimur*) in everything the holy fathers and doctors of the holy church of God, that is, Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, Theophilus, John Chrysostom, Cyril, Leo and Proclus, and we accept (*suscipimus*) everything they expounded on the orthodox faith and in condemnation of heretics." Trans. Johannes Börjesson, thanks to whom I have come aware of the passage.

²⁰ For a lengthier exposition of the subject, see Pelikan 1975, 108–120.

²¹ Drobner 2007, 339.

²² Jerome, *Interpretatio libri Didymi de Spiritu Sancto*. The quotation is found in the preface, *Hieronymi praefatio ad Paulinianum* ed. PL 23. *Malui alieni operis interpres existere [...] ex Graecis bonis Latina vidi non bona*.

²³ Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* II 24. Trans. NPNF2 3.

²⁴ Hagendahl 1958, 115.

²⁵ Hagendahl 1958, 372. Ragnar Holte, another Swedish scholar, supports Hagendahl's view, Holte 1958, 173–174.

²⁶ The most prominent scholar in the field of Ambrose's dependence and on the models he used is Pierre Courcelle, in Courcelle 1968, Coureclle 1973. Others are Hervé Savon, in

philologist Rainer Henke (1951–) investigates in *Basilios und Ambrosios über das Sechstageswerk*, published in 2000, the relation between the Genesis commentaries of Basil and Ambrose, and Ambrose’s dependence on Basil. The result of Henke’s study demonstrates that Ambrose is far from a mere plagiarist and consciously worked with Basil’s model reworking the contents in such a way in order to serve the Milanese pastoral reality.²⁷

One could also maintain that the fact that Ambrose chose virginity as the theme for his first written treatise is due to the Eastern influence. *De virginibus* contains instructions both for the practice of virgins living alone, as well as for virgins living in communities sharing a devotional life, a habit that was introduced in the West during Ambrose’s time.²⁸ Ambrose’s choice of subject for his writing is, so to say, an Eastern idea, modelled on Greek sources, such as Athanasius’ *Letter to virgins*.²⁹ Dassmann lists care for the consecrated virgins as one of Ambrose’s four main pastoral concerns in ‘Pastorale Anliegen bei Ambrosius von Mailand’.³⁰ Augustine tells about a monastic community (*monasterium*) he once visited outside the city walls of Milan,³¹ as well as another ascetic community inside the city walls.³² Ambrose similarly tells about communities of celibatarians under his supervision in Bologna,³³ Vercelli,³⁴ and Verona.³⁵ During Ambrose’s time two different orders of

Savon 1977, Savon 1998; Goulven Madec, in Madec 1974; Yves-Marie Duval, in Duval 1974; and Lorenzo Taormina, in Taormina 1954. These studies have been done by synoptically setting an Ambrosian text alongside a text from a classical author. Christoph Marksches has tried to show the independence of Ambrose’s use of his sources in his efforts to implement theological ideas in his congregation, Marksches 1995; the introduction to Ambrose, *De fide*, FChr 47:1, 41–43; Marksches 2007, 195–222. Thomas Graumann differentiates between Ambrose’s exegesis, “Auslegungslehre”, and his pastoral practice “Auslegungspraxis”, with the aim of showing how Ambrose creatively subordinated his material in order to guide the Christian community, Graumann 1994.

²⁷ “Ihm geht es um Steigerung und Überbietung seiner Quelle im Hinblick auf die Erfordernisse pastoraler Wirksamkeit”, Henke 2000, 423.

²⁸ Romestin, NPNF2 10 1896, 361; Dückerts, FChr 81 2009, 20–21; Gori, SAEMO 14:1 1989, 41; Dassmann 2004, 48–50.

²⁹ *De virginibus* is the most comprehensive Latin treatise on virginity in the fourth century, even if there are earlier analogies in Tertullian’s *On the veiling of virgins*; *On exhortation to chastity*; and Cyprian’s *On the dress of virgins*.

³⁰ Dassmann 1997, 190–194.

³¹ Augustine, *Confessiones* VIII 6.15.

³² Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus manichaeorum* 1.33.70. Quoted in Dückerts FChr 81, 2009, 22.

³³ Ambrose, *virg.* I 10.60. *Sacrarium uirginitatis incolunt*.

³⁴ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 14 (63 PL). The letter mentions a community of priests in a monastic order several times.

³⁵ Ambrose, *epist.* 56.19 (5 PL). This is probably the first evidence of a monastic community of women in Italy, which was started under Zeno of Verona, bishop between 362–371. See Dückerts in introduction to FChr 81 2009, 21.

consecrated ascetic life – solitary living either in the house of the family, or in a shared monastic community – existed side by side.³⁶

Sometime in 377, after Ambrose had given his three sermons, he published them as *De virginibus*. As a text it received an immediate reception history. In contrast to *De Spiritu Sancto*, Jerome appreciated *De virginibus*. In a letter to his friend, the nun and daughter of Paula, Eustochium Julia (368–419), written in Rome 384, Jerome writes about Ambrose and his texts: “In these he has poured forth his soul with such a flood of eloquence that he has sought out, set forth, and put in order all that bears on the praise of virgins”.³⁷ Augustine mentions *De virginibus* with appreciation and quotes it in *De doctrina christiana*:

Ambrose also uses the temperate and ornamented style when he is holding up before virgins who have made their profession a model for her imitation, and says: “She was a virgin not in body only, but also in mind.”³⁸

The quotation at the end of this Augustinian excerpt is about the Virgin Mary and is taken from *De virginibus* II 2.7–8.

2.2.2. The Athanasian Background of *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18

The Mariological content of *De virginibus* is of Eastern origin, and was particularly inspired by Athanasius. The information about Mary in *De virginibus* II, 2.6–2.18 goes further than the sparse information about her in the Gospels. The two Athanasian models Ambrose follows are as follows: Firstly, *Letter to Virgins*, preserved only in a Coptic fragment.³⁹ The similarities are so striking that Ambrose probably had the *Letter to Virgins* at his desk when he composed *De virginibus*.⁴⁰ Ambrose’s text is not verbatim with Athanasius’, and moreover his version is adjusted to another context. Secondly, there are many similarities between Ambrose’s text and a text called *Sententia Nicaeni synodi*, (more often referred to as the *Gnomes* in modern studies). In 1920 Felix Haase published the Nicaean text in a German translation in *Die koptischen Quellen zum Konzil von Nicäa*. The introductory rubric of the specific fragment Ambrose follows is in Haase’s translation: “Dies sind die Lehrsprüche (γνώμη) der hl. Synode (σύνοδος)”.⁴¹ The Greek word *gnōmē* is translated “means of knowing”, or “opinion of wisdom”.⁴² The origin of the *Gnomes* is ascribed

³⁶ Ambrose, *epist.* 56.1 (5 PL). This letter mentions both the community in Verona, and also tells about the virgin Indicia, who was consecrated by Zeno and lived in her parents’ house. For a general overview in a bigger geographical context, see *Forms of Ascetic Living*, in Clark 1999, 33–38.

³⁷ Jerome, *Letter XXII, Ad Eustochium*. Trans. NPNF2 6.

³⁸ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* IV 21.48, 50. Trans. NPNF1 2.

³⁹ Discovered and published by Lefort in *Le Museon* 42 1929.

⁴⁰ Neumann 1962, 39–43; Duval 1974.

⁴¹ Haase 1920, 47. The complete fragment is translation in Haase 1920, 46–63.

⁴² Liddell–Scott 1975, 166.

to the *synodos*, i.e., the Council of Nicaea 325. Despite its title, it is most probably not a text of the Council. The trinitarian language is nevertheless Nicene,⁴³ and it condemns the Arians and Sabellians. Neumann calls the *Gnomes* a “layman’s rule of life” and “a Church order”.⁴⁴ Haase’s text is ascribed to an archbishop Epiphanius,⁴⁵ but in its oldest and perhaps most reliable manuscript it is attributed to Athanasius.⁴⁶ Whoever wrote the treatise, it might well have been handed over to Ambrose’s family or his context by Athanasius himself, since they seem to have been connected as I will show in the following passage. Sometimes in Ambrose’s description of Mary in *De virginibus*, he uses the *Letter* and sometimes the *Gnomes*.

It is an exciting thought to imagine how these texts from Athanasius could have landed in Ambrose’s library. The two bishops belonged to different generations, but could well have had a personal contact. Athanasius was condemned at the Council of Tyre (in today’s Lebanon) in 335. He, himself, understood the case against him as an “Arian conspiracy”.⁴⁷ After being condemned, Athanasius left Tyre and set out for the imperial court in Constantinople to meet the Emperor Constantine. After having heard both sides, the Emperor judged that Athanasius should remain bishop of Alexandria but be exiled and sent to Trier in Gaul. The province Gaul included present-day France, Spain, Portugal, and parts of Germany, much of Great Britain and parts of northern Africa. Trier was the province capital.⁴⁸

There is not much information about what happened during Athanasius first exile in Trier. It was probably a time of no great disturbances, and Athanasius lived quietly there, made friends, read books, and perhaps wrote some texts. At the time of Athanasius’ first exile, the bishop of Trier was the anti-Arian Maximinus, and the two bishops became friends. The Trier historian Heinz Heinen (1941–2013) takes a developed personal relationship between the Athanasius and Maximinus for granted: “Da in der Zeit des Trierer Exils enge Bande zwischen Athanasius und Maximinus geknüpft worden sind, geht aus der

⁴³ The Trinity (τριάς) is in one substance (ουσία): Father, Son, and Spirit as three hypostasis (υπόστασις). Christ is called Lord and God. Haase 1920, 46ff.

⁴⁴ Neumann 1962, 21.

⁴⁵ Haase 1920, 46.

⁴⁶ The studies of Duval 1975, 416, and Adkin 1992, 264 both support an Athanasian origin of the *Gnomes*.

⁴⁷ Athanasius, *Apologia contra Arianos* 85.

⁴⁸ What remains from the conflict at the time are mostly Athanasius’ own reports of the events, in which he presents himself as the Nicene hero being constantly oppressed by the Arian party. Earlier historians followed him uncritically, while in the last 50 years some studies which try to rewrite his story have been published. Examples of the two perspectives are Barnes 1993, who regards the Alexandrian as a virtual deceiver in his way of describing his opponents; and Kannengiesser 2001, who has reacted against an overly critical challenge against Athanasius. Gwynn 2007 offers a study on the underlying motives of Athanasius’ polemic.

turbulenten Ereignissen der folgenden Jahre hervor”.⁴⁹ Heinen draws this conclusion since Athanasius chose to flee to Rome (339–346) for his second exile. Again he spent time in Trier, and Maximinus, in the context of the Council of Serdica 343 (though he was not present himself), took a stand of behalf of Athanasius.⁵⁰ In 330–40 Trier and Rome were pro-Athanasian environments. Athanasius, with Maximinus and his successor as bishop, Paulinus, became, in the words of Hubertus Drobner, “the outstanding defenders of the Nicene faith in the West”.⁵¹ It is telling about the Nicene milieu in Trier that in his *Confessiones* Augustine writes that his friend Ponticiamus discovered *Vita Antonii* in the city.⁵² The German scholar Maria-Elisabeth Brunert writes in a study on the desert spirituality in Gallia: “Die Vermutung liegt also nahe, dass schon Athanasius seinen *Vita Antonii* nach Trier geschickt hat.”⁵³ Perhaps Athanasius also sent his *Letter to virgins* and the *Gnomes* to the Christian community he had resided with in his exile.

By the time of Athanasius’ first exile in Trier, Ambrose’s father, also named Ambrose, was prefect in Gaul. It is a quite fascinating coincidence that the little baby Ambrose could have been born during Athanasius’ stay there.⁵⁴ Paulinus writes in *Vita Ambrosii*: “And so, when his father Ambrose was administering the prefecture of the Gauls, Ambrose was born”.⁵⁵ Athanasius most probably knew the prefect of the city, and if they knew one another personally Athanasius might very well have met the prefect’s firstborn as a little child.

As far as I understand, there were no traces of Athanasius’ *Letter to virgins* before 1929 other than in Ambrose’s *De virginibus*. Louis-Théodore Lefort discovered Athanasius’ letter as a Coptic fragment and published it in an article, ‘Saint Athanase: Sur la Virginité’, 1929. Most probably, the original letter was written in Greek, but what remains is one Coptic translation, and one Latin one in Ambrose’s *De virginibus*. A possible explanation for this is that Ambrose’s father, the prefect in Trier, received a Greek copy of the letter either directly from Athanasius or via Maximinus, which was subsequently kept and preserved in the family until some 40 years later when Ambrose used it as template in his first writing.

⁴⁹ Heinen 1985, 333.

⁵⁰ Heinen 1985, 333–335.

⁵¹ Drobner 2008, 248.

⁵² Augustine, *Confessiones* VIII 6.15. *Nimirum apud Treveros [...] invenisse ibi codicem, in quo scripta erat vita Antonii.*

⁵³ Brunert 1994, 19.

⁵⁴ Depending on the year in which Ambrose was born, either 33/334 or 339. For a discussion on the alternatives, see Chapter 1.3.1: *Ambrose’s Life in Summary*.

⁵⁵ Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 1.3.

2.2.3. *Theotokos – Mater Dei*

In patristic thought two Mariological dogmas concerned the Church fathers, namely Mary as birth-giver of God (*Theotokos*) and her perpetual virginity. Ambrose is the first known author who used the title Mother of God (*Mater Dei*) in the Latin church.⁵⁶ This use of the title *Mater Dei* is one of the most prominent Eastern impressions on Ambrose's Mariology in *De virginibus*.⁵⁷ One complication is that *Mater Dei* is not the most natural translation of *Theotokos*. The two alternatives for the translation of the term given in the Greek-Latin Lexicon *Graecum Lexicon Manuale* are *Deum pariens* and *Dei genitrix*.⁵⁸ The Ambrosian *Mater Dei* must, however, be a translation of the Greek word *Theotokos*, when *De virginibus* II 2.6–18 is compared to Athanasius' *Letter to virgins*.⁵⁹ Mary Cunningham has noticed that in the Greek-speaking world the term *Mētēr Theou* (the Greek equivalent to *Mater Dei*) "seems to have been used interchangeably with 'Theotokos,' expressing Mary's role in the mystery of the Incarnation".⁶⁰ The term *Theotokos* is not found in the Bible, but could be read into Elisabeth's greeting of Mary as "the mother of the Lord" (Greek *he mētēr tou Kyriou*, Latin *mater Domini*, Luke 1:43).⁶¹ According to Ambrose's Christology, from the real union of the divine Son and the human man in Christ it follows that Mary bore and gave birth to God. The sharing of properties, later in history called *communicatio idiomatum*,⁶² makes it necessary to state that if Mary gave birth to Christ, she gave birth to God.

Both Franco Gori and Peter Dückerts in their respective editions of *De virginibus* support the view that *Mater Dei* is a Latin translation of the Greek word *Theotokos*, excerpted from Athanasius' *Letter*.⁶³ The expression appears twice in the Ambrosian text corpus, in *De virginibus* and in *Exameron*. Noteworthy, the term is not used in his treatises on the divinity of Christ: *De fide*, *De Spiritu Sancto*, and *De incarnationis*. The first instance where *Mater Dei* is used is in *De virginibus*: "What can be more noble than the mother of God?"⁶⁴ Ambrose sees no one with greater

⁵⁶ Huhn 1954, 16.

⁵⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

⁵⁸ Hedericus 1754, 887.

⁵⁹ Athanasius, *Letter to virgins* I 12.

⁶⁰ Cunningham 2015, 113.

⁶¹ In the sixth century, the term "Mother of the Lord" was intermingled with "Mother of God". Romanos Melodos writes in a hymn: "After the conception I saw Elizabeth calling me 'Mother of God' before the birth". Quoted in Arentzen 2017, 168.

⁶² According to Josef Huhn, Origen was the first theologian who expressed the content of *communicatio idiomatum*, in his Commentary to the Romans, quoted in Huhn 1954, 15. *Communicatio idiomatum* includes the idea that everything that can be attributed to the humanity of Christ can also be attributed to his divinity, and *vice versa*. The definition is taken from Boss 2007, 53. The term *communication idiomatum* prerequisites that the one person of Christ unifies the natures and properties of the natures.

⁶³ Gori SAEMO 14:1, 1989, 169; Dückerts, FChr 81, 2009, 214.

⁶⁴ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Quid nobilius Dei matre?*

nobility than Mary, and therefore she is the woman God chose to be his mother. The words “Jesus” and “Christ” are not mentioned in the context of Mary’s pregnancy, present is only “God” (*Deus*) and “Lord” (*Dominus*). The simple use of “God” and “Lord” for Christ is an indication of a pro-Nicene stance in this early text.⁶⁵ Ambrose states about Mary: She was worthy of bearing the Son of God,⁶⁶ she has given birth to God,⁶⁷ and twice (in accordance with the biblical text) she is called “Mother of the Lord”.⁶⁸

The second time Ambrose uses *Mater Dei* is in *Exameron* V 20.65. In commenting on the fifth day of creation and the creation of birds, he writes about a certain female bird who conceives without sexual union with a male bird.⁶⁹ In modern eyes it is a legendary misunderstanding, but Ambrose uses it as an analogy to the virginal conception and begetting. He writes: “Should it be regarded impossible for the mother of God, which is not denied possible in the case of vultures?”⁷⁰ In Ambrose’s eyes it is a natural phenomenon, which “proves the glory of the incarnation and affirms its truth”.⁷¹

When, at the end of the fourth century, Ambrose introduced *Mater Dei* in the West, *Theotokos* was already well established in the Greek-speaking Christian world. The first authenticated instance of the title *Theotokos* is found in a Letter of Alexander, bishop of Alexandria (250–326).⁷² It is also witnessed in texts by the Alexandrian theologian Origen (185–254), though with disputed authenticity,⁷³ and in an early manuscript of the prayer *Sub tuum praesidium*.⁷⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan even suggests the existence of a commemoration of Mary in Egypt at the time of Athanasius.⁷⁵ Contemporary with Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianzen (330–

⁶⁵ Against McLynn 1994, and Williams 1995 who argue that Ambrose first started being pro-Nicene in his text *De fide*.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.10. *Maria digna fuit ex qua dei filius nasceretur.*

⁶⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.13. *Maria Deum genuerat.*

⁶⁸ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.12; *virg.* 2.13. Both times *Mater Domini*.

⁶⁹ This analogy is also used by Basil in *Hexameron* 8.6, and by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 1.37.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *exam.* V 20.65. *Inpossibile putatur in dei matre quod in uulturibus possibile non negatur?*

⁷¹ Ambrose, *exam.* V 20.65. *Incarnationis decorem probaret, astrueret ueritatem.*

⁷² Pelikan 1996, 57.

⁷³ Socrates reports of a now lost Commentary on Romans, that Origen used the term *Theotokos*, in Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII 32. The term *Theotokos* is also present in two Greek fragments of Origen’s Commentary on Luke, though its original presence in the text is disputed, see Graef 2009, 36.

⁷⁴ “Under your mercy we take refuge, o Mother of God (*Theotokos*). Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger, O you alone pure and alone blessed.” Trans. Gambero 1999, 79. The Greek text is John Ryland’s Papyrus 470, and the palaeography (style of lettering) points towards dating it to the third century or the turn of the fourth, even if many scholars presuppose a later dating, see Shoemaker 2007, 130–131, 142.

⁷⁵ Pelikan 1996, 60–61, a view supported by Shoemaker 2007, 142.

390), who was patriarch in Constantinople 380–381, wrote in a letter: “If anyone does not believe the holy Mary to be *Theotokos*, he is without the Godhead”.⁷⁶ For the pro-Nicene theologians at the end of the fourth century, the use of the term *Theotokos* signalled an orthodox dogmatic belief in both Christ and in Mary, a true confession of faith, and a right liturgic expression of Marian devotion.

In the fifth century *Theotokos* was deeply implemented in the Christian culture, not least in Alexandria where Cyril (376–444) was bishop.⁷⁷ Leena Mari Peltomaa writes about the term *Theotokos*:

at the time of the Nestorian controversy, the term was a technical expression, which pointed to the place where the hypostatic union took place; it was the womb, the space, the χώμα, which contained God.⁷⁸

The Nestorian controversy resulted in the condemnation of Nestorius’ Christology at the council of Ephesus 431,⁷⁹ and in further definitions of the hypostatic union in one person at Chalcedon 451.⁸⁰ Alois Grillmeier (1910–1998), in his standard work *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, writes that in the fifth century the term *Theotokos* was so deeply established, that it had become “ein Schlüsselwort für den rechten Glauben an die Inkarnation”.⁸¹

2.3. Mary’s Life as an Example

2.3.1. Mary’s Life Set Forth

The second basic motif in Ambrose’s Mariology is his view of Mary’s life as an example and an ideal. Ambrose’s purpose for preaching, and even publishing the lengthy portrayal of Mary, the virgin, was to show her life and her ethics as an example worth imitating. Josef Huhn writes that

⁷⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Epistula* 101. Quoted in Peltomaa 2000, 37.

⁷⁷ Even this is outside the remit of my study, I make a small excursion: The Alexandrian Christology is schematically characterised as Christology which starts from above with the divinity of Christ, in accordance with John 1:14. When the Constantinople patriarch Nestorius (381–451) gave his Marian proposal *Christotokos*, it met enormous resistance from Cyril and others. Nestorius represents another Christological approach, namely the Christology which starts from below and with the humanity of Christ, in accordance with Philippians 2:5ff. These two approaches to Christology are under continuous discussion, one example is the chapter *Die Methode der Christologie* where Pannenberg discusses Christology “von unten” and “von oben”, Pannenberg 1991, 316–336.

⁷⁸ Peltomaa 2000, 105.

⁷⁹ “If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is God in truth, and therefore that the holy virgin is the mother of God [*Theotokos/Dei genetrix*] (for she bore in a fleshly way the word of God become flesh), let him be anathema.” In *Concilium Ephesinum – 431, Third letter of Cyril to Nestorius*. Text and trans. COD.

⁸⁰ These two councils did not solve the controversy. The Oriental Orthodox Churches either do not accept either of the two or refuse the second.

⁸¹ Grillmeier 1979, 644.

Ambrose was the first Western Father, who “das ethische Marienbild eingehend gewürdigt, der die jungfräuliche Gottesmutter als Vorbild namentlich der Jungfräulichkeit hingestellt hat”.⁸²

In the second book of *De virginibus*, Ambrose addresses his listeners, and tells them his purpose in providing examples for them from holy lives. It is for their progress in faith and virtue.⁸³ The bishop turns to his congregation with the word: “You” (*uos*). Ambrose speaks personally to his congregation about the life of Mary.⁸⁴ Even if the theme of the treatise is virginity, Ambrose had all the people listening or reading in mind. He explicitly states that Mary’s life is a lesson *for all*.⁸⁵ Ambrose introduces Mary in the second book as the first *exemplum*, followed by Thecla and an unknown Antiochian martyr. Mary is called a mirror (*speculum*) from which chastity and virtue shine forth (*refulgo*). The metaphor of a mirror was easy for Ambrose’s listeners to comprehend. A mirror was, at the time, at least among upper class Romans, a common property, usually made of metal. Generally, they were small, such as could be carried in the hand.⁸⁶ The metaphor has biblical roots. In Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 it is said of Wisdom: *For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness*.⁸⁷ Ambrose uses the metaphor not only about Mary, but in other contexts as well. In *De fide* the Son is called a mirror of the Father: “Splendor of his glory, shape of his substance, mirror of God’s majesty, image of his goodness”.⁸⁸ The Old Testament is a mirror, Ambrose writes in another text, *De excessu fratris*: “Spiritual things should be made known as in a mirror and in a riddle”.⁸⁹ Gregory of Nyssa uses the same imagery in *De vita Moysis* and writes that a human soul seeking perfection should be like a mirror for God: when God shows his virtue it can be engraved in the soul.⁹⁰ Mary as *speculum* is a sanctified and glorified model, in which Ambrose’s audience can reflect their faces in her character of chastity and virtue.⁹¹

⁸² Huhn 1954, 210.

⁸³ Ambrose, *virg.* II 1.2. *Amplius proficiatur exemplo*.

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.6. *Sit igitur uobis [...] uita Maria*.

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.15. *Omnium disciplina sit*. Cooper writes: “there is compelling evidence that meditation on – and imitation of – both Mary and the other female saints was considered central to women’s spiritual life”, Cooper 2007, 101. That Mary was an example for women is true, but such a statement must be widened. According to Ambrose, Mary was an example for all, both men and women.

⁸⁶ Article *Speculum*, Smith 1859, 1052–1053.

⁸⁷ It would be too much to say that Ambrose identifies Mary with the wisdom of God, but there is an onset towards such an identification.

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* II Prol. 3. *Splendor gloriae, character substantiae, speculum dei maiestatis, imago bonitatis*.

⁸⁹ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 109. Compare 1 Corinthians 13:12: *now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*.

⁹⁰ Gregorius of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis* 2.47.

⁹¹ Powell 2001, 85–110, is a study on the mirror as a Mariological metaphor of virginity.

The different virtues Mary possesses are humility (*humilitas*), sincerity in speech (*verbum grave*), and prudence (*prudencia*).⁹² It is not possible to differentiate definitely between Mary's internal and external attributes, as she wished everyone well (*bene velle omnibus*) and honoured the elderly (literally, to stand up for the elderly, *adsurgere maioribus natu*).⁹³ In his description, Ambrose puts more weight on Mary's external life, due to his use of Mary as a pattern for a virginal lifestyle. He exhorts the people of his congregation: "Let the holy Mary form an instruction of *living*".⁹⁴ This sentence summons *De virginibus'* lesson of Mary, and in the next section Ambrose sets out the example of Thecla.

I will give some examples of how Ambrose portrays Mary in *De virginibus*.⁹⁵ Mary never offended her parents and never argued with her relatives. This was a way to calm the parents in Milan who worried about their daughters' decisions to live a virginal life. Mary had only good conduct: She did not disdain the lowly, nor laugh at any feeble person. She gave to the needy and avoided gatherings of men that would make her blush with shame. Ambrose even tells about Mary's outer appearance as being of certain charm and grace.⁹⁶

2.3.2. Mary as Teacher in Asceticism

In *De virginibus*, Ambrose not only treats Mary as an example to be emulated by the believers, but also as a teacher (*magistra*) in more active sense. She is a teacher in all aspects of virginity (*virginitas*), chastity (*castitas*), virtue (*virtus*), and honesty (*probitas*): Mary's life "is the virginity itself (*virginitas*) set forth in a picture (*imago*)".⁹⁷ Ambrose describes her as having continuously grown in the virtues without the aid of a human teacher. She, in fact, had the virtues themselves as her teachers (*uirtutes magistras habet*), and everything she did was a lesson (*disciplina est*).⁹⁸ She fulfilled all obligations of virtue, "not so much to learn as to teach".⁹⁹ Since Mary had the virtues as teachers she could, in turn, be a teacher, or instructor, for everybody. *Maria magistra* is an important

⁹² Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7

⁹³ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

⁹⁴ Ambrose, *virg.* II 3.19 *Ergo sancta Maria disciplinam uitae informet.*

⁹⁵ All taken from Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

⁹⁶ Ambrose writes that her eyes were meek, "nothing harsh (*torvus*) in her eyes". She was modest in talking and gentle in behaviour. Even her body and body-language were fine and gentle, no abrupt gestures, with a strong gait and a distinct voice. Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

⁹⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.6. Ambrose sees the "beauty of chastity" (*species castitatis*) and the "shape of virtue" (*forma virtutis*) shining from Mary. *Species* and *forma* are used as synonymous concepts. *Species* with a meaning of "visual appearance, look, splendor, beauty, image" and *forma* "form, figure, shape; sort; beauty". They are both related to the Greek word *eidos*, the platonic concept of original, idea, form.

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.9.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.9. *Ut non tam disceret quam doceret.* Trans. Ramsey 1997.

theme in Ambrose's Mariology. She educates her followers in asceticism, renunciation, and a life devoted to God.

The research field into asceticism in Late Antiquity has been of huge scholarly interest over the last 50 years.¹⁰⁰ The ascetic ideal was highlighted in the consecrated virgins, but also in the Christian bishops. According to the Swedish Church historian Siver Dagemark in his study *Augustinus – munk och biskop*, a growing trend in Late Antiquity was that an episcopal ordination was simultaneously an ordination into an ascetic life. This was the case in both Eastern and Western Christianity. The expectations of how a bishop should conduct himself are shown in the biographies of Martin of Tour, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo.¹⁰¹ The ascetic ideal for a bishop was in line with the general trend in Late Antiquity, that asceticism, renunciation of worldly values, and bodily deprivation belonged to the "divine philosopher".¹⁰² When Ambrose was ordained bishop on the 7th of December 374, he was, thus, simultaneously consecrated to an ascetic life. Afterwards, he set his mind to guide his people in the same direction: A disciplined and ascetic ideal was promoted and preached by Ambrose to all his people.

One important instrument Ambrose was able to use was preaching about ideal examples: biblical persons, such as Abel, Jacob, Joseph, Mary; saints, like Agnes and Thecla; or contemporaries, such as Satyrus, Ambrose's brother. All these examples served as ideals for his congregation to imitate and follow. They were used as models for a virtuous and chaste life in the Christian community, for both monastic and ordinary people.

A commitment to an ascetic lifestyle and chastity was highly praised in Late Antique Christianity. The most disciplined examples, for example, the Egyptian desert fathers, were highly respected among the Christians.¹⁰³ It is important to point out, however, that the ideal was not an exclusively introvert, misanthropic unworldliness. The English Latinist, Carolinne White, writes that if an ascetic life was "practised correctly and assiduously, it was believed, such a life would lead to spiritual liberation and an openness to love of God and of other people".¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Peter Brown and Elisabeth Clark are influential scholars in the field of Late Antique asceticism. See their respective studies in the Bibliography. Martin 2005 offers a survey of the state of research and what he calls a cultural turn, which for example means an interest in the functions of a text, an analysis of discourse, investigations in underlying ideas of body and self, and gender criticism. Laughton 2010 is an example of this perspective applied to Ambrose's writings.

¹⁰¹ Dagemark 1995, 175–187.

¹⁰² Cox Miller 1983, 25.

¹⁰³ Ambrose met the desert ascetic influence in Gallia already, where Athanasius' text *Vita Antonii* was spread. See Brunert 1994 for a detailed research on the influence of desert spirituality in Gallia.

¹⁰⁴ White 1998, xvi.

In *De virginibus* II 2.8–9 Ambrose presents Mary as an ascetic who follows ascetic practises. Mary ate and slept very sparingly, and she did both only for the minimum of living, not for pleasure. She disciplined her body by fasting and vigilance. She was industrious in labour. When sleeping, her soul was vigilant, meditating on what she had been reading, or continuing in her dreams what she had not yet finished while awake, or planning what to do next. Revealing a general view of how a woman should behave when outdoors and alone, Ambrose proposes that Mary went outside of her house only when visiting church (*ecclesia*).¹⁰⁵ Although Ambrose writes about Mary as an example for everyone, *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18 still reveals his contemporaneously informed ideal for the virgins. They should be at home, practice silence and loneliness, avoid male contact, read books, pay attention to the spiritual reality, and pray in solitude.

2.3.3. Mary's Life and Ancient Biography

When Ambrose preached about Mary's life, there were certain literary elements people expected to hear. In Late Antiquity rhetoric was one of the most important subjects in the educational program, one in which Ambrose was well trained and skilled.¹⁰⁶ Two examples of rhetorical figures from *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18 are *interrogatio*¹⁰⁷ and

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.9. *Prodire domo nescia, nisi cum ad ecclesiam conueniret.* Ambrose's information that Mary visited the *ecclesia* is commonly transmitted in modern translations as the Christian church and consequently seen as an anachronism, with the purpose of making Mary relevant for the Christian virgins at the time of Ambrose. "Ambrose has made Mary a Christian before the fact in order to make her example more relevant to Christian virgins", Ramsey 1997, 222. "L'anacronismo si spiega, considerando la volontà di Ambrogio di attualizzare l'esempio della Vergine Maria", Gori SAEMO 14:1, 1989, 173. "Es ist erstaunlich, daß Ambrosius hier von einem Gang Marias zur Kirche spricht [...] dieser Anachronismus erklärt sich aus dem Bestreben, das Beispiel der Maria zu aktualisieren [...] mehr die christliche Jungfrau, als Maria im Blick," Dücker's FChr 81, 2009, 220. That need not be the case, however, as both in the Greek Antiquity and in the New Testament era the Greek word *ekklesia* was not used exclusively in the meaning of a church building but also generally for both assemblies of citizens, and for a synagogue. *Ekklēsia* could, for example, generally mean "assembly", in LXX "the Jewish congregation", and in NT "the church". *Ekklēsia* and *synagogē* could be used to "mean much the same, and often correspond to the same Heb. word.", Schmidt 2006, quotation on page 528.

¹⁰⁶ Rhetoric was one of the liberal arts Ambrose was educated in, *edoctus liberalibus disciplinis*, Paulinus *Vita Ambrosii*, 1.5.

¹⁰⁷ *Interrogatio*, the rhetorical question, is a conspicuous example of a stylistic figure which Ambrose uses very often. Generally, in Antiquity this figure was often used in speech and is described in the rhetorical handbooks from that time. The book *De ratione dicendi ad C. Herennium* explains *interrogatio* briefly as if well used decorating a speech. *Ad Herennium* IV 22. Quintilian develops the theme more fully and describes the figure in his *Institutio oratoria* as something that is sometimes more effective than using a plain statement. Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* IX II 6–16.

amplificatio.¹⁰⁸ Two other examples of how Ambrose transferred the classical heritage into the Church is his use of Cicero's model for his *De officiis ministrorum*, he even borrowed the name,¹⁰⁹ and the sermon at his brother's funeral in 378, *De excessu fratris*.¹¹⁰ Ambrose used the classical heritage subordinating it to his main purpose of pastoral care. Noteworthy, the perspective of my study is that the context in which he spoke was always primarily in service of the church. As the German scholar Martin Biermann writes:

Ambrosius kennt die rethorische Theorie; wo er sich zu Aufgaben des Predigers äußert, fließt theoretisches Wissen in seine Ratschläge ein. Er formuliert aber keine technischen Regeln. Er äußert sich überhaupt nur zur Predigt des Bischofs, nicht zu weltlicher Rhetorik oder gar speziell zu Leichenreden oder laudationes.¹¹¹

Spiritual guidance and pastoral care were Ambrose's main concerns in the Christian community. Rhetoric, in his task as bishop for his people, was a toolbox to use with words oral and written, in preaching and in writing. Ambrose wrote and preached about biblical characters in order to extort and lead his people and preach certain theological and philosophical principles to them: How to believe and how to live as a Christian.

Mary is not the only exemplary person pictured in Ambrose's writings. In various Bible expositions and descriptions of post-biblical Christian examples Ambrose describes many ideals for his congregation to imitate. Many of his books are detailed descriptions of lives, such as Noah, Jacob, Abraham and so on.¹¹² In writing about their lives, that is biographies, the

¹⁰⁸ *Amplificatio* is an extension of expressions and qualifications which Ambrose uses in *virg.* II 2.7. He asks what there is to say about Mary's virtues, and he answers by counting 27 different internal and external behaviours and attitudes.

¹⁰⁹ For a lengthy analysis of the dependence of Ambrose on Cicero's *De officiis*, Hagendahl 1958, 347–381. See also Wihlborg 2011, where I have tried to reveal the motives for copying classical models.

¹¹⁰ In *De excessu fratris* Ambrose follows the pattern of a funeral *laudatio*, for the congregation's, common good: "although the funeral is of a private person, yet the weeping is public", *Itaque licet privatum funus, fletus tamen est publicus, exc. fr.* I 5. Ambrose extolls Satyrus for his prudence (*prudentia*), fortitude (*fortitudo*), wisdom (*sapientia*) and so on. Examples are Ambrose, *exc. fr.* I 42 *prudentia*, I 44 *fortitudo*, I 51 *simplicitas*, I 52 *puer*.

¹¹¹ Biermann 1995, 19.

¹¹² All the headings used in the interpretation above could also be used as headings in an interpretation of Jacob the Old Testament patriarch described in Ambrose's text *De Jacob et vita beata*. Mary and Jacob are both called examples (*exemplum*) and teachers (*magistra/magister*), (mainly in two different areas) for the Christian people to imitate and follow, virginity (*virginitas*) for Mary and happiness (a happy life, *vita beata*) for Jacob. The bishop understands the two biblical characters as examples and models of two different virtues, virginity and happiness. Mary is thus used as an image of virginity, and Jacob as an image of the happy life. Both Mary and Jacob are pictured as having a virtuous inner being, their bodies and passions governed by a virtuous mind (*mens*). They are portrayed as having minds of simplicity (*simplicitas*), humility (*humilitas*), and a lack of longing for

bishop had an antique literary genre to follow, where idealising a person or a thing was a figure of speech. In the context of Christianising the Roman society, writing biographies fitted very well. It was a natural task for a fourth century theologian to give the Romans new, Christian ideals and examples to follow and imitate. Twice in *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18 Ambrose uses the term *vita*¹¹³ in his description of Mary, and in creating a literary *vita Mariae* he follows a pattern of a Late Antique biography. It should be noted that throughout his complete text corpus Ambrose does not seem to be influenced by either the *Protoevangelium of James*, which offers information about Mary's parents and childhood, or by traditions about Mary's last moments in life and death. Many Christian theologians in Late Antiquity, including Origen and Zeno of Verona, were influenced by the *Protoevangelium*, but *De virginibus* contains another tradition about Mary, taken over from Athanasius.

2.3.3.1. Biography in Late Antiquity

In Antiquity there was a difference between history and biography. An antique historical text was expected to put a human in a wider context, whereas a biographical text focused on an individual person, regarding both their internal life and external appearance. The outer course of events concerned the biographical writer only as far as it cast light on the person. A distinction not made in Antiquity was today's differentiation between science and literature; in Antiquity stylistic concerns were as important as historical accuracy.

Why does anyone write a biography of a past person? There is more than one answer to that question. One purpose is remembrance and veneration of a certain individual worth remembering. A second purpose, valid for the Christians, was to commemorate and venerate the saints. The holy person was understood as being heavenly alive and interceding on behalf of the Church. A third, and no less important purpose, is that it gives a message to the contemporary society. The message was the individual's example, ideas, and standards. Their perfect interior characters and thinking were held up for the contemporary society to imitate and follow.

worldly good and prestige. Ambrose pictures both Jacob and Mary with ascetic and good behaviour, and good manners. They are both abstemious with food, and very respectful towards their parents. Their bodies reflect their inner virtuous souls and minds. Noteworthy are the references to paradise and the divine image. According to Ambrose Mary's bodily appearance was an image (*simulacrum*) of her soul, not bound by sinful passions, and Jacob was unconcerned with worldly things coming close to the image (*ad imaginem*) and likeness (*similitudo*) of God. Both are portrayed as longing for God as the ultimate goal and share an indifference towards any worldly goods. A last, noteworthy similarity is the singing. The end of Mary's earthly life is the start of a new heavenly task of leading the choir of virgins, and Jacob is singing with spiritual notes at the end of his life. The singing concludes the life of both, perhaps revealing Ambrose's own musical interest.

¹¹³ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.6; *virg.* II 2.15.

The American scholar Patricia Cox Miller (1947–) has written *Biographies in Late Antiquity*, a study of Late Antique biographies. Her overriding perspective is that “ancient biographies of holy men were caricatures whose aim was to evoke, and thus to reveal, the interior geography of the hero’s life”.¹¹⁴ In this, “exaggerating, typifying, stylizing, idealizing, and so on”,¹¹⁵ was a naturally proper and approved part of the concept. This is said of biographies in general in Late Antiquity. A specific Christian example can be seen in *Life of Constantine*, Eusebios’ biography of the first Christian emperor.¹¹⁶ Looking at Ambrose’s texts, the bishop certainly intended to reveal good Christian examples for his parish, exemplifying their inner lives, their virtues, their struggle for righteousness, and in this he exaggerates, typifies, stylises, idealises, and so on.

There was a stylistic change in Late Antique biography which occurred at the same time as Christianity entered the scene. Earlier, pagan biography was more concerned with the outer life. Cox Miller writes that in the third century the idea of the divine philosopher, a holy man, changed the concept of biographical portrayals. Sextus writes in his *Sentences* that the soul of the sages, the true philosophers, were “God’s mirror”.¹¹⁷ Porphyry declared that the sage “became divine by his likeness to God”.¹¹⁸ Porphyry wrote a biography of the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, who died in 270, in which Plotinus is described as an unworldly person, and the picture portrayed is similar to that of Christian ascetics.¹¹⁹ Cox Miller describes the change thus:

biography helped create and promote the myth of the holy man and was not simply a vehicle for reporting idealistic embroiderings on historical lives; biography became an important tool, along with apology, in the proselytizing of Christians and pagans.¹²⁰

The *Lives* became important as a pattern for Christian culture, as the Oxford professor Averil Cameron (1940–) writes: “Sacred lives functioned as ideological and literary exemplars”.¹²¹ Moreover, “the *Lives* presented ideals of behavior for Christians to follow”.¹²²

Undoubtedly, Christian biographies played an important role in Christianising the Roman society. Carolinne White has translated and

¹¹⁴ Cox Miller 1983, xi.

¹¹⁵ Cox Miller 1983, xii.

¹¹⁶ For a broader discussion on biography in Late Antiquity, see Cameron 1991, Williams 2008, and Hägg 2012. Hägg’s study is more focused on the classical heritage, and less on the Christian era.

¹¹⁷ Sextus, *Sentences* 450. Quoted in Cox Miller 1983, 18.

¹¹⁸ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 285.20. Quoted in Cox Miller 1983, 18.

¹¹⁹ Porphyry, originally in Greek but in Latin *Vita Paulinii*, White 1998, xxx–xxxi.

¹²⁰ Cox Miller 1983, 20.

¹²¹ Cameron 1991, 145.

¹²² Cameron 1991, 147.

published no less than 16 lives of different men and women from the Christian Late Antiquity.¹²³ I think Ambrose sums up the one main goal of sharing the lives of these individuals with his congregations when he writes: “the lives of the saints are for the rest a standard how to live”.¹²⁴ The same biographical goal is described by Athanasius in his *Vita Antonii*: “Remember the deeds done by each of the saints so that the memory of their example will inspire your soul to virtue and restrain it from vices”.¹²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa writes about his sister Macrina: “Look at her [...] remember what she taught you about what was proper and correct in each situation.”¹²⁶ It should not be overlooked, however, that the purpose was not only to give Christians examples to follow, but also to promote certain ideas. *Vita Antonii* is, for example, a biased account in the Arian debate of the fourth century.

2.3.3.2. Models for a Vita

In *De virginibus* Ambrose gives information about Mary’s outer good behaviour, bodily outlook, inner strength, and virtuous life and so on, as well as biographical data on the events of the annunciation.¹²⁷ Dagemark presents a possible model used by the Christian biographers.¹²⁸ It belongs to the genre Speech of praise (*laudatio*) and had the following fixed pattern (this model was used as training exercise):

¹²³ The six men’s lives translated in White 1998, was followed by ten (or nine) women’s in White 2010.

¹²⁴ Ambrose, Ioseph 1.1. *Sanctorum vita caeteris norma vivendi est*.

¹²⁵ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 55. Trans. White 1998.

¹²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 27. Trans. White 2010.

¹²⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.10–14 retells and comments on the Gospel story from Gabriel’s visit to the birth of Christ (Luke 1:26–2:38). The evangelist portrayed (*evangelista monstravit*), the angel found (*angelus repperit*) and the Holy Spirit chose (*Spiritus Sanctus elegit*) Mary. She sat without human company alone in the presence of books (*libri*), archangels (*archangeli*) and prophets (*prophetae*). Ambrose uses the plural (*ad ipsos ingressus angeli*) for Gabriel visiting Mary, revealing an idea of several visits. This diverges from the narrative in Luke’s Gospel, who only mentions one visit (Luk 1:26). *Gnomes* 35 gives the information: “Denn die Engel kamen viele Male zu ihr, sie betrachteten die Eigenart ihrer Lebensweise und bewunderten sie”, trans. Haase 1920. At the visit of the angel, Mary was frightened at first, as she mistakenly thought it was a man, but when she understood the angelic visit, she was appeased. After the Annunciation Mary visited Elisabeth, which shows Mary’s virtuous attitude towards her older kin. Mary did not set out for Elisabeth in order to set an example or as a help in belief, but rather to show love (*pietas exhibetur*). Ambrose enumerates the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Christ, the barren Elisabeth gave birth, the virgin conceived, the dumb spoke, the magi adored, Simeon waited, but Mary kept herself undisturbed, “kept all things in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Ambrose explains the wonders as Mary gaining knowledge about God. Mary, although she is the most perfect example, was ignorant in many regards and “desired to learn the precepts of the Lord” and “yearned to know God”.

¹²⁸ Dagemark 1995, 9–41.

1. Outer good
 - The lineage and background of the hero: city of birth, public constitution, parents, and family.
 - Personal preferences: upbringing, friends, reputation, official position, wealth, number and appearance of children, death.
2. Bodily good
 - Health, strength, beauty, emotional expression.
3. Spiritual good
 - Virtues (*virtutes*), such as wisdom, temperance, fortitude, justice, piety, generosity, magnanimity.

In a Late Antique biography, it was most important to show the inner virtues, perfection of the soul. The Roman biographer Suetonius' (about 70–130 AD) biographies of the emperors (*De vita caesarum*) were well read in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and influenced later biographical writing. In *Lives* Suetonius differentiates between public life (*vita*) and private, inner life (*mores*). A genre closely related to biography is the *encomium*, which is a figure, song or speech of praise. The content in an *encomium* is grouped around the virtues of a specific person, who is worth glorifying. The Swedish professor in Classics Tomas Hägg (1938–2011) writes (published *post mortem* 2012) that in the Hellenistic Antiquity “there was no rigid divide between biography and encomium”.¹²⁹ Hägg uses the term “encomiastic biography”,¹³⁰ and *encomium* could have the general meaning of a laudatory speech. More usually in Antiquity a wise man was seen as purified in his body, and liberated in his soul so he could contemplate and gaze on the divine being – but it was the inner purity and good virtues that took form in the outer manifestations in, for example, their way of eating, dressing, working etc. In other words, the movement of a virtuous life was from the inside and worked outwards.

2.3.3.3. Biography of Christian Women

In *De virginibus* Mary, a woman who is simultaneously a virgin and a mother, is pictured by Ambrose as the most splendid example and ideal. Writing lives of women was a Christian novelty. According to Hägg there are “only distant analogies in the earlier tradition”.¹³¹ The first narratives about Christian women were stories of martyrs. In 203 Perpetua and

¹²⁹ Hägg 2012, 232.

¹³⁰ Hägg 2012, 233.

¹³¹ Hägg 2012, 386. Compare Boatwright et al.: “The virtual absence of women from a history of the Roman state affairs is glaring but readily accounted for. Even women of citizen status were excluded from the types of activity that historians normally recorded.” Boatwright et al. 2006, 129.

Felicitas were martyred in Carthage. Their story is one of the oldest known, and might be, according to White, in part autobiographical.¹³² Gregory of Nyssa lived almost exactly at the same timespan as Ambrose (relatively 330–90 and 339–397) and in 380 Gregory wrote a biography about his sister Macrina.¹³³ We read of her as a well-educated woman, drawn to a monastic community where she becomes the head, and someone who also inspired and guided her brother spiritually. The purpose for Gregory, beside love and veneration of his sister, was propagating an ascetic ideal and showing in Macrina an ideal model for a chaste monastic life. *Life of Macrina* was followed by numerous accounts of lives of Christian women. Jerome, for example, wrote about his female friends Paula, Marcella, and Fabiola. Ambrose's picture of Mary in *De virginibus* was composed around this time, written in 377, in fact three years prior to the *Life of Macrina*.

The lives of Christian women in the Late Antique era have been thoroughly investigated in recent decades.¹³⁴ The aforementioned translations of lives made by White show the role holy female lives played in Late Antiquity, and in the introductory notes White lists the different apologies found for writing about the women. The ascetic women described were as worthy as men, and White writes that they “shed those characteristics thought to be typical of the female sex and become like men in their courage, determination and discipline”.¹³⁵ The female lives offered two principal ways for Roman Christian women to demonstrate radical self-discipline; firstly, rejection of family ties to live in celibacy, and secondly, rejection of inherited wealth to live in poverty.¹³⁶

The main expectation of a woman in Roman society was to marry and have children. Most Christian women lived within the normal structure of family life. Since the *Lives* were for all people to hear, or read, an interesting question is how the stories functioned in the Christian society. They certainly made an impact, but not in a way that made all women choose an ascetic life for themselves, in fact, only an exceedingly small minority did so. It was an important theological task for the theologians to preach and teach the good of both marriage and celibacy, and to maintain a balanced view between the two. As is clear in Ambrose's description of Mary, sexual renunciation was one, although not the primary, characteristic of a monastic life. White lists financial generosity, rejection of comfort and elegance, fasting, sleep deprivation, and effort put

¹³² The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas is translated in White 2010, 5–17.

¹³³ According to Hägg, Gregory's biography about his sister was a novelty also in him being so closely related to the subject of the book, Hägg 2012, 386.

¹³⁴ For a brief list of studies and translations, see White 2010, xxxi–xxxiii.

¹³⁵ White 2010, x.

¹³⁶ White 2010, xii.

into attaining virtues as all playing more prominent roles than virginity.¹³⁷ All these could be striven for, even by a married person.

Another scholar, Lynda L. Coon, in her *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, published in 1997, in seeking for the biblical roots of asceticism argues that the *Lives* transmitted biblical images of piety and faith into the Church and has had a continuous influence in modern times. Coon calls the Late Antique holy female *Lives* “sacred fictions”, and “sacred models”, and attributes them with having the purpose of evoking experiences of desert asceticism, reinforcing theological orthodoxy, and promoting virginity. About the female image, another Church historian interested in female biography, Susan Harvey, writes in *Women in Byzantine Hagiography*:

as women had been the source of sin through Eve, they could also be the source of salvation through Mary, the Second Eve. In hagiography, women become the weak made strong, the unworthy made worthy, the foolish made wise, the sensual made spiritual.¹³⁸

This quotation makes it interesting to investigate Ambrose’s idealised image of Mary, together with his picture of Eve as will be seen in the chapter on Protology later in this work.

2.3.3.4. *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18 in Context of Late Antique Biography

So far, certain patterns and contents of Late Antique biography have been described and now it remains to be seen whether these can be detected in Ambrose’s *De virginibus* II 2.6–18. Ambrose writes that Mary’s life (*vita*) is given as an example and the purpose of preaching about Mary, is in setting forth her life as an example to those under his pastoral charge. Mary is called a teacher for everyone, particularly for the virgins. She is a mirror from which many desirable virtues shine. The ascetic ideal is promoted through Mary’s life, which is an instruction of life (*disciplina vitae*). Mary is ascribed many ascetic practices, including fasting and vigilance.

The picture of Mary in *De virginibus* is an idealisation and contains extra-biblical material. For example, in the biblical texts there is no notion that Mary never laughed at a feeble person, but Ambrose informs of that she did not.¹³⁹ Another example of new information is Mary’s literary interest: Did she really enjoy reading books?¹⁴⁰ A modern reader would suggest that nobody knows. Ambrose, however, steers the gaze of his congregation towards Mary and states that she read books, with the purpose of encouraging reading for both men and women under his pastoral care.

¹³⁷ White 2010, xxii.

¹³⁸ Harvey 1990, 45.

¹³⁹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.10.

Mary is portrayed as having an outer good, a bodily good, and a spiritual/internal good. The picture of Mary is not a complete biography, however, and the outer circumstances of her life's context are sparsely present in the picture: It contains no detailed descriptions of her relatives, hometown, or parents. The bodily good is described as her having a delicate bodily language and a pleasant voice. The spiritual good is, however, what Ambrose makes the most of. Her virginity is in her mind, more than in her body. Moreover, her virtuousness works from the inside out; her soul is like a lamp shining in a house. According to Ambrose's text, it is Mary's private, inner life that is the most admirable.

The description of Mary in *De virginibus* ends with a sublime and magnificent passage about Mary as leader of the heavenly choir of virgins.¹⁴¹ This makes the point of setting Mary forth for the Christian community clear: She turned her whole being towards God and the heavenly realms of reality. Ambrose had an important message for his congregation, and he allows Mary to tell his people: Turn yourselves towards God and put your hope in heaven.

Concludingly, Cox Miller writes in her book *Biography in Late Antiquity* about the purpose of evoking and revealing an interior geography. Ambrose preached to his congregation about Mary's inner life and virtues, and how it took on outer expressions such as caring for parents, handling money, lifestyle, and so on. Cox Miller's words of "exaggerating, typifying, stylizing, idealizing, and so on"¹⁴² aptly summarise how Ambrose made Mary an ideal type of a self-disciplined, restrained, ascetic, pious, and respectful Christian example. Mary was clearly used as pattern for a Christian culture. Her inner mind and outer behaviour were a pattern for Ambrose's people to follow.

2.4. Mary as Perpetual Virgin

2.4.1. Virginity in Mind

So far, two fundamental motives of Ambrose's Mariology have been highlighted: Firstly, that he uses Athanasius and other Eastern theologians as building stones, and secondly, that he uses Mary as an example and this is done following Late Antique patterns of sketching a person's life story. The third motif in Ambrose's Mariology is his belief in Mary's perpetual virginity. As such she works as a biblical person in whom the believing Christians at the time of Ambrose might reflect him- or herself: The virgins, but also the mothers and even the men. The picture of Mary in *De virginibus* begins with introducing Mary's life as a virgin is set forth in an

¹⁴¹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.16–17

¹⁴² Cox Miller 1983, xii.

image or portrait.¹⁴³ For Ambrose Mary's *virginitas* was a fundamental feature of her character.

According to Ambrose's definition, Mary's virginity was not only a bodily status, but foremost something regarding the mind. In *De virginibus* Ambrose often refers to the virginity of the mind. One example is *De virginibus* I 8.44–46, where Ambrose writes about virginal souls and a seal of God in the heart of the virgin which is fenced by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁴ The question of where in a person Ambrose generally locates the concept of virginity, whether it is in the body or in soul, has recently been put by Julia Kelto Lillis.¹⁴⁵ Lillis notices that Ambrose tends to talk about physical virginity when dealing with past exemplars, whereas virginity of the soul is emphasised in the direct instruction to present-day virgins.¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless Lillis concludes: "virginity consists in both bodily and spiritual purity".¹⁴⁷ In *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18, where the context is Mariology, Ambrose clarifies that a virgin's body is the temple of God: Her mind (*mens*) is the altar where Christ is daily sacrificed, and her soul (*animus*) exhales the divine fire.¹⁴⁸

In the *Gnomes* these two meanings of virginity are also discussed, with precedence given to mental virginity. A virginity of the body prerequisites a mental virginity, for example, it is written in the *Gnomes*: "Die Jungfräulichkeit aber des Körpers ohne die Zucht der Seele ist eine Torheit".¹⁴⁹ The virginity of the mind is exemplified in the *Gnomes*, for example, as a mind without greed and with no interest in fine clothes.

In *De virginibus* Mary is explained to be a virgin not only in the body (*corpus*) but also in the mind (*mens*). Her bodily appearance was an image of her soul and an indicator of her virtuousness.¹⁵⁰ Ambrose uses the metaphor of a house that ought to be judged from the thresholds within and which shines with a lamp from within, and argues similarly that our mind should shine from within.¹⁵¹ To me it is clear that Ambrose counts the virginity of the soul/mind as primary which in turn affects the bodily virginity: Mary's body "was not *hindered* by any bolt".¹⁵² The fall of humanity, as Ambrose understands it, was the loss of the soul's

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.6. *In imagine descripta virginitas vita Mariae.*

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *virg.* I 8.44–46.

¹⁴⁵ Under the heading *Is virginity primarily located in the body or soul(/mind)?*, Lillis 2017, 201–222.

¹⁴⁶ Lillis 2017, 205.

¹⁴⁷ Lillis 2017, 222.

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.18. *Mens* and *animus* are paralleled as synonymous terms in the passage.

¹⁴⁹ Haase 1920, 53.

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Corporis species simulacrum mentis.*

¹⁵¹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Mens nostra [...] lux intus luceat.*

¹⁵² Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Nullis repagulis corporalibus impedita.*

virtuousness, which in turn affects the body in different ways: in sinful actions, illness, and death.¹⁵³

Ambrose develops the idea that Mary had a character that caused her to be chosen by God. “What could be more excellent than the Mother of God? What could be more splendid than she whom the reflection (of the Father) chose (cf. Hebrews 1:3)?”¹⁵⁴ Ambrose describes Mary as having such a character, more particularly with many virtues and behaviours, that God was able to choose her as the mother of God. Compared to Athanasius, Ambrose emphasises this point, using the word *as such* (*talis*): *as such* the evangelist, the angel and holy Spirit portrayed, found and chose her in Nazareth.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore: “She was deserving (*digna*) of giving birth to the Son of God”.¹⁵⁶ During her life Mary kept her inner character and lifestyle virtuous. Ambrose sees in Joseph, Mary’s husband, a metaphor for “purity” (*pudor*). In the same way as Mary did not go to the temple without Joseph, wherever a virgin might go out she should bring *pudor* with her as companion to each of her virtues. *Pudor* could be translated as purity, but it also includes the nuances of shame, chastity, and modesty. Gori uses the Italian word “*pudore*”, which means modesty and shame. Dücker translates it as “*Keuschheit*”, which is chastity. Without *pudor*, Ambrose can think of no virginity.¹⁵⁷

2.4.2. Virginität in Body

Ambrose’s proclamation in *De virginibus* about Mary reads: “What could be more splendid than she whom the reflection of the Father chose, what more chaste than she who gave birth to a body without any corruption of her body?”¹⁵⁸ Mary’s splendor and her virginity are fundamental terms for Ambrose’s Mariology. The wording Ambrose uses is *corpus sine corporis contagione generavit*. Two physical and biological bodies are involved in the conception and the birth: the body of Christ and the body of Mary. It is important to understand the Latin feminine noun *contagio* (not the masculine *contagium*) here. *Contagio* generally means contact and touch, also in a sexual way. It has a negative sense of physical damage and

¹⁵³ This is developed further in Chapter 3: *Protology: Deus creator omnium*. For a short and well written passage on illness and health in regard to the fall in Ambrose’s thoughts, see Müller 1967, 209–214.

¹⁵⁴ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Quid nobilius dei matre? Quid splendidius ea, quam splendor elegit?*

¹⁵⁵ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.10. *Talem hanc euangelista monstrauit, talem angelus repperit, talem spiritus sanctus elegit.*

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.10. *Digna fuit ex qua dei filius nasceretur*. The idea of Mary’s holy character and her worthiness is a seed for what later developed to the concept of Mary’s immaculate conception in Western Christianity, even if it is not yet expressed as such in Ambrose’s theology.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.14.

¹⁵⁸ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. [...] *quae corpus sine corporis contagione generavit.*

infection, and more abstractly as a bad influence and demoralisation.¹⁵⁹ In James Adams' *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (listed as *contamino*) *contagio* is regarded in classical Latin as a sexual expression for violence and corruption (even if it is a rare term).¹⁶⁰ I suppose that *contagio* is used in a seemingly straightforward way to express Mary's perpetual virginity, but not in the way of disparaging human sexuality on a general level.

2.4.2.1. *Virginitas ante partum*

Ambrose believed Christ's conception was a virginal conception. That Christ was conceived without sexual intercourse is the first aspect of Ambrose's teaching on Mary's virginity. The issue in the whole passage on Mary in *De virginibus* is not the perpetual virginity of Mary but rather her as an example. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the expression *Mater Dei*, Mother of God, and how it was introduced into Western terminology by Ambrose himself. In chapter 4, I will return to the subject and analyse Ambrose's main treatises on Christology. These treatises are *De fide* in five books, *De Spiritu Sancto* in three books, and *De incarnationis* in one book. How Ambrose understood the mystery of the divine-human conception in relation to Mary as virgin can be traced in these works in particular.

2.4.2.2. *Virginitas in partu*

Ambrose believed and preached that Mary was and remained a virgin during the birth of Christ. This belief is a reflection on the basic human condition of life and death, pain, and fragility of the human body. According to the biblical story of creation and fall, it is pregnancy and birth that are mostly influenced by the fall (Genesis 3:16). The *locus* in which the idea of Mary as *virgo in partu* is thus not only Christology, but also Protology since it is about a birth from a female body. Therefore, when in *De virginibus* Ambrose writes that "the bodily appearance itself was a representation of her soul, a figure of her virtuousness",¹⁶¹ the thought that Ambrose believed Mary's bodily and mental character was like Eve's pre-lapsarian character is close at hand. This idea is more closely developed in *De institutione virginis*, where Mary is portrayed as an ideal woman, as Eve was before the fall. Mary, as the second Eve, gives birth without being influenced by the curse of the first (compare Genesis 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:14–15). In chapter 3, I analyse and discuss Ambrose's main texts about the creation and fall, *Exameron* and *De paradiso*, and investigate whether Ambrose pictures Mary as a mother of identification

¹⁵⁹ Ahlberg 1945, 188. Sleumer lists as translations of *contagio* 1) Berührung, Ansteckung, Seuche. 2) Befleckung, lasthafter Verkehr; terrenum: mit der Welt oder Sünde. 3) eheliches Beilager, Befruchtung. Sleumer 1926, 239.

¹⁶⁰ Adams 1982, 198–199.

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. [...] *ut ipsa corporis species simulacrum fuerit mentis, figura probitatis.*

for his contemporary mothers. In *De virginibus*, Mary's ideal body is described as not being hindered (*impedio*) by any bodily restraints (*repagulum*),¹⁶² which indicates that Mary, as the virginal ideal, is in some way in a paradisiac manner. It is not totally clear what Ambrose regarded as virginity in birth. Nonetheless, in preaching about Mary giving birth, the listening mothers of Ambrose's congregation could find in Mary a birth-giving woman with whom they could identify themselves.

2.4.2.3. *Virginitas post partum*

Ambrose believed and preached about Mary's life-long celibacy; she had no children other than Jesus. The subject of Mary's perpetual virginity is treated at length in the text *De institutione virginis*, originally a personal account against a proposal from a certain bishop Bonosus that Mary had had a normal marriage with Joseph and had given birth to more children than Jesus. The basic idea revealed in *De virginibus* is that Mary's life is an example of a celestial virginity, set forth in the likeness of divine origin.

The passage about Mary in *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18 ends with a celestial vision of Mary in heaven, leading a choir of virgins.¹⁶³ It is a magnificent vision of how the virgins will enter heaven after a completed life-run. Mary will, from the heavenly realm, greet the virgins, embrace them, and draw them to the Lord. Ambrose paints Mary as the faithful bride of Christ, "she has been faithful to the marriage with my Son, she has maintained her bridal bed with an unstained chastity!"¹⁶⁴ The picture is intimate: A marriage (*torus*), a marriage bed (*thalamus nuptialis*), and Mary with an unstained chastity (*pudor immaculatus*). In the vision, Jesus Christ himself commends the followers of Mary to the Father.

There will be a procession, with joyous applauding angels, when one who has lived a heavenly life in the world merits inhabiting heaven itself. Taking the tambourine Mary will lead the choir of virgins who are chanting to the Lord. This is an allegorical interpretation of Miriam leading the female choir in Exodus 15. Ambrose has already mentioned this passage about Miriam in the first book of *De virginibus*, and called her a type of the Church:

¹⁶² Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7.

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.16–17. The passage is closely paralleled to Athanasius' *Letter to virgins*. Noteworthy is that Ambrose pictures a heavenly choir of virgins, not a choir of angels. Biblical models for this might be behind this idea, as Jeremiah 31:13: "then shall the virgins rejoice in the dance", a passage which Jerome later translated as *virgo in choro*. The translation is, however, unlikely, since the Septuagint does not insert the Greek word for choir, *choros* (Jeremiah 38:13 according to the Septuagint enumeration). Later, the picture became a beloved motive in byzantine iconography. I am not aware of earlier or contemporary patristic descriptions of the heavenly choir of virgins outside of Athanasius' and Ambrose's writings.

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.16.

Miriam too, who with her timbrel led the dancing with virginal modesty (cf. Exodus 15:20). But consider what she represented then. Was it not the Church, which as a virgin was, through the unsullied Spirit, coupled with the devout assemblies of the people so that they might chant divine songs?¹⁶⁵

In *De virginibus* I 3.12, Miriam is a type of the Church, but Neumann notices that “whenever in his later writings the text of Exodus recurs, it is always of Mary, Mother of Jesus, that he thinks”.¹⁶⁶ In *De virginibus* II 2.18, the Red Sea is understood allegorically as the world, and Mary and the virgins entered the heavenly realm through the water of this age, undefiled by worldly waves.¹⁶⁷ After this sublime ending of the description of Mary, Ambrose makes a literal bridge to his example, the virgin Thecla.

The basic idea of drawing Mary as an example and making her function as a person of identification in *De virginibus* is that Ambrose believed she was a virgin throughout her whole life.¹⁶⁸ For Ambrose, Mary was the most perfect picture and example of a heavenly life, in that all her earthly behaviour and faith was directed toward the ultimate goal of heaven. According to him, she is the most splendid¹⁶⁹ example of how a virgin’s life is like a heavenly life.¹⁷⁰ In chapter 5, I analyse and discuss Ambrose’s view of *virginitas post partum* in context of his Eschatology using three of Ambrose’s main treatises on Eschatology: *De fuga saeculi*, *De bono mortis*, and *De excessu fratris* II.

2.5. Conclusions on Chapter 2

De virginibus II 2.6–2.18 is a passage about Mary, setting her up as an example, and as a perpetual virgin. Ambrose holds up the virginity of Mary as something for his congregation to admire and imitate, with the goal of encouraging his people to grow in the Christian faith.

In this chapter I have revealed the three basics of Ambrose’s Mariology. In *De virginibus* II 2.6–18 Ambrose clearly already had the foundations of his Mariology. Firstly, Ambrose lets himself be deeply influenced by Greek theology; secondly, Ambrose uses the technique and pattern of antique

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *virg.* I 3.12. Trans. Ramsey 1997.

¹⁶⁶ Ambrose makes the comparison between Miriam and Mary eight times, all listed in Neumann 1962, 51–56.

¹⁶⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.18. *Per mare saeculi [...] sine saecularibus fluctibus.*

¹⁶⁸ In the whole course of *De virginibus* virgins are pictured as living for heaven, and not for this world. The home country for a virgin is heaven, as in Ambrose, *virg.* I 5.20: “She is a stranger here, but a denizen there”.

¹⁶⁹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Splendidus.*

¹⁷⁰ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.17. *Vita caelesta.*

biography to idealise Mary and hold her up as an example; and thirdly, Ambrose sees Mary's virginity in mind and body as a fundamental basic feature of her being and character.

As we have seen so far, Ambrose regarded Mary's virginity as an ideal for his contemporary virgins, but also more generally as a lesson and example for everyone. Regarding the hypotheses and questions of the present study, one noticeable pattern is the pastoral perspective in Ambrose's preaching. Mary the virgin is drawn upon as an example to imitate, and as a person of identification in whom the believer might reflect her or his own existence.

3. Protology: *Deus creator omnium*¹

In this chapter I will expound Ambrose's teaching on Mary's virginity during the birth (virginitas in partu). I will read Ambrose's views on Mary's giving of birth in relation to his Protology, and what feelings and associations that awakened in his congregation. The Ambrosian material I use in this chapter is the sermons on the creation and fall. The once blessed state in paradise and the human fall was one of the first subjects Ambrose chose to study, studies preserved as the text De paradiso. In Lent the year 386 Ambrose taught his congregation about the six days of creation, a series of sermons preserved as a treatise called Exameron. Ambrose's Protology explains Mary's perpetual virginity, and foremost the virginity during birth. A birth is a basic human experience, in hope and joy, as well as sorrow and suffering. In order to reveal the context of Ambrose's pastoral care I will in this chapter investigate which understandings and associations around a birth, a delivery, that possibly could have existed in the congregation. Ambrose used the idea of God as creator, the fall of humanity, and the perpetual virginity of Mary as tools in his pastoral care.

3.1. Introduction to the Chapter

Late Antiquity was a culture of sounds, and thus one task of patristic scholarship must be to hear and present the sound of the silence. Dell Hymes' model of SPEAKING, introduced in Chapter 1.6.3: *Hearing the Silence*, gives a framework for enlarging the literary competence with regard to Ambrose's writings, and thus help to reveal how his listeners might have heard his sermons. The *setting* of Ambrose's writings of this chapter was originally the pulpit of the Church, except for his letters which were written. The time and place of the theological content was mainly in worship surrounded by prayer, liturgy, and songs. An awareness of the *participants* is important. Ambrose handled *Mariae virginitas in partu* differently in the sermons heard by ordinary men and women compared to those instances where he expected to reach only male theologians. In other words, Ambrose describes Christ's birth differently dependent on what purpose he had for his utterings. In the Christian Milan, the majority of the congregation members lived ordinary family lives. Most of them had probably experienced the giving of birth with both joy and sorrow, not only joy. The *end*, or the expected outcome, of preaching Mary's *virginitas*

¹ Trans.: "God, the Creator of everything". Latin text Ramsey 1997, 171. *Deus creator omnium* is the first line of one of Ambrose's most famous hymns.

in partu, might have been to defend the possibility of a birth in poor circumstances similar to those in Bethlehem. Ambrose did lead the congregation to face the wondrous birth of Christ in order to see them grow in awe and marvel. Further, his sermons on the creation had the purpose of encouraging his Christian people to strive for perfection, *virginitas*, of the mind. The *act sequences* include the style of information used and also the comfort offered. The *keys* Ambrose used for the material of this chapter are foremost his seriousness in speech and tone. The verbal resources, the *instrumentalities*, in imagining a birth, were governed by the congregation's experiences of the deliveries of newborns. The Late Antique community did their best to create safe care for women in birth – Soranus's *Gynaikeia* is witness to that. The *norms* are the rules that govern the speaking. Interpreting a public speech about a delivery demands a consciousness of what was understood to be *decorum* at the time. To understand the texts, it is necessary to be aware of how Ambrose could preach on a birth trying to re-sound his congregation's reactions in his own words. It is important to consider the *genre* in which one finds the utterances of Ambrose. He mentions Christ's birth in preaching, poems, and letters.

Anni Maria Laato has observed that Gregory of Nyssa sees Isaiah 54:1 and 66:7 as the Biblical prooftext for the idea of "giving birth without pain".² Other scholars, including Mary Cunningham,³ David Hunter,⁴ and Gregor Emmenegger⁵ presuppose and briefly mention Genesis 3:16 as the biblical base for a teaching on Mary's virginity during birth: *I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children*. None of them, however, extends their research and show in what ways Ambrose (or any other theologian) could possibly have related the Protology to the *virginitas in partu*. Noteworthy is that neither Charles W. Neumann⁶ nor Josef Huhn⁷ discuss Genesis 3:16 in comparison to Mary's *virginitas in partu*.

In this chapter I investigate the Protology of Ambrose and put it in relation to his Mariology. The main biblical text on Protology is Genesis 1–3. The questions I deal with in this chapter regarding Protology concern whether Ambrose regarded Eden as a physical place, whether he believed that Adam and Eve had sexual relations before the fall, his ideas about the curse on female begetting (Genesis 3:16) compared to the birth of Christ, and also how the term virginity (*virginitas*) relates both to a birth and an original state of human condition.

² A. M. Laato 2019, 52.

³ Cunningham 2015, 96.

⁴ Hunter 2007, 179.

⁵ Emmenegger 2014, 240.

⁶ Neumann 1962.

⁷ Huhn 1954.

According to Karl Rahner, the notion of Mary's *virginitas in partu* includes a birth without pain, a delivery where Mary kept her hymen intact, and that the birth was *sine sordibus*. *Sordes* is understood as blood and the afterbirth.⁸ This three-part definition of Rahner has to be regarded as anachronistic if it is read into the Church Fathers prior to the fifth century.⁹ Albert Mitterer structures Thomas Aquinas' belief in *virginitas in partu* using four terms: An inactive ("inactive"), non-opened ("öffnungslose"), non-injured ("verletzungslose"), and painless ("schmerzlose") birth.¹⁰ Reading all these terms into Ambrose's Mariology would also be anachronistic. One important progress in recent research, see Giulia Sissa¹¹, Gregor Emmenegger,¹² and Julia Kelto Lillis¹³, is the discovery that generally the virginal hymen was an unknown concept in Antiquity. The idea as such first appeared only in the late fourth, or early in the fifth century. None of the medical authorities knew of a hymen, the only person mentioning it was Soranus, who denied its existence.¹⁴

The Catholic theologian Georg Söll (1913–1997) writes that none of the patristic theologians has "versucht, das Geschehen physiologisch zu beschreiben, weil die äußeren Umstände der Geburt des Herrn offenbar theologisch nichts erbringen".¹⁵ On the contrary, I think that Ambrose made a theological point of Mary's physiological *virginitas in partu*. In this chapter I use three basic starting points for understanding Ambrose's view of Mary's childbirth.

First, a sentence by Hugo Koch that one ought to take seriously into the discussion of Ambrose's view of *virginitas in partu*:

Was nun die *virginitas in partu* betrifft so spricht Ambrosius zwar von *inviolabilis uterus* Mariens bei der Empfängnis, aber diese Unverletzlichkeit gilt wohl auch für die Geburt. Auch andere

⁸ Rahner 1960, 204.

⁹ In the Latin tradition a fully developed expression of *virginitas in partu* is found in Albertus Magnus (1206–1280): There are three woes (*vae*) in childbirth, the woe of 1) pain in giving birth, 2) the losing of bodily powers in begetting, and 3) breaking seals in delivery. "The Virgin was set free from all this". By the Middle Ages a formulation of the doctrine of *virginitas in partu* that corresponds to Rahner's definition had been reached. Albertus Magnus, *Super Lucam, Lemma 1:28, Triplex etiam in partu est vae: doloris scilicet in parturitione, destitutionis virium in generatione, et effractionis sigillorum in emissione [...]* *Ab omnibus autem his libera est Virgo*. Quoted in Delius 1961, 36.

¹⁰ Mitterer 1952, 122.

¹¹ Sissa 1990, 2013. Sissa defines *parthenos* as "not having had sexual intercourse", but that it was not believed to prove this by inspection. She writes: "Greek virginity had nothing to do with the presence of a hymen". Sissa 1990, 167.

¹² Emmenegger 2014.

¹³ Lillis 2016; Lillis 2017.

¹⁴ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 5. The hypothesis that the ancient medicine did not know of a hymen has been questioned by Ann Hanson 1992 II, and MacLachlan 1994.

¹⁵ Söll 1978, 46–47.

Kirchenväter reden gelegentlich von der “Öffnung des Mutterschoßes”, obwohl sie die *virginitas in partu* annehmen”.¹⁶

Following Koch’s view, it is perfectly possible that Ambrose, and other Church Fathers, might have believed in *virginitas in partu* and at the same time considered the birth of Christ as a normal human birth. The Roman-Catholic professor in Lugano, Manfred Hauke (1956–), follows the theory of Koch in this regard and uses the term paradox for Ambrose’s view of *in partu*.¹⁷

Second, Rahner pleads for an understanding of Mary in a holistic way:

Die active Geburt [...] ist [...] ein *ganzmenschlicher* Akt, der darum in der weise, in der er gesetzt, erlitten und erfahren wird, die Ganzheit der betreffenden menschlichen Person aussagt. [...] die aktive Geburt entspricht bei Maria ihrem Wesen.”¹⁸

To grasp and understand Ambrose’s teaching of Mary’s *virginitas in partu*, we have to understand his whole view of humanity, creation, fall, and human procreation more generally.¹⁹ I, therefore, try to understand Ambrose’s teaching of *virginitas in partu* in this holistic light.

Third, Ambrose’s stress on a virginal birth suggests that he must have been aware of the many among his listeners who had had the personal experience of giving birth. An important question, as far as I have seen never hitherto asked, is whether Ambrose’s teaching on Mary’s childbirth reflects something of parental experience, anxieties, and worries about parturition, death in childbirth, infant mortality, and so on. These matters were concrete realities in the Milanese congregation.

3.2. An Ordinary Birth and the Birth of Christ

One of the questions of the present study is to understand Ambrose’s concept of virginity in the context the biological and medical assumptions of his time. In this section I map the Late Antique perceptions on the event of giving birth and subsequently outline Ambrose’s teaching on Mary giving birth to Christ.

¹⁶ Koch 1937, 96.

¹⁷“Diese paradoxe Redeweise betont gleichzeitig die wahre menschliche Geburt Jesu aus dem Mutterschoß Mariens und die bleibende Jungfräulichkeit.” Hauke 2007, 110.

¹⁸ Rahner 1966, 196–197.

¹⁹ Hunter writes: “the most likely biblical source of the idea of *virginitas in partu* is Genesis 3:16, which includes the pain of labour as one of the penalties placed on Eve after the first sin.” Hunter 2007, 179. Another background to the idea of giving birth without pain, as pointed out by Anni Maria Laato, is Isaiah 54:1, Laato 2016, 248. Ambrose himself sees in Isaiah 7:14 a prophecy of the *virginitas in partu*, epist extra coll. 15 (PL 44).

3.2.1. The View of a Normal Childbirth in Ambrose's Time

A normal human birth is a universal female experience which is both complex and painful for the mother, most probably also for the child. In this passage I use texts that describe the procedure of childbirth in order to understand how a birth-giving woman in Ambrose's Milan might have experienced such a basic life event.²⁰ This is no easy task, due to the poor state of primary sources pertaining to women in Late Antiquity. There are, with few exceptions, no interviews or diaries of women who gave birth in this particular era. One notable exception is *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which is autobiographical in part.²¹ In 203 Perpetua and Felicitas were condemned to death in Rome. The description of Felicitas giving birth is one example of stories that were in circulation at the time of Ambrose, even if he himself does not mention the two martyrs in his texts.

As for Felicitas, the Lord's grace touched her too in the following way. When she was eight months pregnant (for she had been pregnant when she was arrested) and the day of the games was approaching, she became very upset at the thought that her martyrdom would be postponed because of her pregnancy (for it was against the law for pregnant women to be executed) and that she would have to shed her holy and innocent blood afterwards in the company of people who were common criminals. Her fellow martyrs were also upset at the thought that they would have to leave such a good friend alone on the road to the same hope. And so a couple of days before the games they shared in her sorrow by saying a prayer to the Lord together. As soon as they had finished the prayer she went into labour. Since she was in great pain because of the natural difficulty of giving birth in the eighth month, one of the assistants of the prison guards said to her, "You are in great pain now but what will you do when you are up against the beasts? Did you

²⁰ Other than the medical writings of Galen and Soranus, in this passage I take advantage of the scholarly efforts presented in different books: more generally on Galen's and Soranus' gynaecology, Lachs 1902 and Lachs 1903; on a woman's body, Dean-Jones 1994; among other strengths Demand 1994 has listed all cases involving pregnancy in the Hippocratic *Epidemics*; the comprehensive study on female medicine, Flemming 2000; on the cultural perspective, Rautman 2006; the sourcebook, MacLachlan 2013; and the short study on children in Antiquity, Horn 2017.

²¹ It should also be said that the descriptions of the progress of conception and giving birth, with the sole exception of *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, were all written by men. On the other hand, they were the results of empiric investigation of both human and animal bodies and could surprisingly often be recognised even by a modern reader. Both Soranus and Galen show an interest in female anatomy, as did other doctors as well. Celsus, for example, documented that the pubic bone was straighter in men, and more bent in women, which could prevent difficulties in childbirth. Celsus, *De medicina* 8.2, *rectius in viris, recurvatum magis in exteriora in feminis, ne partum prohibeat*, Latin quotation in Lachs 1903, 14–15. Galen describes the womb in three parts; a main body (*soma*), a bottom (*pythmen*) where the navel is located, and a neck (*auchen*), and offers a detailed description pertaining to the purpose of each as well as how it looks with details of nerves and veins. Lachs 1903, 18.

not think of them when you refused your sacrifice?" She replied, "Now it is I who suffer this, but there it will be someone else in me who will suffer for me, just as I will suffer for him." Then she gave birth to a girl whom one of her sisters brought up as her own daughter.²²

The text is a vivid and touching description of a delivery, one which depicts Felicitas in a dreadful and naked situation. The text describes the process of giving birth as a work of pain (*in partu laborans doleret*). It was a strenuous work (*laboro*), undertaken in pain (*doleo*), and suffering (*patior*).

There are several indirect ways to reach and understanding of the common experience of a birth in Late Antiquity, namely by sifting through theoretical medical writings and manuals, and further, inscriptions, paintings, and tombstones. Midwifery had a long and respectful tradition in the classical world, both Latin and the Greek. Midwives were supposed to be both literate and scholarly educated.²³ So, even if common people did not read the texts of Galen or Soranus, they could very well have received the medical knowledge indirectly through a competent midwife. Consequently, reading the manuals and medical writings of Late Antiquity does give us insight into the knowledge of the common people, albeit in an indirect way.

Most women in Late Antiquity gave birth at home, with a midwife, or another nearby woman, present. Health, at the time, reflected above all one's position in society, and not everyone could afford the most ideal conditions under which to give birth. This basic reality was, probably, reflected on when the early Christians heard about Christ's impoverished birth and that Mary had had to put him in a manger. In the nativity story of Christ, in Luke 2:7, 12, 16, the Greek word *phatnē* (Latin *praesipium*) is used three times. The term means manger, crib, or feeding-trough. According to *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *phatnē* is used in Luke 2 with "surprising emphasis", which shows that "great importance was attached to the concept".²⁴ Galen's writings and Soranus's *Gynaikeia* presuppose an ideal situation of childbirth, with all necessities and possible amenities at hand. This was certainly not about the case in the stable (or cave) which the Gospels stated was where Mary gave birth to Jesus.

Soranus' *Gynaikeia* is a practical manual, more than theoretical. He writes:

²² *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 15. Trans. White 2010, 13.

²³ Soranus *Gynaikeia* I 1.3. Soranus writes that a woman suited for midwifery is one who is literate, with her wits about her, possessed of a good memory, loving work, respectable, generally not unduly handicapped as regards her senses, sound of limb, and robust. Trans. Temkin 1956.

²⁴ Hengel 2006, 53.

For a normal labor one must prepare beforehand: olive oil, warm water, warm fomentations, soft sea sponges, pieces of wool, bandages, a pillow, things to smell, a midwife's stool or chair, two beds, and a proper room.²⁵

In Late Antiquity, the midwife was there to support the woman in delivery by means of cervical massage, pressing the womb and encouraging her to breathe rhythmically during the delivery. The midwife also had to be prepared in case something went wrong during the process of childbirth.²⁶ Three other women were present to help the mother. Their contribution is described as supporting her with encouragement and calmly talking to her to allay any anxiety; two of them were to stand, one on either side of the mother, while the third sat behind her.²⁷ Soranus also gives instructions about how the child should be treated after the birth (there was to be an examination to determine whether the baby was male or female, a cutting of the umbilical cord, a sprinkling with salt, and a bathing in warm water etc.).²⁸ For one week postpartum the woman was supposed to rest in bed. The chapter treating the mother's retreat is unfortunately lost in Soranus' own writings, but it is probable that it is his instructions for this advice which are preserved in Muscio's (500 A.D.) *Gynaecology*.²⁹ Soranus follows the galenic theory of how the milk was produced in the mother's breast; lactation happens when the superfluous blood flows into the breasts and is thus transformed into milk.³⁰

In comparison to Soranus, Galen's writings show more interest in theoretical reflections on childbirth. A basic assumption in Galen's theory is the expediency in all human functions, which means that in both the conception and the birth there are certain expedient powers involved. In Chapter 4 of the present study I investigate the powers in conception and pregnancy further. Suffice for now is that the power of Genesis, of Growth and of Nutrition were understood to be involved in conception and were used to explain how a baby comes into existence and develops and grows in the female womb. The powers were a theory of certain teleological forces in the seed. Galen was also concerned with the function and power of the seed in his treatise *De Semine*.

At the right time for the birth another teleological power came into play, the *Eliminative*, also called *Propulsive*. This faculty of Propulsion was latent for the nine months of pregnancy, resting while the foetus reaches maturity in the womb. During this time the womb has its "neck quite

²⁵ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* II 2.2. Trans. Temkin 1956.

²⁶ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* II 2.2–8.

²⁷ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* II 3.5.

²⁸ Soranus *Gynaikeia* II 3.9–4.23.

²⁹ Lachs 1902, 17.

³⁰ Lachs 1903, 22.

closed, and entirely surrounding the embryo together with the *chorion*".³¹ Thus the foetus stays in the womb, in order to grow, take shape or form and mature. Galen envisages a retentive faculty, holding the foetus in the womb, on one hand, and on the other hand a propulsive faculty (*facultas epultrix*) which is at rest for nine months. When the time is right, however, the propulsive faculty, hitherto quiescent, becomes activated. Galen praises "the art of nature", how "she has placed in each organ the capabilities of useful activities", and "fore-ordained the times both of rest and movement".³² In due time, the propulsive power ensures that:

the os opens, whilst the whole fundus approaches as near as possible to the os, expelling the embryo as it does so; and along with the fundus the contiguous parts – which form as it were a girdle round the whole organ – co-operate in the work; they squeeze upon the embryo and propel it bodily outwards. And, in many women who exercise such a faculty immoderately, violent pains cause forcible prolapse of the whole womb; here almost the same thing happens as frequently occurs in wrestling-bouts and struggles, when in our eagerness to overturn and throw others we are ourselves upset along with them; for similarly when the uterus is forcing the embryo forward it sometimes becomes entirely prolapsed, and particularly when the ligaments connecting it with the spine happen to be naturally lax.³³

Galen continues to explain how a midwife was to oversee that the progress of birth proceeds normally; she follows the process (of labour) and palpates the woman as she gradually dilates for the birth. When she is sufficient opened, wide enough to allow the transit of a child, the midwife orders the woman to sit on an obstetric chair, "and bids her make every effort to expel the child".³⁴ Up until this point the delivery has proceeded without the help of the human will, but it is at this point that the woman herself must undertake the conscious additional work of "epigastric muscles, which also help us in defaecation and micturition".³⁵

Ambrose writes about the female contribution in conception, pregnancy, and childbirth too:

The women's *co-operation* [italics mine] turns out to be of major import in the process of a birth, it is just as the earth by receiving, confining, and fostering the seed makes it to grow and produce fruit.³⁶

Both Galen and Soranus (as Hippocrates) also count on the active cooperation of the child in the giving of birth.³⁷

³¹ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* III 2. Trans. Loeb 71, 229.

³² Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* III 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 231.

³³ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* III 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 235.

³⁴ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* III 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 237.

³⁵ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* III 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 237.

³⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 9.48. *Maior quaedam in causa generationis operatio mulieris repperitur sicut istius terrae, quae semina primo accepta cohibendo paulatim motu suo adolescere facit et producit in segetem.*

³⁷ Lachs 1903, 52.

Not everything always went as hoped for in a delivery, and even routine childbirths were a risk. Bonnie MacLachlan writes:

Death in childbirth was all too common in the Graeco-Roman world, attested by tombstone inscriptions. Many of these inscriptions indicate that these women were adolescents, girls urged to marry as soon as they reached puberty.³⁸

Excavations in Greek cemeteries have indicated a lower average age for women compared to men, with men outliving women by five to six years, primarily due to risks at the prime childbearing age.³⁹ Without the beneficial facilities of modern maternity hospitals the mortality in the childbed may have been approximately two to three percent.⁴⁰ Children were also vulnerable, perhaps only half of them survived their fifth birthday.⁴¹ Due to infections and other complications, even the mother was vulnerable during the time after the delivery. Cornelia Horn writes:

Concomitant to the deaths of children was the mortality rate for mothers during or shortly after parturition. The phenomenon of childhood mortality crossed all class, ethnic, and gender boundaries. It shaped the view of childhood itself as liminal, vulnerable, dependent, and, in some ways, as lying on the fringe of human existence.⁴²

An example of the maternal risks during parturition can be taken from a Hippocratic treatise called *Epidemics*. Of the 38 pregnancies mentioned in the text, 15 are said to have been fatal. Some of these deaths were caused by the actual act of giving birth, while others were due to postpartum complications.⁴³

The delivery of a child in Late Antiquity was not always a happy event, and thus misfortunate childbirth was an area that demanded pastoral concern and effort. Ambrose guides all the parents of his congregation to give thanks after the birth of a child. “A divine gift is a child for the parents”.⁴⁴ This type of exhortation to thanksgiving has a Christian tradition behind it. In the *Apology* of Aristides (second century) parents were advised to give thanks after a childbirth, and if the child died, they were to give thanks for heaven.⁴⁵

Pain and an amount of danger are normal parts of a childbirth at any time, but in historical times a childbirth was always – for the woman –

³⁸ MacLachlan 2013, 198.

³⁹ Rautman 2006, 9. Rautman writes that “comparable figures have been reported by archeologists working in Italy, Cyprus, and across the Near East.”

⁴⁰ Rautman 2006, 53–54.

⁴¹ Rautman 2006, 8–9. Ingemark et al. gives another number, namely that about 30 percent of the newborn died before they reached the age of one, and that half of them did not survive their tenth birthday. Ingemark et al. 2000, 190.

⁴² Horn 2017, 301.

⁴³ Hippocrates *Epidemics*, quoted in Dean-Jones 1994, 211–212; Demand 1994, 168–183.

⁴⁴ Ambrose, in *Luc.* I 30. *Ammonentur etiam parentes gratias agere non minus pro ortu quam pro meritis filiorum [...] Diuinum igitur munus fecunditas est parentis.*

⁴⁵ Aristides, *Apology* 15.9. Quoted in Horn 2017, 301–302.

potentially life-threatening. The Church Fathers were aware of this. Gregory of Nyssa writes about childbirth in *De virginitate*, a text written to teach about virginity.⁴⁶ The author, himself married, sees many disadvantages of marriage in this fallen world, including the fear of losing a beloved wife and children. This fear affects the husband and creates anxiety in him. In this longer part of Gregory's text, he intimately describes the woes of losing a wife:

But her time of labour comes upon the young wife; and the occasion is regarded not as the bringing of a child into the world, but as the approach of death; in bearing it is expected that she will die; and, indeed, often this sad presentiment is true, and before they spread the birthday feast, before they taste any of their expected joys, they have to change their rejoicing into lamentation. Still in love's fever, still at the height of their passionate affection, not yet having grasped life's sweetest gifts, as in the vision of a dream, they are suddenly torn away from all they possessed. But what comes next? Domesticity, like conquering foes, dismantle the bridal chamber: they deck it for the funeral, but it is death's room now; they make the useless wailings and beatings of the hands.⁴⁷

A passage describing the sorrow of losing the child, not a particularly unusual experience in a society with high infant mortality, follows. Further on in the same chapter, Gregory offers words on the female perspective, and writes:

Both parents share alike in these; but who could recount the special anxieties of the wife? We omit the most obvious, which all can understand, the weariness of pregnancy, the danger in childbirth, the cares of nursing, the tearing of her heart in two for her offspring, and, if she is the mother of many, the dividing of her soul into as many parts as she has children; the tenderness with which she herself feels all that is happening to them.⁴⁸

In the context of pastoral care, Gregory met and consoled many parish members in the situation *De virginitate* so vividly describes. Gregory's words reflect a common context also in Ambrose's Milan, and a common experience of all times and places:⁴⁹ To bear and give birth to a child is a matter of both health and joy on one hand, and sickness and pain on the other. It includes both physical and spiritual dimensions, and moreover, in Late Antiquity it bore a real risk of mortality.

⁴⁶ Not only Gregory of Nyssa writes about the pain and danger in giving birth, see Zeno of Verona, *Tractatus* II 7.3. where he utters himself like Gregory.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* 3. Trans. NPNF2 5.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* 3. Trans. NPNF2 5.

⁴⁹ A study about giving birth in our time, Larsson 2018.

3.2.2. Eve – Second Eve and the Tradition of *Mariae virginitas in partu*

Before turning my attention to how Ambrose preached about the birth of Christ to his congregation, I offer a historical survey on the belief in Mary's virginity during birth. The idea of a wonderous birth, without pain and without hurt, is an idea not easily comprehensible for modern minds, but by the fourth century this idea was deep imbedded in Marian theology. In Patristic thought, the tradition of the *Mariae virginitas in partu* is intertwined with the tradition of Mary as the second Eve.⁵⁰ In this passage I briefly present the different explanation models for Mary as the second Eve and Christ's birth as a virginal birth that one can meet throughout the Late Antique Christian authors, and which create the background for Ambrose. Among the Church Fathers contemporary with Ambrose, generally the thought of *virginitas in partu* did not necessarily entail a birth without labour or rule out a normal opening of the womb.

The use of typology as a method of biblical interpretation is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. Typology means using Old Testament figures as types for explaining matters in the New Testament, in the Church,⁵¹ or even in the world to come. Adam, for example, is a figure that could be prefiguring Christ, and Eve could prefigure Mary.⁵² Early in the Christian tradition Mary was seen as the second Eve, who turns the fall and condemnations of Eve into a blessing.⁵³ Christ, understood as the second Adam, is a Pauline typology (Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49). There is, however, no mention of Mary, as the second Eve, in the Bible.⁵⁴ The first known historic text using the typological parallel between Eve and Mary was written about one generation after the New Testament, in Justin Martyr's (died in 165) *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*:

⁵⁰ Josef Huhn calls Mary as the second Eve "das Fundament der patristischen Mariologie", Huhn 1954, 128.

⁵¹ A further discussion on the Church will come in the study, in Chapter 5.4.1: *Mary as typus ecclesiae*.

⁵² Many articles in *Adam and Eve Story in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Perspective*, ed. Laato A. and Valve, L., 2017 treats aspects of different reception traditions of the Adam and Eve story.

⁵³ Pelikan notices that the Pauline parallel between the *earthly* Adam and the *heavenly* Christ in Eve and Mary provided for the Church fathers an important corrective, the contrast between the *earthly disobedience* of Eve and the no more than *earthly obedience* of Mary, Pelikan 1996, 42–43.

⁵⁴ The idea might be present in the Bible, Paul (or a deutero-Paul) could have had Mary as the second Eve in mind in 1 Timothy 2:13–3:1a. It is interesting to read how the Church historian J.N.D. Kelly interprets the passage. He mentions interpreting the "child-bearing" in 1 Tim 2:15 as referring to Christ's Nativity as an option but considers it to be exegetically doubtful, Kelly 1981, 69–70. The ecumenical project presented in R.E. Brown et al. 1978, was intended to cover all New Testament passages about Mary, but, conscious or not, makes no reference to 1 Tim 2:13–3:1a.

For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her.⁵⁵

Justin was followed by Irenaeus' (second century) *Adversus Haereses* in which he expands the parallel between Eve and Mary and makes it an important part of his recapitulation theory.⁵⁶ These early writers show that the typology of Eve and the second Eve was public property within the Church.

Mary as the second Eve, with its deep roots in the Christian tradition, is connected to the idea of the wonderous delivery of Christ. The earliest extant mentioning of Mary's virginity *in partu* is found in apocryphal sources, some Gnostic, some not.⁵⁷ The first known is the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a partly Jewish, partly Christian text, which was compiled around 150 A.D. It states: "Mary straightaway looked with her eyes and saw a small babe, and she was astonished. And after she had been astonished her womb was found as formerly before she had conceived".⁵⁸ Another Apocrypha is the *Odes of Salomon* from the first half of the second century, which tells of Mary as the "mother of many mercies", who "brought forth a Son without pain". The picture of Mary in *Odes of Salomon* is not one of a humble and weak woman, and her power is emphasised, she "acquired Him in great power".⁵⁹ The Gnostics, especially the Docetists, denied the true humanity of Christ and regarded his sufferings as unreal and phantasmal.⁶⁰ Since nothing is more concrete and more loathsome for the Gnostics than "the process of human procreation and birth", gnostic Christians tended to see Mary as a "primary focus of their reinterpretations, as well as of the orthodox replies".⁶¹ Both Graef and Söll emphasise that due to a general apocryphal tendency to picture Mary as super-human, with a purity that "forbade her tread the earth as a child or eat normal food", the early theologians of the Church were always prepared to separate themselves from Gnosticism in their sayings of Mary.⁶²

The Manicheans rejected any thought of a natural birth of Jesus. To be born of woman's flesh and blood was seen as unclean by them. Jovinian

⁵⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 100. Trans. ANF 1.

⁵⁶ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, 3.22.

⁵⁷ The *Odes of Salomon* is Gnostic has been disputed in the second half of the twentieth century by many scholars, neither is *Ascension of Isaiah* obviously Gnostic, Hunter 2007, 175–177.

⁵⁸ *Ascension of Isaiah* 11.8. Trans. Graef 2009, 27.

⁵⁹ Quotations are taken from the *Odes of Salomon* 19. Trans. Graef 2009, 27.

⁶⁰ Kelly 1977, 141.

⁶¹ Pelikan 1996, 51.

⁶² "Im übrigen galt es stets gegen gnostische Vorstellungen front zu machen", Söll 1978, 47. The quotation in the text above, in Graef 2009, 30.

accused Ambrose of Manicheism, an accusation explained by what Mani said in the third century:

Far be it from me that I should confess our Lord Jesus Christ to have come down through the natural reproductive organs of a woman. For he himself gives witness that he descended from the bosom of the Father.⁶³

The most important text for the subsequent Christian tradition about Mary's *virginitas in partu* is the *Protoevangelium of James* (or with its original title *The Nativity of Mary: Revelation of James*), written in Syria or Egypt around the middle of the second century.⁶⁴ In the West, the so-called *Decretum Gelasianum* (ca. 500) rejected the text as something "the catholic and apostolic Roman Church does not in any way receive".⁶⁵ In the East, however, the book was widespread in an early stage and remained in general use. The *Protoevangelium* is an interesting text, certainly containing fictitious material, but also early enough in history possibly to have some factual roots. Many Church historians doubt that the *Protoevangelium* gives historical information about Mary,⁶⁶ but not everyone, as the Benedictine theologian and archeologist Bargil Pixner (1921–2002) demonstrates. Pixner was, for all his life, convinced that there were material and traditions in the *Protoevangelium* that most likely had their roots in Jesus' family.⁶⁷ The aim of the *Protoevangelium* is to glorify Mary and put forward her perpetual virginity. In the passage where the birth of Christ is described, Mary is alone in a cave while Joseph is searching for a midwife:

And they stopped at the entrance to the cave, and behold, a bright cloud overshadowed the cave. And the midwife said, "My soul is magnified today, for my eyes have seen wonderful things; for salvation is born to Israel." And immediately the cloud disappeared from the cave and a great light appeared, so that our eyes could not bear it. A short time afterwards that light withdrew until the baby appeared, and it came and took the breast of its mother Mary. And the midwife cried, "This day is great for me, because I have seen this new sight." And the midwife came out of the cave, and Salome met her. And she said to her, "Salome, Salome, I have a new sight to tell you about; a virgin has brought forth, a thing which her condition does not allow." And Salome

⁶³ *Acta Archelai* 54 (GCS 16.80), quoted in R. E. Brown et al. 1978, 269.

⁶⁴ A Swedish trans. of *Protoevangelium of James* is found in Gärtner 1972.

⁶⁵ *Decretum Gelasianum*, quoted in R. E. Brown et al. 1978, 248.

⁶⁶ As De Strycker, a Belgian Jesuit scholar, who judges the *Protoevangelium* to be "inventive hagiography", see R. E. Brown et al. 1978, 248, 258–262. Altaner writes that the story betrays "in der palästinischen Geographie und in jüdischen Sitten grobe Unwissenheit", Altaner 1978, 125.

⁶⁷ Pixner has discovered connections between Mary and the Essene movement. There were diverse Jewish traditions at the time of Jesus, and the *Protoevangelium of James* might well reflect the Jewish tradition of the Essenes, Pixner 2010, 23–49. For a positive valuation of Pixner's discoveries, see Hesemann 2016, 47–66.

said, "As the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and test her condition, I will not believe that a virgin has given birth." And the midwife went in and said to Mary, "Make yourself ready, for there is no small contention concerning you." And Salome inserted her finger to test her condition. And she cried out, saying, "Woe for my wickedness and unbelief; for I have tempted the living God, and behold, my hand falls away from me, consumed by fire!"⁶⁸

After this, Salome bowed down before the child, she confessed her unbelief and was healed by the little baby Christ. It is important to focus here on the virgin test and investigate what purpose it may have had. Julia Kelto Lillis suggests that the test did not mean proving a hymenal virginity, but rather that the common ingredients of parturition were lacking in Mary: "the usual materials and fluids, her labor and delivery are not painful, and her genitals have not needed to expand, stretch, or tear."⁶⁹ Lillis argues that the virginity in *Protevangelium* meant "puerperal virginity" and not a "genital" or "hymenal virginity". Gregor Emmenegger writes, in intimate clarity, about the test of virginity in *Protoevangelium*:

Wer eine Geburt miterlebt hat, weiss, wie unglaublich der weibliche Körper dabei beansprucht wird. Es braucht nicht viel Fachwissen, und es muss auch kein Hymen ertastet werden, um den Unterschied zwischen der Vagina einer Frau, die eben geboren hat, und der einer Jungfrau zu erkennen."⁷⁰

This notion of Lillis and Emmenegger is important in understanding Ambrose's teaching of *virginitas in partu* 200 years later, even if he himself did not make use of the *Protoevangelium*. In his time, the Latin world still had no clear concept of hymenal virginity.

⁶⁸ *Protoevangelium of James* 19.2–20.1. Trans. Elliott 1993, quoted in Gambero 2006, 41–42.

⁶⁹ Lillis 2016, 17.

⁷⁰ Emmenegger 2014, 210.

Ignatius of Antioch (died ca. 110),⁷¹ Irenaeus (second century),⁷² and Clement of Alexandria (died before 215),⁷³ all wrote about Christ's birth as something miraculous. In none of their texts, however, is it clear that the virginity during birth meant a hymenal virginity. Clement's disciple Origen did not embrace the idea of Mary's *virginitas in partu*, at least not as it was later defined. In the *Homilies on Luke* Origen does not seem to have believed it. It might, however, be possible to trace a development in his thought towards an embracement of the idea, because later on in his *Homilies on Leviticus* he wrote that Mary gave birth as virgin,⁷⁴ as well as in other texts including *Commentary on Matthew*. We cannot, however, take such development for sure, one reason being that the *Homilies on Luke* remains only in Jerome's Latin translation and the *Homilies on Leviticus* in Rufinus'.⁷⁵ Ambrose is, in his *Expositio in Lucam*, dependent on Origen, and we will return to the Alexandrian exegete later on.

Origen was reluctant to express the extraordinary birth of Christ. So was the Latin theologian, Tertullian (ca. 160–220), who did not like the idea *virginitas in partu*. Worth noting, however, was that his adversaries were not believers in the doctrine of *in partu*, but docetic Gnostics. The

⁷¹ Ignatius points at the birth of Christ as something special: "Hidden from the Prince of this world was the virginity (*he parthenia*) of Mary and her childbirth (*ho toketos*) and also of the death (*ho thanatos*) of the Lord – three mysteries loudly proclaimed to the world though accomplished in the stillness of God." Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1. Ignatius' uttering of the secret of Mary's childbirth that is now loudly proclaimed could be a belief in the *virginitas in partu*. Many Church Fathers regarded Ignatius' text as a witness to Mary's virginity during the birth of Christ. Alternately, his saying might equally be an anti-gnostic statement not about *virginitas in partu*, but about the real body of Christ, See Neumann 1962, 108.

⁷² "The perfect One (i.e. Christ) opens purely Mary's pure womb", Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4 33.11. There are some more passages in *Adversus haereses* that could possibly be interpreted as pointing to Mary's *virginitas in partu*, see Neumann 1962, 109–110. Hugo Koch interprets Irenaeus contrary, see Koch 1937, 37–43.

⁷³ Clement argued that the Scripture was the criterion by which truth and heresy could be distinguished in the subject of Mary's childbirth. "Many (*hoi polloi*) in our time regard Mary, on account of the birth of her child, as having been in the puerperal state (*dia ten tou paidiou gennesin*), although she was not. For some say that, after she delivered (*maioomai*), she was found, when examined, to be a virgin (*parthenos*)". Clement continues that Mary gave birth in an extraordinary way, she was examined and shown to have remained a virgin. Clement understood the doctrine of *virginitas in partu* as believed by only by a minority, the "many" (*hoi polloi*) thought of a normal birth contra the "some" who did not. Clement finds the Scriptural basis for *virginitas in partu* in Ezekiel 44:2. He interprets the passage: "For she gave birth (*tikto*), and yet did not gave birth". Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* VII 16.93.

⁷⁴ Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum* VIII 2. *De Maria autem dicitur quia virgo concepit et peperit.*

⁷⁵ For a brief discussion on Origen's developed view of *virginitas in partu*, see Söll 1978, 46–47, and Graef 2009, 34–36. Hunter and Crouzel share the opinion that Origen never clearly embraced the notion of Mary's *virginitas in partu*, due to his strong stance against Docetism, Hunter 2007, 184–187, Crouzel 1962, 40–44. "Une évolution à partir du texte de l'*Homèlie XIV sur Luc* manque de prevue", Crouzel 1962, 42.

North African theologian deals with different docetic opponents in *De carne Christi*.⁷⁶ In this polemic, Tertullian emphasises Jesus' real physical conception, his growth in Mary's womb, and his birth from her. Tertullian writes about the birth of Christ: "the same modesty of a woman giving birth, who should be honoured for the peril, or to be piously looked at in respect of the nature" was found in Mary.⁷⁷ Hunter regards Tertullian's view: "For Tertullian, the incarnation required an actual birth of Jesus from Mary with all of the physical changes in his mother's body that birth normally implies".⁷⁸ The well-known phrase, *virgo quantum a viro, non virgo quantum a partu*,⁷⁹ was written by Tertullian in the context of commenting on the Isaiah prophecy in 7:14. His critique seems to have reappeared in Jovinian's opposition to Mary's *virginitas*, both regarding *in partu* and *post partum*, in the late fourth century.

Before the fourth century, however, the birth of Christ was a somewhat marginal feature in the patristic writings. In the fourth century this changed and, for example, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen all highlighted the actual birth of Christ. Of special interest is Athanasius, who played a decisive role in Ambrose as was demonstrated in the previous chapter. In a letter to a certain Epictetus, bishop in Corinth, he writes about Christ:

He was offered as a sacrifice, in that He Who was born had opened the womb. Now all these things are proofs that the Virgin brought forth. And Gabriel preached the Gospel to her without uncertainty, saying not merely 'what is born in thee,' lest the body should be thought to be extraneously induced upon her, but 'of thee,' that what was born might be believed to be naturally from her, inasmuch as Nature clearly shews that it is impossible for a virgin to produce milk unless she has brought forth, and impossible for a body to be nourished with milk and wrapped in swaddling clothes unless it has previously been naturally brought forth.⁸⁰

In Athanasius' letter, the main point concerns Christ's true humanity and included in being a real man is having had an actual and real birth. Christ is said to have *opened* the womb, in connection to Luke 2:23 and Mary's

⁷⁶ Tertullian turns against Marcion to whom he attributes a teaching that Jesus had no flesh at all, and Apelles who should have taught that Jesus had an astral body but no real flesh. Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 6.3. The old gnostic Valentinian, to whom Tertullian ascribes a teaching that Jesus due to his spiritual body underwent a painless type of birth is also dealt with. Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 15.1–6. Tertullian received his information from Irenaeus, who said of Valentinian's view of the conception and birth of Christ, he "passed through Mary just as water through a tube", Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III 11.3. Trans ANF.

⁷⁷ Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 4. *In ipsum mulieris enitentis pudorem, vel pro periculo honorandum, vel pro natura religiosum.*

⁷⁸ Hunter 2007, 183.

⁷⁹ Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 23.3. "Virgin regarding conception, not virgin regarding the delivery".

⁸⁰ Athanasius, *Epistula* LIX, 5. Trans. NPNF2 4.

offering in the temple. The child is not “extraneously induced upon her”, and Mary is not merely a channel but the mother of Christ biologically. Moreover, the birth was so *natural* that her milk production started in the normal way. Athanasius believed a normal birth was prerequisite for lactation to begin. Of certain interest is the word *natural*, the bringing forth is to be understood in such a way that it is in line with common human nature.

John Chrysostom, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, writes about a conception, and a time of nine months, and in due time pangs, and a delivery, and of giving suck.⁸¹ Chrysostom thus emphasises the true human aspects of Christ’s conception and birth. According to his outer appearance Jesus was a normal baby. Is Chrysostom’s utterance a denial of the idea of *Mariae virginitas in partu*? Not necessarily. It depends on how the definition of the term is to be understood.

The first Latin writer who wrote that Mary was undamaged regarding her virginity in the context of Christ’s birth was Hilary of Poitiers (about 300–367). He writes about “things corporeal” in Christ’s birth, but, in opposite to Tertullian, argues in favor of an un-hurtful and painless birth of Christ, of *Mariae virginitas in partu*. In the third book of *De trinitate* Hilary writes that the birth of Christ did not harm the virginity of Mary. He sees this event of birth as a miracle corresponding to the miracle of a virgin conception:

You ask what was the manner in which, as the Spirit teaches, the Son was born? I will put a question to you as to things corporal (*de corporeis rebus*). I ask not in what manner He was born of a virgin; I ask only whether her flesh, in the course of bringing His flesh to readiness for birth, suffered any loss. Assuredly she did not conceive Him in the common way, or suffer the shame of human intercourse, in order to bear Him; yet she bore Him, complete in His human Body, without loss of her own completeness (*et perfectum ipsa de suis non imminuta generavit*). Surely piety requires that we should regard as possible with God a thing which we see became possible through his power in the case of a human being.⁸²

Hilary explains Mary as being unhurt during the pregnancy and the begetting of Christ and sees this as a divine miracle. The thought of a lost hymenal virginity must not necessarily be read into the saying “her own completeness”, however, and just as likely it might well be interpreted as undamaged in the birth situation. Another Western theologian who was a strong advocate for asceticism and Mary’s *virginitas perpetua* was Jerome. It appears, however, that he was not interested in the issue of *in partu*. Jerome does not mention *virginitas in partu* in his text *Contra Helvidium*, composed around 383. Ten years later, in *Adversus Jovinianum*, in which

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaem* VIII, 4.

⁸² Hilary of Poitiers, *De trinitate* III, 19. Trans. NPNF2 9.

Jovinian was the target of Jerome's polemic, he was probably not yet aware of the condemnations of Jovinian in Rome and Milan, and so in this text *virginitas in partu* is not discussed either.⁸³

The North Italian theologian, Zeno of Verona (ca. 300–370), most vehemently supported the idea of *Mariae virginitas in partu*. Zeno's text corpus consists of ninety-two sermons. His discussions of Mary's virginity are found in his Christmas sermons and in *De continentia*. For Zeno, the *virginitas in partu* was motivated by both Christological and ascetical concerns. With his unique identity as God and man, Christ's birth had to be something extraordinary:

Mary gave birth not in pain, but in joy; a son was born without a father, nor did he come entirely from his mother, for he owed to himself the fact of his conception, and he gave to his mother the fact of his birth. She was the first to be amazed that such a son had come forth from her, nor would she have believed that he was born from her, had she not remained a virgin after the birth, just as she was incorrupt after the conception.⁸⁴

In Zeno's text, the lack of pain and incorruption are stressed. This quotation shows how Zeno's Christological concerns led him to state that Mary gave birth to Christ without pain. Christ's divine nature required an extraordinary birth. The incarnation of the Son, a miraculous and over-natural conception in Mary, must logically be followed by a likewise miraculous birth. Zeno's writings reveal an understanding of the normal human birth as something which was contaminating and impure. Zeno regarded the physical bodily matters that are part of any normal childbirth, such as blood, mucus, and the placenta or afterbirth, as something impure and as something from which both Christ and his mother were spared.⁸⁵ He writes in a sermon: "O great mystery! Mary conceived as an incorrupt virgin; after conception she gave birth as a virgin; after birth she remained a virgin".⁸⁶ The *Protoevangelium of James* directly influenced Zeno writings, and in his preaching he explicitly refers to the doubting Salome, and what happened to her.⁸⁷ Neumann writes that Zeno "assumes its narrative of the nativity to be known to his hearers".⁸⁸

Hilary, Jerome, and Zeno demonstrate the thinking surrounding the birth of Jesus in the Latin world of Antiquity and at the time of Ambrose. I have dealt in length with this background of *Mariae virginitas in partu* because it is an idea that is strange and unfamiliar to the modern ear. What is meant by a virginity *in* the delivery of a child is also ambiguous or

⁸³ A lengthier discussion is found in Hunter 2007, 188–192.

⁸⁴ Zeno, *Tractatus* II 12.2. Trans. Hunter 2007, 194.

⁸⁵ Hunter 2007, 192–196.

⁸⁶ Zeno, *Tractatus* I 54.4. Trans. Hunter 2007, 195.

⁸⁷ Zeno, *Tractatus* I 54.5.

⁸⁸ Neumann 1962, 113.

unclear, and it is to this, in the context Ambrose's writings on the subject, we now turn.

3.2.3. Ambrose's Teaching on *Mariae virginitas in partu*

When Ambrose entered the scene as bishop in 374, the belief in *Mariae virginitas in partu* and Christ's birth as a miraculous birth was a recognised property in the Church. Ambrose received and implemented the typology of Christ as the second Adam and Mary as the second Eve, the latter is investigated later in this chapter. In this section I focus on the content of Ambrose's teaching on *in partu*. Unlike Zeno, Ambrose does not give any detailed descriptions of the physical status of Mary's body and there are no allusions to the *Protoevangelium of James*.⁸⁹ From his literary beginning, *De virginibus*, onwards, however, Ambrose demonstrates he believed in the idea that the actual birth of Christ was something extraordinary.⁹⁰

The way in which Ambrose allowed his audience to steer the way in which he describes the idea of the virginity during birth can be demonstrated. In the context of an official ecclesial text, which was published as a letter, in CSEL as *Epistula extra collectionem* 15 (42 PL), Ambrose uses, in comparison to his pastoral preaching, a different way of explaining the virginal birth of Christ. In analysing the teaching of *Mariae virginitas in partu* in Ambrose's writings, it is possible to distinguish between how the virginity in the birth is expressed in official ecclesiastical documents on the one hand, and how it is told in his pastoral sermons on the other.

3.2.3.1. *Virginitas in partu* Pastorally Preached

For Ambrose, the idea of a miraculous and wonderous character of Christ's birth is of the uttermost importance. He writes in *De fide*: "Not only Christ's generation of the Father is admirable, but admirable is also his birth of the Virgin", and continues about the manner of Christ's conception and birth: "it had no likeness to the manner of our birth", it was "without the seed of a man".⁹¹ It is further called: "A birth (*partus*) of

⁸⁹ Zeno's use of the text is a proof that *Protoevangelium of James*, with its information about Christ's nativity circulated in North Italy. Nowhere in his text corpus, on the other hand, does Ambrose explicitly refer to this apocryphal text, although he, as Zeno of Verona, indubitably believed *Maria virgo in partu*. For the similarities between Zeno and Ambrose, see Duval 1974, 61–64.

⁹⁰ Ambrose's opinion on this question is well mapped in different studies, with different views in the analysis. See Koch 1929; Huhn 1954, 110–126; Neumann 1962, 105–113; Hunter 2007, 171–204.

⁹¹ Ambrose, *fid.* I 12.77. *Non sola admirabilis ex Patre generatio Christi, admirabilis etiam ipsa generatio ejus ex virgine [...] istam nostrae esse dissimilem [...] sit natus ex Maria, quo usu uterus eum habuerit virginalis, quomodo sine semine viri partus [...] Unde leges novatae partus?*

a new law". The new law means something new, not following the old law, i.e. that under the sin. The delivery of Christ was unlike (*dissimilis*) the human common experience of a birth. Awe and wonder were the fundamental features in Ambrose's teaching on the birth of Christ, including the whole process of the seedless conception, Jesus' growth in Mary's womb, and his delivery. For Ambrose, Christ's birth was something exceptional and never hitherto seen, revealing the majesty of the Son. The Latin word *admirabilis* reflects what Ambrose wanted to emphasise: The birth of Christ is admirable, extraordinary, and praiseworthy.

Two passages exemplify the underlying belief in *virginitas in partu*. Firstly, in a passage in *De virginibus*, Ambrose writes: "she gave birth to a body without any corruption of her body".⁹² Two human bodies were involved in the birth of Christ – and against the common experience it did not affect Mary's body negatively. On the other hand, Ambrose believes Mary to have actively taken part in the delivery. The verb "bring forth" (*genero*) is used by him in the active form. This expression is in line with the female contribution Ambrose mentions in *De paradiso*: "The woman's co-operation (*operatio mulieris*) turns out to be something of major importance".⁹³

A second noteworthy example is found in *De virginitate*: "The virgin has conceived and delivered a good smell, the Son of God".⁹⁴ It is not the birth in itself, but Christ, which is the good smell. Nonetheless, in using the term good smell (*odor bonus*), Ambrose points at a birth-giving event that is out of the standard experience of a birth. The idea of Christ as a good smell returns in *De Spiritu Sancto* II: "Mary is the rod. Christ is the flower of Mary, who sprouted forth from a virginal womb to spread the good smell of faith throughout the whole world".⁹⁵ Ambrose is not, however, pointing at the virginal delivery in this passage in *De Spiritu Sancto*, but rather at the conception.

In many of his sermons Ambrose uses standard phrases indicating *Mariae virginitas in partu*. One example of Ambrose phrasing the *virginitas in partu* is found in *Explanatio Psalmi 45* where he writes: "The virgin has received and delivered in her womb".⁹⁶ Moreover, in *De fide* he writes: "As immaculate you have proceeded from the virgin's womb".⁹⁷ In *De fide*

⁹² Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.7. *Corpus sine corporis contagione generavit.*

⁹³ Ambrose, *par.* 9.48, already quoted in Chapter 3.2.1: *The View of a Normal Childbirth in Ambrose's Time.*

⁹⁴ Ambrose, *virginit.* 11.65. *Virgo concepit, uirgo peperit bonum odorem, dei filium.* It is a poetic language and an exposition of the Song of Songs.

⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Spir.* II 5.38. *Virga Maria, flos Mariae Christus, qui bonum odorem fidei toto sparsus orbe virginali ex utero germinavit.*

⁹⁶ Ambrose, *in psalm.* 45.18. *Virgo in utero accepit et peperit.*

⁹⁷ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 4 44. *Immaculatus ex alvo virginis processisti.*

Ambrose calls the birth of Christ something that did not diminish or hurt (*imminutio*) the body of Mary.⁹⁸

In *De incarnationis* Ambrose uses the expression: “The virgin has conceived, the virgin has given birth, so that you might believe he is God”. In the text Ambrose differs between two different conditions. The line of thought here is that Christ was in the womb in an ordinary way (*secundum condicionem*); he was born, he was nursed at the breast and he was placed in the crib just like any child. There is, however, also a beyond condition, (*supra condicionem*), in the birth of Christ: Mary conceived as a virgin and as a virgin begat Jesus. Ambrose preaches this with the goal of strengthening belief in the incarnation of the Son: As God Christ renewed nature, and as man he was born according to nature.⁹⁹

In the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia* Ambrose makes liturgical poetry of Mary’s childbirth:

6. Teaching that the vows of a married woman concealed a high mystery, that the virgin’s holy bringing forth would not harm the mother’s chastity.	<i>praetenta nuptae foedera</i>
8. We believe the God who was born, the offspring of the holy virgin, who, seated at the Father’s right, has taken away the sins of the world.	<i>alto docens mysterio, ne virginis partus sacer matris pudorem laederet. Nos credimus natum Deum partumque virginis sacrae, peccata qui mundi tulit ad dexteram sedens Patris.</i> ¹⁰⁰

Christ’s birth from the virgin was something which Ambrose calls holy (*virginis partus sacer*). Her birth did not harm her chastity (*pudor*). It is fascinating that the actual holy birth was something Ambrose taught his congregation in Milan to celebrate in song.¹⁰¹

In 390 Ambrose composed *Expositio in Lucam*, a commentary on the Gospel of Luke. The treatise is composed of sermons and is one example of Ambrose’s pastoral concerns. One intimate detail is found in the exposition on the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38). Ambrose writes in the context of the mystery of the incarnation and the birth of Christ: “As virgin she conceived us, as virgin she gave birth to us without any sound of pain”.¹⁰² “Give birth” (*pario*) is used in the active form, but notably absent was the sound of pain (*gemitus*). This is remarkable. *Gemitus* means

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* III 8.54. *Sine humanae inminutione naturae*. Marksches translates: “Ohne Schmälerung der menschlichen Natur”, FChr 47:2.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *incarn.* 6.54. *Secundum condicionem etenim corporis in utero fuit, natus est, lactatus est, in praesepio est conlocatus, sed supra condicionem virgo concepit, virgo generavit, ut crederes quia Deus erat, qui novabat naturam, et homo erat, qui secundum naturam nascebatur ex homine.*

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Iam surgit hora tertia*. Trans. Ramsey 1997.

¹⁰¹ More about the hymns, Chapter 1.3.2: *Ambrose’s Pastoral Duties*, and Chapter 4.4.5: *Christ’s Virginal Birth in Worship*.

¹⁰² Ambrose, *in Luc.* II 7. *Concepit nos uirgo de spiritu, parit nos uirgo sine gemitu.*

sound, noise, sigh, roaring. Any of the listeners who had experienced a birth knew the sounds a woman in the throngs of the pains of labour makes. These screams and sighs, tells Ambrose, were absent in Bethlehem when Mary delivered Christ. Foremost in the context Ambrose points at the miracle as a parallel to the church. I return to this subject in Chapter 5.4.1: *Mary as typus ecclesiae*.

In the exposition of the actual birth of Christ Ambrose writes that *she gave birth to her firstborn son* (Luke 2:7), Ambrose does not highlight the actual delivery. He might have been reluctant to teach the idea of *Mariae virginitas in partu* publicly, perhaps due to its docetic undertones. This cannot, however, be proven, and he does actually mention it later on in the *Expositio in Lucam*.¹⁰³ In the exposition of Luke 2:7 Ambrose writes that Luke explains Christ's birth in the flesh (*carnem Christus natus sit*) only briefly (*breuiter*). *Expositio in Lucam* 2:7 continues with a quotation and explanation of the Prologue of the Gospel of John. The only point Ambrose makes on Luke 2:7 is to emphasise Christ's twofold birth, and the notion that Luke writes about Christ's birth in the flesh while the evangelist John focuses on his eternal birth from the Father.¹⁰⁴

The next thing to notice is how Ambrose explains Luke's quotation of Exodus 13:2: *Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people [...] is mine* in Luke 2:23.¹⁰⁵ The interpretation he offers has troubled both Josef Huhn and Charles W. Neumann. Both did their best to show that also here Ambrose consistently taught *Mariae virginitas in partu*, even if none of them defined the term *virginitas*. Huhn argues that Ambrose wanted to reject those who, in general, did not believe in Mary's virginal state.¹⁰⁶ Neumann makes a thorough and scrupulous comparative exegesis of Origen's and Ambrose's expositions to show how Ambrose turned Origen's statement around so it became an affirmation of *virginitas in partu*.¹⁰⁷ Neumann makes the point that *Expositio in Lucam* was composed before the Jovinian controversy, which he sees as the reason for Ambrose expressing himself unclearly.¹⁰⁸ I find that both Huhn's and Neumann's studies, and later works relying on

¹⁰³ The reluctance in *Expositio in Lucam* may also be compared to the fact that either in the same year or within one or two years the idea was defended and put forward as a binding ecclesial truth at the synod.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *in Luc.* II 40.

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *in Luc.* II 56.

¹⁰⁶ Huhn 1954, 124–125.

¹⁰⁷ Neumann 1962, 113–138, means that “open” refers to the conception and not to the actual delivery. He was followed for example by Lillis 2017, 210. Neumann was not, and does not pretend to be, the first scholar arguing this way. Koch quotes as one example Phillip Friedrich who believed that the opening of the womb is not about “in pariendo, sondern in concipiendo”, Koch 1937, 95–96.

¹⁰⁸ Neumann 1962, 113–138.

them¹⁰⁹ suffer from a lack of definition: What did Ambrose actually think of in his understanding of Christ's birth? Origen, in his *Homilia in Lucam*, understood Luke 2:7 as pointing to a real opening, which is not in harmony with a later developed understanding of *Mariae virginitas in partu*. Ambrose seems to have known the passage of Origen, and either follows the Alexandrian perfectly according to Hugo Koch,¹¹⁰ or does not follow it according to Neumann.¹¹¹

In *Expositio in Lucam* 2.56 Ambrose begins by stating that Christ is "truly holy, while immaculate" (*uere sanctus, quia immaculatus*). Christ is consecrated, he is holy, and thus Exodus 13:2 is, in its deepest sense, a Christological statement. Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit who infused an immaculate seed into Mary's unviolated womb (*inmaculatum semen inuiolabili utero spiritus sanctus infudit*). Ambrose writes this about the conception, not about the birth. I believe Julia Kelto Lillis misinterprets this passage, when she concludes: "Ambrose grounds Christ's holiness in his unique birth by making him the sole subject of statements from Exodus 13".¹¹² Ambrose's text states: "Christ was truly holy, because he was immaculate" (*Et uere sanctus, quia immaculatus*). Nothing in Ambrose's text points at the proposal made by Lillis that Christ's conception or his birth made him holy. Ambrose rather refers Christ's holiness to his eternal divinity as Son to the Father.¹¹³

Ambrose continues *Expositio in Lucam* 2.56 with an exposition of Christ's birth. Christ alone, in an immaculate newness of birth, has not undergone any influences of earthly corruption. In his birth he laid aside his heavenly majesty.¹¹⁴ The thought seems to be that Jesus, both in his conception and in his birth, makes things new. He is without the consequences of the fall. Two expressions in this sentence explain Christ's birth: Firstly, his birth is in an immaculate newness of birth (in the ablative case *inmaculati partus nouitate*). Secondly, Christ surrendered his heavenly majesty in the incarnation (in the ablative case *caelesti maiestate*). Mary expels the influences of earthly corruption. Ambrose's saying is in line with Mary as the second Eve and that the birth of Christ is something new, hitherto never seen on earth.

In the next passage, *Expositio in Lucam* 2.57, Ambrose develops his interpretation of the immaculate birth and writes that Christ alone

¹⁰⁹ As Hunter 2007; Laughton 2010; Lillis 2017.

¹¹⁰ Koch 1937, 95–97.

¹¹¹ Neumann 1962, 113–138.

¹¹² Lillis 2017, 210.

¹¹³ I will return to the subject in Chapter 4.4.6: *The Virginal Birth and the Original Sin*.

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, in *Luc.* II 56. *Qui terrena contagia corruptelae immaculati partus nouitate non senserit et caelesti maiestate depulerit*. The last words, *depulerit caelesti maiestate*, might be a reference to Philippians 2:6ff, that Christ put his heavenly glory aside in his coming as man.

opened his mother's womb (*solus aperuit sibi uulvam*) for himself. He opened his mother's womb, so that he who is immaculate could come out (*qui aperuit matris suae uuluam, ut immaculatus exiret*). The propulsive power, using Galen's term, in Mary's begetting of Christ, is Christ himself. This makes the birth on one hand super-natural, since the incarnate divine Son is not a normal child. It differentiates Mary's childbirth from the case of any other woman. On the other hand, by referring to an opening of the mother's womb Ambrose indicates the process of a normal birth.

In *De institutione virginis* Ambrose talks about Christ's birth in connection to the prophesy in Ezekiel 44:1–3. The Bible passage contains a saying that in the future a temple will arise there. The temple will have a gate to the east that is closed; in Ambrose's version *this gate is closed and is not opened* (*haec porta clausa erit et non aperietur*). Nobody, as it is written in Ezekiel, shall walk through that gate but the Lord. Ambrose interprets Mary as being the gate, through which Christ entered this world: "When he was poured out in a virginal birth, he did not dissolve the enclosed genitals of virginity".¹¹⁵ In connection to the wording in Ezekiel, Ambrose writes: "Christ went through it, but opened not".¹¹⁶ Either Ambrose changed his view on Christ's birth in the year between *Expositio in Lucam* and *De institutione virginis*, or he uses the term "open" (*aperio*) with two different meanings. The following passage makes it clear that it is Christ, as the Lord of Israel, who is the only one allowed to *open* Mary's womb:

It is then the gate of the womb, but not always closed; truly only one was able to remain closed, through which he went out in a birth without loss of the enclosed genitals of virginity. Therefore, the Prophet says, *this gate shall be closed, and not be opened, and no one shall pass through it*, that is, no man, *since the Lord and God of Israel shall pass through it*. And it shall be closed, that is, [before]¹¹⁷ and after the Lord has passed through, and it shall not be opened for anyone, and not was it open; since Christ is always his own gate, who said: *I am the gate* which no one is able to tear off.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 8.52. *Quando uirginali fusus est partu, et genitalia uirginitatis claustra non soluit.*

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 8.53. *Transiuit per eam Christus, sed non aperuit.*

¹¹⁷ There is a problem of textual criticism here. The edition in SAEMO 14:2 excludes the word *ante* which I put in brackets, and though not best documented it is certainly a word which gives more sense to the passage.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 8.55. *Est ergo et porta uentris, sed non clausa semper; uerum una sola potuit manere clausa, per quam sine dispendio claustrorum genitalium uirginis partus exiuit. Ideo ait propheta: Porta haec clausa erit et non aperietur et nemo transibit per eam, hoc est nemo hominum, quoniam dominus, inquit, deus Israel transibit per eam. Eritque clausa, id est [ante] et post transitum domini erit clausa, et non aperietur a quoquam, nec aperta est, quoniam habuit semper ianuam suam Christum, qui dixit: Ego sum ianua, quam nemo ab ea potuit auellere.*

Ambrose writes that since Christ is truly divine, the Lord and God, he alone could be born out of Mary's womb, but not in the common way of birth. This indicates that Ambrose has a real human birth in mind, but it happens, nevertheless, in a way that no ordinary mother has ever experienced. Christ was born in a miraculous way and was himself the propulsive power of his birth. When Ambrose writes of a non-opening (*non aperio*) in this context, he is referring to the intactness of Mary's intimate and procreative bodily parts. She was, as it is written in the following passage, "but assuredly strengthened and kept intact. To conclude, she is as not opened".¹¹⁹ In this passage, *virginitas* in the context of birth is most probably thought of as an un-hurting and non-damaging event that left no wounds or bodily marks.

Giulia Sissa interprets *De institutione virginis* and the *porta clausa* of Ezekiel 44:2 incorrectly, according to my findings, when she understands Ambrose as the first to recognise an intact hymen as miraculous in the birth of Christ. On one hand, the virginity of mind was for Ambrose the most significant, which Sissa recognises. Her conclusion, in the study *Greek virginity*, reads:

The virginity that one could touch was therefore vulgar, because it justified disturbing manipulations without offering reliable proof. Ambrose did not believe in it at all. Nevertheless, in this Mariological context, the genitals of the Virgin, hence of all virgins, are sealed; the hymen exists. Henceforth this was considered an assumption essential for any interpretation of scripture: it was the physical detail that made the birth of the son of a virgin miraculous, inherently mysterious, and performe unique.¹²⁰

I believe Sissa misinterprets the passage, since she does not read it either in the context of *De institutione virginis*, or in the greater context of other texts written within a few years of *De institutione virginis*.

A short sentence showing the use of different words in context of the birth of Christ is found in *Explanatio Psalmi 47*. In the exposition of the psalm Ambrose writes about Mary adoring her child as God, in seeing and nursing him. He writes: "Mary *has not* given birth (*parturio*) in pain, but begotten (*pario*), so that she knew she from herself had generated the Lord for salvation".¹²¹ This concludes what we have seen so far: *Parturio* is a birth as women normally experience it, while *pario* means no more

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 8.56. *Sed confirmavit profecto et servavit intactam. Denique non est aperta.* I have inserted an "as not opened" in the translation, since I think that is what Ambrose meant.

¹²⁰ Sissa 1990, 173–174. On the contrary, Emmenegger 2014 has convincingly shown that the idea of a hymen was not brought into Western theological thinking on the birth of Christ at that time, and moreover, that it appears even later in the East.

¹²¹ Ambrose, in *psalm.* 47.11. *Eum Maria non parturiuit, sed peperit, quia et dominum et salutare sciebat ex se esse generandum.*

than “give birth”, or “bring forth”.¹²² Ambrose seems to think that Mary never underwent birth pangs, she just gave birth.

In the letter numbered in CSEL as *Epistula extra collectionem* 14 (63 PL), Ambrose addresses the neighbouring Church in Vercelli. They were about to elect a bishop, and Ambrose guides them in what he thinks is important in the Christian faith. It is one of the last texts from Ambrose, written about a year before his death. It reads:

Why should I speak about the great grace of virginity which deserved of being chosen by Christ so that it might be the bodily temple of God, in which, as we read, dwelt the fullness of the Godhead in a bodily form. A virgin begot the salvation of the world, a virgin brought forth the life of all. Should virginity, then, be renounced which was of benefit to all in Christ? A virgin carried him whom this world cannot contain or sustain. And when he was born of Mary’s womb, he preserved the enclosure of her generative function, and the inviolate seal of her virginity. Thus, Christ found in the virgin that which he wanted to be his own, that which the Lord of all might take for himself. Through a man and a woman flesh was cast out of paradise; through a virgin it was joined to God.¹²³

In this letter we find something on the birth of Christ, even if, in this context, Ambrose is not primarily writing about Mary’s delivery of her son. Mary is just one example of virginity, probably used to urge the Church at Vercelli to hold a high standard of sanctity. If we treat the birth of Christ as an isolated subject, we can see four things: 1) Mary begot the salvation of the world, 2) she actually brought forth, 3) she preserved in her childbearing “the enclosure of her generative function, and the inviolate seal of virginity” which Christ also wanted for himself, and 4) her childbearing is paralleled with the fall, the being cast out from paradise of Adam and Eve. The fundamental idea in all these four points is the parallel Eve – Mary. 1 Timothy 2:15 (*salva erit per filiorum generationem*) echoes this passage (*virgo genuit mundi salutem*).

The expression that Christ preserved the seal of virginity (*intemerata virginitatis signacula*)¹²⁴ could be understood as a thought of a hymen preserved intact but this is not probable. The point of the preservation of Mary’s virginity, (“thus”, *itaque*), is that Christ wished to find in his mother, what “he wanted to be his own” (*quod suum esse vellet*). What he

¹²² Ahlberg 1945, 629; Morwood 2005, 133.

¹²³ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 14.33 (63 PL). *Quid autem loquar quanta sit virginitatis gratia, quae meruit a Christo eligi, ut esset etiam corporale Dei templum, in qua corporaliter, ut legimus, habitavit plenitudo divinitatis? Virgo genuit mundi salutem, virgo peperit vitam universorum. Sola ergo non debet esse virginitas, quae omnibus in Christo profuit? Virgo portavit, quem mundus iste capere ac sustinere non potest. Qui cum ex Mariae nasceretur utero, genitalis tamen septum pudoris, et intemerata virginitatis conservavit signacula. Itaque in Virgine Christus reperit, quod suum esse vellet, quod sibi omnium Dominus assumeret. Per virum autem et mulierem caro eiecta de paradiso, per virginem iuncta est deo.*

¹²⁴ The same expression is found in Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 8.52.

wanted for his own was: “That which the Lord of all might take for Himself” (*quod sibi omnium Dominus assumeret*). Christ wanted to assume, adopt, and receive true human flesh (*caro*). The flesh was, through the virgin, joined to God (*virginem juncta est Deo*). The context points to Mary in the whole process of conception, pregnancy, and birth giving. The birth of Christ was for the salvation of all, the re-joining to God what had been lost in Adam and Eve’s fall. Rather than intimately mentioning Mary’s private parts, Ambrose seems to point at a paradisiac virginity of Christ which restores the pre-lapsarian state of human beings.

In the short passage of *Epistula extra collectionem* 14 Ambrose uses three words for childbirth, *gigno*, *pario*, and *nascor*. A fourth word defining childbirth, *parturio*, is omitted by Ambrose in this context. The most possible explanation for this is that *parturio* has connotations of “labour pains”, “birth pangs”, and “anguish” in the context of giving birth.¹²⁵

3.2.3.2. *Virginitas in partu* in Official Ecclesiastical Texts

Due to the Jovinianist controversy, Ambrose called a council in Milan in 390. The *Epistula extra collectionem* 15 (42 PL) is the official synodal letter reporting from this synod.¹²⁶ The letter is addressed to the pope and signed by eight bishops and clearly has an official character.¹²⁷ The synod in Milan dealt with three Jovinian proposals: 1) That apart from baptism there is no difference in merit in the Christian life, 2) that Mary was not ever-virgin, and 3) that fasting is of no merit. This letter is the only source for this synod,¹²⁸ and, in fact, is the only synod throughout the history of the Western Church that presents theological arguments for *Mariae virginitas in partu*. Thus, concerning the *virginitas in partu*, it must be regarded as a highly interesting text from Ambrose, and is generally one of the most important texts in the history of Western Mariology.¹²⁹ The

¹²⁵ Compare for example Ambrose, in *psalm*. 47.11. *Eum Maria non parturiuit sed peperit*.

¹²⁶ The Milanese synod is not easily dated; different dates have been proposed, varying from 389–393. Beyenka dates the synod to 389, FC 26, Beyenka, 225. Huhn discusses the years 391, 392 and 393, Huhn 1954, 117; Palanque prefers to date the synod to 393, Palanque 1933, 545; in the dating he was followed by Dudden 1935, 393–395. Neumann criticises these two and argues that *Epistula extra collectionem* 15 (PL 42) must have been written around 390, before *De institutione virginis*.

¹²⁷ The letter is signed (item *subscriptio*) by the bishops Eventius, Maximus, Felix, Bassianus, Theodolus, Constantius, Geminianus (represented by the presbyter Aper), and Eustasius. Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15.14 (42 PL).

¹²⁸ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15 (42 PL). Karl Rahner writes that it ought to be judged as not universally binding: “es handelt sich nur um eine Partikularsynode”, Rahner 1960, 178.

¹²⁹ It is noteworthy that Emmenegger fails to even mention the text in his study, *Wie die Jungfrau zum Kind kam*. A whole chapter in his study, *Jungfrau und Gottesmutter: wie Maria ihr Kind gebär*, deals with *Mariae virginitas in partu*, Emmenegger 2014, 197–256. In fact, the letter is sparingly dealt with in books about Mariology and the History of dogma. The synodal letter is not present in the collection of symbols and definition of Denzinger–

letter is addressed to the pope, Siricius, who earlier in the same year had gathered his clergy in Rome against the same Jovinian controversy.¹³⁰

The synodal letter begins by praising pope Siricius for being a good shepherd and keeping the wolves away from the Lord's flock. The wolves, with their "habitual unbelief and deadly barking",¹³¹ is a picture of Jovinian and his companions.¹³² "It is bestial barking to show no favor for virginity",¹³³ according to the synod, which continues by stating that there are different kinds of deeds with different heavenly rewards. Virginity and fasting as example of meriting virtues are also dealt with in the letter.

Mariae virginitas in partu is the subject of the fourth to the seventh paragraph of the synodal letter. The synod argues that if the conception was virginal, the birth ought to be virginal as well: Christ granted for his mother what he had *for himself (sibi)*. As in the aforementioned *Epistula extra collectionem* 14,¹³⁴ the most important virginity in the letter is ascribed to Christ. The synodal letter, *Epistula extra collectionem* 15, is preoccupied with the Christological aspect of the miraculous birth of Christ. The eternal and divine Son was born of Mary, and the birth must be understood as a wonder. A great deal of the letter consists of biblical prooftexts. They are not, in themselves, directly convincing but are used to show that a miraculous birth is thinkable. They are: Isaiah 43:19: *Behold I make all things new*, showing that a new kind of birth is possible; Matthew 1:23: *God with us*, the birth shows that Christ is truly divine; Luke 1:37: *Nothing is impossible for God*, again showing that the miracle is not impossible for God; Isaiah 7:14: *Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son*, showing that both the conception and birth should be of a virgin; Ezekiel 44:20: *No man shall pass through it except God of Israel*, arguing that Mary is that gate through which God but no-one else, has passed. These biblical passages are followed with an enumeration of five Old Testament miracles, showing that God is able to work in this world against the law of nature.¹³⁵ In accordance with these miracles, the birth of Christ

Hünemann. Pagnamenta deals with it in only one note, Pagnamenta 1932, 167. Söll does not mention it throughout the chapter *Virginitas in partu*, Söll 1978, 46–47. Examples of studies who do actually analyse the synodal letter are Huhn 1954, 110–126; Neumann 1962, 152–173; Delius 1963, 131–132; Graef 2009, 62–63.

¹³⁰ Siricius, *Sirici epistula* (PL 41a), is a short circular letter, found in CSEL 82:3, 296–301, which explained the issue to Ambrose.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15.1 (42 PL).

¹³² According to Siricius' letter the names of the leading teachers of the movement known in Rome were *Jovinianus, Auxentius, Genialis, Germinator, Felix, Plotinus, Martianus, Januarius et Ingeniosus*, Siricius, *Sirici epistula* 6 (PL 41a).

¹³³ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15.1 (42 PL).

¹³⁴ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 14.33 (63 PL), discussed in Chapter 3.2.3.1: *Virginitas in partu Pastorally Preached*.

¹³⁵ Psalms 113:3; Exodus 17:6; Exodus 14:22; 2 Kings 6:6; Matthew 14:26.

was against the law of nature (Christ's mother remained virgin).¹³⁶ The synodal letter also argues that the *ex Maria virgine* of the Creed prerequisites a virginal conception as well as birth.¹³⁷

Absent in the letter are speculations on physical matters of Mary's body in the birth. The point made in the synodal letter is that Christ's virginal birth is possible, and its possibility is in accordance with the teaching of the Bible and the Creed. A short conclusion of this is: After the bishops had dealt with *Mariae virginitas in partu*, the report of their conclusion was only that such an event was indeed possible for God. They said nothing regarding the biological and physical details about what a *virginitas in partu* actually meant.

3.2.3.3. Conclusions on Ambrose's Teaching on *virginitas in partu*

There are two perspectives on the virgin birth, one Christological and one Mariological. The miraculous virginal birth of Christ was, for Ambrose, something in accordance to the will of Christ and in correspondence with his divine majesty. This is the Christological perspective, which was foremost for Ambrose in the synodal letter *Epistula extra collectionem* 15.¹³⁸ In his pastoral sermons, the Mariological perspective on what happened with Mary is also important. When Ambrose himself expounds on the birth of Christ in his sermons directed to everyone, as in *Expositio in Lucam*, he talks about it as a real birth where Mary's womb was opened. This opening differs from normal births in that the negative sides of childbirth, such as pain, danger, contamination, and wounding of the mother, as were normal in a common birth, were absent. When Ambrose talks to or about his contemporary virgins, as in *De institutione virginis*

¹³⁶ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15.7 (42 PL). *Contra usum originis naturalis peperit Maria, et virgo permanet.*

¹³⁷ According to Manfred Hauke the synodal letter is the first evidence of a belief that *ex Maria virgine* of the Roman Creed included *Mariae virginitas in partu*. "Die Formulierung *generatus a Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine* wird hier erstmals nicht nur auf die jungfräuliche Empfängnis gedeutet, wie in der Erklärung des Symbolums durch Ambrosius aus früherer Zeit, sondern auch auf die Jungfräulichkeit in der Geburt." Hauke 2007, 107–108. This was not, according to Hauke, interpreted in the Creed in his earlier *Explanatio symboli*. I am not as sure as Hauke on this point. *Explanatio symboli* is a very short treatise and about *ex Maria virgine* Ambrose writes: "You know the sign of the heavenly creator, he was made man and received in his flesh our infirmities, but he came with the privilege of the eternal majesty," *praerogativam auctoris coelestis agnoscis; factus quidem ut homo ut infirmitates nostras in sua carne susciperet, sed cum privilegio venit majestatis aeternae.* Ambrose, *ymb.* 3. Text PL. The virginity of Mary's mind and body was a sign of the eternal majesty, and the coming (*veniens*) of Christ did correspond to that. In the term privilege (*privilegium*) Ambrose might well have had both *ante partum* and *in partu* in mind.

¹³⁸ For example, Delius counts only the Christological perspective: "Es sind also alle diese Aussagen unter christologischen Gesichtspunkten zu werten. So verteidigt er die Gottheit Christi gegenüber den Arianern, indem er als Zeichen der Göttlichkeit die jungfräuliche Geburt anführt, die das Werk des heiligen Geistes ist." Delius 1963, 132.

and *Epistula extra collectionem* 14, his purpose is to highlight the virginity. He exhorts the virgins to persevere in their calling: To be virginal both in mind and in body, as were both Mary and Christ, her son.

3.3. Ambrose's Protology

In this section I map Ambrose's Protology regarding human beings, and present its basic constructions. Preaching on the Protology is a significant part of pastoral caretaking. Its purpose is to bring into conscious awareness the dignity of being human and explain the consequences of the fall. Thus, it explains where humans come from and why life could be difficult and hurting. The fall and an anthropological distinction between *ante* and *post peccatum* plays a distinctive role in Ambrose's theology. The most distinguished effect of the fall is the un-harmonious relation between the body and soul in the human being. One of the most influential Church historians in our time, Peter Brown, wrote about Ambrose's anthropology in *Body and Society*:

From Philo, Origen, and Plotinus, Ambrose had picked up a dualism of soul and body of exceptional sharpness. He instinctively tended to identify Paul's somber and all-engulfing sense of the war between the spirit and the flesh with the more familiar, classical opposition of mind and body.¹³⁹

Brown's words reflect a common understanding in Ambrose's anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century. Most scholars, who comment on Ambrose's view of human nature, see in him:

an unreconstructed Platonist, an advocate of extreme asceticism in the light of a dualistic view of human nature in which the soul is our true identity and the body is the source of our moral problems.¹⁴⁰

One exception in the earlier research is Stanis-Edmund Szydzik's study *Ad imaginem Dei*. Szydzik highlights Ambrose's biblical anthropology in which the human being is the completeness of body and soul.¹⁴¹ I agree with the common view that Ambrose makes a marked difference between the body and soul, which I take into consideration below. It is not to be expected, of course, that in Brown's short survey on Ambrose in *Body and Society* every nuance is considered, but I do miss a clear exposition of the consequences of the fall in this context. Humanity is not in the state it was

¹³⁹ P. Brown 2008, 348.

¹⁴⁰ Colish 2005, 31–32. Among the scholars are Courcelle 1968, 1973; Hagendahl 1958, Seibel 1958; Dassmann 1965. Colish makes a review of the scholarly standpoints during the twentieth century, with more names and titles than I have used, in Colish 2005, 5–12, 31–40.

¹⁴¹ Szydzik 1961.

meant to be, regarding either the soul or the body, nor indeed the completeness of body and soul.

Marcia Colish, in the study *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, has interpreted the treatises *De Abraham*, *De Isaac*, *De Iacob*, and *De Ioseph*. Her conclusion is that Ambrose's anthropology draws more from the Bible than earlier commentators have recognised. Colish has noticed what she calls "a hylomorphic understanding of human nature" in some of Ambrose's texts.¹⁴²

3.3.1. The Human Soul Created by God

3.3.1.1. Christ, the Image of God

Ambrose's reading of Genesis is Christological. For the creation he prerequisites the account of John's Gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). Jaroslav Pelikan writes on the commentary on the Creation stories from the Early Church that there "does seem to have been a practice in early Christianity of reading the first three chapters of Genesis as anticipating the coming of Christ".¹⁴³ This fact certainly describes Ambrose's interpretation of Genesis 1–3. More than being foretold in Ambrose's view of Protology, Christ is present. Szydzik wonderfully interprets Ambrose's Christological reading of the creation story to mean that all creation from the beginning on is destined for salvation: "Die Schöpfung ist christusförmig".¹⁴⁴ The *imago Dei* in which Adam is created is, according to Ambrose, the divine Son: Christ is, so to say, already present in Adam, and in Eve, in an allegorical meaning, the Church.¹⁴⁵

According to Genesis 1 God created human beings *in our image, after our likeness* (Genesis 1:26).¹⁴⁶ Ambrose explains that since God is spirit and not body, God's image is incorporeal and invisible.¹⁴⁷ In the creating word, *Let us make man* (Genesis 1:26) Ambrose hears the divine Father talking to the divine Son, God's image. The most important lesson from Genesis 1:26, therefore, is that Christ, who in the Gospel says *I and the Father are one* (John 10:30), is the image of the Father.¹⁴⁸

The likeness (*similitudo*) of Christ to the Father consists of power (*virtus*), wisdom (*sapientia*), and righteousness (*iustitia*). These shared properties show the consubstantiality of the two divine persons, Father

¹⁴² Colish 2005, 33.

¹⁴³ Pelikan 1996, 41.

¹⁴⁴ Szydzik 1961, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 3.24 about Eve as picture of the Church.

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.40. *Faciamus inquit hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostrum.*

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.40. *Incorporeus et inuisibilis.*

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.41. Compare Ambrose's interpretation of Colossians 1:15 in *fid.* I 7.48: *Apostolus dicit imaginem patris Christum esse.*

and Son.¹⁴⁹ The true *imago Dei* is the Word, the pre-existent Christ. In Christ, God created heaven and earth.¹⁵⁰ This is shown in Ambrose's conclusion of *Exameron*: On the seventh day Christ made a rational soul in the human being to find repose in and forgive sins.¹⁵¹ In Ambrose's theological construction, Christology is the foundation of his Cosmology, a thought which is more usually and most clearly found and developed in the Eastern Christian tradition, in the line of Origen, Gregory Nazianzen and Maximos Confessor.¹⁵²

3.3.1.2. The Human Soul as an Image of Christ

According to Ambrose, who reflects a common thought in early Christianity, human soul, not the flesh, is created according to the image and likeness of God.¹⁵³ The human soul is created to and by the Son, the Word in the Trinity, who truly is *imago Dei*. The human soul is created in the image and likeness of the pre-existent Christ.¹⁵⁴ Ambrose differentiates between *imago Dei*, which is the divine Son, and *ad imaginem Dei*, which is said of the creation of man, an originally righteous humanity created in the likeness of Christ. This is the basis for the human duty to strive for righteousness and a virtuous life, and Ambrose thus could exhort his congregation with the words: "O man, made in the image of God".¹⁵⁵

The soul is thus created *ad imaginem Dei*, that is, more precisely in the image of Christ. The body should reflect the soul, but in its constitution is similar to all other created animals, an *imago bestiae*.¹⁵⁶ The soul, Ambrose writes, is painted by God; it has in itself the grace of virtues and piety's luminosity and brightness.¹⁵⁷ This description was the case before the fall, but after the fall almost everything changed as Ambrose explicitly writes in the same context.¹⁵⁸ Righteousness, wisdom, and virtue belong to the

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.41. In this context, Ambrose quotes many New Testament verses, including Christ *qui est imago Dei*, Col 1:15. Christ is the one image of the Father, *ipse est imago Patris, qui semper est et erat in principio*.

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *exam.* I 1.15. *In Christo fecit deus caelum et terram*.

¹⁵¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 10.76.

¹⁵² Thunberg 1999, 127–134.

¹⁵³ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.45. *Non ergo caro potest esse ad imaginem Dei, sed anima nostra, quae libera est [...] ea igitur est ad imaginem Dei quae non corporeo aestimatur, sed mentis vigore*.

¹⁵⁴ In this context Ambrose follows Origen, and uses the same expressions and word, McCool 1959, 67–68.

¹⁵⁵ Ambrose, *exam.* V 13.41. *O homo, ad imaginem dei factus*.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.43. *Anima igitur nostra ad imaginem dei est [...] corpus autem ad speciem bestiarum*.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.42. *Illa anima a deo pingitur, quae habet in se uirtutum gratiam renitentem splendoremque pietatis*.

¹⁵⁸ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.42. *Secundum hanc imaginem Adam ante peccatum, sed ubi lapsus est, deposuit imaginem caelestis, sumpsit terrestris effigiem*.

original state of the soul.¹⁵⁹ Dudden’s conclusion concerning Ambrose’s view is: “The image of God consists, first in reason, secondly in virtue, and thirdly in the dominion.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, Dudden understands image exclusively as being about the qualities of the soul. He omits, however, Ambrose’s relational aspect between the original image and its likeness, namely, that it is fundamentally about the relationship to Christ. Ambrose explicitly writes that in the human being “in whom God is ever-present”, the soul is *ad imaginem Dei*.¹⁶¹ Ambrose does not make a distinction between *imago* and *similitudo* in *Exameron*, a point that is found both in earlier patristic writings as well as in those of the later medieval era.

3.3.1.3. The Soul as a Bridge between Heaven and Earth

In a passage describing the body with its senses and functions, Ambrose writes that what differentiates humans from other animals, is the reason (*mens*) of the soul.¹⁶² The soul is characterised by its mind, or reason.¹⁶³ This is shown in two ways, according to *Exameron*. Firstly, the soul enjoys a freedom compared to the limitations of the body. The bodily functions cannot see and hear everywhere and everything. As an example, Ambrose takes travelling and socialising: In one’s mind one can instantly travel to Africa or Syria, and talk to and embrace those far away and even make dead people alive. This is possible for the human soul because it possesses the “power of reason”.¹⁶⁴

Secondly, the soul has the ability to reach union with God, through Christ. The soul can search for heaven, as is written in Paul’s letter to the Philippians: *Our citizenship is in heaven* (Philippians 3:20).¹⁶⁵ This was meant to be the case in the created original state of humankind. The case after the fall, however, was that God seeks the soul more effectively when it is alone, and when it has dissociated itself from the slime of the body and associated fleshly cupidity.¹⁶⁶ Ambrose, as a philosophical heritage from Plato, considers the soul as having an affinity (*cognatio*) both to the heavenly world and to the material world. Szydzik writes: “Die Seele verfügt über ein geistiges und ein sinnliches Erkenntnisvermögen; sie ist mit zwei Welten, der unsichtbaren und der sichtbaren, verwandt”.¹⁶⁷ The human soul is created as a bridge between heaven and earth, and is

¹⁵⁹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.46.

¹⁶⁰ Dudden 1935, 612.

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.45. *Non est ergo ad imaginem dei in qua deus semper est?*

¹⁶² Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.67.

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *Noe* 4.10. *Homo mens est, quae est rationis capax.*

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.44–45. *Ea igitur est ad imaginem dei quae non corporeo aestimatur, sed mentis uigore, quae absentes videt etc.*

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.45.

¹⁶⁶ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.46. *Melius enim quaerit ista, si sola est, abducens se a corporis caeno et a cupiditate carnali.*

¹⁶⁷ Szydzik 1961, 25.

obliged to strive upwards, even after the fall when it unfortunately often strives in the wrong direction. This metaphysic is seen in the soul itself. In a letter to Irenaeus, Ambrose makes it clear that a human does not have two souls but rather that the one human soul has two qualities: it is intelligible (*rationabilis*) and sensible (*sensibilis*).¹⁶⁸ In another letter to Horontianus, when answering questions about *Exameron*, Ambrose expounds his thought and explains the soul as a heavenly creation (*creatura coelestis*) on earth.¹⁶⁹ The bishop sees the soul as being of a celestial matter not found in the corporeal creation. Thus, the soul is given a tremendous value, something that equalises all people: The poor and the rich alike own this treasure. In this present world the body is corruptible in itself, but conversely the soul is immortal and from God.¹⁷⁰

3.3.1.4. The Soul as the Life and the Human self

Ambrose sees the soul as a person's life, or life-giving principle. Ambrose interprets the meaning of this in *De Isaac vel anima*. He starts by presenting different philosophical views of the soul, and continues that biblical teaching considers the soul as being synonymous with the life. Adam was made "a living soul", since the soul gives life and rules the body; without soul a person lacks feeling and life.¹⁷¹ Some thoughts from *De bono mortis* clarify Ambrose's view on the soul as well. There it is stated that the soul is immortal and a person's true life, a condition clearly seen when the departs from the body. A body without a soul is a dead body, but a body with a soul lives.¹⁷² One necessary condition for seeking God is the immortality of the soul; it is, so to speak, eternal from its creation onwards. Even when death came into human existence, "the soul survives death".¹⁷³ In accordance with its nature, therefore, the soul should despise the lower, forget the earthly, and hasten to the heavenly and eternal.¹⁷⁴

The body is given life by the soul, and the soul is the human self. In the soul, with reason (*mens*) as its central capacity, the true person is found.

¹⁶⁸ Ambrose, *epist.* 14.2 (33 PL). *Non duas animas, sed diversas qualitates unius animae comprehensas arbitror.*

¹⁶⁹ Ambrose, *epist.* 29.7 (43 PL). *Quasi quaedam coelestis in terris creatura. Nam etsi corpore cum bestiis confertur, animo tamen caelestibus adnumeratur; sicut enim portavimus imaginem terreni, ita portamus et imaginem caelestis. Quomodo non caelestis, qui ad imaginem et similitudinem factus est dei (Genesis 1:26)?*

¹⁷⁰ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.52. *Adtende tibi, pauper, quia anima tua pretiosa est. Etsi caro mortalis, diuturna anima.*

¹⁷¹ Ambrose, *Isaac* 2.4. *Anima est vivens, quia factus est Adam in animam viventem, eo quod insensibile atque exanimam corpus anima vivificet et gubernet.*

¹⁷² Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 9.42. *Et cui anima infunditur, vita infunditur: a quo anima discedit, vita discedit. Anima ergo vita est.*

¹⁷³ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 4.13. *Superstes mortis est anima.*

¹⁷⁴ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 6.24. *Inferiora despiciens, terrena obliviscens, ad coelestia et aeterna contende.*

Ambrose sometimes describes the body as a prison of the soul, but more often sees the body as being owned by the soul. The actual human being is the soul, and the body is comparable to a dress. In *Exameron* (with a picture that is revisited in *De Isaac vel anima*) Ambrose describes the soul (*anima*) as being with reason (*mens*), as the centre of a human, and the body as something it owns, and all other things such as houses, slaves etc. that can belong to a person exist in an outer ring.¹⁷⁵ The human person is found in the soul; without it one would be nothing.¹⁷⁶ Ambrose does not differentiate between a male and female soul. He also prefers to use the word *homo* in his argumentation, which is a term for humanity – if he were writing about a man as opposed to a woman, he would have used *vir* or *mas*. Ambrose writes that a biblical understanding of the word soul (*anima*) points at the actual human being (*homo*) and humanity (*humanitas*).¹⁷⁷ The latter term is, *nota bene*, even a feminine noun.

3.3.2. The Human Body Created by God

3.3.2.1. The Value of the Body

The high valuation Ambrose placed on the soul in his writings has already been demonstrated. According to Dassmann, Ambrose, in his writings, processes towards a biblical understanding of body/flesh and soul/spirit, but never fully appreciates the human body.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, the description of the human body in *Exameron* VI is a verbose praise of its beauty and expediency. Another example of Ambrose valuing the body is found in *De interpellatione Job et David*: “The Lord made our human flesh as a potter makes vessels of clay.”¹⁷⁹ Ambrose regarded the human body as created by God, and a masterpiece of divine creative ability. Men and women share the human nature, created by God. Ambrose writes in *De fide* IV: “Man and woman are one in the flesh of nature”.¹⁸⁰

Ambrose describes matter and the human body in *Exameron*, in Frank E. Robbin’s words “showing that it was admirably contrived by God to meet the needs of man”.¹⁸¹ The human body is a small portion of created material, and functions in the same way as all other animals in terms of all bodily features. A human being is not even the heaviest, fastest or tallest

¹⁷⁵ Ambrose, *Isaac* 1.3. *Nos sumus, hoc est anima et mens, nostra sunt corporis membra et sensus eius, circa nos autem pecunia est, serui sunt et uita iustus adparatus.* And in *Exam.* 9, 7.42. *Quid est itaque homo? utrum anima an caro an utriusque copula? aliud enim nos sumus, aliud nostrum, alius qui induitur et aliud uestimentum.*

¹⁷⁶ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.43. *In hac (i.e. anima) totus es, homo, quia sine hac nihil es.*

¹⁷⁷ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.46. *Et multo aptius anima uel homo latine uel graece ανθρωπος dicitur, alterum ab humanitate, etc.*

¹⁷⁸ See discussion in chapter *Senectus mundi* in Dassmann 2004, 266–279.

¹⁷⁹ Ambrose, *Iob* IV, 5.20.

¹⁸⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 3.27. *Mulier et vir unius sunt in carne naturae.*

¹⁸¹ Robbins 1912, 58–59.

animal. The body is from the earth and will return to the earth (Genesis 3:19). Nonetheless, the human body is unique in creation: It inhabits the human soul, created *ad imaginem Dei*, of Christ.¹⁸² This gives Ambrose reason to view the human body as more noble than all other bodies.

A basic principle in Ambrose's Protology is that the body is made of earthly material, once created from nothing (*ex nihilo*). In this respect Christian theologians differentiated themselves from the classical philosophy. Ambrose begins *Exameron* with an overview of the principles of creation according to Greek philosophy. Plato and his pupils, Ambrose writes, have established three principles for all things: God (*Deus*), idea (*exemplar*), and matter (*materia*), all incorruptible (*incorrupta*), uncreated (*increata*), and without beginning (*sine initio*).¹⁸³ This is unacceptable according to Ambrose's cosmology. Moreover, Aristotle and Pythagoras do not satisfy the bishop either: God alone is eternal and everything else is created in time out of his will.

3.3.2.2. The Body as a Picture Drawn by God

Ambrose writes about the body as an *imago bestiae*, but this must not be understood in disparaging terms. The human body is pictured, as is the soul, as created by an outstanding artist and painter, God, our Lord.¹⁸⁴ Consequently two things, according to *Exameron*, follow. Firstly, one should be grateful rather than vainly trying to improve the body. Secondly, because every human being is a work of God, an *opus Dei*, it is a severe crime to take somebody's life.¹⁸⁵

Ambrose does not use the Eastern Christian tradition's terms macro- and micro-cosmos, which means that a human person is a micro-cosmos, an image of the creation with a mediating function.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the idea is certainly present in Ambrose's writings. In *De paradiso* Ambrose comments on the order of creation: "He placed man in paradise, just as he placed the sun in heaven,"¹⁸⁷ while in *Exameron* he talks of the human body as being constructed like the universe: The heaven with its bright stars is alike the human head.¹⁸⁸ Using another analogy, the crown of a tree is found to be comparable with the human head,¹⁸⁹ and the constitution of the physical body is shaped to form an image of the soul. Thus, Ambrose sees the image of God as in the human soul, and "the

¹⁸² Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.43–8.44.

¹⁸³ Ambrose, *exam.* I 1.1.

¹⁸⁴ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.47. *Pictus es ergo, o homo, pictus a domino deo tuo.*

¹⁸⁵ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.47–48.

¹⁸⁶ On Maximus Confessor, see Thunberg 1999, 70–71.

¹⁸⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 1.5.

¹⁸⁸ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 9.55.

¹⁸⁹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 9.56.

human face is an image of the soul".¹⁹⁰ The body as image of the soul is an *ante peccatum* vision; a righteous body is created as the image of a righteous soul. It is a virginal soul in a virginal body.

Ambrose treats how to handle the body in *Exameron*. Not unique among the Fathers, Ambrose chooses, as an example of human offence towards God, women who use make-up, which makes "not beauty, but ugliness, not simplicity, but deceit".¹⁹¹ In *Exameron* Ambrose follows the Greek physiology, most prominently Galen, where the male body was norm.¹⁹² Reading *Exameron* as a whole, however, it is only when Ambrose talks about the genitals that the male body is the self-evident object of a human body.¹⁹³ In all other passages of *Exameron*, women are included in a natural way. When writing about the human hair, for example, small boys, soldiers, women, a priest, and so on, are all highlighted – even if difference is a prerequisite: Long hair is becoming for one sex, short for the other.¹⁹⁴ In another passage Ambrose cites 1 Corinthians 11:7, where Paul argues for man (*vir*) as the first created image of God, and here Ambrose first uses the non-gender term *humanitas* for a moral exhortation, and also when he quotes the Bible-text uses the term *vir*.¹⁹⁵ In the creation order Ambrose counts man as being in charge in the relation of man and woman, as is clear in both *Exameron* and *De paradiso*.

A noteworthy point which Ambrose reveals in *De paradiso* is when he writes that man alone was *not* good (Genesis 2:18), but that man and women together were *very* good (Genesis 1:31). Man and woman joined in creation are, for Ambrose, the completion of humanity, and God did not treat either of them in a special manner. Ambrose quotes Genesis 1:31, *God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good*, and writes: "The meaning is clear, the creation of both man and woman is

¹⁹⁰ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.58. *Imago animi loquitur in uultu.*

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.47. *Illa pictura vitii, non decoris est, illa pictura fraudis, non simplicitatis est.* This is the first-time "woman" is explicitly mentioned in the *Exameron*-sermons. M. C. Horowitz judges this as "in this backhanded way, Ambrose recognizes that women were also created in God's image". Horowitz 1979, 299. Horowitz misjudges Ambrose on this point. Extending the picture, one can see *Exhortatio virginitatis* 10.68: "Both man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God", *scire ergo se debet sive vir sive mulier, quia ad imaginem Dei est et similitudinem.* Dooley quotes Mausbach who wrote about the Late Antique Christian general view: "Das weibliche Geschlecht ist nicht moralisch minderwertig; die Natur der Frau ist kein Hindernis sittlicher Kraft, keine Entschuldigung sittlicher Schwäche", Dooley 1948, 28.

¹⁹² Flemming 2000.

¹⁹³ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.73.

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.56. The discussion on long and short hair is based on 1 Corinthians 11:14–15.

¹⁹⁵ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.49. *In his autem non requiescit deus, sed requiescit in moribus humanis, quos fecit deus ad imaginem suam et similitudinem, quando fecit uirum, qui non debet uelare etc* (1 Corinthians 11:7).

declared good.”¹⁹⁶ The exposition in *De paradiso* continues with a clarification that it was not good for man to be *alone*, not that man is bad.¹⁹⁷ This biblical reading of “not good” and “very good” returns in the writing *De institutione virginis* composed twenty years later in a slightly altered form, and this is explored further on in this chapter.

3.3.2.3. The Body under the Shadow of Life

A common human experience is that the human body is limited in time and space, fragile and mortal. Most probably Ambrose regarded paradise as a bodily, material place. He writes that God placed man in paradise not in the image of God, but as a body, and the body can only be put in a place.¹⁹⁸

Since the body as a material creation was also limited in space and time in paradise it was dependent on the breath of God for its life. Ambrose interprets this life as being equivalent to accessing the tree of life. Immortality of the body was never an interior quality of the body itself.¹⁹⁹ Not yet a sinner, man did not possess immortality and inviolability in himself.²⁰⁰

Ambrose juxtaposes two terms: “the shadow of life” (*umbra vitae*), and “the shadow of death” (*umbra mortis*). In paradise, mankind lived in the shadow of life. The shadow of life means that Adam and Eve dwelled near to the tree of life and enjoyed God’s breathing.²⁰¹ Though living in a material body, life in paradise was without death, with a certain nearness to God and his life.

3.3.2.4. The Body with its Senses and Functions

Ambrose sees that all normal bodily functions in a human body work in the same way as in other mammals. For him, as has already been noted, the animal lack of mind and reason is the decisive distinction: An animal cannot interpret and reasonably understand any sense perception. Ambrose takes as an example a heifer. She raises her eyes to the sky but is unaware of what she sees. A human being, on the other hand, lifts his (or her) eyes to the sky, takes notice of the glory of the sky, and marvels. Humans interpret the evening star and the morning star, and understand

¹⁹⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 10.46. *Euidenter declaratur bonum esse quod et uir sit factus, et mulier.*

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 10.47.

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *par.* 1.5. *Intellege iam quia non eum hominem qui secundum imaginem dei est posuit, sed eum qui secundum corpus; incorporalis enim in loco non est. posuit autem eum in paradiso sicut solem in caelo expectantem regnum caelorum, quemadmodum creatura expectat reuelationem filiorum dei.*

¹⁹⁹ Ambrose, *par.* 5.29. *Quia habebat insufflationem dei, habebat ergo pignus immortalitatis.*

²⁰⁰ Ambrose, *par.* 5.29. *Etsi nondum peccator, non tamen incorruptae inuiolabilisque naturae [...] ergo inter insufflationem dei et escam ligni uitae nulla discretio.*

²⁰¹ Ambrose, *par.* 5.29. *Denique in umbra uitae erat; qui autem peccatores sunt in umbra mortis sunt.*

why one shines in evening, the other in the morning, they understand the movements of Orion, and the phases of the moon.²⁰²

Of outstanding importance is the sense of hearing. A human being can hear the voice of God; and even more, a human being has the ability to speak and become the organ of the voice of God and give utterance to heavenly words with his corporeal lips.²⁰³

In *De paradiso* Ambrose makes the most of a created distinction between a man and a woman. Adam was created outside paradise, an inferior place, and subsequently put into paradise. Eve was made in paradise, a superior place. Ambrose interprets this as meaning a different amount of grace is needed for different weaknesses. He writes that a man is generally stronger than a woman, not only physically, and should therefore work as protector. The bishop thus advises men to claim a subservient woman for themselves and underlines that a man and a woman should share grace. Ambrose quotes 1 Peter 3:7: *Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honour on the woman, as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may be not hindered.*²⁰⁴ According to Ambrose a “man is more skilful in public duties, and a woman is esteemed to be more adaptable to domestic ministrations”.²⁰⁵

Ambrose does not seem to have understood life in paradise as being a bodily life as we, living *post peccatum*, experience it. In paradise, the food provided for eating, Ambrose writes, was not earthly and corruptible and there the bread that was eaten was a spiritual bread, an angelic bread, the same as Christ talked of: *My food is to do the will of the Father* (John 4:34).²⁰⁶ Ambrose never speculates on how a paradisiac begetting would have occurred, but using his view of the created bodily existence in paradise, a birth without pain could be considered. I return to this question later in this chapter.

3.3.3. The Soul and Body Created for Harmony

3.3.3.1. The Harmonious Relation between Soul and Body

Ambrose pictures *homo ante peccatum* as a harmony of bodily functions, the will, senses, mind, and intellect. The expression is not explicitly used, but it could be called a virginal state of soul and body. Although the human body was not, according to Ambrose, created *ad imaginem Dei*, it should, nonetheless, radiate the soul's image of God. A harmonious relation

²⁰² Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.67.

²⁰³ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.67.

²⁰⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 4.24.

²⁰⁵ Ambrose, *par.* 11.50. *Uir publicis officiis ita mulier domesticis ministeriis habilior aestimatur.*

²⁰⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 9.42. *Et ideo non terrenum et corruptibilem hunc cibum esui fuisse possumus aestimare, quia qui non bibunt neque manducant erunt sicut angeli in caelo.*

between body and soul, this is what a “virginity in mind” is about.²⁰⁷ The joining of the body to the soul includes the body, as well as the soul, in salvation after the fall.

Adam was put in the garden of Eden, the name of which means delight (*voluptas*).²⁰⁸ In Ambrose’s view of *voluptas* after the fall, he appears to give it negative connotations,²⁰⁹ although in paradise the *voluptas* was a state of harmony between the body and soul.²¹⁰ Of note is that Ambrose writes that Adam was not placed there as a divine image (*ad imaginem Dei*), rather it is as the soul, but in respect to the body (*corpus*).²¹¹ Ambrose also sees an allegorical meaning in this. The human soul, he said, was planted in Eden. The fertile soul was a paradise, with the virtues growing as the seed germinates. Adam represents the earthly mind (*nous terrenum*),²¹² and Eve the sense (*sensus*).²¹³ In paradise there was a river (Genesis 2:10) which means Jesus Christ, the fount of eternal life and the Wisdom in the centre of the soul.²¹⁴ The one river was divided into four branches: Phison, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates. These correspond to the four principal virtues: Prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice.²¹⁵ In the middle of the garden there were two trees: The tree of life symbolises the fear of God; the tree of knowledge, Wisdom.²¹⁶

From creation onward humanity was meant to grow in virtue and wisdom, just as a child grows. Ambrose sees the actual definition of a blessed life in happiness as a state when the bodily, natural functions are mingled with the grace; it is a life lived in virtue.²¹⁷ In paradise, the body carried the inward principle of life, the soul, in perfect virtue, balance and harmony. Life in paradise was a happy and good life. This blessed life was from God, and Paul writes it is *hidden with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3).

²⁰⁷ See Chapter 2.4.1: *Virginity in Mind*, about the virginity in the mind in Ambrose’s thinking.

²⁰⁸ Ambrose, *par.* 1.4. *Locus autem eius, in quo est plantatus, uoluptas dicitur.*

²⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Isaac* 1.1, 2.5, 3.8, 3.9, with synonyms *passionis*, and *illecebra* 4.13, 6.55.

²¹⁰ Peter Brown must be corrected on this point. He erroneously writes that Ambrose turned against Jovinian’s view of marriage, as it “was to imply that *voluptas*, a capacity for sexual pleasure, had been a part of the human person intended by God at creation”. P. Brown 2008, 361.

²¹¹ Ambrose, *par.* 1.5. *Intellege iam quia non eum hominem qui secundum imaginem dei est posuit, sed eum qui secundum corpus.*

²¹² Ambrose, *par.* 2.11. *Adam voũv terrenum interpretati sunt.*

²¹³ Ambrose, *par.* 3.12. *Est etiam voũç tamquam Adam, est et sensus tamquam Eva.*

²¹⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 3.13.

²¹⁵ Ambrose, *par.* 3.14–18. In *par.* 3.14. *Quae sunt quattuor initia uirtutum nisi unum prudentiae, aliud temperantiae, tertium fortitudinis, quartum iustitiae?* In *Par.* 3.18. *In his ergo fluminibus quattuor uirtutes principales quattuor exprimuntur.*

²¹⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 5.29.

²¹⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 9.44. *Vita uiuere admirabilem quandam illam uitam beatamque significet et hunc uiuendi usum spirandique munus cum beatae uitae gratia ueluti coniunctum et quadam participatione permixtum demonstrare uideatur. hoc est enim uita uiuere, uirtute uiuere, beatae uitae actus habere in istius corporis uita.*

Ambrose writes in *Exameron* about this divine nearness: The soul's destination is realised in a soul where God is ever-present, that soul is *ad imaginem Dei*.²¹⁸

From the very beginning, nevertheless, there was a possible fear; the evil, untamed passions. Among the animals in paradise, there were cattle, birds, and wild beasts (Genesis 2:20). The wild beasts and the birds represent the irrational senses, the diverse emotions of the body. Ambrose writes that humanity was created with these imperfections, but highlights the verse in Genesis showing humans were meant to have dominion over all animals (Genesis 1:26).²¹⁹ In paradise, the interior mind of the soul ruled the passions of the body.

3.3.3.2. Human as a Resting Place for Christ

Ambrose completes his *Exameron* with a comment pertaining to the seventh day, the day when God rested after having created humankind. The bishop interprets God resting as highlighting that a human person is created to be such that God could find therein a place to rest his head. God did not find rest after he had created fishes, birds, and beasts, he only found rest after he had made man in his own image (Genesis 2:2). Using a verse from Isaiah 66:2: *in whom shall I rest but on him that is humble and gentle and that trembles at my words?*,²²⁰ Ambrose argues that controlling the bodily affections (*adfectus*), makes the human body a proper resting place, and that God cannot find repose in a bestial human heart (*in pectore bestiali*).²²¹

Ambrose writes that God rests in the deep recesses of a human being, in their mind and will.²²² God rests in the person who strives for virtue and is eager for heavenly grace.²²³ In humanity, God had finally made someone in whom Christ could rest, and whom Christ could forgive sins. This thought reappears in *De Isaac vel anima*; Christ can only be found by the humble soul and in such a soul he seeks to live and rest.²²⁴ In relation to Christ Ambrose sees the true worth of humanity and the true, blessed life. In *Expositio Psalmi 118* Ambrose writes that the soul is created for and

²¹⁸ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.45. *Non est ergo ad imaginem dei in qua deus semper est?*

²¹⁹ Ambrose, *par.* 11.51–52.

²²⁰ The aforementioned verse is in Ambrose's version; the *Revised Standard Version* reads *whom I will look*.

²²¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.48.

²²² Ambrose, *exam.* VI 10.75. *Requieuit autem in recessu hominis, requieuit in eius mente atque proposito.*

²²³ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 10.75. *Uirtutum aemulatorem, cupidum caelestium gratiarum.*

²²⁴ Ambrose, *Isaac* 5.51. *Tu aperi, ut in te Filius hominis reclinet caput, cui non est requies nisi supra humilem et mansuetum.* In *Isaac* 6.53. *Sic enim Christus invenitur, et tale sibi quaerit hospitium.*

meant to be a house for heavenly living (*habitatio caelestis*). God is supposed to live in this house.²²⁵

3.3.3.3. If Adam and Eve had a Sexual Relation in Paradise

Did Adam and Eve have sex in paradise? That question sounds peculiar to the ears of a modern Christian, but in Late Antiquity it was sincerely meant. According to Hendrik S. Benjamins' article, 'Keeping Marriage out of Paradise', the creation story, in the Christian Late Antique Church, was generally read through the lens of 1 Corinthians 7 and the higher standard of virginity Paul expresses in that chapter. Benjamins writes, with the support of Elisabeth Clark, that this interpretation was followed by "Ambrose, Jerome, and the young Augustine" (even if Augustine in his older age held marriage in a higher degree).²²⁶ An example of a Church Father who vehemently exhorted his listeners to a virginal life was Jerome, who was able to write that "all sexual intercourse is unclean in view of the purity of the body of Christ".²²⁷ In his time this view was seen as suspicious by some. Clark writes that a teaching of Adam and Eve as "engaged in sexual union only after the fall might be considered a Manichean position".²²⁸ Jerome denied accusations of Manicheanism, and later alleged that "only heretics would deny the goodness of marriage".²²⁹ Nonetheless, the common view among the early Church theologians was that Adam and Eve did not have a sexual relationship in paradise.²³⁰

As I understand the sources, Ambrose did not regard it as non-thinkable that man and woman could have had a sexual union in paradise. He regards the good pre-lapsarian body as sexually differentiated between a corporeal male and female. Ambrose writes that this sexual differentiation, created by God, was for the future ages and humanity's hereditary succession.²³¹ When God created Eve, he had the whole human race in mind.²³² Literally read, however, Genesis only tells about a sexual

²²⁵ Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 10.7, 11.

²²⁶ Benjamins 2000, 103. On Ambrose's view of the good of marriage, see Dooley 1948.

²²⁷ Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* 1.7, 8, 20, quoted in Clark 1999, 41.

²²⁸ Clark 1999, 40. Clark references Didymus of Alexandria, who supposed celibacy in paradise as Manichaean, but that Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom also all believed this.

²²⁹ Jerome, *Epistula* 48 and 49, quoted in Clark 1999, 41.

²³⁰ Irenaeus gives an interesting proposal in *Adversus haereses* III 22.4. He writes that in paradise Adam and Eve had no knowledge regarding the procreation of children. They were meant to grow and understand the sexuality in an adult age. Irenaeus' idea is that the first humans were created as children.

²³¹ Ambrose, *par. 4.25. Et quamvis paradisi operibus, inquit, ruralibus non egeret, tamen quia primus homo lex posteritatis futurus erat, ideo legitimi etiam in paradiso speciem suscepit laboris, ut nos ad operationem et custodiam debiti officii et haereditariae successionis munus astringeret.* Ambrose shows on this point as on many throughout *De paradiso* a dependence on Philo, in this case *Questiones in Genesin* 1.14.

²³² Ambrose, *par. 11.49.*

union firstly after the fall.²³³ I think a useful differentiation in the Ambrosian thought can be made between ability and factuality. Adam and Eve could have had sex in paradise, but according to Ambrose's literal reading of Genesis, they did not.

In his expositions of the Genesis story Ambrose is not only allegorical and spiritual but also what I would call a "biologist", mostly in *Exameron* but also in *De paradiso*. Ambrose is dependent on the physiology of his time, and he had an objectively medical view of the corporeal aspects of the human body and sexuality. In *De paradiso* Ambrose writes that progenerating functions in humanity in the same way as in all other animals. Additionally, humanity is constituted of two sexes, male and female. Created first, man needed the woman's co-operation for generation. The male sperm works in a female womb in the same way as the earth receives, confines, and fosters the seed of a fruit.²³⁴ The bishop sees the conjugal union, the marriage, as a material good that can gradually turn our eyes towards God's kingdom. A man and wife in a household "seems to point toward a state of full perfection".²³⁵

3.3.4. The Fall

Pastoral care is exercised in a fallen world. Preaching about the fall offers an explanation of why things in life are not perfect. With his stoic heritage Ambrose interweaves the thought of the natural law into his theology. He writes that even in paradise, humanity knew and feared death and sin, disobedience and concupiscence, through the law of nature and reason. Thus, God planted the law of nature in humankind, who thus, with at least a superficial knowledge of evil, would have been able to avoid sin. According to Ambrose, even a child understands that concupiscence is a crime.²³⁶ To this God added the command: *Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat* (Genesis 2:17). Human reason should have understood and followed this command. The fall, however, happened, and thus insight into how Ambrose understood what the fall consisted of and how it affected the human nature is needed.

3.3.4.1. Adam, Eve, and the Serpent

In *Exameron* the fall is mentioned only sparingly, and it is in the earlier writing *De paradiso* where it is commented on in detail. In *De paradiso* Ambrose makes a clear distinction between Adam and Eve as he interprets the fall. Firstly, the woman is naturally weaker and thus more

²³³ See Genesis 4:1, this fact is mentioned not in *De paradiso*, but in Ambrose, *inst virg.* 5.36.

²³⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 9.48.

²³⁵ The passage in Ambrose's text where this is found is Ambrose, *par.* 10.48–11.51. The quotation is from *par* 11.50. *In uiro et muliere domus uidetur quaedam plena esse perfectio.*

²³⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 6.31. *Ad quam partem etiam puer potest esse perfectus iure naturae, priusquam sciat concupiscentiam crimen esse uel concupiscentiae crimen admittat.*

inclined to do sin, and secondly, she is the one to blame for the first sin. In what follows I first discuss Ambrose's view in *De paradiso* of the female as the weaker sex, and subsequently the question of guilt.

According to Genesis, Adam was made outside paradise, which he calls an inferior place, and *was put in the garden* (Genesis 2:8). Ambrose does not speculate as to where that could have been, but nonetheless gives it an allegorical meaning. Eve, on the other hand, was made in paradise, that is a superior place. Nonetheless, Ambrose considers woman to be inferior to man. Eve was the first to be deceived and thus responsible for deceiving Adam.²³⁷ According to Genesis, it was Adam who received God's command. Eve had not even been created at that time, and he subsequently shared the command with her. That Eve had indirect information about the command serves as an explanation for Ambrose as to why the Devil chooses to tempt her rather than Adam.²³⁸

Ambrose reads that the serpent was present in paradise, created by God, but fallen.²³⁹ The evil one is seen as a spiritual creation and a personal being.²⁴⁰ Satan, the most cunning in creation, attacked Eve. Ambrose offers a kind of "psychology of the serpent". Satan envied the happiness of man placed in paradise, a happiness he could never attain. Ambrose intends to show in detail how the Adversary works in his temptations. Ambrose reads in it a lesson to be read as not only having happened first in Genesis 3, but also applicable in his own time: Satan attacks the lesser- informed one, with half-lies, additions to the truth etc.²⁴¹

Ambrose writes that when Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she was aware of what she was doing. Her sin was a conscious act of disobedience.²⁴² Knowledge of evil is not yet a sin, whereas the acting on it is.²⁴³ Adam and Eve possessed a free will, and thus God cannot be blamed for the fall because the two humans did have the choice not to sin. The actual fall consisted of disobedience against God's command.²⁴⁴ Ambrose writes: "sin was the human transgression of divine law and disobedience of heavenly precepts".²⁴⁵ Humanity, starting with Eve, was taken over by cupidity and fear. Their longing was for pleasure, not in God

²³⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 4.24. *Mulier enim prior decepta est et uirum ipsa deceptit.*

²³⁸ Ambrose, *par.* 12.54.

²³⁹ Ambrose, *par.* 2.9. *Denique serpentem in paradiso inuenis utique non sine dei uoluntate generatum. in serpentis autem figura diabolus est.*

²⁴⁰ Ambrose, *par.* 12.54.

²⁴¹ Ambrose does this in a longer passage, from *par.* 12 to the end.

²⁴² Ambrose, *par.* 6.33.

²⁴³ Ambrose, *par.* 6.34. *Cum actus inplet malitiam.*

²⁴⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 6.30. *Oportuit autem hominem oboedire mandato, non oboediendo autem praeuaricatus est. igitur qui non oboediuit errauit, quia praeuaricatio peccatum est. In par. 6.31. Non oboediendo autem mandato incurrimus in culpam: ergo culpam fatemur.*

²⁴⁵ Ambrose, *par.* 8.39. *Quid est enim peccatum nisi praeuaricatio legis diuinae et caelestium inoboedientia praeceptorum?*

but in an improper way, according to the flesh.²⁴⁶ In *De paradiso* Ambrose considers anger (*iracundia*) and cupidity (*cupiditas*) to be the two basic attributes that cause humanity to err, and to this he adds extreme fear (*timor*). Eve ate out of cupidity, and secondly, she gave the fruit to Adam out of fear; she was afraid of living outside paradise without him.²⁴⁷ Eve sinned first, and she deceived Adam because she loved him and did not want to lose him. Ambrose considers her desire not to lose Adam as making the fall excusable.²⁴⁸

In the context of explaining the condemnations after the fall, Ambrose continues discussing the psychology of the fall. We have seen that Eve is considered as a type for the human sense, Adam for the mind. The serpent is, however, a type for bodily pleasures. The psychology is seen in such a way by Ambrose that pleasure, the serpent, stirred the senses, Eve, which in turn had an effect on the mind, Adam. Therefore, the primary source for sin is pleasure (*delectatio*).²⁴⁹ This thought is re-echoed in *De Abraham*, where Ambrose writes that mankind was in a blessed state in paradise where the mind controlled the senses and pleasures.²⁵⁰

It is important to be aware of a distinction in Ambrose's theology between sign/allegory on one side and reality on the other. Adam as mind and Eve as sense are allegorical; in reality both Adam and Eve both had mind and sense, and consequently could fall in sin.²⁵¹ Ambrose plays with the idea that Adam taught Eve erroneously, and he admits an uncertainty in deciding which of the two was guilty. In *De paradiso* Ambrose accuses Eve because she was deceived first. Ambrose supports his view citing Paul: *Adam was not deceived, but the woman* (1 Timothy 2:14).²⁵²

The actual fall, the act of sinning, was a spiritual act. Ambrose understands man's life in paradise as being more like that of the angels. From this it follows that Ambrose sees the human original sin not as a

²⁴⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 12.54. Their gradual inclining toward sin is shown in three stages: *Est igitur uia prima, ut decipiatur. dum condicione sua maiora desiderat. hic enim quidam est conatus industriae. deinde carnis est quod non habeat desiderare. postremo in quo uideor ego omnibus esse sapientior, nisi circumscribam hominem et uersutia et fraude contendam?*

²⁴⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 6.34. *Primo fuerat cupiditas auctor erroris, ut ipsa ederet, sequentisque fuit causa peccati. [...] quod diligens uirum ab eo timuerit separari et hanc causam cupiditatis praetendant, quod esse uoluerit cum marito.*

²⁴⁸ Ambrose, *par.* 6.34.

²⁴⁹ Ambrose, *par.* 15.73. *Delectatio igitur prima est origo peccati.*

²⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Abr.* II 1.1. *Adam etenim mentem diximus, Evam sensum esse significauimus, serpentis specie delectationem expressimus; sed ibi de summa beatitudine, et quadam naturali uirtutum amoenitate per circumscriptionem sensus, et delectationis illecebram refluxus ad culpam est.*

²⁵¹ Ambrose, *Abr.* II 1.2. *Cognati sunt animae nostrae corporis sensus.*

²⁵² Ambrose, *par.* 12.56. *Nam etsi de duobus uideatur incertum, tamen sexus prodit qui prius potuerit errare. adde quia praeiudicio illa constringitur, cuius et postea prior error inuentus est. uiro enim mulier, non mulieri uir auctor erroris est. Unde et Paulus ait: Adam inquit etc.*

material eating, but rather as a spiritual, prophetic act.²⁵³ The soul is the subject to temptation, not the body, but it brings the body in sin.²⁵⁴

3.3.4.2. If Womanhood Is to Be Blamed for the Fall in *De paradiso*

In Ambrose's *De paradiso* the question of a general female guilt is answered in the affirmative, even if it is not totally clear.²⁵⁵ In *De paradiso* Ambrose does not distinctively differentiate between allegorical and literal exegesis, leaving the reader with some uncertainty as to when he is talking about the physical woman and when sinful passions are the subject of his scrutiny.

In *De paradiso* Ambrose discusses whether it was good to create Eve, woman, when it turned out that she was the one to sin. For Ambrose, the answer is that of *felix culpa*.²⁵⁶ God knew creating woman would lead to the fall, but man and woman together generate more humans. God preferred the existence of many that he could save over and above one perfect man alone. God chose to create both man and woman, knowing they were to fall, and had already chosen to send Christ in this world to redeem sinners.²⁵⁷

Ambrose makes a clear statement in *De paradiso*: "He fell by his wife's fault and not because of his own".²⁵⁸ One possible interpretation of the Genesis story is that Eve did not act as a representative for women but rather as an individual. Ambrose, however, considers that the fall of Eve reflects something more general about men and women. He thinks of the female as the weaker sex, and thus more inclined to fall in sin. Of course, also important for Ambrose is that the woman confessed: *The serpent beguiled me, and I ate* (Genesis 3:13). Where there is admission of guilt, there is forgiveness. The woman (*mulier*, singular) must not despair; she did not keep silent before God but admitted her sin.²⁵⁹

There is a passage in *De Spiritu Sancto* III that offers enlightenment on this subject. Ambrose writes about Mary Magdalene, one of the first

²⁵³ Ambrose, *par.* 9.42.

²⁵⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 12.54.

²⁵⁵ This returns in *De fide* V where Ambrose writes: "The woman (in Matthew 20:20–28) has done wrong in an inherited error", *hereditario mulier delinquebat errore*. Ambrose, *fid.* V 5.60.

²⁵⁶ In another text, Ambrose, in *psalm.* 39.20, he writes: "O happy fall, which was renewed to the better", *felix ruina, quae reparatur in melius*. I will return to this subject in Chapter 5.4: *Mary in Ambrose's Eschatology*, and the final completion of everything in the Eschaton.

²⁵⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 10.47. *Maluit enim deus plures esse quos saluos facere posset, et quibus donaret peccatum quam unum solum Adam, qui liber esset a culpa. denique quia idem utriusque auctor est operis, uenit in hunc mundum, ut saluos faceret peccatores.*

²⁵⁸ Ambrose, *par.* 13.62. *Non sua culpa, sed uitio lapsus uxorio est.*

²⁵⁹ Ambrose, *par.* 14.71. *Veniabilis culpa, quam sequitur confessio delictorum. ideo non desperata mulier, quae non reticuit deo, sed magis confessa peccatum est, quam medicabilis secuta sententia est.*

eyewitnesses of the resurrection. He talks about a “hereditary debt of woman and great offence of womankind”, but notes that this debt has now been paid. Ambrose alludes to Romans 5:20, “where offence abounded, grace did much more abound”, and he sees Mary Magdalene as a worthy herald to the Apostles. It is here then that Ambrose draws a parallel between Eve and this particular Mary, she “first announced sin to man, and first announced the Lord’s grace”.²⁶⁰ Ambrose sees in Mary Magdalene a woman who told the now redeemed condemnation of Eve. The passage in *De Spiritu Sancto* III is worth quoting in full:

For Mary adored Christ, and, chosen as the herald of the resurrection to the Apostles, released the hereditary debt and the great offence of womankind. For the Lord worked this in a mystery, that *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more* (Romans 5:20). A woman is worthily chosen as a herald to men, that she who had first announced sin to man, might be the first to announce the grace of the Lord.²⁶¹

3.3.4.3. Ambrose’s Interpretation of the Condemnations in *De paradiso*

In the final passages of *De paradiso* Ambrose deals with the condemnations, as told to the serpent, to Eve, and to Adam (Genesis 3:14–19). The serpent had to crawl on his belly, a fitting punishment for pleasure.²⁶² Adam was cursed with hard labour on earth, among thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17–19). It is not an earthly matter (nor man, nor woman) that is condemned and evil. Ambrose notices that in fact it is only the serpent which is condemned *per se*, and matter is turned to something good provided it is used in a spiritual way. Thus, the human being is not condemned.²⁶³

My task in this present study is to understand Ambrose’s Protology in relation to his Mariology, and consequently the focus here is on Eve. According to *De paradiso* Eve is given a milder and more salutary sentence than Adam, and Ambrose understands this as being due to her admitting her crime.²⁶⁴ The condemnations for Eve meant firstly, that childbearing and birth would become painful and secondly, she had to serve under her

²⁶⁰ Ambrose, *Spir.* III 11.74. *Adoravit enim Christum Maria, et ideo praenuntia resurrectionis ad apostolos destinatur, solvens haereditarium nexum, et feminei generis immane delictum. Hoc enim operatus est in mysterio Dominus; ut ubi superabundaverat peccatum, superabundaret et gratia* (Romans 5:20). *Meritoque ad viros femina destinatur; ut quae culpam viro prima nuntiaverat, prima Domini gratiam nuntiaret.*

²⁶¹ Ambrose, *Spir.* III 11.74. [...] *solvens hereditarium nexum et feminei generis inmane delictum* [...]

²⁶² Ambrose, *par.* 14.74.

²⁶³ Ambrose, *par.* 15.77. *Non est maledictus homo, sed maledicus est serpens, nec terra in se maledicta est, sed maledicta inquit in operibus tuis ad animam dictum est. tunc terra maledicta, si habeas opera terrena, id est opera saecularia, et maledicta non in uniuersum, sed ut spinas etc.*

²⁶⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 14.72.

husband's power, that she might not be inclined to do wrong, and that she, as subservient to Adam, was not to dishonour her husband. Note that serving, in this context, is something bad when it belongs "to this world"; it is, however, turned to something good in the Church. Ambrose quotes Matthew 20:27: *Whoever would be first among you must be your slave*. In *De paradiso* Eve is thus seen as a *figura ecclesiae*. For Ambrose, the order between men and women primarily demonstrates the mystery of Christ and his Church. Ambrose puts servitude under Christ and the fear of God in opposition to liberty in this world. The order in God's words to Eve after the fall reflects the future turning of the Church (containing men and women) toward Christ and her submissive service to the Word of God. Submission under God is, Ambrose emphasises, far better than the liberty of this world.²⁶⁵

3.3.4.4. The Fallen State of the Body and Soul, under the Shadow of Death

After the fall, in Ambrose's words, the eyes of the heart (*oculi cordis*) were opened. Adam and Eve realised their new, shameful nakedness.²⁶⁶ According to Ambrose, it was not the physical eyes of Adam and Eve that were opened. Obviously, Adam must have had eyes to see and name all the animals before the fall (Genesis 2:19–20). After the fall their inner eyes (or "eyes of the heart", *oculi cordis*), were opened so that they could see their purity taken away, their protective coverings of virtues (*virtutum velamina*) stripped off.²⁶⁷

The body itself underwent a change in the human fall. In a passage in *Exameron* Ambrose explains: "Once (*ante peccatum*) created in the image and likeness of Christ, man laid after the fall aside (*deposuit*) the heavenly image and put on (*sumpsit*) a terrestrial one".²⁶⁸ This terrestrial image cannot enter the city of God in its fallen state.

According to Ambrose, the soul was righteous and virtuous, made *ad imaginem Dei* with a close nearness to God. This sublime, divine

²⁶⁵ Ambrose, *par.* 14.72. *In quo quidem mysterium Christi et ecclesiae euidenter agnosco. designatur enim ecclesiae ad Christum futura conuersio, et religiosa seruitus subdita dei uerbo, quae multo sit melior quam saeculi hujus libertas.* For more about Mary and the Church see Chapter 5.4.1: *Mary as typus ecclesiae*.

²⁶⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 6.33. *Aperti sunt oculi cordis et cognouerunt turpe esse nudos se degere, sine dubio ubi gustauit mulier de ligno scientiae boni et mali, peccauit et se peccasse cognouit.* The expression *oculi cordis* is found in the New Testament, Ephesians 1:18 *inluminatos oculos cordis vestri* (Vulgate).

²⁶⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 13.63. *Quomodo cognouerunt, id est interiore et altiore scientia non tunicam sibi, sed uirtutum deesse uelamina.*

²⁶⁸ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 7.42. *Secundum hanc imaginem Adam ante peccatum, sed ubi lapsus est, deposuit imaginem caelestis, sumpsit terrestris effigiem.*

relationship was lost in the fall. Ambrose used expressions such *imago peccati*²⁶⁹ to describe humanity after the fall.

Ambrose makes a distinction between humanity living in paradise under the shadow of life, and the situation after the fall: After the fall humanity lives under the shadow of death.²⁷⁰ Humankind, when following the corrupt promises of the serpent, becomes subject to death.²⁷¹ Access to the tree of life meant being in a state of everlasting life, and when humankind was cast out of paradise it tasted death. Death is seen as an evil and the price of condemnation.²⁷²

In this fallen world belongings and the body pass like a shadow. Nothing lasts forever. In *Exameron* Ambrose points at the graves and states: “Look into the sepulchers of men and see that nothing will remain from your body but ashes and bones”.²⁷³ In the sepulcher we see no difference between rich and poor, between free men and slaves. In a sermon at his brother’s funeral, Ambrose explains death as originally not being part of the human nature, but that it has become natural. He teaches, however, that death has been transformed for a Christian, and in Christ it could even be called a remedy.²⁷⁴

In the next chapter, on Christology, how Ambrose considered the incarnation in Mary’s womb is investigated. The Son assumed flesh, Christ had a mortal body and lived under the shadow of death, but was without sin, neither original nor actual.

3.3.4.5. The Body with its Sinful Passions and the Original Sin

According to the two writings *De paradiso* and *Exameron*, the fall profoundly changed the whole of human existence. There is a fundamental difference between the states of *ante* and *post peccatum*. One example of how this could be preached is found in the second part of *De excessu fratris* where Ambrose writes: “In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of paradise, in Adam I died; how shall the Lord call me back except He finds me in

²⁶⁹ Ambrose, in *psalm*. 35.8.

²⁷⁰ Ambrose, *par*. 5.29. *Denique in umbra vitae erat: qui autem peccatores sunt in umbra mortis sunt.*

²⁷¹ Ambrose, *par*. 13.61. *Ecce unum falsum; nam morte mortuus est homo, qui secutus est promissa serpentis.*

²⁷² Compare Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 1.2: *Non servavit praeceptum, et caruit fructu, atque ejectus de paradiso mortem gustavit. Malum igitur mors, quae pretio damnationis infertur.*

²⁷³ Ambrose, *exam.* IX 8.51. *Respice in sepulchra hominum et uide quid ex te nisi cinis et ossa remanebunt, hoc est ex corpore tuo.*

²⁷⁴ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 47. *Et mors quidem in natura non fuit, sed conversa est in naturam; non enim a principio Deus mortem instituit, sed pro remedio dedit.*

Adam; guilty as I was in him, so now justified in Christ?"²⁷⁵ This is true for everyone after the fall.

According to Ambrose, one aspect of the post-lapsarian existence is being in a constant state of spiritual warfare. On earth, a spiritual war has begun, where Satan is raging against humankind. But nobody must fear him. He has the power to tempt, but is, on the other hand, not competent to subvert, except when the human will is weak.²⁷⁶ In *Exameron* Ambrose quotes Isaiah 49:16: *God has painted the walls of Jerusalem*, and interprets that as God having made good walls as protection against Satan raging against humanity, and moreover, that the protection is the church with its priests. In the same passage Ambrose quotes Isaiah 27:10: *I am a fortified city, I am a city besieged*.²⁷⁷ In the state of war and in the midst of the struggle against evil on earth, Ambrose understands the purpose of striving towards righteousness and the Church. He lets these two biblical verses describe the righteous soul and the Church, which are fortified by Christ and besieged by Satan.

One thought that often recurs in Ambrose's texts is that the post-lapsarian existence is characterised by the control of the irrational bodily passions over the soul. An example is found in *De Isaac vel anima*. Ambrose quotes Song of Songs 6:11 about the chariots of Aminadab. This, the bishop writes, is a picture of the soul with its body. The soul is a chariot which should carry the good master, Christ. The chariot could, however, have either good or bad horses. The good horses are the virtues of the soul: Prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice and have the same meaning as the four branches in paradise. But there are four bad horses as well. The bad horses are the sinful passions of the body: wrath, concupiscence, fear, and injustice.²⁷⁸ After the fall, and before the advent of Christ, the chariot of the human soul is carried away by the sinful passions of the body.

Both David Hunter and Carol Harrison describe Augustine's view on the *post peccatum* state of the human soul, and stress how important it is to recognise the fall in an interpretation of anthropology and the soul's

²⁷⁵ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 6. *Lapsus sum in Adam, de paradiso ejectus in Adam, mortuus in Adam; quomodo revocet, nisi me in Adam invenerit, ut in illo culpa obnoxium, morti debitum, ita in Christo justificatum?*

²⁷⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 2.10. *Ergo non metuamus eum, qui eo usque infirmus est, ut et ipse casurus in terram sit. accepit quidem temptandi licentiam, sed non accepit copiam subruendi, nisi sua sponte labatur infirmus affectus, qui sibi auxilium non norit accersire.*

²⁷⁷ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 8.49. On the Bible verses, Ambrose's version differs from the *Revised Standard Version*. *Ecce ego, Hierusalem, pinxi muros tuos* (Isaiah 49:15). The second quotation: *Ego ciuitas munita, ego ciuitas obsessa* (Isaiah 27:10).

²⁷⁸ Ambrose, *Isaac* 8.65. *Boni equi virtutes sunt animae: mali equi, passiones sunt corporis [...]. Boni equi sunt quatuor, prudentia, temperantia, fortitudo, iustitia. Mali equi iracundia, concupiscentia, timor, iniquitas.* (Migne points in the PL edition that the picture appears in Augustine's *Contra Iulianum* II 5; III 14.)

relation to the body. Harrison writes about Augustine's view: "following the Fall, the soul has become attached to the body rather than to God – a servant rather than a master."²⁷⁹ Hunter writes about Augustine's views on "disordered desires and movements of the body",²⁸⁰ which are also in line with Ambrose's description of the effect of the fall.

In his descriptions of the sinfulness of humanity and the original sin Ambrose is pre-Augustinian, a fact that ought not to be overlooked.²⁸¹ In Romans 2:14–15 Paul writes about *a law by nature [...] written in their hearts*. For Ambrose this natural law indicates some kind of liberty even after the fall. Besides Adam, Ambrose takes as an example the apostle Judas, who could have abstained from sinning if he had guarded what he had received.²⁸² A precondition for not sinning is the grace of Christ. Ambrose writes that God is not to blame for man's sinning, but is to be thanked for saving humankind:

In truth, this accusation would be valid only if this evil so has infected the power of soul and most secret place of mind that it in no way could be taken away, that this poison has taken possession of our minds and souls and caused incurable wounds.²⁸³

Ambrose sees an innocent person in a little child:

I shall, therefore, not despoil Adam lest I may despoil the whole human race, which is innocent before it acquires the capacity to know good and evil. [...] The child, when he is scolded, does not retaliate. When he is struck, he does not strike back. He is not conscious of the allurements of ambition and self-seeking.²⁸⁴

This view should be compared to Augustine's utterance on his observation of a baby boy jealously being breast fed, and how Augustine shamefully reminds himself of his own childhood.²⁸⁵ This significant difference between Augustine and Ambrose should not in the latter's case be understood as Ambrose believing in a human natural capacity not to commit sin. Knowledge of the good is one thing, and the weakness of the flesh is another, and it is this weakness of the flesh which makes every

²⁷⁹ Harrison 2019, 45.

²⁸⁰ Hunter 2018, 31. Also Nisula 2018 presents a similar view as Harrison and Hunter.

²⁸¹ See Feretti 1951, 41–75. Feretti looks at direct influences and actual quotations from Ambrose's texts in the works of Augustine.

²⁸² Ambrose, *par.* 8.39.

²⁸³ Ambrose, *par.* 8.41. *Verum haec accusatio tunc locum haberet. si ita animae uim et intimae secreta mentis inficeret, ut nullo pacto posset aboleri et inmedicabilium uulnerum menti atque animae nostrae uirus insideret.*

²⁸⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 12.59. *Non spoliabo ergo Adam, ne genus humanum omne dispoliam, quod innocens est antequam sensum accipiat scientiae boni et mali. neque enim otiose dictum est: nisi conuersi fueritis et efficiamini sicut puer iste, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum (Matthew 18:3). puer enim cum maledicitur, non remaledicit, cum percutitur non repercutit, ambitionum et rapinarum temptamenta non nouit.*

²⁸⁵ Augustine retells his childhood in *Confessiones* I, 6.7–11.18.

human subdued to sinful acts.²⁸⁶ The question of the effects of the original sin are returned to in Chapter 4.4.6: *The Virginal Birth and the Original Sin*.

3.3.5. A Short Summary on Ambrose's Protology

In sum, Ambrose taught his congregation about a pre-lapsarian human existence. In that existence man lived with a created, good body with materiality, senses, and motions; even sinful passions were potentially part of the human constitution. The righteous mind was in control over the body and passions, which were perfectly mastered in the blessed state before the fall. This harmonious state was foiled in the fall. When sin entered human existence, the Evil one became a constant threat, and consequently mortality is ever present, and the irrational senses have become dominant over a potentially virtuous mind. In the post-lapsarian existence, the sinful passions and affects are in control of the body and of the human soul. The Church's task, with word and the sacraments, is to allow the grace of God to work in such a way, that this blessed original state is not only retrieved, but surpassed and matured. This last idea, that heaven is a better place than the paradise ever was, is the subject of the fifth chapter of this work.

3.4. Mary in Ambrose's Protology

One of the scholarly questions of the present study is to understand how Ambrose incorporated the concept of Mary's virginity into his overall pattern of faith? We now turn to Mariology in Ambrose's Protology. Mary was an example and was preached to Ambrose's listeners as a means of identification. Ambrose exercised his pastoral care towards men and women in Milan. In his congregation were women who were mothers, those who had experienced the joy and expectations of life offered by childbirth, as well as its pain, danger, and suffering.

3.4.1. Rehabilitating Eve in *De institutione virginis*

The role of Protology in Ambrose's Mariology is revealed in the writing – the actual composition – of *De institutione virginis*. Firstly, Ambrose makes an exposition of Genesis' story of the fall. He refutes the objections to Mary's perpetual virginity made by Jovinian, Helvidius, Bonosus, and others from this theological foundation. In this perspective the fundamental idea of *De institutione virginis* is that in Mary, Eve (who depicts fallen humanity) is called back: *Veni Eua, iam Maria*.

²⁸⁶ Ambrose, *par.* 12.60.

According to Ariel Laughton, in her study on Ambrose's virginity writing, Ambrose himself is not consistent regarding womanhood in his late virginity texts compared to his early. Laughton has discovered a new tone, and it is possible that something happened at this time which changed how Ambrose preached to his congregation about virginity and of women in general. Laughton argues that it was the charges brought by Jovinian and other opponents who found Ambrose's earlier figural understanding of Adam and Eve as "Manichaeism".²⁸⁷ Laughton has not seen that Ambrose already delivers many of his thoughts of Genesis in the earlier *De paradiso*²⁸⁸ but I believe she is right that the bishop clarifies himself on the subject. Let us now investigate the Protology revealed in *De institutione virginis*.

Early in *De institutione virginis* the now elderly bishop points at the men in the congregation and writes: "We accuse the great part of the feminine sex to be cause of the fall, but we do not consider the even more righteous blame that bounces back (*retorqueo*) on us".²⁸⁹ In this way Ambrose rebukes any man's misunderstandings and unfair judgements on women. It is possible that Ambrose had heard such ideas among the men in his congregation, and thus tries to refute it here.

Ambrose continues with a clarification of those parts of Genesis pertaining to creation and the fall. Again, Ambrose writes that God judged all created things as good, and humanity as being the most splendid in creation. God expressively said, however, that man alone was "not good" (Genesis 2:18), and it is only when woman is created that humanity is pronounced to be very good (Genesis 1:31).²⁹⁰ Ambrose understands it figuratively, that the creation of man and woman prefigures the Church, and quotes Ephesians 5:31–32. This prefiguration would be impossible without the woman, thus making Eve a figure of grace (*figura gratia*). Adam calls her Eve, which means "life" (*vita*): Christ was to be born of a woman and the Church provides life for the world.²⁹¹ "Nobody can deny that the woman sinned first",²⁹² Ambrose admits, but explains that her falling should cause no wonder. She was deceived by the wisest of all

²⁸⁷ Laughton 2010, 132–189, see especially 145ff.

²⁸⁸ Laughton argues that *De institutione virginis* is the first with an apologetic and positive reading of Eve, and that Ambrose addresses such passages as Genesis 2:18, *it is not good for a man to be alone* in a new way. Chapter *Redeeming Eve*, in Laughton 2010, 145–156. I cannot agree with Laughton on this point, and it is certainly wrong as for the example, Ambrose uses the same interpretation of Genesis 2:18 in *De institutione virginis* as in *De paradiso*, one of his first writings.

²⁸⁹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 3.16. *Accusamus autem plerumque femineum sexum quod erroris causam inuexerit, et non consideramus quanto iustius in nos obiurgatio retorquetur.*

²⁹⁰ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 3.22.

²⁹¹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 3.23–24.

²⁹² Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.25. *Sane negare non possumus quod errauerit mulier.*

created beings, Satan. Adam, in turn, was deceived by Eve, who was less wise than Satan.²⁹³

The condemnations that followed the fall are interpreted by Ambrose as being more severe in the case of Adam than in Eve. Eve is condemned to beget in pain and be subdued her husband, while the man is said to become earth. Both begetting and obedience in Christ is something blessed, while, conversely, becoming dirt could not be considered as positive.²⁹⁴ Eve behaved better after the fall than Adam, and thus the judgement of her must be less severe. Moreover, she is credited with being the more pious of the two. When Eve confesses her sin, a confession that leads to forgiveness, she can point at the serpent as the cause of her sin. Ambrose writes:

In this great judgement the woman is milder than the man. He accused his woman, she the serpent, that is, no accused sin has bounced back, but he wants as consequence of his accusation, if it is possible, rather to forgive than to bind.²⁹⁵

More clearly than in any earlier writing, Ambrose expresses that God's purpose of the *post peccatum* condemnations was not punishment, but rather salvation and forgiveness. In *De institutione virginis* 4.25 Ambrose uses the word "bounce back" (*retorqueo*) again, echoing the aforementioned *retorqueatur* in *De institutione virginis* 3.16. Ambrose rebukes men who accuse women for the fall and writes that the accusation bounces back on them with righteous blame. This is the case firstly because Adam, the man, is the one who is most deserving of a reprimand for sinning, and secondly, the condemnations were not meant to punish at all, but rather as a means of forgiveness.

The last objection Ambrose mentions is that certain men in the Milanese congregation complained that women were tempting to them. "You say, o man, that a woman is a temptation of a man".²⁹⁶ Ambrose tells his listeners that although it is right that a wife should please her husband more with her virtue than her beauty, a man can never blame a woman for his own sinning. "It is not the fault of a woman that awakens the sin, it is the fault of a man who seeks in a wife what often tempts. In that, if she is weaker, the woman sins, if he is stronger, the man is in danger".²⁹⁷ If a man

²⁹³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.25. *Mulier excusationem habet in peccato, uir non habet. Illa, ut scriptura asserit, a sapientissimo omnium serpente decepta est, tu a muliere; id est: illam superior creatura decepit, te inferior.*

²⁹⁴ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.26, 29.

²⁹⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.29. *In iudicio ipso quanto clementior mulier uiro! Ille mulierem suam accusauit, ista serpentem; hoc est, nec accusata crimen retorsit, sed ipsum accusatorem suum maluit, si posset, absoluere quam ligare.*

²⁹⁶ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.30. *Sed dicis, o uir, quia mulier tentatio fuerit uiri.*

²⁹⁷ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.30. *Non est uitium mulieris esse quod nascitur, sed uitium uiri est quaerere in uxore quo saepe tentatur, in quo si infirmior fuerit, mulier ipsa labatur, si fortior, uir periclitetur.*

is tempted by a woman, he has himself to blame. Ambrose even feels impelled to state that if a woman is beautiful, a man should not criticise the Creator who has made her bodily beauty.²⁹⁸ Ambrose turns to the men of his congregation and tells them that if a man is tempted he should not blame the women, but that he should seek remedy in what Jesus says: *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation* (Matthew 26:41).

Ambrose's line of thought in this context ends with an invitation and exclamation directed towards Eve. It is a poetic language and one can speculate as to whether it was taken from a hymn figuring in Milan at that time. Irregardless, the words serve as an end of the Genesis exposition in *De institutione virginis*.

32. O come, Eve, now sober; o come, Eve, once intemperate, but now in your child temperate. O come, Eve, now such, that you do not need to be excluded from paradise, but lifted to heaven. O come, Eve, now Sarah, who begets children not in sorrow, but in joy: not in mourning, but in laughter. Isaac will beget many children to you. O come, once again Eve, now Sarah, about whom is said to the man: *Listen to Sarah your wife* (Genesis 21:12). Let it be that you are subdued man, it is suitable, but quickly you have been solved this sentence, while the man is commanded to listen.

33. If she who was to beget a prefiguration of Christ deserved to be listened to of a man, how much more does her sex go forward who has begotten Christ, yet preserved in virginity! O come thus, Eve, now Mary, who not only has set an incitement of virginity, but also has brought God.²⁹⁹

3.4.2. Eve's Childbirth in Pain Turned to Blessing in Mary

Paul writes in the Bible about a woman giving birth, and he ascribes it a saving importance. It is possible to interpret 1 Timothy 2:11–3:1 as a passage about Mary as the second Eve.³⁰⁰ In the three writings dealt with in this chapter, Ambrose quotes 1 Timothy 2:15 three times. The bishop understands the Pauline uttering as being on one hand Mary, and on the

²⁹⁸ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.30. *Non possumus reprehendere diuini artificis opus, sed quem delectat corporis pulchritudo.*

²⁹⁹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.32–33. *Veni, Eua, iam sobria; ueni, Eua, etsi in te aliquando intemperans, sed iam in prole ieiuna. Veni Eua, iam talis, ut non de paradiso excludaris, sed rapiaris ad caelum. Veni, Eua, iam Sara, quae parias filios non in tristia, sed in exultatione: non in moerore, sed risu. Isaac tibi multiplex nascetur. Veni iterum, Eua, iam Sara, de qua dicatur uiro: Audi Sarai uxorem tuam* (Genesis 21:12). *Sis tu licet uiro subdita, quia esse te decet; cito tamen soluisti sententiam, ut uir te audire iubeatur. Si typum Christi illa pariendo a uiro meretur audiri, quantum proficit sexus qui Christum, salua tamen uirginitate, generauit! Veni ergo, Eua, iam Maria, quae nobis non solum uirginitatis incentiuum attulit, sed etiam deum intulit.*

³⁰⁰ Thanks to Dr. Ingemar Rådberg (1943–2015), I have been aware of this interpretation. Kelly 1981, 69–70.

other all subsequent mothers in the Church.³⁰¹ The content of 1 Timothy 2:15 is: *Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.*

The first mention of 1 Timothy 2:15 is found in *De paradiso* 10.47. Ambrose discusses the sin of Eve and Adam, and writes:

It is true that the woman was the first one to sin, but the fact that she was the one destined to bring forth redemption must not be excluded from the operations of the Divine Providence. Although *Adam was not deceived, the woman was deceived and was in sin.* Yet woman, we are told, *will be saved by giving birth to children* (1 Timothy 2:14–15), in one of these she also generated Christ.³⁰²

It is important to understand and interpret the expression: *Inter quos generavit et Christum* correctly. The subject in the sentence is a singular woman (*mulier*); it could either be Eve or the woman in general, or Mary. I understand that Ambrose's implied subject of the sentence is Mary, the one woman who gave birth to Christ. This interpretation is supported by the only passage where Paul undoubtedly mentions Mary, namely Galatians 4:4. In Galatians Mary is also called "woman" (*mulier*), in the indefinite form: *God sent forth his Son, born of woman.* Ambrose's line of thought is that among the many childbirths throughout history (*inter quos*) she generated (*generavit*, third person singular) Christ. If Ambrose had understood 1 Timothy 2:15 to be about the childbearing of any woman, he would not have had mentioned Christ. His way of doing so further supports that Ambrose understood 1 Timothy 2:15 to be about Mary and her childbirth for the salvation of the world. In the continuing passage of *De paradiso*, Ambrose speaks positively about a normal childbirth as well.³⁰³ Ambrose seems to value childbearing in general and the good of the generation of Christ in particular.

The second mention of 1 Timothy 2:15 is in *De paradiso*, and here it is used to point to Christian marriage and the mystery of Christ and the Church. In the context, Ambrose explains the condemnation of Eve. She was said to be subject to her husband (Genesis 3:16) which Ambrose typologically explains as figuring the Church being subjected to Christ. Servitude toward God and one another in the Church is lifted to a higher realm in the Church:

³⁰¹ MacMullen must be corrected on one of his theories. He writes "women were valued for the renunciation of their sex". MacMullen 1997, 7. In the following passage it will be clear that Ambrose values Christian women simply in them being women. For more on the issue see Chapter 5: *Eschatology: Nec timeo mori*, in the present study.

³⁰² Ambrose, *par.* 10.47. *Nam si mulier prior peccatura erat, tamen redemptionem sibi paritura non debuit ab usu diuinae operationis excludi. quamuis enim Adam non est seductus, mulier autem seducta in praeuaricatione fuerit, salua tamen inquit erit per filiorum generationem* (1 Timothy 2:15), *inter quos generavit et Christum.*

³⁰³ Ambrose, *par.* 10.48.

This, then, is the mystery mentioned by the Apostle in reference to Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:2). The servitude existed formerly, in fact, but in a condition of disobedience which was to be later made salutary by the generation of children *in faith and love and holiness with modesty* (1 Timothy 2:15). What was certainly among the fathers a generation brought into existence in sin shall become salutary in the children, so that what was a stumbling block to the Jews shall in the society of Christians undergo improvement.³⁰⁴

In his mystical reading of Genesis, Eve symbolises the Church and Adam Christ. The generation of Mary's only child, Jesus Christ, would be followed by many others, *children* in plural. The condemnation of the fall is turned into a blessing in the Church. In the Church a new ethic is found, where servitude in faith, love, holiness, and modesty is esteemed as the greatest virtue.

The third mention of 1 Timothy 2:15 is in *De institutione virginis* 4.29. The context is an explanation of the creation story and Eve's role and treatment in the fall. The text is in general about women giving birth, and is as follows:

You have forgiveness of sin in confession and of satisfaction in excuse. *In unhappiness*, it says, *you will give birth* (Genesis 3:6). The woman feels the burden of her condemnation, in the painful task she fulfills. For you, the woman struggles in many pains and she comes to the reward in her punishment, when she is liberated through her children, when damaged of them. And so is grace present in the injury, salvation through the weakness. For it is written *she shall be saved in giving birth to children* (1 Timothy 2:15). Therefore, she provides with salvation when she gives birth in unhappiness and leads those she has given birth with pain to praise.³⁰⁵

There is nothing allegorical in this interpretation, Ambrose makes nothing of the typology Eve – Mary. In opposition to Zeno of Verona there is a different tune in Ambrose's words: The act of giving birth is valued exclusively positively. It is interesting that Ambrose states that salvation comes through pains, damage, injury, and weakness in childbirth, which is quite the opposite to a *virginitas in partu*. Of course, due to Ambrose's sense of *decorum* in the rhetoric of preaching, no intimate details of a birth

³⁰⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 14.72. *Hoc est ergo mysterium quod ait apostolus in Christo et in ecclesia. haec enim vere in praeuaricatione ante fuit, sed salua erit per filiorum generationem in fide et caritate et sanctificatione cum castitate, praeuaricata utique in patribus generatio hominum saluatur per filios, ut quod in Iudaeis offenderat in Christiana posteritate corrigeret.*

³⁰⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 4.29. *Habes igitur et culpae absolutionem in confessione et sententiae in executione. In tristitia, inquit, paries filios. Condemnationis suae pondus agnoscit, munus poenalis conditionis exsequitur. Pro te mulier doloribus suis militat, et remunerationem ex poena inuenit, ut per filios per quos affligitur, liberetur. Facta est itaque gratia ex iniuria, salus ex infirmitate. Scriptum est enim quia salua erit per filiorum generationem. Cum salute itaque parit, quos in tristitia parturiuit, et ad laudem educat quos peperit cum dolore.*

are uttered. The expressions used are unhappiness (*tristis*), burden of condemnation (*pondus condemnationis*), struggles in many pains (*militat doloribus*), damaged by them (*per quos affligitur*), injury (*iniuria*), and weakness (*infirmitas*). Everything in a normal childbirth is included here too.

In his book *Body and Society* Peter Brown has one idea, which is taken as an accepted truth by many scholars today: Ambrose's connection between baptism/salvation and sexual continence. Brown's interpretation is as follows: In baptism Christ was put onto the baptised. Brown quotes Ambrose's catechisms of baptism, *De mysteriis* combined with a passage in *Expositio in Psalmum 118*, "Your flesh was a pool of shade, which has cooled the high fevers of our desires, which has slaked the fires of our lusts",³⁰⁶ along with another passage from *Expositio in Lucam* of an "ugly scar".³⁰⁷ Brown understands the ugly scar as sexuality in itself and from this Brown draws the conclusion that Ambrose taught that a baptised Christian should avoid sex completely.³⁰⁸

I find impossible to concur with Brown on this; it must be problematised. Given the view of a created sexuality made for pleasure and procreation, and the exposition of 1 Timothy 2:15 and childbearing in the Church described above, Ambrose must be understood as having valued sexuality, procreation, and childbirth as something positive. The different valuation Ambrose gives to celibacy, widowhood, and marriage is, in fact, a biblical thought (Matthew 19:10–12; 1 Corinthians 7). Ambrose did consider a Christian marriage, including conception and birth, as both right and proper. A passage from *De Cain et Abel* clarifies that the problem Ambrose sees with sex is actually sex outside marriage, not within it, where a wife and a husband, on the contrary, sanctify one another:

We are not sanctified through carnal copulation, by conception, and by parturition, whereby the womb of a woman is opened and her virginity deflowered. Although a wife sanctifies a husband and a husband his wife, it frequently happens that a woman's womb is opened without the sanctification of wedlock. Again, it is not a question of sanctification being confined solely to the husband. The wife, too, partakes in it. The natural functions of each sex are distinct in the process that leads to a giving of birth (*partus*). The men have their functions, and the women have their distinguished duties.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 19.5. Trans. P. Brown 2008.

³⁰⁷ Ambrose, in *Luc.* V 24.

³⁰⁸ P. Brown 2008, 349–351. Dassmann gives a more sensible interpretation of Ambrose's view of sexuality, that the bishop surely emphasises the mortification of the flesh, but that he does not go beyond "in seiner Lehre über Ehe und Jungfräulichkeit nicht die Aussagen der allgemein kirchlichen Lehre", Dassmann 1965, 240.

³⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Cain* I 10.46. I will return to the topic in Chapter 5.2.2: *The View of Sexuality, Marriage, and Celibacy in Ambrose's Texts*.

3.4.3. Ambrose's Pattern of Protology and Mary's *virginitas*

The initial starting point for this chapter was Koch's sentence that Ambrose might have believed in *virginitas in partu* and at the same time considered the birth of Christ as a real human birth. The second, was Rahner's plea for a holistic understanding of Mary and the *virginitas in partu*. The third and final, was the awareness of the listening congregation who had parental experiences. I now take all these three points into consideration.

3.4.3.1. Protology and Mariology in General

In *Explanatio Psalmi 1* Ambrose interprets the *tree planted by streams of water* (Psalms 1:3) as the tree of life in paradise (Genesis 2:9). Ambrose writes:

That is the tree, through which our redemption has come. Rightly is said, that the earth has brought him forth, as he was born from a virgin [...] Jesus is the tree of life, the tree of wisdom, planted in the womb of the Virgin according to the Father's will.³¹⁰

In the allegorical interpretation of Psalm 1, Ambrose parallels paradise with the virginal womb of Mary (*paradisus – uterus virginis*). More, he parallels the tree of life with Christ (*lignum vitae – Christus*). Ambrose, with clarity, sets Mary in the paradisiac position.

Ambrose's view of the creation and fall certainly cast light on his Mariology. The two condemnations of Eve are turned to blessings in Mary, which means that the second Eve 1) subdued herself in obedience to God, and 2) gave birth in a paradisiac manner and begot Christ, the second Adam who was sent for the salvation of the world, without pain. Mary offered her body and soul to the Word incarnate and turned the fall of the first Eve into a blessing. In *Exameron*, Christ's resting in man's soul is seen as the perfect goal of all creation. *In whom shall I find repose but on him who is humble and peaceful and who trembles at my words* (Isaiah 66:2). Mary, as the second Eve, was a welcoming soul and body for Christ to find repose in. This is a physical and concrete expression about Mary, during her months of being pregnant with Christ; he did physically live and grow in her. In the previous chapter, we saw that in *De virginibus* Ambrose considered Mary's virginity not only in respect to her body, but first and foremost to her soul.³¹¹ In this chapter, we have seen that, according to Ambrose, the most severe problem of human existence *post peccatum* was the dominance of fleshly pleasures. One consequence of the fall is that the

³¹⁰ Ambrose, in *psalm. 1.35. Quod esse hoc lignum dicimus nisi per quod nobis salus uenit? et recte hoc terra produxit, quia eum uirgo generauit [...] Jesus, qui est lignum vitae, lignum sapientiae, plantatum in uterum virginis uoluntate patris.*

³¹¹ Ambrose, *virg. II 2.7.*

sinful passions of the body have taken over and have begun to master the soul. Consequently, a soul who has reached perfection masters the body. A human life in perfection means that a virtuous soul, with its reason, steers and controls the body. Ambrose understood that when God choose among women a mother for his Son, Mary came to be *Mater Dei*, while her mind was in control of her bodily passions.

3.4.3.2. Three Theological Points of Ambrose's Teaching on *virginitas in partu*

Ambrose did embrace the idea, deeply rooted in Church history, of a painless and super-natural birth of Christ. He did it both from a Christological perspective, and a Mariological one. Georg Söll denies that any Church Father made a theological point of Mary's physiological *virginitas in partu*, but it appears to me that Ambrose certainly did. So, which theological points could be made that Ambrose himself hopefully would have recognised?

The first theological point of Mary's physiological *virginitas* in the birth of Christ is an awareness that biology matters. As we have seen, Ambrose sees the bodily functions as fundamentally good, human sexual function is created of God, and childbirth could have happened in the original paradise. Granted, the pain and suffering in childbirth were not originally meant to be but are part and parcel of the post-lapsarian conditions. In Mary, the condemnation of Eve is turned into a blessing, not only in Mary's case but for all women giving birth in the Church. In *Expositio in Lucam* Ambrose reveals that he presupposes a propulsive power and an opening of the womb in the case of Christ being born. Ambrose does not set the birth of Christ free from Galen's physiology: The birth of Christ meant a bodily process in Mary. Nonetheless, Ambrose stresses the Christological aspects in *Mariae virginitas in partu*, as we have seen in *Epistula extra collectionem* 15. Ambrose seems to understand two things with *virginitas in partu*: Firstly, that it was a divine wonder, a Christological question, and secondly, that the delivery was an opening of the womb of Mary happening in a way, contrary to the fallen nature, without her having any wounds, suffering, pains, and without any danger to her life. This is the way Ambrose thinks any woman would have given birth had the fall never happened. Ambrose thus bases his teaching of *Mariae virginitas in partu* on fundamental theological reflections on both the creation and the fall.

The second theological point of Ambrose's teaching on Mary's *virginitas in partu* is her role as an example and for identification. This is an important aspect of how Mary giving birth functions in Ambrose's pastoral ambitions and concerns. The listeners must be involved and consulted in order to interpret what Ambrose writes correctly. In the different texts where Ambrose deals with Christ's birth, there are different types of audiences: The synodal letter in which the pope is addressed had

no listeners and was read only by theologically-schooled readers, most probably exclusively men. In, for example, *De institutione virginis, Expositio in Lucam*, on the other hand, and in his expositions on the Psalms, Ambrose talks to a mixed congregation, mixed according to class, age, and gender. Ambrose preaches knowing he is addressing people with their own experience of childbearing. A normal childbirth included danger, pain, and suffering. Thus, when Ambrose preached to his congregation many of them had already experienced the anguish of birth, wounds caused by childbirth, and had painful memories of wives and children lost during parturition. There were women with personal experience of parturition, and there were also married couple with many children of whom, on average, every second died as a child. There were men with the experience of having seen their wives die because of childbirth or complications after childbirth. Ambrose thus addressed women – and men, also listening – with personal experience of the vulnerability and suffering in childbearing and offered them this picture of Mary in their life-situation as mothers. What is more, an awareness of the primitive circumstances of Christ's birth is also drawn into the current context: Mary was alone with Joseph in an inn with animals, or a cave, where there could not possibly have been ideal standard of security, instruments, painkillers (analgesics), or an aseptic environment in which to give birth. Thus, Ambrose creates a mother in whom the listeners find an example as well as someone to identify with. He paints her as a mother in whom it is possible to reflect and recognise oneself.

The third theological point is Ambrose presenting an ideal. Mary is put forward as having given birth in an extraordinary way, and thus works as an exaggerated ideal and a subject of fascination. This follows the pattern of Mary as an ideal investigated in the previous chapter. This, I believe, at least in my Swedish context, shows a different logic regarding what messages work spiritually as consoling. Ambrose in his pastoral care pictured great, unattainable ideals for the good of his congregation. Contemporary spiritual advisors tend to do the opposite, to picture biblical figures as weak, fragile, and usual, in order to create a sense of recognition and identification.

3.5. Conclusions on Chapter 3

The main scholarly question of the present study is how Ambrose used the concept of Mary's virginity in his pastoral care. The definition of pastoral care used in the study is communicating the Christian message, as summarised in the Creed, in the tension between Christian dogma and the existing culture in order to empower the Christian people to grow in

grace, delight, faith, and living. In this chapter I mapped Ambrose's preaching on the pre-lapsarian state of harmony and the mind's dominion over the bodily passions. In the fall, this harmony was turned upside down, and one of the consequences for women was giving birth in pain. In Mary, the condemnation on the woman was lifted away, and her birthing of Jesus was carried through in a miraculous way. The tension with the existing Late Antique culture is obvious. A normal birth was not always a happy event and it did include danger and pain.

Albert Mitterer has pointed at Mary's real delivery of Christ as a decisive Mariological issue. The giving of birth is a basic aspect of Mary's true motherhood. Mitterer writes about the mother as the active part in the delivery, that her womb's muscles actively force the child out into the daylight. Mitterer writes "die leibliche Mutterschaft in der Geburt ist ein Teil der vollen leiblichen Mutterschaft".³¹² According to Mitterer, Christian theology demands a real motherhood of Mary, which includes a physical giving of birth. As Ambrose lived among and preached to ordinary people, he occasionally met parents in joy and thankfulness after a happy delivery as well those in the midst of worries and sorrows after sincere complication due to having given birth. This fact must have been an important aspect of his pastoral care.

One purpose of this chapter has been to clarify and make sense of Ambrose's view of *Mariae virginitas in partu*. I have realised that it is no easy task to do and I am not sure if Ambrose himself was very clear on the concrete aspects of *virginitas in partu*. I think the explanation most close at hand is to use the word paradox. Paradox means a shining contradiction (literally the Greek word *para-doxa* means against the appearance). A paradox is, thus, something that looks contradictory but is in fact not. A superficial reading of Ambrose deals with the delivery of Christ in a rather confusing way: Christ opens, and he does *not* open the womb of Mary. It is confusing until one takes the term paradox into account. Hugo Koch's and Manfred Hauke's notion that a belief in a *virginitas in partu* might include the normal circumstances of opening and delivery seems probable in this light.

I have also realised the importance of defining correctly what Ambrose could have meant when he used the term *virginitas* in the context of a birth. *Virginitas* was, for Ambrose, a term which carried more than a bodily meaning. In the previous chapter I demonstrated that Ambrose regarded the *virginitas* of the mind, which means a state of perfection of the mind, as most desirable. In his sermons on the creation and fall Ambrose delivers both a *pre* and a *post peccatum* picture of the human existence. The fall affected human existence by taking away the mind's dominion over the bodily passions. The fall affected the female body in a

³¹² Mitterer 1952, 116.

physical way: the female body was condemned to a painful birth-giving. In Mary and her delivery of Christ, giving birth is sanctified in the Church. Mary, as the second Eve, also includes an idea that she gave birth in a way which was unaffected by the fall of Eve.

The dogma Ambrose delivered in his contemporary culture, where a birth was potentially pernicious and life-threatening, was that Christ was born in a miraculous way in poor circumstances and placed in a manger. In Northern Italy, a delivery of a child in poor circumstances was risky and hazardous. Several grave findings from the time show that delivery in a society with under-developed maternity care was not always a happy event. When Ambrose preached on the birth of Christ in a miraculous way, he preached into this particular situation. One possible way of hearing the message of Ambrose was: "No, Christ could not have died in the manger, nor Mary in delivering him." The material I have used in this chapter gives two perspectives on the virginal delivery of Christ, one from the divinity of Christ, and the other from Mary as the second Eve. God was in Christ in a wonderful way, and made the birth safe, however poor and dirty the circumstances in Bethlehem might have been.

Mary, as the second Eve, turned the condemnation of all humans, particularly womankind, into blessing. In this way, Ambrose lifts up the maternal function of giving birth for his congregation. Ambrose recognises the births of the mothers in his congregation and they received the message from him: In Mary they can identify themselves as Christian mothers. This is a pastoral perspective of the idea of *virginitas in partu*.

4. Christology: *Natus de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine*¹

In the present chapter I expound Ambrose's teaching on Mary's virginity before the birth regarding the occurrence of the Son's incarnation (virginitas ante partum). I read the virginal conception in relation to his Christology, on one hand, and his contemporary medicine and cultural understanding of a conception and growth of a child in the womb on the other. The Ambrosian material used in this chapter are the writings on Emperor Gratian's request for a guidance in the Nicene Faith: De fide, De Spiritu Sancto, and De incarnationis. Ambrose composed the treatises from sermons which had been held earlier. I intend to show how Ambrose explained the virginal conception of Christ, and within which cultural limits his explanations are to be positioned. Reproduction is a prerequisite for human existence. I will remake the congregation's understandings and associations concerning the beginning of a human life in a woman's womb.

4.1. Introduction to the Chapter

The present chapter begins with a reiteration of Dell Hymes's model of SPEAKING, a model used in this study to hear the silence of Ambrose's culture. The *setting* of Ambrose's Christological writings was the Arian/Homoian controversy in the late 370s and early 380s. The *participants* are the Christian community in Milan, with Ambrose as the leading figure, and on the other side what he understood as the Arian perfidy. Occasionally, the tension between the two groups became violent. For Ambrose, the *end*, or the expected outcome, was to save the true confession of the Son and Spirit as divine in the same sense as the Father. To that purpose Mary had her place as mother of God, and the body in which the incarnation took place. *Act sequences*: In the Christological sermons Ambrose is anti-heretically oriented. He warns against the threat of Arianism and defends the Nicene faith. The *keys* are in line with the seriousness of a rhetorical enemy, the Arians, who threatened the true belief in the Triune God. His tone was hard and cold towards them. The verbal resources, the *instrumentalities*, are the limits and views created by the cultural comprehension of Ambrose's time concerning the conception and development of a child in the womb. The medium of communication

¹ This is a quotation from Ambrose, *ymb*. Trans.: Who was born of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. For the complete Creed, see Chapter 8.1: *The Milanese Version of the Apostle's Creed*.

in this chapter is treatises written as an explanation and defence of the theology of Nicaea, which were edited oral communications. *Norms* are the rules that govern the action and reaction of the speaking. It is probable, and can be seen throughout the series of writings comprising the primary material of the present chapter, that Ambrose had a sensitive ear towards his listeners' questions on the conception of Christ and Mary's role in it. One sees that Ambrose used all different *genres* of texts to help his listeners to grow in Christian faith and living: Sermons, hymns, letters, and prayers.

Of special interest for the Christology is the bodily function of reproduction. Christ was incarnate and resided for nine months in Mary's womb. When Ambrose preached the virginal conception of Christ as a Christian truth, he did so in the tension between his contemporary understanding of conception and the content of his Christology. As in our own time it was difficult for his contemporaries to believe in a virginal conception. They had their own cultural understanding of biology, which they formulated to correspond to the reality they experienced.

The incarnation of the eternal Son and how to express his divine nature properly was of main interest among the theologians in the fourth century. In 325 the Nicæan Creed expresses the Son to be:

from the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father [...] for us humans and for our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human.²

The technical term *ousia* appears in the Creed twice, and there is a third occurrence in the anathema over Arius at the end. The term caused huge debates over the subsequent 60 years. The council of Constantinople 381 stands as a first end point of the debate in affirming *homoousios*, and the council at Chalcedon 451 marks its definitive ending.

Jaroslav Pelikan writes:

The most important intellectual struggle of the first five centuries of Christian history – indeed the most important intellectual struggle in all of Christian history – took place in response to the question of whether the divine in Jesus Christ was identical with God the Creator. For the answer to that challenge, too, was Mary, defined now as Theotokos and Mother of God.³

Trier, Rome, and Milan were all important cities during Ambrose's life, and thus were important arenas in the Christological debates of the fourth century. Dealing with Ambrose's Christology means studying the Christological controversies of Western Christianity and Northern Italy in particular. In this chapter on Christology, I use three writings of Ambrose as a foundation for his teaching on the subject: *De fide*, *De Spiritu Sancto*,

² *Concilium Nicaenum I: Expositio fidei*. Text and trans. COD.

³ Pelikan 1996, 48.

and *De incarnationis*. In all these, Ambrose's utterings about Mary are always in relation to Christ. This is generally the case of Ambrose's Christology; I believe therefore that his Mariology is Christo-centric.

4.2. An Ordinary Conception, and the Conception of Christ

One of the questions of the present study is to understand Ambrose's concept of virginity in the context of the biological and medical assumptions of his time. In this section I map the Late Antique perceptions pertaining to the conception. The question of how Ambrose understood the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary is spread out over the whole chapter and concluded at the end.

4.2.1. The View of a Normal Conception in Ambrose's Time

Ambrose articulates his ideas on human conception in a number of passages. In *Exameron* he describes the male constitution for procreation,⁴ and in *De fide* he writes:

It may frequently happen that weak men have sons and stronger men have not, that slaves have children and their masters have not, and that the poor have and the rich have not [...] some men (*homines*) may desire to beget children, but are unable to do so [...] whether one has children or no, is not dependent upon or derived of his power, but upon the attributes of a father and that begetting lies not in the power of our will, but is contingent upon the quality of the body.⁵

Ambrose writes about the ability to have children, and in this context his purpose is to give a biological analogy in order to refute those who regard the divine Son at a lower degree as being born of the Father.

Fertility, the potential to give life, is a fundamental aspect of the human body, male as well as female. It lies at the core of human existence. The incarnation of the divine Son in the Virgin Mary's womb is central in the Christian faith. Mary's womb is the *locus* where the creative act and miracle of the incarnation are to be searched for in the Christian theology. Tertullian, the early Latin theologian, expressed the biological aspect most clearly on these issues. He writes that the virginal conception did not disavow the human substance of being flesh. Christ was born, Tertullian writes, "of blood", but argues that the Christian faith denies the matter of a male seed in the conception. With regard to the growth of Christ in Mary's womb, "the warm blood, converted by separation (*despumatione*),

⁴ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 9.73.

⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 8.81–82.

made a foetus (*coagulum*) of the woman's blood".⁶ Tertullian reveals a familiarity with the common knowledge of his time in how a child was created and develops: The starting point is a male seed making and the foetus grows from the female blood, which coagulates and gradually forms a child. Tertullian even mentions the umbilical cord that tied Christ to Mary's womb.⁷

Gregor Emmenegger has convincingly shown that the theologians of the fourth century gradually moved away from exclusively biological explanations of the incarnation.⁸ I accept a general historical tendency towards a gradually increasing hesitation among Christian theologians in using biological language and analogies for the incarnation. There is one example from Ambrose which makes Emmenegger's point. Instead of seeking natural explanations for the virginal conception, Ambrose regards it as a divine wonder. Nonetheless, Ambrose, who believed that the Word became flesh and appeared as a full human being, could and did use natural analogies for Christ's virginal conception. One example is when he uses the vulture as an animal that gives birth virginally as an apology for the Christian belief in the virginal birth of Christ.⁹ Ambrose regarded Christ to be fully human with a fully human body, and as all other bodies, Christ was dependent on the laws of natural existence.

Ambrose predominantly understood the conception of Christ in Mary as a wonder, a miracle. In *Expositio in Lucam*, in the context of explaining the angel's visitation in Mary's house and the pregnancy of Elizabeth in her old age, writes: "that everything is possible for God, he is free to do whatever pleases him",¹⁰ and further, "I sense the miracle, I know the mystery: The Mother of the Lord being pregnant by the Word, so it favored God".¹¹ In another passage, on the other hand, however, Ambrose used the vulture as a natural and biological analogy for the virgin birth.¹² In Late Antiquity the vulture was regarded as an animal which procreated in an asexual way i.e. virginal procreation.¹³ A natural explanation of the virgin

⁶ Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 19.

⁷ Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 20. *Si adhaesit qui avulsus est, quomodo adhaesisset nisi dum ex utero est per illum nervum umbilicarem quasi folliculi sui traducem adnexus origini vulvae?*

⁸ For the result of his study, see the conclusion Emmenegger 2014, 257–263.

⁹ Ambrose, *exam.* V 20.65.

¹⁰ Ambrose, *in Luc.* II 19. *Ut possibile deo omne quod ei placuerit adsereret.*

¹¹ Ambrose, *in Luc.* II 25. *Miraculum sentio, cognosco mysterium: mater domini uerbo feta, deo plena est.*

¹² Ambrose, *exam.* V 20.65. *Auis sine masculo parit et nullus refellit and the bird is a picture of desponsata Maria.*

¹³ The Ancient Greeks believed that also locusts and some fish did reproduce parthenogenetically. Lesley Dean-Jones puts this ancient belief in context of the view of a normal conception in the Greek Antiquity, Dean-Jones 1994, 148–153.

birth is called *Parthenogenese*,¹⁴ which means to understand the virgin birth not as a wonder, but as biologically explainable.

In order to understanding Ambrose's hearers in Milan, one must understand what kind of ideas they had about sexual reproduction at that time. Firstly, their views were different from ours. Ambrose did not, for example, know about the 23rd pair of chromosomes, which today we schematise as male XY, and female XX. He did not reason on an egg receiving a sperm and them creating something new together. Did the Late Antique bishop, well informed in the biology of his time, have any understanding of biological heritage? One can ask Ambrose this, somewhat anachronistic, question: Has Mary anything to do with her child, genetically speaking, or did she just carry him for nine months as a surrogate and subsequently give birth to him?

In *Dissection of the Uterus* Galen writes that the male semen arrives at the right time, when the mouths of the vessels in the female womb are open. The seed can adhere to the roughness in the uterine surface.¹⁵ In the text *De naturalibus facultatibus* Galen describes three activities or powers effecting a new human being: The powers of Genesis, Growth, and Nutrition.¹⁶

The male semen contains the potential of a full human being, and when it arrives in the female womb something new arises, a foetus, which has its *telos* in a fully developed man or woman. "For that which was previously semen, when it begins to procreate and to shape the animal, becomes, so to say, a special *nature*."¹⁷ The *nature* is what a certain kind of seed is meant to be. From a goat seed there will eventually be a goat and from a human seed a human being will develop. The same principle is to be understood in plants. A plant has its seed which aims to give new plants of the same kind:

The seed having been cast into the womb or into the earth (for there is no difference), then, after a certain definitive period, a great number of parts become constituted in the substance which is being generated; these differs as regards moisture, dryness, coldness and warmth, and in all the other qualities which naturally derive therefrom.¹⁸

From one point of view Galen regarded the male semen as the active principle, while the female contribution was understood to be passive, receiving the seed and giving material (nutrition) to it: "And what is semen? Clearly the active principle of the animal, the material principle being the menstrual blood."¹⁹ Johann Lachs has highlighted the positive

¹⁴ Mitterer 1952, 62.

¹⁵ Galen, *De uteri dissectione*. Quoted in Flemming 2000, 298.

¹⁶ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* I, 5–8. Trans. Loeb 71, 17–31.

¹⁷ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* II 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 131.

¹⁸ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* I 6. Trans. Loeb 71, 19.

¹⁹ Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* II 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 135.

evaluation of the menstrual blood, and writes: “Sämtliche Verfasser des Alterthums mit Ausnahme der Methodiker habe somit die Menstruation als zur Erhaltung der Gesundheit notwendig angesehen”.²⁰ Galen understood the woman’s part as giving material, i.e., the alteration of her blood to form all the different parts of a body, like bones, artery, veins, nerves, hands, feet, etc.²¹ Normally after nine month the foetus is formed and ready to be born. When the time is right, the “propulsive faculty” commenced, and the baby could be born.²² The decisive nutrition tool is the umbilical cord. Galen describes the navel as the centre of the little human organism growing in the womb. The material that formed the different parts of the body: Liver, stomach, intestines, and so on came through the umbilical cord.²³ According to earlier traditions, the child breathed and ate in the womb, in the same way as could be observed after the birth. Hippocrates believed that the child ate through its mouth and breathed through its nose in the mother’s womb. Soranus was not convinced, however, and did not believe it to be proven; conversely, he subscribed to the notion that all nutrition was supplied through the navel.²⁴ Galen is closer to Soranus on this point.

Did Galen, as other physicians did, account for the female seed as well?²⁵ According to Galen, in conception the male and the female seed met in the womb and made the pregnancy possible.²⁶ More expressively than earlier physicians, Galen described the female seed as differentiated, of a different kind, compared to the male seed. It is true that Galen regarded the male seed as more complete, but he understood that a combination of both male and female seed was necessary in the process of conception.²⁷ Of interest is Soranus’ notion that prerequisite for a pregnancy is lust and enjoyment in the sexual act.²⁸ In Ambrose’s sermons *Exameron*, he mentions the seed needed for procreation: “What shall I say about the genitals, which led by the veins receive the generating seed from the area of the neck through the reins and loins for the function and joy of

²⁰ Lachs 1903, 23.

²¹ For example, Galen, *De foetuum formatione* IV 657–658. There is described how the nutrition in the form of blood comes to the foetus. Hankinson 2017, 257–258.

²² Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* III 3. Trans. Loeb 71, 229–237.

²³ Lachs 1903, 32–33.

²⁴ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 17.58.

²⁵ Lesley Dean-Jones maps and interprets Greek medicine, mainly the Hippocratic and Aristotelian traditions. She traces historical developments and interpretation models in matters of reproduction. See chapter *The Female’s Role in Reproduction*, Dean-Jones 1994, 148–224.

²⁶ Galen, *De usu partium* 11.

²⁷ Lachs 1903, 25–26.

²⁸ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 12.

procreation?”²⁹ It should be noted, however, that in this sentence it is not clear whether he had both sexes in mind.

All the materials for the body with its parts were received from the mother. Thus, in Late Antiquity, a baby was understood as being closer to its mother than to its father. Under Athenian law, marriage between a man and a woman with the same father was permitted, but not between those with the same mother. In both these cases they were seen as half-siblings, but the two with the same mother were understood as being more closely connected. Lesley Dean-Jones interprets this law and writes: “originating from the same womb made such a relationship incestuous where springing from the same seed did not”.³⁰

In summary, the biological science at Ambrose’s time identified three conditions required for a human conception: The male semen, the female counterpart, and the menstrual blood. Within these conditions, the different powers of birth teleologically actualised the birth.

4.2.2. The Tradition of *Mariae virginitas ante partum* up to Ambrose

The idea of a virginal conception of Christ is first found in the biblical material. Both of the two Gospels retelling the infant story of Christ prerequisite the virgin birth.³¹ Paul mentions the birth of Christ in Galatians 4:4, even if Mary is not called virgin but “woman”. Already Ignatius of Antioch mentions Mary, with five references to her.³² With Justin Martyr the virginal conception gained prominence in theological argumentation, Mary’s virginity is a proof of Christ’s messiahship and the sign of a new time.³³ Justin is also the first to explicitly make use of the typology Eve – Mary.³⁴

Origen quotes in *Contra Celsum* Celsus’ objection to the virgin birth. In approximately 178, the pagan philosopher Celsus had written in a treatise that Jesus invented the virgin birth. According to Celsus, a Roman soldier named Panthera was Jesus’ father. Thus, Jesus was the son of Mary due to an illegitimate relationship.³⁵ Origen argues against this, stating that Jesus was the most admirable person who ever existed, with wisdom, miracles, and power of government, so it was becoming that his birth happened in a miraculous way.³⁶ The Creator of the world could not have been born in

²⁹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 9.73. *Quid de genitalibus loquar, quae uenis e regione cervicis per renes lumbosque deductis suscipiunt genitale seminum ad munus et gratiam procreandi?*

³⁰ Dean-Jones 1994, 153.

³¹ Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38.

³² Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 1.1; *Trallians* 9.1; *Ephesians* 7.2, 18.2, 19.1.

³³ R. E. Brown et al. 1978, 254–255, Delius 1963, 52–58.

³⁴ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100.

³⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28.

³⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.30.

a vile and disgraceful way.³⁷ To the Jews, Origen also argues that many Old Testament prophecies, such as Isaiah 7:14, foretell the virgin birth.³⁸ To the Greeks, Origen uses the analogy of different animals, e.g. the vulture, who give birth in an asexual way.³⁹

Among the Church Fathers the forming of Christ in Mary was described as occurring without any male contribution. The Latin theologian Tertullian describes the incarnation, using explicit language, as Mary's body making Jesus' body.⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa saw an analogy with the creation of the first man Adam. God took dust from the ground, and similarly God used the material of Mary to create Christ's humanity: "the first time God the Logos took dust from the earth and formed man, but this time he took dust from the virgin and did not merely formed man, but formed man around himself."⁴¹

Gregory Nazianzen is also worth mentioning in this context. For him, the virginal conception of Christ did not make Mary's body and womb insignificant. The forming of Christ in Mary's womb happened in accordance with the laws of conception, the biological process presented above. Gregory and his contemporaries regarded this process as the natural way a foetus came into being and grew in the mother's womb. The decisive difference in Christ's birth was the divine intervention in the actual conception, which occurred without a male seed. Gregory writes in a letter to the priest Cleodnius:

If anyone does not admit that holy Mary is Mother of God (*Theotókos*), he is cut off from the Godhead. If anyone claims that Christ merely passed through Mary, as if passing through a channel, but denies that he was formed within her in a divine way (because there is no intervention of a man), and in a human way (that is, according to the laws of conception), he is equally godless.⁴²

This survey offers some insight into the belief surrounding the virginal conception of Christ, as historical background to Ambrose's writings. Nobody in Ambrose's ecclesiastical context questioned the idea of *Mariae virginitas ante partum*, as was the case with *virginitas in partu* and *post partum*. Ambrose firmly believed that Christ was conceived without the cooperation of a man. The virginal conception was, for him, in Neumann's

³⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.32.

³⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.34–35.

³⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.37.

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 4. *Humoris et sanguinis foeda coagula*.

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* IV 3. Trans. NPNF2 5.

⁴² Gregory Nazianzen, *Epistula* 101. Trans. Gambero 1999, 162. Gambero's translation of the Greek word *Theotokos* as Mother of God is unfortunate, Birthgiver of God is more appropriate.

word, a “self-evident truth”.⁴³ I return to the question of Mary’s virginity in the conception, after the passage on Ambrose’s Christology, which now follows.

4.3. Ambrose’s Christology

In this section I map how Ambrose preached about who Christ was and the salvation which came through him, through the person and work of Christ. Christology in the context of pastoral care is a matter of forgiveness and new life in Christ communicated to the Christian people. In Ambrose’s case, his Christology was chiseled in a polemic situation, with the writings of the Greek Christian authorities as his main models. Ambrose’s context was the Arian/Homoian controversy.

4.3.1. Arianism as Antithesis

The Christological debate in the fourth century concerned how to believe in and express the Trinitarian belief. With regard to the Son that meant foremost how to confess the eternal divinity of the Son within the Trinity, and simultaneously his humanity. Ambrose deals with the Christological questions in *De fide* I–V and *De incarnationis*. Following the Christological debate, a Pneumatological debate arose. This was a debate on how to express the divinity of the Spirit. *De Spiritu Sancto* is a contribution from Ambrose on this particular issue. All these writings of Ambrose are polemical, with Arianism as its antithesis. They were written with the purpose of arguing, emphasising, and implementing the true and eternal divinity 1) of the Son (*De fide, De incarnationis*) and 2) of the Spirit (*De Spiritu Sancto*). As written in a polemical situation, a summary of the history of Arianism up to their author’s time must be presented in order to understand their context.

The Christological crisis started in Alexandria with the presbyter Arius (died in 336) who taught that the Son is created and thus once in time did not exist.⁴⁴ The term *homoousios* (consubstantial) of the Nicene Creed was intended to solve this particular problem but was subsequently questioned and it continually caused controversy until it was reiterated again and eventually established in Constantinople in 381. The

⁴³ Neumann 1962, 67. For a comprehensive overview of the passages and underlying thoughts on *Mariae virginitas ante partum* in Ambrose’s writings, see Huhn 1954, 37–110; Neumann 1962, 67–102.

⁴⁴ The definition from Nicaenum 325 quotes Arius’ famous words, *Concilium Nicaenum I, Expositio fidei*: “There once was when he was not”, ἦν ποτε στε οὐκ ἦν, *erat quando non erat* [...] “before he was begotten he was not” πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἐξ οὐκ οὐτῶν, *priusquam nasceretur non erat*. Text and trans. COD.

development between the two councils (Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381) is complex. At least four different parties appeared with different interpretations on the relationship between Father and Son: The Nicene *Homoousians* (confessing the Son as consubstantial with the Father), *Homoiousians* (the Son as of similar substance with the Father), *Homoians* (the Son as similar to the Father, thus avoiding the term *ousia*) and the pure Arian *Anhomoians* (the Son as dissimilar from the Father). In the case of the theological environment in Milan, scholars tend to classify Ambrose's opponents as Homoians of some kind. For this reason, some scholars prefer not to describe them as Arians. This present study is not about identifying the different factions of the Christological controversy, and therefore I use the standard term used in contemporary studies, Homoians, even though Ambrose himself called them Arians (*Arianus*).⁴⁵

North Italy was a stronghold of Nicene critics in the mid-fourth Century, and bishop Auxentius (died in 374) held the see of the important city Milan. Some anti-Nicene Creeds were accepted at Western Councils under Emperor Constantius, and these are geographically relevant for Ambrose as bishop. A well-known incident was Hilary of Poitiers' (300–367) and Eusebius of Vercelli's (283–371) unsuccessful campaign against Auxentius in 364, which ended in them being forced to leave Milan accused of threatening the public order. Two councils met in Milan, in 345 and 355, where the first avoided the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* and the second openly turned against the Nicene Creed. Three Councils were held in Sirmium, in 347, 351, and 357. The Creed taken up in the third was outspokenly against using either of the terms *homoiousios* or *homoousios* arguing that both were non-biblical. To calm the debate, two new Councils were convened in 359, one in the Eastern area, Seleucia, and one in the Western area, Rimini on the Adriatic coast of east Italy. In Rimini more than 400 bishops were gathered, finally accepting a Creed that was both anti-Arian and anti-Nicene, calling the Son "like the Father" avoiding the term *ousia*. In Seleucia such a creed was also accepted, of which Jerome stated: "the whole world moaned and was surprised to find itself Arian".⁴⁶ In Jerome's view the Empire was, at this point, Arian. In Constantinople in 360 a small number of bishops were gathered to ratify the decisions made in 359, and a creed that can be characterised as Homoian was published.⁴⁷ The creed of Constantinople 360 expresses the following concerning the Son and the term *ousia*:

⁴⁵ For very thorough discussion on Ambrose's *homoousianism* and *neo-nicaeanism*: McLynn 1994, Williams 1995, and Markschiefs 1995.

⁴⁶ Jerome, *Dialogus adversus Luciferianos* 19. *Ingemuit totus orbis, et Arianum se esse miratus est.*

⁴⁷ For this overview I have used Kelly 2006, 274–295; Hanson 1988, 348–386; and Ayres 2004, 133–166.

And in the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from God before all ages and before every beginning, by whom all things were made, visible and invisible, and begotten as only-begotten, the only from the only Father, God from God, like to the Father who generated him, according to the Scriptures; whose origin no one knows, except the Father who generated him. As we know, this only-begotten Son of God came forth from the heavens, as it is written, for the undoing of sin and death, and was born from the Holy Spirit, and from Mary the virgin according to the flesh, as it is written, and taught the disciples and fulfilled the whole economy according to the Father's will [...]

But the word *ousia*, which was simplistically put down by the Fathers, being unknown to the people, has become a scandal, because the Scriptures do not contain it, we have decided should be removed [...] neither should hypostasis concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be used [...]⁴⁸

This Homoian creed remained the imperially-sanctioned definition of orthodoxy for two decades. Ambrose was ordained bishop in Milan in 374. During his episcopate, the theological opinion in the empire changed, and at another Council of Constantinople in 381 the Nicene Creed of 325 was re-confirmed. The Constantinopolitan Creed contains the term *homoousios* but was not an exact copy of the Nicene Creed. The most important difference is that it altered and extended the precisions concerning the nature of the divine Spirit. The frenetic pro-Nicene work of theologians such as Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose of Milan in the West, and Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa in the East, led to the renewed creed being accepted in Constantinople in 381. Intervention by the secular powers, and the shift of imperial sympathies with Theodosius in 379 also played an important role.⁴⁹ It would be an oversimplification to state that the trinitarian debate ended in Constantinople in 381, but it was, nonetheless, a definite turning point. No officially supported councils expressed an anti-Nicene stand after that date.

One necessary question to put is whether it is possible to trace any anti-Nicene Mariology. In the original creed of Nicaea in 325, the Virgin Mary is not mentioned. For some reason it was regarded less important in its anti-Arian formulas. In the creed of Constantinople 381 *homoousios* was affirmed and the phrase Virgin Mary was inserted: "became incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary".⁵⁰ I have no explanation as to

⁴⁸ Athanasius, *De synodis 30*. Trans. NPNF2 4, quoted in Ayres 2004, 164–165.

⁴⁹ On the question of was the most important, theological considerations or worldly powers, Ayres writes: "The truth lies somewhere in between: Basil's theological and ecclesio-political work was of importance, but he was one of many architects of pro-Nicene theology. At the same time the accession of Theodosius in 379 was nothing if not providential for pro-Nicenes." Ayres 2004, 187.

⁵⁰ *Concilium Constantinopolitanum: Expositio fidei*. Text and trans. COD.

why Virgin Mary was excluded in 325; she is, for example, present both in the Apostolic creed and in the anti-Nicaean creeds of the fourth century.⁵¹ Neumann writes that “the Arians, and Eunomius himself, were at one with the Catholics in calling Mary *the virgin*”.⁵² Actually, Arius might even have used the title *Theotokos* for Mary, according to Huhn.⁵³ Later Nicene critics might, however, perfectly well have avoided the term *Theotokos* even if Arius himself did use it. According to Arius’ reputation it might even have been tactical from an ecclesio-political view for the Homoians not to use the term.

Arius and the so-called Arians were accused of not believing in the divine Son as truly God. William P. Haugaard argues in his article ‘Arius: Twice an Heretic?’ that Arius himself was never interested in the true humanity of Christ, but that on the other hand neither was Athanasius. It cannot be proven either, according to Haugaard, that Arius taught about Christ not having had a human soul.⁵⁴ The objective of debate was different. The Arian controversy was about the eternal existence and origin of the divine Son. As far as Mary was concerned her role as virginal mother does not seem to have been an issue of controversy in the original Arian dispute.

In *De fide* Ambrose actually points to the Virgin birth as unifying the Arians with the Nicene party:

However, I know some who say that also the mystery of the incarnation is non-created, that it is not caused by a normal coming together with a man, as it is a Virgin’s birth. If the most interpreters say about this passage that the birth from Mary was not a normal work, why do you, Arian, regard the Word of God as a work?⁵⁵

Ambrose sees the virginal birth as a common acknowledgement between the Arians and the belief he represents. Ariel Laughton has noticed this, and points at the problem being that Ambrose saw an Arian mix between the divine and the human generation:

In *De fide*, Ambrose had labeled “Arians” those who had mixed the mysterious divine generation of the Son with generation of the flesh and thus improperly attributed the lowliness of humanity to the nature of the unified God. In *De institutione*, his earlier anxiety for the absolute

⁵¹ As in the Creed of Sirmium 359, Kelly 2006, 289.

⁵² Neumann 1962, 210. On the issue he refers to Joussard, *Marie à travers la patristique*, 88–90.

⁵³ Huhn 1954, 13. Huhn quotes as proof a Greek Nestorian saying published by Friedrich Loofs in *Nestoriana: die Fragmente des Nestorius*, Halle 1905, 273. It explains that the Arians, Eunomians, Apollinarians, and their successors all used the title *Theotokos* for Mary. The text is from about one hundred years after the outbreak of Arianism and might well reflect Homoian views in the late fourth century.

⁵⁴ Haugaard 1960.

⁵⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* III 14.114. *Scio autem aliquos dicere inoperatum etiam incarnationis esse mysterium, quod non sit virilis copulae usus operatus, quia partus est virginis. Si ergo plerique hoc loco nec Mariae partum opus esse dixerunt, tu, Arriane, opus putas esse dei verbum?*

unity of the Father and Son is reiterated as a concern for the divinity of the Son in the face of his possible mixture with lowly flesh through human parturition.⁵⁶

I agree with Laughton on the first part of her sentence but would like to adjust the latter statement. Ambrose generally evaluates human sexuality and the ability to procreate in a positive way, as is seen in *De paradiso* and *Exameron*.⁵⁷ I think the different accents Laughton sees depends on the different audiences addressed as well as the different goals of the two texts, *De fide* and *De institutione virginis*. The five books of *De fide* were given as sermons, spoken to a mixed congregation. *De institutione virginis*, on the other hand, with its guiding efforts on living in virginity, was directed towards the virgins of his congregation.

It is difficult to determine with precision where the dividing lines were between different parties in the Christological controversy; linguistic differences, political ambitions, and dividing metaphysical starting points existed. The Church historian, Socrates, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, has a chapter about the three Homoian Councils in Sirmium. According to their anathemas, which Socrates quotes, they were opposed to the term *homoousios* since the word was not recorded in the Scripture. Of Mary is said that “if anyone shall dare to assert that the Unbegotten, or a part of him, was born of Mary, let him be anathema”⁵⁸ The Unbegotten is the Father. Later in the same formula it is said: “If anyone declares that the Son that was born of Mary was man only, let him be anathema. If any man affirming him that was born of Mary to be God and man, shall imply the unbegotten God himself, let him be anathema.” It also stated that “the Son assumed the human nature through which he suffered, from the Virgin Mary”.⁵⁹ The Oxford theologian John Norman Davidson Kelly (1909–1997) in his *Early Christian Creeds* quotes from the third Council of Sirmium about Mary: “the Son took flesh or body, that is, man, from the womb of the Virgin Mary”, and “he took from the Virgin Mary manhood”.⁶⁰

The formulas of the council in Sirmium indicate, perhaps, a certain reluctance to use the word “god” (with a meaning of the divine and eternal Son) for Mary’s son. In that case, the Homoian avoided calling Mary *Theotokos* or *Mater Dei*, and this explains Ambrose’s use of the title in *De virginibus*. If this is the case, then Ambrose’s use of *Mater Dei* is significant for his early pro-Nicaean language. On the other hand, the creedal formula from Constantinople 360 did call the divine Son “God of God”. Noteworthy is that Ambrose does not mention Mariology among the Arian errors in his

⁵⁶ Laughton 2010, 70.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3, *Protology: Deus creator omnium*, above. In Chapter 5, *Eschatology: Nec timeo mori*, I will return to the question of the good of marriage in the writings of Ambrose.

⁵⁸ Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.30. Trans. NPNF2 2.

⁵⁹ Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.30. Trans. NPNF2 2.

⁶⁰ Kelly 2006, 286.

enumeration of such in the passage *Expositio dogmatis Arriani* in *De fide* I.⁶¹

The sources do not clearly reveal a distinct Arian/Homoian Mariology, and thus nothing can be ascertained with certainty. This brief outline of the anti-Nicaeanism and its Mariology at the time of Ambrose, however, has not shown that the Mariology should be regarded as a controversial issue.

I end this passage with some words on the term Homoians/Arians. I have, in this section, used the term Homoians for the Anti-Nicene group in Milan. The Anglican theologian Rowan Williams (1950–) declared, in a review of the English professor Richard P. C. Hanson’s (1916–1988) study *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, that, “the time has probably come to relegate the term ‘Arianism’ at least to inverted commas, and preferably to oblivion.”⁶² Hanson wrote: “The Arian controversy is a serious misnomer.”⁶³ During the fourth century, in different areas of the empire, and under the jurisdiction of different bishops and emperors, the legacy of the creed of Nicaea 325 was questioned. The objection from Williams and Hanson concerns whether all of these should be classified as Arian. During the hundred years of Nicaean debate, however, a proper way to express the mystery of the Trinity was sought.⁶⁴ In Ambrose’s writings the *Arriani* play the role of arch-heretics against whom a stand can be taken. The Arians are used as a model for heresy and in that way fulfil a rhetorical purpose. At the same time there was a real trinitarian debate between groups with different competing views about the leading influence in the Church. None of these liked or affirmed being called Arians. Ambrose writes about his opponents: “Those refuse being called Arians, even if they expose Arian views.”⁶⁵ Ambrose did not simply create Arianism as a rhetorical antithesis, but he made good use of its rhetorical potential to give his contributions to the Trinitarian debate.

4.3.2. Ambrose’s Nicaeanism

As for the most part of Ambrose’s texts, the treatises I work with in this chapter existed originally as sermons,⁶⁶ and were later edited for publishing. Ambrose was not a systematic theologian, but rather a preacher for the Christian community. Nonetheless, he had a very clear

⁶¹ Ambrose, *fid.* I 5.34–42. This is true also of other passages where the error of Arius is described, as *fid.* I 18.120–20.133.

⁶² Williams 1992, 102.

⁶³ Hanson 1988, xvii.

⁶⁴ Specific studies dealing with this period are Simonetti 1975, Hanson 1988, Williams 1993, Ayres 2004.

⁶⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 9.96. *Et Arrianos se negare consuerunt, qui proponunt Arri quaestiones!*

⁶⁶ The editing work is sometimes not done at all, as when Ambrose in a passage explicitly refers to the reading of the day’s service, in *fid.* II 8.73.

basic pattern of Nicene theology. The English Church historian Lewis Ayres (1966–) defines Nicaeanism in the 370–380s according to three points:

1. a clear version of the person and nature distinction, entailing the principle that whatever is predicated of the divine nature is predicated of the three persons equally and understood to be one (this distinction may or may not be articulated via a consistent technical terminology);
2. clear expression that the eternal generation of the Son occurs within the unitary and incomprehensible divine being;
3. clear expression of the doctrine that the persons work inseparably.⁶⁷

The content of *De fide*, *De Spiritu Sancto*, and *De incarnationis* is clearly pro-Nicene,⁶⁸ without being a systemised exposition of the creed of Nicaea 325. Ambrose calls the 318 Fathers of Nicaea “our fathers”.⁶⁹ Ambrose discretely criticises the Council of Rimini 359, which at the time he wrote was an official Council.⁷⁰ Ambrose even quotes an anathema from Rimini to support his anti-Arian view: “It was enough to say, that those who say that Christ is created, is condemned”.⁷¹ His concern is to refute those he calls the *Ariani* in his own time, and to explain in opposition to them an orthodox and proper understanding of the inner-trinitarian theology and the eternal being of the Godhead.

Ambrose reads unity and differentiation in the divine and triune Godhead. He ascribes to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit the same divine *substantia*, which is the Latin term for *ousia* he uses.⁷² He sometimes uses the Greek term *homoousios*.⁷³ Ambrose does not regard

⁶⁷ The definition is verbatim from Ayres 2004, 236.

⁶⁸ Carefully mapped in Dudden 1935, 566–580.

⁶⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* I 18.119. *Nostrī patres*. The Council of Nicaea is mentioned several times, as in for example *fid.* I Prol 5; *fid.* III 15.125.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* I 18.122. The synod intended not to change the Creed of Nicaea 325, but in fact they did stroke out the word *homoousios* from the Creed. Ambrose calls those bishops who withdrew from the council, “the second Correction”. This interpretation is given of de Romestin in NPNF2 10, note 1 page 221.

⁷¹ Ambrose, *fid.* III 16.132. *Satis fuerat dicere: Qui dicit creaturam Christum, anathema sit*. Markschiefs clarifies in his translation: “auf der Synode von Rimini”, FChr 47:2.

⁷² For example, Ambrose, *fid.* III 14.108. [...] *loquar unius filium cum patre esse substantiae*. *De fide* III is from 14.108–17.142 a cohesive argumentation on the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father.

⁷³ Ambrose, *fid.* III 15.126. “Rightly we call the Son homoousios of the Father”, *recte ergo homousion patri filium dicimus*.

unity only in substance, but also in all divine qualities, including power, majesty, eternity, life, omnipotence, work, peace etc.⁷⁴

If, then, there is one peace (*pax*), one grace (*gratia*), one charity (*caritas*), one communication (*communicatio*) on the part of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, surely there is one operation (*operatio*), and where there is one operation, certainly the power (*virtus*) cannot be divided, and substance (*substantia*) separated.⁷⁵ [...] also one and the same will (*voluntas*), one calling (*vocatio*), and one giving of commands (*praeceptio*), which may be seen in the great and saving mystery of the Church.⁷⁶

Ambrose ascribes the differentiation (*proprietas*, personal character of each) of the divine persons in their relationship. The Father is unbegotten, the Son is born of the Father (*generatio aeterna*).⁷⁷ The Father is the source (*fons*) and origin (*radix*) of the Son.⁷⁸ The special characters (*proprietas*) of the Son are to be begotten (*generatio*), God (*deus*), Son (*filius*), and Word (*verbum*).⁷⁹ The Spirit proceeds from the Father (and the Son).⁸⁰ Ambrose makes a differentiation in the work of the Trinity as well. For example, Ambrose writes that the Son differentiates from the Spirit, in that one was incarnate and died in the flesh, the other did not.⁸¹

The complex situation in Milan was the outer context of Ambrose's dogmatic writings on trinitarian theology. When Auxentius died in 374, he had been bishop since 355. He had had Homoian tendencies and supported the Council of Rimini 359. One can therefore assume a Homoian influence among the clerics and congregation of Milan at that time. Ambrose had lived in Milan for about four years before being ordained bishop. It must be assumed that he had a good knowledge of the Homoian theological culture in the city. Ambrose knew the culture of Milan well having lived in the city for about seven years before he published his first

⁷⁴ Markschies lists Ambrose's predicates of the Son, which is a complete list of the traditional terms: *beatus, inaccessibilis, inaestimabilis, incomprehensibilis, immortalis, (omni)potens, perfectus, permanens, solus, sciens omnia*, Markschies 1995, 203.

⁷⁵ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 12.131.

⁷⁶ Ambrose, *Spir.* II 10.101.

⁷⁷ The term *generatio aeterna* in regard of the Son appears 15 times in the nine trinitarian texts, according to CCTA.

⁷⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 10.132. *Fons pater fili est, radix pater fili est.*

⁷⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* II Prol. 2. *Proprietas itaque sunt generatio, deus, filius, verbum.* Markschies 1995, 203.

⁸⁰ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 11.120. *Spiritus quoque sanctus, cum procedit a patre et a filio, non separatur.* This should not mistakenly be interpreted as a developed teaching of *filioque*. Dudden quotes more examples from Ambrose's writings and concludes: On this question of the Procession, then, Ambrose's position is not clearly defined", Dudden 1935, 575. Dassmann writes: "Es gibt Aussagen in *De Spiritu Sancto*, die sich mit entsprechendem Auslegungsgeschick sowohl für wie auch gegen die Beteiligung des Sohnes an der Hervorbringung des Heiligen Geistes heranziehen lassen [...] Ambrosius an diesem Problem nicht interessiert war", Dassmann 2004, 68.

⁸¹ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 9.106–107.

writing, *De virginibus*.⁸² According to Daniel Williams, in his study *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflict*, and also Neill McLynn, in *Ambrose of Milan – Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Ambrose was pro-Nicene but ambivalent in this during his first years as bishop. It is only in 378, in *De fide*, where he officially takes a stand for the Nicene theology for the first time.⁸³ Both Christoph Marksches, in *Ambrosius von Mailand und die Trinitätstheologie*,⁸⁴ and Ernst Dassmann, in *Ambrosius von Mailand – Leben und Werk*,⁸⁵ on the other hand, emphasise the bishop's clear pro-Nicene standpoint and precise Neo-Nicene language from his first writings. Although Ambrose has no outspoken polemic against what he calls the *Ariani* in his texts before *De fide*, his use of Athanasius as authority, a letter-exchange with Basil the Great,⁸⁶ and his use of the title *Mater Dei* do indicate a pro-Nicaenism in his early writings too. The culture in Milan was, however, peaceful in 374, no violence is reported to have taken place at that time and no Homoian priests were excommunicated then, as far as we know. One can easily presume, therefore, that Ambrose published no openly anti-Arian texts his first years as bishop not only due to tactical reasoning but also for reasons pertaining to pastoral care.

In 378 the Western Emperor Gratian urged⁸⁷ Ambrose to explain the orthodox faith: “Your sacred Majesty, has decreed to hear my confession of faith”.⁸⁸ At this time, there was a growing number of Homoians in Milan because many Gothic refugees had come from the zone of instability north of Milan. Shortly after publishing his first books, , since Ambrose had, in his own words, experienced Homoian reactions,⁸⁹ he wrote another three books on *De fide*. In 381 the three books *De Spiritu Sancto* were written. This is the first treatise we know of on the divine Spirit in the Western Church. During the same year, or the next, a single book about Christology, *De incarnationis*, was published. It falls naturally together with *De fide* and *De Spiritu Sancto* into a series of nine dogmatic books on the Nicene faith all written within the space of a few years.

⁸² Laughton 2010, argues that Ambrose chose virginity as a subject all could agree on, consciously avoiding the Christological debate.

⁸³ *De fide* “marked a turning-point in Ambrose’s career”, Williams 1995, 153.

⁸⁴ “Eine bewußte und frühe Entscheidung des Ambrosius für den neunizänischen Kurs diagnostizierbar ist”, Marksches 1995, 5.

⁸⁵ Dassmann 2004, 61–80.

⁸⁶ The answer from Basil is unfortunately the only letter that remains. Marksches writes that Basil from start on regarded Ambrose as a pro-Nicene theologian, Marksches 1995, 85.

⁸⁷ It is an insoluble scholarly discussion to exactly date the first two books of *De fide*, 378 or 380 are the main proposals. Dassmann 2004, 66–69.

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* I Prol. 1.

⁸⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* III 1.1–2. About that certain malicious minds continuously persist as Homoians.

Ambrose's main Christological treatises were thus written in opposition to the Homoianism of his time. Ambrose tied all the different anti-Nicene parties and groups together under one term: *Ariani*. His Christology was thus written as a polemic against a rhetorically constructed enemy, which he denounced as "outwardly human but on the inside filled with the madness of beasts",⁹⁰ and "heretics and Antichrist".⁹¹ Ambrose even regarded those *Ariani* who denied their Arianism, as such.⁹²

The theological content of Ambrose's trinitarian theology has been valued differently in different times. In the East, the reception in his own era was immediately positive with at least two different Greek translations of *De fide* being made.⁹³ In modern times, however, Ambrose's trinitarian theology has been regarded both as theologically uninteresting, and as a creative Nicaenism. The German Church historian Hans von Campenhausen (1903–1989) writes about Ambrose's texts: "*fides quae creditur* zu lehren, ohne von *fides qua creditur* zu wissen".⁹⁴ Another German theologian, Ludwig Hermann, writes: "Der Theologe Ambrosius von Mailand ist kein eigenständiger Denker".⁹⁵ Lewis Ayres calls Ambrose's description of the relationship between Father and Son as "a rather clumsy portrayal".⁹⁶ On the other hand, as a creative inventor of a distinctively original Latin neo-Nicaenism, Christoph Marksches writes that one can:

den schöpferischen Rezeptionsprozeß beobachten, durch den Ambrosius sich hier zugleich traditionelle lateinische und moderne griechische Trinitätstheologie selbständig aneignete und für seine Leser (bzw. Hörer) nutzbar machte.⁹⁷

My task is not to evaluate the originality of Ambrose's theology or thoroughly investigate his trinitarian texts, but rather to understand his view of Mary's virginity in Christ's conception and development in the womb.

In the Council of Aquileia in 381, the same year as the Constantinople Council, Ambrose took a stand against all kinds of Arianism in North Italy. Two Homoian bishops were present, Palladius of Ratiaria and Secundianus of Singidunum, and they were put to an ecclesiastical trial.

⁹⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* II 1.15. *Humana adopertos specie, intus dementiae bestialis.*

⁹¹ Ambrose, *fid.* II 15.135. "The apostle John says that heretics are Antichrist", *Iohannes dicit haereticos esse antechristos.* The Bible reference is 1 John 4:1–6).

⁹² Ambrose, *fid.* IV 9.96. *Et Arrianos se negare consuerunt, qui proponunt Arri quastiones.*

⁹³ Marksches 1995, 165.

⁹⁴ Campenhausen 1929, 277.

⁹⁵ Hermann 1954, 144.

⁹⁶ Ayres 2004, 262.

⁹⁷ Marksches 1995, 213.

They were both condemned and removed from their sees.⁹⁸ Dassmann calls this council “das theologische Ende des Arianismus im Westen”.⁹⁹ The purpose of the council in Aquileia was not to discuss theological issues, but to end Homoianism in the West.

Ambrose’s struggle for the Nicene faith reached another climax in 385–386.¹⁰⁰ The empress Justina applied for a basilica in Milan, Basilica Portiana, for Homoian worship. This was a request Ambrose refused harshly. As a response, in the Holy week of 386 the emperor Valentinian II sent soldiers to the Basilica Nova, where Ambrose presided, to secure the delivery of the aforementioned basilica. Ambrose, together with some of his faithful followers, occupied it singing hymns, and saying prayers. At the end, the Homoians had to accept that they were unable to claim any church for their own use in Milan. This dramatic event must be understood as the conclusion, the defeat, of the anti-Nicene party in Milan, even if later texts also include an anti-Arian polemic.¹⁰¹

4.4. Mary in Ambrose’s Christology

One of the questions of the present study is to understand how Ambrose incorporated the concept of Mary’s virginity in his overall pattern of faith. In this section I investigate Mary in Ambrose’s Christology.

4.4.1. Mary, Mother of God

Previously, in Chapter 2.2.3: *Theotokos – Mater Dei*, I discussed Ambrose’s expression *Mater Dei*. The term is his Latin translation of the Greek term *Theotokos*, birth-giver of God. Ambrose introduced this expression into the Latin world, and it signalled an orthodox belief in the content of the incarnation: Mary gave birth to God. Surprisingly, *Mater Dei* is not used in Ambrose’s trinitarian writings, even if the meaning of the expression is clearly there: Christ is God. Reiterating the title *Mater Dei* was not the only way of signalling orthodoxy. In the text *De institutione virginis* Ambrose points at Mary and interprets her name to mean: “God of my birth” (*deus*

⁹⁸ Fortunately, there is not only the acts from the council remaining, but also a report from the Homoian side, ed. by Gryson, in SCH 267. The way the council was held in putting the two Homoian bishops for an unprepared trial and condemnation, is not easy to regard as a good ecclesiastical policy. Both Campenhausen 1929, 80 and Ayres 2004, 265–266, are very critical towards Ambrose. Dassmann evaluates the way the council was held in a positive way though, Dassmann 2004, 78–80.

⁹⁹ Dassmann 2004, 78.

¹⁰⁰ For more about the conflict in my study, see Chapter 1.3.2: *Ambrose’s Pastoral Duties*.

¹⁰¹ For example, in Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 10.65. One who has noticed this is Laughton 2010, 55–76.

ex genere meo).¹⁰² In the same writing, Ambrose uses the expressions Mary “has brought God” (*deum intulit*),¹⁰³ and she “carried God” (*deum portauerat*).¹⁰⁴ From her, Ambrose writes “God was born from the virgin” (*deus ex uirgine nasceretur*),¹⁰⁵ and in Mary, “in her womb the virgin carried God” (*in suo utero deum uirgo portaret*).¹⁰⁶ In accordance with Ambrose’s belief in the incarnation of the Son, the union between the divine and the human substance in Christ makes Mary, as mother of the little baby Jesus, simultaneously the mother of God, *Mater Dei*. In *De fide* IV Ambrose writes about Mary’s visit to Elisabeth, and states that God was there, deep inside Mary’s body and womb, as acknowledged by John the Baptist.¹⁰⁷

Ambrose makes a point of the two-fold birth of Christ. As God and Son, Christ is born not only of Mary, but also in the eternity begotten of the Father. Repeatedly in his dogmatical writings, Ambrose returns to the Son’s eternal begetting of the Father. Ambrose understands the divine begetting as an impassible extension of the divine nature.¹⁰⁸ The divine Son exists in eternity and his begetting of the Father is not analogous to a normal human birth. The eternal begetting of the Son is commented on in length from a wide perspective by means of many Bible quotations. Still, Ambrose allows it to remain a mystery which no one will ever fully comprehend. In eternity, the Son is begotten of the Father, not made.¹⁰⁹ Ambrose’s purpose of writing *De fide* was to prove the eternity of the Son, and to make it clear that “he is begotten, not made.”¹¹⁰ In one short passage of *De fide* V 11.137–145 Ambrose reiterates the sentence “The Son is not a creation”, as many as eight times.¹¹¹

This eternal begetting is connected to the virgin birth of Christ. The divine mystery of paternal begetting requires, in Ambrose’s view, a virginal human birth. In *De fide* V Ambrose writes that “he was created of

¹⁰² Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.33. In the same passage Ambrose also etymologically derives Mary to *mare*, sea. More about Ambrose’s Marian etymologies, Huhn 1954, 18–19.

¹⁰³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.33.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.45.

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 17.104.

¹⁰⁶ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 17.108.

¹⁰⁷ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 9.113–114.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Ambrose, *fid.* II Prol. 3. “From the One ‘who is’, comes the begetting, from the Eternal One ‘God’, from the Father ‘the Son’, from God ‘the Word’”, *ex eo enim “qui est”, generatio, ex sempiterno “deus”, ex patre “filius”, ex deo “verbum”*. Later in the passage, Ambrose mentions in the context three basic relational terms: *generatio, filius, unigenitus*, Ambrose, *fid.* II Prol. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* I 14.89. In context an interpretation of Isaiah 53:8: *Generationem inquit, non creationem*. See also *fid.* I 14.93. *Non enim deus factus, sed deus dei filius natus est, postea autem secundum carnem homo factus est ex Maria*.

¹¹⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* II 1.1. *Sempiternum esse dei filium, non dissimilem patris, gentium, non creatum*.

¹¹¹ Ambrose, *fid.* V 11.137–145. *Non ergo creatura filius*.

the virgin, so that he would be believed to be born of the Father”.¹¹² Christ’s virgin birth is thus a sign of the eternal divinity of the Son, a sign of the eternal begetting of the Father. Ambrose writes that Christ is “Son of God, and son of the Virgin”.¹¹³ Both the inner-trinitarian, eternal, unimaginable occurrence of paternal begetting and Mary’s virginal birth of Christ demand our wonder: “Admirable is not only Christ’s generation of the Father, but also admirable is his generation of the Virgin”.¹¹⁴ A passage in *De fide* III explains: “Born without human father according to the incarnation, and begotten without mother according the divine generation”.¹¹⁵ This relation between the eternal begetting and the virginal birth is a thought not found exclusively in the trinitarian dogmatical work. In *Expositio in Lucam* Ambrose writes: “The *generationes* are twofold in Christ: one Fatherly, the other Motherly, the Fatherly divine, and the Motherly when he came down to our distress and needs”.¹¹⁶

Each time Mary is mentioned in *De fide*, it is as mother of Christ in time as counterpart to the eternal generation from the Father. The first example can be found in the first book, the very first sentence after the prologue: The Son is “begotten of the Father before time, and later born of the virgin.”¹¹⁷ Christ is God and Man, and he receives his “Godhead from his Father, Manhood of his Mother, the first being before all things, the later derived from the Virgin”.¹¹⁸ Also, in eternity the Son is subdued in his Father, but naturally in his human body, subdued in his mother.¹¹⁹ We can hear the bishop preach emphatically to his congregation of different backgrounds and classes: First and last, these two mysterious and inconceivable *generationes* demand worship and devotion from the faithful.

Ambrose stresses the eternal divinity of the Son throughout *De fide*. The incarnation did not diminish the Son’s divinity. Ambrose points at the different events that appeared when Christ was born:

As man he is perceived, as Lord he is adored. He is laid in swaddling cloths, and shines in the stars. The cradle shows that he was born, the

¹¹² Ambrose, *fid.* V 4.54. *Creatur ex virgine, ut ex deo natus esse credatur.*

¹¹³ Ambrose, *fid.* V 18.221. *Dei filius et filius virginis.*

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *fid.* I 12.77. *Non sola admirabilis ex patre generatio Christi, admirabilis etiam ipsa generatio eius ex virgine.*

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* III 11.88. *Sine patre secundum incarnationem natus est et sine matre secundum divinam generationem.* This thought returns in *De fide* V where Ambrose writes about Christ’s human subordination in relation to his earthly parents, *fid.* V 14.173.

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, in *Luc.* II 64. *Duae sunt in Christo generationes: una est paterna, materna altera; paterna illa diuinior, materna uero quae in nostrum laborem usumque descendit.*

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *fid.* I 1.6. *Natum ex patre ante tempora et ex virgine postea editum.*

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* I 14.91. *Divinitatis ex patre, carnis ex matre, illam, quae ante omnia, istam, quae ex virgine.*

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* II 10.88. *In eo ergo legis subditum patri, in corpore scilicet, in quo erat subditus matri.*

stars that he reigns. The flesh is what lays in swaddling cloths, the divinity is served by the angels. So, the worthy of his majestic nature is not passed away, and the truth of the assumed flesh is approved.¹²⁰

In this way Ambrose maintains the distinction between humanity and divinity, and their respective dignity and properties. The stars and angels are under his divine control, while in his humanity, he is helpless and swaddled in cloths.

The fundament of Ambrose's Mariology is that Mary was chosen for the incarnation of the divine Son, who is God in the same existence as the Father is.

4.4.2. Mary, Mother of man

4.4.2.1. Christ as the Work of God

Ambrose writes in *De fide* that human nature prerequisites being made: "The nature of a human body is createdness."¹²¹ Every individual man and woman in existence, from Adam onwards, has a beginning. Ambrose sees the humanity of Christ of being of a material precisely like ours. Ambrose did not divide the two Testaments; he highly estimated both the Old and the New Testament, and read Christ in both the Old and the New.¹²² He firmly believed that in the history of Israel the Triune God is revealed, and that Christians also find important moral lessons in it. The Old Testament also contains the human lineage of Jesus. An example of the latter is found in *De patriarchis* where Ambrose comments on Christ's kingly line from Judah, and his priestly line from Levi.¹²³ In *De fide* Ambrose points at Romans 1:3, which calls Christ a creation of David's seed,¹²⁴ and of Abraham's seed.¹²⁵ Christ is from the line of Abraham and David in the Old Testament and bears the Israelite heritage his body.

At the same time, Ambrose speaks of the humanity of Christ as a new beginning. Christ is not precisely like any of us: "As also we are created, there is difference between us and Christ, and between the elements and

¹²⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* I 4.31. *Ut homo cernitur, ut dominus adoratur; iacet in pannis, sed fulget in stellis; cunae nascentem indicant, stellae dominantem; caro est, quae involvitur, divinitas, cui ab angelis ministratur. Ita nec dignitas naturalis maiestatis amittitur et adsumptae carnis veritas conprobatur.*

¹²¹ Ambrose, *fid.* III 2.7. *Corporis est, quod etiam factus adseritur.*

¹²² The big part of Ambrose's exegetical writings is dealing with Old Testament books and persons. One interesting detail is the story of Augustine asking for a Bible book to read to understand about Christ. Ambrose recommended him to read the prophet Isaiah, in which Ambrose saw the Gospel of Christ show forth most clearly. This recommendation gives insights both in Ambrose's Christological view on the Old Testament, and in his technique of spiritual guidance. Augustine, *Confessiones* VIII 5.13.

¹²³ Ambrose, *patr.* 3.15–4.16.

¹²⁴ Ambrose, *fid.* III 3.34. *Factus est ex semine David.*

¹²⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* III 11.84. *Semen Abrahae.*

Christ”.¹²⁶ His birth was a “new law of birth”.¹²⁷ I do see a theological paradox here, a paradox that ought not to be dissolved. The humanity of Christ is explained by Ambrose both in continuity with Israel and as a new creation. Ambrose’s view of Christ as a new creation is thus now explored in this present study. Ambrose writes in an interpretation of the angel’s message to the shepherds on the night when Christ was born (Luke 2:8–14):

*To you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). To us then, was born that which was not before – that is, a son of the Virgin, a body from Mary. As man he was made after us, whereas as God he was before us.*¹²⁸

According to Ambrose’s theology, the divine Son is eternal God, and the existence of the humanity of Christ, his body and soul, unlike a normal conception, is due to a new creation. In the incarnation of the Son “the cause was missing (*causa deerat*), but a son was born”.¹²⁹ The *causa* in the conception was understood by Ambrose to be the male sperm, which was missing in the case of Christ’s virginal birth. The active principle for the creative act of the incarnation, was the Trinity.

Ambrose does not exclusively ascribe the incarnation to one of the divine persons, but rather to any of the three. On the other hand, there is an interesting development in the Nicene Creed on behalf of the Spirit. The bishops at Nicaea 325 accepted the formula “he came down and was incarnate, became human”. In Constantinople 381 a closer definition was made: The Son “became incarnate from the holy Spirit and the virgin Mary”.¹³⁰ Ambrose, in line with this development, tends to explain the Spirit, more than the other person of the trinity, as the active principle of the incarnation. Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit (*opus Spiritus*).¹³¹ As when the angel visited Mary, and she affirmed the incarnation: “The Holy Spirit come upon her, and was about to have her womb filled of grace with the heavenly Word”.¹³² The virginal conception is thus described as a complete filling of the Holy Spirit.

There is a problem in the expression “of the Holy Spirit” which makes further specifications necessary. The incarnation is an *opera ad extra* of the Trinity, an outer work in which the Trinity as one God works together.

¹²⁶ Ambrose, *fid.* I 16.100. *Ergo quoniam et nos creati sumus, inter nos et Christum, inter Christum et elementa nulla distantia est.*

¹²⁷ Ambrose, *fid.* I 12.77. *Causa deerat, et generabatur filius. Unde leges novatae partus?*

¹²⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* III 8.55. *Nobis ergo quod non erat natum est, hoc est puer ex virgine, corpus ex Maria; hoc enim post nos, illud ante nos.*

¹²⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* I 12.77. *Causa deerat, et generabatur filius.*

¹³⁰ *Concilium Nicaenum I/Constantinopolitanum I: Expositio fidei.* Text and trans. COD.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *Spir.* III 11.79. *Incarnatio autem opus spiritus sit.*

¹³² Ambrose, *Spir.* I 7.85. *In eam sanctus spiritus superveniret, et plenum gratiae uterum verbo esset habitura caelesti.*

Ambrose ascribes the creative principle not only to the Spirit, but also to the Son himself and to the Father:

[...] he took on flesh for us [...] that we may see the divine power in the assumption of the body. As we read that the Father created the sacrament of the Lord's incarnation, the Spirit also created it, so we read that Christ himself also created his own body. For the Father created, according to what is written: *The Lord created me* (Proverbs 8:22), and elsewhere: *God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law* (Galatians 4:4). The Spirit created the whole mystery too, according to what we read: *Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 1:18).¹³³

This is a good example of the patristic trinitarian belief *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*. The operation of the Trinity, in creating, reconciling and perfecting the world, is undivided, a work of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit.¹³⁴ The Father created, the Spirit created, and Christ himself worked the incarnation. There is unity in the divine operation.

That notwithstanding, Ambrose mostly refers to the Spirit as the active principle of the incarnation. Both Matthew (Matthew 1:18, 20) and Luke (Luke 1:35) refer to the Spirit as the author of the incarnation. The Son was incarnated "when the Spirit came upon the Virgin",¹³⁵ Ambrose writes. Many times throughout Ambrose's writings this coming upon of the Spirit is expressed as the biblical picture of a cloud descending, as in Luke 1:35 *the power of the Most High will overshadow you (obumbro, obumbratio)*.¹³⁶ In *De Spiritu Sancto* II 5.38 Ambrose uses the expression *opus Spiritus* as many as three times: "So the birth from the Virgin is the work of the Spirit. The fruit of the womb is the work of the Spirit. [...] the flower of the root is the work of the Spirit."¹³⁷

In Late Antiquity the male seed was regarded as the active principle in a human conception. Without the male seed, there was no human conception or pregnancy.¹³⁸ One might think that it was an uncreated,

¹³³ Ambrose, *Spir.* II 6.59. [...] *carnem pro nobis suscepit [...] ut divinam potentiam in ipsa corporis adsumptione videamus. Etenim sicut legimus quia creavit pater incarnationis dominicae sacramentum, creavit et spiritus, ita etiam legimus quod et ipse suum corpus creavit. Creavit enim pater, secundum quod scriptum est: Dominus creavit me, et alibi: Misit deus filium suum factum ex muliere, factum sub lege. Creavit et spiritus illud omne mysterium, secundum quod legimus quia inventa est Maria in utero habens de spiritu sancto.*

¹³⁴ Compare Ambrose, *Spir.* II 12.130, that there is one work in the Trinity, *opus unum est*.

¹³⁵ Ambrose, *Spir* II 5.37. *Spiritu in virginem superveniente.*

¹³⁶ Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 1.16; *myst.* 13; in *Luc.* X 42. More about the overshadowing of the Spirit, also in relation to the Christian baptism, see Huhn 1954, 69–71.

¹³⁷ Ambrose, *Spir.* II 5.38. *Opus ergo Spiritus Virginis partus est. Opus Spiritus fructus est ventris, secundum quod scriptum est: Benedicta tu inter mulieres, et benedictus fructus ventris tui. Opus Spiritus flos radices est etc.*

¹³⁸ Both for example Origen and Ambrose alluded to a vulture's virginal birth, an animal that after all is something else than a human.

eternal humanity brought forth in Mary, but Ambrose rejects this opinion, and explains the creative operation of God:

Now I know that some assert that the mystic incarnate form was uncreated, forasmuch as nothing was done therein through intercourse with a man, because our Lord was the offspring of a virgin. If, then, many have, on the strength of this passage, asserted that neither that which was brought forth of Mary was produced by a creative operation, dare you, disciple of Arius, think that the Word of God is something so produced.¹³⁹

The normal procedure of any conception is not like Christ's. He has the same human nature as everyone else, however, a nature in union with the uncreated divine nature of God.

We have now traced a basic condition of Ambrose's Mariology: The incarnation of the divine Son is an act of divine creation; in the words of the Niceno-Constantinopolitanian *incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto*. The next task in this present study is to investigate more closely what the same Creed calls *et Maria virgine humanatus est*.¹⁴⁰ How did Ambrose understand Mary's role when the Son took on flesh?

4.4.2.2. The Humanity of Christ from the Virgin Mary

In Ambrose's trinitarian writings, short Mariological formulas¹⁴¹ such as *creatus ex virgine*,¹⁴² *puer ex virgine*, *corpus ex Maria*,¹⁴³ *ex alvo virginis processisti*,¹⁴⁴ *creatur ex virgine*,¹⁴⁵ or *factus ex virgine*,¹⁴⁶ recur time and again. Christ was made from Mary, from her flesh and blood, and in her womb. His body "is a fruit of the virgin".¹⁴⁷ According to Ambrose, this put Mary in a unique position in humanity for all time: "Before all then, is the generation; within all and for the good of all created things; begotten of the Father, above the Law, made from Mary, under the Law".¹⁴⁸ The quotation uses one term, *natus* (a synonym to *generatio*), for the Son's begetting from the Father; and another term for the making (*factus*) from Mary. Christ is *natus ex patre*, and *factus ex Maria*. This important differentiation between begotten (*generatio* or *natus*, a term Ambrose uses for Christ's birth from Mary as well) and made (*factus*, a term never

¹³⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* III 14.114.

¹⁴⁰ *Concilium Constantinopolitanum I: Expositio fidei CL patrum*. Text and trans. COD.

¹⁴¹ For a more comprehensive mapping on Ambrose's terminology on the incarnation in relation to Mary, see Neumann 1963, 79–81.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *fid.* III 7.46, 48.

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *fid.* III 8.55.

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 4.44.

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* V 4.54.

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *fid.* V 18.109.

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 3.54. *Fructus est virginis*.

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* III 9.62. *Ante omnia ergo generatio, inter omnia et propter omnia creatura, natus ex patre supra legem, factus ex Maria sub lege* (Galatians 4:4).

used in relation to the Father) is conscious,¹⁴⁹ and accentuated even in texts outside the texts treated in this present chapter: “The Son is begotten, not made, from the Father.”¹⁵⁰

Ambrose, in accordance with the knowledge of his time, ascribes the male seed the creative activity in procreation.¹⁵¹ He understands the male seed as being absent in the incarnation, which points at the mystery. Ambrose writes in *De fide* III about the conception and forming of Christ in the womb of Mary: “Nothing was done therein through intercourse with a man, because our Lord was the offspring of a virgin”.¹⁵² Ambrose uses a similar expression in *De institutione virginis*, where he writes: “Mary has given birth to the author of salvation without the ordinary bodily coming together”.¹⁵³ The word for “coming together” (*commixtio*, the verbal form *commisceo*) is, according to James Adams’ *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, used “in medical and technical writers”¹⁵⁴ to refer to intercourse and conception.¹⁵⁵

Turning to Christ in a prayer in the fourth book of *De fide* Ambrose writes: “You alone, in the mystery of the incarnation, are, as I have read, the only begotten Son of the Father, you alone was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin”.¹⁵⁶ In this context of prayer, Christ is addressed “born of the Spirit and the Virgin”. The conjunction of Christ in relation to Mary is not “from” (*ex*) as is the case used in relation to the Father and the Spirit, but “and” (*et*). The choice to use conjunction “and” ought to be understood as Mary’s passive cooperation. Ambrose sees the incarnation as a mystery. It is a creative operation, something extraordinary and a one-time event. At the same time Mary was understood to have received in her womb in a passive female way, in the same way as women were understood to do naturally in the first phase of any pregnancy.

De fide is the first of the dogmatic writings; *De Spiritu Sancto* followed next; and *De incarnationis* was the last. During their years of composition, the emperor and other members of Ambrose’s congregation must have reacted to his writings and asked him to specify Mary’s function in the incarnation. In *De fide* Mary’s function is mainly expressed by formulas, such as *ex Maria virgine*, or by general sayings of Christ pertaining to his

¹⁴⁹ For example, Ambrose writes about a difference “between beget and create”, *inter genere et creare*, not understood by the Arians. Ambrose, *fid.* I 16.100.

¹⁵⁰ This example is found in Ambrose, *virginit.* 4.18. *In patre semper, natus, non factus.*

¹⁵¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 9.73.

¹⁵² Ambrose, *fid.* III 14.114. *Non sit virilis copulae usus operates, quia partus est virginis.*

¹⁵³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 14.88. *Sine ulla commixtione corporeae consuetudinis auctorem salutis uirgo generavit.*

¹⁵⁴ Adams 1982, 181.

¹⁵⁵ Peter Brown draws to hastily a line between such an expression of Ambrose and a “sharp fear of every admixture”, P. Brown 2008, 362.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *fid.* IV 4.44. *Sed solum te unigenitum filium legi ex patre natum, solum te ex spiritu sancto accipi et virgine secundum incarnationis sacramenta generatum.*

being and taking flesh from Mary. In *De Spiritu Sancto*, there is an interesting passage, where Ambrose calls Mary the rod (*virga*), and Christ the flower of this rod. The essence of Ambrose's thought is that Mary's womb is a fertile environment in which Christ could grow. Ambrose uses the picture of a lily in a fertile soil. The soil is Mary, and the lily is Christ who "sprouted forth from a virginal womb".¹⁵⁷ This picture is in accordance with Galen's thought of human seed as parallel to the seed of any plant. The text where Ambrose emphasises the contribution of Mary the most and clarifies Mary's function most clearly is in *De incarnationis*. One possible explanation for the increasingly more explicit mentioning of Mary might be his congregation's reactions to his sermons, and the questions they raised about the conception and Mary's pregnancy; such as: The actual conception is extraordinary and a miracle, but what about the pregnancy? Did it work as pregnancies normally do?

In *De incarnationis* the divine operation of the incarnation is described in accordance with Ambrose's knowledge of human sexual procreation. The female cooperation of Mary in the conception and growth of Christ logically follow the medicine of his time. In *De incarnationis* Ambrose writes: "She received power".¹⁵⁸ Further:

Power came into the Virgin [...] But she gave birth to a body, thus, indeed, we have a heavenly descent, but a human conception. The flesh's nature and the nature of the divinity could not have been the same.¹⁵⁹

The divine power (*virtus*) corresponds to the power of Genesis and Growth of the male seed in Galenic medicine. Mary contributed to the incarnation with her body's Nutrition power, by which the body of Christ was formed. Thus, Ambrose regarded Mary's role as being the same as that of the female in any conception. The conception and starting power were a work of God, but Christ received the wholeness of his human body from her womb and blood. Ambrose does not ascribe Mary only a passive female role. She is described as the actively nutritive subject of Christ in the same way as women were seen to be active in any conception and growth. In *De fide* Ambrose writes that the Son assumed his flesh from Mary.¹⁶⁰ In *De incarnationis* Ambrose writes:

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose, *Spir.* II 5.38. *Virginali ex utero germinavit.*

¹⁵⁸ Ambrose, *incarn.* 6.52. *Virtutem accepit.*

¹⁵⁹ Ambrose, *incarn.* 6.61. *Virtus venit in virginem, sicut et angelus ad eam dixit quia virtus altissimi obumbrabit te. Sed natum et corpus ex virgine et ideo caelestis quidem descension, sed humana conception est.*

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* I 14.94. *Factum ex muliere: Adsumpto corpori adscriberetur. Factum ex muliere, per carnis susceptionem.*

Mary produced from herself, in order that what was produced from her, in him, the prerogative of the Lord's production being preserved, there might be the true nature of the body.¹⁶¹

Mary is thus understood as the active and operating subject (*generavit Maria*) giving nutrition to the baby. Ambrose refers to three texts from the Bible i.e., Christ was *from David according to the flesh* (Romans 1:3), *descended from David* (2 Timothy 2:8), and that he was *born of woman* (Galatians 4:4) in this context. Following the ancient medicine, the principle of Mary ought to be understood as her blood being the nutrition faculty; from the very first moment of pregnancy she gave the material needed for arms, veins, artery, nerves, feet etc. to the developing child. Christ was thus being made in her womb. In a passage in *De fide*, Ambrose writes about Mary visiting Elisabeth. In the meeting there were two women and two babies. Of the babies Ambrose writes, that they were both "in being".¹⁶² Christ was in being; Mary produces her child "from herself", an expression that should be understood according to Galen. In accordance with Ambrose's thought the humanity of Christ was produced from Mary's blood.

There is a longer passage in *De incarnationis* worth quoting in full:

103. What could be more of one nature as our flesh with the true body of the Lord? Yet they have both been brought forth by different causes, have arisen from different beginnings. For the flesh of the Lord, generated when *the Spirit came upon* the Virgin (Luke 1:35), did not await the normal intercourse of male and female union. Our flesh cannot be formed within the maternal womb unless the male and female sex bring genital seed to the natural channels. Yet, although the cause of generation was different, nevertheless the flesh of Christ is of one nature with all men.

104. For the virgin giving birth did not change her nature, but established a new method of generating. So, flesh was born of flesh. Thus, the Virgin had of her own what she gave; for the mother did not give something of another, but she contributed her own from her womb in an unusual manner, but in a usual function. Therefore, the Virgin had the flesh, which by customary right of nature she transferred to the foetus. Therefore, the nature of Mary, who gave birth, and that of the Begotten are the same according to the flesh [...] Surely the Son of God is like to us not according to *the whole fullness of deity* (Colossians 2:9), but according to our rational soul, and, to speak more clearly, according to the truth of our human body.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *incarn.* 6.53. *Ex se enim generavit Maria, ut, quod generaretur ex ipsa, in eo salva incarnationis dominicae praerogativa corporis esset vera natura.*

¹⁶² Ambrose, *fid.* IV 9.114–115.

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *incarn.* 9.103–104. [...] *generata non expectavit virilis femineique coitus sollemne commercium [...] Partus enim virginis non naturam mutavit, sed generandi usum novavit; denique caro de carne nata est. Habuit ergo de suo virgo, quod traderet; non enim*

This is a description of the three Galenic powers involved in any procreation: In the case of Christ, however, the power of Genesis is understood as being supernatural, a divine operation. The power of Growth was normally ascribed as being coded in the foetus, originating from the male seed, but the power of Nutrition was from the woman, in Christ's case from Mary. The complete human flesh of Christ was taken from Mary. This is in line with the general view of generation expressed by Ambrose in *De paradiso*. There he writes that the conception in the female womb is a parallel to how the earth, by receiving, confining, and fostering the seed, causes it to grow and produce fruit in time.¹⁶⁴

The thought of a divine creative act in Christ's conception and growth, has a parallel in the creation of Adam, the first human. In *Expositio in Lucam*, the bishop writes: "from the virgin soil Adam was created, from the Virgin Christ."¹⁶⁵ Adam was not a creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), but rather came from the existing element, the soil. He was a creation from the old (*creatio ex vetere*). The virgin soil of the first creation corresponds to the creation of Christ in Mary, the Virgin herself. Another interesting passage on the same subject is found in several letters of a series of six letters of correspondence between Ambrose and a bishop named Sabinus, in which he elucidates Sabinus' questions on the thoughts expressed about creation and fall in *Exameron* and *De paradiso*. The first man, Adam, could easily fall, "though made from virgin clay",¹⁶⁶ but Christ came to restore grace to human nature, "in fact to give it increase, that where sin abounded grace might more abound".¹⁶⁷ This is a reference to Romans 5:20. Ambrose's idea is that the second Adam excels the first, and that is a prerequisite of grace and salvation.

It is a Mariological condition for Ambrose that Christ received his humanity from Mary (*ex Maria*), according to the view of pregnancy commonly held at the time of Ambrose. He shared the opinion that the male seed was the active principle in the conception in the female womb, and the woman's blood was the material principle forming the seed into a complete human being. This was the cultural and philosophical context in the belief that Christ assumed humanity from the Virgin Mary. For Ambrose, the virgin birth is a proof, an evidence, of a divine miracle, "That men may believe he is born of God".¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, as Ambrose

alienum dedit mater, sed proprium e visceribus suis contulit, inusitato modo, sed usitato munere. Habuit igitur carnem virgo, quam naturae sollemnis iure transcripsit in fetum [...]

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *par.* 10.48.

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, in *Luc.* IV 7. *Ex terra uirgine Adam, Christus ex uirgine.*

¹⁶⁶ Ambrose, *epist.* 34.13 (45 PL). *Labi tam facile potuit, ex terra creatus uirgine.*

¹⁶⁷ Ambrose, *epist.* 34.15 (45 PL). *Venit Dominus, qui reformaret naturae gratiam, immo auget, ut ubi superabundavit peccatum, superabundaret gratia* (Romans 5:20).

¹⁶⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* V 4.54. *Creatur ex uirgine, ut ex deo natus esse creatur.*

understood it, Mary's contribution was the material necessary for a child to be actualised and completed.

4.4.3. Mary, Mother of Christ in Two Natures

Ambrose's Mariology, found in his trinitarian treatises, is, without exception, formulated from the perspective of the incarnation. Mary has, thus, the function as mother of the one person Jesus Christ, in whom everything is created and by whom everything is redeemed. Christ is, according to Ambrose, truly divine and truly human. Mary is mother of God, and of him who was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, and ended his earthly days in Jerusalem. As already shown above, Ambrose draws a parallel from the eternal begetting of the Son to the virginal birth of Christ. Ambrose points at the miraculous virgin birth and asks analogously: "Why then do you search in God the Father the run of a normal generation".¹⁶⁹ In this way Ambrose reveals an idea of an interrelation between the two nature's respective kinds of begetting. One is in eternity from the Father, and the other is, in time, of Mary. Ambrose understands the biological and historical necessity of the virgin birth of Christ, as being due to the divine nature of Christ being in union with his human nature.

Christology is a subject which deals with the union and separation between the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ. Ambrose clearly writes about two substances, or natures, in one Christ. In *De fide* II Ambrose writes about the importance of maintaining the difference between the divine and the fleshly in Christ. He continues in the same passage: "in one and the same is both natures."¹⁷⁰ In *De fide* III he writes: "[...] to signify that in Christ there is a twofold substance, divine and human, nobody should deny neither his divinity nor his humanity",¹⁷¹ and "in Christ there is two substances".¹⁷² Ambrose accused the Arians of "confusing the divine and human generation".¹⁷³

Ambrose argues that in no way did the incarnation reduce or diminish the eternal divinity of the Son. In *De excessu fratris*, he writes about Christ as "God and man in respective nature's difference, yet in each nature the same, and not one in the other".¹⁷⁴ Christ is in two natures; one divine and one fleshly. The former is from the Father, the latter from the Virgin. In *De*

¹⁶⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* I 13.78. *Quemadmodum in deo patre propriae generationis usum requiris?*

¹⁷⁰ Ambrose, *fid.* II 9.77. *Servemus distinctionem divinitatis et carnis [...] In eodem utraque natura est.*

¹⁷¹ Ambrose, *fid.* III 9.59. *Geminam in Christo significare substantiam, divinitatis et carnis, ne quis aut divinitatem neget eius aut carnem.* The expression twofold substance (*gemina substantia*) Ambrose used also in the hymn *Intende, qui regis Israel.*

¹⁷² Ambrose, *fid.* III 10.65. *In Christo gemina substantia.*

¹⁷³ Ambrose, *fid.* III 10.65. *Divinam generationem humanamque confundunt.*

¹⁷⁴ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* I 12. *Deus et homo diversitate naturae, idem tamen, non alter in utroque.*

patriarchis Ambrose writes that the incarnation did not have the effect of Christ of depriving his divinity when he was born from a virgin and was in human form.¹⁷⁵ According to Ambrose, the divine nature of the Son remains undiminished eternal, almighty, and impassible throughout the incarnation.

On the other hand, the flesh of Christ was made by means of a creative operation of the Spirit, like the first creation of Adam, and the creative, nutritive cooperation of the Virgin Mary. As man, Christ in his flesh, according to the assumption of the body, is equal (*suppar*) to Mary, and to all humanity.¹⁷⁶ In the comprehensive *Expositio in Lucam*, written about ten years after the dogmatical writings, Ambrose deals with Christ's agony and suffering. A classic example in the history of dogma of Christ showing Jesus' humanity is in the garden of Gethsemane. In this time of great agony Jesus prays: "be not according to my will, but may your will be done".¹⁷⁷ Ambrose separates the human will of Christ, which is temporal, from his divine will, which is eternal.¹⁷⁸ When Christ speaks as a human, his human soul is disturbed appallingly, "the Wisdom is not in sorrow, not the divine substance, but his human soul".¹⁷⁹ Christ's agony in Gethsemane was not due to any "bodily passion of his own but to our dispersion".¹⁸⁰ In a passage in *De fide* Ambrose writes that when Christ suffered and died he did so as a man, but as God he reigns over the universe: "He hang at the cross, and all the elements served him".¹⁸¹ The resurrection on the third day was a consequence of the union of human and divine nature. He, who was immortal, could not remain in death: "The corruptive cannot remain mixed with the divine."¹⁸² In the same context Ambrose writes that "on one hand, the flesh was weak, on the other hand the divine is eternal: the death is according to the flesh, immortality is to the divine power."¹⁸³

The two unified natures, divine and human, in the one Christ, must be understood together, and paradoxically simultaneously separated. In one Christ, the divine nature of the Father exists with the human nature from Mary. Ambrose writes in *De incarnationis*:

¹⁷⁵ Ambrose, *patr.* 11.51.

¹⁷⁶ Ambrose, *incarn.* 4.26. *Supparem virginis secundum susceptionem corporis.*

¹⁷⁷ Luke 22:42, *non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat.*

¹⁷⁸ Ambrose, *in Luc.* X 60. *Voluntas enim hominis temporalis, voluntas divinitatis aeterna.*

¹⁷⁹ Ambrose, *in Luc.* X 61. *Non est tristis sapientia, non divina substantia, sed anima.*

¹⁸⁰ Ambrose, *in Luc.* X 61. *Non pro sua passione, sed pro nostra dispersione.*

¹⁸¹ Ambrose, *fid.* II 11.96. *In cruce pendebat, et elementa ei omnia serviebant.* The sentence continues: "The sun disappeared, the day was set, darkness spread around everywhere, the earth trembled, but the crucified did not tremble", *sol refugit, dies occidit, offusae et circumfusae tenebrae, terra tremuit, et non tremuit qui pependit.* This is almost verbatim reiterated in *fid.* V 14.174.

¹⁸² Ambrose, *fid.* III 3.19. *Non sunt fragilia comparanda divinis.*

¹⁸³ Ambrose, *fid.* III 3.21. *Alia enim carnis infirmitas, alia divinitatis aeternitas: mors carnis est, immortalitas potestatis.*

[...] a unity of two-shaped and twin nature [...] being God of eternity, he assumed the sacrament of the incarnation, not divided, but one, because he, one, is both, and one in both, that is, as regards both divinity and body. For one is not of the Father, and the other from the Virgin, but the same is of the Father in the one way, and from the Virgin in the other.¹⁸⁴

Christ's human flesh was created in Mary's womb, and the divine nature is of eternal existence. Later in *De incarnationis* Ambrose emphasises this differentiation and writes: "when they say that his flesh was of the same substance as was the Son of God, they run into absurdities".¹⁸⁵ In the idea of an eternal begetting of the Father, Ambrose sees the affirmation of the divinity of Christ, and in the begetting of Mary the affirmation of his humanity. The difference between the divine and human nature is of such an art that they cannot possibly be mixed and confused: "A body was born of the Virgin, and thus, indeed, he is a heavenly descent, and of a human conception. So, the nature of the flesh and the divinity could not be the same".¹⁸⁶ In *De incarnationis* Ambrose turns against "all impious men" who exemplify with a Jew "who separates the Son of the Virgin Mary from the God the Father".¹⁸⁷ The divine and human nature of Christ should not be confused or separated. As has been treated in Chapter 2 of this present work,¹⁸⁸ the real union of natures in the one person Christ calls for a sharing of properties, *communicatio idiomatum*, a term never used by Ambrose, but the idea of which is, nonetheless, found in his writings.¹⁸⁹

The expression "two natures in one person" was first approved at the Council of Chalcedon 451 (and disapproved by a large body of Eastern Christians). In the fifth century debate, the two-nature dogma was a Western contribution to the formula of Chalcedon. The text approved at the Council was a letter sent to the meeting by Pope Leo, which is the tradition Ambrose lived and operated in. The Definition of Faith from Chalcedon uses four terms for the paradox: the one person Christ in two natures, which undergoes no confusion (*inconfuse*), no change (*immutabiliter*), no division (*indivise*), no separation (*inseparabiliter*).¹⁹⁰ Even if Ambrose lived half a century before these formulations were

¹⁸⁴ Ambrose, *incarn.* 5.35. [...] *biformis geminaeque naturae unus [...] deus semper esset aeternus, incarnationis sacramenta suscepit, non divisus, sed unus, quia utrumque unus et unus in utroque, hoc est vel divinitate vel corpore.*

¹⁸⁵ Ambrose, *incarn.* 7.78.

¹⁸⁶ Ambrose, *incarn.* 7.61.

¹⁸⁷ Ambrose, *incarn.* 2.6. *Filium virginis Mariae a patre deo separat.*

¹⁸⁸ I have dealt with the term *communication idiomatum* in Chapter 2.2.3: *Theotokos – Mater Dei.*

¹⁸⁹ "Ambrosius kennt zwar nicht den *terminus*, wohl aber die Sache", Huhn 1954, 32. According to Huhn, Ambrose closely follows Origen who was the first theologian using the idea of *communicatio idiomatum* in his Commentary to the Romans, quoted in Huhn 1954, 15.

¹⁹⁰ *Concilium Chalcedonense: Definitio fidei.* Text and trans. COD, 83–87.

made, his formulations are in line with the definition later agreed on in Chalcedon. The two-nature formula of Christ is explained by Ambrose as a belief in a union and separation of the divine and human substance in Christ. He regards Mary as giving birth to God, and simultaneously teaches the true human flesh and soul of Christ.

4.4.4. Mary, Mother of Christ the Redeemer

For the theologians of the fourth century, including Ambrose, Christ's true humanity was of soteriological concern. Christology and Soteriology are two reciprocally dependent areas of Christian theology. The Father's purpose in sending the Son and letting him be born of the Virgin Mary was the salvation of all humanity. Christ's true humanity, with body and soul, is a necessary condition for that redemption. The incarnation and the redemption were even greater than being limited to humankind only and included the whole of creation. Ambrose writes, with a reference to Romans 8:21–22: "The mystery of God's incarnation is for the redemption of the whole created universe".¹⁹¹ Ambrose regards both the incarnation and the passion of Christ with great admiration, but the passion even more than the incarnation.¹⁹² The cross, where Christ offered his human body, was the fulfilment of the incarnation: "The Lord of Majesty was crucified, who was born of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary".¹⁹³ The body of Christ was a new creation of the Spirit, he received his human material from Mary, and that body was crucified for the redemption of the world.

Quotations demonstrating the importance given by Ambrose to Christ's humanity in the redemption of all now follow. Christ, he writes, "has taken up flesh, that he, who teaches the people, will conquer as a man."¹⁹⁴ Christ's victory is obtained thanks to the human nature made from Mary: "To save the creation of the Father, the Lord Jesus was created of the Virgin".¹⁹⁵ Without a human nature, Christ would not have been able to save the world: "It was not the Godhead who was crucified, but the flesh".¹⁹⁶ In the flesh Christ was "crucified, dead, and buried".¹⁹⁷ The divine Son needed a stainless body to die on the cross; God, who is impassible, needs a human body for his passion: "They crucified the flesh [...] The flesh has suffered, but the divinity is free from death".¹⁹⁸ In another passage

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, *fid.* V 8.106. *Incarnationis dei mysterium universae salutis est creaturae.*

¹⁹² Ambrose, *Spir.* III 17.126. *Non minoris quidem aestimo sanctae Virginis partum: sed gratius sumo benedicti corporis sacramentum.*

¹⁹³ Ambrose, *Spir.* III 22.168.

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *fid.* II 11.90. *Suscepit carnem, ut quasi homo vinceret, qui homines erudiret.*

¹⁹⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* III 7.46. *Quod ad redimenda opera patris dominus Iesus ex virgine sit creatus.*

¹⁹⁶ Ambrose, *fid.* I 15.95. *Non divinitas crucifixa, sed caro est.*

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *fid.* I 15.96. *In quo et crucifixus et mortuus et sepultus est.*

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *fid.* II 7.57. *Christi carnem crucifixerunt. [...] Caro igitur est passa, divinitas autem mortis libera.*

Ambrose writes: “Where purification is, there is a victim; where a victim is, a body; where a body is, an oblation; where the office of oblation is, there is sacrifice of suffering”.¹⁹⁹ Ambrose writes in *De Spiritu Sancto* I: “He died in the body he took from the virgin”.²⁰⁰ In *De incarnationis*: “He suffered according to his human body [...] not according to the impassible divine nature, which is completely without pain”.²⁰¹

Christ received in his incarnation everything that is truly human, with the sole purpose of redemption and salvation. In a long passage in *De fide* II Ambrose extends his explanations pertaining to everything in the human mind and body that Christ received: the will (*voluntas*), the ability to feel pain (*dolere*), a soul with its passions (*suscepit anima et animae passiones*), and flesh (*caro*).²⁰² He had all the weaknesses of humankind: “He has taken not only the body, but also the weaknesses of the body.”²⁰³

Ambrose ascribes Christ with a human soul with both will and reason. In *De incarnationis* Ambrose writes that the savior without a rational soul would have been unprofitable for us.²⁰⁴ Christ needed the human soul in order to set the souls free:

[...] the substance of Christ was present in the underworld. For he was operating in the lower world (hell) to set free, in the soul of his own body, the souls of the dead, to lose the fetters of death, to remit sins.²⁰⁵

Christ needed everything that belongs to true humanity for his redemptory work. In *De Spiritu Sancto* Ambrose writes a sentence which could serve as a conclusion of Ambrose’s thoughts on Christ the Redeemer presented so far: “The Lord Jesus crucified in his flesh abolished all sins of the world, not only the sins human’s do but also the desires of the souls”.²⁰⁶

In *De incarnationis* Ambrose uses the dogma of the two natures in Christ to explain his redemptory work. Ambrose argues that Christ received from Mary what He offered for humanity in all times, and her perpetual virginity is a divine sign to make us believe. The quotation goes:

¹⁹⁹ Ambrose, *fid.* III 11.78. *Ubi purificatio, hostia, ubi hostia, corpus, ubi corpus, oblatio, ubi munus oblationis, ibi sacrificium passionis.* In next passage Ambrose, *fid.* III 11.79, points: “The death could not be referred to the eternal divinity, but the human fragility”, *mors autem non ad divinitatis aeternitatem, sed ad fragilitatem refertur humanam.*

²⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 9.107. *In eo utique mortus, quod suscepit ex virgine.*

²⁰¹ Ambrose, *incarn.* 5.37. *Patiebatur secundum corporis passionem [...] non patiebatur secundum verbi impassibilem divinitatem, quod totius exsors doloris est.*

²⁰² Ambrose, *fid.* II 7.53–57.

²⁰³ Ambrose, *fid.* III 1.6. *Non solum corpus, sed etiam infirmitates nostri corporis.*

²⁰⁴ Ambrose, *incarn.* 7.66–68.

²⁰⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* III 14.111. [...] *in inferioribus Christi fuisse substantiam. Etenim ut defunctorum animas in sui corporis anima liberaret, vincla mortis solveret, peccata donaret, operatus est in inferno.*

²⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 1.3. *Dominus Iesus in carne sua totius mundi peccata crucifixus aboleret, nec solum delicta factorum, sed etiam cupiditates animorum.*

According to our nature, then, he offered himself, that he might do a work beyond our nature. He gave a sacrifice from that which is ours, from his is the reward; and many things will you find in him both according to nature and beyond nature. According to the ordinary condition (*secundum condicionem*) of the body he was in the womb, he was born, he was nursed, he was placed in the manger, but beyond condition (*supra condicionem*) the Virgin conceived, the Virgin gave birth, that you might believe that it was God who renewed nature, and it was man who was born of man according to nature.²⁰⁷

The connection between the incarnation and the cross leads to an important Mariological question, namely, Mary's role at Golgotha. It must be noticed, Ambrose consciously did not take steps towards the idea of Mary as *co-redemptrix*, which is an idea that her cooperative work is redemptory. For this title to hold it is not enough that she has begotten Christ, she must also have taken an active part in the death of Christ.²⁰⁸ Reflections on Mary standing under the cross appears three times in Ambrose's writings. This section is also a response to Laughton's words in the conclusion of *Virginité Discourse and Ascetic Politics in the Writings of Ambrose of Milan*, where she writes that Mary's participation in the suffering and death of Christ deserves further analysis and refers to *De institutione virginis*:

Mary's important role in the process of humankind's salvation – not only as the bearer of Christ, but as participant in his redemptive sacrifice – is another interesting avenue for further exploration.²⁰⁹

Against this hypothesis, I demonstrate, with full evidence, that Ambrose did not give Mary a redemptive role at Golgotha. I take a closer in-depth look at and investigate three passages about Mary at the cross, in Ambrose's writings; all outside the trinitarian treatises.²¹⁰

First, in *Expositio in Lucam*, probably written in the late 380s:

Mary was worthy being the Mother of Christ. When the apostles fled, she stood before the cross. With pious eyes she saw her son's wound. She did not expect the death of her beloved son, but the salvation of the world. She, the regal chamber, perhaps thought, since she knew that the world's redemption should be through her son's death, that she might through her own death give herself for the common well. But Jesus had no need of a helper in redeeming all. Therefore, he has said: *I have become as a man without help, free among the dead* (Psalm 88:5). He indeed received devotion of his mother but did not ask for help from another. So then, we have a pious teacher. The reading teaches that the motherly passion ought to be imitated, that respect of sons should be followed, so that all mothers offer themselves in dangers of their sons.

²⁰⁷ Ambrose, *incarn.* 6.54. [...] *virgo concepit, virgo generavit.*

²⁰⁸ This leads Huhn to state that Ambrose did not teach the doctrine of *co-redemptrix*, Huhn 1954, 169.

²⁰⁹ Laughton 2010, 239–240.

²¹⁰ For a synopsis of the three passages, see Chapter 8.3: *Mary at the Cross, a Synopsis.*

The motherly care is better for them than to be in sorrow caused by grief of death.²¹¹

A similar text, almost a copy, is found in *Epistula extra collectionem* 14 (63 PL), written in 396 to the Church at Vercelli in a situation when they were about to elect a new bishop. The application at the end, addressed to another group of people, obviously differs:

Mary was worthy being the Mother of Christ. When the apostles fled, she stood before the cross. With pious eyes she saw her son's wound. She did not expect the death of her beloved son, but the salvation of the world. She, the regal chamber, perhaps thought, since she knew that the world's redemption should be through her son's death, that she might through her own death give herself for the common well. But Jesus had no need of a helper in redeeming all. He saved all without a helper. Therefore, he says: *I have become as a man without help, free among the dead* (Psalm 88:5). He indeed received devotion of his parents but did not ask for help from another. Imitate her, holy mothers, who in her dearly loved only son set forth such an example of motherly virtue. You do not have sweeter children, nor did the virgin seek consolation of being able to bear another son.²¹²

In *De institutione virginis*, written in 393, Ambrose also uses the scene at Golgotha, here as a proof text of Mary's perpetual virginity. This is a completely different text and it is interesting to note the different accents. In this work it is, again, emphasised that Christ did not need help in the redemption:

The mother stood before the cross, when the men fled, she stood untroubled. Look and tell if the mother of Jesus could exchange her chastity, she who had so an unmoved mind. With pious eyes she saw her son's wounds, by which she knew there would be a future redemption for all. The mother stood in front of this not unworthy

²¹¹ Ambrose, in *Luc. X* 132. *Sed nec Maria minor quam matrem Christi decebat, fugientibus apostolis ante crucem stabat, et piis spectabat oculis Filii uulnera, quia exspectabat non pignoris mortem, sed mundi salutem. Aut fortasse quia cognoverat per Filii mortem mundi redemptionem, aula regalis putabat se et sua morte publico muneri aliquid additurum. Sed Jesus non egebat adiutore ad omnium redemptionem, qui dixit: Factus sum sicut homo sine adiutorio, inter mortuos liber (Psalms 88:5). Suscepit quidem matris affectum, sed non quaesivit hominis auxilium. Habemus igitur pietatis magistrum: docet lectio quid maternus debeat affectus imitari, quid sequi reverentia filiorum; ut illae se offerant in filiorum periculis, illis amplius sollicitudo materna quam suae mortis moestitia sit dolori.*

²¹² Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 14.110 (63 PL). *Sed nec Maria minor quam matrem Christi decebat. Fugientibus apostolis ante crucem stabat et piis spectabat oculis filii vulnera, quia exspectabat non pignoris mortem sed mundi salutem aut fortasse quia cognoverat per filii mortem mundi redemptionem aula regalis, etiam sua morte putabat se aliquid publico addituram muneri. Sed Jesus non egebat adiutore ad redemptionem omnium qui omnes sine adiutore servavit. Unde et dicit: Factus sum sicut homo sine adiutorio inter mortuos liber (Psalms 88:5). Suscepit quidem affectum parentis, sed non quaesivit alterius auxilium. Hanc imitami, matres sanctae, quae in unico filio dilectissimo tantum maternae virtutis exemplum edidit; neque enim vos dulciores liberos habetis neque illud virgo quaerebat solatium, quod alium posset generare filium.*

theatre, without fear of the murderer. Her son hung on the cross, and the mother offered herself to the persecutors. If she would have been there only to be thrown to the ground before her son, she would have deserved praise of her motherly affection, because of which she did not want to survive her son. But if she wanted to die with her son, it was because she desired to resurrect with him. She was not unaware of the mystery, that the one she had begotten should rise from the dead. She knew the death of her son would happen for the good of all, and she was prepared that through her death she could add something for the common well. But the passion of Christ had no need of any help, as the Lord had foretold long ago: *I looked, but there was no one to help; and I listened carefully, but no one supported me, and I set them free with my own arm* (Isaiah 63:5).²¹³

The first thing to recognise is the common content of the three narratives. Ambrose pictures the scene at Golgotha with the cross and Mary beneath it (*stabat mater ante crucem*). Mary stands there as the mother of Jesus Christ. The apostles were afraid and fled, but she was brave and stayed. The mother has her pious eyes fixed on the wounds of her suffering son. She steadfastly believes that Christ's death is for the salvation of the world. She is also, as Christ's regal chamber (*Expositio in Lucam* and *Epistula extra collectionem* 14, *aula regalis*), prepared to die herself, if it were needed for the common good. She is prepared to offer herself (*De institutione virginis* has: *mater se offerebat*). Ambrose emphasises that Mary's offering of her own body is, however, not required. All three texts state that Jesus Christ needs no helper in redeeming humanity. The Bible texts quoted is Psalm 88:5 (*Expositio in Lucam, Epistula extra collectionem* 14), a verse taken from a psalm of deep agony and distress, and Isaiah 63:5 (*De institutione virginis*) which points at the same thought. In both *Expositio in Lucam* and *Epistula extra collectionem* 14 Ambrose elucidates that Christ himself appreciated his mother's devotion (or parent, *Epistula extra collectionem* 14), without requiring her help. In two of the texts, Mary's perpetual virginity is also mentioned (*Epistula extra collectionem* 14 and *De institutione virginis*).

The common Mariological content in the three texts are: 1) The Virgin Mary is pious, virgin, strong and brave, 2) she desires and offers to help

²¹³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 7.49. *Stabat ante crucem mater, et fugientibus viris, stabat intrepida. Videte utrum pudorem mutare potuerit mater Jesu, quae animum non mutavit. Spectabat piis oculis filii vulnera, per quem sciebat omnibus futuram redemptionem. Stabat non degeneri mater spectaculo, quae non metuebat peremptorem. Pendebat in cruce filius, mater se persecutoribus offerebat. Si hoc solum esset, ut ante filium prosterneretur, laudandus pietatis affectus, quod superstes filio esse nolebat: sin vero ut cum filio moreretur, cum eodem gestiebat resurgere, non ignara mysterii quod genuisset resurrecturum. Simul quae publico usui impendi mortem filii noverat, praestolabatur si forte etiam sua morte publico muneri aliquid adderetur. Sed Christi passio adiutore non eguit, sicut ipse Dominus longe ante praedixit: Et respexi, et non erat adiutor: et attendi, et nemo suscipiebat; et liberabo eos brachio meo* (Isaiah 63:5).

Christ in his suffering, but she cannot, and 3) she is seen as an example to follow. What differs between the texts is now explored, along with an attempt to try and understand why Ambrose alters them.

As the earlier written text, *Expositio in Lucam* is the original which is then copied in *Epistula extra collection* 14 – the two texts are almost verbatim. There is, however, one noteworthy clarification in the *Epistula*, and it is the interpolation “he saved all without a helper” (*qui omnes sine adiutore servavit*).²¹⁴ Ambrose had the earlier text at his desk when writing the second, and thus consciously chose this interpolation. The alteration makes sense if the bishop saw a sensible reason to emphasise that Mary did not participate in Christ’s redemption. Perhaps some people in Milan, or Vercelli, were discussing and debating the co-redemptive role of Mary at this time, and Ambrose thus offered this as a rebuttal.

In *De institutione virginis*, Ambrose, due to its purpose, utters his words in a different way compared to the other two texts. *De institutione virginis* is a text which argues for Mary’s perpetual virginity (*virginitas perpetua*), where she is also pictured as an extraordinary example for his contemporary ascetics. The first interesting alteration is the use of the general term “men” instead of the “apostles” in the other two texts, thus making clear that Mary is stronger than any man, not only stronger than any apostle. Ambrose turns to his listeners and urges them: “look at Mary! (*videte*)” and explicitly explains the parallel between Mary’s courage under the cross and her perpetual virginity. The picture of Mary as being the sole person brave enough to stay under the cross is emphasised by the use of the expressions untroubled (*intrepida*) and fearless (*non metuebat*). A theme omitted in *Expositio in Lucam* and *Epistula extra collectionem* 14 is the resurrection of Christ. In *De institutione virginis* Mary is said to have had knowledge of the coming future: “She was not unaware of the mystery, that the one she had given birth was to rise again”. Ambrose ascribes Mary this fore-knowledge, not necessarily prophetic although being foretold of Christ (Matthew 16:21 with parallels).

An important Mariological condition, the eternal Son of the Divine Father who was made man of the Divine Spirit and born in the flesh as Mary’s son, was crucified for the salvation of the world, is seen in Ambrose’s writings. In the sense of making the incarnation possible, Mary cooperates with God in the act of salvation; but the bishop, rejects the idea of any cooperation from Mary in the sense of Mary as *co-redemptrix* in Christ’s sacrifice for the world at the cross.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Huhn notices the alteration, without any further comments, Huhn 1954, 171.

²¹⁵ The meaning of Mary as *co-redemptrix*, which is not proclaimed dogma in the Catholic Church, could rightly be understood as a thought also in Luther’s theology, Gorski writes: “Der Heils-Advent beginnt mit Christi Geburt. Und nur insoweit, als Maria causa instrumentalis dieser Geburt ist, hat sie daran teil.” Gorski 1987, 209.

4.4.5. Christ's Virginal Birth in Worship

Thus far the present chapter has focused on Ambrose's dogmatical writings. The poetry, which Ambrose made a part of the common worship, is now investigated.²¹⁶ Augustine tells about his experience of the Milanese liturgy and mentions the hymns and canticles that were sung in Church.²¹⁷ Another telling story, and indeed part of a dramatic set of events, was the fight for the basilicas in 385 and 386.²¹⁸ The imperial court, led by the emperor Valentinian and his mother Justina, supported the Homoians and demanded a basilica to celebrate their liturgy. Ambrose refused the emperor, explaining that he had no rights to any divine property. In a second violent attempt to take control of a basilica in 386 Ambrose felt obliged to occupy the church in question with his congregation. There the hymns played an important role as an instrument of prayer and consolation in the midst of this precarious situation. The imperial guards stood outside the walls, whereas the people inside the church encouraged one another with prayers and hymn singing. As the story goes, the drama ended with the triumph of Nicaeanism; the guards left the basilica and the Homoians eventually disappeared from the Milanese arena.²¹⁹

There is no direct evidence of any liturgical Marian intercession in North Italy from the time of Ambrose or indeed of any official cult of Mary as a feast in memory of her from then. Josef Huhn argues that no Marian feasts or celebrations existed in Ambrose's Milan.²²⁰ Stephen Shoemaker, however, is of another opinion, perhaps unconscious of being polemic towards Huhn. Shoemaker concludes that Ambrose's use of Mary as an example and an ideal indirectly indicates veneration and cult of her.²²¹ Marian piety was not unheard of in Christendom at that particular time, and was seemingly stronger in the Eastern part of the Church. Shoemaker writes that at least three annual feasts were celebrated to commemorate Mary in the fourth century. They originated from Alexandria and Jerusalem.²²² Many devotional hymns to Mary are known, the earliest found in the *Jerusalem Georgian Chantbook*.²²³ An early form of *Sub tuum*

²¹⁶ More about the hymns, Chapter 1.3.2: *Ambrose's Pastoral Duties*, and Chapter 3.2.3.1: *Virginitas in partu Pastorally Preached*.

²¹⁷ Augustinus, *Confessiones* IX 7.15.

²¹⁸ The sources for this event are all tendentious on Ambrose's side. His own letters *Epistulae* 75–77 (PL 20–22), of course it is told in Paulinus' *Vita Ambrosii*, Augustine gives his perspective in *Confessiones* IX 15ff, and the two historians Rufinus *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 15f and Sozomenos *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII 13. The story in context offers Demant 2007, 160–162.

²¹⁹ For the role of the hymns at this event, see Dassmann 2004, 145–149.

²²⁰ Huhn 1954, 271–272.

²²¹ Shoemaker 2016, 173.

²²² Shoemaker 2016, 178–186.

²²³ Shoemaker 2016, 186–194.

praesidium in Greek is known in a fragment that could be as early as the third century, and is an early evidence of applying for intercession from Mary.²²⁴

One can conclude that in Ambrose’s theology Mary is highly estimated, venerated, and praised in relation to Christ as a virgin and a mother. That is true in his writings, prayers, and hymns. It is, however, also important to understand certain limits in the veneration of her. In *De Spiritu Sancto* Ambrose found it necessary to emphasise a Marian correction. According to him, since the Spirit is the divine author of the incarnation, no one should divert this to Mary. Ambrose understands Mary’s primal role as offering her own body for Christ to live and grow in. Ambrose points out: “Mary was the temple of God, not the God of the temple. And thus, he alone is to be adored who was operating in the temple”.²²⁵ The warning in *De Spiritu Sancto* against any exaggeration of the adoration of Mary might be an indication of a cult in honour of the Virgin Mary.

The Ambrosian hymn that contains most devotional expressions of Mary is now examined:

<p>1. Hearken, you who rule Israel, you who sit upon the cherubim. Appear before Ephraim; rouse up your power and come! (Cf. Ps. 80:1–2).</p> <p>2. Come, redeemer of the nations, Show forth the virgin’s begetting. Let the whole world marvel: such a birth befits God.</p> <p>3. Not by a man’s seed but by a mystical inbreathing did the Word of God become flesh and the fruit of the womb flourished.</p> <p>4. The virgin’s womb swells but the door of chastity remains shut. The banners of virtue are radiant: God dwells in his temple.</p> <p>5. Let him come out from his bridal chamber, / the royal hall of chastity, a giant of twofold nature, eager to run his course (cf. Ps. 19:5).</p> <p>6. His going out is from the Father, his coming back is to the Father, his journey is as far as hell, his return is to the throne of God.</p> <p>7. The equal of the eternal Father,</p>	<p><i>Intende, qui regis Israel, super Cherubim qui sedes, appare Ephraem coram, excita potentiam tuam et veni. Veni, redemptor gentium, ostende partum virginis, miretur omne saeculum, talis decet partus Deo. Non ex virili semine, sed mystico spiramine verbum Dei factum est caro fructusque ventris floruit. Alvus tumescit virginis, claustrum pudoris permanet, vexilla virtutum micant, versatur in templo Deus. Procedat e thalamo suo, pudoris aula regia, geminæ gigas substantiæ alacris ut currat viam. Egressus eius a Patre, regressus eius ad Patrem; excursus usque ad inferos, recursus ad sedem Dei. Aequalis aeterno Patri,</i></p>
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²²⁴ According to Graef 2009, 37–38, *Sub tuum praesidium* is not liturgical, since in the early church liturgy all prayers were addressed to God.

²²⁵ Ambrose, *Spir.* III 11.80. *Ac ne quis hoc derivet ad Mariam virginem: Maria erat templum Dei, non Deus templi. Et ideo ille solus adorandus, qui operabatur in templo.*

he girds on the trophy of our flesh,
fortifying the frailty of our body
with his enduring strength.

8. May your crib now shine forth
and the night produce a new light.
May no night destroy it,
and may it beam with constant faith.

*carnis trophaeo cingere,
infirmi nostri corporis
virtute firmans perpeti.
Praesepe iam fulget tuum
lumenque nox spirat novum
quod nulla nox interpolet
fideque iugi luceat.*²²⁶

Ambrose wrote the hymn *Intende, qui regis Israel* for the celebration of Christ's nativity. The hymn is translated into many modern languages.²²⁷ *Intende, qui regis Israel* is an example of the liturgy's cultic "now". The singing congregation follows the progress of Mary's pregnancy, is present with her in the stable and sees the crib with the child. This makes the purpose of the hymn very clear: it is to invite and lead the congregation to see and marvel at the begetting of Christ.

In the first stanza Psalm 80, a prayer to the king of Israel, is quoted and understood by Ambrose as referring to Christ. The first and the last words of the stanza are "harken" (*intende*) and come (*veni*). It is a prayer to the divine Son: Hear us and come. The second stanza of the hymn invites Christ, redeemer of the nations, to come and show the virgin's begetting: The Virgin Mary gives birth to God. A wondrous virgin birth is *decorum* of God, it befits God to be born in such a way. In the third stanza the conception is extolled. As a condition for a normal pregnancy a man is included, "a man's seed". In this exceptional case, however, there is the "mystical inbreathing" and the "Word of God become flesh". The female womb of Mary flourished; it was there where Christ grew. In the fourth stanza we see how Mary's womb swells; Christ is growing inside Mary. But still, no man has touched her, the banners of virtue spark and shine, they are radiant (*mico*). In Mary we see the temple of God, the dwelling place of God. In the fifth stanza the begetting draws close: "Let him come out". The language is borrowed from Psalm 19, where the sun is the subject. Christ is the sun, he is true man and true God, "a giant of twofold nature". The singers are waiting for the delivery. Christ is asked to come out. The body and womb of Mary are "his bridal chamber", a "royal hall of chastity". Mary is a descendant of king David and thus for the faithful an ideal and example of chastity and devotion. In the sixth stanza the purpose of the incarnation is praised. From the Father he has gone out, and to the Father he has returned. The journey was long, all the way to hell and back to God's throne. In the seventh stanza Ambrose allows the theme to become personal. The eternal Father's equal girds himself with "the trophy of our flesh". *Tropheaum* means trophy, victory, telling something generally

²²⁶ Text and trans. in Ramsey 1997, 172–173.

²²⁷ Martin Luther translated the hymn in German 1524, which was followed by a Swedish version by Olaus Petri 1531. For the contemporary Swedish Hymnbook, it was edited by Johan Olof Wallin 1816, as number 112 called *Världens frälsare kom här*.

about the created human body: The incarnation makes the human flesh a trophy. The glorious Christ turns to human beings and fortifies the “frailty of our body”. In the eighth and final stanza the crib is praised. The begetting took place at night when darkness overwhelmed the earth. So, in song, the congregation prays that the crib may shine forth, that the night may produce light. The light is Christ, the sun shining in the world’s darkness, and the hymn is concluded with a plea that it may “beam with constant faith”.

In these eight stanzas the Christ-centered Mariology of Ambrose find its way into the common worship and thus into his congregation’s heart. Its Mariological content can be summarised as follows:

- Virgin Mary is *Mater Dei*, in the hymn expressed *partus deo*. Her Son is the eternal divine Son of the Father, a truth that befits God and astounds the whole world.
- The conception of Christ is a creative operation of God, a work of his inbreathing, of the Holy Spirit.
- Mary has the important role of giving the Son his humanity; her womb swells, and Christ finds nutrition and the power to be and grow in her.
- Mary is the mother of Christ human and divine.
- In Mary Ambrose sees an ideal and exemplar. Her body is God’s bridal chamber, as it is for everyone who receives Christ in faith (compare 1 Corinthians 2:19).
- The reason for all this activity is the salvation of all humanity from hell. The Son went out from the Father, his trip was as far as to hell, and he returned to the throne of God. This is a return to the Father that the Church will follow.

The hymn elucidates how Mary and Mariology had its place in Ambrose’s spirituality and pastoral care. He regarded the Virgin Mary as a woman and a human being worth singing about and who was permitted by him to touch the hearts and minds of the congregation.

Josef Huhn has noticed that the hymn played a role in the Nestorian controversy half a century later. Early in 430 Cyril of Alexandria asked for support from pope Caelestine in using the title *Theotokos*. The pope answered: “I give thanks to the blessed Ambrose, who in the feast of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ taught all people to sing in one voice: *Come, redeemer of the nations* [...]”. Caelestine quotes the whole strophe. After the hymn quotation he gave his approval to calling Mary *Theotokos*, and

again quotes Ambrose's poem to show his agreement with Cyril: "Such a birth befits God".²²⁸

4.4.6. The Virginal Birth and the Original Sin

The idea of an original sin that affects and explains the existence of humanity plays an important role in Christian theology and its pastoral care. Its aim is to help people to understand the condition they live in and recognise their undesirable behaviour. Preaching on the original sin also reveals the necessity of forgiveness and salvation through Christ.²²⁹

Charles W. Neumann writes that the virginal conception appears "in an instrumental and almost necessary role" in God's salvation plan, otherwise Christ would not have been the "holy one".²³⁰ Another scholar, Goulven Madec, has written about the transmission of sin through the sexual act in *Ambroise et la philosophie*, and the necessity of the virginal birth for Christ's sinless human nature.²³¹ A third scholar, Berthold Altaner, writes that Ambrose taught about a hereditary sin (*noxiae conditionis hereditas*, a quotation from *Explanatio psalmi 38*), and argues that children, therefore, have to be baptised.²³² Peter Brown sees a connection in Ambrose's thinking between the "act of intercourse and the transmission of original sin" and further he characterises the bishop's view in the words: "All forms of "admixture" and *concretio* – all confused jumbling of separate categories – were deeply repugnant to Ambrose." According to Brown, however, a full reflection on the relation between the act of intercourse and the transmission of original sin first appears only with Augustine, a generation later.²³³ Peter Dückerts writes about "eine Grundbefindlichkeit des Menschen, die mit der geschlechtlichen Fortpflanzung zusammenhängt".²³⁴ All these scholars present many prooftexts from Ambrose's writings.

I would like to suggest an objection when reading these scholars' works. Ambrose view of sexuality and procreation was according to the view of his own time – from where would he believe something to be inherited, if not through "the act of intercourse"? He understood the male sperm, or seed, as containing the *telos* of a fully developed human and,

²²⁸ Caelestine, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* IV, 550. *Recordor beatae memoriae Ambrosium in die natalis Domini nostri Jesu Christi omnem populum fecisse una voce Deo canere: Veni redemptor gentium, ostende partum virginis, miretur omne saeculum: talis decet partus Deum [...] dicit Θεοτόκον Mariam, valde concordat: Talis decet partus Deum.* Quoted in Huhn 1954, 75–77.

²²⁹ More on the original sin in Chapter 3.3.4.5: *The Body with its Sinful Passions and the Original Sin.*

²³⁰ Neumann 1962, 77–78.

²³¹ Madec 1974, 256–260.

²³² Altaner 1978, 386–387.

²³³ P. Brown 2008, 353.

²³⁴ Dückerts 2009, 51.

moreover, that the male sperm generated a new human being in the female womb from the woman's blood. This is a self-evident truth in our contemporary medical assumptions too: Every bodily heritage is transferred in the sexual act. What does such a truism add to the discussion? That the original sin is inherited through the sexual act, as is everything else that concerns the body, does not necessarily mean that Ambrose regarded the sexual act *per se* as sinful.

Mary's holiness and her flawlessness were important for Ambrose's view of Christ's human perfection. He was without sin, but for our sake "He assumed our sin, He is called sin".²³⁵ In *De paenitentia*²³⁶ Ambrose writes about the sinlessness of Christ's human nature in connection to the virgin birth. In one passage Ambrose quotes Paul's Letter to the Romans, about Jesus Christ "in the *likeness* of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3–4):

Christ was not begotten, as is every man, by intercourse between male and female, but born of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin. Christ received a stainless body, which not only no sins polluted, but which neither the material admixture of generation nor of conception have darkened. For we are all born under sin, and our very origin is in evil, as we read in the words of David [...]²³⁷

Ambrose uses the expression "stainless body", which is the condition that allows Christ to offer his body for our sake. Important here is the expression that Christ was not stained by any "material admixture of generation" and of "conception". All others – except Christ – are born under sin and have an evil origin. Ambrose explains what this means in the next sentence of the passage. He writes that we all "have a body of death". This is the point, and which is the consequence of the fall. Ambrose continues that this basic human condition *post peccatum* is healed when Christ died in his human flesh.

An elucidating passage is found in *Expositio in Lucam*. Ambrose comments on the saying of Gabriel, *the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God* (Luke 1:35). He writes: "It was not sexual intercourse of a man that opened the secret room of the virginal womb, but the Holy Spirit poured immaculate seed in the unbroken uterus".²³⁸ The immaculate seed of the Spirit conceived Christ, and he received his human material from

²³⁵ Ambrosius, *incarn.* 6.60. *Nostra peccata suscepit, peccatum dictus est.*

²³⁶ *De paenitentia* was written somewhere between 384 and 394, and is a refutation of the Novatianist position. Novatian was Roman priest in the mid-third century, and the Novatianists did not consider it possible for the Church to forgive all sins. Ambrose argues that the divine mercy is measureless, and that God waits and longs the conversion of even the worst sinners.

²³⁷ Ambrose, *paen.* I 3.13. [...] *Nec generationis aut conceptionis concretio fuscaverunt [...]*

²³⁸ Ambrose, *in Luc.* II 56. *Non enim uirilis coitus uulvae uirginalis secreta reseravit, sed immaculatum semen inuiolabili utero spiritus sanctus infudit; solus enim per omnia ex natis de femina sanctus dominus Iesus, qui terrenae contagia corruptelae immaculati partus nouitate non senserit et caelesti maiestate depulerit.*

Mary. Her body also had to be pure, or unbroken/sacrosanct (*inviolabilis*). Ambrose understood Jesus, the human being born of Mary, to be the only one born from a holy conception and born sinless from any woman. He was born through the novelty of an immaculate birth (*novitate partus immaculati*). Ambrose does not develop whether, how, or when Mary's body was made immaculate any further.

It is documented by many scholars that Ambrose believed in an inherited original sin. Christ is lifted out of this inheritance, and he was virginally conceived and born in an immaculate way. In fact, however, Ambrose ascribes the holiness of Christ to his divine origin rather than to the virginal conception. He writes in *De Spiritu Sancto* III "only the eternal Godhead is pure and immaculate in regard of sin".²³⁹ The virginal conception is a consequence and a sign of the eternal begetting of the Father, as I demonstrated earlier in Chapter 4.4.1: *Mary mother of God*. Josef Huhn has, in my opinion, got it right on this topic. Huhn writes: "dieses Privileg der jungfräulichen Empfängnis wird von Ambrosius erklärt mit der Hinweis auf die Gottheit Christi".²⁴⁰ It is Charles W. Neumann who has perhaps confused the idea by introducing the virginal conception as being equally important for Christ's holiness. He writes: "Mary's virginity was a sign of her Son's divinity [...] the virginal generation of Christ is demanded so that He be free of the stain of *original sin*".²⁴¹ Neumann quotes Ambrose's *Explanatio psalmi 37*, in the same context, but which only states the necessity of a completely new entrance of God into this world to break the power of sin.²⁴² Neumann interprets the passage:

Mary's virginity ante partum appears, therefore, more and more in an instrumental and almost necessary role, that of rendering her Son a *holy one* in every sense of the word, as though He would not have been such without the virginal generation.²⁴³

It is perhaps due to Neumann that many scholars, such as Julia Kelto Lillis,²⁴⁴ David Hunter,²⁴⁵ and Peter Brown²⁴⁶ miss the obvious point made by Huhn. These later scholars all ascribe Christ's holiness solely to his

²³⁹ Ambrose, *Spir.* III 18.136. *Sola autem est a peccato immunis et immaculata sempiterna divinitas.*

²⁴⁰ Huhn 1954, 80.

²⁴¹ Neumann 1962, 78.

²⁴² Ambrose, in *psalm.* 37.5. *Nec in iniquitatibus conceptus et natus est in delictis, qui non ex sanguinibus neque ex uoluntate carnis neque ex uoluntate uiri, sed de spiritu sancto natus ac uirgine est.*

²⁴³ Neumann 1962, 78.

²⁴⁴ Lillis 2017, 210. "Ambrose grounds Christ's holiness in his unique birth".

²⁴⁵ Hunter 2007, 197–204. Ambrose "linked sin to sexuality and salvation to sexual purity", quotation 200. "Virginity, for Ambrose, had become the paradigm of salvation", quotation 202.

²⁴⁶ P. Brown 2008, 351. Christ's body was "unscarred by the double taint of a sexual origin and of sexual impulses".

immaculate and virginal conception. For Ambrose, the virginal conception and birth, was primarily a necessary consequence of the eternal divinity of the Son. The virginal conception was used, for Ambrose, only as a secondary motive for explaining the absence of original sin in Christ.

The next question to ask is how Ambrose preached the presence of original sin in humanity to the Milanese congregation. How did he explain their children's nature? Offering the sacraments was an important task for him as a bishop. I offer two practical examples which reveal how Ambrose understood the original sin affecting children. Firstly, a passage found in *De paradiso*:

I shall, therefore, not despoil Adam lest I may despoil the whole human race, which is innocent (*innocens est*) before it acquires the capacity to know good and evil. Not without reason was it said: *Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18:3). The child, when he is scolded, does not retaliate. When he is struck, he does not strike back. He do not know of the temptations of ambition and plunder.²⁴⁷

A child, also in our *post peccatum* state of existence, is an example for everyone. Ambrose uses the words of Jesus as proof for his view on the state of mind of children. A child is, according to the bishop, innocent before it acquires the knowledge of sin. It does not retaliate (*ne remaledicit*), does not strike back (*non repercutit*), and do not know of ambition and plunder (*ambitionum et rapinarum temptamenta non nouit*). The difference in Ambrose's view when compared to Augustine's reflections on a human child in *Confessiones* is striking.²⁴⁸ Ambrose's view does not necessarily follow that a child is good and without sin. *De paradiso* continues with the explanation that no one can avoid sin, even with knowledge of the good.²⁴⁹ In other texts as well Ambrose emphasises a human inability actually to do good. The first example of this is found a passage in *De fuga saeculi* where Ambrose writes that our heart and our thoughts are not in our power.²⁵⁰ A second example is in *De bono mortis* where he writes that from its first day a child cannot be clean from sin.²⁵¹

The view of childish innocence returns in the first book of *De officiis ministrorum*. In the context of teaching about how to avoid being caught in anger, Ambrose writes:

Quarrels among children (*pueri*) are harmless and have more of kindness (*gratia*) than bitterness (*amaritudo*) about them. If children come to quarrel one with the other, they are easily calmed down again, and quickly come together with even greater friendliness. They do not know how to act deceitfully (*subdolos*) and unnaturally (*artificiosus*).

²⁴⁷ Ambrose, *par.* 12.59.

²⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessiones* I 6.7–20.31.

²⁴⁹ Ambrose, *par.* 12.60.

²⁵⁰ Ambrose, *fuga* 1.1.

²⁵¹ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 11.49.

Do not condemn these children, of whom the Lord says: *Unless you turn and become like this child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18:3).²⁵²

The children's manner, they not being possessed by anger and in easily forgiving wrongs, are offered as examples for his listeners to imitate. This is a witness of a basically positive view of how a child's mind is constituted. Ambrose continues the passage by pointing at Jesus as child:

So also, the Lord himself, who is the power of God (*Dei uirtus*), as a boy (*puer*), when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he was struck, struck not back. Set then your mind on this – like a child never to keep an injury in mind, never to show malice. May all things be done blamelessly by you.²⁵³

The most splendid child that have ever lived, is Christ. Nonetheless, every child is an example for the adults to keep their mind turned away from anger and revenge.

Ambrose undoubtedly believed that the original sin is inherited. Of this inherited sin it does not follow, however, that every act of a normal child is sinful. Quite the opposite: Ambrose sees a child as exemplary in many ways. Christ as a child is the greatest example, and he differs from all other children in being born in an immaculate way, and also in possessing the power that follows being substantially God.

4.5. Conclusions on Chapter 4

The main scholarly question of the present study is how Ambrose used the concept of Mary's virginity in his pastoral care. The definition of pastoral care used in the study is communicating the Christian message, as summarised in the Creed, in the tension between Christian dogma and the existing culture in order to make the Christian people grow in grace, delight, faith, and living. In the present chapter I have mapped Ambrose's preaching on the conception of Christ, the incarnation. The tension in question is between the belief in the incarnation of the Son, which Ambrose worked to make his congregation believe, and the cultural perceptions of a normal human conception.

The crucial Christological debate in North Italy during the second half of the fourth century was over the orthodox way to express the divinity of the Son. As bishop of Milan Ambrose succeeded Auxentius, who had been an outspoken Homoian bishop for twenty years. A Homoian, as well as Homoousian, view of Mary was that Christ assumed his flesh from her. It might be the case that the Homoians did not give her the title Mother of

²⁵² Ambrose, *off.* I 21.93.

²⁵³ Ambrose, *off.* I 21.93.

God (*Mater Dei*) because they believed only the Father could be called God in a real sense. If this was the case Ambrose emphatically turned against the Homoians in his first writing, calling Mary Mother of God, even if none of his early texts were polemical in their character.

The texts Ambrose delivered to his Emperor were sermons, edited for publication. They were all part of his pastoral concerns, edited as texts to offer spiritual guidance to his Emperor. The tension between the dogma and the culture on the matter of Christology is the tension between the idea of a virginal conception and the medical theories on and around fertilisation. Ambrose preached the Christian dogma of the virginal birth, in a culture where the understanding of a birth was according to the Hippocratic and Galenic ideas. In that particular context Ambrose explains the virgin birth as a wonder, a miracle of the Triune God, rather than an event which could be explained biologically. A closer reading identifies that Ambrose considers the Holy Spirit to be the active principle of the conception, paralleling the male seed, in Galen's medicine, of the incarnation. Mary offered the Holy Spirit her womb as the fertile soil, in correlation to planting a seed in the ground, to effect the miraculous event of incarnation. Mary's function was to offer the material and nutritive principle for Christ. Mary gave Christ his actuality through her own flesh and blood. This corresponds to the Galenic view of the mother which understood the material of her body as nutritive in the development of a baby.

The primary purpose of the incarnation was, according to Ambrose, the redemptory work of Christ. As the incarnation in her womb had its final purpose in the cross and resurrection, Mary can be seen as cooperating in the salvation. The body which Christ offered for the salvation of the world was received by him from Mary. Ambrose, however, rejected the idea of a salvific co-suffering from Mary's side at Golgotha, even if Ambrose read into her mind that she was fully prepared to die with her son. This is clear from a parallel reading of three of his – almost identical – passages describing Mary at the foot of the cross.

In his *Expositio psalmi 118* Ambrose comments on the singing: "What we in heart and mind hold fast, we use to sing, and what we sing grab our inner life."²⁵⁴ There is a certain power in music; it reaches realms words alone cannot reach. It is also pedagogical; a hymn can be brought home and reflected on in everyday life in a way which is impossible for a sermon. We probably cannot come any closer to the feelings and beliefs of ordinary lay people, than what comes from a slow reading of a hymn they employed. This is no different from today; a long sermon with its many complicated words may pass us by, but a short and easily sung hymn

²⁵⁴ Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 7.25. *Quae enim bene tenemus cantare consueuimus et quae cantantur melius nostris adhaerent sensibus.*

touches the mind on a different level. In the hymn *Intende, qui regis Israel* Ambrose wonderfully turned his Mariology into spirituality: The Milanese congregation singing out the message of incarnation in that Christological hymn. The content of the hymn explicitly mentions the virginal conception, the growing of Christ, and Mary's swelling womb. This very vivid picture of Christ growing in the womb of Mary can hardly be undervalued as being a recognition of the experience of pregnancies in the Milanese congregation under Ambrose's pastoral care.

5. Eschatology: *Nec timeo mori*¹

In this fifth chapter I expound Ambrose's teaching on Mary's virginity after the birth of Christ (virginitas post partum), a belief which carries the idea that Mary lived in lifelong celibacy. I am reading this idea of virginity in relation to Ambrose's Eschatology, that means his views on the fragility of life, on death, coming resurrection, judgement, and eternity. Consolations in death, poverty, and sickness are ubiquitous in Ambrose's sermons, as well as exhortations in favor of virginity and asceticism. I reconstruct his congregation's understandings and their associations regarding the tension between life and death and see how these fit the tension between sexuality and celibacy. Ambrose did not generally have a negative view of sexuality, but nevertheless it was something he regarded as belonging to this passing world.

5.1. Introduction to the Chapter

For Ambrose, the concept of a perpetual virginity includes a *virginitas in partu*, which has already been dealt with in Chapter 3. How Ambrose taught the conception of Christ has, similarly, been dealt with in Chapter 4. What is still needed, however, and thus the subject of this chapter, is an investigation of how Ambrose's teaching on the Eschatology enlightens Mary's *virginitas post partum*. Virginity after the birth is the idea that Mary persisted in a lifelong celibacy after the birth of Christ.

In order to hear the silence of the Late Antique Milan, Dell Hymes' model of SPEAKING gives the frame of this present study. The original *setting* of Ambrose's writings of this chapter was the Church's pulpit. The time and place were in the context of worship, and in one case a funeral. On questions on death, the fragility of the present life and the world to come, one must presuppose personal conversations of spiritual art, which influenced the sermons implicitly. The setting is a premodern society with its high infant mortality rates and the ever-present risk of death through infections, diseases, and so on, also for adults. The cultural understanding of sexuality was also premodern, for example, continence was seen as physically healthy. The *participants* are the people of the Christian community in Milan, a mixed congregation of men and women, educated and non-educated, rich and poor, all of whom needed consolation and hope. We can presume all had personal experiences of premature deaths

¹ Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 45. Trans.: "I do not fear death". Ambrose said the words on his deathbed.

in the family, both of infants and of adults. The *end* of Ambrose's pastoral care was the eternal life with God, and with that hope at the forefront of his thinking, he offered his congregation both consolation and encouragement in this present life. Ambrose preached to help his people live actively in the fragile and perishable life of his audience and help them not to fear death. *Act sequences* are about style and linguistic structure of the speech act. In the writings studied in the present chapter consolation is the main stylistic sequence. The *keys*, the tones and manners of the communication, are foremost the mild and warm language of consolation. The *instrumentalities* are the medium of communication, which in Ambrose's case was oral communication. His listeners had experienced premature deaths and could be expected to regard sexuality as foremost being a matter of procreation. The *norms* are the rules that govern the vocalisation of the message. I interpret Ambrose's public speeches about death and sexuality as being mindful of how the different people of the congregation might have reacted. It is important to pay attention to the *genre* in which one finds the Ambrose's utterances on death and the life to come. He often preached about death and virginity, not only in the funeral speeches. Basically, he understood that the fundamental aspect of baptism was a death from this world in order to live for the impending world. The virgins and Mary herself were signs of the world to come. Ambrose speaks on Eschatology in all his writings. The material for this chapter comes from his consolatory preaching.

In this chapter I first investigate what assumptions Ambrose could have had about sexuality. From both a psychological and a physiological perspective, Ambrose had a pre-modern view of sexuality. He did not regard it as something that urgently had to be experienced. This has to do with both certain medical and theological presuppositions of his, which I try to explore. As the next step, I use his eschatological writings to create a background for his view on Mary's perpetual virginity. The life to come was an important matter for Ambrose. According to Paulinus when lying on his deathbed Ambrose said: "I do not fear death, for we have a good Lord".² One could say that Ambrose had thoroughly taught himself that attitude during the years he was pastorally active. During his episcopate he put a lot of energy and effort into comforting and leading his congregation away from the fear of death.

Ambrose handles the questions of separation between the body and soul in death, the spiritual death of baptism, the transcendent realm of a future heavenly life both collectively with regard to the Church and individually to the baptised Christian. In his sermons Ambrose frequently conveyed a message of the heavenly hope to his listeners. It is telling that one of Ambrose's most frequently used Bible quotations is Philippians

² Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 45. *Nec timeo mori, quia bonum Dominum habemus.*

3:20: *Our citizenship is in heaven* – the true homeland.³ Ambrose also deals with the universal questions of final judgement and the world to come.

Ernst Dassmann has noticed that Ambrose never loosened himself fully from the stoicism of his time in his use of terminology of the body/flesh and the soul/spirit. He often uses stoic terms such as *vita beata* which is the *summum bonum* which will eventually lead to the *vita aeterna* and allowed these to form his Eschatology.⁴ Ambrose relied not only on earlier Christian authors but also on different philosophical schools as well.⁵ The Latin theologians at the time let themselves be so strongly influenced by stoicism, so much so that Marcia Colish claims that without Ambrose and other Church Fathers many of Cicero's works would not have been preserved into the Middle Ages at all.⁶ My task is, however, not to investigate Ambrose's dependence on different philosophical schools, but rather to hear and understand what he pastorally preached to his congregation. His different views on sexuality and basic conditions in life, when compared to modern times, must create an awareness that Ambrose's concept of virginity is alien in our contemporary context. Two notions are starting points for this chapter:

1. Galen refers in one of his writings to two ideas that he regarded characteristic for the Christians: A restraint sexual ethic and a belief in the resurrection of the body – i.e. virginity and a hope in death.⁷ Bonnie MacLachlan wrote in a review of Giulia Sissa's *Greek Virginity*: "Another important question that arises whenever one considers the Greek *Parthenos* is its association with death, in ritual and in myth, but Sissa makes no notion of this".⁸ In a later article Sissa agreed with the criticism: "Finally, MacLachlan accuses me of not exploring the connection of virginity and death. She is right. I have no excuse."⁹ The correlation between virginity and death was a general theme in Late Antiquity. In this chapter I investigate how in Ambrose's theology baptism meant a spiritual death, which means that the baptised Christian was dead to this world.

³ Philippians 3:20: *Nostra autem conuersatio in caelis est*. For example: *exam.* III 12.51, VI 8.45, VI 8.48, VI 9.74; *lac.* II 9.38; *fid.* V 15.184, *epist extra coll.* 14.104 (63 PL).

⁴ Dassmann 2004, in the chapter *Senectus mundi*, 266–279.

⁵ For example, one could call *De officiis ministrorum* a Christianisation of Cicero's work with a similar title.

⁶ Colish 1985 I, 156–157.

⁷ Galen writes in a summary of Plato's Republic: "We now see the people called Christians, though they have drawn their faith from mere allegories, sometimes acting like true philosophers. For their lack of fear of death and of what they will meet thereafter is something we can see everyday, and likewise their restraint in cohabitation. For they include not only men but also women who have refrained from cohabiting all through their lives". Quoted and trans. in Beard et al. 1998, 338. I have found this notion, thanks to Dr. Daniel Johansson.

⁸ MacLachlan 1994, 78.

⁹ Sissa 2013, 89.

The ultimate example of this spiritual death was the Virgin Mary, and in her imitation all virgins of the Church. The virgin was for the world a symbol of the sacramental death in baptism.¹⁰

2. The second starting point of this chapter is that the new creation is not only a return to paradise, but, even more, a completion and fulfilment of creation. Ambrose writes in *De paradiso* that both life and the cause of death were present in the middle of paradise.¹¹ In the world to come, however, there will be an absence of the presence of death and consequently the purpose of procreation will be removed. In this chapter, I demonstrate that Mary, as perpetual virgin and as the second Eve, not only points backwards to the creation, but, even more, points forwards to the future goal of creation.

5.2. An Ordinary Sexuality, and The Virgin Mary's Celibacy

One of the questions of the present study is to understand Ambrose's concept of virginity in the context the biological and medical assumptions of his time. In this section I first map the Late Antique perceptions on sexuality on a general level and then proceed to Ambrose's teaching on sexuality, celibacy, and marriage, in the context of his guidance of the congregation towards a life in hope of the world to come. This exposition is started in this section and continues throughout the whole chapter.

5.2.1. The View of Sexual Activity Generally in Late Antiquity

The view that human sexuality is a basic psychological issue and an experience which can be divorced from procreation is a thought far from Ambrose's world. One reason for this change in perception is, of course, medical development in our contemporary society where contraception has caused sexual behaviour and childbearing to become two different matters. Another reason is the development of psychological science in modernity. Sigmund Freud comments on the worldview of virginity in his time in *Das Tabu der Virginität*:

Wer zuerst die durch lange Zeit mühselig zurückgehaltene Liebessehnsucht der Jungfrau befriedigt und dabei die Widerstände überwunden hat, die in ihr durch die Einflüsse von Milieu und Erziehung aufgebaut waren, der wird von ihr in ein dauerndes Verhältnis gezogen, dessen Möglichkeit sich keinem anderen mehr eröffnet. Auf Grund

¹⁰ Peter Brown has written interestingly on the virgin and virginity as bearing a symbolic charge, in P. Brown 1985.

¹¹ Ambrose, *par.* 5.29. *In medio paradiso et uita erat et causa mortis.*

dieses Erlebnisses stellt sich bei der Frau ein Zustand von Hörigkeit her, der die ungestörte Fortdauer ihres Besitzes verbürgt und sie widerstandsfähig macht gegen neue Eindrücke und fremde Versuchungen.¹²

According to Freud, a virgin suffers from an inhibited sexuality, and when she marries a man and they start having intercourse, this relieves her and makes her strongly connected to that man. With this twentieth century view on sexuality in mind, one easily sees the fundamental difference between it and the viewpoint held in Ambrose's time.

Perhaps more than any earlier movement in history, Christianity in Late Antiquity encouraged celibacy and chastity.¹³ The Christianised Roman society come to accept it as a desirable ideal, although questions why and how it happened have, in Kate Cooper's words, "troubled the historical profession since Gibbon, and no satisfactory answer has yet been found".¹⁴ One must not overlook, that Ambrose held Christian marriage in high esteem, even if he did regard celibacy as an even higher call.¹⁵

As in every era prior to the sexual revolution, i.e. before safe contraception and legal abortions were available, sexual activity between a man and a woman in Late Antiquity could be expected to be followed by the lifelong consequences of a child. Generally, the purpose of marriage was to beget children rather than to express love and devotion.¹⁶ Sexuality and the contract of a marriage were matters of society and social life, more than fulfilment of an individual self. This does not necessarily mean that a marriage based on romantic love was deemed subversive, as Kate Cooper has noticed while discussing Greek novels: "it may have been perceived as an attempt to stabilize a founding institution of social order by calling attention to its charm".¹⁷ It is also true, that in ancient Greece and Rome certain forms of homosexuality, prostitution, a free man's right to have sex with his slaves, and to a limited degree contra-receptive (for example abortion, though forbidden according to the Hippocratic oath), made sexuality (at least for men at the higher levels of society) a matter that could be decoupled from procreation and thus more about power, lust,

¹² Freud 1981, 29-30.

¹³ Men and women choosing a life in celibacy is not only a Christian phenomenon but is found in every culture. Abbott 2001 offers an historical overview of celibacy as a phenomenon in a world-wide perspective.

¹⁴ Cooper 1996, 1.

¹⁵ Dooley 1948 is an investigation on the marriage in Ambrose's thought; see also Pelikan 1996, 119-121.

¹⁶ Ingemark and Gerding 2000, 43.

¹⁷ Cooper 1996, 37.

and enjoyment.¹⁸ For the women it was different; reciprocity in sexual relations was not considered: “The ideal in ancient sexual relations was not, as a rule, reciprocity. Instead, sex was hierarchically structured and conceptually integrated with power”¹⁹ Elaine Paigels writes that a young girl who hesitated or refused to marry the man her family had chosen for her would have been seen as obstinate or even mad.²⁰ Marriage was something for the common good, and every human individual was a part of the whole, with Aristotle’s world a social animal (*politikon zoon*). When Christianity entered the scene in Late Antiquity it was followed by a more austere sexual ethic; sex outside Christian marriage, homosexuality, and prostitution were rejected. This more austere ethic was, in some respects, shared with Stoicism. Daniel H. Garrison writes about Roman Stoicism in its most strict form: “sex should be only for procreation; diet should be vegetarian, preferably uncooked”.²¹

I will now turn attention to Late Antique medicine. Interest in a woman’s anatomy, physiology, and pathology was due to the necessity and importance of procreation.²² Some medical authorities did propose different treatments for infertility, including herbal and animal medicines, as can be seen in the prescriptions of Hippocrates²³ and Celsus.²⁴

In what ways, then, did sexual intercourse on the one hand and abstinence, on the other, affect a woman’s body? In the Hippocratic medicine, a prolonged sexual abstinence for a woman was believed to cause maladies, which Sissa calls “virgins’ ailments”, and the proven remedy was productive intercourse, that is to become pregnant and give birth.²⁵ One example is that it was thought that a woman suffering from dropsy would get well if she gave birth.²⁶ On the Hippocratic medicine, Sissa writes:

Normal menstruation, proper moistening of the uterine tissue, correct size of the cervix, and correct position of the uterus in the body were all

¹⁸ One remarkable study on the History of sexuality is Foucault’s *Histoire de la Sexualité* in three books, 1. *La volonté de savoir* 1976, 2. *L’usage des Plaisir* 1984, 3. *Le souci de soi* 1984. I have read this in a Swedish translation *Sexualitetens historia*, Foucault 2002. In line with this, Skinner writes: “Our literary sources from classical Athens about sexual attitudes are biased through upper class perspective and predictably focus on homoerotic relations,” Garrison 2014, 74.

¹⁹ Skinner, in Garrison 2014, 71.

²⁰ Pagels 1988, 156.

²¹ Garrison 2014, 21.

²² See Marilyn Skinner’s chapter on *Sex*, Garrison 2014, 67–82.

²³ Hippocrates, *On sterile women*. Reference Sissa 1990, 46.

²⁴ Celsus, *De medicina* 5.21.7 “Om en kvinna icke koncipierar, så har man att använda lejonfett, som uppmjukas med rosenolja”. Trans. Odenius 1906.

²⁵ Sissa 1990, 45.

²⁶ Hippocrates, *On nature of Women* 3. Reference Sissa 1990, 45.

desirable and probable consequences of a timely and prolific marriage.²⁷

Soranus writes that in his time there were two different views about renunciation of sexual intercourse, one regarding intercourse for a woman as bodily negative, the other one as positive. The arguments are as follows:

Some have pronounced permanent virginity healthful, others, however, not healthful. The former contend that the body is made ill by desire. Indeed, they say, we see the bodies of lovers pale, weak, and thin, while virginity because of inexperience with sexual pleasures is unacquainted with desire. Furthermore, all excretion of seed is harmful in females as in males. Virginity, therefore, is healthful, since it prevents the excretion of seed.²⁸

The negative effect on the female body was, however, not only due to the excretion of seed. Soranus continues in the same passage:

For pregnancy and parturition exhaust the female body and make it waste greatly away, whereas virginity, safeguarding women from such injuries, may suitably be called healthful.²⁹

There were also those who regarded intercourse as positive for the female body. In the next passage Soranus continues describing the second position:

desire for sexual pleasures appertains not only to woman but to virgins also [...] the only abatement of the craving is found in the use of intercourse not in its avoidance. Maintenance of virginity, therefore, does not abolish desire.³⁰

Their answer to the excretion theory was that sexuality was only harmful when lived out in excess. The great advantage of sexual relations was posited as intercourse relaxing the whole body.³¹ After having described both positions, Soranus declares himself on the side of the first: “permanent virginity is healthful, because intercourse is harmful in itself as has been shown in more length in the book *On Hygiene*.”³² The book Soranus refers to is unfortunately lost, but another text, probably based on Soranus’ work, *De salutaribus praeceptis*, states that “intercourse is necessary for conception but bad for the preservation of the bodily health”.³³

Sissa, in her study *Greek Virginity*, offers the thesis that Antique medicine did not believe there were any bodily signs demonstrating whether a girl had had sex or not, other than being caught in the act, or a resultant pregnancy. Of the question of a hymen, the medical authorities

²⁷ Sissa 1990, 44–45.

²⁸ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 7.30. Trans. Temkin 1956.

²⁹ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 7.30. Trans. Temkin 1956.

³⁰ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 7.31. Trans. Temkin 1956.

³¹ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 7.31.

³² Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 7.32. Trans. Temkin 1956.

³³ Quoted in Temkin 1956, 29.

did not believe in a membrane that was destroyed during the first intercourse. Soranus writes that it

is a mistake to assume that a thin membrane grows across the vagina, dividing it, and that this membrane causes pain when it bursts in defloration or if menstruation occurs too quickly [...] the membrane is not found in dissection.³⁴

5.2.2. The View of Sexuality, Marriage, and Celibacy in Ambrose's Texts

In exercising his pastoral care Ambrose is more concerned about the life of the soul than that of the body. That does not mean he was not interested in bodily matters. In *Exameron* Ambrose extols the Creator for having made the human body. As we have already seen, Ambrose describes the bodily constitution in the Genesis-sermons with awe, he has ideas where the semen is produced, and he mentions that conception includes enjoyment.³⁵ In his book *Marriage according to St. Ambrose*, William J. Dooley has collected many passages from Ambrose's texts which reveal a high value placed on marriage. Ambrose calls marriage holy, for example, in the expression "holy joining together" (*sancta copula*),³⁶ and it was seen as a road to salvation for Christians. Ambrose recognises a freedom in the ordered celibatarian state, and conversely a yoke in marriage, but noteworthy it is "a yoke of love" (*vinculum caritatis*).³⁷ Ambrose lived in a time in Church history when marriage, or matrimony, was about to be regarded as a sacrament.³⁸

Ernst Dassmann argues that Ambrose points so heavily towards virginity, that the marriage as sacrament slides into the background. According to Dassmann, in perspective of his Catholic understanding of

³⁴ Soranus, *Gynaikeia* I 3.17.

³⁵ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 9.54–74.

³⁶ Ambrose *Apol. Dav.* I 11.56.

³⁷ Ambrose, *exh. virg.* 4.21; *virginit.* 6.33; *vid.* 11.69; 13.81.

³⁸ Marriage as one of the sacraments was first defined as a dogma of faith at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). But by that time it had been long been regarded as such. The medieval theologians supported their sacramental views on marriage on Augustine. He provided for them the theological material for a sacramental view on marriage. In his *De bono coniugali* Augustine expresses the three "goods" of marriage: Children (*proles*), fidelity (*fides*), and sacramental joining together (*sacramentum*). During that time, from the patristic era into the early medieval time, a noteworthy development can be detected; namely the estate of marriage, the enduring married life, was seen as sacramental, while finally the marriage rite, the transient act of marrying, was established as the actual sacrament in Trent. I have taken the information about the history of marriage as sacrament from Philip L. Reynolds' exhaustive survey *How Marriage Became One of the Sacraments*, published in 2016. Another recent publication with introductory commentary and source material on marriage in the early Church is David Hunter's *Marriage and Sexuality in the Early Christianity*, published in 2018.

truth: “Ambrosius lehrt nicht falsch, aber er denkt und fühlt falsch”.³⁹ Dassmann writes that in theory, and when not under duress, Ambrose valued both marriage and celibacy, but conversely, when upset and stressed, as during the Jovinianist controversy, he idealised virginity in an improper way. Ambrose followed a line that traces its origin from the New Testament (most clearly in 1 Corinthians 7) about a rank in merits between those who are married, widows, and virgins. This hierarchy was questioned by Jovinian, Helvidius, and others. In the synodal letter written at the Synod of Milan around 390,⁴⁰ Ambrose writes:

We do not say that marriage was not sanctified by Christ, since the Word of God says that *the two shall become one flesh* (Matthew 19:3) and one spirit [...] Marriage is good: through it the means of human continuity are found. Virginity is better: through it are attained the inheritance of a heavenly kingdom and a continuity of heavenly rewards. [...] Christ chose for himself the special privilege of virginity and set forth the benefit for chastity, manifesting in himself what he had chosen in his mother.⁴¹

Both Christ and his mother Mary are set forth in the passage as examples of virginity. In the hierarchy of the Church, Ambrose regarded the virginal life as being higher than married, but taught that both should be understood as good Christian callings: “Marriage is therefore honourable, but celibacy/integrity is more honourable”.⁴² Ambrose follows a hierarchy of three-divided callings in the church. An example is found in *De viduis*:

We are taught that the virtue of chastity has three forms – first that of married life, second that of widowhood, third that of virginity; for we do not so praise one form as to exclude others.⁴³

Virginity was for a few, and most of the adults in Ambrose’s congregation were married and lived family lives. For a proper understanding of Ambrose’s views, it is important to recognise the genre and context in which he preaches. To the married majority Ambrose preached that sexuality for procreation was a good thing, a task to be fulfilled, as in *Exameron* or *De paradiso*.⁴⁴ To the virgins, Ambrose preached about the good of abstinence, and chastity as being a task to

³⁹ Dassmann 1965, 261. Still 40 years later Dassmann evaluated Ambrose’s sexual ethics as somewhat over reactive and that the bishop never loosened himself from the stoic ideal, Dassmann 2004, 50–52, 274–275.

⁴⁰ About the Synod and the Letter, see Chapter 3.2.3.2: *Virginitas in partu in Official Ecclesiastical texts*.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15.3 (42 PL).

⁴² Ambrose, *vid.* 12.72. *Honorabile itaque coniugum, sed honorabilior integritas.*

⁴³ Ambrose, *vid.* 4.23. *Docemur itaque triplicem castitatis esse virtutem; unam coniugalem, aliam viduitatis, tertiam virginitatis; non enim aliam sic praedicamus, ut excludamus alias.*

⁴⁴ More on the subject in Chapter 3.3.3.3: *If Adam and Eve had a Sexual Relation in Paradise.*

fulfil.⁴⁵ In *De Cain et Abel* the bishop writes that intercourse in “marriage is sanctified, but outside is destroying virginity”.⁴⁶ As has already been shown in Chapter 3 on Protology, Ambrose did not consider sexual differentiation, marriage, and procreation as existing only *post peccatum*, but rather as a created faculty imbedded in humanity. Peter Dückerts writes in the introduction to his edition of *De virginibus* that Ambrose devalued marriage.⁴⁷ This is not necessarily accurate. It is of decisive importance to be aware of the genre of the writing Ambrose uses. It is in the virginity writings that Ambrose praises virginity. In other texts he does not mention virginity at all.

With this as background, it becomes clear that to answer how Ambrose thought about sexual intercourse, one must distinguish whether it happens inside or outside of marriage. That is why I think David Hunter draws a too hasty a conclusion when he writes about Origen and Ambrose that “Origen’s belief in Mary’s *virginitas post partum* also was based in his view that sex caused contamination” and that sexual “relations were inherently defiling”.⁴⁸

An important issue is the question of the virginity test. This has been the subject of research for many scholars; Emmenegger, Lillis, Sissa, Hanson, MacLachlan all discuss it.⁴⁹ Around 380 Ambrose was asked for counsel in a case of a virgin charged with having broken her vow of celibacy. In charge of the virgin was the bishop Syagrius of Verona, and either he or another bishop had subjected the virgin to an investigation by a midwife. Ambrose took the side of the virgin and wrote a letter of serious critique to bishop Syagrius. It is an interesting letter revealing not only both Ambrose’s view of the philosophical medicine and of the medical authorities of his time, but also how he handled an accusation like this. Ambrose firstly states that such a trial is against the canonical law.⁵⁰ Moreover, such a test is, seen from the medical perspective, of dubious worth, since no “inspection of hidden and secret parts, but modesty, evident to all, gives proof of her integrity”.⁵¹ There is but one proof that a virgin has had intercourse, and that is pregnancy, a belly swelling with child. According to Ambrose, we ought to, instead of looking at the accused virgin, focus on the accuser. Ambrose writes: “Maximus, should get our full attention”.⁵² Ambrose seems to have had a suspicion that Maximus had

⁴⁵ The virginity writings are *De virginibus*, *De virginitate*, *De viduis*, *De institutione virginis*, and *Exhortatio virginitatis*.

⁴⁶ Ambrose, *Cain* I 10.46.

⁴⁷ Dückerts, in the introduction to FChr 81, 49–50.

⁴⁸ Hunter 2007, 185–186.

⁴⁹ See their respective titles in the bibliography.

⁵⁰ Ambrose, *epist.* 56.2 (5 PL).

⁵¹ Ambrose, *epist.* 56.6 (5 PL). *Nec abditorum, occultorumque inspectio, sed obuia omnibus modestia astipulatur integritati.*

⁵² Ambrose, *epist.* 56.4 (5 PL).

made up the story himself out of envy of the girl. Further, Ambrose points at the accumulated wisdom and experience of the medical authorities: “What of the fact that the physicians say that the trustworthiness of an inspection is not clearly understood and this has been the opinion of older doctors of medicine?”⁵³ Ambrose points to the Bible in his letter and states that, according to the Bible, midwives should not inspect virgins, but rather they are there to assist deliveries.

Setting aside the midwife’s test described in the Protoevangelium of James⁵⁴ it is only Cyprian (about 200–258) among the Church fathers prior to Ambrose who has any uttering about a virginity test. The background is that a bishop called Pomponius asked for advice about ordained virgins who were accused of living in sexual relationships. In Cyprian’s answer the most reliable evidence was to find the couple in question in bed or to understand that they lived together. In his answer the virginity test by midwives is also brought into question. We do not know Cyprian’s physiological ideas about the female genitals, but it is clear that he regarded a virginity test by midwives as an unreliable method to prove virginity:

Nor let any think that she can be defended by this excuse, that she may be examined and proved whether she be a virgin; since both the hands and the eyes of the midwives are often deceived [...] But if they have repented of this their unlawful lying together, and have mutually withdrawn from one another, let the virgins meantime be carefully inspected by midwives; and if they should be found virgins, let them be received to communion, and admitted to the Church.⁵⁵

Augustine also mentioned such a test, in *De civitate Dei* I 18, where he writes about a midwife and a virginity examination. Such an operation could cause damage, according to Augustine. Among the Greeks in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, there was no evidence for such a test in the fourth century.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ambrose, *epist.* 56.8 (5 PL). *Quid, quod etiam ipsi archiatri dicunt non satis liquido comprehendere inspectionis fidem, et ipsis medicinae uetustis doctoribus id sententiae fuisse?*

⁵⁴ This was a test which could not possibly have been a test of virginity. Emmenegger writes about the inspection: “Eine Inspektion des Hymens erscheint mir jedoch aus mehreren Gründen unmöglich”, Emmenegger 2016, 210.

⁵⁵ Cyprian, *Epistula* 61.3–4. Trans. ANF 5. Dr. Edwina Murphy has shown me a possible correction of my interpretation. Her point is that Cyprian treats the virgins who pass the test differently from those who do not. Further, Cyprian seems to mean that virgins should not congratulate themselves on physically remaining virgins while sharing beds with men and cause other to stumble and do sin in other ways. Edwina Murphy has generously provided me her forthcoming article, ‘Like Angels in Heaven: Cyprian, Sex, and Celibacy’, in which she deals with Cyprian’s views on the virginity test.

⁵⁶ Emmenegger 2016, 208.

5.2.3. The Tradition of *Mariae virginitas post partum* up to Ambrose

By Ambrose's time, the belief in *Mariae virginitas post partum* was a strong tradition. That the idea has deep historical roots is unquestioned in the scholarly discussion. According to the traditional view, the only example of a Church Father who taught that Mary had more children than Jesus is Tertullian.⁵⁷ Early in the twentieth century Hugo Koch did – in two very concise treatises – question whether *virgo post partum* was generally believed in the Late Antique Church.⁵⁸ According to Koch, Ireneaeus's word *adhuc virgo*, about both Mary and Eve, opens up for an interpretation that both of them were once virgins, but that neither had remained so.⁵⁹ This has met opposition among Catholic scholars,⁶⁰ and a Catholic handbook Georg Soll's *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* states "Versuche, für Irenäus eine auf die Leugnung der virginitas post partum hinauslaufende Einstellung nachzuweisen, überzeugen nicht".⁶¹

Mary's reply to the angel's message: *How can this be, since I have no husband* (Luke 1:34) sounds strange when seen from the perspective just a few verses earlier that she was *betrothed to a man* (Luke 1:27). A common interpretation of Luke 1:34 throughout history has been that Mary's answer indicates a vow of virginity made prior to the annunciation. The first documented theologians who make this specific interpretation of Luke 1:34 are Gregory of Nyssa (in *In diem natalem Christi*) in the East and Augustine (in *De sacra virginitate* and *Sermo* 291)⁶² in the West. Up to the twentieth century it was, according to Koch, taught among the majority of Catholic exegetes, with one exception only, Cajetan in the sixteenth century.⁶³ Ambrose never mentions the vow tradition, even if he very markedly taught on Mary's lifelong celibacy.⁶⁴

Related to the vow tradition is a tradition that from childhood on Mary belonged as a virgin to the temple in Jerusalem. The background is the *Protoevangelium of James* which portrays Mary as a maiden in the temple and Joseph chosen as her husband and protector because of his age, and who never violated her virginity.⁶⁵ According to the *Protoevangelium* Mary's parents placed her in the temple, and thus she did not make an

⁵⁷ Graef 2009, 33.

⁵⁸ Koch 1929, and Koch 1937.

⁵⁹ Koch 1929, 8–12.

⁶⁰ Graef 2009, 33.

⁶¹ Soll 1978, 44.

⁶² Craghan, in his dissertation study *Mary: The Virginal Wife and the Married Virgin, The Problematic of Mary's Vow of Virginity*, Rome 1967, asserts that Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine must be considered as the earliest witness of this specific tradition.

⁶³ Koch 1929, 38–40.

⁶⁴ Neumann 1962, 100–101.

⁶⁵ For more on the *Protoevangelium* see Chapter 3.2.2: *Eve – Second Eve and the Tradition of Mariae virginitas in partu*.

independent vow of her own.⁶⁶ The trouble with the story is that it does not fit the laws of Judaism, where procreation had been a basic command and duty since the first humans (Genesis 1:28). One interesting theory was presented by Bargil Pixner in the twentieth century. He argues that Mary's family had ties to the Essenes, and there were celibate Essene monks living in monastery communities in Qumran and Jerusalem. Pixner writes that if Mary belonged to the Essenes she could perfectly well have intended to live a life in celibacy and virginity all her adult life.⁶⁷ If Pixner is correct, one must conclude that both the tradition of a vow and Mary's *virginitas post partum* are very old.

The belief that Mary's pregnancy was due to a divine miracle is found in the New Testament (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35). When Mary is mentioned in the Bible, she is not called virgin, but simply Mary (ex. Luke 1:30; 2:5), mother (ex. Matthew 12:47; John 2:1), or woman (ex. John 2:4; John 19:26; Galatians 4:4). Later, as could be seen in the old Roman Creed, Mary was given the attribute virgin almost as a title to her name: She was *virgo Maria*.⁶⁸

Origen was one of the most creative and productive teachers in the Early Church. He believed, along with the *Protoevangelium of James*, that Mary was among the virgins in the temple. Moreover, Origen argued that the right interpretation of the brethren of the Lord was that they were sons of Joseph from an earlier marriage.⁶⁹

In the fourth century Jovinianus and others questioned Mary's perpetual virginity. David Hunter has scrupulously studied and rewritten this controversy in *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity*, published in 2007. According to Hunter the Jovinianists were closer to the earlier tradition than subsequent scholars have assumed. Jerome pictures Helvidius as a full-fledged heretic, in his *Contra Helvidium* 383.⁷⁰ Ten years later the controversy and a certain bishop Bonosus⁷¹ caused Ambrose in Milan to publish *De institutione virginis*, which is a refutation of the Jovinianists similar to Jerome's writing. Ambrose held the sermon, and later published the text, in defence of Mary's lifelong celibacy. In a short article I have tried to structure the arguments Ambrose used to defend the view of Mary's life-long virginity.⁷² Ambrose's arguments are also well and

⁶⁶ *Protoevangelium of James* 6–7.

⁶⁷ Pixner 2010, 23–37.

⁶⁸ [...] *natus est de Spiritu sancto et Maria virgine*. Text in Kelly 2006, 102.

⁶⁹ Graef 2009, 35.

⁷⁰ *Contra Helvidium* is translated in Swedish, in *I martyrerens och bekännarnas tid, Den helige Cyprianus och den helige Hieronymus*, 2014.

⁷¹ Neumann 1962, 205–235 deals with different possibilities of who Bonosus might have been and what he taught.

⁷² Wihlborg 2012.

profoundly presented by Neumann.⁷³ Here I briefly summarise Ambrose's argumentation.

One can sort Ambrose's arguments into three groups: Exegetical from the New Testament, arguments about Mary's character, and Old Testament arguments. The bishop Bonosus seems to have used Bible verses from the New Testament to show that Jesus had brothers and sisters. Ambrose lists and refutes these:

- *The woman* (in Ambrose's text *mulier*, John 2:4; Galatians 4:4). Ambrose explains simply that when Mary is called woman, and not virgin, it does not mean she had a normal marital relation to Joseph.⁷⁴
- *Before they came together* (in Ambrose's text, *antequam conveniret*, Matthew 1:18): The biblical word *convenio* could have a sexual connotation, and both sides agreed that it does carry this meaning in this case. According to Ambrose Matthew's expression is meant to emphasise the virginal conception, "even before they came together".⁷⁵
- *He knew her not until she had borne a son* (in Ambrose's text, *non cognovit eam donec peperit Filium*, Matthew 1:25): The problem here is whether *donec* points to one actual point, and that Joseph began to live with Mary after that specific point in time. Ambrose shows different places in the Bible where *donec* simply cannot mean that someone starts doing something after the *donec* is finished. Simply put, Ambrose does not include in the term an end and a new start.⁷⁶
- *Unwilling to put her to shame* (in Ambrose's text *noluit eam traducere*, Matthew 1:19): This shows that Joseph was unaware of the mystery. Nevertheless, Ambrose argues that his ignorance does not negate the virginal conception.⁷⁷
- *He took his wife* (in Ambrose's text, *accepit coniugem suam* (Matthew 1:24): According to Ambrose Joseph took Mary to be his wife in name only. Their marriage was not a normal marriage.⁷⁸
- *Brothers of the Lord* (in Ambrose's text *fratres Domini*, Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3 et al.): Ambrose embraces the theory from Origen

⁷³ Neumann 1962, 236–270.

⁷⁴ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.36. *Vulgi usus non praeiudicat ueritati*. Neumann 1962, 237–240.

⁷⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.37. Neumann 1962, 240–244.

⁷⁶ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.38. Neumann 1962, 244–248.

⁷⁷ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.39. Neumann 1962, 248–251.

⁷⁸ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.41–42. Neumann 1962, 252. For a lengthier discussion of the marriage between Joseph and Mary, with references outside *De institutione virginis*, see Neumann 1962, 85–100.

that the *fratres* of Jesus were Joseph's children from an earlier marriage.⁷⁹

The second set of arguments concern Mary's character and virtuousness. Ambrose leaves the rebuttal of Bonosus' objections and set out to argue positively for the perpetual virginity of Mary:

- Christ's choice of a virginal mother. If Mary had not been chaste and virtuous, Christ would not have chosen her as his mother.⁸⁰
- Mary as a model for virgins. Christ chose Mary as his mother and at the same time gave all virgins a model and example in her.⁸¹
- The rewards of virgins were intended for Mary. The reward is greater for virgins than for ordinary Christians, and the highest reward must be intended for Mary.⁸²
- Mary's awareness of her dignity. Mary knew what noble task she would have in the economy of salvation. She would never have let that dignity down by consummating a sexual relation with Joseph.⁸³
- Joseph's respect for Mary's dignity. When Joseph finally understood the mystery, he had the greatest respect for it. He was a just man, *vir iustus*.⁸⁴
- Mary's virginity was attested to on Calvary. In the drama of salvation, Christ's death on the cross, Jesus delays the redemption to honour his mother. Christ talks to Mary and gives her to John.⁸⁵
- Mary's courage on Calvary. Mary remained brave and courageous under the cross, even when all the apostles fled. Ambrose sees this sign of strength as a proof that she also remained a virgin.⁸⁶
- Mary, by being a virgin, distributes the grace of Christ. She is a chaste and heroic virgin, and as such she distributes the grace of Christ to the earth. Ambrose does not point at a concrete distribution of grace, but rather at Mary as an example.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.43. Neumann 1962, 252–257.

⁸⁰ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.44. Neumann 1962, 257–258.

⁸¹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.44. Neumann 1962, 258–259.

⁸² Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.45. Neumann 1962, 259–260.

⁸³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.45. Neumann 1962, 260.

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 6.45. Neumann 1962, 260–261.

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 7.46–48. The text is found in the present study in 8.3. *Mary at the Cross, a Synopsis*. Neumann 1962, 261–264.

⁸⁶ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 7.49–50. The text is found in the present study 8.3 *Mary at the Cross, a Synopsis*. Neumann 1962, 264–268.

⁸⁷ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 12.79. "The virgin is a royal pot [...] as a cloud she lets the grace of Christ rain on earth", *aula regalis est uirgo [...] quasi nubes pluit in terram gratiam Christi*. Neumann has missed this line from Ambrose's argument, which is noteworthy in an otherwise very comprehensive study.

A third kind of argument is the allegorical interpretation of Old Testament passages. Ambrose uses only one; he did not seem to know a Mariological interpretation of Genesis 3:15 for example.

- The *porta clausa* of Ezekiel 44:2. The last argument is an allegorical reading of Ezekiel 44: *And the Lord said to me, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut.* The gate through which God entered the world is Mary. And Ezekiel says clearly that it remained shut.⁸⁸

The controversy about Mary and virginity which arose in the late fourth century was calmed down. We hear nothing of a Jovinianist movement in the fifth century. A definitive solution was made at the Council of Constantinople in 553, as professor Owen Chadwick (1916–2015) writes: "In the Council of Constantinople 553 the bishops ruled that she is ever virgin; that is to say, she bore no brothers nor sisters after Jesus was born; she was mother to God and to him alone".⁸⁹ In the *Sentence against the "Three Chapters"*, and in the second and the fourteenth of the anathema against the "Three Chapters" the term ever virgin (*aeiparthenos/semper virgo*) is used three times:

Sententia: Additionally, we anathematize the heretical letter which Ibas is alleged to have written to Mari the Persian. This letter denies that God the Word was made incarnate of the ever virgin (*aeiparthenos/semper virgo*) Mary, the holy mother of God, and that he was made man.⁹⁰

2: If anyone will not confess that the Word of God has two nativities, that which is before all ages from the Father, outside time and without a body, and secondly that nativity of these latter days when the Word of God came down from the heavens and was made flesh of holy and glorious Mary, mother of God and ever-virgin (*aeiparthenos/semper virgo*), and was born from her: Let him be anathema.⁹¹

14: God the Word, who became incarnate of Mary the holy mother of God and ever virgin (*aeiparthenos/semper virgo*), became man,⁹²

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 8.51–57. Neumann 1962, 268–270. The passage from *De institutione virginis* 8.51–57 has been dealt with in Chapter 3.2.3: *Ambrose's Teaching on Mariae virginitas in partu*. In the passage from *De institutione virginis* an important part of Ambrose's understanding of Mary's *virginitas in partu* is created.

⁸⁹ Chadwick 1995, 89.

⁹⁰ *Concilium Constantinopolitanum II: Sententia adversus "tria Capitula"*. Text and trans. COD, Tanner 1990, 113.

⁹¹ *Concilium Constantinopolitanum II: Anathematismi adversus "tria Capitula 2*. Text and trans. COD, Tanner 1990, 114.

⁹² *Concilium Constantinopolitanum II: Anathematismi adversus "tria Capitula 14*. Text and trans. COD, Tanner 1990, 121.

By the sixth century the term *semper virgo* had become a title signalling orthodoxy in the Church.

5.3. Ambrose's Eschatology

In this section I outline the basic features of Ambrose's Eschatology. Ambrose believed himself living close to the end of the world. In *Expositio in Lucam* he reflects that: "we are in the evening of our world".⁹³ He expected the Eschaton to be imminent. The virgins of his time were eschatological signs. The few who had chosen virginity worked as a reminder of heaven for all. Baptism, common for all Christians, was likewise an eschatological sign, and its ritual made a great impact. In this section I discuss these two themes on Eschatology, analysing the theology in Ambrose's three main writings on the world to come.

One important aspect to keep in mind for this chapter, is the ever presence of death in the Ancient society. For every Christian in Late Antiquity death was a reality imbedded in everyday life. Only half of all newborn babies survived until their fifth birthday. Half of all men died before reaching the age of about 40–45. The life expectancy for women was even lower, due to risks during childbirth, and on average they lived 5 to 6 years less than men.⁹⁴ Adult baptism was still the most common form in Ambrose's time. Cornelia Horn, however, observes:

Among Christians, the stages in the early life of a child in the ancient world, that is, birth, baptism, and for many children also death and burial, were the central events that were ritualized, leading to, and defining the social completion of the young person.⁹⁵

Attending the funeral of one's child, was, for a Late Antique parent, as natural as celebrating another child's birthday.⁹⁶

5.3.1. Baptism as an Eschatological Sign

Baptism is a Christian initiation rite and signifies death from the old life, sins, and entry into a world in order to live for Christ. Christian baptism, therefore, is an eschatological event. A person who once was born as a human, experiences in baptism a rebirth in Christ, with the purpose of living the life of the world to come already down here on earth. The Jesuit theologian Hugo Rahner (1900–1968) has written about Ambrose's ecclesiology in his study of Early Christian symbols and figures of the

⁹³ Ambrose, in *Luc. X* 40. *In occasu saeculi sumus*.

⁹⁴ Rautman 2006, 8–10.

⁹⁵ Horn 2017, 301.

⁹⁶ For more on mortality rates in Late Antiquity see Chapter 3.2.1: *The View of a Normal Childbirth in Ambrose's Time*.

Church, published in 1964 as *Symbole der Kirche. Die Ekklesiologie der Väter*. Rahner writes about Ambrose's descriptions on the birth of the Logos from the heart of the Father in the heart of the believers. Rahner quotes a passage in *De Abraham* which shows Ambrose's view that this birth of Christ takes place in *cor intelligibile*, the most inner part of the human heart/soul.⁹⁷ I have already written about this in Chapter 3 on Ambrose's Protology of the present study. The human soul is created to be a resting place for Christ.⁹⁸ "Christ loves to be in the heart",⁹⁹ and his being in the heart instigates a virtuous life. Even if Ambrose never, according to Rahner, explicitly connects the mystical birth of the eternal Logos in the heart of the believer with the event of baptism,¹⁰⁰ baptism is, nevertheless, the point where the Christian life starts. An individual person is joined to the communion of the Church in baptism. This is a fine notion in Ambrose's ecclesiological thinking, one which ought not be overlooked: A baptised Christian is put into a new sort of existence that is at the same time both individual and collective. This existence has given him or her a new ecclesial soul, an *anima ecclesiastica*.¹⁰¹ The new Christian identity is thus seen as an identification with the Church. Ambrose uses this specific expression: *Anima ecclesiastica*, twice in his writings. In *Expositio in Lucam* Ambrose writes: "Salomon is speaking with the soul that is one with the Church, or of the Church herself, when he says: *Who shall find a valiant woman* (Proverbs 31:10)".¹⁰² Ambrose understands the picture of the valiant woman in Proverbs 31 as both the ecclesiastical soul, *anima ecclesiastica*, and the Church, *ecclesia*. Ambrose did not know the concept of being a Christian without the Church. The second passage where Ambrose uses word *anima* in connection to *ecclesiastica* is in *Expositio psalmi 118*. Ambrose quotes Exodus 3:5: *Remove the sandals from your feet*. The bishop uses the saying to point at the individual Christian: "The soul should therefore remove the flesh for the ecclesial grace, so it may pass through this life's run and transition with glory".¹⁰³ The only translation here that makes sense is to let

⁹⁷ H. Rahner 1964, 56–60.

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 10.75. *Requieuit autem in recessu hominis, requieuit in eius mente atque proposito.*

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *virginit.* 19.124. *In corde amat esse Christus.*

¹⁰⁰ H. Rahner 1964, 58.

¹⁰¹ The expression *anima ecclesiastica* has found its way into contemporary Systematic Theologies. Robert W. Jenson has a whole passage in his *Systematic Theology* named *Anima Ecclesiastica*, Jenson 1999, 289–305. He writes to explain the passage's title: "a Christian individual is someone whose nation and polity and communion are the Church", Jenson 1999, 289.

¹⁰² Ambrose, in *Luc.* VIII 10. *Qualis illa uel anima ecclesiastica uel ecclesia.* Trans. H. Rahner 2010, 96.

¹⁰³ Ambrose, in *psalm.* 118 17.16. *Calciat se ergo carne anima [ecclesiastica gratia], ut cursum uitae huius et transitum cum decore praetereat.*

ecclesiastica belong to *gratia*. Thus, the soul becomes ecclesial, with the ecclesial grace (*ecclesiastica gratia*). For Ambrose, being a Christian was an existence identified with the Church, and the Church in turn is a mystical subject that goes further than the sum of the believers.¹⁰⁴

For Ambrose, as for any of the Church Fathers, baptism was necessary for everyone wanting to be a Christian, while virginity was just for a few. The Jovinianist controversy was about baptism, and a questioning of the hierarchy in the Christian life.¹⁰⁵ Jovinian put the supposed hierarchy of virgins, widows, and ordinary married Christians in doubt, making baptism the only ground for merit, and teaching that all baptised members of the Church could expect an equal eschatological reward once in heaven. Ambrose taught strongly against this view, as has already been demonstrated in the passage on his view of sexuality. Nonetheless, he still believed in the fundamental turning-point of baptism. The sacrament of baptism created a new Christian existence in an individual person.

American professor J. Warren Smith has written about the theology of Ambrose's view of baptism in *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, in 2011. His book deals with Ambrose's theoretical pattern of baptism as an initiation into and spiritual source for the Christian life. What is foremost left out in his study, however, is the practical character of Ambrose's theology: That it is a theology based on worship, liturgy, and pastoral care. The German theologian Josef Schmitz' study *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand* from 1975 is fundamental in exploring how life-changing an event baptism was in the Late Antique Milan.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, a classic study of the rites of passage is Arnold van Gennep's *Les Rites de Passage* in 1909, in which he identifies three different stages in a rite of passage: separation ("séparation" = set free from the old context), liminality ("marge" = to be on the outside, a death from the old), and aggregation ("agrégation" = an incorporation to something new).¹⁰⁷

Christian baptism is a rite of passage, aiming at a new Christian identity. Baptism is the turning point in the Christian existence, a death

¹⁰⁴ Song of Songs offered for Ambrose material for his Ecclesiology more than any other book in the Bible. Ambrose sees the bride in *Song of Songs* both as the individual soul and the communion of the Church longing for and believing in Christ. Ambrose often returns to the Song of Songs, and in two treatises in particular, *Expositio Psalmi 118* and *De Isaac vel anima*, Song of Songs offered material for his Ecclesiology. In *Expositio Psalmi 118* Ambrose mainly interprets Song of Songs with ethical implications. In *De Isaac vel anima* Ambrose paints the Church as an independent subject knowing Christ and leading the individual faithful. Dassmann 2004, 26–27. See also Rubenson 2009, 105–127.

¹⁰⁵ Hunter 2007.

¹⁰⁶ Hunter makes a careful and empathetic description of baptism in the fourth century Milan in his book *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity*. Also Finn, Jensen, Ferguson, and Aasgaard have contributed to my understanding of the Milanese baptismal rite, see their respective titles in the bibliography.

¹⁰⁷ Gennep 1909, 1–18. Dagemark uses Gennep's terms as pattern to understand the ordination to bishop in Late Antiquity, Dagemark 1995, 41–51.

from the old and a resurrection to something new.¹⁰⁸ Gunnar af Hällström writes about Origen's view of baptism, "the baptised person 'begins' a new life, having 'destroyed' the previous one".¹⁰⁹ This quotation might be as well said about Ambrose's view, as in *De institutione virginis* where he writes:

There are two humans, one old one and one new. The old is submissive to and dilapidated in sin, but the old clothing is dressed off and destroyed when we are fixed, in baptism, to the cross.¹¹⁰

The preparations for baptism and the ceremonies that actualised the baptism were dramatic and made a deep impression on the participants. Professor Robin M. Jensen (1952–) writes: "It left an indelible memory and mark",¹¹¹

Two sacramental descriptions, or baptism speeches, from Ambrose have survived: *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*. *De sacramentis* is a composition of sermons preached during Easter week after the baptism had taken place. Ambrose taught the neophytes about the implications and significance of their baptism and its rituals. *De mysteriis* deals with the same issues but is a more edited treatise for publication.¹¹² One metaphor Ambrose uses in these lectures for baptism is death,¹¹³ and another frequently used metaphor is re-birth.¹¹⁴

5.3.1.1. Phase One: Preparations Separating from the Old¹¹⁵

In the late fourth century, adult baptism was still the norm. When a person decided to become a Christian, he joined the catechumenate, and became an *aspirantes*. As such, he or she started a process – both individual and communal – which can be called "a ritual journey".¹¹⁶ The length of this process differed; for some it took years and for others just a short time.

¹⁰⁸ Already in the Bible baptism is called a death and a resurrection with Christ to a new life, for example Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20.

¹⁰⁹ Hällström 2011, 999.

¹¹⁰ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 2.13. *Sunt etiam duo homines, uetus et nouus. Vetus ille peccato obnoxius et obsoletus, ac uestimenti ueteris similitudine attritus et scissus quem in baptisimate affigimus cruci.*

¹¹¹ Jensen 2012, 3.

¹¹² The Latin texts of *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis* are edited and published in PL, SCh, CSEL and SAEMO, and among the translations to different languages, one is done in Swedish by P. Beskow, *Om sakramenten, Om mysterierna*, 2001. The predominant belief among scholars today is that the text *De sacramentis* consists of notes made by a stenographer on oral expositions of Ambrose, and moreover, the text *De mysteriis*, which undoubtedly has a higher stylistic level, is edited and published by Ambrose himself. This proposal was made by F. Probst in 1893 after a time of doubt as to whether or not Ambrose was the author of *De sacramentis*, and he was followed by O. Faller (CSEL), R.H. Connolly, B. Botte (SCh) among others, taken from Beskow 2001, 10–11.

¹¹³ Ambrose, *myst.* 21, *sacr.* 2.23; 3.2; 6.8.

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *myst.* 5; 59, *sacr.* 3.2.

¹¹⁵ The three phases are taken from Finn 1992 I, 3; and Hunter 2007, 43–50.

¹¹⁶ Finn 1992 I, 2.

When a catechumen decided that he or she was ready, the candidate was introduced as member of the *competentes* (“askers”, “those seeking together”) at Epiphany. They were preparing for baptism through instructions in Christian faith and life, fasting, and exorcisms. It was a time of intensive learning, with instruction taking place almost every day. The instructions were based on Bible lessons and committing the creed to memory. Information was just one part, formation to new Christian life and values was even more important. In the preparation phase several exorcisms therefore took place, in order to set each *competens* free from every satanic and demonic influence. The point was to set the candidate free from his or her (destructive) old patterns of beliefs and ethical behaviour. After this first phase the *competentes* were ready to receive the baptism, ready to enter into a new Christian existence and be born again with new convictions and ways of conduct.

5.3.1.2. Phase Two: Baptism Effecting the Transition from Old to New

The actual baptism took place during the Easter night, with the focal point of an immersion of each candidate in a baptismal font full of flowing water. Before that, there was an anointing with oil, a renunciation of the devil, and a prayer for the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷ The candidate received a blessing “in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.¹¹⁸ This was followed by a three times immersion in water and after each immersion the candidate was asked a question: Do you believe in God the Father almighty? Do you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and his cross? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? This was the turning point in the ritual, a death and a resurrection in Christ for the baptised person. The baptismal font was simultaneously understood as the *tomb*, where the baptised was buried, and the *womb* of the Church, out of which the baptised was born anew.¹¹⁹ Baptism was an event that existentially meant a turning point in a person’s life, which affected the person’s self.¹²⁰ This was liturgically expressed in that on having entered the baptistery those being baptised were directed westwards while renouncing the devil, and then turned to the east when confessing Christ.¹²¹ Ambrose is believed to have given, in a baptistery in Milan, the following description of what happened in the baptismal font:

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.4–5, 15.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *sacr.* 2.14.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *sacr.* 2.19. “The baptismal font came to be seen as at once a tomb and a womb”, Finn 1992 I, 9; “The font is as a sepulchre”, Hunter 2007, 47–48. “The font [...] a watery tomb and a watery womb”, Jensen 2012, 3. In her book Jensen returns to the imagery of womb and tomb, see Jensen 2012, 56–57.

¹²⁰ Augustine refers to his baptism in Milan in 387, and the deep emotions that filled him afterwards, Augustine, *Confessiones* IX 6.14.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *myst.* 7.

Here, whoever wants the sins of a shameful life
to lay aside, may bathe the heart strings and have a pure soul.
To this place may they eagerly come: however dark he may be
who has the courage to approach, he departs whither than snow.
To this place may they hurry to be holy: without these waters
no one is holy, in them is the kingdom and counsel of God,
the glory of righteousness. What is more divine than this,
that in a brief moment the guilt of the people perishes.¹²²

The new Christians were greeted by the bishop and anointed in oil for a second time.¹²³ The bishop washed their feet (John 13:1–11) and prayed that the baptised might receive the seven gifts of the Spirit.¹²⁴ After this the baptised were dressed in white clothes as a symbol of their newly received purity.

5.3.1.3. Phase Three: Incorporation (or Reintegration) into a New Life

Until this point, the now baptised had never taken part of the Lord's supper. On the night of Easter, they were taken into the Church for their first Communion. One can imagine the beautiful and fascinating procession of newly baptised Christians dressed in white, each bearing a candle in his or her hand, coming from the dark night into the Church. They were now in full communion with the rest of the Christian community. For one week after the baptism Ambrose gave daily lessons to the neophytes, these lessons remain as *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*. In his recommendations for the Christian life, Ambrose encourages them to receive the Eucharistic sacrament daily, in order to endure in their struggle against sin and to consolidate their new Christian identity.¹²⁵ Fundamental in the new Christian life was the fight. The Christian is called "Christ's athlete".¹²⁶ The fight was not only against one's inner tendencies to sin, which Ambrose regarded as a power which continued to exist in the human self also after the baptism, but also against the devil¹²⁷ and the world with its temporary richness and pleasures.¹²⁸

5.3.2. Virginity as an Eschatological Sign

Baptism was for all who searched for a Christian life, and it created in the individual person a deep change of existence. It was an overwhelming experience. On the other hand, it did not affect the everyday life regarding

¹²² Quoted and trans. Ferguson 2009, 638.

¹²³ Ambrose, *sacr.* 2.24.

¹²⁴ Ambrose, *sacr.* 3.5–10. The idea of seven gifts of the Spirit is a reference to Isaiah 11:2.

¹²⁵ Ambrose, *sacr.* 4.26–29; 5.25.

¹²⁶ Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.4.

¹²⁷ Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.5.

¹²⁸ Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.8; *myst.* 5.

family structure, relatives, and profession. Most Christians lived married family lives, even in those cities where bishops most enthusiastic about the virginal ideal were in charge. A life of celibacy was, on the other hand, a choice for the few, and it profoundly affected everything in their everyday life. Lifelong celibacy is an enthusiastic, or even extreme, form of asceticism. In the last 50 years many scholarly works have been written which reveal and explain the enthusiasm for asceticism amongst the Late Antique Christians.¹²⁹ There have been different proposals for a general definition of asceticism, as in direction of social-scientific, religious/devotional, or psychoanalytic definitions.¹³⁰ Female celibacy could actually have meant a new possibility for women giving them personal autonomy, to read, travel, and have an impact on society, in place of expectations of marriage and childbearing. Some have proposed that asceticism helped in liberating them from a culturally-imbedded gender oppression.¹³¹ Asceticism might, throughout history, also have been a means to change an existing culture.¹³² Peter Brown has written many books from the perspective of revealing underlying power and unconscious motivations. He suggests that the zeal for exhorting virginity was due to materialistic gains for the Church. Brown writes that the virginity texts:

were written so as to change upper-class opinion – to persuade emperors, prefects, and provincial governors to allow wealthy widows and virgins to remain dedicated to the Church, and to tolerate the redirection of parts of the wealth of great families, through such women, to pious causes.¹³³

Brown's suggestion is based on a sociological and monetary perspective, one in which theology plays a lesser role. In this chapter on Eschatology I try to show that Ambrose's view of celibacy and virginity was based on a fundamental theological assumption about the world to come. Peter Dückerts interprets the virginal ideal in another way. He writes that at a time when the Church was growing quickly in number, Ambrose searched for people who were devoted to the faith. The virgins demonstrated a

¹²⁹ See Ruether 1974; the works of Clark are found in the bibliography; Elm 1994; Cooper 1996; Martin–Miller 2005.

¹³⁰ Clark offers an overview of the dividing definitions among scholars. She also offers an overview of scholarly opinions on asceticism in a larger context, beginning with von Harnack. Clark takes into considerations different confessional approaches. Clark 1999, 14–42

¹³¹ Elm writes: "Asceticism began as a method for men and women to transcend, as virgins of God, the limitations of humanity in relation to the divine. It slowly changed into a way for men as men and women and women to symbolize the power of the Church to surpass human weakness." Elm 1994, 384.

¹³² Valantasis 1995 is a presentation of that view.

¹³³ P. Brown 2008, 345.

standard which was way beyond that of the common superficial believers, who were inclined to follow the stream.¹³⁴

Kate Cooper writes that:

It was Ambrose who catapulted the virginal ideal to prominence in the Latin Church, and it was he more than any other who found in virginity a key for interpreting the biblical literary heritage as a rich mine of possible identities for the faithful.¹³⁵

On the other hand, the Bible itself encourages celibacy. "Sexual abstinence appeared to have scriptural and apostolic authority".¹³⁶ Moreover, the Bible itself promotes virginity as an eschatological sign. Jesus praised celibacy, and gave it a heavenly status when talking about being an eunuch for heaven's sake (Matthew 19:10–12), and comparing the heavenly life with a non-married life (*like angels in heaven*, Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34–36). 1 Corinthians 7 also had a deep impact on the general view of celibacy contra marriage in the Late Antique Church. Paul argues that at that present time marriage was something good, but virginity was better (1 Corinthians 7:38). To these passages there are numerous biblical examples of celibatarians, including Elijah, John the Baptist, Hannah in the temple, Jesus, Paul, and others. Because this view of virginity was implemented and praised in the Roman society,¹³⁷ there was certainly a certain social prestige in being a virgin, but conversely virginity promoted as a lifelong concept did meet resistance in Milan as not all people supported the idea. Ambrose had to defend it, for example, against parents' dislike of their daughters choosing the virginal life.¹³⁸

There are thus biblical passages which highlight celibacy as a heavenly lifestyle, a life oriented towards an eschatological realm. Schematically, one can see the purpose of marriage and virginity respectively as this:

What:	Marriage	Virginity
Purpose:	Society	Contemplation
	New generations	Purity
	Life on earth	Life in heaven
	Temporal lifestyle	Eternal alignment

This scheme proposes that as much as it is better in heaven than on earth, and as much as virginity is better than marriage, nonetheless, based on my findings presented in the passage on Ambrose's view of marriage, that

¹³⁴ Dückerts, in FChr 81, 23–24. Clark quotes Jerome's saying on virginity in comparison to the lukewarm *hoi polloi*: "Learn from me a holy arrogance, if you are better than they", Clark 1999, 22–23.

¹³⁵ Cooper 1996, 78.

¹³⁶ Skinner 2014, 378.

¹³⁷ For the biblical idea in the context of Antiquity as a whole, see chapter *Perversa voluntas – Deviant inclination*, Sissa 2008, 165–191; Skinner 2014, especially 377–380.

¹³⁸ Ambrose's many texts on virginity witness to this resistance.

would not be a proper interpretation.¹³⁹ According to Ambrose's thought there were many things in this temporal life on earth that were of less worth when put in the perspective of the eternal life in heaven. Examples of such offerings are marriage and sexual relations. One example taken from the *Epistula extra collectionem* 14 (63 PL) is where Ambrose praises the life of the angels (*vita angelorum*): busy praising God all the time and seeking him, day and night.¹⁴⁰ Their life was supposed to be a sexually continent life.

Marriage in Late Antiquity, as we have already seen, was not merely an individual choice, it also had a social impact; it was "a *social act*".¹⁴¹ The Christian notion of virginity was, therefore, a social sign which bore a message to the whole community. That message was the benefit, value, and worth in striving for heaven. The ordained Christian virgin was, in her (or his) person, a bodily message of the Christian Eschatology. Ambrose regarded virginity as a way of life that went beyond the natural borders of birth and death, beyond the normal existence of human life. "The body of the virgin smells of resurrection," Ambrose writes in *De virginitate*.¹⁴²

One biblical text Ambrose uses for exhorting the virginal life is the story about Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11. After a battle, Jephthah made a vow: He would offer to the Lord the first person he met when coming home. The person happened to be his daughter. She was distressed, but nonetheless willing to fulfil her father's vow although first asked to have time to *bewail her virginity* (Judges 11:38). The story might point to a virginity vow, suggesting that Jephthah's daughter lived her life to be one of perpetual celibacy. Ambrose refers to this story in his treatise *Exhortatio virginitatis*. He does not interpret the story as meaning a vow for virginity, but rather believes Jephthah made a human offering to the Lord, without doubt a terrible wrongdoing, but in accordance with his hare-brained vow. The application Ambrose makes for his time and to the parents and children in his congregation is firstly, not to make any hare-brained and irreversible vows; but considering the context, the aim of his sermon was also to exhort virginity. Ambrose exhorts his listeners to embrace the idea of lifelong virginity as a good and blessed life pointing towards the world to come. This context makes the choice of Bible text as an encouragement to parents to accept and affirm their daughters' choice for virginity, which is a kind of death for the family. Most weight in the interpretation is placed on the piety and faithfulness of Jephthah's daughter. Ambrose writes: "When she heard that it was a promise to the

¹³⁹ For more on the subject, see Chapter 5.2.2: *The View of Sexuality, Marriage, and Celibacy in Ambrose's Texts*.

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 14.71 (63 PL). On the lifestyles of the angels, see Dücker, in the introduction to FChr 81, 28.

¹⁴¹ P. Brown 1985, 428.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *virginit.* 12.73.

Lord, she fulfilled the offering. She solved with her blood the vow of the father".¹⁴³

5.3.3. Flight from this World: *De fuga saeculi*

The writing *De fuga saeculi* is a late text in Ambrose's life, probably published after 390.¹⁴⁴ The theme of escaping the world returns in every surviving text of Ambrose, from the first to the last in his career,¹⁴⁵ and *De fuga saeculi* (together with the text *De bono mortis* dealt with in the next section) presents a full and pastoral experienced theology on the art of consoling in the face of life's fragility and death.

The first thing to notice in *De fuga saeculi* is the baptismal language that is used. This is particularly clear at the end of the text where the bishop concludes his teaching. Ambrose writes about baptism, that Christ died for every person "who is baptised in the death of Christ".¹⁴⁶ Moreover, he quotes biblical passages that draw attention to baptism: *the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (Galatians 6:14), and *our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed* (Romans 6:6), *we were buried together in the likeness of his death* (Romans 6:4-5). He alludes to baptism when he writes in the same passage: "We have obtained the spiritual grace".¹⁴⁷

The congregation addressed here, however, is not a group of virgins but ordinary people. Noteworthy for my study, celibacy is not mentioned at all. Instead Ambrose emphasises that the flight for the Christian is neither a hidden knowledge nor only possible for a chosen few. He points out that the way of departure is open to all.¹⁴⁸ The only passage that perhaps reveals the kind of differentiated callings of virtue is where Ambrose writes: "If someone cannot fly like an eagle, let him fly like a sparrow, and not to the heavens, let him fly to the mountains".¹⁴⁹ In this passage I do not regard it likely that a comparison between virginity and

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *exh. virg.* 8.51. The two last sentences of the interpretation are: *Tum illa hortata est ut promissum deo munus impleret. Itaque incautam patris oblationem sanguine suo soluit.*

¹⁴⁴ Dassmann 2004, 330.

¹⁴⁵ "Weltflucht is ein Thema [...] das ihn während seines gesamten bishöflichen Wirken begleitet hat", Dassmann 2004, 271. So, when Ambrose opens his sermon with the words, *Frequens nobis de effugiendo saeculo isto sermo*, it is certainly no overstatement, Ambrose, *fuga* 1.1.

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *fuga* 9.55. *Qui baptizatur in morte Christi.*

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *fuga* 9.57. *Mihi enim mundus crucifixus est et ego mundo.* Further: *uetus ille homo noster adfixus est cruci, destructum est peccatum.* Further: *cuius mortis similitudini consepulti.* Further: *gratiae spiritalis accepimus.* Romans 6:3-11 seems, according to R. Aasgaard, to have come more in vogue during the fourth century, Aasgaard 2010, 1261.

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose *fuga* 2.6.

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose *fuga* 5.31. *Qui non potest ut aquila uolare nolitet ut passer, qui non potest ad caelum uolet ad montes.*

married life is being made; rather it is a general exhortation to the listener to do whatever he or she is able to do.

The bishop sees the Christian life as a flight from this world with its wickedness, deceits, and temptations. Ambrose allegorically interprets the six cities of refuge in the fourth book of Moses (Numbers 35:9–28), to answer the question of the concrete meaning of the flight. The practical meaning of the cities of refuge for the Christian people in Milan are: 1) knowledge in the divine Word, 2) consideration of God's work, 3) contemplation on his royal power and eternal majesty, 4) reflection on God's grace, 5) contemplation on the law of God, i.e. on the commandments one should uphold, 6) a delving deeper into God's law leading to contemplation on what one not should do.¹⁵⁰ This is further developed in the continuing pages.

On the question of what one should flee from, Ambrose offers a concrete answer as to what is meant with flight, for example, to see no worth in material richness,¹⁵¹ to avoid sin and fleshly passions,¹⁵² to flee the world's evil,¹⁵³ to flee the serpent or adversary.¹⁵⁴ Put systematically, Ambrose instructs his listeners on the soul's three enemies: the world, the devil, and the sinful self. He admonishes the Christian people to show repentance (*paenitentia*), and believe in the grace of God (*gratia Dei*).¹⁵⁵ According to Ambrose, committing sin, even if only in thought, meant that death was let in.¹⁵⁶ Death in sin is a spiritual death. In the next section I return to the idea that Ambrose has different meanings for the word death. The flight he speaks of is, however, not only from the bad, but also to the good:

We ought to flee from here, that we may come from evil to good, from uncertainty to trust, and a trust filled with the truth, and from death to life. The Lord showed that life – that is eternal life – is a good.¹⁵⁷

The meaning of the flight thus is to flee from this world, and to live a hidden life in God (a reference to Colossians 3:3).¹⁵⁸

The highest good, according to Ambrose, is heaven, "the eternal city" (*civitas aeterna*).¹⁵⁹ In *De fuga saeculi* he writes about the importance of

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *fuga* 2.9.

¹⁵¹ Ambrose *fuga* 7.38. Other examples: *Iob* II 5.22, III 8.23; *exam.* IX 8.52.

¹⁵² Ambrose *fuga* 1.3, 5.25. Another example is *Isaac* 1.1.

¹⁵³ Ambrose *fuga* 7.39.

¹⁵⁴ Ambrose *fuga* 7.40–43. Another example is *Iob* IV 7.28.

¹⁵⁵ Ambrose, *fuga* 6.34.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *fuga* 1.3. The expression *intrauit mors* comes three times in this passage, with the alteration of *penetrauit mors* in the last instance.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose, *fuga* 7.37. *Est igitur non mediocri causa cur hinc fugere debeamus, ut perveniamus a malis ad bona, ab incertis ad fidelia et plena veritatis, a morte ad vitam. [...] Dominus [...] demonstravit quia bonum vita est, sed aeterna.*

¹⁵⁸ Ambrose, *fuga* 7.38.

¹⁵⁹ Ambrose *fuga* 9.53.

knowing the goal. Any flight without the knowledge of where to fly is foolish.¹⁶⁰ The goal for the Christian is the uncorrupt eternal life in heaven the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of peace.¹⁶¹ The baptised Christian is mentioned as entering the city of God¹⁶² where there will be perfect communion with Christ.¹⁶³

Baptism, thus, is the essential step on the road; it is an incorporation into Christ's person and work, and his Church. There is a fine allegory of time as an ocean is compared to the baptism in water in Ambrose's theology. In *De interpellatione Iob et David* the bishop writes that "Adam was cast out of his heavenly homeland and from his dwelling in paradise and was banished to the island of sin".¹⁶⁴ Through the advent of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, surrounded by another water, however, a human can be renewed in the water of baptism.¹⁶⁵ Thus, starting with the renewal and forgiveness of baptism, a journey back over the worldly ocean of time has started, echoing back to the eternal haven of heaven. *De fuga saeculi* ends with this magnificent picture:

Sail in such a way as if you were passing through the world, not roaming over it like the ships of Tharsis; thus, you may direct your course into spiritual havens and convey there the riches of the sea. Hurry in such a way that it may be said of you: *they were swifter than the eagles* (Lamentations 4:19). You see the necessity of fleeing from the coming wrath. Those will be able to turn away from it who have placed their hope of escape in repentance and have imbibed a faith in the reconciliation that is to come through our Lord Jesus Christ, whose kingdom is from the ages and now and for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁶⁶

The bad and sinful self is an enemy to the good goal in heaven. For Ambrose that does not mean, however, that the body is a bad thing. In an earlier chapter, I dealt with Ambrose's view of soul and body – spirit and flesh.¹⁶⁷ Ambrose never fully separates himself from his dependence on

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose *fuga* 7.38.

¹⁶¹ Ambrose *fuga* 5.31. *Civitas pacis Hierusalem.*

¹⁶² Ambrose *Iob* III 8.24. *Intrat in civitatem Dei.*

¹⁶³ *De Isaac vel anima* is about the individual soul and the communal Church who seek, long for, strive for Christ, his kisses, *Isaac* 3.8; the individual soul's union with Christ, *Isaac* 4.11 etc.

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose *Iob* IV 9.34. *Adam dejectus de patria coelesti et illa sede paradisi, in insulam peccati est relegatus.*

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose *Iob* IV 9.34. *Per adventum Domini peccatorum remissione renovatae sunt, id est, homines in lavacro, medii inter aquas quasi insulae constitute.*

¹⁶⁶ Ambrose *fuga* 9.58. *Sic navigate quasi transfretantes mundum, non pererrantes, quasi naves Tharsis; ut ad intelligibiles portus cursum dirigatis, et convehatis divitias maris. Sic festinate, ut dicatur de vobis: Leves facti sunt super aquilas* (Lamentations 4:19). *Ab ira enim ventura fugiendum videtis, quam declinare poterunt, qui per poenitentiam sibi spem locaverint evadendi, et reconciliationis futurae fidem hauserint, per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, cui regnum est a saeculis, et nunc, et semper, et in omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.*

¹⁶⁷ Chapter 3.3: *Ambrose's Protology.*

Stoic anthropology and ethics, but he certainly evaluates the body. Essential for Ambrose's thinking on Christian morality is that a forgiven and renewed righteous mind controls the body. In some places the body is called a prison for the soul, but it could also be described as clothes for the soul.¹⁶⁸ As Ambrose very closely follows the medicine of his time, he does not see the bodily functions as negative *per se*, but teleologically every part has its proper design and functions well for its purpose. Using the body with its different parts according to "the reason for which it is created"¹⁶⁹ is, for him, a right usage. Asceticism against the true human nature does not fill a good purpose. Some notes in *De interpellatione Iob et David* demonstrate that Ambrose valued the body as an important part of the Christian life. The body is a tabernacle where the feasts are celebrated. Christ knocks at the door of your body that you may open it, but the adversary cuts the door down with axes.¹⁷⁰ A Christian life and morality show a new state of the body, a state where both body and soul are in harmony.¹⁷¹ The body is likened to a musical instrument, a cithara, and the soul plays good tones on that instrument. "Our soul has its own cithara [...] The cithara is our flesh when it dies to sin to live to God, it is a cithara when it receives the sevenfold Spirit in the sacrament of baptism".¹⁷²

5.3.4. Death as a Good: *De bono mortis*

Life and death are the two great magnitudes that enclose the human existence in our time as well as in Late Antiquity. The tension between life and death and the basic human instinct to long for life make consolation and guidance in this matter ubiquitous in a bishop's pastoral program. Death with its departure from this world was a subject of permanent urgency for Ambrose in his duties of pastoral care. In his time sickness and death were realities in the everyday lives of all people. He lived in a society in which any childbirth, numerous non-curable diseases, unknown viruses, and bacterial life, could terminate a lively and healthy person's life within a week. Additionally, in Ambrose's time there were external dangers such as war and instability within – and outside of – the borders of the Roman Empire.

In *De bono mortis* Ambrose brought everything he had thus far experienced and understood concerning death together and put it in the

¹⁶⁸ Examples of the latter, in *Luc.* 7.123.

¹⁶⁹ Ambrose, *fuga* 4.21. *Quid et qua causa creatum sit.*

¹⁷⁰ Ambrose, *Iob* IV 7.28.

¹⁷¹ Ambrose, *Iob* IV 8.30.

¹⁷² Ambrose, *Iob* IV 10.36. *Habet citharam suam anima nostra [...] Cithara est caro nostra, quando peccato moritur, ut Deo vivat: cithara est, quando septiformem accipit Spiritum in baptismatis sacramento.* The picture of the body as an instrument appears in *bon. mort.* 6.25.

light of Christian hope. It is a lesson of *ars moriendi*, the art of dying. *De bono mortis* was preached at about the same time as *De fuga saeculi*, i.e. after 390.¹⁷³ It most probably consisted of two homilies composited into one treatise, the first sermon being chapters 1–29, and the second chapters 30–57.¹⁷⁴ As a text, *De bono mortis* is a continuation of *De Isaac vel anima*.¹⁷⁵ The foundations of the text are biblical texts, but this notwithstanding, much of the content is Greek-Roman philosophy, and Ambrose reflects on that consciously. He tells his listeners not to follow Plato and Socrates but nonetheless states that what “stands out as good in the books of the philosophers belongs to us”.¹⁷⁶

Ambrose presupposes that the soul is immortal. Bodily life is breath: “Life is the enjoyment of breath”. Bodily death is seen as a consequence of the fall: “Death is the evil which is introduced as the price of condemnation”.¹⁷⁷ When considering the Bible as a whole, Ambrose notices that the concept of death has more than one meaning, and is not only negatively evaluated. Firstly, he found the death due to sin, secondly, the mystical death when a soul dies to sin (in baptism and faith) and lives to God, and thirdly, death is the completion of the lifespan and end of the bodily functions.¹⁷⁸ Death for a Christian is thus not necessarily something negative. In accordance with this scheme, Ambrose finds as many as three usages of death which carry a positive meaning in the Bible: The good life-giving death with Christ in baptism, the death and departure from sin in repentance, and the good physical death of a Christian when one’s soul departs from the body.

Life, as it appears here on earth, is fragile, full of threats and sorrows, and physical death comes as a relief which ends all despairs. Life is a burden, and death is a release. Physical death is also seen as something good, as it frees the Christian from the battle between body and soul. The definition of physical death is a separation of body and soul. This death can be considered as something good, since the body has found rest and the soul, if it has been devout, is in peace. The soul has been set free and is with Christ.¹⁷⁹ Of importance is forgiveness, the eternal life is forgiveness

¹⁷³ Dassmann 2004, 330.

¹⁷⁴ Quasten 1986, 157.

¹⁷⁵ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 1.1.

¹⁷⁶ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 11.51. *Nostra sunt itaque quae in philosophorum litteris praestant.*

¹⁷⁷ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 1.2. *Malum igitur mors, quae pretio damnationis inferitur.* Still the death is seen as a remedy, in *De excessu fratris* Ambrose writes: “death was not a part of the nature of man, but became natural, for God did not found death at first, but gave it as a remedy”, *exc. fr.* II 47.

¹⁷⁸ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 2.3.

¹⁷⁹ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 3.8. *Mors igitur solutio est animae et corporis [...] ut corpus resoluatur et quiescat, anima conuertatur in requiem suam, et sit libera, quae si pia est, cum Christo futura sit.*

of sins.¹⁸⁰ Death is good, while all that is “restless, or shameful, or hostile to us [...] is finally at rest”.¹⁸¹

A great deal of *De bono mortis* consists of ethical exhortations. One picture Ambrose uses is to liken the body to a music instrument, controlled by the soul/the will which also play virtues on it. In this context *virginitas* is mentioned as one of the virtues to be played on the bodily instrument. Six virtues are mentioned: 1) chastity (*castitas*), 2) temperance (*temperantia*), 3) sobriety (*sobrietas*), 4) uprightness (*integritas*), 5) virginity (*virginitas*), 6) widowhood (*vidua*).¹⁸² The soul that has the body under its control makes the body a servant to these virtues. For a harmonious life on this earth, the soul and body should be in tune, with the soul in control and the body being used. If the situation is reversed the body brings death to the soul.¹⁸³ In this passage, virginity is advocated. The congregation is not told, however, that all Christians ought to live a life-long celibacy. It is rather a reasoning of different fundamental approaches to life which everyone had to receive in the way he or she could. The two examples Ambrose takes in this context of people who do not use their bodies in the right way are the wealthy (*pecuniosus*) and the greedy (*avarus*), neither of which pertains to sexuality and marriage.

What is frightening in death is not death itself, writes Ambrose, but the uncertainty about what happens in death. A fear of death is grievous, not the death in itself.¹⁸⁴ There is, however, nothing for a Christian to fear, “death is to the just a haven of rest, but is reckoned a shipwreck for the evildoers”.¹⁸⁵ In this context Ambrose warns his listeners to do evil, and encourages them to live for Christ, to live virtuously, and not fear death. A Christian person should long for “the land of the living” (*in regione uiuorum*, Psalms 114:8), that is striving upwards for eternity with God.¹⁸⁶ Ambrose emphasises that not one person knows when his or her time to die is set, and everybody should therefore entrust his or her soul to Christ at all times.¹⁸⁷

Taking care of a person one who is poor, infirm, or dying is highly valued. Ambrose comments on Job 29:13 (about the blessing of the person who is about to die):

¹⁸⁰ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 2.5. *Vita aeterna remissio peccatorum est.*

¹⁸¹ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 9.38. *Id quod inquietum, id quod erubescendum, id quod inimicum nobis [...] conquiescat.*

¹⁸² Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 6.25.

¹⁸³ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 7.26–27.

¹⁸⁴ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 8.31. *Opinio de morte [...] grauis est timor mortis [...] uiuere sub metu mortis.*

¹⁸⁵ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 8.31. *Denique iustus mors quietis est portus, nocentibus naufragium putatur.*

¹⁸⁶ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 9.39.

¹⁸⁷ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 10.44. *Commenda animam tuam in manus domini.*

The verse has inspired in me a sense of shame, if I have passed someone who was about to die, if I have not visited someone who was gravely sick, if I have disdained one who was poor, if I have not redeemed the captive and have despised an old man.¹⁸⁸

Ambrose writes that being close to a person when they physically die confers a certain blessing. This is an example of the Christian interest in taking care of the dying, treating the incurable ill, and the moral meaning of illness and suffering.¹⁸⁹

Ambrose turns his attention towards the end of *De bono mortis* to the issue of what happens after death, after the separation of soul and body. “There are a dwelling (*habitaculum*) for the souls up above”¹⁹⁰ waiting for the final judgement, “some await penalty and others glory”.¹⁹¹ There are “the unholy who have denied the Lord”.¹⁹² These individuals are already condemned in this life, even though they appear to be alive – Ambrose teaches a present judgement, according to whether a person has received Christ or not.¹⁹³

The final words of the text are consoling. One can imagine that Ambrose had his congregation in mind when he prepared the sermon and their faces in front of his eyes when he delivered it. He writes: “Do not be afraid of the darkness, because Christ is the light, do not be afraid of the death, because Christ is the life. Everyone who comes to him, will not in eternity see death”.¹⁹⁴

5.3.5. Resurrection and the World to Come: *De fide resurrectionis*

One basic task for an ordained Christian priest or bishop in Late Antiquity (as well as today) was to handle burials and deliver consolation and guidance at the funeral service. Three burial speeches are preserved from Ambrose: one for his brother Satyrus, *De excessu fratris* (in 378), and two for emperors, *De obitu Valentiniani* (in 392) and *De obitu Theodosii* (in 395). These three speeches follow the common scheme of *laudatio*, a speech of praise. The funeral sermon *De excessu fratris* consisted of two parts, the first held at the actual occasion of the burial service, the second speech was delivered a week later. The second part is entitled *De fide resurrectionis* and deals with questions on the resurrection of the body at the end of time. Some observations on the second part of *De excessu fratris*,

¹⁸⁸ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 8.37.

¹⁸⁹ Mayer 2015, 11. For more see Chapter 1.3.3: *Ambrose’s Cultural Context*.

¹⁹⁰ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 10.45.

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 10.47. *Alias manet poena, alias gloria.*

¹⁹² Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 9.56. *Impii dominum negauerunt.*

¹⁹³ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 9.56. *Videntur uiuere, sed in inferno sunt.*

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *bon. mort.* 12.57. *Nolite timere a tenebris, ego sum lux: nolite timere a morte, ego sum vita. Quicumque ad me venit, mortem non videbit in aeternum.*

which explains the belief in the coming resurrection and the world to come, now follow. Martin Biermann published in 1995 a study on all the funeral speeches. He proposes that Ambrose in the second speech to Satyrus offers his opinions on the book of the Apocalypse, which was read from the pulpit in the service.¹⁹⁵

Ambrose did expect a future resurrection from the dead. The second half of the sermon *De fide resurrectionis* deals with proofs on the final resurrection. Ambrose offers a three part of argument:

- Reason
Ambrose writes that “our whole human life consists in the union of body and soul”.¹⁹⁶ A fact that reason shows is that a human existence is body and soul and, moreover, that in the resurrection, there will be a final judgement. What will be judged is how body and soul interacted during the life on earth: “could the soul be called to judgement without the body?”.¹⁹⁷ There are limits for what reason can achieve. Ambrose clarifies that reason alone makes no faith. If rightly understood, the reason is just and complete, but Ambrose writes that he does not demand reason from Christ: “If I am convinced by reason, I refuse the faith”.¹⁹⁸
- Analogy from universal examples
The whole course of the universe shows the likeliness of the resurrection. One example Ambrose gives is the sun which disappears at night but reappears in the morning, but the best example is the grain which is sown and seems to die but subsequently comes back up again.¹⁹⁹ He also sees the legendary bird Phoenix, who dies and comes back to life, as a proof of the future universal resurrection of all humans.²⁰⁰ Ambrose mentions that the blood and moisture will dry out of a dead human body and asks how that can be called back to life. Ambrose explains by the means of analogies: A grain and the Phoenix are likewise dried out and they come back to life.
- Biblical evidences

¹⁹⁵ Biermann 1995, 126.

¹⁹⁶ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 52. *Omnis vitae nostrae usus in corporis animaeque consortio sit.*

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 52. *Quomodo enim in iudicium vocabitur anima sine corpore.*

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 89. *Si ratione vincor, fidem abnuo.*

¹⁹⁹ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 53–57.

²⁰⁰ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 59. The legend is described by Herodotus, Tacitus, and Pliny. Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, and other Church Fathers, refer to the Phoenix as proof of the resurrection, see note in NPNF2 10.

Ambrose quotes single Bible passages about the resurrection: For example, Daniel 12:1–3, about the coming resurrection and judgement of all, Job 19:26 (from the Septuagint), and other passages from Isaiah and Ezekiel. Ambrose also takes examples from the Gospels: Lazarus (John 11), the young man of a widowed mother (Luke 7), and the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue (Mark 5). Ambrose also mentions the dead child whom Elijah raised from the dead (1 Kings 17) and Peter who said prayers for the dead Tabitha (Acts 9). As biblical evidence Ambrose mentions that many bodies of ancient times came up from their tombs and walked in Jerusalem (Matt 27:50–53).²⁰¹ Ambrose also reminds his audience of Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), who were both caught up alive in heaven.²⁰²

Of certain difficulty for the listeners in the time of Ambrose was the belief in the resurrection of the shipwrecked people whom the sea had swallowed, and the martyrs whom the wild beasts had torn to pieces or eaten altogether. Ambrose's answer is that it would not be difficult for God to join together what was separated and to unite what was spread apart.²⁰³

The future existence will be a perfected existence, exceeding the creation according to Ambrose, who writes: "You are men and women" with a "head, and a wonderful countenance, whose maker we cannot see". All this, he continues, will rise again in an even better shape.²⁰⁴ Further on in the text, Ambrose again parallels the future resurrection with the great wonder of creation. When creating the world, God made all elements spring up at a word: *He spoke and it came to be* (Psalms 33:9). Ambrose rhetorically asks about God, who commands the elements: "why should the dead not rise at his word?"²⁰⁵ Ambrose argues further, that God can make everything in a moment, "and will raise the dead at the last trump".²⁰⁶

The new human existence after the resurrection and final judgement will be characterised by immortality (*immortalitas*) and imperishableness (*in corruptio*).²⁰⁷ In the present human state, there is a military type struggle between the soul and the flesh. In the coming kingdom a

²⁰¹ The Bible passages are spread out in Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 66–88.

²⁰² Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 94.

²⁰³ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 58.

²⁰⁴ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 60.

²⁰⁵ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 85. *Dixit, et facta sunt [...] cur dicto mortui non resurgant?*

²⁰⁶ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 104. *Omnia in momento facit, et in novissima tuba mortuos suscit.*

²⁰⁷ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 54. *Immortalitas* and *in corruptio* return in the last and concluding passage, in *exc. fr.* II 135.

spiritualised human shall, in the Spirit, see the divine mysteries. Ambrose makes a moral exhortation for the present from this future good:

Here we strive according to our flesh, there we will in the spirit see the divine mystery. The character of the true law should be expressed in our manner of life, who walk in the image of God.²⁰⁸

The new bodies of flesh shall be “closed joined to the Spirit”,²⁰⁹ that is a certain nearness to God. The impending good is, in a biblical manner, compared to a wedding feast, where the adornments at the heavenly wedding are, “the confessors’ purple stripes, the martyrs’ blood, the virgins’ lilies, and the priests’ crowns”²¹⁰, who, in Ambrose’s view, have chosen a spiritual life in this present state and thus also chosen a heavenly life.

In a passage near the end, Ambrose gives his people the rhetorical choice between the miseries down here, and the completeness that will follow the resurrection to come: “Now, put this life in contrast with that, and choose”. There will be “a perpetual *bodily* life in good work”.²¹¹ Ambrose tells his grieving listeners that everything in the world to come will transcend everything we can experience in the present world.

5.4. Mary in Ambrose’s Eschatology

One of the questions of the present study is to understand how Ambrose incorporated the concept of Mary’s virginity in his overall pattern of faith. I answer that question in this section with regard to the third article of the Creed, Mary in the Eschatology.

5.4.1. Mary as *typus ecclesiae*

Previously in this chapter I have investigated baptism in Milan, how it took place as a life-changing event, and its liturgical purpose of death and the renewal of life. According to Ambrose baptism as rebirth affected a fundamental change of existence for the believer and created in him or her a soul that is one with the Church. This is where Mariology finds a place. As many Church Fathers before him,²¹² Ambrose calls Mary *typus*

²⁰⁸ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 109. *Nunc secundum carnem militamus, tunc spiritu videbimus divina mysteria. Et ideo verae legis character in nostris moribus exprimitur, qui in dei ambulamus imagine.*

²⁰⁹ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 132. *Spiritui copulata.*

²¹⁰ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 132. *Confessorum livore, martyrum sanguine, liliis virginum, coronis etiam sacerdotum.*

²¹¹ Ambrose, *exc. fr.* II 123. *Compara nunc [...] atque contende vitam hanc cum illa vita et elige, [...] perpetuam corporis vitam in labore.*

²¹² Finding prefigurations of the Church in the Old Testament was popular among the Church Fathers, A. M. Laato 2019.

ecclesiae, a type of the Church. Mary has, in relation to the Church, been the subject of much scholarly and confessional effort during the twentieth century.²¹³ Mary as the fundamental type of the Church has been investigated from different angles. The Jesuit theologian Otto Semmelroth (1912–1979) provides a definition of the term *typus* in his book *Urbild der Kirche*, published in 1954. The word *typus* means originally a strike, or a beat, which gives a physical relation between the type and the thing it typifies. Semmelroth identifies the meaning of strike as implicit in the theological use of the term *typus*: It is a physical representation of something spiritual, and there is a real bond between the fundamental *typus* and what it represents. The relation is between the archetype and image (“Urbild – Abbild”).²¹⁴

In contemporary theology, Mary, the virgin, is often investigated and discussed as the ultimate *typus* of the Church. It is, therefore, eye-opening to discover that in Ambrose’s writings different women are also called types of the Church. Ambrose uses the expression *typus ecclesiae*, or the equivalent term *figura*, several times almost exclusively hinting at women.²¹⁵ A perusal on the different passages listed in *Thesaurus Sancti Ambrosii* (CCTA), reveals that Ambrose mentions twelve biblical women as types for the Church. The Old Testament women are: Eve,²¹⁶ Rebecca,²¹⁷ Sarah,²¹⁸ Rachel,²¹⁹ Rahab,²²⁰ Mirjam,²²¹ and the widow in Zarephthah (1 Kings 17:8–24).²²² In the New Testament, in addition to Mary, Ambrose reads the Church into four other women: The one suffering from a haemorrhage (Matthew 9:20–22) is an image (*species*) of the Church, in her likeness the Church confesses her wounds, and desires to be healed of

²¹³ Works I have found useful in my study are Semmelroth 1954; H. Rahner 1964; 2010; Ratzinger 1983; 2010; A. M. Laato 2016; 2019. Further, it is interesting that the Catholic Church through the second Vatican Council 1962–1965 has officially decided to treat Mariology not as an isolated theme, but rather as intertwined in the Ecclesiology, see the chapter on Mary in *Concilium Vaticanum II: De ecclesia*, COD, 891–898.

²¹⁴ Semmelroth 1954, 29–36.

²¹⁵ Things can prefigure the Church as well, the temple, in *Luc.* II 89, and Noah with his ark, in *Luc.* II 92; III 23. In one passage, a man prefigures the Church, and it is Abel. Cain and Abel are called *figura synagogae et ecclesiae*, in *Cain* I 2.5. According to A. M. Laato 2019, other Church Fathers allowed that Jacob prefigured the Church.

²¹⁶ Ambrose, in *Luc.* IV 66. In the passage Ambrose calls Adam and Eve *typi* of Christ and the Church respectively.

²¹⁷ Ambrose, *Spir.* I 16.166; in *psalm.* 118 4.14.

²¹⁸ Ambrose, *Abr.* I 4.31; 5.38.

²¹⁹ Ambrose, *fuga* 5.27; *epist.* 18.12 (70 PL). In *vid.* 15.90 Rachel is called *figura mysterii*.

²²⁰ Ambrose, in *Luc.* III 23; VIII 40.

²²¹ Ambrose, *virg.* I 3.12. In this case *figura*.

²²² Ambrose, *vid.* 3.14. Neither *typus* nor *figura* is used. Ambrose plainly writes that the mystery of Christ and the Church is shown in Elijah and the widow. Elsewhere in *Luc.* IV 50, the widow is called a *typus ecclesiae*.

Christ.²²³ The woman with a spirit of infirmity, in Luke 13:10–18, is figuring the Church.²²⁴ The widow offering only two copper coins in Luke 21:1–4, is seen as a type for the Church,²²⁵ while the Mary who anointed Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, is likewise seen as a type for the Church by Ambrose.²²⁶ All these biblical women represent the Church, and Ambrose mentions them for the purposes of demonstrating particular aspects of the Church. In *De virginitate* Ambrose points at Rebecca and Rachel as two sterile women. As such, infertile women, who went on to have children, they are types for the Church. These two are read into Isaiah 54:1, where it is written: *Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail!*²²⁷ This is a combination of the virgin and mother, the sterile women who do bring forth.

At the foundation of Ambrose's ecclesiological symbolism is the female Church, a woman both virgin and mother. Ambrose seems to have preferred to liken the Church to the virgin bride,²²⁸ rather than the mother of the faithful.²²⁹ Virgin and mother point at different aspects of the Church respectively.²³⁰ This makes the step towards Mary as the basic *typus* for the Church a small one. For Ambrose, Mary, more than any other woman, combines the pictures of virgin and mother. After having given birth to Christ, the enduring benefit of Mary in Ambrose's preaching is thus not only her as the prime example for a virginal soul and body,²³¹ but also as a *typus* of the Church. Each individual Christian existence, as well as the communion of believers, is, as it is explained in Ambrose's eschatological writings, like the Virgin Mary, a life of hope in sorrows, of begetting and longing in this world, of spiritual motherhood and virginal

²²³ Ambrose, *paen.* I 7.31. The term used here is neither *typus* nor *figura*, but *species: Ecclesiae tuae species est in illa.*

²²⁴ Ambrose, in *Luc.* VII 173. In this case *figura*.

²²⁵ Ambrose, *epist.* 68.5 (26 PL).

²²⁶ Ambrose, *Spir.* II prol. 14.

²²⁷ Ambrose, *virginit.* 14.91.

²²⁸ As in Ambrose, *virg.* I 5.22; in *psalm. 118* 1.4. Dassmann explains the fact that *sponsa* is preferred as a basic ecclesial symbol with Ambrose's dependence on Hippolyt and Origen, Dassmann 2004, 111.

²²⁹ The expression *mater ecclesia* is found, for example, in *De incarnationis* 2.13. When Ambrose does call the Church a mother, he tends to combine that picture with virginity, as in *Expositio in Lucam* where Ambrose calls the Church an immaculate virgin, in baptism washed clean and filled with the Spirit of God, in that state a fruitful mother, in *Luc.* VI 50. The maternal picture of the Church emphasises the hierarchy and legalistic aspects of the Church, as in *Expositio in Lucam* where Ambrose writes: "As children should the faithful give right to the mother Church", in *Luc.* VI 4. Dassmann 2004, 113–114.

²³⁰ Dassmann 1989 takes this stand from Patristic and Ambrosian thought and addresses his contemporary Church situation.

²³¹ See Chapter 2 of the present study about Mary's life as an example, and her perpetual virginity.

bridehood waiting for the eternal marriage. According to Tina Beattie, Ambrose is the first Latin Father who associated Mary with the Church.²³² This idea has found its way into the heart of uncountable theologians over the centuries. Anni Maria Laato writes: “The idea expressed by Ambrose was adopted and developed by Augustine and has since become influential, especially in our own time”. Laato continues: “If Ambrose was brief in his expression, Augustine is not”.²³³

Mary is one of the biblical women Ambrose uses as *typi* of the Church. With Semmelroth’s definition one must search deeper than merely the superficial in this symbolism. The virgin and mother Mary, as the type of the Church, has a more profound connection to the Church than any other woman: She gave birth to him whose body is the Church.²³⁴ The Church as the body of Christ means that the Church was formed, even physically came into existence, at the moment of the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary. Thus, Ambrose appreciates Christmas Day as the birthday of the Church: “See the beginning of the rising Church. Christ is born and the shepherds begin to be watchful.”²³⁵ Josef Huhn writes: “Die Kirche hat dieses Freudenruf des Bischofs Ambrosius in die Matutin an Weihnachten aufgenommen und damit den hehren Gedanken des heiligen Lehrers approbiert”.²³⁶ Three important passages where Ambrose explains Mary as the *typus/figura ecclesiae* now follow.

The first is in *De institutione virginis* 14.87–89, where Ambrose calls Mary *figura ecclesiae*, and not *typus*. In the passage, the point is Mary’s mystical way of giving birth to Christ, the virginal birth, and how that is an example in chastity for Ambrose’s contemporary virgins. Mary is called beautiful (*pulchra*), a figure of the Church (*figura ecclesiae*), and it is stated she gave birth mystically (*mysteria generationis*).²³⁷ In this context, Ambrose lets the words in Song of Songs 7:2–3 be directed to Mary: *Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies* (Song of Songs 7:1–2). Christ is conceived, grows, and

²³² Beattie 2007, 79.

²³³ Laato 2019, 52.

²³⁴ The Church as the body of Christ, for example: Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 1:22–23; Colossians 1:18. Ambrose writes about the Church as the body of Christ in, for example, *psalm*. XXXVI 16.

²³⁵ Ambrose, in *Luc.* II 50. *Videte ecclesiae surgentis exordium: Christus nascitur et pastores uigilare coeperunt*. The shepherds in the passage are interpreted as the priests of the Church.

²³⁶ Huhn 1954, 160.

²³⁷ Ambrose *inst. virg.* 14.89.

is delivered in the heart of the virginal soul, as he once was in Mary's physical womb.²³⁸

The next passage revealing Ambrose's understanding of Mary and the Church, is *Epistula* 18 (70 PL), addressed to Horontianus, a priest in Milan. In the letter, Ambrose writes that just as the Word became flesh in Mary so it – in a mystical way – repeatedly happens in the individual Christian soul and in the Church's sacraments. Ambrose uses the whole *Epistula* 18 to interpret the parallelism between the incarnation in Mary and what repeatedly happens in the Church. The letter's starting point is Micah 5:2, and it has the character of a Bible exposition on Micah 5 and the little town Bethlehem Ephrata. "In Bethlehem Christ was born of Mary"²³⁹ Ambrose writes, and explains that the event that happened once recurs in the soul of the believer. The birth of Christ happens in the heart:

Every soul which receives the bread which comes down from heaven is a house of bread, the bread of Christ. [...] Every faithful soul is a Bethlehem. [...] the true bread, which, after it was broken into bits, has fed the whole world.²⁴⁰

This thought is close to another important feature about the repose of Christ inside the faithful as found in *Exameron*.²⁴¹ The repose of Christ is the inhabitation of the divine Word within the faithful heart. Christ's presence in the heart makes it a Bethlehem, the place where Mary gave birth to Christ. Ambrose refers to the Eucharist, in this context, in pointing to the bread broken into bits that feed all people. Ambrose continues:

Christ comes to a soul, he comes with fruitfulness, he comes with childbearing. So, Hanna (1 Samuel 2:5) once came to the Church, she who brought forth more than she who *has many children*, she *borne seven*, that is law-abiding, tranquil, peacemakers. The soul who begins to conceive will experience Christ to be formed in her if she accepts his arrival and is *fed on his riches* (Psalm 37:3, LXX). She *shall not want* (Psalm 23:1), and other souls, seeing her, return to the path of salvation.²⁴²

Christ comes, mystically and unseen, to the faithful soul, and there will be fruits which prosper as well as childbearing. Ambrose alludes strongly to

²³⁸ The picture of Christ conceived and growing in the heart and humble soul of the virgin is the theme in *inst. virg.* 14.91–15.93. Examples of passages where the same theme appears are *virg.* I 8.44; *virginit.* 9.51.

²³⁹ Ambrose, *epist.* 18.9 (70 PL).

²⁴⁰ Ambrose, *epist.* 18.13 (70 PL). *Omnis anima fidelis Bethleem est. [...] Verus panis est, qui fractus et conminutus satiavit universos.*

²⁴¹ Ambrose, *exam.* VI 10.76. For more on the subject, see Chapter 3.3.1: *The Human Soul Created by God.*

²⁴² Ambrose, *epist.* 18.16 (70 PL). *Cui advenit Christus, advenit fecunditas, advenit partus, sicut advenit ecclesiae, quae peperit plures, quam quae filios habebat et peperit septem, (1 Samuel 2:5) id est legitimos, tranquillos, pacificos. Incipit ergo concipere anima et formari in ea Christus, quae receperit adventum eius et pascitur in divitiis eius, (Psalm 37:3), ut nihil ei desit (Psalm 23:1), ut videntes eam etiam aliae animae revertantur ad viam salutis.*

the biological conception that happens unseen within the secret of a female womb and makes it a picture of the advent of Christ in the human soul. Ambrose continues the picture in the same passage of *Epistula* 18 and lets the pregnancy and the growth of the child in the female womb become a picture of the forming of Christ in the faithful soul.

Hugo Rahner combines the intimate picture in *Epistula* 18 with a passage in *De virginitate*. Rahner draws a line between the experience of Christ's advent in the heart, where the soul imitates Mary, and the meeting between Christ and Mary Magdalene in the garden (John 20:11–18). When Mary Magdalene was unable to believe, she was addressed with "the name of her who gave birth to Christ". That effected in her "a soul who spiritually gave birth to Christ". Ambrose, thus, makes a symbolical connection between Mary who gave birth to Christ in Bethlehem and the coming to faith of a contemporary believer.²⁴³

The third passage where Mary is seen as a type of the Church is in *Expositio in Lucam* II 7. In the passage Ambrose describes Mary, in the combination of being a virgin and a mother, as the woman who receives, bears, and begets Christ. As such, she is a type of the Church. In *Expositio in Lucam* Ambrose writes about Mary:

We have heard the wording of truth, we have heard the plan (of the annunciation): Let us learn from the mystery. Mary was betrothed, but virgin. She is a type of the Church, as immaculate and also married. As a virgin she has for us conceived from the Holy Spirit, and for us she gave birth as a virgin without any sound of pain. Perhaps the reason why the holy Mary was betrothed to one, and filled with the fruit of the womb by another, because all the singular churches are filled with the Spirit and grace, and at the same time externally joined to a mortal priest.²⁴⁴

In this dense text Ambrose explains how the virginal birth of Christ and Mary's perpetual virginity depict the Church. As virgin, immaculate, and betrothed to Joseph, the Spirit made her the mother of Christ. Ambrose draws a line from this to the Church, where the Spirit does the work, but states that as it appears it is the priests who preach, use the sacraments, and do the pastoral work.

²⁴³ Ambrose, *virginit.* 4.20. *Maria uocatur. Nomen eius accipit quae parturit Christum; est enim anima quae spiritaliter parit Christum.* I first found this combination of Bethlehem in *Epistula* 18 and Mary Magdalene in *De virginitate* thanks to H. Rahner 1964, 59.

²⁴⁴ Ambrose, in *Luc.* II 7. *Didicimus seriem ueritatis, didicimus consilium: discamus mysterium. Bene desponsata, sed uirgo, quia est ecclesiae typus, quae est immaculata, sed nupta. Concepit nos uirgo de spiritu, parit nos uirgo sine gemitu. Et ideo fortasse sancta Maria alii nupta, ab alio repleta, quia et singulae ecclesiae spiritu quidem replentur et gratia, iunguntur tamen ad temporalis speciem sacerdotis.*

Does Ambrose call Mary the mother of all faithful? I highlight four passages on this question.²⁴⁵ Firstly, a passage in *Expositio psalmi 118*, which is in line with the idea of Mary being depicted the Church. In the passage Ambrose interprets the description of the bride in Song of Songs 7:1 as pointing at either Mary or at the Church: “The birth of Christ from the virgin or the spreading of the Church”.²⁴⁶ Ambrose parallels the birth of Christ to the spread of the Church.

Secondly, in *Expositio in Lucam II 24*, Mary is clearly understood as a figurative mother of all Christians. In the context Ambrose interprets Mary’s visit to Elisabeth in Judah (Luke 1:39–56) as follows. Elisabeth greets Mary with the words: *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb* (Luke 1:42). Ambrose asks who the fruits are, and quotes Psalm 127:3 – *Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward* – as an answer. Ambrose writes: “The Lord’s heritage are sons, who are each yearning’s fruit, who has proceeded from Mary’s womb.”²⁴⁷ This is not only figurative language in Ambrose’s thought; he continues to explain that the Jewish people are literally the people Mary belonged to, and Mary was in turn literally the mother of Christ, who is the giver of life for everyone. In that sense Ambrose sees Mary as the mother of all Christians.

Thirdly, the symbolism of the Church as the body of Christ, could be reversed to point at Mary as the mother of the Church. In *De institutione virginis* Ambrose praises Mary as “the mother Jerusalem”, which is the Church. The body of Christ came into existence in the womb of Mary:

Blessed is the mother Jerusalem, blessed is the womb of Mary which has crowned such a Lord. She has crowned him when he was formed, she has crowned him when he was beget [...] since she conceived and gave birth to him who brought salvation to all, she put upon his head the crown of eternal love, so that through the faith of the faithful Christ might be the head of all people [...] the flesh of Christ, which the Virgin Mary conceived.²⁴⁸

Inside Mary, in a biological event in her womb, Christ was conceived, formed, and finally delivered. Mary crowned him in conceiving him and giving birth to him who is the savior of the world. Ambrose uses the word

²⁴⁵ Josef Huhn has a passage in which he deals with this question. In mapping Ambrose’s thoughts Huhn’s passage certainly has a continuing value. Huhn 1954, 156–169.

²⁴⁶ Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 17.19. *Sive ergo generatio Christi ex uirgine sive ecclesiae propagatio.*

²⁴⁷ Ambrose, in *Luc. II 24*. *Hereditas domini filii sunt, qui mercis sunt fructus illius, qui de Mariae uentre processit.*

²⁴⁸ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 16.98. *Beata mater Ierusalem, beatus et Mariae uterus, qui tantum dominum coronauit. Coronauit eum quando formauit, coronauit eum quando generauit [...] tamen hoc ipso quod ad omnium salute eum concepit et peperit, coronam capiti eius aeternae pietatis imposuit, ut per fidem credentium fieret omnis uiri caput Christus. [...] caro Christi, quam ut Maria uirgo conciperet.*

flesh (*caro*) which signals a concrete language, and thus is not only figurative or allegorical. Four biological terms related to giving birth are used: to form or shape something (*formo*), to beget (*genero*), to conceive (*concipio*), and to bring forth (*pario*). These are biological references. Ambrose points at Christ's actual body which came into existence in the womb of Mary. Christ's body is the Church, and Mary is the actual mother of the one who is the Church. In this transferred sense, Ambrose sees Mary as the mother of all believers.

Fourthly, in *Expositio in Lucam* X 134 Ambrose deals with the meaning of Christ's commending of Mary to John under the cross (John 19:26–27).²⁴⁹ Ambrose writes that this scene at Golgotha is a mystery, with something hidden under the surface. "There is a mystery, that John, the youngest among them, is commended to Mary".²⁵⁰ The hidden meaning Ambrose interprets in the words of Christ is about the Church: "One should notice that the Church's mystery is here present".²⁵¹ Ambrose understands the older as being the Jewish people, in which the Church existed in as a hope, but not in its fullest sense. In commending Mary to the youngest, Christ points to the Church as a new beginning, a younger people. Ambrose thus parallels Mary and the Church. Earlier in *Expositio in Lucam* Ambrose had interpreted the same passage without mentioning Mary by name, merely letting the words in John 19:26–27 point to the Church. Ambrose writes about Christ's disciples:

Also to you might Christ say from the gibbet of the cross, *behold your mother*, and to the Church might be said *behold your son*. Then you will begin to be a son of the Church, when you look at the victorious Christ on the cross".²⁵²

In this passage, Ambrose has replaced Mary with the Church at the foot of the cross. There is a complete identification between Mary and the Church. He sees the Church in Mary, and Mary in the Church. Note however, as far as I have noticed there is nothing in the sources which indicates a continuing metaphysical relation between Mary and the Church. The relation Ambrose mentions is a mystical and allegorising interpretation of the Scripture.

5.4.2. Mary as an Eschatological Sign

The virgins, ordained to an ordered way of virginal life, were eschatological signs. For Ambrose, the Virgin Mary was the prime example

²⁴⁹ For context, see the text in Chapter 8.3: *Mary at the Cross, a Synopsis*.

²⁵⁰ Ambrose, in *Luc. X 134. Mysticum tamen est quod commendatur Iohanni inter ceteros iuniori*.

²⁵¹ Ambrose, in *Luc. X 134. Discat ergo ecclesiae hic esse mysterium*.

²⁵² Ambrose, in *Luc. VII 5. Dicat et tibi de patibuli crucis Christus: ecce mater tua, dicat et ecclesiae: ecce filius tuus; tunc enim incipies esse filius ecclesiae, cum in cruce uictorem uideris Christum*.

of the virginal life. In *De institutione virginis* Ambrose calls the virginal life “a wealth of Marian virginity”.²⁵³ The Virgin Mary is thus the prime sign in Ambrose’s eschatological pattern. Ambrose regarded Mary as the most splendid example of a celestial and devoted life. This is the main point in *De virginibus* II 2.6–18, (treated in length in Chapter 2 of this present study). The treatise *De institutione virginis* is dedicated to the concept of virginity and uses Mary as the prime example of an ascetic life.

Mary is also an eschatological sign in being the type of the Church, *typus ecclesiae*. The Church waits for its eschatological wedding and union with Christ. In *De interpellatione Iob et David* Ambrose interprets the Sicheim, called the “select portion” (Genesis 48:22) as being the Church, who is the bride of the Song of Songs. In the next sentence the Sicheim turned to Mary through whom a sword pierced and divided. In the context the Church is the answer to the question of Song of Songs *Who is she that comes up clothed in white, leaning upon her brother?* (Song of Songs 8:5).²⁵⁴ This is a picture of the Church, who is made white through forgiveness and thus filled with virtues, with its goal in heaven. Ambrose identifies Mary with the Church.²⁵⁵

In *De virginibus* Ambrose calls the Church the bride of Christ,²⁵⁶ which is a fundamentally eschatological picture (see Revelation 21:2). Later in *De virginibus*, the great picture of Mary ends with a vision of her in heaven together with all the virgins. There will be a heavenly procession, Ambrose writes, and a great joy of applauding angels, when one who has lived a heavenly life in the world merits inhabiting heaven itself. At that time, Mary taking the timbrel (*tympanum*) will excite the choir of virgins who are chanting to the Lord.²⁵⁷

The biblical text behind this vision is Miriam leading the female choir in Exodus 15:20–21. Ambrose has already mentioned this passage about Miriam in the first book of *De virginibus*, and called her a figure of the Church (*figura ecclesiae*), and now he returns to the song of Miriam as a prefiguration of Mary in heaven. Neumann notes that “whenever in his later writings the text of Exodus recurs, it is always of Mary, Mother of Jesus, that he thinks”.²⁵⁸ The Red sea is the world, and Mary and the virgins have entered the heavenly realm through the water of this age (*per mare saeculi*), undefiled by worldly waves (*sine saecularibus fluctibus*).²⁵⁹

²⁵³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 13.81. *O diuitias Marianaе uirginitatis!*

²⁵⁴ On this verse, Ambrose’s version differs from the *Revised Standard Version*.

²⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Iob* II 4.16. *Haec Sicima Maria est, cuius animam gladius Dei transit et dividit. Haec Sicima est ascendens, sicut interpretatio habet. Quae sit ascendens, audi de Ecclesia.* Text PL.

²⁵⁶ Ambrose, *virg.* I 5.22.

²⁵⁷ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.16.

²⁵⁸ Neumann 1962, 51.

²⁵⁹ Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.17.

The body of Mary is essential for salvation; through her the Son became flesh. Equally important in Ambrose's Mariology is her righteous and virginal mind.²⁶⁰ He stresses her virtuous life and her life as a heavenly life on earth. Throughout his writings, foremost in the treatises on virginity, he uses many short distinctive sayings and titles to enforce Mary as an eschatological sign. Mary, with her soul and her body, is called "a hall for the heavenly mysteries",²⁶¹ "a heavenly hall",²⁶² "a hall of heavens",²⁶³ "a royal hall" who belongs to God alone.²⁶⁴ Mary, for Ambrose, "has sanctified the temple of chastity".²⁶⁵

Ambrose sometimes calls Mary immaculate. The birth of Christ was immaculate,²⁶⁶ and she is called "an immaculate virgin" (*virgo immaculata*).²⁶⁷ In *Expositio in Lucam*, Ambrose writes that "For Mary follows, that the better she is, the greater is the prophecy".²⁶⁸ This reveals that Ambrose believed Mary's perfection to be deeply important. The idea of Mary as immaculate from every sin was further developed in the Middle Ages²⁶⁹ and reached its culmination on the 8th of December 1854 when pope Pius IX declared *Conceptio immaculata* as a Catholic dogma in the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*.

5.4.3. Creation – New Creation

An underlying principle in Ambrose's Eschatology is a belief that heaven will be even better than paradise ever was. Professor Brian E. Daley (1940–) has demonstrated, that Ambrose in his *Expositio psalmi 118* repeatedly stresses that everyone who wished to enter the paradise had to pass the cherubim *with the flaming sword* (Genesis 3:24).²⁷⁰ Thus,

²⁶⁰ For more see Chapter 2.4: *Mary as Perpetual Virgin*.

²⁶¹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 7.50. *Erat aula coelestium sacramentorum*.

²⁶² Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 17.105. *Aula caelestis*.

²⁶³ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 7.50. *Aula caelestium*. Compare also *paen.* I 1.4.

²⁶⁴ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 12.79. *Aula regalis*.

²⁶⁵ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.33. *Sacrauit templum pudoris*.

²⁶⁶ Ambrose, in *Luc.* II 56. *Virginis partus. Et vere sanctus, quia immaculatus*.

²⁶⁷ Ambrose, *epist. extra coll.* 15.4 (42 PL). *Partu etiam immaculatae Virginis*.

²⁶⁸ Ambrose, in *Luc.* II 28. The whole passage runs: *Sequitur Mariae, quo persona melior, eo prophetia plenior. Nec otiosum uidetur quod et ante Iohannem Elisabet prophetat et Maria ante domini generationem; serpunt enim iam tentamenta salutis humanae. Nam sicut peccatum a mulieribus coepit, ita etiam bona a mulieribus inchoantur, ut feminae quoque muliebria opera deponentes infirmitati renuntient et anima, quae non habent sexum, ut Maria, quae nescit errorem, religioso imitetur studio castitatem*.

²⁶⁹ There was from the early Church on an agreement on that Mary was in some way immaculate, but in what way was a matter of dispute. For example, Thomas Aquinas did not teach her immaculate conception, *conceptio immaculata*. Thomas writes: "her soul had to be free from sin and her body far removed from every taint of carnal concupiscence". Note however, this was not, according to Thomas, the case from her conception: "she had, indeed, to be conceived with Original sin". Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* 275, 279.

²⁷⁰ Daley 1991, 97–101. Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 3.14–17; 20.12–15.

salvation is seen as a return to paradise. It is thus a return, and more. In paradise, death was a potential threat. In the world to come, life will be imperishable and indestructible. Ambrose sees the Church as the beginning of the new creation, and Mary, as the type of the Church, as foretelling the new creation. In the deliverance from the world and all evils, the Church is the new, ethereal, and heavenly sphere on earth which a Christian is brought into by baptism. In the Church the sacraments are celebrated, in her the heavenly word is uttered. The Church on earth has a forward direction, which is the future heavenly goal. This move towards heaven has existed since the creation of the world. In *Expositio psalmi 118*, Ambrose writes that the Church was present in paradise, continues through all times, and will finally be completed in the Eschaton.²⁷¹

In his *Expositio in Lucam*, the bishop parallels Adam and Christ, and pictures a reversed movement in Adam compared to Christ:

The first Adam was cast out of paradise to the desert (Genesis 3:24), the second Adam moves from the desert to the paradise [...] Adam was created from the virgin soil (Genesis 2:7), Christ from the Virgin. Adam was made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), Christ is God's image. Adam had dominion over all the irrational animals (Genesis 1:28), Christ hold everything that breathes. Through the woman folly (Genesis 3:6-7), through the Virgin wisdom. Death through the tree, life through the cross.²⁷²

With all these parallels Ambrose demonstrates his fundamental belief: Christ, as the image of God, is superior even to Adam in his the prelapsarian state. According to Ambrose, the fall was sincere, but redemption is greater. In this scheme, Mary is also superior, firstly in relation to the virgin soil, and secondly in relation to Eve. Together this shows that Ambrose regarded the incarnation, the cross, and the redemption of Christ as stronger and more superior to the sin which poisoned all generations of humanity. Christ came as the second Adam to restore grace to human nature. The second Adam excels the first, and that is a prerequisite of grace and salvation.

In *De virginibus* II 2.16-18 Ambrose pictures Mary in heaven, as the leader of the heavenly choir. In *Exameron* Ambrose depicts the human soul as being created in such a way that it stands between corporality and spirituality.²⁷³ As a heavenly creation every soul should strive upwards towards the goal and purpose of its existence. In *De Isaac vel anima*

²⁷¹ Ambrose, in *psalm. 118* 1.4. *Sancta ecclesia, quae in primordiis mundi desponsata in paradiso.*

²⁷² Ambrose, in *Luc. IV* 7. *De paradiso in desertum Adam primus eiectus sit, ut aduertat quemadmodum de deserto ad paradisum Adam secundus reuerterit. [...] Ex terra uirgine Adam (Genesis 2:7), Christus ex uirgine, ille ad imaginem dei factus, hic imago dei, ille omnibus inrationabilibus animalibus, hic omnibus animantibus antelatus – per mulierem stultitia, per uirginem sapientia, mors per arborem, uita per crucem.*

²⁷³ For more on the subject, see Chapter 3.3: *Ambrose's Protology.*

Ambrose writes that in order that she may be with God the soul must gaze from the body on things divine and raise herself up to eternal things.²⁷⁴ Ambrose taught his parish that in every soul there is a longing for the eternal life.

In *De fuga saeculi* Ambrose stresses the flight from the world as a necessary Christian attitude in face of this present life. In *De bono mortis* Ambrose consoles his congregation in their fears concerning bodily death. Moreover, in *De resurrectione*, Ambrose confirms the hope of the coming resurrection to his Christian flock. The celestial life every Christian is called to live on earth has its beginning in baptism. The divine Christian life is, nonetheless, a foretaste of an impending good, one that will be manifest in an even greater happiness than even the paradise Eden could offer. Ambrose speaks about the clarity of paradise that will be surpassed by the clarity of the coming world in a passage of *De fide* V. In context, Ambrose interprets the words from Christ to one of the criminals at his cross: *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise* (Luke 20:43). This paradise is even more glorious than the first paradise. The criminal is, according to Ambrose, promised “the clarity that was before the world was created”.²⁷⁵

In 2 Corinthians Paul states: *What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived. What God has prepared for those who love him* (2 Corinthians 2:9). His thought is that in the world to come, there will be a glory beyond what any human person has ever experienced. In that perspective, Ambrose calls the fault of Eve a “happy fault”, since the fall opened all of creation for redemption and completion. Thus, Ambrose could write, in *De institutione virginis*, that the fault of Eve helped us more than hurt us,²⁷⁶ and in *Explanatio Psalmi 39*: “O happy fault, which was repaired to the better”.²⁷⁷ In the funeral speech to the emperor Theodosius, Ambrose writes: “Mary was visited, that Eve would be liberated”.²⁷⁸

In a saying echoing the Roman law, Ambrose writes:

Acknowledge me in my flesh, which has sinned in Adam. Acknowledge me not from Sara, but from Mary, so that my flesh might be a pure virgin, but a virgin through grace free from every stain of sin.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ Ambrose, *Isaac* 7.62. *Sed ipsa magis lucem expetit tamquam in superioribus domus suae, id est, corporis sui, et supra mundum posita divina intuetur, et ad aeterna se elevat, ut Deo adsit.*

²⁷⁵ Ambrose, *fid.* V 7.93. *Haec est ante mundum claritas.*

²⁷⁶ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 17.104. *Amplius nobis profuit culpa quam nocuit.*

²⁷⁷ Ambrose, *in psalm.* 39.20. *Felix ruina, quae reparatur in melius.*

²⁷⁸ Ambrose, *ob Theod.* 47. *Visitata est Maria, ut Evam liberaret.* (Text PL)

²⁷⁹ Ambrose, *in psalm.* 118 22.30. *Suscipe me in carne, quae in Adam lapsa est. Suscipe me non ex Sarra, sed ex Maria, ut incorrupta sit uirgo, sed uirgo per gratiam ab omni integra labe peccati.*

Suscipio is a technical term for the power of the father (*patria potestas*) to accept or to refuse a child as his own.²⁸⁰ Ambrose turns this term into a prayer to his almighty heavenly Father, begging him to acknowledge his flesh (*caro mea*). Ambrose understands his flesh as having been ruined by the fall, and thus affected by sin. In Mary, however, Ambrose sees a new beginning, a new creation, in which his flesh might also be cleaned and set free by grace. This thought fits well into his idea of Mary as the mother of the believer.

I will end this passage with Ambrose's poetic words to Eve from *De institutione virginis*:

O come, Eve, now sober.	<i>Veni, Eua, iam sobria. [...]</i>
O come, Eve, now such, that you do not need to be excluded from paradise, but lifted to heaven.	<i>Veni Eua, iam talis, ut non de paradiso excludaris, sed rapiaris ad caelum. [...]</i>
O come thus, Eve, now Mary, who not only has set an incitement of virginity, but also has brought God.	<i>Veni ergo, Eua, iam Maria, quae nobis non solum uirginitatis incentiuum attulit, sed etiam deum intulit.</i> ²⁸¹

5.5. Conclusions on Chapter 5

The main scholarly question of the present study is how Ambrose used the concept of Mary's virginity in his pastoral care. The definition of pastoral care used in the study is communicating the Christian message, summarised in the Creed, as found in the tension between Christian dogma and the existing culture, the purpose of which is to make the Christians grow in grace, delight, faith, and living. In the present chapter the main tension is between the existing life on earth, and the Christian hope in a world to come. Sexuality and procreation were social and political matters, as well as biological. Ambrose most probably embraced the idea that self-regulation, celibacy, and continence were physically healthy things. It was not only philosophers and monastic athletes who proposed celibacy and virginity, but also medical experts such as Soranus who suggested that chastity as something that was desirable (at least at times) for everybody for reasons of health.

Eschatology played a profound role in Ambrose's pastoral care. It was present in almost all his sermons both to virgins and to ordinary Christians. His time was an era where the fragility and mortality of life was

²⁸⁰ Leppermann, *Griech.-röm. Altertumskunde*, Münster 1915, 187: "Ein neugeborenes Kind wurde dem Vater vor die Füße gelegt, damit er vermöge seiner *patria potestas* entweder durch Aufheben desselben (*tollere suscipere*) sich zur Erziehung verpflichte oder es durch Liegenlassen zur Aussetzung oder Tötung bestimme". Quotation found in Huhn 1954, 158.

²⁸¹ Ambrose, *inst. virg.* 5.32–33.

more manifest than in contemporary times, particularly in the birthing of a child and in early childhood. Ambrose put the family life and reproduction in an eschatological light. In his preaching, in the way baptism was enacted as a death and a subsequent rebirth into a new existence, and in his exhortations to the virgins of his day, were portrayed as eschatological signs. The theme of the biological death and the world to come are ubiquitous concerns in Ambrose's pastoral care. Basically, living an eschatological life was desirable for all Christians, and started with the spiritual death and resurrection of baptism.

This made Mary's life a pattern for all to imitate, irrespective of whether they belonged to the majority (those who were married) or the minority (the smaller group of virgins). Ambrose firmly believed and preached on Mary's lifelong continence, which is her *virginitas post partum*. The Virgin Mary is, thus, used by Ambrose as a sign of the world to come. In her, Ambrose saw a sign of the eternal heavenly realm. In the impending world there would be no further need for procreation and marriage. As a picture of the Church, Mary becomes an even greater eschatological sign. The Church is part of the anticipated eternal world, while already existing on earth. Ambrose therefore reacted strongly when confronted with the ideas of Jovinian, Helvidius, Bonosus, and others who stated that the married state was as good as the virginal one of the celibates and that Mary might have had more children than Jesus. According to Ambrose, the whole point of Mary, as an eschatological sign, got lost in their thinking.

In the present chapter I have mapped the views of sexuality, celibacy, marriage, and the Eschaton found in Ambrose's writings. There were two starting points. Firstly, virginity is, in Ambrose's writings, strongly connected to death. Christian baptism was also a death from the world. Thus, the virgins, and most importantly, Mary, were eschatological signs for every baptised member of the congregation. The second starting point was that Ambrose regarded the life to come as even more blessed than paradise ever was. Ambrose preaches eschatologically in the tension between on the one hand human sin and fragility and on the other the redemption in Christ and the future hope. Adam is turned to hope in Christ, and the old sin of Eve is turned to an even greater blessing in Mary.

6. Conclusions

The goal of this work on Ambrose's pastoral usage of the belief in Mary's perpetual virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ has been to understand how Ambrose's words were intended to be perceived and understood by the Milanese Christians exposed to his pastoral care. Foundational to the study has been the idea that pastoral care is an exercise in the tension between dogma and culture. The dogma, in this case, has been understood as summarised in the Creed, and the culture as the philosophical frame of reference of Ambrose's time. Ambrose preached his words in a specific and existing cultural environment with the intention of guiding, consoling, and making the minds and senses of the listening congregation steadfast in grace, delight, faith, and living.

This study has at least one major restriction, or weakness, which is, the methodological attempt to "hear the silence" of Ambrose's pastoral context. It exists an uncertainty regarding the connection between, on the one hand, Ambrose's oral preaching, and, on the other hand, the texts edited for circulation among readers who had a theological interest in what he wrote. I treated Ambrose's texts as examples of what was heard in his congregation. I am, on the one hand, aware of the restriction of the study, but, on the other hand, it helps to reveal a world and culture otherwise hidden from the modern reader.

I structured my study according to the credal dogmatical perspective of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Fulfiller of the creation, in correlation to the trisected aspects of Mary's perpetual virginity, before, during, and after the birth. Within this dogmatical perspective, I investigated the biological and medical philosophies which created the common frame of reference in which Ambrose's preaching was pastorally exercised. Thus, my study is an answer to Ernst Dassmann's call for the necessity of studying Ambrose from the perspective of pastoral care, made in the article 'Pastorale Anliegen bei Ambrosius von Mailand'. This work was not intended to replace, but rather to offer a complementing pastoral perspective to the two exhaustive studies already in existence: Joseph Huhn's *Das Geheimnis der Jungfrau-Mutter Maria nach dem Kirchenvater Ambrosius*, and Charles William Neumann's *The Virgin Mary in the Works of Saint Ambrose*.

To date, the main interests in studies about Ambrose's writings have been of a historical and systematic theological kind. Many academic works have been written about different aspects of Ambrose's role in history and his theology. Hitherto none, as far as I am aware, has considered Ambrose's usage of the concept of Mary's perpetual virginity in relation to the congregation who listened to him, regarding conception, pregnancy,

birth-giving, and sexuality. Ambrose's world was a world of sounds, smells, and seen things, but for the majority not of written texts. Carol Harrison's words "We need to stop thinking about early Christianity in mute mode, allow it to sound and speak, and then listen to its echoes and resonances in those who heard it"¹ have been presupposed throughout the present study. When Ambrose preached about Christ's birth and Mary's virginity, he spoke in a cultural sounding board of certain medical and biological assumptions.

In contemporary science, social and psychological aspects are significant in maternity care. Åsa Larsson's study *Barnafödandets mysterium* (means: *The mystery of giving birth*) reveals the birth of a child as a both physical and spiritual process for the mother. Birth is about happiness, joy, health, and renewal of life, and at the same time pain, anguish, suffering, and danger. Ambrose preached his message about the perpetual virginity of Mary into this basic human reality. Basically, the human outer and inner life, with its body, mentality, and psyche, did not differ in Late Antiquity from any other time.

I reiterate the starting hypothesis and the question formulations of this present work here. I have read and categorised Ambrose's teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity according to the following hypotheses:

- As bishop, Ambrose made pastoral efforts to guide, exhort, and teach his congregation in faith, hope, and love: The Virgin Mary functions foremost in his pastoral care as an example and for identification.
- Ambrose's ultimate pattern for the seen and unseen reality is summarised in the Christian Creed, the *regula fidei*: God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, and the One who completes everything.
- Mariology is not exclusively a spiritual subject but also deals with biological and physical matters (about the Word becoming *flesh*, John 1:14), that is, Mariology is a subject also including human sexuality, conception, pregnancy, and birth in a biological understanding.

In each chapter respectively, I mapped the Late Antique biology about conception, the giving of birth, and sexuality. The Creed – Protology, Christology, and Eschatology – have been opposed to the cultural understanding of Biology. In so doing, I have recognised that Ambrose's concepts of Biology and the Creed correspond with the Mariological content of his writings. I have not violated the texts in order to make the

¹ Harrison 2013, 12.

hypotheses fit the material. Quite the contrary, the hypotheses have given a deeper knowledge to the pastoral character of the writings.

The purpose of the study has been to understand how Ambrose's teaching on Mary's virginity might have been intended to work as pastoral care in his Milanese congregation. In correspondence to the hypotheses I posed the following scholarly questions. Firstly, the over-arching question:

- How did Ambrose use the concept of Mary's virginity in his pastoral care?

In order to achieve my purpose and answer the overall question, I divided the main question into two secondary questions, each respectively representing the dogma and the culture which create the tension in the context of his pastoral care:

- How did Ambrose incorporate the concept of Mary's virginity in his overall pattern of faith?
- How must Ambrose's teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary respectively before, during, and after the birth of Christ be interpreted in the context the biological and medical assumptions of his time?

Throughout this work the content has been structured in such a way so as to answer the questions. The second chapter is a general introduction to Ambrose's Mariology, while the third, fourth, and fifth chapters map the cultural assumptions of giving birth, conception, and sexuality. In the same chapters respectively, the content of Ambrose's preaching on Protology, Christology, and Eschatology has been depicted. Moreover, in each chapter biology and medicine have been woven together with the pattern of the Creed in order to come to an understanding of how Ambrose used the concept of Mary's virginity in his sermons.

During the process of my work, it became clear that in Ambrose's thinking the three aspects of the perpetual virginity of Mary, a virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ, correspond to the content of the Creed. The Protology, including creation and the fall, corresponds to Mary as the second Eve and virginal birth-giver of Christ. The Christology, including the person and work of Christ, corresponds to the virginal conception in Mary's womb. The Eschatology, including the completion of the creation, corresponds to Mary's lifelong celibacy as a heavenly sign and picture of the Church. In Ambrose's writings, Mary has a place in his preaching on the history of salvation. At a certain point in history, the Son of God was made man, and Mary was the human instrument God needed for the incarnation. Ambrose's preaching about Mary, nevertheless, not

only demonstrates an interest in the history of salvation, but also presents her as a person who was a message for his contemporary Christian community. Two terms more adequately describe Ambrose's pastoral Mariology than others: *Identification* and *example*. Ambrose portrayed Mary in such a way that virgins and married Christian women alike could reflect themselves, empowered by Ambrose to identify with a person who, on the one hand, was a virgin, and, on the other hand, had carried and given birth to a child. Mary was, foremost, an example of a virgin in the mind, which for Ambrose was a fact of relevance for all his people, both men and women.²

In the second chapter, I delineated the content of *De virginibus* II 2.6–18, which is Ambrose's first exposition on the Mary, the virgin. The passage in *De virginibus* reveals three basic explanation models, or motives, for a general understanding of Ambrose's Mariology: Firstly, it is of Eastern and Greek origin. Ambrose copies and is dependent on Eastern theologians' writings for his Mariology, foremost Athanasius. He is also known as the Latin father who gave Western Mariology its decisive direction. Secondly, Ambrose presents Mary as an ideal and an example in his ethical instructions. Within the pattern of biography, Ambrose presented Mary as an ideal example for all Christians in terms of faith and living. Thirdly, Mary's perpetual virginity in all three aspects is present in *De virginibus* II 2.6–2.18. The bodily virginity before, during, and after birth is present. A noteworthy aspect in Ambrose's theological thinking is that Mary, as an example of a virginity in thoughts, words, and deeds, is for everyone. Virginity is foremost in the mind, which all Christians ought to be able to imitate.³

In the third chapter, I mapped out Ambrose's Protology and views of his times pertaining to the delivery of a child. Three points were highlighted as a result of this study. Firstly, Christ's birth, including Mary's *virginitas in partu*, might very well have been taught while at the same time it was believed to be a normal human birth. The birth of Christ seems to have been preached as a paradox, a shining contradiction. Ambrose's belief in a virginity in the birth-giving might perfectly well have included the normal circumstances of opening and delivery, and this is even probable in light of his pastoral care. Of the passages where Ambrose dealt with the *virginitas in partu* it is only in *Epistula extra collectionem* 15 (42 PL), which was intended to be read by male and celibatarian theologians, in which Ambrose does not deal with the delivery as pointing at a physical event. Secondly, the birth of Christ must be understood in a holistic

² See Chapter 2.4.1: *Virginity in Mind*. Further Chapter 3.3, *Ambrose's Protology*, for more discussions on the virginity in mind in Ambrose's ideal and pre-lapsarian state of human being.

³ Chapter 2.3.1. *Mary's life Set Forth*. Ambrose, *virg.* II 2.15. *Omnium disciplina sit*, Mary was an example for all, men and women.

perspective of human existence. The pre-lapsarian body with its bodily functions is basically good, and Ambrose pictures a pre-lapsarian state of harmony between the body and the soul. According to Ambrose, Mary turns the post-lapsarian condemnations of Eve into blessings. A part of the holistic view of *virginitas in partu* is Mary, the second Eve, as a virgin in regard to the mind. For Ambrose that meant a harmonious state of her soul and body, in which her passions were under the supreme control of her mind. After the fall, the female body was condemned to a painful giving of birth. In Mary, giving birth is given a redeeming purpose, that is in her giving birth to Christ (2 Timothy 2:15). Thus, giving birth is sanctified in the Church. Notable is that Ambrose expresses himself in a way that might well be interpreted as Mary actively giving birth to Christ. In his description of the birth of Christ, there was the Galenic propulsive power involved in the delivery.⁴ Thirdly, Ambrose's preaching about Christ's birth reflects the parental experiences of his audience. In Ambrose's pastoral care, Mary's significance becomes clear: The mothers of the congregation listening to Ambrose could reflect on and identify themselves with Mary in both the joy and the anxiety as child-bearing mothers. One aspect of theological significance regarding the delivery of Christ is that the true humanity of Christ – and Mary – demands for a normal and true human birth. This fact does not exclude any miraculous aspects of the birth – that God watched over both Mary and Christ in the poor circumstances of Bethlehem.

The fourth chapter dealt with the incarnation, that is the conception of the person Christ who is true man and true God, in the womb of Mary. The context of Ambrose's Christology is the complex Arian/Homoian debate of the fourth century. His dogmatic writings show an important aspect of Ambrose's pastoral care: To warn his people against feared heresies. Ancient medicine ascribed the male seed the power of Genesis, Growth, and Nutrition. In the incarnation of the divine Son, Ambrose understood the male seed as being replaced by the miraculous creative action of the Spirit. To Mary, on the other hand, he ascribed everything that was understood as being the female contribution in a normal conception and pregnancy. Since Mary gave birth to Christ, the Redeemer, she decisively contributed to the redemption of the world.

I started the fifth chapter with two basic points: Firstly, the relation between virginity and death, and secondly, the idea of the coming world as being better than paradise. Ambrose preached about death as being something good, for the Christians. Every baptised member of the Milanese congregation was considered dead, an event that had occurred

⁴ See Chapter 3.2: *An Ordinary Birth, and the Birth of Christ*. The Propulsive power was Galen's term to describe the force that presses the child out of the mother's womb. Galen saw the Propulsive power as not being controlled by the will. At a certain moment, however, the birth-giving mother must cooperate, using her powers.

during their baptism. The consecrated virgins, and ultimately Mary, were the strongest signs of being dead to this world, in order to live for heaven. Ambrose counted Mary, virgin and mother, as a *typus ecclesiae*, together with many biblical women. The Church has its direction towards heaven, and so had Mary. Since Mary's perpetual virginity and lifelong celibacy had that function, Ambrose put considerable effort into arguing against those theologians who believed Jesus had biological brothers and sisters. Ambrose did not diminish marriage, but he did highlight celibacy. In fact, he might even have had medical arguments for the benefits of celibacy. Soranus believed permanent virginity was bodily healthy. On the one hand, an aspect in Ambrose's theological thinking is that celibacy is a positive calling – for Mary as well as for others. On the other hand, the biblical idea of celibacy was not to overshadow the married state in terms of dignity and honour. Further, the issue of pastoral care in matters of life and death was, for Ambrose, both a consolation and a hope. Due to the constant nearness of death in the Late Antique society, consolation in grieving and sorrows is ubiquitous in Ambrose's writings. In the wonderful poetic passage *De institutione virginis* 5.32–33, Ambrose calls Eve to come back. In Mary, Eve as representative of all humans, does not need to be excluded from paradise, but can be lifted to heaven.

The main scholarly question of my study was: How did Ambrose use the concept of Mary's virginity in his pastoral care? In the process of researching, I discovered some features in Ambrose's preaching that answer the question. Mary is pictured for the consecrated virgins as an example in faith, courage, and devotion, but she is also used as an example for all. Ambrose uses the concept of virginity in the mind, which is a mind in control of the bodily passions, as something which ought to be sought after by all Christians. Mary's virginity during the birth is compatible with her as the second Eve, and through her the condemnation on woman to give birth in pain is reversed and reconciled. This message preached lifts the women of Ambrose's congregation and encourages them in being mothers and birth-givers of children. Mary functions as a woman for identification. Mary's virginity before the birth preached is purposed to awake the sense of awe and wonder among Ambrose's listeners. It was to strengthen their faith in Christ, as the divine Son being incarnate. Lastly, Mary's virginity after the birth preached was to encourage and exhort his listeners in living for the world to come. Every baptised Christian has experienced death and received new life in Christ. Mary – who lived a virginal life directed to heaven, and as mother and virgin a picture of the Church – functions as an example. She lived a life dead to this world and one which was directed to the world to come. She will lead the heavenly choir of virgins in the eternal worship to the triune God.

Having presented the main chapters of the study and drawn the conclusions from them, I now share some incidental findings. Firstly,

Ambrose's way of handling Mary and her role in the economy of salvation demands comment regarding the structure of Systematic theology. Ambrosian Mariology is to be positioned in the subject field of Christology. The only unique role Ambrose ascribes Mary is in relation to Christ, as mother of God. For the alternative of relating the Mariology to Ecclesiology, it can be mentioned that Mary is one of twelve biblical women who serve as figures of the Church in Ambrose's writings.

Secondly, Ambrose was pre-Augustinian in his view of original sin.⁵ He did not regard the fall to have affected a total loss of the human capacity to do good. Mariologically, the question is about the *conceptio immaculata* of Mary. Ambrose calls Mary immaculate, but does not define what that means, and never points at an immaculate conception.⁶

Thirdly, in reading Ambrose, one must interpret the holiness of Christ correctly.⁷ Many contemporary theologians misinterpret Ambrose on this issue. The view that Ambrose ascribed Christ's holiness, and his salvation, primarily to the virgin birth must be corrected. More likely, Ambrose sees Christ's holiness as foremost a consequence of the divinity of the Son. For Christ's holiness, the virgin birth is a consequence, a secondary matter. In most parts of Ambrose's writings, when addressing common Christians, physical virginity was not even mentioned as a virtue. The most usual message heard by an ordinary Christian in Milan during Ambrose's time as bishop, was not about salvation linked to virginity as the supreme virtue. They heard about salvation in the sacraments, through Christ's work, in faith and in admonishment to live according to other virtues depicted by Ambrose. On this point, the result of Marcia Colish's study *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man*, ought to be implemented also on Ambrose's teaching on *Mariae virginitas perpetua*. In understanding Ambrose's writings, it is important to see whom he addresses: in his sermons about virginity and to virgins he praises virginity, in sermons directed to common people he does not praise virginity particularly.

Fourthly, Ambrose contributes to the discussion of Mary as *co-redemptrix*.⁸ In three different passages, Ambrose deals with the scene of Mary at the cross.⁹ The first, made in *Expositio in Lucam*, functioned as a model for the other two. Ambrose understands her mind as being prepared and willing to offer herself, for the common good, but Jesus "had no need of a helper in redeeming all" (*non egebat adiutore ad omnium redemptionem*). In the second passage about Mary at the cross, in *Epistula*

⁵ Chapter 3.3.4.5: *The Body with its Sinful Passions and the Original Sin*, and Chapter 4.4.6: *The Virginal Birth and the Original Sin*.

⁶ Chapter 5.4.2: *Mary as an Eschatological Sign*.

⁷ Chapter 4.4.6: *The Virginal Birth and the Original Sin*.

⁸ Chapter 4.4.4: *Mary, Mother of Christ the Redeemer*.

⁹ For an arrangement of the three passages, see Chapter 8.3: *Mary at the Cross, a Synopsis*.

extra collectionem 14 (63 PL), Ambrose copied this sentence *verbatim*. In that letter, however, Ambrose also felt obliged to insert an extra emphasis about Christ's work on the cross with the words "He saved all without a helper" (*qui omnes sine adiutore servavit*). Plainly, Ambrose very consciously rejects the idea of Mary as a helper at the cross in the redemption of the world. Nonetheless, Ambrose ascribed Mary an important role in the scene at Golgotha: she was prepared to offer herself. In the passages where Ambrose dealt with Mary at the cross, she is pictured as an example of courage and faith.

At the end of my study, it is the right place for me to look ahead and make some proposals for future studies. During the study, I have identified some specific areas where a fresh study would make worthwhile contributions. One is the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity in the Protestant tradition. Questions that have arisen concern how the older Lutheran theologians motivated Mary's perpetual virginity, and why this gradually lost its significance.¹⁰ Another specific theme is about the interpretation of the story of Jephthah's daughter and the offering of her (Judges 11). One question pertaining to this is how it might have been used to exhort and defend a virginal life against hesitating parents, not only by Ambrose, but by the Church Fathers in general.¹¹

My hope is that this study can stimulate a view of Mariology as a holistic subject. The birth of Christ was a biological and bodily occurrence, which also involved spiritual aspects of human existence. Thus, Mariology was (and is) a biological as well as a spiritual field. It deals with virginity and motherhood, celibacy and sexuality, theology, and culture. This means, different cultural understandings of biology and psychology will shift Mariological views regarding her virginity and motherhood.¹² I would, therefore, like to return to the confessional survey used to introduce this study. In *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II lists the teaching about Mary as a subject in need of fuller study before a consensus of faith can be achieved.¹³ One essential contribution to the study John Paul II asked for must be research in the History of dogma. In the case of Mary's perpetual virginity, all three aspects of virginity (*ante partum*, *in partu*, and *post partum*) are approved in fundamental confessional statements made in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, even if it has been tuned down in later Protestantism. Robert Jenson asks in his *Systematic Theology* for a theology of a unified Church.¹⁴ In finding a Mariological

¹⁰ Chapter 1.2.3: *The Perpetual Virginity of Mary in Protestant Tradition*.

¹¹ Chapter 5.3.2: *Virginity as an Eschatological Sign*.

¹² For example, one aspect of the conception of Christ where Ambrose's Late Antique biological approach addresses contemporary thinking is that a modern understanding of a conception must count the female egg as genetic material.

¹³ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* 79.

¹⁴ Jenson 1997, vii–viii.

consensus for an undivided Church, Albert Mitterer's method of research in dogmatic and comparison of worldviews ("Weltbildvergleichende Dogmenforschung") has an ecumenical potential.¹⁵ All denominations face a new worldview in the area of medicine and biology compared to the era when the dogmas of Mary's virginity and motherhood were formulated. All the great confessional authorities before the modern era believed in a biology of generation ("Erzeugungsbiologie"), and all confessional theologians of today have to face a modern view of biology as developmental ("Entwicklungsbiologie"). Since Mariology is both a biological and spiritual matter, and as every part of Systematic theology must take pastoral realities into consideration, this new worldview demands a common ecumenical effort to reinterpret the explanations of the Mariological dogmas, for the sake of the worshipping congregation.¹⁶

Lastly, I dare to offer a constructive contribution to the theological intellectual efforts of our time. A basic patristic and Ambrosian theological idea was that God created the universe from nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*. One significant theological point I draw from the Ambrosian material is the idea of *ex nihilo* in relation to *ex vetere*.¹⁷ The original creation was an event empowered by God's word, from nothing. Man was, however, created from the already existing material, from the dust from the ground, and thus of matter that already existed: Man was a creation from the old (*creatio ex vetere*). Christ, as the new beginning and the new creation, was – in a similar way – created from the old creation: Mary's human material. The important idea of Mary as *typus ecclesiae* makes the point of *creatio ex vetere* relevant for the Church too. The Church is a communion of *animae ecclesiasticae*, many souls at one with the Church. The Church is as a new creation; a promise of the world to come. As such, the Church is in disguise and the mystery she carries is the future heaven made present on earth. This means, the material which will create the new creation, is the old and existing creation. The sacraments, the people, the pastoral care, everything existing and exercised in the Church today, are the old material which will be used in the making of the world to come. This insight ought to deepen the Ecclesiological formulations and practical theology of the Church's calling in the world.

¹⁵ Mitterer calls the series of his studies on the subject *Wandel des Weltbildes von Thomas auf heute*. See the titles of Mitterer in the bibliography.

¹⁶ Note, a fair judgement of Albert Mitterer must consider that he understands the revelation as given, it stands as it stands. What might have to be corrected is the understanding and explanation of the dogma in a new scientific context.

¹⁷ Chapter 4.4.2.2: *The Humanity of Christ from the Virgin Mary*.

7. Appendices

7.1. The Apostles' Creed

The baptismal Creed of Milan can be extracted from two sources, with only small alterations regarding the content. The first source is from Ambrose himself, and the treatise *Explanatio symboli ad initiandos*. The second source is three sermons on the Creed from Augustine, *Sermones* 212, 213, and 214. This versions and translations are taken from J. N. D. Kelly's *Early Christian Creeds* 1972, 172–173, with the alterations of Denzinger–Hünemann (DH) 13 in brackets.

Apostolic Creed of Milan, Ambrose

Credo in deum patrem omnipotentem;
Et in Iesum Christum, filium eius unicum, dominum nostrum, qui natus est de Spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine, sub Pontio Pilato passus, [mortuus, DH adds] et sepultus, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit in caelum [ad caelos, DH alters], sedet ad dexteram patris, inde [unde, DH alters] venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos;
Et in Spiritum sanctum, sanctam ecclesiam, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem.

Apostolic Creed of Milan, Augustine

Credo in deum patrem omnipotentem;
Et in Iesum Christum, filium eius unicum, dominum nostrum, qui natus est de Spiritu sancto et Maria virgine, passus est sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus et sepultus, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit in caelum, sedet ad dexteram patris, inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos;
Et in Spiritum sanctum, sanctam ecclesiam, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem.

Apostolic Creed of Milan, Kelly's translation

I believe in God, the Father almighty;
And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was born from the Holy Spirit and (or from) the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified (*not in Amb.*) and buried, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, thence will come to judge the living and the dead;
And in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh.

7.2. De virginibus II 2.6–18¹

Maria virgo perfecta²

2.6. *Sit igitur uobis tamquam in imagine descripta uirginitas uita Mariae, e qua uelut speculo refulget species castitatis et forma uirtutis. Hinc sumatis licet exempla uiuendi, ubi tamquam in exemplari magisteria expressa probitatis, quid corrigere, quid effugere, quid tenere debeatis ostendunt.*

7. *Primus discendi ardor nobilitas est magistri. Quid nobilius dei matre? Quid splendidius ea, quam splendor elegit, quid castius ea, quae corpus sine corporis contagione generauit?*

Bonitas interior et exterior Mariae

Nam de ceteris eius uirtutibus quid loquar? Virgo erat non solum corpore, sed etiam mente, quae nullo doli ambitu sincerum adulteraret adfectum: corde humilis, uerbis grauis, animi prudens, loquendi parcior, legendi studiosior, non in incerto diuitiarum, sed in prece pauperis spem reponens, intenta operi, uerecunda sermoni arbitrum mentis non hominem, sed deum quaerere, nulli laedere os, bene uelle omnibus, adsurgere maioribus natu, aequalibus non inuidere, fugere iactantiam, rationem sequi, amare uirtutem. Quando ista uel uultu laesit parentes, quando dissensit a propinquis? Quando fastidiuit humilem, quando risit debilem, quando uitauit inopem eos solos solita coetus uirorum inuisere, quos misericordia non erubesceret neque praeteriret uerecundia? Nihil toruum in oculis, nihil in uerbis procax, nihil in actu inuerecundum: non gestus fractior, non incessus solutior, non uox petulantior, ut ipsa corporis species simulacrum fuerit mentis, figura probitatis. Bona quippe domus in ipsa uestibulo debet agnosci ac primo praetendat ingressu nihil intus latere tenebrarum, ut mens nostra nullis repagulis corporalibus impedita tamquam lucernae lux intus posita foris luceat.

Maria ascetica

8. *Quid ego exequar ciborum parsimoniam, officiorum redundantiam, alterum ultra naturam superfuisse, alterum paene ipsi naturae defuisse, illic nulla intermissa tempora, hic congeminatos ieiunio dies? Et si quando reficiendi successisset uoluntas, cibus plerumque obuius, qui mortem arceret, non delicias ministraret. Dormire non prius cupiditas quam necessitas fuit et tamen, cum quiesceret corpus uigilare animus: quae frequenter insomnis aut lecta repetit aut somno interrupta continuat aut disposita gerit aut gerenda praenuntiat.*

9. *Prodire domo nescia, nisi cum ad ecclesiam conueniret, et hoc ipsum cum parentibus aut propinquis. Domestico operosa secreto, forensi stipata comitatu, nullo meliore tamen sui custode quam se ipsa, quae incessu adfectuque uenerabilis non tam uestigium pedis tolleret quam gradum uirtutis adtolleret. Et tamen alios habeat uirgo membrorum custodes suorum, morum autem suorum se habeat ipsa custodem. Plures erunt de quibus discat, si ipsa se doceat quae uirtutes magistras habet, quia quidquid egerit disciplina est. Sic Maria intendebat omnibus, quasi a*

¹ Text ed. SAEMO 14.

² The headings that arrange Ambrose's text in different sections are meant to clarify the content and are all mine.

pluribus moneretur, sic omnia implebat uirtutis officia, ut non tam disceret quam doceret.

Annuntiatio: Visitatio Angeli

10. *Talem hanc euangelista monstrauit, talem angelus repperit, talem spiritus sanctus elegit. Quid enim in singulis morer, ut eam parentes dilexerint, extranei praedicauerint, quae digna fuit ex qua dei filius nasceretur? Haec ad ipsos ingressus angeli inuenta domi in penetralibus sine comite, ne quis intentionem abrumperet, ne quis obstreperet; neque enim comites feminas desiderabat quae bonas comites cogitationes habebat. Quin etiam tum sibi minus sola uidebatur, cum sola esset; nam quemadmodum sola, cui tot libri adessent, tot archangeli, tot prophetae?*

11. *Denique et Gabrihel eam ubi reuisere solebat inuenit et angelum Maria quasi uirum specie mota trepidauit, quasi non incognitum audito nomine recognouit. Ita peregrinata est in uiro quae non est peregrinata in angelo, ut agnoscas aures religiosas, oculos uerecundos. Denique salutata obmutuit et appellata respondit, sed quae primo turbauerat adfectum postea promisit obsequium.*

Maria uisitat Elisabeth et euenta cetera in euangelio enarrati sunt

12. *Quam uero religiosa in propinquas fuerit, scriptura diuina significat. Nam et humilior facta est, ubi a deo se cognouit electam, et statim ad cognatam suam in montana processit, non utique ut exemplo crederet quae iam crediderat oraculo; "beata" enim inquit "quae credidisti". Et tribus cum ea mensibus mansit. Tanti autem interuallo temporis non fides quaeritur, sed pietas exhibetur. Et hoc posteaquam in utero parentis exiliens puer matrem domini salutauit prius compos deuotionis quam naturae.*

13. *Inde tot sequentibus signis, cum sterilis pareret, uirgo conciperet, loqueretur mutus, adoraret magus, expectaret Simeon, sidera nuntiarent, Maria mobilis ad introitum, immobilis ad miraculum "conseruabat" inquit "haec omnia in corde suo". Quamuis mater domini discere tamen praecepta domini desiderabat, et quae deum genuerat deum tamen scire cupiebat.*

14. *Quid quod annis quoque omnibus ibat in Hierusalem sollempni die paschae et ibat cum Ioseph? Ubique in uirgine comes singularum uirtutum est pudor. Hic indiuiduus debet esse uirginitati, sine quo non potest esse uirginitas. Nec ad templum igitur Maria sine pudoris sui custode processit.*

Inclusio: Ambrosius reuertitur ad Mariam quam imaginem uirginitatis

15. *Haec est imago uirginitatis. Talis enim fuit Maria, ut eius unius uita omnium disciplina sit. Si igitur auctor non displicet, opus probemus, ut quaecumque sibi eius exoptat praemium imitetur exemplum. Quantae in una uirgine species uirtutum emicant: secretum uerecundiae, uexillum fidei, deuotionis obsequium, uirgo intra domum, comes ad ministerium, mater ad templum.*

Maria ductrix chori caelestis

16. *O quantis illa uirginibus occurret, quantas complexa ad dominum trahet dicens: "Haec torum filii mei, haec thalamos nuptiales immaculato seruauit pudore". Quae admodum eas ipse dominus commendabit patri nimirum illud repetens suum: "Pater sancte, istae sunt, quas custodiui tibi, in quibus filius hominis caput reclinans quieuit. Peto ut ubi ego sum et ipsae sint mecum. Sed non solis sibi debent*

posse quae non solis uixerunt sibi: haec parentes redimat, haec fratres. Pater iuste, mundus me non cognouit, istae autem me cognouerunt et mundum cognoscere noluerunt."

17. *Quae pompa illa, quanta angelorum laetitia plaudentium, quod habitare mereatur in caelo quae caelestem uitam uixit in saeculo. Tunc etiam Maria tympanum sumens choros uirginales citabit cantantes domino, quod per mare saeculi sine saecularibus fluctibus transierunt. Tunc unaquaeque exultabit dicens: "Et introibo ad altare dei mei, ad deum qui laetificat iuuentutem meam." "Immolo deo sacrificium laudis et reddo altissimo uota mea."*

Pons litterarius ad proximum exemplum uirginitatis

18. *Neque enim dubitauerim uobis patere altaria, quarum mentes altaria dei confidenter dixerim, in quibus cotidie pro redemptione corporis Christus immolatur. Nam si corpus uirginis dei templum est, animus quid est, qui tamquam membrorum cineribus excitatis sacerdotis aeterni redopertus manu uaporem diuini ignis exhalat? Beatae uirgines, quae tam immortalis spirantis gratia, ut horti floribus, ut templa religione, ut altaria sacerdote.*

3.19 *Ergo sancta Maria disciplinam uitae informet. Thecla doceat immolari. Etcetera.*

7.3. Mary at the Cross, a Synopsis

<i>Expositio in Lucam</i> X³	<i>Epistula extra coll.</i> 14⁴	<i>De institutione</i> <i>virginis</i> ⁵
<p>129. <i>Stabant autem mulieres haec uidentes, stabat et mater, cum studio pietatis sua pericula posthaberet. Sed et dominus suspensus in cruce, qui sua pericula contemneret, pio matrem commendabat affectu. Quod non otiose Iohannes pluribus prosecutus est (John 19:25);</i></p> <p><i>alii enim mundum describere concussum, caelum tenebris obductum, refugisse solem. Addiderunt Matthaeus et Marcus, qui humana atque moralia uberius prosecuti sunt: deus, deus meus, respice me! Quare me dereliquisti? Vt ad crucem Christi susceptionem peruenisse crederemus condicionis humanae. Lucas autem competere euidenter adseruit latroni ueniam sacerdotali intercessione donatam, et Iudaeis persequentibus eodem</i></p>	<p>109. <i>Maria, domini mater, ante crucem filii stabat;</i></p> <p><i>nullus me hoc docuit, nisi sanctus Iohannes evangelista (John 19:25).</i></p> <p><i>Mundum alii concussum in passione domini conscripserunt, caelum tenebris obductum, refugisse solem,</i></p> <p><i>in paradysum latronem,</i></p>	<p>46. <i>Sed tamen Maria suis, non alienis moribus defendatur. Non defecit, ut dixi. Ipse testis est Filius Dei, qui cum esset in cruce, discipulum matri commendabat ut filium: discipulo eam tradebat ut matrem (John 19:26,27). Docuit hoc Joannes, qui mystica magis scripsit. Alii enim evangelistae scripserunt quod in passione Domini terra contremuit, sol refugit, persecutoribus uenia postulata est. Iste dilectus Domini, qui e pectore ejus hauserat secreta sapientiae, et piae voluntatis arcana, ab aliis dicta (Matthew 27:51f.) praeteriens, hoc diligentius prosecutus est ut maternae uirginitatis perseverantiam suo iudicio comprobaret (John 13:23), quasi filius de matris pudore sollicitus, ne quis eam tanto conuicio temeratae integritatis aspergeret.</i></p> <p>47. <i>Dignum quippe erat ut qui latroni ueniam</i></p>

³ Text ed. CCL 14.

⁴ Text ed. CSEL 82.

⁵ Text ed. SAEMO 14.

<p><i>munere indulgentiam postulatam (Luke 23:45).</i></p> <p><i>130. Iohannes ergo, qui plenius diuina penetrauit mysteria, non inmerito laborauit, ut quae deum generauerat, mansisse eam uirginem declaret. Solus ergo me docet,</i></p> <p><i>quod alii non docuerunt, quemadmodum in cruce positus appellauerit matrem (John 19:26), pluris putans quod uictor suppliciorum atque poenarum, uictor diaboli pietatis officia diuidebat</i></p> <p><i>quam quod regnum caeleste donabat. Nam si religiosum est quod latroni uenia donatur a domino, multo religiosius quod mater honoratur a filio.</i></p> <p><i>131. Nec praeposterum iudicetur, quod prius latronis absolutionem quam matris appellationem scripsi; qui enim uenerat saluos facere peccatores (1 Timothy 1:15) non absurdum si prius in meis scriptis susceptum munus in redimenda salute peccatoris impleuit. Denique ipse ait: Quae est mater mea, et qui sunt fratres mei (Matthew 12:48)? Quia non uenerat</i></p>	<p><i>sed post piam confessionem receptum (Luke 23:45).</i></p> <p><i>Iohannes</i></p> <p><i>docuit</i></p> <p><i>quod alii non docuerunt, quemadmodum in cruce positus matrem appellauerit (John 19:26) pluris putans quod uictor suppliciorum pietatis officia matri exhibebat,</i></p> <p><i>quam quod regnum caeleste donabat. Nam si religiosum est quod latroni donatur uenia, multo uberioris pietatis est quod a filio mater tanto affectu honoratur:</i></p>	<p><i>donabat, matrem dubio pudoris absolveret. Dicit enim ad matrem: Mulier, ecce filius tuus. Dicit et ad discipulum: Ecce mater tua (John 19:26-27). Ipse est discipulus, cui mater commendabatur. Quomodo marito uxorem tolleret, si fuerat Maria mixta conjugio, aut usum tori conjugalis agnoverat?</i></p> <p><i>48. Claudite ora, impii: aperite aures, pii: audite quid Christus loquatur. Testatur de cruce Dominus Jesus (John 19:26), et paulisper publicam differt salutem, ne matrem inhonorem relinquat. Subscribitur Joannes testamento Christi. Legatur matri pudoris defensio, testimonium integritatis: legatur et discipulo matris custodia, pietatis gratia. Et ex illo suscepit eam discipulus in sua (John 19:27). Non utique Christus faciebat divortium, non Maria relinquebat virum. Sed cum quo uirgo habitare debebat, quam cum eo quem filii haeredem, integritatis sciret esse custodem?</i></p>
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<p><i>uocare iustos, sed peccatores. Sed ibi pro loco, hic et in cruce non inmemor matris appellat eam dicens: ecce filius tuus et Iohanni: ecce mater tua (John 19:26,27). Testabatur de cruce Christus</i></p> <p><i>et testamentum eius signabat Iohannes, dignus tanto testatore testis.</i></p> <p><i>Bonum testamentum non pecuniae, sed uitae, quod non atramento scribitur, sed spiritu dei uiui: Lingua mea calamus scribae uelociter scribentis (Psalms 45:1).</i></p> <p><i>131. Sed nec Maria minor quam matrem Christi decebat, fugientibus apostolis ante crucem stabat,</i></p> <p><i>et piis spectabat oculis filii uulnera, quia exspectabat non pignoris mortem, sed mundi salutem.</i></p>	<p><i>Ecce, inquit, filius tuus, ecce mater tua (John 19:26,27). Testabatur de cruce Christus et inter matrem atque discipulum dividebat pietatis officia. Condebat dominus non solum publicum sed etiam domesticum testamentum</i></p> <p><i>et hoc eius testamentum signabat Iohannes dignus tanto testatore testis.</i></p> <p><i>Bonum testamentum non pecuniae sed vitae aeternae, quod non atramento scriptum est sed spiritu dei vivi, qui ait: Lingua mea calamus scribae uelociter scribentis (Psalms 45:1).</i></p> <p><i>110. Sed nec Maria minor quam matrem Christi decebat. Fugientibus apostolis ante crucem stabat</i></p> <p><i>et piis spectabat oculis filii uulnera, quia exspectabat non pignoris mortem, sed mundi salutem</i></p>	<p><i>49. Stabat ante crucem mater, et fugientibus uiris, stabat intrepida. Videte utrum pudorem mutare potuerit mater Jesu, quae animum non mutavit.</i></p> <p><i>Spectabat piis oculis filii uulnera, per quem sciebat omnibus futuram redemptionem. Stabat non degeneri mater spectaculo, quae non metuebat peremptorem. Pendebat in cruce filius,</i></p>
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<p><i>Aut fortasse quia cognouerat per filii mortem mundi redemptionem, aula regalis putabat se et sua morte publico muneri aliquid addituram.</i></p> <p><i>Sed Iesus non egebat adiutore ad omnium redemptionem,</i></p> <p><i>qui dixit: factus sum sicut homo sine adiutorio, inter mortuos liber (Psalms 88:5).</i></p> <p><i>Suscepit quidem matris adfectum, sed non quaesiuit hominis auxilium.</i></p> <p><i>Habemus igitur pietatis magistrum. Docet lectio quid maternus debeat adfectus imitari, quid sequi reuerentia filiorum, ut illae se offerant in filiorum periculis, illis amplius solitudo materna quam suae mortis maestitia sit dolori.</i></p>	<p><i>aut fortasse quia cognouerat per filii mortem mundi redemptionem aula regalis, etiam sua morte putabat se aliquid publico addituram muneri.</i></p> <p><i>Sed Iesus non egebat adiutore ad redemptionem omnium,</i></p> <p><i>qui omnes sine adiutore servavit.</i></p> <p><i>Unde et dicit: Factus sum sicut homo sine adiutorio inter mortuos liber (Psalms 88:5).</i></p> <p><i>Suscepit quidem affectum parentis, sed non quaesivit alterius auxilium.</i></p> <p><i>Hanc imitamini, matres sanctae, quae in unico filio dilectissimo tantum maternae virtutis exemplum edidit; neque enim vos dulciores liberos habetis neque illud virgo quaerebat solatium, quod alium posset generare filium.</i></p>	<p><i>mater se persecutoribus offerebat. Si hoc solum esset, ut ante filium prosterneretur, laudandus pietatis affectus, quod superstes filio esse nolebat: sin vero ut cum filio moreretur, cum eodem gestiebat resurgere, non ignara mysterii quod genuisset resurrecturum. Simul quae publico usui impendi mortem filii noverat, praestolabatur si forte etiam sua morte publico muneri aliquid adderetur.</i></p> <p><i>Sed Christi passio adiutore non eguit,</i></p> <p><i>sicut ipse Dominus longe ante praedixit: Et respexi, et non erat adiutor: et attendi, et nemo suscipiebat; et liberabo eos brachio meo (Isaiah 63:5).</i></p>
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8. Abbreviations

8.1. Writings of Ambrose¹

Abr.	De Abraham
Apol. Dav.	Apologia prophetae David
Apol. Dav. alt.	Apologia prophetae David altera
bon. mort.	De bono mortis
Cain	De Cain et Abel
epist.	Epistulae
epist. extra coll.	Epistula extra collectionem
exam.	Exaameron
exc. fr.	De excessu fratris sui Satyri libri duo
exh. virg.	Exhortatio virginitatis
fid.	De fide ad Gratianum Augustum
fuga	De fuga saeculi
Hel.	De Helia et ieiunio
Iac.	De Iacob et vita beata
incarn.	De incarnationis dominicae sacramento
inst. virg.	De institutione virginis et sanctae Mariae virginitate perpetua
Iob	De interpellatione Iob et David et de hominis infirmitate
Ioseph	De Ioseph
Isaac	De Isaac vel anima
in Luc.	Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam
myst.	De mysteriis
Nab.	De Nabuthae
Noe	De Noe et arca
ob. Theod.	De obitu Theodosii
ob. Val.	De obitu Valentiniani
off.	De officiis ministrorum
paen.	De paenitentia
par.	De paradiso
patr.	De patriarchis
in psalm.	Explanatio Psalmorum XII
in psalm. 118	Expositio Psalmi CXVIII
sacr.	De sacramentis

¹ The abbreviations of Ambrose's writings are taken from Dassmann 2004, 327.

Spir.	De Spiritu Sancto
ymb.	Explanatio symboli
Tob.	De Tobia
vid.	De viduis
virg.	De virginibus
virginit.	De virginitate

8.2. Series of Primary Sources and Translations

ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers (10 Vols., Buffalo, 1885–1896, repr. Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004)
BKV	Bibliothek der Kirchenväter (1. Reihe 80 Vols., Leipzig: Engelmann, 1869–1888. 2. Reihe 63 Vols., Kempten: Kösel, 1911–1931, 20 Vols., Munich: Kösel & Pustet, 1932–1939)
BELK	Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (2 Vols., Göttingen, 1955)
CCL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–)
CCTA	Corpus Christianorum Thesaurus Patrum Latinorum: Thesaurus Sancti Ambrosii (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994)
COD	Conciliorum Oecumeniorum Decreta (2 Vols., eds. G. Alberigo et al., bilingual ed. English trans. N.P. Tanner, <i>Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils</i> , London, 1990)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866–)
DH	Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum (eds. H. Denzinger–P. Hünemann, 43th ed., Latin-English, trans. R. Fastiggi–A. Englund Nash. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012)
FC	Fathers of the Church (English trans. of patristic texts, Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1946–)
FChr	Fontes Christiani (bilingual collection of patristic texts, German trans., Fribourg Schweiz: Herder, 1991–)

Loeb	Loeb Classical Library (bilingual collection, English trans., Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press/London: Heinemann, 1912-)
LXX	Septuaginta
NPNF1	The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series (14 Vols., Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1886-1900, repr. Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004)
NPNF2	The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (14 Vols., Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1886-1900, repr. Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004)
PL	Patrologia Latina, Cursus completus (221 Vols., ed. J. P. Migne, Paris, 1844-1891)
PSt	Patristic Studies (bilingual collection of patristic texts, English trans., Washington)
SAEMO	Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera (bilingual ed. of Ambrose's works, Italian trans., Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana-Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1977-)
SCh	Sources chrétiennes (bilingual collection of patristic texts, French trans., Paris: Cerf, 1941-)

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9.1.1. Ambrose

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- *De bono mortis*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:1 (C. Schenkl, 1896); SAEMO 3 (C. Moreschini, 1982); BKV1 49 (F. X. Schulte, 1871); *Des hl. Kirchenvaters Ambrosius Schrift der Tod ein Gut* (J. Huhn, Fulda, 1949); FC 65 (M. P. McHugh, 1972).
- *De Cain et Abel*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:1 (C. Schenkl, 1896); SAEMO 2:1 (P. Siniscalco, 1984); FC 42 (J. J. Savage, 1961).
- *Epistulae/Epistula extra collectionem*: PL 16 (1845); CSEL 82:1–4 (O. Faller–M. Zelzer, 1968–1996); SAEMO 19–21 (G. Banterle, 1985–1988); FC 26 (M. M. Beyenka, 1954). Selected letters trans. in NPNF2 10 (H. de Romestin, 1896), *Ambrose* (Ramsey, 1997).
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- *De fuga saeculi*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897); SAEMO 4 (G. Banterle, 1980); Sch 576 (C. Gerzaguët, 2015); BKV1 49 (F. X. Schulte, 1871); FC 65 (M. P. McHugh, 1972).
- *De Helia et ieiunio*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897); PSt 19 (M. J. A. Buck, 1929); SAEMO 6 (F. Gori, 1985).

¹ Here is mapped the editions and some selected translations of Ambrose's writings. The purpose is to guide the reader among the different editions and translations that exist.

- *De Iacob et vita beata*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897); SAEMO 3 (R. Palla), 1982; Sch 534 (G. Nauroy, 2010); FC 65 (M. P. McHugh, 1972).
- *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento*: PL 16 (1845); CSEL 79 (O. Faller, 1964); SAEMO 16 (E. Bellini, 1979); FC 44 (R. J. Deferrari, 1963).
- *De institutione virginis et sanctae Mariae virginitate perpetua*: PL 16 (1845); SAEMO 14:2 (F. Gori, 1989).
- *De interpellatione Iob et David*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897), SAEMO 4 (G. Banterle, 1980); FC 65 (M. P. McHugh, 1972).
- *De Ioseph*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897); SAEMO 3 (R. Palla, 1982); FC 65 (M. P. McHugh, 1972).
- *De Isaac vel anima*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:1 (C. Schenkl, 1896); SAEMO 3 (C. Moreschini, 1982); FC 65 (M. P. McHugh, 1972).
- *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*: PL 15 (1845); CSEL 32:4 (K. Schenkl, 1902), CCL 14 (M. Adriaen, 1957); Sch 45, 52 (G. Tissot, 1956, 1958); SAEMO 11–12 (G. Coppa, 1978); BKV1 21 (J. E. Niederhuber, 1915).
- *De mysteriis*: PL 16 (1845); CSEL 73 (O. Faller, 1955); SAEMO (G. Banterle, 1982); Sch 25 (B. Botte, 1961); NPNF2 10 (H. de Romestin, 1896); BKV1 32 (J. E. Niederhuber, 1917); FC 44 (R. J. Deferrari, 1963); *On the Mysteries* (in Ambrose, Ramsey 1997); *Om mysterierna* (P. Beskow, Skellefteå, 2001).
- *De Nabuthae*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897); PSt 15 (M. McGuire, 1927); SAEMO 6 (F. Gori, 1985); *On Nabaoth* (in Ambrose, Ramsey, 1997).
- *De Noe et arca*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:1 (C. Schenkl, 1896); SAEMO 2:1 (A. Pastorino, 1984).
- *De obitu Theodosii*: PL 16 (1845); PSt 9 (M. D. Mannix, 1925); CSEL 73 (O. Faller, 1955); BKV 32 (J. Niederhuber, 1917); FC 22 (R. J. Deferrari 1953).
- *De obitu Valentiniani*: PL 16 (1845); CSEL 73 (O. Faller, 1955); FC 22 (R. J. Deferrari 1953).
- *De officiis ministrorum*: PL 16 (1845); SAEMO 13 (G. Banterle, 1977); CCL 15 (M. Testard, 2000); NPNF2 10 (H. de Romestin, 1896); BKV1 32 (J. E. Niederhuber, 1917); *Ambrose: De officiis* (I. J. Davidson, 2002).
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- *De Spiritu Sancto*: PL 16 (1845); CSEL 79 (O. Faller, 1964); SAEMO 16 (C. Moreschini, 1979); NPNF2 10 (H. de Romestin, 1896); FC 44 (R. J. Deferrari, 1963).
- *Explanatio symboli*: PL 17 (1845); CSEL 73 (O. Faller, 1955); SCh 25 (B. Botte, 1961); SAEMO (G. Banterle, 1982).
- *De Tobia*: PL 14 (1845); CSEL 32:2 (C. Schenkl, 1897); PSt 35 (L. M. Zucker, 1933); SAEMO 6 (F. Gori, 1985);
- *De viduis*: PL 16 (1845); SAEMO 14:1 (F. Gori, 1989); BKV1 13 (F. X. Schulte, 1871); NPNF2 10 (H. de Romestin, 1896).
- *De virginibus*: PL 16 (1845); SAEMO 14:1 (F. Gori, 1989); FChr 81 (P. Dückers, 2009); NPNF2 10 (H. de Romestin 1896); BKV1 32 (J. E. Niederhuber, 1917); *On Virgins* (in *Ambrose*, Ramsey, 1997).
- *De virginitate*: PL 16 (1845); SAEMO 14:2 (F. Gori, 1989); BKV1 13 (F. X. Schulte, 1871).
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9.1.2. Others²

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- *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (text and trans. in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, H. Musurillo, 1972; trans. *The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, C. White, 2010)

Athanasius

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- *Epistula* (trans. *Letters of Athanasius*, NPNF2 4)
- *Letter to virgins* (in *Saint Athanase: Sur la Virginité*, in *Le Museon* 42, 1929)
- *De synodis* (trans. *Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*, NPNF2 4)
- *Vita Antonii* (trans. *Life of Antony*, in *Early Christian Lives*, White C., Oxford, 1998)

² I here list the texts which I have related to in my study. Only the editions and translations I have used are recorded.

Augustine

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- *De bono coniugali* (trans. *On the good of Marriage*, NPNF2 3)
- *De civitate Dei* (trans. *St. Augustin's City of God*, NPNF1 2)
- *De doctrina christiana* (trans. *On Christian Doctrine*, NPNF1 2; *Tolkning och retorik: de doctrina christiana*, L. Nyberg, Skellefteå, 2006)

Basil the Great

- *Hexaemeron* (trans. *Hexaemeron: Nio homilier om skapelsen av Basilius den store*, S. Y. Rudberg, Skellefteå, 1998)

Celsus

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Cyprian

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Galen

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- *De naturalibus facultatibus* (text and trans. *On the natural faculties*, Loeb 71, A. J. Brock, 1916)
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- *De usu partium* (trans. *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, M. T. May, Ithaca New York, 1968)
- *De uteri dissectione* (trans. *On the Anatomy of the Uterus*, C. M. Goss, in *Anatomical Record* 144, 1962, 77–84.)

Gregory of Nyssa

- *Contra Eunomium* (trans. *Against Eunomius*, NPNF2 5)
- *De virginitate* (trans. *On virginity*, NPNF2 5)
- *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* (trans. *Gregorios av Nyssa: Den heliga Makrinas liv*, S. Hidal, Skellefteå, 1999; trans. *The Life of Macrina*, in *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, White, C., London, 2010)

Gryson, R.

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Hilary of Poitiers

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Irenaeus of Lyon

– *Adversus haeresis* (trans. *Irenaeus against Heresies*, ANF 1)

Jerome

– *Contra Helvidium* (trans. *The perpetual virginity of blessed Mary: Against Helvidius* NPNF2 6; *I martyrnas och bekännarnas tid, den helige Cyprianus och den helige Hieronymus*, G. Fäldt, Stockholm, 2014)

– *Contra Jovinianum libri duo* (trans. *Against Jovinianus*, NPNF2 6)

– *Dialogus adversus Luciferianos* (trans. *The dialogue against the Luciferians*, NPNF2 6)

– *Interpretatio libri Didymi de Spiritu Sancto* (PL 23)

– *Vulgata* (fourth ed. R. Gryson, Stuttgart, 1994)

John Chrysostom

– *Homiliae in Matthaeeum* (trans. *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, NPNF1 10)

Justin

– *Dialogus cum Tryphone* (trans. *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, ANF 1)

Official texts of the Catholic Church

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Origen

– *Contra Celsum* (trans. *Against Celsus*, ANF 4)

– *Homiliae in Leviticum* (SCh 286–287, I. M. Borret, 1981)

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Philo

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Quintillian

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Rufinus

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Siricius, Pope

Epistula 7 (PL 13)

Socrates

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Soranus

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Sozomenos

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Theodoret

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***Mariae virginitas perpetua* — the Concept of Mary's Virginitas in Ambrose of Milan's Pastoral Care**

The topic of the present study is the perpetual virginity of Mary (*Maria semper virgo/Mariae virginitas perpetua*) through the lens of Ambrose of Milan's (339–397) work as a pastoral theologian. In his pastoral care, Ambrose used, on the one hand, the Creed, with its content of Protology, Christology, and Eschatology, and, on the other hand, he addressed the congregation in a specific cultural context. This is, in short, the content and structure of my study.

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