

NOTES

SOME LITTLE-KNOWN EARLY WITNESSES TO MARY'S VIRGINITAS IN PARTU

The Fathers, beginning with Ignatius of Antioch and continuing with Aristides, Justin, and Irenaeus, univocally attest that Mary was and remained a virgin when she conceived—therefore, *ante partum*.¹ But as to her subsequent state as woman, whether she remained a virgin *in partu* (only with this state are we concerned here) and *post partum*, these same early Fathers are not so clear; it is a far cry to the precise formulation by Zeno of Verona who wrote in the last half of the fourth century: “*Maria virgo incorrupta concepit, post conceptum virgo peperit, post partum virgo permansit.*”² It is pointed out that neither Ignatius nor the early classical exponents of Mariology, Justin and Irenaeus, ever deny or contest or even doubt Mary’s *ἀειπαρθενία*, the thesis that she remained a virgin in and after the birth of her Divine Son. In fact, it is emphasized, these same writers intimate and presuppose that her virginal state remained intact and unimpaired at least *in partu*. The aura of mystery and miracle that accompany these early accounts, the implication of a very special divine intervention, give such negative arguments or arguments *ex silentio* very considerable support.³ And, after all, was not the single phrase used by the ancient bishop of Antioch, describing Jesus Christ as *γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου*,

¹ See Ignatius, *Ephes.* 19, 1 and *Smyrn.* 1, 1 (ed. Bihlmeyer); Aristides, *Apol.* 15, 1 (ed. Goodspeed); Justin, *I Apol.* 22, 5, and 32 f. (ed. Goodspeed); *Dial.* 43, 45, 48, 66 ff., 76 ff., etc. (ed. Archambault); Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* III, 9, 2 (II, 31 Harvey); III, 19, 2 (II, 96 H.); III, 25, 1 (II, 115 f. H.); III, 32, 1 (II, 123 H.); IV, 55, 2 (II, 266 H.).

² Zeno, *Tract.* II, 8, 2 (*PL*, XI, 414A–415A); cf. also *Tract.* I, 5, 3 (*PL*, XI, 303A), Better known is the formulation by St. Augustine, *Serm.* CLXXXVI, 1 (*PL*, XXXVIII 999): “*Concipiens virgo, pariens virgo, virgo gravida, virgo feta, virgo perpetua.*”

³ Cf., e. g., L. Kösters, “*Maria, die Mutter Jesu*,” *LTK*, VI (1934), col. 890; B. Bartmann, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, I (7th ed.; Freiburg i. Br., 1928), p. 426. P. Friedrich, “*St. Ambrosius von Mailand und die Jungfraugeburt Marias (Virginitas Mariae in partu)*,”² in *Festgabe Alois Knöpfler* (Freiburg i. Br., 1917), p. 89, passes over Ignatius, Justin, and Irenaeus as witnesses for the *virginitas in partu* of Mary. The primary thesis of H. Koch, *Adhuc virgo: Mariens Jungfrauschafft und Ehe in der altkirchlichen Überlieferung bis zum Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, II; Tübingen, 1929), was to show that Irenaeus considered Mary’s virginity ended with the birth of her Son. He was ably refuted by the reviewers: B. Capelle, “*Adhuc Virgo chez Saint Irénée*,” *Rech. de théol. anc. et méd.*, II (1930), 388–95; A. Eberle, *Theol. Rev.*, XXIX (1930), 153–55; O. Bardenhewer, “*Zur Mariologie des hl. Irenäus*,” *Zeitschr. f. kath. Theologie*, LV (1931), 600–604.

“really born of a virgin,”⁴ as had also been foretold by the prophet (Is. 7:14) and reported as fulfilled by the Gospel writer (Mt. 1:22–23), so inclusive as to extend Mary’s state of virginity to her fully accomplished motherhood? Here St. Augustine saw clearly that if Christ was born of a virgin, it could not be otherwise: “And if only in His birth her virginity had been destroyed, from that moment He would not have been born of a virgin, and the whole Church would proclaim falsely, which God forbid, that He was born of the Virgin Mary.”⁵

The apparent diffidence of the earliest patristic witnesses to speak out clearly on this subject is undoubtedly owing to the presence, already in apostolic times, of the heresy of Docetism.⁶ Some Docetists taught that Christ was only a divine phantom, that He had no human body. They held—to use the terminology handed down by Irenaeus and Tertullian—that Christ was only a *putativus homo* and that His body was only *putativa corpulentia*.⁷ Others conceded that Christ indeed had a human body, but that He was not born *ex virgine*, but came with this body from heaven, passing through the Blessed Virgin, *per virginem*. To both groups of heretics the claim of a perduring virginity of Mary was a most welcome confirmation of their claims: Christ was only apparently conceived by her and only apparently born of her.⁸ In opposing to the Docetist fantastic Christ the real Christ, who had really been born man and really lived the life of men, Tertullian—always a staunch defender of Mary’s virginity in conceiving the Son of God—stated of her: “Virgo quantum a viro; non virgo quantum a partu.”⁹ Thus, what the fear of unintentionally and unavoidably further-

⁴ Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 1, 1 (ed. Bihlmeyer). For an argument that Ignatius asserts the *virginitas in partu*, cf. A. d’Alès, “Marie, Mère de Dieu,” *DAp*, III (1916), col. 200.

⁵ Augustine, *Enchir.*, X, 34 (ed. Krüger); trans. by L. A. Arand, *St. Augustine: Faith, Hope, and Charity* (Ancient Christian Writers, 3; Westminster, Md., 1947), p. 42.

⁶ Even Koch (*op. cit.*, p. 7), who claims to prove that the early Fathers actually denied *virginitas in partu* and did so from pure conviction, admits that the concern not to lend any comfort or encouragement to the Docetists may have played a role in the treatment of the present question.

I convey above that the early Fathers are *apparently* diffident in discussing Mary’s virginity in her childbearing and that one would wish them to be more clear on it: the indications that such virginity was accepted are most evident in the case of Irenaeus (who furnishes us one of the little-known passages adduced below); cf. especially F. Diekamp, *Theologiae dogmaticae manuale*, II (9th ed.; Paris, 1944), p. 424 f.

⁷ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, IV, 52, 2 and V, 1, 2 (2.260 and 315 Harvey); Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*, III, 11 (ed. Kroymann, *CSEL*, XLVII, 393, 8).

⁸ See G. Bareille, “Docètes, Docétisme,” *DTC*, IV, 2 (1924), cols. 1479–1501; J. P. Junglas, “Doketen,” *LTK*, III (1931), col. 371 f.

⁹ *De carne Christi*, 23 (II, 461 Oehler). This treatise, written about 210–212, contains

ing the archenemy's doctrinal claims apparently had caused to remain more or less unmentioned and unasserted for more than a century, was now sacrificed: Mary was really a mother, so much so that she lost her virginity in her childbearing. It was the case of an exaggerated realism put forth in behalf of the real Christ.¹⁰

However, the century before Tertullian is not at all so chary of testimony for Mary as *mater virgo in partu* as it appears. Long before Origen stated that she "conceived and gave birth as a virgin,"¹¹ certain documents, descriptive of the nativity, graphically picture to us rather than assert, the Mother as *virgo pariens*. These documents are either very little known or have only recently been discovered and published. It will be of some value to assemble them here.

First of all, there is Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, written about A.D. 190 and discovered in an Armenian translation in the year 1904. Although given to the world in a number of excellent editions and translations, its contents—a presentation of the apostolic tradition—have been too little read and exploited. In c. 54 of this work, Irenaeus, having applied to Christ the words of Isaias 7:14: "A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son," continues: "And yet again concerning His birth the same prophet says in another place: *Before she that travailed gave birth, she escaped and was delivered of a man-child*. Thus he showed that His birth from the virgin was unforeseen and unexpected."¹² In the verse quoted from the epilogue of Isaias (66:7), the prophet, addressing Israelites in exile, foretells a marvellous repopulation of Jerusalem through Mother Zion.¹³ Irenaeus interprets the verse as messianic, as spoken of the Virgin Mary who gave birth to the man-child Christ in a manner that was without parallel—suddenly, without birth pangs, with no injury or change to herself ("she

a most forceful indictment of the Docetism of Gnostics such as Marcion, Apelles, Valentine, and Alexander. Cf. O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Litteratur*, II (2nd ed.; Freiburg i. Br., 1914), p. 412 f.

¹⁰ Regarding Tertullian's position in this matter as dictated apparently by his determined opposition to Docetists of every description (and not by any Montanistic considerations), cf. E. Dublanchy, "Marie," *DTC*, IX, 2 (1927), col. 2371 f.; J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, I (3rd. English trans.; St. Louis, 1930), p. 317; Kösters, *art. cit.*, col. 890 f.; Bartmann, *op. cit.*, p. 426 f.

¹¹ "De Maria autem dicitur quia *virgo* concepit et peperit"; cf. Origen, *Comm. in Levit.*, hom. VIII, 2 (ed. Baehrens, GCS, Orig., VI, 395, 6); but elsewhere Origen, like Tertullian, denies *virginitas in partu*; for the passages, cf. Dublanchy, *art. cit.*, col. 2372.

¹² Translation by J. A. Robinson, *St. Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; London, 1920), p. 117 f.

¹³ Cf. L. Dennefeld, *Les grands prophètes* (La Sainte Bible, VII; Paris, 1947), pp. 19, 232.

escaped").¹⁴ Certainly, there is here "an unmistakable allusion to virginity *in partu*."¹⁵

Our next testimony comes from witnesses of a very different sort, apocrypha.¹⁶ The first of these, the *Protevangelium Iacobi*, dates from approximately the middle of the second century or perhaps a few decades later.¹⁷ That Mary, who had conceived the Savior as a virgin, did not lose her virginity *in partu*, is, as Amann puts it, the "*idée capitale*" of this interesting document.¹⁸ Purporting to be the Apostle James the Less, the author probably was a Judeo-Christian living somewhere outside Palestine. He was a very popular writer, as is attested by the fact that his story of the Blessed Virgin has survived in more than thirty Greek manuscripts and was anciently translated into a half-dozen other languages.

In cc. 17 and 18 we find the venerable widower Joseph,¹⁹ his sons, and his girl wife Mary (she is sixteen) journeying to Bethlehem in obedience to an edict issued by Caesar Augustus. A few miles short of their goal, Mary, who

¹⁴ Compare the passage in Irenaeus' better known work, the *Adversus haereses* (III, 26, 2 [II, 118 Harvey]): "Quoniam inopinata salus hominibus inciperet fieri, Deo adiuvante, inopinatus et partus Virginis fiebat."

¹⁵ J. Niessen, *Die Mariologie des hl. Hieronymus* (Münster i. W., 1913), p. 19. The significance of the passage as testimony for Irenaeus' acceptance of *virginitas in partu* is recognized by Diekamp, *op. cit.*, II, 424; so, too, by O. Bardenhewer, in his reply to Koch (cf. above, note 3), p. 404. For Irenaeus' Mariology, see the monograph by J. Garçon, *La mariologie de saint Irénée* (thèse Lyons, 1932).

¹⁶ In the following I pass over a description in verse of the birth of Christ, with clear indication of virginal conception and virgin birth, found in a Christian section of the Sibylline Oracles: VIII, 456-79. Kösters, *art. cit.*, col. 890, includes this passage among the testimonies of the early apocrypha, doubtless because the editor of the *Sibyllina*, J. Geffcken, asserts (e. g., in E. Hennecke's *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* [2nd ed.; Tübingen, 1924], p. 401) that the entire book in which the verses occur should be dated before 180 A.D. However, the opinion that the part of the book containing these verses certainly does not antedate the third century seems very much more probable: cf. A. Harnack, *Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*, II (Leipzig, 1904), p. 187 f.; A. Rzach, "Sibyllinische Orakel," in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll-Witte, *RE*, 2. Reihe, 4. Halbband (1923), col. 2146; Christ-Schmid-Stählin, *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur*, II, 2 (6th ed.; Munich, 1924), p. 1220.

¹⁷ Cf. E. Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins* (Les apocryphes du Nouveau Testament; Paris, 1910), pp. 99, 100; also A. Meyer, in E. Hennecke, *op. cit.*, p. 85. Others place it in the first half of the second century: cf. Bardenhewer, *op. cit.*, I (2nd ed.; Freiburg i. Br., 1913), p. 535.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31. Meyer, *loc. cit.*, says: "Die Absicht des ursprünglichen Erzählers geht darauf, die makellose Reinheit der Jungfrau Maria von Haus aus und namentlich ihre Jungfräulichkeit auch nach der Geburt festzustellen."

¹⁹ Here are details, among many others, calculated to support the *idée capitale*—the perpetual virginity of Mary; cf. Amann, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-30.

was with child, having conceived of the Lord's "Word" (11, 2), felt that her hour had come. Joseph led her into a cave and then set out to find a midwife. And now, in c. 18, 2, the eyewitness St. Joseph is suddenly made the narrator of the wondrous thing about to happen to his virgin wife:

18, 2: Now I, Joseph was walking, and I walked not. And I looked up to the air and saw the air in amazement. And I looked up unto the pole of the heaven and saw it standing still, and the fowls of the heaven without motion. [Further examples of such phenomena follow.]

19, 1: And behold a woman coming down from the hill-country, and she said to me: 'Man, whither goest thou?' And I said: 'I seek a midwife of the Hebrews.' And she answered and said unto me: 'Art thou of Israel?' And I said unto her: 'Yea.' And she said: 'And who is she that bringeth forth in the cave?' And I said: 'She that is betrothed unto me.' And she said to me: 'Is she not thy wife?' And I said to her: 'It is Mary that was nurtured up in the temple of the Lord; and I received her to wife by lot; and she is not my wife, but she hath conception by the Holy Ghost.'

And the midwife said unto him: 'Is this the truth?' And Joseph said unto her: 'Come hither and see.' And the midwife went with him.

19, 2: And they stood in the place of the cave: and behold a bright cloud overshadowing the cave. And the midwife said: 'My soul is magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen marvellous things: for salvation is born unto Israel.' And suddenly the cloud withdrew from above the cave, and a great light appeared in the cave so that our eyes could not endure it. And by little and little that light withdrew itself until the young child appeared and took the breast of its mother Mary.

And the midwife exclaimed and said: 'Great unto me today is this day, in that I have seen this new sight!' 19, 3: And the midwife left the cave and Salome met her. And she said to her: 'Salome, Salome! a new sight have I to tell thee. A virgin hath brought forth, which her nature alloweth not!' And Salome said: 'As the Lord my God liveth, if I make not trial and prove her nature, I will not believe that a virgin hath brought forth.'

20, 1: And the midwife went in and said unto Mary: 'Order thyself, for there is no small contention arisen concerning thee.' And Salome made trial *καὶ ἔβαλε Σαλώμη τὸν δάκτυλον αὐτῆς εἰς τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς* and cried out and said: 'Woe unto mine iniquity and mine unbelief! I have tempted the living God—lo, my hand falleth away from me in fire!' [Salome, also a midwife, prays to God for forgiveness, and her hand is restored].²⁰

²⁰ Except for some slight changes, the translation is by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1926), p. 46 f. For the Greek text, cf. C. de Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha* (2nd ed.; Leipzig, 1876), pp. 34–38; Amann, *op. cit.*, pp. 248–54; C. Michel, *Évangiles apocryphes*, I (Textes et documents, 13; Paris, 1911), pp. 36–40.

This very realistic assertion and demonstration of Mary's continued virginity in her motherhood suggests this important comment: it is quite evident that in the author's time, the year 150 or thereabout, the question of the Blessed Mother's *virginitas in partu* was much debated, and both asserted and denied. The disagreement may have been among orthodox Christians themselves. Or, as seems more likely, the author wished to refute certain heretics (Gnostics) who denied Mary's *virginitas in partu*; he wished to settle the question once and for all, and so chose a most graphic and drastic argument, *de visu et tactu*.²¹ To Ps.-James *virginitas in partu* was an issue of real importance; and, incidentally, most likely he was not the first to set it forth in the manner that he chose.

And now to look briefly into another unique apocryphon, the *Ascensio Isaiae*. The testimony it brings for our theme is much less detailed and graphic than that just seen in the *Protevangelium*. It is a composite piece—in part Jewish, in part Christian—the several components of which appear to have been united by about the year 150. The work was edited in Greek; but the complete version exists only in Ethiopic (three manuscripts).²² Because the *Ascensio* is a fusion piece or compilation and as such appeared scarcely before the middle of the second century, references—if made at all—to the testimony we are about to reproduce, date it as of the second century. But such references do not take into account that the component piece in which this testimony occurs, has its own prehistory—a rather striking prerogative of age, so it would appear.

Actually, the section containing the testimony was for long considered an interpolation of the Christian component termed *Visio Isaiae*, cc. VI—XI, 1–40. Near the end of this piece, c. XI, 2–22, the prophet envisages Christ's life on earth. This section is omitted in a Latin and a Slavonic version. Because of this and other considerations the section, along with certain other parts, was declared interpolated by another Christian some time after the parent piece, the *Visio*, had been written.²³ However, R. H. Charles has disproved one of the principal assumptions on which the theory of interpolation was held, and with further arguments shows convincingly that the disputed section was originally a part of the *Visio*; and he assigns this *Visio* to the end of the first century.²⁴ E. Tisserant accepted this date for the

²¹ Cf. Amann, *op. cit.*, p. 254 f.; also pp. 31–36.

²² For detailed information, cf. E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, III (4th ed.; Leipzig, 1909), pp. 386–93; and, especially, the prolegomena of the editions (Dillmann, Charles, Tisserant) referred to below.

²³ Cf. A. Dillmann, *Ascensio Isaiae, Aethiopice et Latine* (Leipzig, 1877), pp. xi–xii. His view is favored by Harnack, Schürer, and others; see R. H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (London, 1900), pp. xxxvi–vii.

²⁴ Charles, *ibid.*, pp. xxii–iv; xxxvii–viii; xlv–v.

disputed passage, c. XI, 2–22, adding the approximation “entre 88 et 100.”²⁵ In the *Visio* Isaias states:

XI, 2: And I indeed saw a woman of the family of David the prophet, named Mary, a virgin, and she was espoused to a man named Joseph, a carpenter, and he also was of the seed and family of the righteous David of Bethlehem Judah. 3 And he came into his lot. And when she was espoused, she was found with child, and Joseph the carpenter was desirous to put her away. 4 But the angel of the Spirit appeared in this world, and after that Joseph did not put her away, but kept Mary and did not reveal this matter to any one. 5 And he did not approach Mary, but kept her as a holy virgin, though with child. 6 And he did not live with her for three months. 7 And after two months of days while Joseph was in the house, and Mary his wife, but both alone, 8 it came to pass that when they were alone that Mary straightway looked with her eyes and saw a small babe, and she was astonished. 9 And after she had been astonished, her womb was found as formerly before she had conceived. 10 And when her husband Joseph said unto her: ‘What has astonished thee?’ his eyes were opened and he saw the infant and praised God, because into his portion God had come. 11 And a voice came to them: ‘Tell this vision to no one.’²⁶

The first part of this passage (1–6) follows quite accurately the account given by the evangelist Matthew (1:18–25): Mary is espoused to Joseph, she conceives as a virgin; Joseph doubts and is reassured by an angel; he keeps and respects her. But the following extraordinary account of the nativity (7–10) reveals nothing of the details reported by the Evangelist Luke (2:6–7). The representation of the utterly sudden and wholly unexpected, apparition-like appearance of the Infant, with Joseph at first completely unaware of His presence, has led to the common assumption that the author (or at least the author of these verses) of the *Visio* was a Docetist or inclined to Docetism.²⁷ And because the author has been made suspect, the testimony for Mary’s *virginitas in partu* is sometimes depreciated.²⁸

However, the entire remainder of the *Ascensio*, both the Jewish and the Christian components, yields no certain traces of Docetism. And this is certain, that the author, whether an orthodox Christian or a Christian with “modern” ideas, does assert *virginitas in partu*. The Child which Mary

²⁵ E. Tisserant, *Ascension d’Isaie* (Documents pour l’étude de la Bible; Paris, 1909), p. 60. See also Bardenhewer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 703.

²⁶ Translation by Charles, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–6.

²⁷ Cf. G. T. Stokes, “Isaiah, Ascension of,” in Smith and Wace’s *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, III (1882), pp. 298–301; H. Weinel, in Hennecke, *op. cit.*, p. 299; Amann, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–36; etc.

²⁸ Thus Dublanchy, *art. cit.*, col. 2370: “il vaut mieux ne pas insister sur ce texte dont le docétisme est à peine voilé.”

suddenly sees she has conceived as a virgin, has borne through a period of gestation as a virgin, and given birth to as a virgin. The author, moreover, very evidently purposes to prove demonstratively that the Child was real, was really born in human flesh, by pointing, in verse 9, to the Mother's return to physical normalcy *post partum*.²⁹

Finally, if the more recent editors of the *Ascensio Isaiae*, Charles and Tisserant, are right in placing the writer of this testimony in the last decade or so of the first century, we have in him a contemporary of the subapostolic writer who is regularly mentioned first as witness to Christ's conception and birth of a virgin, Ignatius of Antioch.³⁰ In fact, the unknown writer's testimony would antedate that of the fiery defender of Mary's virginity and her divine Son's humanity by a goodly number of years. And here we should also call attention to a rather astonishing discovery which Charles claims to have made and which he adduces in support of the date he attaches to the *Visio*.³¹ In his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 19, 1, Ignatius writes: "And the Prince of this world was in ignorance of the virginity of Mary and her childbearing and also of the death of the Lord—three mysteries loudly proclaimed to the world, though accomplished in the stillness of God."³² This sentence was again and again quoted by the Fathers.³³ Charles thinks and he attempts to show that the source of Ignatius was the following sentence in the *Ascensio*, coming after the account of Christ's birth as quoted above (XI, 16): "This hath escaped all the heavens and all the princes and all the gods of the world."³⁴ Should Charles's deduction be correct, the writer of this Christian component of the *Ascensio* certainly was not a Docetist! Ignatius, the uncompromising castigator of Judaizers and Docetists, could not have paid him the compliment of quoting or imitating him.

The testimony with which we conclude comes from a unique source, the *Odes of Solomon*, quite certainly written originally in Greek and made accessible to us through their discovery and publication in a Syriac version by

²⁹ As Tisserant, *op. cit.*, p. 204, remarks: "Il me semble que son récit est seulement inspiré par le désir d'exprimer aussi catégoriquement que possible la naissance virginale." See also Kösters, *art. cit.*, col. 889.

³⁰ Usually with a reference to the article in the *Symbolum A postolicum* (Denzinger-Bannwart-Umberg, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* [21-23 ed.; Freiburg i. Br., 1937], No. 2): "*qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine.*"

³¹ Charles, *op. cit.*, p. 77; cf. also pp. xxii and xxiii.

³² Translation by J. A. Kleist, *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch* (Ancient Christian Writers, 1; Westminster, Md., 1946), p. 67.

³³ Cf. the passages listed by J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers, Part II: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp*, II (2nd ed.; London-New York, 1889), p. 76 f.

³⁴ Translation by Charles, *op. cit.*, p. 77 f.

by J. Rendel Harris in 1909.³⁵ In the ensuing flood tide of scholarly industry much effort was spent to show that this collection originated with the Gnostics or was influenced by them. But more and more scholars agree that one should not "claim these lovely songs of the Spirit for Cerdo, Cerinthus, or Simon Magus,"³⁶ but recognize them for what they are—one of the finest pieces of ancient Christian hymnody, inspired by Johannine piety and mysticism and eminently worthy of companionship in rediscovery with the *Didache*.³⁷ We are here concerned with Ode XIX, which was very probably familiar to Eusebius,³⁸ was quoted by Lactantius from an early collection of Scriptural *Testimonia*,³⁹ and which again, as we shall remark later, seeks the affinity of that ancient witness, Ignatius of Antioch.

The first part of the ode (vv. 1–5), which is couched in highly mystical language and is exceedingly difficult to understand—the Holy Spirit is represented as opening the Father's bosom and mingling the milk of the Father in a cup which is the Son—may be passed over. The odist then continues:

- 6 The womb of the Virgin took (it)
and she received conception and brought forth;
7 And the Virgin became a mother with great mercy;
8a And she travailed and brought forth a son without incurring pain;
8b And it did not happen without purpose;
9 And she had not required a midwife,
For He delivered her.
10 And she brought forth, as a man, of her own will. . . .⁴⁰

³⁵ *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon* (Cambridge, 1909; 2nd ed., 1911). The work was completely re-edited and published in 2 volumes by Harris and A. Mingana (Manchester, 1916–20).

³⁶ Harris-Mingana, *op. cit.*, II, 205. Cf. also J. H. Bernard, *The Odes of Solomon* (Texts and Studies, VIII, 3; Cambridge, 1912), pp. 28–30.

³⁷ J. Schmid, "Oden Salomons," *LTK*, VII (1935), col. 674: "Durch die Plastik ihrer Bildersprache u. die Tiefe u. Wärme der in ihnen Ausdruck findenden, bes. vom Jo-Ev beeinflussten, myst. Frömmigkeit sind die O. S. neben der Didache die wertvollste neuere Entdeckung aus der altchristl. Literatur u. eines der schönsten Stücke der frühchristlichen Hymnenpoesie."

³⁸ Cf. Harris-Mingana, *op. cit.*, II, 33 f.

³⁹ Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, IV, 12, 3 (edd. Brandt-Laubmann, *CSEL*, XIX, 310); cf. Harris-Mingana, II, 7–11.

⁴⁰ Translation by Harris-Mingana, II, 299; but for the last phrase quoted the alternative "of her own will" has been preferred to "by (God's) will" (the Syriac reads "of will," *ἐκ θελήματος*). For a discussion of the ode, cf. Harris-Mingana, *ibid.*, pp. 304–12; also P. Batiffol, in J. Labourt-P. Batiffol, *Les Odes de Salomon, une œuvre chrétienne des environs de l'an 100–120* (Paris, 1911), pp. 11–18; H. Grimme, "Die neunzehnte Ode Salomos, eine

Here certain phrases are obscure,⁴¹ but the odist's conception of Mary as virgin-mother is given with remarkable clarity and finality. We need but quote the observation of the editors: "The second part appears to present the doctrine of the Virgin Birth in a highly evolved form; as, for instance, Virgin Birth, *plus* painlessness, *plus* non-necessity of a mid-wife."⁴² It should be added that an assertion of Mary's virginal motherhood which is not immediately obvious is very probably contained in the words of verse 10: "And she brought forth, as a man, of her own will." Here the Syriac word for "man" corresponds to the Greek *άνήρ* (*vir*) and not *άνθρωπος* (*homo*); that is, human births ordinarily are dependent on the will and the initiative of the man, the father; but Mary bore her Son independent of the antecedent will of a man or human father; this initial generative will was her own, co-operating with God's will.⁴³

The Odes are of the highest antiquity. There is scarcely a scholar who dates them later than the year 150 A.D. In fact, the preponderance of opinion seems to favor an even earlier date. Batiffol gives 100-120 as an approximate date and Syria or Asia Minor as the *locus originis*.⁴⁴ Tondelli suggests that the Odes were written in Asia Minor about the year 120.⁴⁵ Harris and Mingana are convinced that the home of the collection is Syria, more specifically, Antioch, and that it was composed before the end of the first century.⁴⁶ They find a considerable number of coincidences between the language of the unknown odist and that of Ignatius of Antioch. They

Rekonstruktion," *Theologie u. Glaube*, III (1911), 11-18; R. H. Connolly, "The Odes of Solomon: Jewish or Christian?" *Jour. of Theol. Stud.*, XIII (1912), 306-09; J. M. Bover, "La mariologia en las 'Odas de Salomon,'" *Estudios eccles.*, X (1931), 349-63.

⁴¹ E.g., v. 7, "with great mercy": Batiffol, *ibid.*, p. 75 f., suggests that this is a reflection of *κεχαριτωμένη*, "full of grace," in Luke 1:28. Regarding v. 10, see below.

⁴² Harris-Mingana, II, 305.

⁴³ Cf. the note by H. Leclercq, "Odes de Salomon," *DACL*, XII, 2 (1936), col. 1913, note 1. The suggestion by Batiffol, *op. cit.*, p. 77, that we read "comme un homme" (read *un homme* as in the accusative case)—"as if," "as it were a man"—lends yeoman service for his thesis that the odist is some sort of Docetist (cf. below), but does violence to the Syriac text which attests *ως άνήρ*, not *ως άνδρα*, for the original Greek text.

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.* (cf. the sub-title used), p. 121.

⁴⁵ L. Tondelli, *Le Odi di Salomone, cantici cristiani degli inizi del II secolo* (Rome, 1914). This work, which has not been available to me, is excerpted by H. Leclercq, *art. cit.*, col. 1914 f.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, II, ch. IV (pp. 61-69): "Origin and Time of the Composition of the Odes." Cf. also J. R. Harris, "The Odes of Solomon and the Biblical Targums," *Expositor*, 8th ser., XXI (1921), 271-91. Such early dating is opposed by J. H. Bernard, who cannot conceive of the Odes as having been composed before 150: "The Odes of Solomon," *Expositor*, 8th ser., XXII (1921), 81-93.

come to the conclusion that Ignatius knew the Odes; in fact, they speak of quotation or the equivalent of quotation by him.⁴⁷ The parallelism between the representation of the Virgin Birth in Ode XIX and Ignatius' own statement of Christ's birth of a virgin is also adverted to.⁴⁸

This presumed familiarity of Ignatius with the Odes could be taken as lending support to Batiffol's theory that the odist in his Christology and soteriology reveals the same type of mystical Docetism as is denounced by Ignatius.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the array of parallelisms offered for our consideration by Harris and Mingana uncovers no criticism or castigation of the Odes on the part of Ignatius. These scholars even find the bishop and the odist in agreement with regard to heretics, perhaps even Docetists!⁵⁰

In these documents, then, all of them very probably originating with orthodox Christians, we have witnesses for the time of Ignatius of Antioch, and quite likely even for a decade or so preceding the writing of his Letters. They offer a full commentary and illustration of his claim that the Savior was "really born *ἐκ παρθένου*." They remove every vestige of doubt that this *ἐκ παρθένου* was meant to convey that she who had been a virgin *ante partum* remained such *in partu*. For the time between Ignatius and Origen they constitute a formidable chain of witnesses to this permanent *virginitas*, while also lending certitude to the indications in Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons that they likewise regarded the Mother of God as *ἀειπαρθένος*.

Catholic University of America

JOSEPH C. PLUMPE

⁴⁷ Harris-Mingana, pp. 42-49, 67. Earlier, J. de Zwaan, "Ignatius and the Odist," *Amer. Jour. of Theol.*, XV (1911), 617-25, had called attention to a "spiritual fellowship" or "spiritual kinship" between Ignatius and the writer of the Odes; but he denied any literary dependence.

⁴⁸ Harris-Mingana, p. 46.

⁴⁹ Batiffol, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-121.

⁵⁰ Harris-Mingana, pp. 42, 48 f.