

St. Mary in the Christian East

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Abstract: *As the apostolic Church pondered the mystery of Christ, it also inevitably pondered the mystery of the divine motherhood of Mary. Most of this foundational theology was done in the Christian East. This essay attempts to outline the Eastern Christian approach to Mary the Mother of God and to identify the foundational approach to Eastern mariology by examining an iconographical symbol which first appeared in the Protevangelium of James. This symbol will become the foundation for the icon of the Protection of the Virgin, or the Protecting Veil.*

Key Words: Blessed Virgin Mary – history of devotion; Mariology – Eastern Fathers; Protevangelium of James; protecting veil of Mary – *pokrov*

The Apostolic Fathers

The scriptural passage which shows most clearly that the life and person of the Mother of Jesus was a leading element in the Church's earliest theologies is John 19:25-27. We will confine ourselves to this one passage, which occurs in St John's Gospel.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, this is your son". Then to the disciple he said, "This is your mother". And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home (Jn 19:25-27).

This passage is part of a dramatic and highly emotional symbolic narrative emphasising the deeply pious reverence for Mary's "divine mothering." Its meaning and significance is far and above the merely mundane. Frank Moloney points out that *'the passage cannot simply mean that the Beloved Disciple is to look after the widowed mother of Jesus once her only son has died.'*¹ Maloney notes that the expression 'mother' occurs no less than five times within the space of three verses,² and that Mary is revealed as mother precisely because of the lifting up of Jesus upon the Cross. In the dramatic and theological expression 'from that moment' *'the Beloved Disciple and the Mother become one...from the moment of the cross a new family of Jesus has been created.'*³ This is of particular importance because it underlines Mary's motherhood as a motherhood which embraces the Beloved Disciple even as his care accepts and cherishes her motherhood. In Jesus' words from the Cross we see that, in the person of John, every disciple of Jesus is also offered the gift of Mary as the mother of their faith. Although Mary is the very first to commit herself unconditionally to the word of Jesus (Jn 2:3-5), her importance is not derived from the fact that hers is the model of faith to which every Christian aspires. While

¹ F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 4 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 504.

² Jn 19:25 [2x], 26 [2x], 27. Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 504.

³ Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 504.

she is unquestionably such a model, her relationship to the believer goes deeper still. Moloney sees that John's unconditioned acceptance of the word of Jesus creates, not a relationship of model and imitator, but a bond so deep that the disciple and the mother become as one. Here we touch upon that element which Eastern Christianity will develop and emphasise above all others regarding Mary the Mother of Jesus. It is not her purity or her femininity, not her moral example or even her royal lineage. Not despising any of these, Eastern Christianity's theology of Mary is a theology of her divine motherhood, and in regard to the believers, to the brothers and sisters of Jesus, it is a theology of her divine mothering.

The first evidences from the post-Apostolic period concerning Mary the Mother of Jesus reveal that it was precisely this element of the mystery of Mary, that of her divine motherhood, which received the Church's devotional and theological attention.

The earliest, sustained comment on Mary and her importance comes from Justin Martyr (d. circa 165 AD.) in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. He is the first of the Apologists and Fathers to make the parallel between Eve and Mary.

Eve, a virgin and incorrupt, conceived the word which the serpent spoke and brought forth rebellion and death, while Mary the Virgin, receiving faith and grace when the angel Gabriel brought her the good news,... answered, "Be it done unto me according to your word."⁴

This association reverberates throughout homily and hymn, liturgy and sacred art in the Eastern Church. Eve was the 'mother of all the living' (Gn 3:21), thus Mary is also 'mother of all the living', a theme which swells to reach an inspired height in the fourteenth century in the school of St Gregory Palamas. But that is to go too far ahead. For the moment let us simply note the Eve-Mary parallel occurring from the mid second century. There is also the firmest evidence that the earliest Christians regarded Mary as an intercessor because of her divine motherhood. This fragment of a papyrus from the early third century, today housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, provides two pieces of intriguing evidence. First, it contains one of the first uses of the title 'Theotokos,' Mother of God or God-bearer, though it is in the vocative case, 'O Mother of God.'⁵ Second, it is clearly the ancestor of the famous hymn of the Latin Church, '*Sub tuum praesidium confugimus*' a form of which also appears in the Byzantine tradition.

Under your mercy, we take refuge, O Mother of God (*Theotoke*, vocative case), do not eject our petitions in necessity. But deliver us from danger. [You] alone chaste, alone blessed.⁶

Thus from the earliest times Mary is the New Eve and the Christian is to go to her for delivery from danger and as a merciful refuge.

The Protevangelium, or the Book of James

Another source of evidence for the existence of intense theological and devotional attention to the Mother of God in the first centuries of the Christian era is the so-called

⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100.4-5, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Garnier Brothers and J.P. Migne Successors, 1857-1887), 6:709-712. Hereafter PG.

⁵ Michael O'Carroll in his *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982), claims that the first certain literary use of the title Theotokos occurred in 325 A.D. in *Epist. ad Alexand. Byzant.*, 1.12, (PG 18:568c) a work of Alexander of Alexandria (d.328). Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia has drawn my attention to even earlier certain uses of 'Theotokos.' See Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, fragments 41.3; 80.4 (ed. M.Rauer, 2nd edition, 244, 260); cf. Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7.332 (PG 67.812B).

⁶ Manchester, 1938, III, 46ff.

Protevangelium, or the *Book of James*. This is an apocryphal work which purports to give details of the early life of the Virgin. It is genuinely a very early work indeed. Its critical editor, de Strycker, believed it to be written no later than 200AD. The work is important because it gives us more than a glimpse of the quite developed Marian piety of the age. But most of all it gives an account of Mary's presentation and life in the temple, and in quite some detail.⁷ These detailed scenes, as well as the work as a whole, had the most far-reaching effects upon doctrinal development in the East. The *Protevangelium* raised the whole question of the precise nature of Mary's holiness, as well as inspiring a flood of later homiletic literature and Marian themes. However, it is not until the fifth century that we can demonstrate that the *Book of James* begins to influence Christian iconography.

The examples that follow are from a later work, but we choose them because of their sheer artistic brilliance. These examples of illustrations from the *Book of James* come from the late medieval mosaic cycle of the childhood of the Virgin found in the narthex of the Church of the Monastery of the Holy Saviour in the Fields (Chora or Karije Jami) in Constantinople.

The child Mary is received by the priest in the temple and the artist includes further information in this scene. The *Protevangelium* says that Mary was fed by angels while she dwelt in the House of God.

'And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as a dove that is nurtured: and she received food from the hand of an angel.'⁸

The angelic feeding is portrayed under a baldacchino above the head of the priest, while the hands of the priest and parents express offering and receiving.

...And the priest received her and kissed her and blessed her and said: The Lord has magnified your name among all generations: in you in the latter days shall the Lord make manifest his redemption to the children of Israel. And he made her to sit upon the third step of the altar. And the Lord put grace upon her and she danced with her feet and all the house of Israel loved her.⁹

In the need to weave a new veil for the Temple of God in Jerusalem, the *Protevangelium*, or *Book of James*, for the first time, calls forth a theological symbol which will recur throughout the iconography of the East, an artistic and theological element that will become the symbol of Mary's divine and protecting motherhood.

Let us make a veil for the temple of the lord...and the priests called to mind the child Mary, that she was of the tribe of David and was undefiled before God...and the priest said: cast lots, which of you shall weave the gold and the undefiled (the white) and the fine linen and the silk and the hyacinthine, and the scarlet and the true purple. And the lot of the true purple and the scarlet fell to Mary, and she took them and went to her house. [And at that season Zacharias became dumb, and Samuel was in his stead until the time when Zacharias spoke again] But Mary took the scarlet and began to spin it.¹⁰

This passage is illustrated in a mosaic from Kariye Jami. On the left of the scene the priest hands Mary the scarlet and true purple thread. Mary is spinning this curtain even after she

⁷ This is not the place to argue for the historicity of the presentation and temple stories. It may very well be that as the greatness of the mystery of the person of the Mother of God is apprehended by the minds of early Christians, they begin, almost naturally, to construct an early life paralleling the elements of the life of her divine Son, such as Virginal Conception, Presentation in the Temple etc. The story as history is not what matters. What matters is the story as witness to the Early Christian apprehension of Mary's mysterious greatness.

⁸ *Protevangelium VII*. In M.R. James (ed., trans.), *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 42-43.

⁹ *Protevangelium VI*.

¹⁰ *Protevangelium X*.

has left the temple and betrothed to Joseph. She is still spinning it at the time of the annunciation. In the *Protevangelium* there are two annunciations. An illustration shows the first of them. It is a kind of prelude to the second annunciation. In the first annunciation Mary hears an angelic voice when she is drawing water at the well. She has now left the Temple and lives in the house of Joseph, her betrothed. The angelic voice disturbs her.

...and being filled with trembling she went to her house and set down the pitcher, and took the purple and sat down upon her seat and drew out the thread.¹¹

There is a scene in which the second annunciation occurs, the account of which closely follows St Luke. In all later portrayals of the annunciation, the iconographers include details derived from the *Protevangelium*. Mary is now always seen holding the distaff and the scarlet and true purple thread. The power of the symbol is now clear. In her consent and conception, she herself has become the new veil of the temple of God. The scarlet and the true purple is the symbol of her motherhood through which the divine Logos will become man.

In a 12th century rendering of the Annunciation, now in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Holy Virgin holds the red wool in her left hand. But in a wonderful 15th century rendering of the Annunciation by Fra Angelico, and thereafter in all Western renderings, the influence of the *Protevangelium* is absent. As lovely as this painting is, and still echoing Byzantine artistic models, it reflects different concerns. It is too strong to say that the *Protevangelium* is a point of departure between east and West, but its use does underline certain differences of emphasis. For example, the medieval iconography of the Annunciation in the West frequently shows Mary pondering the Word of God, one hand to the text, the other to her heart. She becomes the 'poet' of the Word, when the Word passes from text to flesh in her own body. East and West are wonderfully complementary, though different on this theme. However, Western homilists and theologians declined to use the *Protevangelium* in the patristic period.¹² They seemed to have different concerns. For St Jerome or St Ambrose, Mary's virginity seems to be of most interest, although Fathers such as St Gregory of Nyssa also pondered on her virginity. Augustine was the most sober of all. While he praised Mary generously, he seems never to have invoked her.

All this is in virtue of her motherhood. Cyril makes it clear when he says, '*Through you the only begotten Son of God...has shone forth as light*' The real cause of all is Christ, yet Mary was indeed the instrument through which all these things came to pass. As O'Carroll has noted, this is a clear statement of Mary's mediation, an inspired utterance by a man privileged to unite his personal intuition with the revealed truth of God. This is another essential element in the Eastern Christian view of Mary which will reach its apogee in the late medieval Palamite school.

The teaching of Cyril's council also appeared in the Church's sacred art. The Patriarchal Basilica of Santa Maggiore contains some of the best examples. The cycle of mosaics executed on the triumphal arch of the basilica immediately after the council depicts the Annunciation above, and the Adoration of the Magi below. In both Mary is dressed in the richest of royal garments. The top register is interesting in that it shows the influence of the *Protevangelium*. The angel flying and speaking above the scene recalls the angelic voice that Mary heard at the well.

¹¹ *Protevangelium* XI.

¹² It was only in late medieval times that the *Protevangelium* had some influence on developments in Marian devotion in the West.

The scarlet and true purple is very prominent. This time there is a large basket to contain the material which spills out into both hands of the holy virgin. The angel to her left is the messenger Gabriel. The two Annunciations of the *Protevangelium* are conflated into one, and even Joseph's receiving of an explanation for Mary's pregnancy is included in the same picture.

The Syrian Byzantines

In both the Akathistos Hymn and the poetry St Romanos the Melodist another Marian theme is given prominence. Though present in other and earlier works, these two authors emphasise Mary's role in the redemption, associating her closely with Christ. Some would find it uncomfortable to hear the Akathistos Hymn hail her as the '*reconciliation of many sinners*,' the '*stole of those stripped of the right to appeal*' or as the one by whom '*was paid the ransom for transgression*.' When she is hailed as '*gate of salvation*' and as one '*who has begotten anew those who were born in sin*,' the latter-day Christian iconoclast would cry 'Mariolatry!' but mistakenly. The Hymn has been influenced by Apocryphal 'Matthew' and certainly seems to attribute powers to Mary that strictly belong to God, but only because she is 'Theotokos,' mother of the Creator. Also, the 'chiretismoi,' the verses beginning 'hail,' are a special genre whose epithets describing and praising the Virgin are not meant to be exact theological statements. The sole author of man's salvation is the Holy Trinity in Jesus Christ, yet the Virgin plays a unique instrumental role, alike to no one, short of the Godhead itself. In praising her the Byzantine (Syrian) poet seeks to please the Deity, to whom she is not only instrumentally essential in the work of salvation, but to whom she is also the dearest being in all his creation. God's love for Mary is creation's joy. This idea is not a theological fancy. Indeed, it is expressed constantly in the Byzantine liturgy, '*In you all creation rejoices*' and is portrayed in its iconography.

But St Romanos and the Hymn are at one in seeing Mary as the mighty intercessor for all of mankind before the face of God. In both the theme of her universal motherhood reaches its greatest height. Speaking to Christ, the Virgin affirms it.

I am not simply your Mother...but for all men I beseech you. You have made me the mouth and the glory of my whole race. In me your world has a mighty protectress, a wall and a support. The exiles from the paradise of delights look to me.¹³

Let there be no mistake. The high Marian statements of the Akathistos Hymn and St Romanos are always counterweighted with the fact that whatever the glories of Mary, they are the work of and come about by the power of her Son. But with a kind of heavenly delicacy, it is never Christ who reminds his Mother of her creatureliness. In all this sacred poetry it is Mary who does this. She reminds us that '*he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name*'

This God-ordained role of protectress of all the human race (also an ecclesiological statement, in that Mary and Church symbolise each other) is a convenient place to consider a particular feast, unique to our Churches in the East. If dire events had not dictated the development of the feast of the Protection (Intercession) of the Mother of God, the sheer weight and direction of the Church's theology of Mary would have finally given it its own separate liturgical festival amongst the other great Marian feasts. The Russians call it '*Pokrov*' and it was the Church of ancient Rus that chose to develop it, perhaps because certain aspects of the theology of the feast, known but little celebrated

¹³ Romanos, *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, I.474ff, in J.B. Pitra, *Analecta Sacra* (Paris: A. Jouby and Roger, 1876) 1:11.

amongst the Greeks, spoke particularly to the Slavic Christian experience of following Christ.

The Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, 'Pokrov'

The literary source of the feast of the Veil/Protection of the Mother of God on 1 October is the Greek *Life of St Andrew the Fool* which was translated quite early into Slavonic and was very popular with the Slavs. Although the story is about the saving of Constantinople, as is the icon (of which there are only Slav examples, as far as I know), the Slavs took it to themselves and made 1 October the feast. It is now in the Greek Synaxarion, but later, on 28 October.¹⁴

The story of St Andrew the Fool's vision is in the original Greek version of the *Life*, lines 3722-58, in Rydén's edition.¹⁵ This section tells of St Andrew's vision in the Blachernae church where the Mother of God appeared with her veil spread over the congregation and praying for the city of Constantinople.¹⁶ In all versions of an icon depicting this scene, Andrew appears usually on the bottom right. He is a wild looking figure in tattered clothes and he is pointing to the holy vision and talking to a courtier, Epiphanius, who is some kind of patron. The vision occurred at the fourth hour of the night and they saw the Mother of God appearing 'very tall, from the Royal Doors, escorted by an awe-inspiring retinue in which there were, amongst others, the honourable Forerunner and the son of Thunder, holding her by the hand on both sides. (The icons do not show this holding of hands. Our lady stands separately)...Before their eyes she knelt and prayed for a long while, besprinkling with tears her godlike and immaculate face. Having finished her prayer she went into the sanctuary and prayed there for the people standing around. As she prayed she removed with beautiful dignity her veil that she had on her immaculate head, appearing like a flash of lightning and spread it (it was large and awe-inspiring) with her immaculate hands over all the people that were standing there. For a long time the admirable men saw it stretched out over the congregation, radiating the glory of God like an electrum. As long as the most Holy Mother of God was there the veil was also visible... but her favour she left to those who were there.'

The dates for this appearance vary wildly from the 8th to the 10th century, but in this vivid story, as in no other, we can come to understand something of the inner spiritual climate of the strongly increased devotion to Mary that occurred between the 5th and the 8th century. In this developing Marian tradition of the early empire, Mary is a mediator who answered the prayers of the faithful who called upon her, full of compassion for mankind. Mary Cunningham has noted that the fact that she prays is revealing in itself:

the power to save comes not from herself but from God, with whom she stands in a unique relationship. The text also suggests the Virgin's accessibility to ordinary men and women. She is ready to answer every prayer and to help in any difficulty.¹⁷

¹⁴ Icon of the Protection/Intercession of the Mother of God, Northern province of Nvgorod, second half of the 16th century.

¹⁵ *Life of St Andrew the Fool*, ed. Lennart Rydén, 2 vols., *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia*, vol. 4 (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1995), 254.

¹⁶ The girdle and veil of the Virgin were prized relics kept in this same Church from the time of the Emperor Leo I in the 5th century. The feast day of their translation to Blachernae, 2 July, is the origin of the much later Western feast of the 'Visitation.'

¹⁷ Mary Cunningham, *Sobornost*, 62-64.

Following Cunningham we should note that Mary appears *within* the Church and as part of the Church. However, in the discussion of whether it was her virginity or her maternity that commended her to the Church, Cunningham correctly notes that

her virginity and her maternity are in no way ambiguous. They are rather described by the fathers as essential paradoxes which stem directly from the greatest paradox of all, the Incarnation of Christ.¹⁸

However, it is her motherhood which is to the fore in the icon of Mary interceding for Constantinople. While her virginity is important theologically as guaranteeing the divine identity of her Son, in the realm of prayer and intercession it is her motherhood that is paramount. As far as I know, no commentator has given attention to the veil itself as it is portrayed in the icon. We should note that it is always red. Indeed, I propose that it recalls the veil that Mary was weaving from the scarlet and true purple in the *Protevangelium*. But as discussed earlier, she herself is the new veil of the temple of God. It is through her that the Holy One comes into the world, and that is nothing less than her divine motherhood itself. This is what the veil symbolises. But there is more. Commentators have neglected the ancient Graeco-Roman meaning of the veil. It is the sign of a married woman. In this case, it is a married woman who is bride and mother. Mary protects with her divine motherhood, while this icon also allows us to see that Mary, as Mother of God, is also figurative mother of mankind. She represents the link between the divine and human spheres and is thus intimately involved in our redemption and salvation.

The Eastern tradition has even more to say about the mystery of Mary's motherhood in terms of the spiritual life of each believer. Her protecting motherhood operates not only at the macrocosmic level of Church and society, but at the microcosmic level of the individual Christian. She is also the mother of the spiritual life in the believer. One example of this application from the Church's preaching will have to suffice. In a homily delivered on the feast of the Protection of Our Lady in 1884, Archbishop Dimitri Muretov took the theme of 'Rejoice, our Joy.' The sermon was republished in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* to celebrate the feast one hundred years later in 1984. The Archbishop says that she is both the '*Joy of the whole world*' and '*principally the Joy of Christians.*' He makes it clear that this is a role Mary plays empowered by her Son, and a relationship that is engendered at holy Baptism. Not only does the Christian die and rise with Christ in a renewal of their entire being, but they also enter into the relationship of the Redeemer and his Mother.

She is their mother by grace of rebirth; their protection and guardian from all evil by the glory, power and might granted Her; the Giver of all good things, spiritual and physical, through Her maternal goodness, love and mercy to all believers in the Name of Her Son and God.¹⁹

The bishop speaks of a particular 'spiritual joy' and how to find one's way to it. He declares that the source of this spiritual joy, which alone can '*effectively comfort us in any sorrow*' is the '*All-Holy and Life-Giving Spirit-the Comforter.*' The Christian must win and preserve in themselves the grace of the All-Holy Spirit:

'and be united in one spirit with the Lord Jesus Christ through faith, love and hope, prayer, repentance and communion in his Body and blood; by fulfilling His commandments and living a pious life in the fear of God.'²⁰

¹⁸ Mary Cunningham, *Sobornost*, 62-64.

¹⁹ *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (1984): 28-29.

²⁰ *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (1984): 28-29.

However, 'the Giver of this pure and holy joy in the Lord is the Most Holy Mother of God. 'Known or unknown, Mary plays a role in the coming of grace to all souls.

She, as the life-receiving and life-bearing source, is the first Receiver of the grace proceeding from God's Throne and the first giver of this grace to all believers who pray and ask.²¹

This mystery is expressed liturgically and represented in the icon 'Wisdom has Built Herself a House' Christ, the Divine Word, as the Lord of the Banquet, seated to the lower left in a circle of eternity, is matched by Mary, her Divine Child in her lap presiding over the banquet of Wisdom. She is acclaimed by St John of Damascus with his scroll (lower right) and hailed and blessed by the kingly prophet from an ambo-like structure (middle). In the domed halls above the seven ecumenical councils dispense the word of Christ's truth historically.²² However, '*the Giver of this pure and holy joy in the Lord is the Most Holy Mother of God.*' The eastern approach has reached its apogee in this remark, and I repeat this point, which is that known or unknown, Mary plays a role in the coming of grace to all souls.

Westerners also showed keen attention to Mary's universal mothering, expressing it in sacramental art that complements the East's icon of the "Pokrov" or the Protecting Veil. In the magnificent iconography of the late medieval West, Mary shelters all the children of the Church (diminutive prophets, apostles, popes, and prelates) beneath her mantle.

The 14th Century of Theophanes of Nicaea, St. Gregory Palamas and St. Nicholas Cabasilas

Archbishop Dimitri Muretov's 1884 sermon is full of the echoes of the theology of three fourteenth century theologians who are the undisputed apogee of Marian teaching in the Christian East. In the theology of Theophanes the whole cosmos turns around Mary. He saw her mediation, which the feast of Pokrov celebrates, as grounded in the order of things universal. The divine gifts flow from Christ through his Mother. She has a kind of sacramental role under Christ. Theophanes, following the theological style of Pseudo-Dionysios, sees properties such as omnipotence, dominion and wisdom reflected in Mary. He actually says that she is the 'universal cosmic and super cosmic good,' the cosmos par excellence, because the Word delights to dwell more with her than in heaven.²³

For St Gregory Palamas Mary's mediation is not open to doubt. For him it is implicit in his theory of her destiny and her place in creation. He wrote,

No divine gifts can reach either angels or men, except through her mediation. As one cannot enjoy the light of a lamp... save through the medium of this lamp, so every movement towards God, every impulse towards good coming from him is unrealizable save through the mediation of the Virgin.²⁴

Nicholas Cabasilas' theology is more arresting still. There are strong echoes of Jacob of Sarug in his belief that in Mary mankind '*superbly showed by his deeds the strength that he*

²¹ *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (1984): 28-29.

²² Novgorod Icon, mid 16th century.

²³ For more see O'Carroll, "Theophanes of Nicaea," in *Theotokos*, 340. It would be sheer blindness not to acknowledge that in these 14th century theologians there was plenty of material to inspire the 19th and 20th century Russian sophiological theologians such as Soloviev, Bulgakov and Florovsky. It is true that their 'sophiology' met with resistance from 'conservative' Orthodox authorities, but it is tempting to ask if these same authorities might not have been out of touch with certain elements in their own Eastern approach and not a little influenced by non-Orthodox sources in their opposition to the idea of Sophia, the All-Wisdom of God.

²⁴ O'Carroll, "St Gregory Palamas," in *Theotokos*.

has against sin.' This is not Pelagian. Rather, the fruit of his complex anthropology is that he believed that Mary manifested nature as God had intended it to be. In Mary the aboriginal nature of mankind is manifested. In Cabasilas' thought it is simply not good enough that God should make Mary immaculate as if by some irresistible divine act. Something had to come from within man. Thus, while he believed that God had chosen her '*as a kind of sanctuary for himself and had preferred her before all the earth,*' someone had to manifest man as God had meant man to be. This had to be achieved by overcoming all sin '*from within man himself, by diligence and strength.*'²⁵ Consequently, Mary is the 'saint of saints' who opened the door of holiness to others. Cabasilas is at his most forceful, and the tradition is at its height when he wrote that:

The Incarnation of the Word was not only the work of the Father, of his power and of his Spirit, but was also the work of the will and the faith of the Virgin; without the consent of the Immaculate one, without the contribution of her faith, this plan was as unrealisable as without the intervention of the three divine persons themselves.²⁶

Though a work of the 6th century, we can illustrate Cabasilas' last startling claim for Mary the Mother of God in an icon of Pentecost from the Rabula Codex AD 586, the earliest surviving representation of the Pentecost. Most later icons of the Pentecost do not portray Mary as amongst the apostles at Pentecost. Rather, they show the Apostles receiving the tongues of fire while old man Cosmos looks to them with up stretched arms for salvation and renewal from his well of cosmic alienation. In this earliest icon Mary is not simply amongst the Apostles. She is the leading figure. Even the way she is painted makes her the strongest figure in the whole composition. No work could better illustrate Cabasilas' belief that in the time between the Lord's ascension to heaven and the coming of the Spirit in Pentecost, it was Mary the Mother of Jesus who was the Spirit-bearer to the Church, who communicated the Spirit to the post-Ascension believers. Though St Nicholas Cabasilas has stated it most dramatically and latterly, we can see from our survey that this was the consistently developing view of the eastern Church throughout the ages. Mary was not only 'Theotokos' while she carried the divine man, Jesus. She is always 'Theotokos' and as such communicates him to the world in the Church, and known or unknown, to the soul of the Christian believer.

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²⁵ O'Carroll, "St Nicholas Cabasilas," in *Theotokos*.

²⁶ O'Carroll, "St Nicholas Cabasilas."