

# **Is the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary Based on a Bibliographical Ghost?**

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## Table of Contents

Background .....	1
Thesis .....	2
Dogmatic Status of the Teaching.....	3
Patristics and the Role of Tradition .....	5
Early Writers Against Perpetual Virginity .....	6
Hegesippus.....	6
Tertullian .....	7
Ignatius .....	9
Sects which denied perpetual virginity.....	9
Josephus.....	10
Patristics Supporting Perpetual Virginity.....	11
Origen and the Protoevangelium of James .....	11
Hilary of Poitiers.....	13
Athanasius.....	13
John Chrysostom.....	13
Gregory of Nyssa .....	14
Epiphanius .....	15
Jerome.....	15
Basil.....	15
Didymus the Blind .....	16
Pope Siricius I.....	16
Ambrose .....	16
Augustine.....	16

Leporius, Cyril of Alexandria, Peter Chrysoslogus .....	18
Pope Leo I.....	18
John of Damascus .....	19
Creeds and Councils.....	20
Creeds.....	20
Local Councils and Synods .....	20
Ecumenical Councils.....	20
The Protoevangelium of James.....	21
Use of "Ever-Virgin" in the Liturgy .....	24
Contemporary Orthodox Writers.....	25
Conclusions .....	26
Works Cited.....	28
Works Consulted .....	28

## Background

A major sticking point<sup>1</sup> in contemporary dialog/debate between Eastern Orthodox<sup>2</sup> and Protestants<sup>3</sup> concerns the person and life of Mary<sup>4</sup>.

While both sides<sup>5</sup> agree that Mary is the mother of Jesus and was a virgin prior to the birth of Jesus, Christians in the Eastern Orthodox Church insist that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus was born up through the time of her death. Most Christians in contemporary Evangelical Protestant Churches teach that Mary had marital relations with Joseph and produced other children. There has been much misrepresentation on both sides of the issue concerning the historical record with unwarranted and exaggerated claims made by all parties concerned.

For a Protestant who is concerned about historical theology, but rejects a particular point of

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<sup>1</sup> Nassif, Bradlet, Class notes for "Eastern Orthodox Theology". Fuller Seminary – Summer 1998. "The Word Became Flesh: Orthodox Christology, Schism, and the Role of Mary in the Orthodox Church", describes the subject of Mary as "Here we encounter the 'hard sayings' of Orthodoxy!"

<sup>2</sup> The Roman Catholic Church also teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary.

<sup>3</sup> A typical Protestant statement is "You ask yourself the question, "Why do they believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary? Why do they believe in ... It does not come out of Scripture," you say. Yes. But it comes out of their Secondary Tradition, which is the equivalent of Scripture in terms of its authority. It was decided by the Pope or the Church or the Council." Charismatic Chaos - Part 3 Copyright 1991 by John F. MacArthur, Jr. On the Internet at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/CHAOS3.TXT>

<sup>4</sup> Gillquest, Peter, "Becoming Orthodox", Gillquest is a convert to Orthodoxy from Evangelical Protestantism. In his chapter titled "Facing up to Mary", p 101-102, he wrote, "The highly charged emotional atmosphere which surrounds this subject serves to blunt our objectivity in facing up to Mary".

<sup>5</sup> Conservative theologians in the Orthodox and Protestant Churches agree that Mary was a virgin at the time of conception of Jesus, i. e., that Mary did not conceive Jesus by an earthly/human father. This is a liberal v. conservative issue, not a Protestant v. Orthodox issue. This is based on passages like: Luke 1:34 -35 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

traditional teaching, it's important to have a reasonable explanation for why the generally historically accepted point is rejected. Typical Protestant treatments credit the rise in the role of asceticism as being a key factor in the development of the spread of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary<sup>6</sup> and the attendant need for an appropriate role model for the ascetics. Some feminist sources treat Mary as “an impossible ideal<sup>7</sup>” and “desexed in Christian tradition<sup>8</sup>”. Other theologians have linked the development of the doctrine to the view of Mary as the new Eve, based on allegorical teaching<sup>9</sup>.

### Thesis

It's the contention of the author of this paper that the teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary is a bibliographical ghost<sup>10</sup> that started with the Protoevangelium of James<sup>11</sup> and was carried down through the centuries in both the Eastern and Western Churches eventually gaining almost complete acceptance.

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which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

<sup>6</sup> Perpetual Virginity (parallel to the sinlessness of Jesus). In accordance with the ascetic beliefs of some of the holy orders of the Roman church sexuality with judged to have been too impure for the Mother of God. She was therefore given eternal virginity. On the Internet at: <http://www.jpsscott.demon.co.uk/RC1.html>

<sup>7</sup> Tucker, Ruth, "Daughters of the Church", p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 408.

<sup>9</sup> Tertullian, "On The Flesh Of Christ", Chap, XVII , 8. "As Eve had believed the serpent, so Mary believed the angel ", "Early Church Fathers", Volume 3.

<sup>10</sup> A “bibliographical ghost” is an initially faulty attribution, which is picked up and carried by subsequent authors based on the authority of the original author. Often times, the original source ends up unattributed and the idea reaches the point of an “urban legend”.

<sup>11</sup> A second century document dated variously at 120 to 160 A. D. although some claimed actual apostolic

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

This paper considers the dogmatic status of the teaching patristic evidences, creeds and councils, views of other sects, the Protoevangelium of James itself, use of "Ever Virgin" in the Liturgy, as well as the views of contemporary Orthodox writers in tracing the development of the written records of the teaching<sup>12</sup>. Claims of oral transmission of the dogma are outside the transmitted and preserved texts and, as such, are beyond the scope of this paper.

### **Dogmatic Status of the Teaching**

The dogmatic status itself is a point of some disputation in the Orthodox Church. On one hand, John Meyendorff states that, "the only doctrinal definition on Mary to which the Byzantine Church was formally committed in the decree of the Council of Ephesus which called her the *Theotokos*<sup>13</sup>". In contrast, Timothy Ware states that the title Ever-Virgin has dogmatic status due to its Liturgical usage, "In Orthodox services Mary is often mentioned, she is usually given her full title: 'Our All-Holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorified Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.'<sup>14</sup>"

Other sources also take even more uncompromising stances on the teaching of the Perpetual

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authorship.

<sup>12</sup> Scriptural proof texts used by both sides of the debate are considered on the web site of the author at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/4491/aeiparthenia.html>. This was originally part of the paper, but was removed for space considerations.

<sup>13</sup> Meyendorff, John. "Byzantine Theology", p. 165.

<sup>14</sup> Ware, Timothy, "The Orthodox Church", p. 257.

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Virginity of Mary as a dogma of the church<sup>15</sup>. For instance, the Catechism of the Orthodox

Church states:

Q. What is the Dogma of the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God? A. That the Mother of God "conceived as a virgin, brought forth as a virgin, and after the birth still remained a virgin"<sup>16</sup>.

The insistence on this dogma is illustrated in the same document:

"Which Church is right... ? ... the Protestants are in error, because the so-called brethren of Jesus were not children of the Mother of God, because if she had had other children, Jesus upon His cross would have left His Mother to the care of some one of them, who would have been present at His last moments, and not to the care of John, and He would not have said to her: "Woman, behold thy son," (St. John, Chapter 19, Verse 26), that is, since you are losing the only one you have.

It's important to note that this generalization is not completely accurate. Historically, the

Protestant church has had those who affirm the doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary.

Calvin<sup>17</sup>, Luther<sup>18</sup>, Zwingli<sup>19</sup> and others taught the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, but the teaching

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<sup>15</sup> The Roman Catholic view is reportedly more severe. From: Bart Brewer - Former Discalced Carmelite Priest The Perpetual Virginity of Mary, the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Assumption of Mary, and so on, and so forth. These are mandatory teachings. These are said to be of divine law. The Catholic people may not reject those teachings. If they do, there's what they call an anathema. There's a curse for any Roman Catholic who would reject an official dogma regarding Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Catholic priests will be honest in telling us that indeed this teaching has no foundation in Scripture. On the Internet at: <http://www.vabch.com/tigger/cath4.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Demetry, Constan H., "Catechism of the Eastern Orthodox Church", Article 3. On the Internet at: <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/catechis.html>. Some Orthodox have questioned the legitimacy of this document as there is no "official" Catechism in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Undated.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, John, "Commentary on Matthew". Calvin called those who interpret the gospel (Mt 1:25) to imply that Mary had other children as "pig-headed and stupid." Later, commenting on Mt 13:55, he wrote: "we have already said in another place that according to the custom of the Hebrews all relatives were called "brethren." On the Internet at: <http://www.totustuus.com/virgin.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, Martin. February 2, 1546 wrote that Mary was "a virgin before the conception and birth, she remained a virgin also at the birth and after it." Mary is EVER-Virgin. Current Lutherans accept the Second Council of Constantinople (533AD) and Luther put it into the Book of Concord. On the Internet at: <http://www.totustuus.com/virgin.html>.

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

has fallen into disrepute in Protestant circles in more recent times<sup>20</sup>. Although, this paper refers to the two positions as the Orthodox and Protestant positions, it should be noted that this distinction is not universal<sup>21</sup>.

### Patristics and the Role of Tradition

Although the Protestant hermeneutic of *Sola Scriptura* is often appealed to if the weight of patristic evidence does not favor a particular Protestant doctrine<sup>22</sup>, Protestants realize that a hermeneutic that does not take into account historical development is inadequate at best<sup>23</sup>.

The Eastern Orthodox concept of Tradition places a much heavier weight on the value of the

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<sup>19</sup> Zwingli, Ulrich. Wrote in January of 1528: "I speak of this in the holy Church of Zurich and in all my writings: I recognize Mary as ever virgin and holy." On the Internet at <http://www.totustuus.com/virgin.html>.

<sup>20</sup> The most notable exception is the Anglican Church where the dogma is accepted.

<sup>21</sup> A Protestant who accepts the teachings of Calvin or Luther, in toto, may accept the perpetual virginity of Mary.

<sup>22</sup> A classic example is Luther's defense of his view of Free Will, which was criticized by Roman Catholic scholar Erasmus on the basis of a lack of Patristic support. This can be seen in Rupp, "Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation", p. 152. Luther wrote, "we stand by our negative and even under the judgment of the whole choir of saints which you invoke, or rather of the whole world, we dare to say, and we glory in saying, that it is our duty not to admit something which is nothing and the nature of which cannot with certainty be shown."

<sup>23</sup> Ramm, Bernard. "Protestant Biblical Interpretation" p. 43. "Councils, commissions, and congregations do not have the virtue of infallibility, but their interpretations of Scripture enjoy a high authority."

Ramm offers three specific principles (tests) to determine the authority of the witness of a particular father, including: "(iii). The Fathers must have a unanimous witness to the given interpretation."

Ramm also noted that "This veneration of the Fathers resulted in much medieval exegesis being really studies in patristics and not exegesis in the proper sense".

Of course, the authority of Ramm to make these standards itself could rightly be questioned.



## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

teachings of the Fathers<sup>24</sup>. This section will outline the case that is found in the Patristics.

### *Early Writers Against Perpetual Virginity*

Contrary to the hyperbolic claims by certain Orthodox writers<sup>25</sup>, the dogma is conspicuously absent from the very earliest Christian writers<sup>26</sup> and even explicitly contradicted by a some early<sup>27</sup> writers.

### Hegesippus

Meier<sup>28</sup> notes that “In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, for example, Hegesippus, a convert from Judaism probably hailing from Palestine seems to have considered the brothers and sisters of Jesus to be true siblings, distinct from the cousins and uncles Hegesippus also mentions”. Hegesippus’ work is titled the Hypomnemata (“Memoirs”)<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Nassif, Bradley. Class notes for "Eastern Orthodox Theology". Fuller Summer 1998. "General sources of Orthodox theology : Scripture, liturgy, councils, fathers, saints, canons, church art and architecture."

<sup>25</sup> Gillquist, Peter. "Becoming Orthodox", p. 111. About those who deny perpetual virginity, writes, "Such a teaching is found nowhere in scripture and is contrary to the **consistent voice of the entire church**".

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 110. Gillquist writes, "From the very early years of the Church, Mary was called not only Virgin, but *Ever Virgin*". (Italics in original). However, the evidence just does not bear out Fr. Gillquest's claim. In fact, there appears to be a general progression from calling her just "Mary", to "Virgin Mary", to "Ever-Virgin Mary". As a note, in the Western Church the title "Blessed Virgin Mary" is widely used, but is not universally accepted by the East.

<sup>27</sup> "Early" in this context is defined as the middle of the third century.

<sup>28</sup> Meier, John P. "A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus". p. 318.

<sup>29</sup> Meier, p. 360, footnote 39.

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

### Tertullian

The primary early writer that denied the perpetual virginity of Mary was Tertullian. A dispute arose with the Docetists who denied that Jesus really appeared in flesh. The specific listing of the mother and brothers of Jesus was used as part of the evidence that Jesus had actual family relations as part of the counter apologetic argument. The brothers of Jesus are listed as being actual brothers, with no effort to explain that they were really not brothers at all. In fact, it would have made the argument moot about Jesus having brothers as proof of his being made of actual flesh, if they were really not brothers at all but rather stepbrothers (sons of Joseph by a prior marriage)<sup>30</sup>. Tertullian taught that Mary lost her virginity in the conception of Christ<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, "On The Flesh Of Christ." 7, from the "Early Church Fathers", Volume 3. On the Internet at: <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/>. "Explanation Of The Lord's Question About His Mother And His Brethren. Answer To The Cavils Of Apelles And Marcion, Who Support Their Denial Of Christ's Nativity By It. But whenever a dispute arises about the nativity, all who reject it as creating a presumption in favor of the reality of Christ's flesh, willfully deny that God Himself was born, on the ground that He asked, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" (10) Let, therefore, Apelles hear what was our answer to Marcion in that little work, in which we challenged his own (favorite) gospel to the proof, even that the material circumstances of that remark (of the Lord's) should be considered. (11) First of all, nobody would have told Him that His mother and brethren were standing outside, if he were not certain both that He had a mother and brethren, and that they were the very persons whom he was then announcing, -- who had either been known to him before, or were then and there discovered by him; although heretics (12) have removed this passage from the gospel, because those who were admiring His doctrine said that His supposed father, Joseph the carpenter, and His mother Mary, and His brethren, and His sisters, were very well known to them. But it was with the view of tempting Him, that they had mentioned to Him a mother and brethren which He did not possess. The Scripture says nothing of this, although it is not in other instances silent when anything was done against Him by way of temptation"

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, "On The Flesh Of Christ", 23, from the Early Church Fathers, Volume 3. "The virgin's womb, therefore, was especially (14) opened, because it was especially closed: Indeed (15) she ought rather to be called not a virgin than a virgin, becoming a mother at a leap, as it were, before she was a wife. And what must be said more on this point? Since it was in this sense that the apostle declared that the Son of God was born not of a virgin, but "of a woman," he in that statement recognized the condition of the "opened womb" which ensues in marriage."

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Tertullian wrote that Mary had relations with Joseph after Jesus was born<sup>32</sup>. Tertullian also wrote that the brothers were actually borne by Mary.

When Tertullian was later quoted by Helvidius to support his position against perpetual virginity, Jerome attempted to defeat Tertullian's credibility with a classical *ad hominem*<sup>33</sup> argument<sup>34</sup>.

### Victorinus

Victorinus, bishop of Petavium, is mentioned by Jerome as an opponent of perpetual virginity (references by Helvidius), but Jerome claims in the same text that Victorinus should be interpreted to mean near relative<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Tertullian, "Adversus Marcionem" 4.19 "De Monogamia." 8.1-2, "De Virginitas Velandis" 6.6.

<sup>33</sup> An argument against the man, not the idea. i.e., if Tertullian held heretical views on other subjects that does not make his views on Perpetual Virginity automatically heretical.

<sup>34</sup> Jerome wrote "Of Tertullian I say no more than that he did not belong to the Church."

<sup>35</sup> Jerome. "The Perpetual Virginity Of Blessed Mary: Against Helvidius" On the Internet at: <http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/helvidiu.htm>. "Feeling himself to be a smatterer, he there produces Tertullian as a witness and quotes the words of Victorinus bishop of Petavium. Of Tertullian I say no more than that he did not belong to the Church. But as regards Victorinus, I assert what has already been proved from the Gospel -- that he spoke of the brethren of the Lord not as being sons of Mary, but brethren in the sense I have explained, that is to say, brethren in point of kinship not by nature."

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

### Ignatius

An interesting tidbit is found in one of the epistles of Ignatius in his desire to visit Mary and James, and in particular expresses a desire to see James who he described as bearing a remarkable similarity to Jesus<sup>36</sup>.

If this quote is of early origin, this lends credibility to the view that Jesus and James were half brothers, due to the striking physical similarity reported. If they were simply sons of Joseph and not related by blood to Jesus, then how could the resemblance be explained<sup>37</sup>? Cousins often bear a strong physical resemblance as well.

### Sects which denied perpetual virginity

There were various sects that denied the perpetual virginity of Mary. The beliefs of the sect, outside of this issue are not known. For instance, a group led by Jovinian, which denied the perpetual virginity of Mary, is mentioned<sup>38</sup>.

Another sect mentioned by Augustine was the Antidicomarites who denied the perpetual

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<sup>36</sup> "A Second Epistle Of Ignatius To St. John His Friend". This is one of the spurious epistles. "And in like manner [I desire to see] the venerable James, who is surnamed Just, whom they relate to be **very like Christ Jesus in appearance**, (4) in life, and in method of conduct, as if he were a twin-brother of the same womb. They say that, if I see him, I see also Jesus Himself, as to all the features and aspect of His body."

<sup>37</sup> Some have attempted to explain this by position a very close relationship between Mary and Joseph, typically that Joseph was actually Mary's uncle.

<sup>38</sup> On the Internet at: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/KUNGINF.TXT>. "These queries came from all quarters of the Church. Siricius wrote to Himerius of Tarragona, who had referred several disciplinary matters to Damasus. (Epist. 1. a. 385) To the bishops of Africa he wrote of the decisions of a council that had met in Rome "above the relics of St. Peter." (Epist. 5. a. 386) To Anysius of Thessalonica he wrote about episcopal ordination in Illyricum. (Epis. 4. a. 386) Epistola 7 (a. 390) condemned Jovinian and the others who denied the perpetual virginity of Mary."

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

virginity of Mary<sup>39</sup>"

### Josephus

The Jewish historian, Josephus, referred to James as "the brother (αδελφος) of Jesus"<sup>40</sup>. Josephus used the Greek word (anepsios) 12 times<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Augustine, "Heresies" 56, AD 428 <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. "'Heretics called Anticomarites are those who contradict the perpetual virginity of Mary and affirm that after Christ was born she was joined as one with her husband.'"

<sup>40</sup> Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews", Book 20, Chapter 9, section 1. Josephus wrote "(200) so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judge, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. As recorded in Winston, William, "The Works of Josephus."

<sup>41</sup> Meier, p. 359. Footnote 31. See also footnote 32. p. 359, where Meier writes "When Josephus calls James "the brother of Jesus", there is no reason to think he meant other than "brothers."

### *Patristics Supporting Perpetual Virginity*

Although there is a noticeable dearth of early witness to the perpetual virginity of Mary, the vast majority of the sources after the middle of the fourth century support perpetual virginity. The historical sources that support perpetual virginity are listed in these following sections.

#### Origen and the Protoevangelium of James

A 2<sup>nd</sup> century contemporary of Tertullian, Origen<sup>42</sup> is the key figure in the development of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary since he was the first (in surviving writings) to comment on it. In the earliest recorded quote on the perpetual virginity of Mary, Origen<sup>43</sup> wrote that Jesus was the only child of Mary<sup>44</sup>. Further, Origen credited the source of his ideas about the perpetual virginity of Mary as the apocryphal gospel, “The Protoevangelium of James”<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Schmemann, p. 157. Origen is noted as the source of a number of heresies, some of which took well over a hundred years to root out of the Church.

<sup>43</sup> This in and of itself is not enough to demonstrate that Mary did not have marital relations with Joseph, just that she did not have any other children.

<sup>44</sup> Origen, "Commentary on John", I:6 A. D. 232, in Ante Nicene Fathers, X:300. "For if Mary, as those declare who with sound mind extol her, had no other son but Jesus, and yet Jesus says to His mother, Woman, behold thy son,' and not Behold you have this son also,' then He virtually said to her, Lo, this is Jesus, whom thou didst bear.' Is it not the case that every one who is perfect lives himself no longer, but Christ lives in him; and if Christ lives in him, then it is said of him to Mary, Behold thy son Christ."

<sup>45</sup> Origen, "Commentary on Matthew". 2:17, AD 248. On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>, ""The Book [the Protoevangelium] of James [records] that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after that the Holy Spirit came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the firstfruit among men of the purity, which consists in [perpetual] chastity, and Mary was among women. For it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity."

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

This last quote is crucial for several reasons:

- Origen did not consider this a point of dogmatic declaration, since he wrote “Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end”, implying that there were those that don’t agree with the teaching. He is simply supplying a motive for those who hold one particular side of the two alternative positions.
- Origen explicitly credits the source of his opinion as the Protoevangelium of James.
- Origen explicitly notes that his opinion is founded on a rational basis.
- There is neither claim of apostolic tradition nor claims of a Divine origin for the Protoevangelium of James.
- There is no claim that the Protoevangelium of James was actually written by James.

Origen, in other places reiterates some of the parts of the story from the Protoevangelium of James. For instance, he relates the story of how Joseph, an elderly widower, was chosen to marry Mary, a young girl who had made a vow of chastity<sup>46</sup>,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. “And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of priests, saying, 'Behold, Mary has reached the age of twelve years in the temple of the Lord. What then shall we do with her, lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord?' And they said to the high priest, 'You stand by the altar of the Lord; go in and pray concerning her, and whatever the Lord shall manifest to you, that also will we do.' . . . And he prayed concerning her, and behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him saying, 'Zechariah! Zechariah! Go out and assemble the widowers of the people and let them bring each his rod, and to whomsoever the Lord shall show a sign, his wife shall she be. . . . And Joseph [was chosen] . . . And the priest said to Joseph, 'You have been chosen by lot to take into your keeping the Virgin of the Lord.' But Joseph refused, saying, 'I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl.’”

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Further details, beyond the Biblical text, are revealed in the Protoevangelium of James<sup>47</sup>.

### Hilary of Poitiers

An indirect appeal to the perpetual virginity of Mary is made by Hilary attempted to refute the idea that they brethren of the Lord were Mary's children<sup>48</sup>.

### Athanasius

Some of the clearest statements supporting the perpetual virginity of Mary come from St.

Athanasius. This statement presupposes that there are people who deny the perpetual virginity of Mary<sup>49</sup>.

### John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom presents an argument against the word "till" being taken to mean that Mary had marital relations with Joseph after Jesus was born. This statement is apparently offered as a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. And Annas the scribe came to him [Joseph] . . . and saw that Mary was with child. And he ran away to the priest and said to him, 'Joseph, whom you did vouch for, has committed a grievous crime.' And the priest said, 'How so?' And he said, 'He has defiled the virgin whom he received out of the temple of the Lord and has married her by stealth.'

And the priest said, 'Mary, why have you done this? And why have you brought your soul low and forgotten the Lord your God?' . . . And she wept bitterly saying, 'As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him, and know not man.'

<sup>48</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, "Commentary on Matthew" 1:4, AD 354. On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. "If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary's sons and not those taken from Joseph's former marriage, she would never have been given over in the moment of the Passion [Crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, 'Woman, behold your son,' and to John, 'Behold your mother' [John 19:26-27], as he bequeathed filial love to a disciple as a consolation to the one desolate."

<sup>49</sup> "Orations against the Arians", II:70. A.D. 362, in NPNF2, IV:386-387. "Therefore let those who deny that the Son is from the Father by nature and proper to His Essence, deny also that He took true human flesh of **Mary Ever-Virgin**; for in neither case had it been of profit to us men, whether the Word were not true and naturally Son of God, or the flesh not true which He assumed"



## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

apologetic against those who raised the argument that the Scriptures indicate the marital union of Joseph and Mary<sup>50</sup>.

### Gregory of Nyssa

Another writer that supported perpetual virginity was Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Gospel of Matthew", V:5. A.D. 370, in NPNF1, X:33. "And when he had taken her, he knew her not, till she had brought forth her first-born Son.' He hath here used the word till,' not that thou shouldst suspect that afterwards he did know her, but to inform thee that before the birth the Virgin was wholly untouched by man. But why then, it may be said, hath he used the word, till'? Because it is usual in Scripture often to do this, and to use this expression without reference to limited times. For so with respect to the ark likewise, it is said, The raven returned not till the earth was dried up.' And yet it did not return even after that time. And when discoursing also of God, the Scripture saith, From age until age Thou art,' not as fixing limits in this case. And again when it is preaching the Gospel beforehand, and saying, In his days shall righteousness flourish, and abundance of peace, till the moon be taken away,' it doth not set a limit to this fair part of creation. So then here likewise, it uses the word "till," to make certain what was before the birth, but as to what follows, it leaves thee to make the inference. Thus, what it was necessary for thee to learn of Him, this He Himself hath said; that the Virgin was untouched by man until the birth; but that which both was seen to be a consequence of the former statement, and was acknowledged, this in its turn he leaves for thee to perceive; namely, that not even after this, she having so become a mother, and having been counted worthy of a new sort of travail, and a child-bearing so strange, could that righteous man ever have endured to know her. For if he had known her, and had kept her in the place of a wife, how is it that our Lord commits her, as unprotected, and having no one, to His disciple, and commands him to take her to his own home? How then, one may say, are James and the others called His brethren? In the same kind of way as Joseph himself was supposed to be husband of Mary. For many were the veils provided, that the birth, being such as it was, might be for a time screened. Wherefore even John so called them, saying, For neither did His brethren believe in Him.'

<sup>51</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. "On Virginity", 13, A.D.371, in NPNF2, V:359-360. "But those who by virginity have desisted from this process have drawn within themselves the boundary line of death, and by their own deed have checked his advance; they have made themselves, in fact, a frontier between life and death, and a barrier too, which thwarts him. If, then, death cannot pass beyond virginity, but finds his power checked and shattered there, it is demonstrated that virginity is a stronger thing than death; and that body is rightly named undying which does not lend its service to a dying world, nor brook to become the instrument of a succession of dying creatures. In such a body the long unbroken career of decay and death, which has intervened between the first man and the lives of virginity which have been led, is interrupted. It could not be indeed that death should cease working as long as the human race by marriage was working too; he walked the path of life with all preceding generations; he started with every new-born child and accompanied it to the end: but he found in virginity a barrier, to pass which was an impossible feat. Just as, in the age of Mary the mother of God, he who had reigned from Adam to her time found, when he came to her and dashed his forces against the fruit of her virginity as against a rock, that he was shattered to pieces upon her, so in every soul which passes through this life in the flesh under the protection of virginity, the strength of death is in a manner broken and annulled, for he does not find the places upon which he may fix his sting."

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

### Epiphanius

Epiphanius referred to the perpetual virginity of Mary<sup>52</sup>.

### Jerome

The pivotal position was that of Jerome. In his disputation with Helvidius is found the earliest theological dissertation on the subject of the perpetual virginity of Mary<sup>53</sup>. Jerome also brought an additional innovation<sup>54</sup> when he proposed the solution to the “brethren of Jesus” being his first cousins<sup>55</sup>.

### Basil

Basil is typical of early writers who state that he believes in the perpetual virginity of Mary<sup>56</sup>, but

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<sup>52</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis, "Well Anchored Man", 120, A. D. 374, in JUR, II:70. "[T]he Son of God...was born perfectly of the holy ever-virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit..." And, "Medicine Chest Against All Heresies" 78:6, AD 375, from <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>, "And to holy Mary, [the title] 'Virgin' is invariably added, for that holy woman remains undefiled."

<sup>53</sup> Jerome. "The Perpetual Virginity of Mary Against Helvedius". 21 A.D. 383, in NPNF2, VI:344. On the Internet at: <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers/NPNF2-06/treatise/mary.htm>. "But as we do not deny what is written, so we do reject what is not written. We believe that God was born of the Virgin, because we read it. That Mary was married after she brought forth, we do not believe, because we do not read it. Nor do we say this to condemn marriage, for virginity itself is the fruit of marriage; but because when we are dealing with saints we must not judge rashly. If we adopt possibility as the standard of judgment, we might maintain that Joseph had several wives because Abraham had, and so had Jacob, and that the Lord's brethren were the issue of those wives, an invention which some hold with a rashness which springs from audacity not from piety. You say that Mary did not continue a virgin: I claim still more, that Joseph himself on account of Mary was a virgin, so that from a virgin wedlock a virgin son was born. For if as a holy man he does not come under the imputation of fornication, and it is nowhere written that he had another wife, but was the guardian of Mary whom he was supposed to have to wife rather than her husband, the conclusion is that he who was thought worthy to be called father of the Lord, remained a virgin."

<sup>54</sup> As far as the surviving record indicates, that is.

<sup>55</sup> From <http://www.catholic.com/answers/tracts/brethren.htm>, "Prior to the time of Jerome, the standard theory was that they were Jesus' "brothers" who were sons of Joseph though not of Mary."

<sup>56</sup> "Hom. In Sanctum Christi generationem", 5, ante A. D. 379, in OTT, 207. "The friends of Christ do not tolerate hearing that the Mother of God ever ceased to be a virgin"

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

notes that there are other opinions in the Church<sup>57</sup>,”

### Didymus the Blind

Didymus the Blind is another late 4<sup>th</sup> century writer who affirmed the perpetual virginity<sup>58</sup>.

### Pope Siricius I

The emotional repulsion at Mary having relations with Joseph and bearing children was well expressed by Pope Siricius I<sup>59</sup>.

### Ambrose

Imitate her, holy mothers, who in her only dearly beloved Son set forth so great an example of maternal virtue; for neither have you sweeter children, nor did the Virgin seek the consolation of being able to bear another son.<sup>60</sup>

### Augustine

Augustine also took a dogmatic stance on the issue in several of his writings<sup>61</sup>. Augustine takes

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<sup>57</sup> Essey, p. 12. Essey, notes that “St. Basil the Great (+379) cautiously accepts it while also realizing that it was not generally acknowledged even in Orthodox circles. He says that the acceptance of **αειπαρθενια**<sup>57</sup> is not absolutely necessary, though ‘devout Christians’ should confess it. All Basil insists upon is the acceptance of the virgin-birth.” William Essey is now Bishop Basil of the Antiochian Archdiocese

<sup>58</sup> Didymus the Blind, "The Trinity" 3:4, AD 386. On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. “It helps us to understand the terms ‘first-born’ and ‘only-begotten’ when the Evangelist tells that Mary remained a virgin ‘until she brought forth her first-born son’ [Matt. 1:25]; for neither did Mary, who is to be honored and praised above all others, marry anyone else, nor did she ever become the Mother of anyone else, but even after childbirth she remained always and forever an immaculate virgin.”

<sup>59</sup> Pope Siricius I, "Letter to Bishop Anysius", AD 392. On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. “You had good reason to be horrified at the thought that another birth might issue from the same virginal womb from which Christ was born according to the flesh. For the Lord Jesus would never have chosen to be born of a virgin if he had ever judged that she would be so incontinent as to contaminate with the seed of human intercourse the birthplace of the Lord's body, that court of the eternal king.”

<sup>60</sup> "To the Christian at Vercellae". Letter 63:111, A. D. 396, in NPNF2, X:473

<sup>61</sup> "Of Holy Virginity", 4, A. D. 401, in NPNF1, III:418. “Her virginity also itself was on this account more pleasing

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

the issue of virginity a level further than the Biblical text by claiming that Mary was chosen because of her prior commitment to being a virgin<sup>62</sup>.

As with the other writers, there is an imaginary objector who is being interacted with by the author. Whether this is a real objector, or not, there is most likely a real basis for the objections and real questions being answered, unless it is supposed that the author is constructing a strawman and then tearing it down<sup>63</sup>.

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and accepted, in that it was not that Christ being conceived in her, rescued it beforehand from a husband who would violate it, Himself to preserve it; but, before He was conceived, chose it, already dedicated to God, as that from which to be born. This is shown by the words which Mary spake in answer to the Angel announcing to her her conception; How, 'saith she, shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' Which assuredly she would not say, unless she had before vowed herself unto God as a virgin. But, because the habits of the Israelites as yet refused this, she was espoused to a just man, who would not take from her by violence, but rather guard against violent persons, what she had already vowed. Although, even if she had said this only, How shall this take place?' and had not added, seeing I know not a man,' certainly she would not have asked, how, being a female, she should give birth to her promised Son, if she had married with purpose of sexual intercourse. She might have been bidden also to continue a virgin, that in her by fitting miracle the Son of God should receive the form of a servant, but, being to be a pattern to holy virgins, lest it should be thought that she alone needed to be a virgin, who had obtained to conceive a child even without sexual intercourse, she dedicated her virginity to God, when as yet she knew not what she should conceive, in order that the imitation of a heavenly life in an earthly and mortal body should take place of vow, not of command; through love of choosing, not through necessity of doing service. Thus Christ by being born of a virgin, who, before she knew Who was to be born of her, had determined to continue a virgin, chose rather to approve, than to command, holy virginity. And thus, even in the female herself, in whom He took the form of a servant, He willed that virginity should be free."

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, "Holy Virginity" 4:4, AD 401 On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. "In being born of a Virgin who chose to remain a Virgin even before she knew who was to be born of her, Christ wanted to approve virginity rather than to impose it. And he wanted virginity to be of free choice even in that woman in whom he took upon himself the form of a slave."

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, "Sermons" 186:1, AD 411 On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. "It was not the visible sun, but its invisible Creator who consecrated this day for us, when the Virgin Mother, fertile of womb and integral in her virginity, brought him forth, made visible for us, by whom, when he was invisible, she too was created. A Virgin conceiving, a Virgin bearing, a Virgin pregnant, a Virgin bringing forth, a Virgin perpetual. Why do you wonder at this, O man?"

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

### Leporius, Cyril of Alexandria, Peter Chrysoslogus

Leoporius applied the title “ever-virgin” to Mary<sup>64</sup>. Cyril of Alexandria taught that Jesus kept Mary a virgin after her giving birth to him<sup>65</sup>. Peter Chrysoslogus takes it a step farther when he wrote that Mary’s womb was not affected during the pregnancy<sup>66</sup>.

### Pope Leo I

Pope Leo wrote several sermons on the subject<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Leporius, "Document of Amendment" 3, AD 426. On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. “We confess, therefore, that our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, born of the Father before the ages, and in times most recent, made man of the Holy Spirit and the ever-virgin Mary.”

<sup>65</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, "Against Those Who Do Not Wish to Confess That the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God " 4, AD 430. In the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. “The Word himself, coming into the Blessed Virgin herself, assumed for himself his own temple from the substance of the Virgin and came forth from her a man in all that could be externally discerned, while interiorly he was true God. Therefore he kept his Mother a virgin even after her child-bearing.”

<sup>66</sup> Sermon 117, A.D. 432, in FC, XVII, 200. “Where are they who think that the Virgin's conception and giving birth to her child are to be likened to those of other woman? For, this latter case is one of the earth, and the Virgin's is one from heaven. The one case is a case of divine power; the other of human weakness. The one case occurs in a body subject to passion; the other in the tranquility of the divine Spirit and peace of the human body. The blood was still, and the flesh astonished; her members were put at rest, and her entire womb was quiescent during the visit of the Holy One, until the Author of flesh could take on His garment of flesh, and until He, who was not merely to restore the earth to man but also to give him heaven, could become a heavenly Man. The virgin conceives, the Virgin brings forth her child, and she remains a virgin.”

<sup>67</sup> Pope Leo I, "Sermons" 22:2, AD 450. On the Internet at: <http://www.black-hole.com/users/maloney/perpetua.htm>. “His [Jesus's] origin is different, but his [human] nature is the same. Human usage and custom were lacking, but by divine power a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, and Virgin she remained.” And, Pope Leo the Great, regn. A. D. 440-461, "On the Feast of the Nativity", Sermon 22:2 (ante A. D. 461), in NPNF2, XII:130. “And by a new nativity He was begotten, conceived by a Virgin, born of a Virgin, without paternal desire, without injury to the mother's chastity: because such a birth as knew no taint of human flesh, became One who was to be the Saviour of men, while it possessed in itself the nature of human substance. For when God was born in the flesh, God Himself was the Father, as the archangel witnessed to the Blessed Virgin Mary: because the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee: and therefore, that which shall be born of thee shall be called holy, the Son of God.' The origin is different but the nature like: not by intercourse with man but by the power of God was it brought about: for a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bare, and a

## John of Damascus

John of Damascus affirmed the perpetual virginity of Mary and argued against those who quoted the New Testament passages that Mary had other children<sup>68</sup>. He uses other lines of argumentation to make the same point<sup>69</sup>.

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Virgin she remained.”

<sup>68</sup> "Orthodox Faith", 4:14, A. D. 743, in NPNF2, IX:86. "The ever-virgin One thus remains even after the birth still virgin, having never at any time up till death consorted with a man. For although it is written, And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born Son, yet note that he who is first-begotten is first-born even if he is only-begotten. For the word first-born' means that he was born first but does not at all suggest the birth of others. And the word till' signifies the limit of the appointed time but does not exclude the time thereafter. For the Lord says, And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, not meaning thereby that He will be separated from us after the completion of the age. The divine apostle, indeed, says, And so shall we ever be with the Lord, meaning after the general resurrection."

<sup>69</sup> ANF Volume 6. For, without any doubt, it would be proved on the same principles that He had brethren also by her. Now tell me whether these brethren were begotten by Joseph or by the same Holy Spirit. For if you say that they were begotten by the same Holy Spirit, it will follow that we have had many Christs. And if you say that these were not begotten by the same Holy Spirit, and yet aver that He had brethren, then without doubt we shall be under the necessity of understanding that, in succession to the Spirit and after Gabriel, the most pure and spotless virgin(7) formed an actual marriage connection with Joseph. But if this is also a thing altogether absurd--I mean the supposition that she had any manner of intercourse with Joseph--tell me whether then He had brethren. Are you thus to fix the crime of adultery also on her, most sagacious Marcellus? (8) But if none of these suppositions suits the position of the Virgin undefiled, how will you make it out that He had brothers? And if you are unable to prove clearly to us that He had brethren, will it be any the easier for you to prove Mary to be His mother, in accordance with the saying of him who ventured to write,(9) "Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without?" Yet, although that man was bold enough to address Him thus, no one can be mightier or greater than this same person Himself who shows us His mother or His brethren. Nay, He does not deign even to hear it said that He is David's son. (10) The Apostle Peter, however, the most eminent of all the disciples, was able to acknowledge Him on that occasion, when all were putting forth the several opinions which they entertained respecting Him: for he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;"(11) and immediately He names him blessed, addressing him thus: "For my heavenly Father hath revealed it unto thee." Observe what a difference there is between these two words which were spoken by Jesus. For to him who had said, "Behold, Thy mother stands without," He replied, "Who is my mother, or who are my brethren?" But to him who said, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living, God," He makes the return of a beatitude and benediction. Consequently, if you will have it that He was born of Mary, then it follows that no less than Peter, He is Himself thus proved to have spoken falsely. But if, on the other hand, Peter states what is true, then without doubt that former person was in error. And if the former was in error, the matter is to be referred back to the writer.(1) We know, therefore, that there is one Christ, according to the Apostle Paul, whose words, as in consonance at least(2) with His advent, we believe

## **Creeds and Councils**

### *Creeds*

None of the creeds of the ancient church affirm the perpetual virginity of Mary.

### *Local Councils and Synods*

The Lateran Synod of AD 649 was the first to stress the threefold character of Mary's virginity.<sup>70</sup>

### *Ecumenical Councils*

The Council of Constantinople declared Mary's perpetual virginity in 681<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Geisler and MacKenzie, p. 300

<sup>71</sup> On the Internet at: <http://www.religionnews.com/arc97/arc110397.html>

## The Protoevangelium of James

The Protoevangelium of James<sup>72</sup> is an apocryphal gospel/birth narrative<sup>73</sup>. Dating of the Protoevangelium is uncertain. Although some Catholic apologists in the effort to strengthen their case point to early dates<sup>74</sup>, other scholars have proposed later dates<sup>75</sup>. The Protoevangelium is reminiscent of the story of Samuel in the Old Testament, but instead with Mary cast in the role of Samuel. Mary is given to the Jewish temple as at age 3 and stays there until age 12. In the story, Mary takes a vow of celibacy, which is lifetime. Thus, while the Protoevangelium of James itself does not directly state the perpetual virginity of Mary, it is a necessary consequence of the vow that she has taken<sup>76</sup>.

Although the Christian Community did not accept the Protoevangelium as authoritative<sup>77</sup>, the

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<sup>72</sup> On the Internet at: <http://www.csn.net/advent/fathers/0847.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Meier, p. 115 describes the Protoevangelium of James as “fantasy”, and an “hilarious mishmash of the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke.” Also see p. 324, “this solution probably traces its roots to the presentation of Joseph in the Protoevangelium of Jacobi, a wildly imaginative folk narrative that is outrageously inaccurate about things Jewish.”

<sup>74</sup> On the Internet at: <http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/key2mary.htm>, “This document was written no later than A. D. 120, less than sixty years after the conclusion of Mary’s earthly life and when memories of that life were still vivid in the minds of many. “

<sup>75</sup> Brown, Raymond E. “The Birth of the Messiah”, purports a 150 AD date. The Catholic Encyclopedia on the Internet at: <http://www.knight.com/advent/cathen/15646.htm>, lists a date of “the end of the second century”.

<sup>76</sup> Except in the possibility that such a vow could later be rescinded. There is little historical foundation for such a practice among young Jewish females of the first century.

<sup>77</sup> On the Internet at: <http://www-relg-studies.scu.edu/netcours/rs011/sess18/nthist.htm>: “The following links contain very early writings, called "Apocryphal" or "Hidden," that deal with birth and youth of Jesus. These writings were never accepted as authoritative by the Christian Community. The Protoevangelium of James Date: ~140 C.E.:



## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

details in the stories did find their way into the Christian apologetic and traditional teaching<sup>78</sup>. Origen, as we have seen, distinctly credits the Protoevangelium of James as the source of his teaching. With the exception of Jerome whose account of the “brethren of the Lord” was that they were cousins, the other writers all followed the pattern of the Protoevangelium. While it can not be proven conclusively that the Protoevangelium is the source of the materials that followed<sup>79</sup>, there is no other credible sources are known. Both Roman Catholic<sup>80</sup> and Eastern Orthodox<sup>81</sup> scholars acknowledge the literary dependence of the traditions to the Protoevangelium of James.

An issue is raised by this theory of origins, though. Why are there two theories about who the “brethren of Jesus” were? As noted, Jerome seems to be the source of the idea that the “brethren” were actually first cousins<sup>82</sup>. The Protoevangelium presents the view that the “brethren” were the children of Joseph by a prior marriage. If the Protoevangelium was considered to be authoritative, then how did the “cousin” theory gain an advocate with Jerome? No satisfactory

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<sup>78</sup> The “Liturgy of St. James” contains portions of the Protoevangelium of James.

<sup>79</sup> Without a specific correlation to the text of the Protoevangelium of James in the actual source materials themselves, there’s no way to definitively relate the source.

<sup>80</sup> From <http://www.catholic.com/answers/tracts/brethren.htm>, “One work, known as the *Protoevangelium of James* (A.D. 125) records that Joseph was selected from a group of widowers to serve as the husband/protector of Mary, who was a virgin consecrated to God. When he was chosen, Joseph objected: “I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl” (4: 8-9).”

<sup>81</sup> Essey, p. 10, “Although not playing so great a role in the Mariology of the first three centuries, the Proto-evangelium of James was known by some Fathers and planted the seeds which would bear fruit in a few generations.” And “The first Church Father who seems to have been familiar with the Proto-evangelium is St. Clement of Alexandria (+215).”

<sup>82</sup> This shows a rough east/west division that exists to some degree to this day, From <http://lunis.luc.edu/kcillinois/cattalk5.htm>, “This position was dominant in the eastern Churches; while the position

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

explanation has yet been offered to the question. However, the relatively late date of Jerome's theory, along with the lack of any supporting evidence proposed by Jerome, weakens his case. On the other hand, if both traditions were extant at the time, then it weakens the ultimate authority claims of both. None of the earliest fathers credit the apostle James with authorship. The stories contain historical inaccuracies with errors in the details of the temple, for existence. The account seems to be oriented towards providing an apologetic for virginity<sup>83</sup>. Apocryphal books like the Protoevangelium filled a psychological need in people to know more of the details than the otherwise spartan Gospels present<sup>84</sup>. Other apocryphal sources add additional details to the story<sup>85</sup>.

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of Jerome was accepted by the Western Church.”

<sup>83</sup> From <http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/key2mary.htm> “In the same way, Mary was consecrated to the full-time service of God. The documents of the early Church, such as the Protoevangelium of James record that she was one of the women who, like the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36-37), lived celibate lives in the Temple in Jerusalem, serving as full-time prayer warriors -- the Old Testament equivalent of contemplative nuns. According to world-renowned patristics scholar, Johannes Quasten: "The principal aim of the whole writing is to prove the perpetual and inviolate virginity of Mary before, in, and after the birth of Christ" (*Patrology*, 1:120-1)”.

<sup>84</sup> Other books of the same era and genre include the “Ascension of Isaiah” (Graef, 34) and the “Odes of Solomon”.

<sup>85</sup> More than that, the Prologue from Ochrus talks about how St. Jude called himself “The Brother of James” while St. James called himself “The Brother of the Lord.” Why? Because when it was time to divide St. Joseph's estate, the other children (grown) did not want to give Christ a portion, so St. James shared his inheritance with Christ and the Theotokos. Later St. Jude came to believe (and I think died a martyr), but he was so ashamed of the way that he had treated his kinsman Christ that while St. James had the distinction of being “brother of the Lord” not because of fleshly relation but because he BEHAVED as a brother, St. Jude called himself only “the brother of James.” matanna@aol.com, posted in alt.religion.christian.east-orthodox, 1998/07/26

## Use of "Ever-Virgin" in the Liturgy

*Lex orandi est lex credendi et agendi*<sup>86</sup>

The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom<sup>87</sup> is the liturgy that is celebrated most in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Seven separate references to Mary as ever-Virgin can be found in the Liturgy, for instance:

Remembering our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God. (4 times in total)

Only begotten Son and Word of God, although immortal You humbled Yourself for our salvation, taking flesh from the holy Theotokos and ever virgin Mary and, without change, becoming man. Christ, our God, You were crucified but conquered death by death. You are one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit - save us.

Especially for our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever virgin Mary.

Since one of the sources of doctrine in the Orthodox Church is its use in the Liturgy, the use of the title "Ever-Virgin" in the Liturgy establishes it as an authoritative part of the Tradition.

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<sup>86</sup> "The rule of prayer is the rule of belief and action."

<sup>87</sup> The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom can be found on the Internet at:  
<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/liturgy/liturgy.html>

## Contemporary Orthodox Writers

In his book on Mary, St. John Maximovitch of San Francisco gives both explanations of who the “brothers of Jesus” are. He writes: "In the Gospel it can nowhere be seen that those who are called there the brothers of Jesus were or were considered the children of His Mother. On the contrary, it was known that James and others were the sons of Joseph, the Betrothed of Mary, who was a widower with children from his first wife. (St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, \*Panarion\*, 78.) Likewise, the sister of His Mother, Mary the wife of Cleopas, who stood with her at the cross of the Lord (John 19:25), also had children, who in view of such close kinship with full right could also be called brothers of the Lord<sup>88</sup>"

Sergius Bulgakov interacted with the Protestant view of Mary when he wrote, “This failure to be mindful of the Virgin Mary is often found in Protestantism in such extreme beliefs as the Virgin might have had other children by Joseph...<sup>89</sup>”

Other Orthodox sources can be listed confirming a belief in Mary as “the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God.”<sup>90</sup>,

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<sup>88</sup> “The Orthodox Veneration of Mary the Birthgiver of God”, p 37.

<sup>89</sup> Bulgakov, Sergius. “The Virgin and the Saints in Orthodoxy”. As quoted in “Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader”, ed. Daniel Clendenin, p. 66.///

<sup>90</sup> On the Internet at: [http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/old\\_new\\_testament\\_e.htm](http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/old_new_testament_e.htm)  
The Old Testament in the New Testament Church *Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky*

## Conclusions

The Protoevangelium of James is the most likely literary source of the teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary. As the earliest extant writer on perpetual virginity, Origen quoted the Protoevangelium to support the teaching. Origen's influence on Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius, Jerome, Basil, Ambrose of Milan, and Gregory of Nazianzus is well documented<sup>91</sup>. This list is virtually identical to the list of strong supporters of perpetual virginity in the fourth century.

This subject touches on the foundation of the canon itself as well as the authority of traditionally accepted teaching<sup>92</sup> in the church. Both sides of the debate have traditional teachings. The historical churches claim apostolic succession, but can't agree on enough of the details of things like the "brothers" of Jesus to make a convincing story for those who do not accept their epistemological starting point.

Additionally, the argument in favor of perpetual virginity has the appearance of a logical tautology, i.e., "The perpetual virginity of Mary is true because it is proven by Tradition"<sup>93</sup>.

An interesting quote by Schmemmann may shed some light on the development of doctrine:

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<sup>91</sup> Article in the "Catholic Encyclopedia", on the Internet at: <http://www.knight.org/advent/cathen/11306b.htm>, titled "Origen and Origenism", describes Origen's wide ranging influence in the section "Posthumous Influence Of Origen."

<sup>92</sup> Armstrong, Dave. "Dialogue on Private Judgment, Authority, and Epistemology", On the Internet at: <http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZ184.HTM>, 1997 is a dialog between Roman Catholics and Baptists on the issues of the Protestant/Catholic divide.

## History of the Dogma of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Thus in 190-192, Pope Victor demanded in an ultimatum that the Eastern Churches accept the Roman practice of celebrating Easter. ... Victor based his demand on the authority of the apostles Peter and Paul. He was answered by one of the senior bishops of the East, Polycrates of Ephesus, who referred in turn to a tradition that had reached him directly from the apostles. ... Thus a Roman tradition was gradually allowed to develop. When East and West later came to face it, it was too late; for Rome the tradition was already sanctified by antiquity and interpreted as true<sup>94</sup>.

The interesting part is that in this quote, a credible Orthodox source admits that (at least when it's Rome he's talking about) that there have been false claims in the past of apostolic authority for a tradition that was actually a development over time. Both sides claimed to have received something from the apostles. Either one was wrong, or they both were (unless they were taught contrary teachings by the apostles). Eventually, it all boils down to an authority claim. Either one accepts that the Eastern Orthodox Church is the infallible repository of Tradition, or one rejects that claim.

This particular point is illustrative of the differences between the approaches of historical theology and Evangelical Protestant theology. The ultimate questions of the relationship between Church authority and individual autonomy of belief are raised.

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<sup>93</sup> But since the Tradition itself is the subject of the question this is circular.

<sup>94</sup> Schmemann, Alexander. "The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy", pp. 84-84.

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