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Thesis: Ambrose's comprehensive Marian theology, influenced by Eastern and Western thought, developed with pastoral intents, which manifest as either Christological claims, an imitable image of Mary for the monastic female virgins he wrote to, or a combination of the two.

Introduction

Patristic Marian doctrine is often considered most complete in the writings of St.

Ambrose of Milan. By the third century, Ambrose, one of the four Doctors of the Church,

developed a complete theology of Mary. This theology, a bridge between the East and West,

deemed her a model virgin, likened her to the Church, used the virgin birth as proof of the

Incarnation, elevated her to a sinless virgin, and defended her perpetual virginity. Ambrose's

comprehensive Marian theology, influenced by Eastern and Western thought, developed with

pastoral intents, which manifest as either Christological claims, an imitable image of Mary for

the monastic female virgins he wrote to, or a combination of the two.[1]

Ambrose: Where Eastern and Western Mariology Meet

The background of Ambrose and his contemporaries is important to understanding the the

manifestations of his Marian theology. In crude summation, Eastern thought generally venerated

Mary to a place within the divine economy and placed a "special significance on the perpetual

virginity," while freely admitting to a sinning Mary.[2] Tim Perry and Daniel Kendall, S.J.,

professors of theology and religious studies, even cite the Eastern father Basil and his admission

to Mary's faith lapse at the cross.[3] On the other hand, Western thinkers, also insufficiently

summarized, were reluctant to have a sinful Mary and pointed more frequently to the consecrated

virginity of female monastic life.[4] Balancing these two schools of thought, Ambrose served a

critical role as the bridge between the East and the West, borrowing from both traditions by

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[1] By pastoral intent, I mean an intent meant to nurture a community of faith in a way that deepens, betters, or corrects their standing with the Lord and others in their community. In other words, intents to make his community reflect the Lord.

[2] Tim Perry and Daniel Kendall, SJ., The Blessed Virgin Mary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 30-31.

[3] Ibid., 32.

[4] Ibid., 34.

combining the economic place and perpetual virginity of the East with the forever obedient Mary

of the West.[5]

Certain scholars believe that his role as the bridge between Eastern and Western Marian

thought may have been the result of his rushed ascent into the episcopacy; he was not even a

baptized Christian when asked to become the Bishop of Milan.[6] Once he reluctantly accepted, he

had to take up theology; consequently, he read the established works of other patriarchs,

engaging in Eastern and Western literature, alike.[7]

In regards to the East, rhetorical and legal educational background prepared him for a

"more practical and pastoral orientation."[8] He knew Greek well and studied the Greek Fathers

extensively.[9] In particular, Ambrose's conception of Mary's role in human redemption through

the Incarnation pulls from literature written by the Eastern father Athanasius.[10] He even used

Athanasius's form; both *Letter to Virgins* and Ambrose's *De Virginibus* are letters to virgins. In

fact, Ambrose is indebted not only in form, but also in content. Much of Athanasius' *Letter to*

Virgins was borrowed or copied by Ambrose, including ideas relating to Mary as a model, or

virgin of virgins. Ambrose's Mariology is dependent on monastic communities, which were

introduced to the West by Athanasius; thus nearly all of Ambrosian Mariology expands upon the

work of Athanasius.[11] In fact, according to the Society of Mary's Charles William Neumann, the

author of the foundational text on Ambrosian Mariology, only two sections in *De Virginibus* are

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[5] Jaroslav Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1996), 104.

[6] Luigi Gambero, Mary and the Fathers of the Church, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 189.

[7] Ibid., 189.

[8] George E. Saint-Laurent, "Ambrosian Mariology and Monastic Spirituality," in Mary and Monasticism: Our Lady's Place in Monastic Life, ed. Word and Spirit (United States of America: St. Bede's Publications, 1988), 23.

[9] Saint-Laurent, "Ambrosian Mariology," 23.

[10] Gambero, Mary and the Fathers of the Church, 196.

[11] Saint-Laurent, 24-25.

not borrowed from Athanasius: Mary's modesty exemplified through her annual visits to the

Temple with Joseph and her loyalty to the other women at the cross and Visitation.[12]

Ambrose also carried on the Marian traditions of his fellow Westerners. For instance, he

influenced the Western concept of original sin, which would play a critical role in the theology of

Augustine, whom he had baptized. The Augustinian tradition would later develop Ambrose's

idea of a blemishless Mary into a Mary who had to be conceived immaculately in order to avoid

the stain of original sin. However, Ambrose, lacking the original sin vocabulary of later

Catholicism, never stretched his claim of Marian purity as far as the Immaculate Conception.

Despite this, his insistence on Marian purity carried through the Western, and largely

Augustinian, tradition.

Mary: To be Imitated

    I.   **Mary as Virgin of Virgins**

To Ambrose, Mary was the virgin of virgins, or the "monastic ideal," and he uses her

model virginity pastorally by encouraging his female monastic community to imitate her in

various ways.[13] His interest in Mary as a virgin seems to stem from his pastoral role when

writing to consecrated virgins, chiefly his sister Marcellina.[14] Briefly into his time as a bishop,

his sister asked for a sample of his sermons on virginity. The result was the *De Virginibus*.[15]

Ambrose writes in *De Virginibus*:

> Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which,
> as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected. From this

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[12] Charles William Neumann, S.M., The Virgin Mary in the Works of Saint Ambrose (Fribourg, Switzerland: The University Press, 1962), 45.
[13] Ibid., 33.
[14] Gambero, 191.
[15] Neumann, 35.

you may take your pattern of life, showing, as an example, the clear rules of virtue: what you have to correct, to effect, and to hold fast.[16]

In essence, he uses Mary, as a mirror that reflects onto other virgins, as a pastoral example of what a virgin should be. He encourages virgins, through the model Mary, to be "humble in heart, grave in speech, prudent in mind, sparing of words, studious in reading, resting [hope not on uncertain riches, but on the prayer of the poor,] intent on work, [and] modest in discourse."[17] While assigning these virtues to Mary, he even stretches her fulfillment of those virtues, stating that she "fulfilled every obligation of virtue as though she were teaching rather than learning."[18]

Mary's status as the model virgin for monastic women reveals something about the nature of her virginity: it was motherly. The Virgin's motherly nature is further evidence that her virginity was meant to be used as an example. To the Latin Doctor, her role as Mother could not be separated from her role as virgin.[19] Jaroslav Pelikan, the great historical theologian, demonstrates this when pointing to how Ambrose encourages six virtues through Mary: modesty, faith, devotion, a household virgin, a helper to Christ, and the Mother at the temple.[20] The last three of these virtues move away from Mary's own heart and relationship with God, pointing instead towards her mission as Mother.[21] While the last three elements of the list seem to be roles, his intellectual grouping of them as virtues combines her divine motherhood and virginity, bringing forth her status as the virgin of virgins. Likewise, in his commentary on Luke, when writing about Mary watching Christ on the cross, our Latin Father writes, "this text indeed

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[16] Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," ed. Paul Schaff, D.D., LL.D. and Henry Wace, D.D. Peabody, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 2:6.
[17] Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 2:7.
[18] Ibid., 2:9, pg 375.
[19] Pelikan, 120.
[20] Ibid., 120.
[21] Ibid., 120-121.

teaches us what model we should take for motherly love."[22] Therefore, because her motherhood and virginity are intertwined, the community he is pastoring should grow to be like their mother, the virgin, who nurtures them.[23]

Of all her imitable virtues, he perhaps emphasized modesty the most. To Ambrose, evidence of a virgin modesty was being troubled, fearful, and apprehensive when a male spoke; therefore, Mary's questioning of the Angel at the Annunciation was a sign of her apprehension towards men, as was her being alone before the event.[24] This translates into warning virgins to be mindful and apprehensive around men, to act just as Mary had.[25] About modesty, he even writes, "This, without which virginity cannot exist, must be the inseparable companion of virginity."[26] This assertion suggests his affirmation of the community's celibacy; indeed, to Ambrose, celibacy was equal or even superior to marriage. This may have been his attempt to create a positive, Christian ideal for female celibate communities, that contrasted to Roman ideas of female sexuality, which consisted of a variety of extremes "ranging from … the virgin goddess Athena… to the goddess of prostitutes."[27] Ambrose's eager approval of female celibate monastic communities is a Christian answer to the pagan practices of his time. Therefore, in his encouragement to imitate the modesty of Mary, and in his approval of the celibate communities as a Christian answer to pagan culture, Ambrose is using Mary to pastor his community towards a better Christian life.

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[22] Ambrose, Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel According to Saint Luke, trans. Ide M. Ni Riain (Ireland: Elo Press Ltd., 2001), 10:132, pg 352-353.
[23] Pelikan, 121.
[24] Ambrose, The Gospel According to Luke, 29.
[25] Indeed, Ambrose was a *patriarch* in more than one sense of the word.
[26] Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 2:2:14, pg 375.
[27] Angelo Nicolaides, "The Philosophical Conception of Mariology and the Notion the Theotokos in the Teachings of Saint Ambrose," *Phronimon* 15, no. 2 (2014): 23.

Likewise, in his pastoral fashion, he uses Mary as an example of modest — and indeed ideal — virginity. In *Concerning Virgins,* he gives examples of more recent and local women who have successfully imitated Mary, such as the martyred Thecla.[28] These examples ensure that the female community understands they too are to imitate Mary, "[defending] their virginity unto death."[29]

His entire imitable use of Mary can be best summed up in the words he uses to discuss her virginity: *post partum*. Yes, he confessed the *in partu* virginity of the Apostle's Creed, but he stressed her *post partum* virginity because it was closer in line to the subjects he wrote to: they were trying to be chaste from there on out.[30] To Ambrose, Mary's example is a pastoral tool used with virgins to show them how to live; her life is to be imitated by others.

II.   Mary as Church

Ambrose links Mary to the Church by likening Christ's birth to the Church's work of evangelizing souls; this linking is indeed a pastoral goal.[31] He is probably the first theologian to make such a link. He even refers to her as a "*typus Ecclesiae*."[32] This begins in *De Virginibus*, where he "first appeals to the virginity of the Church," and then later, to the individual virgin Mary, inferring a connection between the two.[33] After connecting them, he uses Mary to encourage his readers to imitate the Church's evangelization by making her the "perfect evangelizer."[34]

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[28] Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 2:3:19, pg 376.
[29] Neumann, 45.
[30] Perry, 34.
[31] Gambero, 198.
[32] Deyanira Flores, " Virgin Mother of Christ: Mary, the Church, the Faithful Soul," *Marian Studies* 57, no. 8 (2006): 117.
[33] David G. Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine," Church History 69, no. 2 (2000): 286.
[34] Flores, " Virgin Mother of Christ," 117.

To begin, he must intellectually link Mary and the Church. He does this theologically through the Holy Spirit, who "has the same supernatural fructifying principle."[35] Put simply, because the Holy Spirit intimately purified both, they share a special relationship. In his *Commentary on The Gospel According to St. Luke*, he writes "she is a figure of the Church who is without stain, and yet a spouse … she has conceived us by the Spirit."[36] Therefore, because of their connection, Ambrose is able to give Mary a role as Mother of the Church.

However, this relationship between Mary and the Church is not merely a resemblance or symbolism; it is "operational."[37] In other words, it has a purpose, and Ambrose uses two separate metaphors to make this purpose come to life. The first metaphor he uses, in *De institutione virginis 94*, makes a unique parallel between Mary, the Church, and the faithful. While interpreting Song of Songs 7:1, he writes "From Mary's womb there came into the world that heap of grain, surrounded by lilies, when Christ was born of her."[38] Luigi Gambero, the renowned author of *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, suggests that Ambrose interprets the lily to symbolize Christ and the grain to symbolize the faithful.[39] Our Doctor, in his second metaphor, also describes both the Church and the Virgin using feet imagery — the Gospel being declared through the preaching of the Church and the work of Mary as they wear out their sandals.[40] Sister and Marian scholar Deyanira Flores clarifies, "What the Church does by word of mouth, Mary did by giving birth to the Savior."[41] This can be seen in Ambrose's commentary on

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[35] Ambrose, *The Holy Spirit,* 110. Gambero, 198.
[36] Ambrose, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2:7, pg 28-29.
[37] Gambero, 198.
[38] Ibid., 198.
[39] Ibid., 199.
[40] Flores, "Virgin Mother of Christ," 118-119.
[41] Ibid., 120.

Luke, where he says Mary became virgininally impregnated "for the individual churches."[42] In addition, Flores notes that at the beginning of *De Institutione virginis*, he urges Christians to imitate Mary precisely in her mission of evangelization.[43] Therefore, she is not just a mother to Christ; she is also a mother to the Church. Thus, the Church, through evangelization, continues the work of their mother, Mary. Connecting Mary and the Church to encourage evangelization is indeed a pastoral move, as it fulfills Christ's command to spread the news and grows Church faithful.

Christological

I.   **The Virgin Birth as Proof of the Incarnate God**

Following the Christological tradition of his predecessors, Ambrose uses the virgin birth to point to the Incarnation.[44] Christ had to be born in order to be God incarnate because, to the patriarchs, denying the "reality of the flesh" would entail denying salvation.[45] Ambrose's use of Mary to make Christological statements has pastoral consequences; these statements can be found clearly through his calling of Mary the Mother of God in response to multiple heresies and in his desire to keep Christ stainless through the virgin birth in anticipation of the doctrine of original sin.

During his episcopate, the Arian heresy was revived.[46] Although the Arian's used the word "theotokos" for Mary, they used it in an Arian-filtered way; the one whom Mary gave birth to was not the Creator of all, but a creation. The Arians did not think the Son came from the same substance as the Father (i.e. to them, the Son was created). Therefore, to them, Mary was

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[42] Ambrose, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2:7, pg 29.
[43] Flores, " Virgin Mother of Christ," 120.
[44] Gambero, 192.
[45] Ibid., 193-194.
[46] Ibid., 193.

not really the Mother of God, but of some lesser creation, "the Christ." The denial of the full

divinity of Christ, a formal heresy, was quite predictably unacceptable to Ambrose; instead, he

used the Latin equivalent to *theotokos*, *Mater Dei*, in a way that "repeats against the heretics that

Mary is the true Mother of Christ, the Mother of the Lord, the Mother of God."[47] In other words,

for Ambrose, a clear articulation of the divinity of Christ within the Incarnation is at stake in the

virgin birth, and thus, Mary is the Mother of God. Although it should go without saying, any

statement arguing for the orthodox Incarnation is inherently pastoral because to historic

Christianity, and especially to the patriarchs, the Incarnation played a prominent role in salvation.

Although Nestorius and his followers came after Ambrose, their rejection of Mary as

theotokos is still relevant to Ambrosian Mariology. The Nestorians separated the divine and

human persons of Christ, favoring the title *Christokos* because they believed the alternative title

affirmed the the humanity of Christ, whereas the former did not.[48] In other words, to the

Nestorians, Mary would have only given birth to the human nature of Jesus, not his divine

nature.[49] Ambrose rejected this separation of Christ's natures through the virgin birth. He writes,

"For one is not of the Father, and the other from the Virgin, but the same is of the Father in the

one way, and from the Virgin in the other."[50] In other words, the two natures of Christ could

never be separated, even in the virgin birth; and this unity of the natures, being a key doctrinal

point in the theology of the Incarnation, is inherently pastoral.

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[47] Perry, 33 and Gambero, 194.
[48] Nicolaides, "The Philosophical Conception of Mariology," 20.
[49] Ibid., 20.
[50] Ambrose, "The Sacrament of The Incarnation," ed. Paul Schaff, D.D., LL.D. and Henry Wace, D.D. Peabody, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 5:35, pg 232.

Another group of heretics, the Manichees believed Christ's body was not real, but a sort of "phantasm."[51] Ambrose would have rejected this proposition because to him, Christ is the "Son of man because the Virgin is a human creature. That which is born of flesh is flesh."[52] Therefore, because Christ is the Son of man thanks to the virgin birth, to pastoral Ambrose, to deny the orthodox Incarnation is to deny orthodox salvation; thus, he responded to the attacks on Mary's motherhood through those who said the flesh of Christ came from heaven, "The flesh of Christ did not come down from heaven, because he assumed it from the Virgin on earth."[53] To our Latin Doctor, Mary's virgin birth of God incarnate needed to be defended because it was linked to the Incarnation.

However, his use of the title Mother of God in his responses to various heretics is not the only way Ambrose used Mary as an argument for the incarnate God. Following the Western patristic tradition that was anticipating the doctrine of original sin, in order for Christ to be without sin, his birth had to be different; he had to born of the Spirit and the Virgin.[54] Pelikan thinks that Ambrose was most likely responsible for the clear connection between the sinlessness of Jesus and his virginal conception.[55] This can be seen in Ambrose's commentary on Psalm 34, which Pelikan quotes, "Even though he assumed the natural substance of this very flesh, he was not conceived in iniquity nor born in sin — he who was not born of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a man, but of the Holy Spirit from a virgin."[56] Ambrose, here, uses Mary to ensure Christ had a scapegoat from sin, although the term "original sin" is not present in

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[51] Gambero, 194.
[52] Ibid., 194.
[53] Ibid., 194-195.
[54] Pelikan, 190-191.
[55] Ibid., 190.
[56] Ambrose, *Commentary on Psalm 37*, 5, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries (Harrisonburg: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1996), 190-191.

Ambrose. If he was not born differently, sin would have been passed down to him. Therefore, the

virgin birth was necessary for the Son of God to be sinless, which is simply orthodox theology,

and therefore, is meant for the good of the community (ie., pastoral).

Christological and Imitable: The Sinless and Perpetual Virgin

    I.   **The Sinless Mary**

Mary was the virgin of virgins, or a model, to Ambrose's monastic female community.

She was to be imitated; the peak of this imitational thought is Ambrose's hesitation to allow

Mary to sin. Though his hesitancy ultimately stems from his use of Mary as a model, his

reluctance for a sinning Mother is a bold and unique enough claim to merit a discussion separate

from her ideal virginal status. His reluctance for a sinful Mother is seen in her obedience at the

cross, the Annunciation in Luke, and his use of *"Omnia incorrupta."*

According to Gambero, "Ambrose made a definitive contribution to a portrayal of the

Mother of the Lord as devoid of any defect or imperfection, radiant with exceptional greatness

and holiness."[57] She was an obedient Mary. In the likeliness of Ambrose's undoubting Mary, his

Mary, never left Christ during the scene of the crucifixion; she was loyal to her son.[58] For

example, in his commentary on Luke, he writes, "but Mary stood at the cross, and with loving

eyes gazed upon the wounds of her son."[59] Some of his Eastern contemporaries, willing to admit

to Mary's sinful nature, sided with other Gospel interpretations, and consequently, their Mary left

Christ during the crucifixion; Ambrose's would never do that.

Gambero directs attention to Ambrose's interpretation of the Annunciation in Luke, in

which he interprets her as not doubting the words of Gabriel the angel, but rather she trusts in the

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[57] Gambero, 190.
[58] Ibid., 202. Ambrose, *De institutione virginis 49*. Text in mind: "His mother stood before the cross."
[59] Ambrose, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 10:132, pg 352.

angel, which is shown through her asking about how this miraculous event was to happen. Ambrose writes multiple statements using the Annunciation as evidence of Mary's faith: "How prompt Mary is to believe," "the priest wouldn't believe. The Virgin corrected his error," and "This was not from any lack of faith in the prophecy, not from any doubt… she went out of sheer joy, out of pure desire to fulfil a duty of love."[60] To Ambrose, this event demonstrated how her life was marked by utter obedience and faith, rather than disobedience and unbelief.

In addition, Ambrose's Mary was *sancta Maria* and *sancta Virgo* — a holy person and a holy virgin. Although, anticipating Augustine, she was not merely a holy person; to Ambrose, she was "*omnia incorrupta*," or "all things pure," to show that she was completely pure, or without stain in a literal sense.[61] In *Concerning Virgins*, connecting virginity and being stain free, Ambrose writes "What is virginal chastity but purity free from stain?"[62] Gambero clarifies his position, in light of the language Ambrose uses that "it appears indisputable that he excluded from Mary any stain of sin whatsoever."[63]

However, not only is she without sin, but her being without sin has Christological ramifications: She was without possibility of sin, and her being without sin allowed Christ to be sinless.[64] Therefore, Mary's blameless state is also a Christological statement, and all Christology has pastoral implications. However, since her stainless life is the most complete expression of Mary as the ideal virgin, it is also an imitable statement; the women were to mold themselves after Mary to the point where they ceased to sin, at least ideally.

II.   The Perpetual Virgin

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[60] Ibid., 2:17-19, pg 33-34.
[61] Nicolaides, "The Philosophical Conception of Mariology," 25.
[62] Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 1:5:21, pg 366.
[63] Gambero, 198.
[64] Ibid., 197-198 and Pelikan, 120.

Mary, to Ambrose, was a *post partum*, or perpetual virgin; this concept had major pastoral and Christological implications. Quite simply, Ambrose defined her virginity as "never [having] any sexual intercourse."[65] Many of his writings on this issue were against Helvidius, who was later deemed a heretic.[66] Helvidius pointed to how the language of the Gospels argued that Mary had other children, with phrases like "firstborn" and mentions of siblings.[67] But Ambrose had to deny this; if he did not, it would undermine Mary's role as the ideal monastic life because she would not have preserved her virginity, which the virgin of virgins would have.[68] However, he does give six reasons "why a chaste marriage Mary and Joseph is, in fact, the most natural reading of their life together."[69] Or in simple terms, he gives six reasons for Mary's perpetual virginity.

He reasons that a chaste marriage would preserve her reputation, legitimate Jesus in the eyes of his fellow Jews, allow Joseph to testify to her purity, would make it so Mary would not have to lie in order to hide her pregnancy, hide Jesus from the Devil when he was most vulnerable, and would "make sense of Jesus' charging John with Mary's care at the cross."[70] The last point, Jesus' charging John with Mary's care, is perhaps the most convincing: if Mary had other children, they would have been required to care for her, and thus, there would have been no need for Jesus to ask John.

In his *Commentary on St. Luke*, Ambrose simplifies the reasoning for her perpetual virginity: she must be a virgin because it would preserve her purity, even outside of the Church,

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[65] Ambrose, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 26.
[66] Perry, 34.
[67] Perry, 35.
[68] Perry, 35.
[69] Ibid., 35.
[70] Ibid., 35-36.

which is necessary for any Saint, especially for the Mother of the Lord.[71] Neumann clarifies, "To deny that the Mother of God persevered as a virgin, he says, leads to denying that she conceived and bore her Son as a virgin," because that would mean "Christ would [have chosen] to be born of a virgin who could not find it in herself to preserve her virginity."[72] Since according to Ambrose the perpetual virginity testified to the Incarnation, a denial of it meant a denial of the Incarnation.[73] Therefore, if a certain teaching could lead one to denying the Incarnation, the teaching should be condemned as heretical, thus Ambrose deemed Bonosus, who denied her virginity, a heretic. This thought process is perhaps logical to a theologian from patriarchal times like Ambrose: the Jews were the first to deny the Incarnation and "Ambrose sees Bonosus' error pregnant with the seeds of theirs."[74] Therefore, in correcting their heresies, to ensure orthodoxy prevailed, he was being pastoral.

Mary's perpetual virginity, according to Ambrose, indeed had Christological implications; however, it also has imitable implications, meant to mold the communities he served. He was writing in a time when monasticism was rising in the West, thanks to Athanasius, and when Manichaeism "rejected marriage because it considered matter, the body, and sexuality to be evil." [75] Ambrose, a Christian pastor, needed to encourage his monastic flock of a "positive ideal of consecrated virginity" rather than the negative depiction created by the Manichees, and Mary was the prime choice for encouraging his female flock.[76] While her virginity prior to Jesus' conception may have been an easy position to defend, her prior virginity would not be something

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[71] Ambrose, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 26.
[72] Neumann, 218.
[73] Neumann, 218.
[74] Ibid., 218.
[75] Saint-Laurent, "Ambrosian Mariology," 33.
[76] Ibid., 33.

replicable; the women in his monastic community, as any, would be unable to change their pasts. The claim that he used perpetual virginity as a means to encourage virginity can be further attested through his use of other role models, such as Thecla, who he says lived a life similar to Mary's. His pointing to other examples allowed the nuns to understand that a life like Mary's can actually be lived out. This was clearly his intention, as he explains why he used other virginal examples, "Some one will say: 'Why have you brought forward the example of Mary, as if any one could be found to imitate the Lord's mother?"[77] Because they needed to focus on their present condition and on how to remain celibate, a perpetual virgin was a necessary pastoral move.

Conclusion: Summary of Argument

Ambrose's Marian thought contains three primary categories: that which is to be imitated (Mary as a model virgin and Mary as a church), that which is Christological (her being proof of the Incarnation), and where the two meet (Mary as sinless and as perpetual virgin). Ambrose's reluctance for acceptance of a sinful Mary is two-fold: it's the ultimate expression of the model virginity language, but it also allows for the Son to be without sin, so it is a distinctive Christological thought. In addition, Mary's perpetual virginity is meant to be imitated and makes Christological statements. All of these categories of Ambrose's Marian theology serve as a bridge between the East and West and are pastoral; that is, they are meant to directly nurture the communities he oversaw. The imitable statements about Mary are pastoral because they are meant to be imitated by a community, thereby providing them with a virtuous example of the

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[77] Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 2:3:21, pg 376.

Christian life. On the other hand, the Christological statements are pastoral in that they are Christological and Incarnational, both of which have direct consequences for human salvation.

Personal Reflections on Ambrosian Mariology

Ambrose's Mariology is humbling and pastoral. He cared deeply about his female monastic community and wanted them to best reflect the Lord. He even desired Christian answers to trends in order to combat the pagan answers.[78] However, I think we can expand this imitation and reflection of Mary beyond celibate women; Ambrose's Mary has something to teach all of us, not just the nuns. The virtues that he ascribes to Mary in *Concerning Virgins* are virtues that are ripped from the pages of the New Testament and therefore, are applicable to everyone. The unshakable faith of Ambrose's Mary at the cross is something that all Christians can seek to imitate in their own doubts. Likewise, her loyalty, humility, and modesty are traits that all should seek to improve in, including myself. We should pray to be like Ambrose's Mary.

Though, as a whole, I appreciate Ambrosian Mariology and think all Christians can learn from it, I still see a clear male patriarchal theology in his choosing of Mary as the model virgin. Jesus himself, our Lord, was a virgin and could have been an exceptional model to any monastic celibate community and it seems to me that Ambrose's choosing of Mary reflects patriarchal thought, in which it would be harder for the females to see themselves in the incarnate Lord. However, I think it is safe to assume that Christ, though a man, did represent women on the cross; and if he represented women on the cross, why is he not their model in all things, including in virginity? I do not want to blame Ambrose for this; if he was being patriarchal, he was not doing so deliberately. There is also the chance that he was not being patriarchal and was

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[78] In particular, I'm thinking about how Ambrose wanted Christian celibate communities since the pagans had their own, and thus he provided a Christian example so they did not need to look to pagan ones.

simply being pastoral, understanding that a female replicable image would do better in a female community than a male one would, even if it is Christ. Perhaps he just chose Mary because female virginity can be socially visible, through pregnancy and offspring, while male virginity is not socially visible, and therefore, since Christ was a male, it would not be as encouraging to a monastic community since males can hide their virginity.

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