Devotion to Mary in Early Christianity

It is a rather remarkable, I think, that even at this late date the development of Marian piety in ancient Christianity has been so little studied. In view of the considerable importance that devotion to the Virgin Mary has held over the course of Christian history, one might expect that by now there would be any number of monographs on this topic. But as others have noted before me, such comprehensive studies have long remained lacking.[1] This absence became quite clear to me some thirty years ago now as I began research for my first book on the ancient traditions of Mary's Dormition and Assumption. In setting out I simply assumed that the origins of Marian piety would already be well mapped onto the history of early Christianity. And I still recall my astonishment when one specialist on early Byzantine piety suggested that I might find in the early Dormition and Assumption traditions the origins of Marian intercession: surely such a matter had long been settled, I (naively) thought.[2] Yet despite the existence of a number of fine articles and even several monographs on specific aspects of devotion to Mary in late antiquity, until quite recently there was no adequate treatment of Marian piety's emergence within the history of early Christianity. It is almost as if, as Peter Brown once wrote of the early cult of the saints, Marian veneration, "as it emerged in late antiquity, became part and parcel of the succeeding millennium of Christian history to such an extent that we tend to take its elaboration for granted."[3] Mary's total absence from Brown's seminal study on the *Cult of the Saints*, I would note, is itself quite telling.

Of course, there has been much previous investigation of Marian doctrine during the early Christian period, but such studies generally pay scant attention to the emergence of Marian devotion and cult, preferring instead to focus on Mary's position in the development of early Christian dogma. And likewise there has been a significant amount of Roman Catholic scholarship on Mary in early Christianity, much of it coming toward the end of the so-called "Marian Century" of 1850-1950. Nevertheless, these works frequently show a strong tendency toward dogmatic readings of the evidence that seek to align early Christian history with modern Roman Catholic doctrine, and occasionally they are also overly optimistic about how quickly veneration of the Virgin Mary took hold within ancient Christianity. While such perspectives have obvious value in a Roman Catholic context, they hold limited use for understanding the historical development

of early Christianity and Mary's place therein. Accordingly, in response to this troubling gap in our knowledge of early Christian history,[4] I published a historical stud of *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion,* which is in fact the title of a book that I published a little over five years ago now.[5]

I wish I could promise that in this book I was able to dispel completely the historical fog surrounding the origins of devotion to the Virgin, but unfortunately the limitations of our evidence preclude such an outcome, a fact that no doubt is largely to blame for the relative neglect of this subject. Instead, what I hope to offer is a new approach to this topic that will contribute to a better understanding of how Mary emerged as a focus of Christian devotion. There is certainly much more to be said about Mary's role in early Christianity than I can cover in my talk today or even could cover in my book, and no doubt additional sources relevant to early Marian piety will continue to emerge. But one of the main goals of my book to assemble the scattered and often overlooked evidence for early Marian piety, from the beginnings of Christianity up through and including the events of the Council of Ephesus, the Third Ecumenical Council, where in 431 Mary was famously proclaimed as "Theotokos." Nevertheless, since there is virtually no evidence of any devotion to Mary prior to 150 CE (or, for that matter, to any other figure besides Jesus), as a practical matter my focus is primarily on the period from the latter half of the second century to the first half of the fifth.

The reasons for selecting this chronological window are fairly obvious: the Council of Ephesus is widely recognized as a watershed event in the history of Marian piety. In fact, the explosion of devotion to the Virgin that took place in the aftermath of this council was so significant that much previous scholarship has credited the council itself and its decisions with giving rise to the cult of the Virgin almost single handedly.[6] It is now increasingly clear, however, that devotion to the Virgin and even her cultic veneration had begun well before the Council of Ephesus had even convened. And there is significant evidence that the controversies of the Third Council were themselves at least partly fueled by an already vibrant devotion to the Virgin Mary in Constantinople and elsewhere in the Roman Empire. So while the Christological views of Nestorius, which were the main focus of this council, were certainly upsetting to his more learned theological opponents, it was Nestorius' refusal to call Mary "Theotokos" that seems to have turned the tide of popular opinion against him. And although questions remain as to just how

much Marian piety may have determined the debates of this council and their outcome, there can be little question that widespread devotion to the Virgin played an important role in the broader conversation.

Yet however one may estimate the relation between Marian piety and the events of the Council of Ephesus, there can be no mistaking that in the Council's aftermath devotion to the Virgin intensified considerably and spread widely. As Brian Daley aptly observes, during the middle of the fifth century "the figure of Mary emerged like a comet in Christian devotion and liturgical celebration throughout the world."[7] Scholars of early Christianity have long struggled to comprehend this dramatic expansion of Marian piety after Ephesus, particularly in light of the apparent paucity of evidence for devotion to the Virgin from the previous centuries. It is in fact true that most Christian sources from the first four centuries have surprisingly little to say about Mary. Early proto-orthodox writers enlist her motherhood of Jesus as a guarantee of his humanity; her virginal conception is a sign of his exalted status; her obedience at the Annunciation rectifies the disobedience of Eve, making Mary a "New Eve" for the New Adam; and, her persistence in virginity is a model for other virgins. There is, however, little interest in Mary in her own right and almost no evidence of Marian cult before the middle of the fourth century. Such relative silence is indeed difficult to reconcile with the thriving Marian piety that we suddenly find in the fifth century, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean world.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of the evidence and the convictions of much earlier scholarship, the notion that the abstruse theological debates over Nestorius' Christology at the Third Council could somehow have generated the cult of the Virgin with such apparent velocity seems, frankly, rather preposterous. While the council's outcome and its proclamation of Mary as Theotokos obviously catalyzed the growth and spread of Marian cult, there can also be little question that veneration of Mary had already begun to establish itself before the events of Ephesus. The difficulty, however, lies in finding clear evidence of devotion to Mary during the first four centuries that can offer meaningful precedent capable of explaining the eruption of Marian piety that took place in the middle of the fifth century. And although such evidence is surprisingly scarce, given Mary's prominence in the later Christian tradition, it is nonetheless sufficient to sketch a history of early Christian devotion to Mary.

There are in fact many traces of incipient Marian piety from the pre-Ephesian period, a number of which are by now well known, but these are scattered and often faint, making it difficult to judge their overall significance as witnesses to emergent devotion to the Virgin. One of the most famous of these is of course the *Protevangelium of James*, a late second-century biography of Mary that tells the story of her youth from her own conception through the Nativity of Christ. The *Protevangelium* reveals a surprisingly developed interest in the Virgin as a significant figure in her own right as well as early devotion to her unique holiness, although there is admittedly no evidence yet of any cultic veneration. Nevertheless, the remarkably advanced Marian piety of the *Protevangelium* stands at a considerable distance from the widespread devotion to Mary that would follow in the fifth century, and it is not at all clear what happened in between. As Averil Cameron observes, "The *Protevangelion* seems so developed for its date, and yet in a sense so isolated. It needs to be set in the broader context of apocryphal writings of a similar period."[8] And this, in essence, is what I have aimed to achieve in my forthcoming book, by bridging the *Protevangelium* with the Marian veneration of the fifth and later centuries through the Marian traditions of the second, third, and fourth centuries.

In order to accomplish this, one must examine a wide range of sources, including a number of long overlooked and recently discovered texts, as well as other more familiar witnesses to early Marian piety. In particular, the apocryphal literature of early Christianity offers a significant if largely neglected witness to early Christian interest in Mary. These extra-biblical writings, and especially the early Dormition and Assumption apocrypha, present much clearer evidence of devotion to the Virgin than one finds in the writings of the Church Fathers. Indeed, it would appear that a focus largely on Patristic sources is at least partly responsible for leading earlier scholars to the conclusion that Marian veneration was largely unknown in the early church. For whatever reason, Marian piety seems to register more clearly in apocryphal and also liturgical texts than it does in theological or moral treatises: why it is more visible in these contexts than in the writings of the early Christian intellectuals and bishops that we name the Fathers admittedly is not entirely clear. Yet the evidence of early devotion from the apocryphal writings could seem to suggest that that Marian piety perhaps first developed in milieux outside the purview of the "orthodox" church authorities, in heterodox and other theologically marginal communities. The sharply heterodox contents of some of these texts would appear to confirm such an hypothesis, and occasionally these

sources reveal understandings of Mary decidedly different from those related by the Church Fathers: some early Christians, for instance, remembered the Virgin Mary as a learned teacher of the divine mysteries. In any case, as we will see, these texts afford clear evidence that Marian veneration had come into existence already by the fourth century at the latest, even if the Church Fathers in the main seem to have kept their distance from this practice prior to the fifth century.

Scholarly response to the sparse state of our evidence for devotion to Mary during the early centuries has varied a great deal, although generally it has fallen in one of two directions, usually according to confessional orientation. Such a sectarian divide certainly comes as no great surprise, particularly given Mary's often volatile status in the history of Protestant and Catholic debate, where her veneration has long posed one of the major theological boundaries dividing these Christian communities. And despite the convergence of much Catholic, Protestant, and secular scholarship on Christian origins over the past several decades, as Beverley Roberts Gaventa observes, "the differences between Catholic and Protestant perspectives on Mary remain significant."[9]

Although one hesitates to generalize about something as diverse as modern Roman Catholicism, there has been a tendency in much Catholic scholarship, as already noted, to maximize the somewhat limited evidence for early Marian piety.[10] One of the most common solutions to this problem is to find ways of reading modern Mariological dogmas back into the writings of the New Testament and early Church Fathers. Such an approach finds passages from early Christian literature that seem reminiscent of modern Catholic doctrines, and despite the clear absence of such beliefs from early Christian literature when read on its own terms and the obvious contextual difficulties of these readings, on this basis it is often alleged that the Marian dogmas of modern Catholicism also belonged to the ancient church.[11] While such an interpretive move is perhaps entirely appropriate within the context of Catholic dogmatics, where confidence in the eternal truth of the Church's teaching effectively requires such readings of the early evidence,[12] these apologetic exercises fail to shed any historical light on the actual emergence of Marian piety.

On the Protestant side, other than general neglect the tendency has been to emphasize the dearth of evidence and on this basis to refuse the existence of any significant devotion to the Virgin prior to the middle of the fifth century: the Council of Ephesus is thus often adduced as the sole

and sufficient cause for what amounts to an essentially medieval cult of the Virgin. In this way the early church can be made into a largely Mary-free zone well suited to Protestantism's rejection of the elaborate and intense devotion to Mary that characterizes its parent faith. Recent decades, it is true, have seen some renewed Protestant interest in Mary, no doubt much of it inspired by broader academic and theological concerns with women's history and gender. Nevertheless, by and large such studies tend to focus primarily on exegesis of Mary's appearances in the New Testament, as one might expect, rather than on Marian doctrine or veneration.[13] It is also worth noting that this narrative of Mary's relatively late arrival on the scene also appears in a kind of "post-Protestant" guise in certain more secular accounts that take a similar approach, and unfortunately here as in much earlier Protestant scholarship, a sort of anti-Catholicism occasionally can stand fairly close to the surface.[14]

Not surprisingly, these confessional dynamics have done little to foster critical study of early Marian piety. Happily, however, it would appear as if this gap is beginning to narrow, as many mainline Protestant theologians have begun to grapple with the fact that their acceptance of the first four ecumenical councils makes Marian devotion somewhat difficult to ignore completely, while Catholic scholarship has shown an increasing willingness to embrace historical critical scholarship, particularly since the Second Vatican Council.[15] Yet the fact remains that outside of Catholic circles, little consideration has been given so far to the possibility that Christians may have begun significant veneration of the Virgin Mary prior to the Council of Ephesus; and likewise much (but certainly not all) of the earlier work by Catholic scholars has been essentially apologetic or dogmatic in nature and is thus of very limited historical value. And so it would seem that in many respects investigation of the early development of Marian piety has only just begun, and above all it will be essential now to look back beyond the events of the Council of Ephesus in order to discover its roots.

No less problematic in the study of early Marian piety has been a persistent urge to discover an explanation for early Marian veneration that locates its genesis primarily in some larger cultural influence extraneous to the Christian tradition. In this respect, much current scholarship on the origins of Marian devotion suffers, in my opinion, from a crisis of both over-explanation and insufficient understanding. Numerous studies have been published that would purport to explain

Christian devotion to the Virgin Mary as the result of some foreign impulse that intruded the Christian faith or else as something fully comprehensible only in light of some modern intellectual discourse that reveals the peculiar logic underlying this reverence for Mary. Indeed, works taking such an approach are often among those most cited studies by non-specialists, particularly because they appear to operate outside of the confessional interests that govern other more theologically oriented works. Nevertheless, it is hard not to see such approaches as a kind of extension of the more avowedly Protestant view of Marian cult as something grafted on the Christian tradition only rather late in the game. As a result, Marian piety is effectively made out to be something so exotic, so discordant with fabric of the Christian faith that external influences must be identified in order to comprehend its very existence. Whether it be ancient goddess traditions, psychoanalysis, the "eternal feminine," or the anthropology of sacrifice, something else must explain why and how the early Christians turned to Mary in prayer and veneration.[16]

To be sure, there is nothing inherently wrong with such perspectives in their own right, and all are immensely valuable for understanding the many facets of Marian devotion and its origins. Feminist critiques of Mary's overwhelmingly patriarchal representation are particularly needful and welcome. But the problem here is, as Leena Mari Peltomaa rightly observes, that this abundance of explanation has in fact prevented us from recognizing that we actually lack a historical reconstruction of the rise of the cult of the Virgin.[17] So much emphasis on discovering the skeleton key that unlocks the mystery of Christian devotion to Mary has left us without an account of early Marian piety that describes how the basic principles undergirding these influential beliefs and practices actually arose from a logic native to the early Christian tradition itself. Instead, devotion to the Virgin is presented as something largely anomalous to the Christian tradition, a historical oddity that requires some sort of dramatic explanation for its genesis. By comparison, for instance, it is hard to imagine a similar urgency being given to discovering why on earth so many early Christians were devoted to St Thecla or St Mary of Magdala: something peculiar seems to be at work in many of these approaches to the development of Marian piety.

Of all these different options, the goddess explanation has certainly proven to be the most popular, and so perhaps it warrants some direct attention. On the one hand there is no denying that Mary's representation and veneration have been deeply colored by the influence of earlier traditions derived from the worship of various goddesses in the ancient Mediterranean world. Yet

on the other hand these similarities are often superficial in nature, and they can frequently distract from more fundamental differences at both the conceptual and practical levels, as also is true more broadly in the early Christian cult of the saints.[18] It is a profound mistake to imagine that such parallels should somehow explain the origins of the cult of Mary and likewise reveal it as something exogenous to the Christian tradition. The simple truth of the matter is that a great deal of traditional Christian faith and practice reflects earlier precedents from the Greco-Roman world, not only in the case of the veneration of saints more generally, but in other areas as well, such as the Eucharist or the celebration of Christmas. So much of early Christian culture was deeply imprinted by Hellenistic precedents that one must wonder why the influence of goddess traditions on Marian piety should somehow be singled out, as it often has been[19] And as scholars have increasingly come to recognize, the Christian/pagan dichotomy that underlies such explanations is largely a false one, particularly in late antiquity.[20]

Moreover, Jonathan Z. Smith and Peter Brown have both drawn attention to the fact that such appeals to the "pagan" origin of certain Christian beliefs and practices, and particularly the veneration of saints, derive largely from Protestant invectives against Roman Catholicism or Enlightenment critiques of "vulgar" religious practices.[21] Of course, such misuse does not mean that the comparative history of religions should accordingly be abandoned – far from it! Rather, we must instead be aware that this approach is not always ideologically neutral and may often reflect various sorts of inherent bias. And in the case of early Marian piety, it is often hard to miss such undertones: Protestant writers have often emphasized the influence of ancient goddess traditions in order to make devotion to Mary appear as something alien to the Christian tradition, framing the rise of Marian cult in terms of her gradual "deification" rather than as a fairly ordinary development of late ancient Christian piety.[22] So while parallels between ancient goddess traditions and early Marian piety of course remain significant for the historian of religion, they do not explain the emergence of Christian devotion to Mary and likewise should not be allowed to control its interpretation in the way that one finds in some previous scholarship. Instead, one is inclined to agree in this matter with Averil Cameron, who rightly concludes of Marian veneration that "no religious development of such importance can be explained in simple or monocausal terms….Pagan syncretism may have played a part, but in my view it was a minor one; competition would be a better model."[23]

So rather than looking for some external cause or explanation, I propose that we should instead seek to understand the origins of Marian piety primarily on terms taken from within the Christian tradition itself. Devotion to Mary is in fact a product of early Christian culture that grew naturally out of its concerns with Christology and virginity and, most especially, the practice of venerating the saints. There is simply no need to find some sort of outside influence that is responsible for Christian veneration of the Virgin Mary: it was implicit in the patterns of early Christian discourse. Of course, there is again no question that precedents from ancient Mediterranean goddess traditions, and insights from modern social sciences can offer important perspectives for studying the history of Marian devotion. Yet at the same time it seems absolutely essential to understand Christian veneration of Mary as something arising from within the Christian tradition itself. The cult of the Virgin must have had a powerful resonance with other central elements of early Christian discourse and practice for it to have achieved the remarkable success that it did. This becomes most evident as we begin to situate the emergence of devotion to Mary within the broader context of emergent Christian devotion to the saints. For that is how the cult of the Virgin should primarily be understood in early Christianity: as simply one variation – albeit a remarkable one – of the nascent cult of the saints.

To be sure, Mary quickly emerged even in this period as a saint whose petitions and influence with her son surpassed that of other potential advocates. Likewise we can see that already in late antiquity the Virgin had begun to acquire some of the accolades and attributes that would ultimately lead to her elevation above the rest of the company of the saints as a sort of "super-saint," especially the late medieval and modern West. Indeed, in these later periods Mary sometimes came to be regarded as almost superhuman and was elevated dangerously close to equal footing with her son. Nevertheless, I will not attempt to account for these more recent developments in the medieval and modern West, since these elements are largely foreign to Mary's veneration in late antiquity, and moreover one can consult any number of fine studies on these aspects of medieval Marian piety.[24] Yet at the same time it would appear that this exaltation of Mary in later western Christianity is at least partly responsible for many of the over-determined explanations of Marian piety that I mentioned previously. Focus on these later developments has occasionally distorted scholarly perceptions of early Marian piety, and thereby inspired the search

for a more dramatic cause for her cult.[25] And while the near apotheosis of Mary in some quarters of the Roman Catholic tradition may perhaps warrant the identification of some extraordinary catalyst (although I remain skeptical), such later developments need not concern us as we try to understand the beginnings of early Christian devotion to Mary. Instead, we need to dial things back a bit from the medieval Mary in order to better understand her role in ancient Christian faith and practice. At this early stage she was effectively a saint among other saints who was revered for her exceptional purity and holiness as well as her intimacy with her son, a more modest status that she retains, more or less, in much of the Christian East up until the present day.

Averil Cameron, was seemingly the first to propose that the origins of Marian veneration are best understood when placed within the broader context of the emerging cult of the saints, and I have certainly learned more about early devotion to the Virgin from her than from anyone else. Nevertheless, Cameron too has proposed that it is "only after the Council of Ephesus and the recognition of her title as Theotokos in AD 431 that we find the real development of the cult of the Virgin which was to find expression in the sixth century in particular in the establishment of Marian feasts…[and] stories of her appearances and of miracles performed by her."[26] Likewise Cameron has often remarked in her many invaluable publications on Marian devotion that the cult of the Virgin developed much more slowly than did the cult of many other early saints, usually citing the cult of St Thecla as the main point of reference. In many respects Thecla presents an ideal figure for such comparison. Even if it turns out that Thecla was not in fact more popular and influential in early Christianity than the Virgin Mary,[27] it seems safe to say at least that that this missionary companion of Paul was the only female figure in early Christianity whose popularity could possibly rival that of Jesus' mother.[28] Yet as we shall see, the evidence for early devotion to Mary actually compares quite favorably with that for Thecla, and in many instances it is much better.

In making the case for Thecla's priority, Cameron points especially to the famous itinerary of an early Christian pilgrim named Egeria, who in 384 visited a shrine of St Thecla on the southern coast of Turkey, near the city of Seleucia (modern Silifke): there, according to the late second-century apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla,* she completed her life. In addition, Cameron notes that Thecla's depiction in visual art and on pilgrimage souvenirs, as well as the existence of a fifth-century *Life and Miracles* collection offer clear indications of an early, active early cult. By

contrast Cameron posits that "in the case of the Virgin, the kind of evidence that is plentiful for the cult of Thecla from the fourth and fifth centuries tends not to be found until the late sixth or seventh centuries," that is, roughly two-hundred years later![29]

Yet despite the frequent assertion of Marian veneration's tardy arrival by any number of Patristics scholars, the truth of the matter is that on the whole the earliest evidence for the cult of the Virgin is not significantly later, particularly if one looks beyond the environs of the imperial capital. As has long been well known, the earliest shrines to the Virgin were established not in Constantinople, but in the Jerusalem area already by the first decades of the fifth century, if not likely even earlier. Admittedly, this is some forty years after we first learn of Thecla's shrine in Seleucia, but one certainly has to wonder: are several decades really evidence that Mary's cult was late on the scene or is this difference simply a matter of serendipity? Specialists on the early Jerusalem liturgies would tend to suggest the latter, and several scholars have proposed that in all probability these shrines and the annual feast of Mary commemorated at them likely go back at least to the later fourth century. And not only that, but around the same time that we find the first clear evidence for these Jerusalem shrines, the early fifth century, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore was just being completed in Rome, even as the Third Ecumenical Council itself was meeting in 431 at a church in Ephesus dedicated to the Virgin Mary![30]

In terms of literary production, the *Protevangelium of James* certainly offers a worthy rival to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and judging from this basis, the Christians of the later second century seem to have held at least as much interest in the mother of Jesus as in this companion of Paul. And Mary certainly can best Thecla in this arena as we move into later centuries: an account of Mary's life and miracles dates to the fourth century – at least century before we find the *Life and Miracles of Thecla*, and in all probability another similar Marian narrative dates to the third century, if not perhaps even earlier. Both of these early Marian texts, one must note, bear witness to the practice of intercessory prayer to the Virgin, and the fourth-century narrative in particular reveals a highly developed cult of the Virgin with three annual feasts in her honor.

The two writings in question are the earliest surviving accounts of the end of Mary's life, that is, her Dormition and Assumption, and one wonders whether the classification of these writings as apocrypha, rather than as hagiography, may have contributed to their neglect in understanding Marian devotion. Although these texts have been largely ignored by scholars of

early Christianity until the present, it is no exaggeration to say that they are equal in importance to the *Protevangelium* for understanding Mary's significance in the early Christian tradition and the rise of her cult. The first of these two early Marian narratives is a work often known in the scholarly literature by its Latin title, the *Liber Requiei Mariae,* or, in English, the *Book of Mary's Repose*. The entire work survives only in a translation into Classical Ethiopic (Geʿez), which seems to have been made sometime during late antiquity, probably not long after the conversion of Ethiopia it would seem, but there are also substantial fragments in Syriac as well as in Old Georgian. No doubt the apocryphon's preservation in these lesser known languages in part explains why it has been so long overlooked.

The Greek original of the *Book of Mary's Repose* dates most likely to the third century, although it is possible that it may be even earlier. In comparison with the *Protevangelium,* this apocryphon is less obsessed with Mary's purity and holiness, and it presents her instead as a much more active figure, who possesses superior understanding of the Christian faith and is revered by the apostles and other members of the Christian community. The story itself, which relates Mary's glorious departure from this world and the miraculous transfer of her body to Paradise, is unmistakably designed to highlight Mary's uniquely exalted status among the followers of Christ. Yet the text also is strikingly heterodox, in sharp contrast to the stalwartly orthodox *Protevangelium*: Jesus is identified as a manifestation of the "Great Cherub of Light," for instance, and the text is riddled with concepts and vocabulary that would be quite at home in a gnostic Christian text. Indeed, the theological peculiarities of this ancient apocryphon alone should warrant it broader consideration within the study of early Christianity than it has yet received.

Perhaps most noteworthy for our purposes, however, is the evidence that the *Book of Mary's Repose* provides for nascent Marian veneration, already by the third century it would seem. Particularly in its conclusion, as Mary tours the places of the damned alongside of the apostles, the power of her intercessions on behalf of sinners is made known. For this reason Enrico Norelli has recently proposed that the traditions of Mary's Dormition and Assumption first emerged during the second century in order to add validation to an existing practice of intercessory prayer to the Virgin: it is an intriguing hypothesis that certainly merits further reflection.[31] Yet it is also worth noting here that this earliest evidence for the veneration of Mary appears to come from within a markedly heterodox theological milieu. This could seem to suggest, as noted briefly already, that

the cult of the Virgin had its origins somewhere outside of the proto-orthodox stream of early Christianity, a point that also could explain the relative silence of many early orthodox Fathers concerning Mary.

The second of these two important early Dormition narratives is a work known as the *Six Books Dormition Apocryphon*, so-called on account of its division into six separate books. Although this text is best preserved in several Syriac manuscripts of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Greek original and its traditions date almost certainly to the middle of the fourth century, if not perhaps even earlier. As much is indicated especially by their apparent connection with a group of fourth-century Christians known as "Kollyridians," whom Epiphanius of Salamis condemned for their excessive devotion to the Virgin Mary. Yet most significantly, the *Six Books Dormition Apocryphon* provides striking evidence for an early cult of the Virgin nearly a century before the events of the Council of Ephesus. It reveals a remarkably advanced level of Marian veneration, including, in addition to frequent intercessory prayers offered to the Virgin, now also organized cult, annual feasts, miracles ascribed to the Virgin, and even Marian apparitions. Judging from this early Dormition narrative, there seems to be little question that the cult of the Virgin had already attained a high degree of complexity by the middle of the fourth century. And once again it is seemingly noteworthy that in this instance emergent Marian veneration is also linked with an allegedly marginal group that was regarded as heretical by at least one contemporary Church Father. Although there is absolutely nothing at all heterodox about the *Six Books Dormition Apocryphon*, or seemingly even the related group that was opposed by Epiphanius, his condemnation of Marian piety as theologically transgressive and subversive similarly suggests some intriguing possibilities regarding an "extra-orthodox" origin for Marian veneration.

In terms of literary evidence then, the cult of the Virgin actually fares better than the cult of St Thecla. It is true, however, that Mary is not quite as visible in early church decoration and pilgrimage art as Thecla, but again the difference is not dramatic. Representations of the Virgin in art are largely absent during the first few centuries, which is hardly a surprise given that very little in the way of distinctively Christian art survives from before the early fourth century. The only possible exceptions would be certain representations in the Roman catacombs, but the interpretation of these images is often difficult and subject to considerable debate. Still, there is a

strong possibility that we find there depictions of Mary in a funerary context dating from the third century. Much more certain are depictions of Mary as an *orans* on gold glass from fourth-century Rome, and now Arne Effenberger's essay in the recently published volume *Presbeia Theotokou* identifies several new, early objects that were unknown to me just a few weeks ago. But it is really only in the fifth century that we begin to find representations of Mary in art in any significant numbers, as is fairly typical, one should note, of other saints.

Yet much more important is the evidence for early Marian piety that we find in liturgical sources. This is another area where we lack much evidence for the first few centuries of Christianity, but Mary is surprisingly well represented in some of the earliest witnesses to Christian worship. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is a prayer to Mary on a papyrus from Egypt dating to the third or fourth century, the famous *Sub tuum praesidium* papyrus. But there is also evidence of liturgical feasts commemorating the Virgin from the later fourth and early fifth centuries in several major urban centers. Jerusalem emerges as the most significant of these, not in the least because its early liturgies are especially well documented, and also because it is the site of two of the earliest and most important Marian shrines. Among the most remarkable service books to survive from the ancient Jerusalem church is surely the recently published "chantbook," a work extant only in Old Georgian translation that preserves a large corpus of hymns from the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In this collection we find ample evidence that Mary's intercessions were regularly sought during the Sunday worship of Jerusalem in the period prior to the Council of Ephesus, along with a substantial corpus of specifically Marian hymnography dating to the early fifth century. In this respect, the evidence for early Marian veneration exceeds considerably what we find for the liturgical cult not only of Thecla but of most other early Christian saints as well.

It is perhaps a bit peculiar, however, that we find evidence of an active cult of the Virgin well before we have clear confirmation of a shrine dedicated to her. Typically a saint's shrine was fundamental in the emergence of a cult, particularly in the case of the martyrs. The cult of the martyrs began at the graveside, where early Christians would gather to commemorate their local martyrs and seek their prayers on the anniversary of their death. The saint's grave and his or her relics provided the main locus for offering intercessory prayers and other ritual activities. Yet with no martyrdom and no relics, it would appear that a shrine was not as important to the emergence of the cult of the Virgin as it was for many other saints, and the evidence would seem to suggest

that her veneration may have initially emerged in the absence of a specific cultic center. There were of course other possible locations for a shrine besides the grave, and one of the earliest centers of Marian cult developed at an alternative site for the Nativity of Christ midway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Almost simultaneously the Virgin's empty tomb in the garden of Gethsemane also emerged as a locus of her special veneration, and as the cult of the Virgin rapidly expanded and took hold of the Christian world during the fifth century, this church quickly took pride of place as the foremost Marian shrine. Like so many other saints then, Mary's cult ultimately came to focus on her tomb, empty though it was. And in the absence of bodily relics, items of her clothing would eventually be discovered in order to evoke her holy presence within her shrines, especially in Constantinople.

As for the silence of the church fathers, on possibility is that this is simply a matter of the *lex orandi* of ancient Christianity being a little bit ahead of its *lex credendi* with respect to honoring and venerating the Theotokos.[32] A look to the broader history of Marian veneration suggests that this is quite probable. Time and again, popular devotion to the Virgin outpaced Mariological doctrine, and only gradually would theologians and bishops yield to the will of Mary's faithful devotees, adjusting their doctrinal formulations and liturgies to account for her new attributes and accolades. In this regard, Jane Baun helpfully draws our attention to "the people-led nature of Marian belief," noting further that it was the Marian apocrypha of early and medieval Christianity that generally served as "the conceptual and devotional vanguard" of Marian piety. These texts form an anonymous and popular corpus not authored by clergy or theologians but which nonetheless "exerted steady pressure on official religion."[33] At times popular developments in Marian devotion were rejected for their excesses, but often they were "prophetic," propelling existing faith and practice into new directions. Presumably, a similar dynamic was at work in early Christian piety.

And as for the Council of Ephesus, what happened there, it would appear, is not the beginnings of the cult of the Virgin, as many have assumed, but rather the embrace and promotion of an already existing set of practices by the Empire and the Imperial Church. These political developments bear the primary responsibility for the explosion of Marian piety that ensued across the Roman Empire in the middle of the fifth century. And this merger, the fusion of Marian piety

with the Christian Empire and its Church, would dramatically transform the Virgin Mary's image and her veneration so that she quickly emerged as the patroness of the Roman (or Byzantine) Empire and its capital Constantinople. But that is a story for another project and another book.

Barker, Margaret. *The Mother of the Lord*. Vol. 1, *The Lady of the Temple*. London: New York : Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012.

Baun, Jane. "Apocalyptic *Panagia*: Some Byways of Marian Revelation in Byzantium." In *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, edited by Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham, 199-218. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011.

Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Benko, Stephen. *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology*, Studies in the History of Religions 59. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993.

Blancy, Alain, Maurice Jourjon, and Groupe des Dombes. *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of the Saints: Toward a Common Christian Understanding*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.

Braaten, Carl E., and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Mary, Mother of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004.

Bradshaw, Paul F. *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, The Haskell Lectures on History of Religions, New Series, 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Brown, Raymond E., et al. *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

Cameron, Averil. "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople." *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 29 (1978): 79-108.

———. "Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity." In *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*, edited by Averil Cameron, 184-205. London: Duckworth, 1989.

———. *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures 55. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

———. *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, A.D. 395-600*. London: Routledge, 1993.

———. "The Early Cult of the Virgin." In *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, edited by Maria Vassilaki, 3-15. Milan: Skira, 2000.

———. "The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making." In *The Church and Mary*, edited by R. N. Swanson, 1-21. Studies in Church History 39. Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004.

———. "Introduction." In *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, edited by Maria Vassilaki, xxvii-xxxii. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

———. "Introduction - The Mother of God in Byzantium: Relics, Icons, Texts." In *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, edited by Leslie Brubaker and Mary Cunningham, 1-5. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011.

Carroll, Michael P. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Clark, Elizabeth A. *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Cunningham, Lawrence. *Mother of God*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982.

Daley, Brian E. *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998.

Davis, Stephen J. *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Delius, Walter. *Geschichte der Marienverehrung*. München: E. Reinhardt, 1963.

Fehlner, Peter Damian M., F.F.I. "Immaculata Mediatrix: Toward a Dogmatic Definition of the Coredemption." In *Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, edited by Mark I. Miravalle, 259-329. Santa Barbara: Queenship Publications, 1996.

Foskett, Mary F. *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

Fulton, Rachel. *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Gambero, Luigi. "Patristic Intuitions of Mary's Role as Mediatrix and Advocate: The Invocation of the Faithful for Her Help." *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 78-101.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts, and Cynthia L. Rigby, eds. *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Geffcken, Johannes. *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*, Europe in the Middle Ages. New York: North Holland Publishing, 1978.

Jaeger, Werner. *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

Jugie, Martin. *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge, étude historico-doctrinale*, Studi e testi 114. Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944.

———. *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Ecriture sainte et dans la tradition orientale*, Collectio Edita Cura Academiae Marianae Internationalis, Textus et Disquisitiones, Bibliotheca Immaculatae Conceptionis, 3. Rome: Academia Mariana/Officium Libri Catholici, 1952.

Karwiese, Stefan. "The Church of Mary and the Temple of Hadrian Olympios." In *Ephesos, Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture*, edited by Helmut Koester, 311-19. Harvard Theological Studies. Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995.

Kearns, Cleo McNelly. *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. New York: Viking, 2009.

Marianus, Congressus Mariologicus. *De primordiis cultus Mariani; Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis in Lusitania anno 1967 celebrati*. 6 vols. Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1970.

Maunder, Chris, ed. *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London ; New York: Burns & Oates, 2008.

McGuckin, John. "The Early Cult of Mary and Inter-Religous Contexts in the Fifth-Century Church." In *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin*, edited by Chris Maunder, 1-22. London: Burns & Oates, 2008.

Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. 3 vols. Vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

Peltomaa, Leena Mari. "Towards the Origins of the History of the Cult of Mary." *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 75-86.

Reynolds, Brian. *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012.

Rubin, Miri. *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Shoemaker, Stephen J. "Marian Liturgies and Devotion in Early Christianity." In *Mary: The Complete Resource*, edited by Sarah Jane Boss, 130-45. London: Continuum Press, 2007.

———. "Epiphanius of Salamis, the Kollyridians, and the Early Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Later Fourth Century." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 369-99.

———. "The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century: A Fresh Look at Some Old and New Sources." In *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, edited by Chris Maunder, 71-87. London: Burns & Oates, 2008.

———. "Apocrypha and Liturgy in the Fourth Century: The Case of the “Six Books” Dormition Apocryphon." In *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of 'Canonical' and 'Non-canonical' Religious Texts*, edited by James H. Charlesworth and Lee Martin McDonald, 153-63. London: T & T Clark, 2010.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, 14. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Tavard, George H. *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996.

von Campenhausen, Hans. *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*. Translated by Frank Clarke, Studies in Historical Theology, 2. London: SCM Press, 1964.

Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. 1st American ed. New York: Knopf, 1976.

---

[1] As noted over thirty-five years ago in Averil Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 29 (1978): 79-108, 79, and more recently, for instance, by Leena Mari Peltomaa, "Towards the Origins of the History of the Cult of Mary," *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 75-86; and Averil Cameron, "Introduction - The Mother of God in Byzantium: Relics, Icons, Texts," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary Cunningham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 1-5, 3-4. One should also note that, despite its title as well as some fine essays, Chris Maunder, ed., *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London ; New York: Burns & Oates, 2008) does not deliver such a study.

[2] One is reminded in this regard of Peter Brown's remark at the beginning of *The Cult of the Saints* that "the cult of the saints, as it emerged in late antiquity, became part and parcel of the succeeding millennium of Christian history to such an extent that we tend to take its elaboration for granted." Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, The Haskell Lectures on History of Religions, New Series, 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1.

[3] Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 1.

[4] Again see, e.g., Cameron, "Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," 79; Averil Cameron, "Introduction," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), xxvii-xxxii, xxvii-xxviii; and Peltomaa, "Towards the Origins," esp. 76-7.

[5] Stephen J Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

[6] See, for instance, the following examples, which reflect a variety of eras and approaches: Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, trans. Frank Clarke, Studies in Historical Theology, 2 (London: SCM Press, 1964), esp. 7-9; Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), xiii; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 34; Averil Cameron, "The Early Cult of

the Virgin," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 3-15, 5; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 117-18.

[7] Brian E. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 6.

[8] Cameron, "Introduction (2011)," 3-4.

[9] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). See also Peltomaa, "Towards the Origins," esp. 76-7. From a slightly different perspective, George Tavard similarly notes this divide, observing that while Protestants and Catholics have eagerly discussed issues such as papal primacy, infallibility, and justification in ecumenical dialogues, Mary is very often, it would seem, a "third rail," that both parties are reluctant to discuss. See George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), vii-viii.

[10] For example, see Luigi Gambero, "Patristic Intuitions of Mary's Role as Mediatrix and Advocate: The Invocation of the Faithful for Her Help," *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 78-101; likewise, without passing judgment on any of the individual essays, one can note a similar sort of optimism regarding the early evidence in the various studies published in the following six-volume collection: Congressus Mariologicus Marianus, *De primordiis cultus Mariani; Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis in Lusitania anno 1967 celebrati*, 6 vols. (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1970).

[11] For instance, the work of Martin Jugie is often characterized by such an approach, particularly in Martin Jugie, *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge, étude historico-doctrinale*, Studi e testi 114 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), and even more so Martin Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Ecriture sainte et dans la tradition orientale*, Collectio Edita Cura Academiae Marianae Internationalis, Textus et Disquisitiones, Bibliotheca Immaculatae Conceptionis, 3 (Rome: Academia Mariana/Officium Libri Catholici, 1952).

[12] See, e.g., the sort of reasoning expressed in Peter Damian M. Fehlner, F.F.I., "Immaculata Mediatrix: Toward a Dogmatic Definition of the Coredemption," in *Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, ed. Mark I. Miravalle (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publications, 1996), 259-329, 314-15.

[13] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), esp. 264-9. For specific examples of Protestant Mariology, see Walter Delius, *Geschichte der Marienverehrung* (München: E. Reinhardt, 1963); and von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth* . Examples of recent interest Mary's biblical representation (which also frequently extend to include the *Protevangelium of James*) include Gaventa, *Mary* ; Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); and Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, eds., *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

[14] E.g., Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology*, Studies in the History of Religions 59 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993); Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary* . The latter is particularly crass for its definition of Marian devotion as a "cult" in the modern sense of the word (that is, what is also called a "new religious movement) and its explicit (and bizzare) equation of Roman Catholic Marian piety with such modern movements as the Church of Scientology, the Hare Krishnas, and the Unification Church: ibid., xi-xii. Examples of anti-Catholic rhetoric linked with the historical analysis of early Marian devotion abound in earlier Protestant writings (e.g., Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, esp. 264-9), but for a more recent example in a Protestant study on early Marian devotion, see von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth*, 7-8 and esp. p. 8 n. 1.

[15] See, e.g., Gaventa and Rigby, eds., *Blessed One* ; Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004); Raymond E. Brown, et al., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); and Alain Blancy, Maurice Jourjon, and Groupe des Dombes, *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of the Saints: Toward a Common Christian Understanding*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 2002). The half century since the Second Vatican Council as seen something of a decline in Marian scholarship, as observed by both Brian Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 3, and Lawrence Cunningham, *Mother of God*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 95. As an example of how far Roman Catholic scholarship as gone in terms of accepting historical criticism, see for instance John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3

vols., vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), which rejects the Virgin Birth on historical grounds and yet was published with the official church sanction of a *nihil obstat* and an *imprimatur*.

[16] For examples of these differing approaches, roughly in order, see Benko, *Virgin Goddess* ; Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, vol. 1, *The Lady of the Temple* (London: New York : Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012); Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary* ; Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1st American ed. (New York: Knopf, 1976).

[17] Peltomaa, "Towards the Origins," 79.

[18] See the excellent discussion in John McGuckin, "The Early Cult of Mary and Inter-Religous Contexts in the Fifth-Century Church," in *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin*, ed. Chris Maunder (London: Burns & Oates, 2008), 1-22, 7-18. With regard to the cult of the saints more generally, see esp. Brown, *Cult of the Saints* , which emphasizes the importance of the saints' status as fellow human beings in the Christian tradition, thus rebutting the false notion that they are somehow merely Greco-Roman deities in Christian guise.

[19] See Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 1-22; Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21-3, 213-21, 229-30. On a more general level, see the classic study Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961); Johannes Geffcken, *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*, Europe in the Middle Ages (New York: North Holland Publishing, 1978), esp. 295.

[20] See, e.g., Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures 55 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), esp. 17-21.

[21] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, 14 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 4-22. Lawrence Cunningham also notes that the comparison of Marian devotion with pagan goddess worship has long been a "commonplace of anti-Catholic polemics": Cunningham, *Mother of God*, 94. Nevertheless, in all fairness, it should also be noted that Marian devotion in particular was often emphasized as a point of Catholic self-definition against Protestantism in the Catholic Reformation, and against modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century: see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

2009), 400-14; and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2009), 417-27.

[22] For a fairly recent example, see Delius, *Geschichte*, 33-4.

[23] Averil Cameron, "The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making," in *The Church and Mary*, ed. R. N. Swanson, Studies in Church History 39 (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004), 1-21, 13.

[24] E.g., Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Rubin, *Mother of God* .

[25] Cameron, for instance, rightly calls attention to "how much of our understanding has been shaped by later ideas, wishes, and religious agendas": Cameron, "Cult of the Virgin," 1. As examples, one could note Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary* , which largely explains the origins of Marian veneration through the analysis of later Catholic piety, or Kearns, *Virgin Mary* , where the medieval idea of Mary's compassion at the Cross is introduced (along with other ideas) to interpret Mary's representation in earliest Christian literature.

[26] Cameron, "Early Cult of the Virgin," 5. See also Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, A.D. 395-600* (London: Routledge, 1993), 149. In a more recent article, however, Cameron identifies the late fourth and fifth centuries as the formative period of Marian piety, while still pointing to the determinative influence of Ephesus: Cameron, "Cult of the Virgin," esp. 1-10.

[27] Averil Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity," in *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*, ed. Averil Cameron (London: Duckworth, 1989), 184-205, 193.

[28] Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

[29] Cameron, "Cult of the Virgin," 3-5, 17, which presents her most thorough discussion of the topic, but see also

[30] Move this note to later chapter when the buildings are discussed in more detail : Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 34. Stefan Karwiese, "The Church of Mary and the Temple of Hadrian Olympios," in *Ephesos, Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Helmut Koester, Harvard Theological Studies (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 311-19, raises questions as to whether

or not the remains traditionally identified with the church of Mary at Ephesus were in fact that church at the time of the council. Nevertheless, his findings in no way raise any question about the existence of a church of Mary at the time of the Third Council in which the council took place: this fact is indicated by the acts of the council, even if the remains of this church have not yet been identified.

[31]

[32] See, e.g., Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Marian Liturgies and Devotion in Early Christianity," in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (London: Continuum Press, 2007), 130-45; Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Epiphanius of Salamis, the Kollyridians, and the Early Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Later Fourth Century," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 369-99; Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century: A Fresh Look at Some Old and New Sources," in *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (London: Burns & Oates, 2008), 71-87; Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Apocrypha and Liturgy in the Fourth Century: The Case of the "Six Books" Dormition Apocryphon," in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of 'Canonical' and 'Non-canonical' Religious Texts*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Lee Martin McDonald (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 153-63.

[33] Jane Baun, "Apocalyptic *Panagia*: Some Byways of Marian Revelation in Byzantium," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 199-218, 204.