

CHRISTIAN EXEGESES ON EZEKIEL'S *PORTA CLAUSA* BEFORE THE COUNCILS OF EPHESUS, CONSTANTINOPLE, AND CHALCEDON

José María Salvador-González

DOI: 10.17846/CL.2021.14.2.3-13

Abstract: SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, José María. *Christian Exegeses on Ezekiel's Porta Clausa Prior to the Councils of Ephesus, Constantinople, and Chalcedon*. This article¹ aims to highlight the exegetical comments that the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers proposed with a Christological and Mariological purpose on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* before or during the Councils of Ephesus (431), Constantinople (448) and Chalcedon (451). Although at first sight it would seem that such exegeses were a consequence of these Councils, it is clear that many of them are documented earlier, and others occurred more or less by the time in which these Councils took place. All the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers agree in interpreting this oriental closed door of the temple in Mariological and Christological terms, in the sense that it is a simultaneous and complementary symbol of both the virginal divine maternity of Mary and her perpetual virginity, as well as the conception and birth of God the Son made man. As such interpretations are previous or, in the best case, contemporary to the three mentioned Councils, they can not be considered as their consequences, but rather as some antecedents that could have served the Church in those Councils to refute the heresies of Nestorius and Eutychius.

Keywords: *Patrology, porta clausa, Ezekiel, Christ's incarnation, Mary's divine motherhood, Christology, Mariology, Ecumenic Council, dogma*

Introduction

During the constant research on Greek and Latin Patrology, we discover with great surprise that many Church Fathers interpret the eastern “closed door” (*porta clausa*) of the temple revealed to the prophet Ezekiel as a double metaphor for Christ and Mary. The consulted Christian thinkers agree on considering this Ezekiel's shut door as a symbol that signifies both the virginal divine maternity of Mary and her perpetual virginity, as well as the virginal conception and the supernatural birth of God the Son made man in Mary's womb.

At first glance, these Greek-Eastern and Latin interpretations would seem to derive from the Christological disputes that arose in the East in the 4th and 5th centuries from the heresies of Nestorius (c. 386 – c. 451) and Eutychius (c. 380 – c. 456). Nestorius and his followers argued that Christ has two separate and independent natures without a substantial union in a single person. Eutychius and his supporters asserted that Christ has only one nature, the divine (monophysitism), and is not a true man. Facing these heresies, the Church established in the first half of the 5th century the orthodoxy on the condition of Christ and Mary in the three Councils of Ephesus

¹ This article is part of the activities of the CAPIRE Research Group, attached to the Complutense University of Madrid: <https://www.ucm.es/capire>.

(431), Constantinople (448), and Chalcedon (451), which set the fundamental Christological and Mariological dogmas.

Under the leadership of Cyril of Alexandria (c. 340/343 – 444), the Council of Ephesus established the dogma that Christ possesses two true natures (dyophysitism), united indissolubly in a single person, that is, an individual simultaneously true God and true man. From this Christological dogma, the Council of Ephesus derived the Mariological dogma that Mary is not only the mother of Christ-man (*Christotókos* and *anthropotókos*), but that she is the true mother of God the Son (*Theotókos*). The Council of Constantinople (448) endorsed the dyophysitism of Christ, reaffirming that his two natures, divine, and human, constitute a single person. Finally, the Council of Chalcedon (451) confirmed the Christological and Mariological dogmas established by the Councils of Ephesus and Constantinople.

With this double dogmatic projection, the exegeses that the Church Fathers offered in the first centuries of the Christian era on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* were not always the consequence of those three Councils. Long before them, many glosses in this regard are already documented. Although the first Christian exegeses that we have registered so far on this sentence of the prophet date from the middle of the 4th century (almost a century before the Council of Ephesus), it is not ruled out that there had been other similar comments before. If these exist, we have not yet discovered them, although they probably no longer exist, perhaps because they disappeared due to human or natural destruction, or because they were transmitted only as an oral tradition, without a documentary reference. It is a plausible hypothesis that in the first three centuries of Christianity (before those three Councils), there had been other Christian exegeses on this shut door because to sustain the double human and divine nature of Christ, as true God and true man, was an unshakable conviction between his apostles and disciples, after Jesus declared himself apodictically Son of God. This leads to the belief that Mary is the mother of the true Son of God who incarnated in her womb as a true man.

This article seeks precisely to highlight the exegeses exposed on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* by the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers before the Councils of Ephesus (431), Constantinople (448), and Chalcedon (451), and in the years close to their development.

To understand these exegetical glosses, it is necessary to quote the text in which Ezekiel describes that "closed door". In the year 25 of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, the prophet points out that Yahweh revealed to him the temple that was to be rebuilt in Jerusalem to replace the one destroyed by the Babylonians. In describing the parts and features of the future temple, Ezekiel says about its eastern portico or gate:

[Yahweh] Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east, and it [was] shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be closed, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut (Ezek. 44,1-2).²

Although at first glance, those statements of the prophet on that eastern door would seem factual and insignificant, many Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches interpreted from an early date this enigmatic phrase of Ezekiel with a double projection, simultaneously Christological and Mariological. All those thinkers interpreted that closed door as a double dogmatic metaphor: a metaphor of Mary's womb when supernaturally conceiving and giving

² "1. Et convertit me ad viam portæ sanctuarii exterioris quæ respiciebat ad orientem et erat clausa. 2 Et dixit Dominus ad me: porta hæc clausa erit; non aperietur et vir non transiet per eam, quoniam Dominus Deus Israël ingressus est per eam; eritque clausa" (Ezek. 44,1-2. Biblia Vulgata 2005 [1946], 847).

birth to the incarnate Son of God, preserving her perpetual virginity; and, a metaphor of the conception and the birth of God the Son made man in the virginal womb of Mary.

Exegeses in Greek-Eastern Church

Although during the first 300 years of the Christian era, the Fathers of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Church are aware of the virginal divine maternity of Mary, none seems to have explained it by exegesis on Ezekiel's *porta clausa*.

From the middle of the 4th century, many Greek-Eastern Fathers³ interpreted the fragment above of Ezekiel in the double Mariological and Christological sense already outlined. Ephrem of Syria (c. 307 – 373) is, to our knowledge, the first to explain the virginal birth of Jesus by his power, as the incarnate Son of God, to leave the closed belly of his mother without opening it, similarly as he would do later when leaving resurrected the closed tomb without opening it. This parallelism between the exit of Jesus from a closed womb without opening it at birth, and his departure from a closed tomb in resurrection, will be taken up again by many Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers and theologians.

Ephrem asserts that Christ also manifested his prodigious birth by his miraculous resurrection because he remained inviolate in the closed womb and alive in the sealed tomb (Ephraem Syrus 1970a, 485-486).⁴ This proclaims that Mary's womb and the "hell" of death (materialized in the grave) gladly announced the resurrection of Christ because, against the laws of nature, the womb conceived him being closed, and the "hell" (the sepulcher) returned him alive, despite being sealed (Ephraem Syrus 1970a, 485-486).⁵ Hence Ephrem infers that Mary's closed womb in Jesus' conception and the sealed stone of the tomb in his resurrection demonstrate Jesus' divine nature (Ephraem Syrus 1970a, 485-486).

Furthermore, Ephrem points out that Christ, born as God united to human nature, could only be born naturally with our same bodily members and could only die naturally with those same members (Ephraem Syrus 1970b, 535). Therefore, Jesus led his body from the (closed) door of his mother's womb to the (closed) door of the tomb, so that at birth he "opened" (in the sense of "leaving by") Mary's womb, and when he resurrected he "opened" (in the same meaning of "leaving by") the closed sepulcher (Ephraem Syrus 1970b, 535). The author concludes that Christ removed the body from the sealed tomb, and the seal of the grave witnessed the seal (the virginity) of the maternal womb in which he was conceived, since, as Mary's virginity was closed and sealed, God the Son came alive through it as a firstborn (Ephraem Syrus 1970b, 535).⁶

Even without mentioning Ezekiel's *porta clausa*, Ephrem is a pioneer in asserting the five dogmatic contents that the later Fathers and theologians will unanimously defend when

³ We will quote the texts of the Greek-Eastern Fathers in the Latin version of Jacques-Paul Migne 1857–1887. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*. Paris, 161 vols. For authors not included in Migne, we will use the Latin version of Sergio Álvarez Campos 1970–1981. *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*. Burgos, 7 vols.

⁴ "Per tuam resurrectionem persuasisti nativitatem tuam: clausus tumulus, signatum sepulcrum; illibatus in tumulo, vivus in sepulcro. Testes pro te fuerunt tumulus et sepulcrum, quae occlusa erant" (Ephraem Syrus 1970a, 485-486).

⁵ "Venter matris et infernus nuntiarunt iubilantes resurrectionem tuam: venter te concepit cum erat clausus; infernus edidit te cum erat signatus: contra naturam concepit venter et infernus reddidit" (Ephraem Syrus 1970a, 485-486).

⁶ "Corpus eduxit e signato sepulcro, et sigillum sepulcri fuit testis sigilli uteri qui portaverat id. Cum signata esset virginitas huius, exivit Filius Dei vivi e medio eius, et primogenitus erat ubique" (Ephraem Syrus 1970b, 535).

interpreting this quotation of the prophet: Mary's virginal divine motherhood (in its two different meanings, in conceiving and giving birth) and her perpetual virginity (with her uterus permanently closed before, during and after giving birth), as well as the conception of the Son of God and his delivery from Mary's virginal womb. Ephrem further precedes his later colleagues by proposing the parallelism between the prodigious exit of the resurrected Christ from the sealed grave and his supernatural conception and birth of the Virgin's closed womb: after all, these three wonders (resurrection, conception, and delivery of Jesus) constitute, according to Ephrem, irrefutable proofs of his divine nature.

Amphilochius of Iconium (c. 339/340 – c. 395/403) begins by saying that, while by natural law women give birth after their vulva was opened in intercourse, this is not the case of Christ, who was born by the "open" (in the sense of "accessible" to God) maternal vulva, without having been opened by any intercourse (Amphilochius Iconiensis s. a., 47). Mary's vulva was already "open" ("accessible") to Jesus, without the doors of her virginity being opened, by the will of the one who was being conceived in her womb: this is what Ezekiel shows in the temple's eastern shut door, proclaiming that it was the door of the Lord, through which he entered and left, and that will remain shut forever (Amphilochius Iconiensis s. a., 50).⁷ Amphilochius concludes that Mary did not cease to be a virgin at the birth of Christ, when the doors of her virginity remained closed, while for the Son of God who was born from her, nothing was closed, but "open" (in the sense of "passable" or "accessible"), because nothing is opposed to God, and all things are open (accessible) to him (Amphilochius Iconiensis s. a., 50). For the above, Amphilochius seems to be the first to explicitly see Ezekiel's *porta clausa* as a symbolic figure of the five Mariological and Christological dogmas aforementioned.

Nilus Abbas († c. 430) expresses quite similar concepts when he points out that Christ, when he was born, "opened" (in the sense that "came out") Mary's immaculate vulva, and by his divine power miraculously left her closed after childbirth, without breaking the seals of her virginity (Nilus Abbas s. a., 182).⁸

Interpreting the text of Ezekiel, Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370/373 – 444) states, in a rhetorical dialogue with the Virgin Mary: "the King of Heaven entered your city or, rather, your womb, and then left it as he wanted, leaving your door [of virginity] closed, because you conceived without semen and you engendered by the divine power" (Cyrillus Alexandrinus s. a., 1031).⁹

Proclus of Constantinople (*ante* 390 – 446) interpreted Ezekiel's sentence several times. Thus, in a speech in praise of Mary, he is astonished that God inhabited the Virgin's womb without limitation and that it contained the One whom the heaven can not embrace (Proclus Constantinopolitanus s. a. a, 682). And, if Mary remained a virgin after the childbirth, it shows that her son is God, born in an unspeakable mystery; for he who entered the closed womb of his virgin mother was born as a man without causing corruption in his mother, thus demonstrating his two natures, divine and human, indissolubly united, like the apostle Thomas acknowledged

⁷ "Enimvero cordate audi et intelligenter: Quod quidem attinet ad naturam virgineam, nullo omnino modo virgineae portae fuerunt apertae, volente eo qui nuper utero gestabatur, juxta illud de ipso oraculum: Haec porta Domini, et ingreditur et egredietur: et porta erit clausa" (Amphilochius Iconiensis s. a., 50).

⁸ "Qui, dum pareretur, vulvam immaculatam adaperuit Dominus noster Christus, ipse et post partum, propria sapientia et facultate, non sine miraculo illum obsignavit, nullo modo sigillis virginittatis solutis. Quod Dei opus esse quicumque sanae mentis est, fatebitur" (Nilus Abbas s. a., 182).

⁹ "Ingressus enim est Rex in urbem tuam, seu potius in uterum tuum, et rursus egressus est ut ipse voluit, et porta tua clausa est. Concepisti enim sine semine, et divinitus genuisti" (Cyrillus Alexandrinus s. a., 1031).

when the resuscitated Jesus entered the cenacle of the disciples without its closed doors preventing him (Proclus Constantinopolitanus s. a. a, 682-683).¹⁰

With this last explanation, Proclus is the first Greek Father to pose the parallelism – retaken so far by many Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers and theologians – between the incarnation of Jesus entering (being conceived) and leaving (at birth) through the closed door of Mary's virginity, and his appearance already resurrected before his disciples entering the cenacle through its closed doors. With such parallelism, Proclus complements the other parallelism established by Ephrem the Syrian by relating the exit of the resurrected Christ from the sealed tomb and his conception and birth of Mary's closed womb.

In another text, Proclus wonders contemplating the miracle that Jesus, being a man, has "opened" (in the sense of "entering and leaving without resistance through") the doors of the maternal womb, and, being God, has not violated nor broken the seals of his mother's virginity (Proclus Constantinopolitanus s. a. a., 691). He concludes by saying that Jesus entered the womb of his mother without intercourse and left without corrupting her, as Ezekiel prefigured in his vision of the temple's closed door, which shows Mary as Mother of God (Proclus Constantinopolitanus s. a. a, 691). In another writing, Proclus qualifies Mary as the temple's closed eastern door, which, according to Ezekiel, was closed and will always remain closed because only God passed through it, meaning that Mary, after childbirth, always remained a virgin. (Proclus Constantinopolitanus s. a. b, 690).

Hesychius of Jerusalem († *post* 450) states that the prophecy of Isaiah announcing that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son, and the prediction of Ezekiel proclaiming that the temple's eastern gate through which God will enter and exit, will always remain closed, they are explained in Mary, because she is a mother remaining a virgin, and after childbirth, she always kept intact the seal of virginity (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus s. a. a, 1459).¹¹ In another sermon, Hesychius, after pointing out that the figure of the burning bush that did not burn means the incarnation of the Only Begotten Son of God and Mary's virginal divine motherhood (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus s. a. b, 1462), states that Mary gave birth as a woman, although without corrupting her virginity, and, even if she became pregnant in her uterus according to the laws of nature, she conceived on the margin of natural laws. This was announced by Ezekiel when he called her the temple's eastern gate, which introduced the King of the closed gates since Mary was converted into a gate for the Only Begotten Son of God incarnate (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus s. a. b, 1463). Hesychius concludes that the Virgin is the eastern gate, for the true light (Christ) that illuminates every man comes from her womb; and, after introducing (conceiving) in her womb the King of closed doors, she also took him out (gave birth to him); but, when conceived and delivered, the King of glory did not open the doors of his mother's vulva nor destroy the seals of her virginity (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus s. a. b, 1463).¹²

¹⁰ "At si etiam post partum virgo permansit, quomodo non etiam erit Deus, ac mysterium quale nemo effari potest? Nulla is corruptione natus est, qui nullo prohibente clausis januis ingressus est; cuius Thomas coniunctas naturas videns, exclamavit dixitque: Dominus meus et Deus meus" (Proclus Constantinopolitanus s. a. a, 682-683).

¹¹ "Intuere quid Isaias prophetans inclamet: *Ecce virgo in utero habebit, et pariet filium*. [...] Quid? lege studiose Ezechielem, et virum desideriorum, quo pacto ille quidem dicebat: *Haec est porta Domini, et ingredietur Dominus per eam et egredietur, et erit porta clausa*. [...] Virgo enim est mater, et post partum permansit sigillum virginitatis quod natura indidit, inconcussum custodiens" (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus s. a. a, 1459).

¹² "Portam in oriente sitam, quia lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in mundum, ex utero tuo processit, velut e quodam thalamo regio. Tu regem portarum clausarum introduxisti, atque

Theodotus of Ancyra (5th century), interpreting somewhat originally the parallelism between the birth and resurrection of Jesus through closed doors, points out that Christ, when resurrecting by opening his tomb, also opened the graves of the saints as a pledge for the resurrection of all people (Theodotus Ancyranus s. a., 1413); and when he was born from his mother's vulva, he did not open it: when he emerged from death and the womb of the earth in his resurrection, Christ opened all the tombs (to eternal life), but at the birth of the Virgin he did not open her uterus and left her womb closed (Theodotus Ancyranus s. a., 1413).¹³

Finally, Theodoret of Cyrus (393 – 465) states that the closed eastern gate revealed to Ezekiel alludes to God; but not because he needed a door to enter when he wanted, accustomed as he is to enter any door, but because by this closed door is meant Mary's virginal womb, through which no one entered or left, but God (Theodoretus Cyrensis s. a., 1234).¹⁴

Exegeses in Latin Church

In an analogous way to what happened in the Greek-Eastern Church, since the middle of the 4th century, comments had been made by thinkers of the Latin Church on the temple's closed door described by Ezekiel. St. Ambrose of Milan (330 – 397) is, to our knowledge, the first Latin Father to consider the closed door as a symbol of Mary in conceiving and virginally giving birth to Christ. In his *Letter 42*, after wondering what is that temple's outer door which is closed and nobody will pass through it, except God (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. a, 1126),¹⁵ he answers that it is the Virgin Mary, through which Jesus entered the world, through which the Lord entered, and it will remain closed: for Mary conceived and gave birth as a virgin, and remained a virgin after childbirth.¹⁶

In his treatise *De institutione virginis*, after stating that the closed door of the prophet, as well as the closed garden and the sealed fountain of the *Song of Songs*, are synonymous with Mary's virginity (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 321), Ambrose interpellates her by telling her that she is the shut door prophesied by Ezekiel, and no one opens it, because Jesus closed it forever, who opened it and nobody closed it and closed it, and no one opens it (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 321).¹⁷ Later, after pointing out that this closed door is Mary in her condition as a virgin

iterum eduxisti. Nequaquam enim Rex gloriae, dum conciperetur aut ederetur, vulvae tuae portas prorsus aperuit, neque virginitatis vincula laxavit" (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus s. a. b, 1463).

¹³ "Resurgens e sepulcro sepulcra aperuit; natusque e vulva vulvam non aperuit. Ex morte enim ac terrae sinu emergens monumenta aperit, nascens vero ex Virgine uterum non aperuit: sed et nascitur, et Virginis sinum clausum relinquit" (Theodotus Ancyranus s. a., 1413).

¹⁴ "Ostendit autem mihi quoque portam ad orientem conversam clausam praecepitque hanc continenter claudi et attribui ipsi auctori omnium rerum Domino, non quod porta indigeret cum ingredi velle, qui ubique interest et omnibus adest. Quomodo enim hac clausa ingressus esset, si per portas ingredi consuevisset?" (Theodoretus Cyrensis s. a., 1234).

¹⁵ "Quae autem est illa porta sanctuarii, porta illa exterior ad Orientem, quae manet clausa; et nemo, inquit, pertransibit per eam, nisi solus Deus Israel (Ezek. 44.2)? Nonne haec porta Maria est, per quam in hunc mundum Redemptor intravit?" (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. a, 1126).

¹⁶ "Haec porta iustitiae, sicut ipse dixit: Sine nos implere omnem iustitiam (Mt. III, 15). Haec porta est beata Maria, de qua scriptum est quia Dominus pertransibit per eam et erit clausa (Ezech. XLIV,2) post partum; quia virgo concepit et genuit" (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. a, 1126).

¹⁷ "Porta clausa es, virgo, nemo aperiat janua tuam, quam semel clausit Sanctus et Verus, qui habet clavim David, qui aperit, et nemo claudit: claudit et nemo aperit (Apoc. m, 7)" (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 321).

(Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320),¹⁸ he declares that this is justified because “Mary is the door through which Christ entered this world when he was begotten in a virginal birth, without breaking the genital closures of virginity” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).

Ambrose clarifies later that, although every woman has a door in her belly, the only ventral door that is permanently closed is that of Mary, through which Jesus went out without breaking her genital closures, according to Ezekiel on the temple's closed oriental door, by which God entered and left without opening it. This means that Mary is the door that will remain closed before and after the passage of Jesus, and no one will open it again (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).

Ambrose concludes with two dogmatic consequences. Firstly, the assertion “that door facing East” means that Mary begot the East (Christ), diffuser of the true light, and gave birth to the Sun of justice, confirming why this door is not open and will remain shut because it only received God (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).¹⁹ Secondly, the statement that this eastern door “will not open and remain shut” means that Mary will not be opened (through intercourse) by Joseph, her husband, for not being allowed to open it, for, after God has gone through it, it must remain shut (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).²⁰

Finally, in his *Hymn XII* Ambrose acclaims the Virgin with these verses:

[Mary] became an accessible door for Christ,
Filled with the fullness of grace,
And the King passed by her and she remains
Closed forever, as she always was (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. c, 1412).²¹

Rufinus of Aquileia (345 – 411) highlights the merit that signifies the birth of one who, being the only Son in heaven, is also the only begotten child on earth, also being born in an unrepeatable way, so that the prophecy of Isaiah could be fulfilled: “a virgin will conceive and bear a son” (Rufinus Aquilensis s. a., 349). This would be the wonderful birth prefigured by Ezekiel by designating Mary as the closed door through which God entered the world (Rufinus Aquilensis s. a., 349).²² According to Rufinus, the symbolic figure of Ezekiel is the best to demonstrate the preservation of Mary's virginity: the door of her virginity being closed in her, through which God the Son passed (when he was conceived), through which he entered the world (being born) from the womb of the Virgin, and then Mary's door remained closed forever, preserving her perpetual virginity (Rufinus Aquilensis s. a., 349).²³

¹⁸ “Quae est haec porta, nisi Maria; ideo clausa quia virgo?” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).

¹⁹ “Haec porta ad Orientem aspiciebat; quoniam verum lumen effudit, quae generavit Orientem, peperitque Solem iustitiae. [...] Sed confirmavit profecto, et servavit intactam. Denique non est aperta” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).

²⁰ “Haec porta ad Orientem aspiciebat; quoniam verum lumen effudit, quae generavit Orientem, peperitque Solem iustitiae. [...] Sed confirmavit profecto, et servavit intactam. Denique non est aperta” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. b, 319-320).

²¹ “Fit porta Christi pervia,
Referta plena gratia,
Transitque Rex, et permanet
Clausula, ut fuit, per saecula” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. c, 1412).

²² “Sed et partus ipsius mirabilem modum Ezechiel propheta ante formaverat, Mariam figuraliter portam Domini nominans, per quam scilicet Dominus ingressus est mundum” (Rufinus Aquilensis s. a., 349).

²³ “Quid tam evidens de conservatione Virginis dici poterat? Clausula fuit in ea virginitatis porta: per ipsam

St. Jerome (c. 347 – 420) asserts that this closed eastern gate through which the Lord entered and will always remain closed means Mary, who before the childbirth and after the childbirth remained a virgin; therefore when Christ was born, she remained a virgin in perpetuity (Hieronymus Stridonensis 2006, 384).²⁴ In addition, in his *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, he reaffirms that only Christ “opened” (in the sense of “passing through”) the closed doors of Virgin’s vulva, which always remained closed, since Mary is the closed eastern door, the one that only God entered and left, being always closed (Hieronymus Stridonensis 2009, 880-882).

And in a sermon, St. Jerome asks how to understand that a virgin man (Christ) was born of a virgin (Mary) and that, after the birth of the virgin man, she is at the same time “mother and virgin, virgin before childbirth, virgin after childbirth” (Hieronymus Stridonensis 1999, 948-950). To this question, he answers with two arguments: a miracle and a prophetic metaphor. The miracle that the resurrected Jesus has passed with his real (not ghostly) body through the tightly closed doors of the cenacle where his disciples were gathered (Hieronymus Stridonensis 1999, 948-950)²⁵ underlines the essential link between two parallel prodigies: just as the true body of the resurrected Christ went through the closed doors of the cenacle without opening them or breaking them, in the same way, God the Son incarnate, being conceived and at birth, crossed the closed doors of Mary’s virginity without opening or breaking them (Hieronymus Stridonensis 1999, 948-950). As for the metaphor of Ezekiel’s prophecy about the temple’s eastern door, which will always remain closed, and no one will enter through it, but only God, Jerome notes that this is understood when the powers of God are recognized, who was born of a Virgin, allowing her to always remain a virgin after childbirth (Hieronymus Stridonensis 1999, 948-950).

In another writing, Jerome, after stating that “Christ is a virgin and that the Mother of this virgin man is a perpetual Virgin, mother and virgin,” reiterates that Jesus entered – both at birth and appearing resuscitated before his disciples in the cenacle – by the closed door, and in addition, he left his closed grave, excavated in a very hard stone (Hieronymus Stridonensis 2013, 436). With this idea, Jerome is the first Latin Father to highlight the symbolic triple analogy – later underscored by many Christian thinkers – between the three closed doors through which Jesus crosses: Mary’s virginal womb when conceived and given birth; that of the tomb when resurrected; and those of the cenacle when he appeared resurrected to his disciples.

St. Augustine (354 – 430) takes up the parallelism between the virgin birth of Jesus and his resurrected appearance before his disciples in the cenacle: the closed doors of the cenacle did not resist the mass of that body in which the divinity was incarnated, so that Christ entered without opening them, just as at birth he allowed (the door of) the virginity of his mother to remain inviolate (closed) (Augustinus Hipponensis 2009a, 921).²⁶ In another text, Augustine repeats ideas similar to those of Jerome, asking why not believe that the same Christ who could as an adult enter the disciples’ cenacle through shut doors could also exit as a tiny infant through the uncorrupted womb of Mary, two miracles that, although they do not want to believe the unbelievers, the

intravit (al. introivit) Dominus Deus Israel, per ipsam in hunc mundum de utero Virginis processit, et in aeternum porta Virginis clausa, servata virginitate, permansit” (Rufinus Aquilensis s. a., 349).

²⁴ “Quod autem porta orientalis extra terminos mundi semper clausa sit [...]. Pulchre quidam portam clausam, per quam solus Dominus Deus Israel ingreditur et dux cui porta clausa est, Mariam uirginem intellegunt, quae et ante partum, et post partum uirgo permansit et enim eo tempore quo angelus loquebatur: Spiritus sanctus superueniet in te, et uirtus Altissimi obumbrabit te, quod autem nascetur ex te Sanctum uocabitur Filius Dei, et quando natus est, uirgo permansit aeterna” (Hieronymus Stridonensis 2006, 384).

²⁵ “Clausae erant ostia et ingressus est Iesus. Nulli dubium quin clausa sint ostia. Qui intrauit per ostia clausa, non erat phantasma, non erat spiritus, uere corpus erat” (Hieronymus Stridonensis 1999, 948-950).

²⁶ “Moli autem corporis ubi diuinitas erat, ostia clausa non obstiteretur. Ille quippe non eis apertis intrare potuit, quo nascente virginitas matris inuiolata permansit” (Augustinus Hipponensis 2009a, 921).

faithful believe them (Augustinus Hipponensis 1993a, 34-35).²⁷ The author reiterates these same arguments in another epistle (Augustinus Hipponensis s. a., 519).

Likewise, in glossing in his *Sermon* 247 the Lord's miracles allowing a virgin (Mary) to conceive without intercourse, St. Augustine emphasizes that an inexplicable miracle like this produced in the virginal conception of Christ is also verified at his birth, for the Virgin gave birth while remaining a virgin, so that Jesus, long before he resurrected (and exited through the shut door of the tomb), had been born through the shut doors of his mother's virginity (Augustinus Hipponensis 2009d, 513-514).²⁸

St. Peter Chrysologus (c. 380 – c. 450/451) emphasizes the idea that so clear a distinctive sign of the deity is having left closed (inviolable) the Virgin after childbirth as having left with the body a closed grave (Petrus Chrysologus s. a. a, 518).²⁹ In another text, after referring to the visit of the resurrected Christ to his disciples in the cenacle with its doors closed, he affirms that there is no reason to doubt that God the Son could (in his conception and birth as a man) penetrate the intimacy of the closed body of his mother and preserve closed her virginal womb, this same Divinity that, thickened with his human body, enters and leaves through closed doors (that of the sepulcher and those of the cenacle) after resurrecting (Petrus Chrysologus s. a. a, 518).³⁰ And in another sermon the Chrysologus insists that, in the conception of God the Son in the house (womb) of Mary, the one who entered (was conceived) and left (was born) without leaving a trace of his entrance or his exit is a divine, non-human tenant; for he who manages to keep his mother a virgin when conceived and given birth is not an earthly man, but a heavenly being (Petrus Chrysologus s. a. b, 865).³¹

Conclusions

This short study could be summarized in three basic conclusions:

1) Already since half a century before the Councils of Ephesus (431), Constantinople (448), and Chalcedon (451), many exegeses of Fathers of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches on the temple's *porta clausa* revealed to Ezekiel are documented.

2) All the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers agree in interpreting this oriental closed door of the temple in Mariological and Christological terms, in the sense that it is a simultaneous and complementary symbol of both the virginal divine maternity of Mary and her perpetual virginity, as well as the conception and birth of God the Son made man.

²⁷ "Cur ergo qui potuit per clausa ostia magnus intrare, non potuit etiam per incorrupta membra parvus exire?" (Augustinus Hipponensis 1993a, 34-35).

²⁸ "Ecce habes unum in Domini conceptu miraculum: audi etiam in partu. Virgo peperit, et virgo permansit. Iam tunc Dominus antequam resurgeret, per clausa ostia natus est" (Augustinus Hipponensis 2009d, 513-514).

²⁹ "Diuinitatis insigne est clausam uirginem reliquisse post partum ; de sepulchro exisse cum corpore est diuinitatis insigne" (Petrus Chrysologus s. a. a, 518).

³⁰ "Rogo, cur dubitatur clausi corporis archanum et obseratum tota integritate domicilium uirginale absoluta diuinitas potuisse penetrare, quae post resurrectionem corporis nostri crassata mysterio, foribus ingreditur et egreditur clausis [...]" (Petrus Chrysologus s. a. a, 518).

³¹ "Intra domum uirginis negotium caeleste sic geritur, ut manentibus claustris ipsa domus septa non sentiat. 6. *Concipies et paries filium*. Qui ingreditur et egreditur, et introitus sui et exitus sui nulla uestigia relinquit, diuinus habitator est, non humanus. Et qui conceptu suo uirginem seruat, et ortu suo relinquit uirginem, non terrenus homo est, sed caelestis" (Petrus Chrysologus s. a. b, 865).

3) As such interpretations are previous or, in the best case, contemporary to the three mentioned Councils, they can not be considered as their consequences, but rather as some antecedents that could have served the Church in those Councils to refute the heresies of Nestorius and Eutychius.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

- Álvarez Campos, Sergio.* 1970-1981. *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*. 7 vols. Burgos
- Ambrosius Mediolanensis. s. a. a.* Epistola XLII. 6. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* 16, 1126.
- Ambrosius Mediolanensis. s. a. b.* De Institutione Virginis. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* 16, 319-321.
- Ambrosius Mediolanensis s. a. c.* Hymnus XII. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* 16, 1412.
- Amphilochius Iconiensis. s. a. a.* Oratio II. De occursu Domini Jesu Christi. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 39, 47-50.
- Augustinus Hipponensis.* 1983a. Sermones de Tempore. Sermo CXCI. In *Natali Domini*, VIII. In *Obras completas de San Agustín*. Tomo XXIV. Sermones (4º). 184-272b- Madrid, 34-35.
- Augustinus Hipponensis.* 2009a. In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXI.4. In *Obras completas de San Agustín*. Tomo XIV, Tratados sobre el Evangelio de San Juan (2ª), Madrid, 921.
- Augustinus Hipponensis.* 2009b. Sermo CCXLVII. In diebus Paschalis, XVIII, 2. In *Obras completas de San Agustín*, Vol. XXIV, 513-514.
- Augustinus Hipponensis. s. a.* Epistola CXXXVII. Cap. II. 8. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* 33, 519.
- Biblia Vulgata.* 2005 [1946]. *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*. Nova editio. Madrid.
- Cyrillus Alexandrinus. s. a. a.* Homilia XI. Encomium in s. Mariam Deiparam. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 77, 1031.
- Ephraem Syrus.* 1970a. Hymni de Nativitate. 10. In *Álvarez Campos* 1970, Vol. II, 485-486.
- Ephraem Syrus.* 1970b. Explanatio Evangelii concordantis 21.2. In *Álvarez Campos* 1970, Vol. II, 535.
- Hesychius Hierosolymitanus. s. a. a.* Sermo IV. De s. Maria Deipara Homilia. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 93, 1459.
- Hesychius Hierosolymitanus. s. a. b.* Sermo V. De s. Maria Deipara Homilia. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 93, 1462-1463.
- Hieronymus Stridonensis.* 1999. Homilia in Iohannem 1.1-14. In *Obras completas de San Jerónimo*, Vol. I. *Obras homiléticas*. Madrid, 948-950.
- Hieronymus Stridonensis.* 2006. Commentaria in Ezechielem. Liber XIII, Cap. XLIV. In *Obras completas de San Jerónimo*. Edicion bilingüe. Vol. VIIb. Comentario a Ezequiel (Libros IX-XIV). Madrid, 384.
- Hieronymus Stridonensis.* 2009. Dialogus contra Pelagianos. Liber II.4. In *Obras completas de San Jerónimo*. Vol. III, 880-882.
- Hieronymus Stridonensis.* 2013. Epistola XLVIII, Seu Liber apologeticus, ad Pammachium, pro libris contra Jovinianum, 21. In *Obras completas de San Jerónimo*, Vol. Xa. *Epistolario I*. Madrid, 436.
- Migne, Jean-Paul* (1844 –1864). *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*. 221 vols. Paris.

- Migne, Jean-Paul* (1857 – 1887). *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*. 161 vols. Paris.
- Nilus Abbas. s. a.* *Epistularum Liber I*. CCLXX. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 79, 182.
- Petrus Chrysologus. s. a. a.* *Sermo LXXV. De Resurrectione Domini XI, 3*. *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 24 A, 518.
- Petrus Chrysologus. s. a. b.* *Sermo CXLII. De Adnunciatione Domini II*. *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 24 B, 865.
- Proclus Constantinopolitanus. s. a. a.* *Oratio I. Laudatio in s. Dei genitricem Mariam*. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 65, 682-691.
- Proclus Constantinopolitanus. s. a. b.* *Oratio II. De incarnatione Domini Jesu Christi*. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 65, 699.
- Rufinus Aquilensis. s. a.* *Commentarius in Symbolum Apostolorum 9*. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* 21, 349.
- Theodotus Ancyranus. s. a.* *Homilia V. In Domini nostri Jesu Christi diem natalem, 1*. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 77, 1413.
- Theodoretus Cyrensis. s. a.* *In Ezechielem 44*. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* 81, 1234.

PhD. José María Salvador González

Complutense University of Madrid

Faculty of Geography and History

Department of Art History

C/ Profesor Aranguren, s/n

Ciudad Universitaria, Moncloa

28040 Madrid

Spain

jmsalvad@ucm.es

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6854-8652

SCOPUS: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57200275838>

WOS ID: I-4775-2016

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?hl=es&user=jtT6I8cAAAAJ>

Publons: <https://publons.com/researcher/2256628/jose-maria-salvador-gonzalez/>

ResearchGate: José María Salvador-González ([researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/José-Maria-Salvador-González))

Academia.edu: <https://ucm.academia.edu/josemariasalvadorgonzalez>