

# The perpetual virginity of Mary in Origen

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SUMMARY: Introduction; Main texts on Mary's virginity in Origen; About the comparison between HLc 14,3-8 and HLv 8,2-3; The allegorical meaning of Mary's virginity; Conclusion.

## Introduction

The topic of Mary's virginity in Origen either has not been studied yet enough,<sup>1</sup> or has been often related to supernatural birth of Christ,<sup>2</sup> as the Alexandrian himself does within his debate both with the Gnostics<sup>3</sup>

- 1 The most significant contributions to this topic are still: C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, Rome 1942, and: H. Crouzel, *La théologie mariale d'Origène*, in H. Crouzel, F. Fournier, P. Périchon (eds.), *Origène. Homélie sur S. Luc*, Paris 1962 (SCh 87).
- 2 See: H. Koch, *Virgo Eva-Virgo Maria*, Leipzig 1937, 67-72.
- 3 See, for instance: *prin praef.* 4: *corpus assumpsit nostro corpori simile, eo solo differens, quod natum ex virgine et spiritu sancto est: SCh 252,80; HEz 7,8: carnei intellectus magnarum nos carniū faciant, ut e contrario est quaedam caro, Dei facies, de qua dicitur: 'Quomodo caro mea in terra deserta, et in via, et in aquosa, sic in sancto apparui tibi' (Ps 62[63], 1-2): SCh 352,266; HLev 1,1: sicut 'in novissimis diebus' (Acts 2,17) Verbum Dei ex Maria carne vestitum processit in hunc mundum et aliud quidem erat, quod videbatur in eo, aliud, quod intelligebatur – carnis namque aspectus in eo patebat omnibus, paucis vero et electis dabatur divinitatis agnitio –, ita et cum per prophetas vel legislatorem Verbum Dei profertur ad homines, non absque competentibus profertur indumentis: SCh 286,66. Against the Gnostics who believe that either Jesus, *i.e.* the second Christ sent outside the Pleroma in order to save Sophía, assumed a heavenly body (see: Ps.-Hypp., *ref.* 6,35,7: οἱ δ' αὖ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνατολῆς λέγουσιν, ὃν ἔστιν Ἀξιόνικος καὶ Ἀρδησιάνης, ὅτι πνευματικὸν ἦν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Σωτῆρος: GCS 26 165,13-14), or he just passed through Mary (see:*

and the Ebionites.<sup>4</sup> Though, according to Socrates (*h.e.* 7,32)<sup>5</sup> and a doubtful fragment attributed to Origen (*FrLc* 80),<sup>6</sup> he seems to have used the term θεοτόκος, his mariology has always been regarded in light of his christology, rarely in his own meaning. The aim of this paper is firstly to focus on the main Origen's texts which deal with Mary's perpetual virginity, namely the IV homily on *Luke* and the VIII on *Leviticus*, two fragments respectively on *John* and *Luke*, and a passage from his *Commentary on Matthew*; secondly, it suggests a solution to a contradiction which scholars lodge among the former two texts; finally, according to Origen's exegesis of the *Magnificat*, it highlights the allegorical meaning of Mary's virginity with regard to two texts from his commentaries on *John* and on the *Song*.

Iren., *a.h.* 1,7,2: εἶναι δὲ τοῦτον τὸν διὰ Μαρίας διοδοῦσαντα, καθάπερ ὕδωρ διὰ σωλῆνος ὀδεύει: *SCh* 264,103), Origen insists on his own real conception; see e.g.: *HLc* 14,4: *Quod quidem adversus eos facit, qui negant Dominum nostrum humanum habuisse corpus, sed de caelestibus et spiritalibus fuisse contextum. Si enim de caelestibus et, ut illi falso asserunt, de sideribus et alia quadam sublimiori spiritalique natura corpus eius fuit, respondeant, qui potuerit spiritale corpus esse sordidum: SCh* 87,220; Pamp., *Apol. Pro Or.* 5: *nec oportet inclinare auram his qui dicunt per Mariam, et non ex Maria eum (scil. Christum) esse natum: PG* 17,587c-588a.

- 4 *CCels* 5,61: οὗτοι δ'εἰσὶν οἱ διττοὶ Ἐβωνάιοι, ἧτοι ἐκ παρθένου ὁμολογοῦντες ὁμοίως ἡμῖν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἢ οὐχ οὕτω γεγεννησθαι ἀλλὰ ὡς τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀνθρώπους: *SCh* 147,166. Also Celsus rejects Mary's virginity; about Origen's response to him see: *CCels* 5,34-35: *SCh* 147,100-108. On this topic: C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 68-77; A. Kamesar, *The Virgin of Isaiah 7,14. The philological argument from the second to the fifth century*, «Journal of Theological Studies» 41/1 (1990), 58-62.
- 5 Socr., *h.e.* 7,32: Καὶ Ὀριγένης δὲ ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ τόμῳ τῶν εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ῥωμαίους τοῦ ἀποστόλου ἐπιστολὴν ἐρμηνειῶν, πῶς Θεοτόκος λέγεται πλατέως ἐξήτασεν: *GCS* (n.F.) 1 381,21-23.
- 6 *FrLc* 80: Ποῖα δὲ ῥήματα συνετήρει ἢ παρθένοσ ἢ ὅσα ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπε πρὸς αὐτήν, ὅσα οἱ ποιμένες, ὅσα ὁ Συμεὼν καὶ ἡ Ἄννα καὶ ὅσα νῦν αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτοῦ: εἰ γὰρ καὶ μὴ τελείως ἔγνωσαν τὰ εἰρημένα παρ'αὐτοῦ, πλὴν συνῆκεν ἢ θεοτόκος, ὅτι θεῖα ὑπῆρχον καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων: *GCS* 49 260 (= *FrLc* 49: *SCh* 87,498). Here Origen is commenting on *Lk* 2,51.

### Main texts on Mary's virginity in Origen

Though Mary is frequently quoted in Origen's works, scholars agree that five are the main texts in which he explicitly refers to her virginity. The first occurs within the I book of his *Commentary on John*, where the idea that Jesus Christ was Mary's unique son results to have been largely asserted.<sup>7</sup> If, according to Eusebius (*h.e.* 6,24,1)<sup>8</sup> and Origen himself (*CIo* 6,2,8),<sup>9</sup> the I book of the *Commentary on John* was written in Alexandria, then the above mentioned text also implies that the idea of virginal conception of Jesus was supported by the Church of Alexandria.<sup>10</sup>

The second and the third texts are strictly linked. In the X book of his *Commentary on Matthew*, within his exegesis of *Mt* 13,55-56, Origen declares that the brothers of Jesus are those children whom Joseph had before getting married with Mary and from another wife.<sup>11</sup> The Alexandrian notes that not only this explanation is suggested by the apocryphal *Gospels of Peter* and *of James*,<sup>12</sup> but also this is generally quoted

- 7 *CIo* 1,4,23: εἰ γὰρ οὐδεὶς υἱὸς Μαρίας κατὰ τοῦς ὑγιῶς περὶ αὐτῆς δοξάζοντας ἢ Ἰησοῦς: *SCh* 120,70.
- 8 Eus., *h.e.* 6,24,1: ταῦτα δ' ἐκείνοις δέοι ἄν ἐπιθεῖναι ὡς ἐν μὲν τῷ ἔκτῳ τῶν εἰς τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην Ἐξηγητικῶν σημαίνει τὰ πρότερα πέντε ἐπ' Ἀλεξανδρείας ἔτ' ὄντα αὐτὸν συντάξαι: *SCh* 41,124.
- 9 *CIo* 6,2,8: καὶ μέχρι γε τοῦ πέμπτου τόμου, εἰ καὶ ὁ κατὰ τὴν Ἀλεξανδρείαν χειμῶν ἀντιπράττειν ἐδόκει: *SCh* 157,132.
- 10 About this see: C. Gianotto, *s.v.* «*Maria*», in A. Monaci Castagno (ed.), *Origene. Dizionario*, Rome 2000, 264.
- 11 *CMt* 10,17: τοὺς δὲ ἀδελφοὺς Ἰησοῦ φασὶ τινες εἶναι, ἐκ παραδόσεως ὁρμώμενοι τοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένου κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγελίου ἢ τῆς βίβλου Ἰακώβου, υἱοὺς Ἰωσήφ ἐκ προτέρας γυναικὸς συνωκηκυίας αὐτῷ πρὸ τῆς Μαρίας. Οἱ δὲ ταῦτα λέγοντες τὸ ἀξίωμα τῆς Μαρίας ἐν παρθενίᾳ τηρεῖν μέχρι τέλους βούλονται, ἵνα μὴ τὸ κριθὲν ἐκεῖνο σῶμα διακονήσασθαι τῷ εἰπόντι λόγῳ: *GCS* 40/1 21,26-30.
- 12 With respect to Origen's usage of New Testament apocryphal texts see: C.A. Spada, *Origene e gli apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, in L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana quarta. Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2.-6.*

in order to defend Mary's virginity. The third text corresponds to a fragment of Origen's *Commentary on John*, which E. Preuschen counts as 31, and it is supposed to comment on *Jn* 2,12. Here the Alexandrian advises that Jesus could have no brothers both because Mary was virgin till the death and because he was not the natural son of Joseph, so the brothers of Jesus mentioned in *Jn* 2,12 must have been the children whom Joseph had before getting married with Mary and whom Jewish law correctly called his own 'brothers', ἀδελφοί.<sup>13</sup> This two texts are likely to deserve two remarks. Firstly, R.E. Heine argues that fr. 31, which is referred to *Jn* 2,12, should appear in the X book of Origen's *Commentary on John*, but it does not,<sup>14</sup> so he concludes that it may have been picked by the catenist from another text of the Alexandrian and possibly reformulated in order to explain *Jn* 2,12.<sup>15</sup> As the two texts are very similar, fr. 31 may have been picked from the text in the *Commentary on Matthew*, also according to R.E. Heine.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the two texts only inform about the so called Mary's *virginity post partum*, *i.e.* she had no children after Jesus' birth, but they focus neither on her virginity before Jesus' birth, *i.e.* the so called *virginity ante partum*, nor on her virginity at Jesus' birth, *i.e.* the so called *virginity in partu*.<sup>17</sup>

*Sept. 1986*), Innsbruck-Wien 1987, 44-53, particularly 47. For a general view see also: M. Grosso, *Osservazioni sui 'testimonia' origeniani del Vangelo secondo Tommaso*, «Adamantius» 15 (2009), 177-178.

- 13 *Fr10* 31: ἀδελφούς μὲν οὐκ εἶχεν φύσει οὔτε τῆς παρθένου τεκούσης ἕτερον, οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἐκ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τυγχάνων. Νόμῳ τοιγαροῦν ἐχρημάτισαν αὐτοῦ ἀδελφοί, υἱοὶ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ ὄντες ἐκ προτεθνηκυίας γυναίκος· καὶ ἐπεὶ καθ' ὁμολογίαν γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἡ Μαριάμ ἐχρημάτισεν: *GCS* 10 506,21-507,1.
- 14 R.E. Heine, *Can the Catena Fragments of Origen's 'Commentary on John' be trusted?*, «Vigiliae Christianae» 40/2 (1986), 120.
- 15 *Ivi*, 130.
- 16 *Ivi*, 133 (n. 40).
- 17 These categories do not properly apply to Origen, as it has been well proved by R. Scognamiglio (*La fisionomia 'teologica' di Maria. Maternità e verginità*, «Theotokos» 10 [2002], 53-69).

The other two texts are in Origen's *Homilies on Luke* and on *Leviticus*. With respect to the former, in the XIV homily on *Luke* within the exegesis of *Lk* 2,21 («When the time came for their purification rites etc.») Origen submits the *quaestio* whom the adjective 'their' refers to. It can't refer only to Mary, who needs purification in so far as she belongs to the mankind and gives birth to Jesus,<sup>18</sup> but also to Jesus: in fact, according to *Jb* 14,4 and *Is* 4,4, everyone who is born in a body is not free from filth, namely *sordes* in Latin translation by Jerome.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, both Mary and Jesus need to be purified, because they have a *sordes*, in so far as the former gives birth to Jesus in a human body, the latter is born in a human body.<sup>20</sup> As C. Vagaggini<sup>21</sup> and H. Crouzel<sup>22</sup> have already showed, the *sordes* which the Alexandrian assigns to the mankind, in general, and to Mary and Jesus, in particular, is related to the implicit idea of the preexistence of the soul:<sup>23</sup> in

- 18 *HLC* 14,3: *Propter purgationem, inquit, 'eorum'. Quorum eorum? Si scriptum esset: propter purgationem eius, id est Mariae, quae pepererat, nihil quaestionis oriretur et audacter diceremus Mariam, quae homo erat, purgatione indiguisse post partum: SCb 87,218.*
- 19 For a general view see: G. Sfameni Gasparro, *Le 'sordes' ('rhupos), il rapporto 'genesis'-'phthorà' dell'enkrateia in Origene*, in R.P. Hanson, H. Crouzel (eds.), *Origeniana tertia. The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies (University of Manchester, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, 1981)*, Rome 1985, 167-183, particularly 172, 181-182.
- 20 *HLC* 14,4: *omnis anima, quae humano corpore fuerit induta, habet sordes suas. Ut autem scias Iesum quoque sordidatum propria voluntate, quia pro salute nostra humanum corpus assumpserat, Zachariam prophetam ausculta dicentem: 'Iesus erat indutus vestibus sordidis' (Zec 3,3): SCb 87,220.*
- 21 C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 85-86.
- 22 H. Crouzel, *La théologie mariale d'Origène*, 32-33.
- 23 About the idea of the preexistence of Jesus Christ's soul see e.g.: R. Ferwerda, *Two Souls. Origen's and Augustin's Attitude toward the two Souls Doctrine. Its Place in Greek and Christian Philosophy*, «*Vigiliae Christianae*» 37 (1983), 360-378; R. Williams, *Origen on the soul of Jesus*, in R.P. Hanson, H. Crouzel (eds.), *Origeniana tertia*, 131-137; A. Le Boulluec, *Controverses au sujet de la doctrine d'Origène sur l'âme du Christ*, in L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana quarta*, 223-237. See also: *prin* 2,6,4-5: *SCb* 252,316-320.

fact, as the soul who falls from her preexistence in God into a human body becomes impure, *i.e. sordida*, so Mary, who gives birth to the preexistent soul of Jesus in a human body, and Jesus himself, whose soul falls from her own preexistence in God into a human body, get a *sordes*. This idea is also confirmed by a short comment of Origen who explains that all children need the baptism's purification, as they get a *sordes* at their birth, *i.e.* their souls have fallen from their pristine preexistence in God.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Mary's virginity – Origen concludes – is denied neither by her *sorditas* nor by the *reseratio vulvae* which occurs at Jesus' birth.<sup>25</sup> Two are the main implications of this text: a. Mary gets a *nativitatis sordes*, namely her filth consists in giving birth to a preexisting soul into a corporeal body; b. though she is *sordida* and her *reseratio vulvae*, her virginity is preserved.<sup>26</sup>

The last main text concerning Mary's virginity occurs in the VIII homily on *Leviticus*, within the exegesis of *Lv* 12,2 («If a woman has conceived seed and born a man child, then she shall be unclean seven

24 *HLc* 14,5: *Parvuli baptizantur 'in remissionem peccatorum' (Act 2,38). Quorum peccatorum? Vel quo tempore peccaverunt? Aut quomodo potest illa lavacri in parvulis ratio subsistere, ni iuxta illum sensum, de quo paulo ante diximus: 'nullus mundus a sorde, nec si unius quidem diei fuerit vita eius super terram' (Jb 14,4)? Et quia per baptismi sacramentum nativitatis sordes deponuntur, propterea baptizantur et parvuli: 'nisi' enim 'quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et spiritu, non poterit intrare in regnum caelorum' (Jn 3,5): *SCh* 87,222.*

25 *HLc* 14,7-8: *Masculina, quae ex eo, quod vulvam matris aperuerunt, sancta erant, offerebantur ante altare Domini: 'omne', inquit 'masculinum, quod aperit vulvam', sacratum quippiam sonat. Quemcunque enim de utero effusum marem dixeris, non sic aperit vulvam matris suae ut Dominus Iesus, quia omnium mulierum non partus infantis, sed viri coitus vulvam reserat. Matris vero Domini eo tempore vulva reserata est, quo et partus editus, quia sanctum uterum et omni dignatione venerandum ante nativitatem Christi masculus omnino non tetigit: *SCh* 87,226.*

26 See: F. Cocchini, *Maria in Origene. Osservazioni storico-dottorinali*, in S. Felici (ed.), *La mariologia nella catechesi dei Padri (età prenicena)*, Rome 1989, 133-140; Ead., *Maria 'modello del cristiano' nell'interpretazione origeniana*, «Theotokos» 10 (2002), 80-82.

days»). Here Origen says that every woman who conceives seed and bears a man child is unclean, namely she is not virgin, whereas Mary, who does not conceive seed but bears Jesus, is clean, *i.e.* virgin, according to *Mt* 1,23 and *Lk* 1,35.<sup>27</sup>

About the comparison between *HLC* 14,3-8 and *HLv* 8,2-3

Scholars have generally compared the XIV homily on *Luke* with the VIII on *Leviticus* and proved a contradiction among them with respect to the topic of Mary's virginity:<sup>28</sup> A. d'Alès has suggested that the text in *HLv* 8,2-3 results a *retractatio* of what the Alexandrian says in *HLC* 14,3-8,<sup>29</sup> which seems to have been predicated around ten years before;<sup>30</sup>

27 *HLv* 8,2: *de Maria autem dicitur quia 'Virgo' concepit et peperit. Ferant ergo legis onera mulieres, virgines vero ab his habeantur immunes [...]. Haec ergo dicta sint nobis de eo, quod observavimus scriptum quia non superfluo addidit legislator: 'Mulier si conceperit semen et pepererit filium' (Lv 12,2), sed esse exceptionem mysticam, quae solam Mariam a reliquis mulieribus segregaret, cuius partus non ex conceptione seminis, sed ex praesentia 'sancti Spiritus et virtute Altissimi' (Lk 1,35) fuerit: SCH 287,12-14. About mystical event of Mary's conception see: *FrLc* 12: τοῦ θουσιαστηρίου δὲ τοῦ θυμιάματος εἶπεν, ἐπειδὴ ἦν καὶ ἕτερον θουσιαστήριον χαλκοῦ τὸ ὀλοκαρπωμάτων: *GCS* 49 235 (= *FrLc* 6: *SCh* 87,468), and also: *HLC* 14,10: *sicut nova fuit generatio Salvatoris non ex viro et muliere, sed ex sola tantum virgine: SCH* 87,228.*

28 See: W.G. Rusch, *s.v.* «Mary», in G.A. McGuckin (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, London 2004, 150.

29 A. d'Alès, *s.v.* «Marie», in Id., *Dictionnaire apologétique de la foi catholique*, fasc. XIII-XIV: *Loi ecclésiastique-Modernisme*, Paris 1917-1918, 170-171, 200.

30 P. Nautin (*Origène. Sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris 1977, 409-412) dates Origen's *Homilies on Luke* around 239-241, whereas F. Fournier (*Les 'Homélies sur Luc' et leur traduction par saint Jérôme*, in H. Crouzel, F. Fournier, P. Périchon [eds.], *Origène. Homélies sur S. Luc*, 81) dates them around 232-233, and H.J. Sieben (*In Lucam Homiliae/ Homilien zum Lukasevangelium*, vol. 1, Freiburg 1991, 30-31) follows him. With regard to his *Homilies on Leviticus'* dating, M. Borret (*Origène. Homélies sur le Lévitique*, vol. 1, Paris 1981, 52) suggests 239-242, so about ten years later.

G. Joussard<sup>31</sup> and R.E. Heine<sup>32</sup> regard the difference among the two texts as depending on the difference among their Latin translators, Jerome and Rufinus; H. Crouzel supposes that this difference depends on their different polemical contexts,<sup>33</sup> hardly antidocetic in *HLc* 14,3-8; only C. Vagaggini grasps a common theological premise in both texts, *i.e.* the idea of the preexistence of the soul, though he also insists on their contradiction.<sup>34</sup>

On basis of these scholars' remarks, the contradiction among *HLc* 14,3-8 and *HLv* 8,2-3 consists in the fact that in the former text Origen declares that Mary, after Jesus' birth, needs purification, *i.e.* she gets a *sordes* which seems to deny her virginity, in the latter he clearly distinguishes Mary's supernatural, virginal conception and birth from natural conception and birth. Nevertheless, if these two texts are examined more carefully, they result not to be contradictory. As previously pointed out, in the XIV homily on *Luke* the *sordes*, *i.e.* the filth which not only Mary is affected with since Jesus' birth, but also Jesus himself at his own birth, does not deny her virginity: in fact her *sordes* consists in bearing the preexistent soul of Christ in a human body, as well as Jesus' *sordes* consists in his coming from his divine preexistence into the world.<sup>35</sup> Neither the *sordes* nor the *reseratio vulvae* deny

31 G. Joussard, *Marie à travers la patristique: Maternité divine, virginité, sainteté*, in H. du Manoir (ed.), *Maria. Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, vol. 1, Paris 1949, 81.

32 R.E. Heine (ed.), *Origen. Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Washington DC 1971, 34-35.

33 H. Crouzel, *La théologie mariale d'Origène*, 32-33.

34 C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 83-87.

35 *HLc* 14,6: *explentur dies et mystice. Neque enim statim, ut nata fuerit anima, purgatur, nec potest perfectam in ipso ortu consequi puritatem; sed sicut scriptum est in lege; 'Si masculum peperit, septem diebus sedebit mater in sanguine immundo ac deinde triginta tribus in sanguine puro, et ad extremum ipsa et infans sedebunt in sanguine purissimo' (Lv 12,2-4), sic quia 'lex spiritalis est' (Rm 7,14) et 'umbram habet futurorum bonorum' (Hb 10,1), possumus intellegere purgationem veram nobis evenire post tempus: *SCh* 87,224.*



Mary's virginity, namely she had no union with a man. Moreover, in the VIII homily on *Leviticus* Origen comments on *Lv* 12,2 by submitting two *quaestiones*. The first has been above mentioned: if a woman has conceived seed and born a child man, she is unclean; though Mary has born Jesus, she has not conceived seed; then, Mary is not unclean.<sup>36</sup> This argument may be sketched as following:

Premise 1	<i>if</i> a woman has conceived seed and born a child man, <i>then</i> is unclean	<i>if</i> A and B, <i>then</i> C
Premise 2	Mary has not conceived seed	<i>not</i> A
Conclusion	Mary is not unclean	<i>not</i> C

Thus, Origen's conclusion of the first *quaestio* is that Mary is not unclean also according to Jewish law, though she born Jesus. As uncertain about this argument's validity, the Alexandrian immediately submits a second *quaestio*: Jewish law states that a woman is unclean, if she has *either* conceived seed *or* born a child man; though Mary has not conceived seed, she has born a child man; then, Mary is unclean.<sup>37</sup> This argument, which seems to accord to Stoic logic,<sup>38</sup> may be

36 See again: *HLv* 8,2: *SCh* 287,12.

37 *HLv* 8,3: *nunc ergo requiramus etiam illud, quid causae sit, quod mulier, quae in hoc mundo nascentibus ministerium praebet, non solum, cum 'semen suscepit, immunda' fieri dicitur, sed et cum 'peperit'. Unde et pro purificatione sua iubetur offerre 'pillos columbinos aut turtures pro peccato ad ostium tabernacoli testimonii' (Lv 12,6), ut 'repropiet pro ipsa sacerdos', quasi quae repropitiationem debeat et purificationem peccati pro eo, quod nascenti in hoc mundo homini ministerium praebuit: SCh 287,14.*

38 About Origen relationship with Stoic logic see: L. Roberts, *Origen and the Stoic logic*, «Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association» 101 (1970), 433-444; J. Rist, *The importance of Stoic logic in the 'Contra Celsum'*, in H.J. Blumenthal, R.A. Markus (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in honour of A.H. Armstrong*, London 1981, 64-78; R.E. Heine, *Stoic logic as handmaid to exegesis and theology in Origen's 'Commentary on the*

sketched as following:

Premise 1	<i>if</i> a woman has conceived seed and born a child man, <i>then</i> is unclean	<i>if</i> A <i>and</i> B, <i>then</i> C
Premise 2	Mary has born a child man	B
Conclusion	Mary is unclean	C

His conclusion is now exactly the contrary of the previous argument: Mary is unclean, and this uncleanness, *immunditia*, reminds of that *sordes* which occurs in *HLC* 14,3-8. Nevertheless, Origen does not suggest any explanation of this *immunditia*, namely *sordes*, but he explicitly alerts that he can't say anything about this mystery.<sup>39</sup> Once again he does not clearly explain the meaning of this *immunditia* *sordes*, but he implies that it is strictly related to the event of birth, according to the biblical quotations mentioned by him:<sup>40</sup> in fact, in

*Gospel of John*, «Journal of Theological Studies» 44/1 (1993), 90-117; R. Somos, *Strategy of argumentation in Origen's 'Contra Celsum'*, «Adamantius» 18 (2012), 200-217; Id., *Is the handmaid Stoic or Middle Platonic? Some comments on Origen's use of logic*, in M. Vinzent (ed.), *Studia Patristica. Vol. LVI*, Leuven 2013, 29-40; Id., *Logic and argumentation in Origen*, Münster 2015, 141-206.

39 *HLv* 8,3: *Ego in talibus nihil audeo dicere, sentio tamen occulta in his quaedam mysteria contineri et esse aliquid latentis arcani, pro quo et 'mulier, quae conceperit ex semine et pepererit, immunda' dicatur et tamquam peccati rea offerre tubeatur hostiam 'pro peccato' et ita purificari: SCh 287,14-16.*

40 Origen also warns that the saints generally curse the day of their birth, and only the sinners, e.g. the Pharaoh and Herod, use to celebrate the day of their birth; see: *HLv* 8,3: *Et ut scias esse in hoc grande nescio quid et tale quod nulli sanctorum ex sententia venerit, nemo ex omnibus sanctis invenitur diem festum vel convivium magnum egisse in die natalis sui, nemo invenitur habuisse laetitiam in die natalis filii vel filiae suae; soli peccatore super huiusmodi nativitate laetantur. Invenimus etenim in Veteri quidem Testamento Pharaonem, regem Aegypti, diem natalis sui cum festivitate celebrantem (Gen 40,20), in Novo vero Testamento Herodem (Mk 6,27). Uterque tamen eorum ipsam festivitatem natalis sui profusione humani sanguinis cruentavit: SCh 287,16.*

*Jer* 20,14-16 the prophet curses the day of his birth, and also Job in *Jb* 3,1-6 and David in *Ps* 50(51),7.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the *immunditia*, or uncleanness, which is assigned to Mary in *HLv* 8,2-3 according to Jewish law and which Origen relates to the event of birth on basis of some Old Testament quotations, results that *sordes* which the Alexandrian himself assigns to Mary in *HLC* 14,3-8 and refers to Jesus' birth. Both the *immunditia* in the VIII homily on *Leviticus* and the *sordes* in the XIV homily on *Luke* mean the filth of Mary who is responsible for bearing Christ's preexistent soul in a mortal body. As also C. Vagaggini has realized,<sup>42</sup> this results the common topic among the two texts.

With respect to the above mentioned contradiction among *HLC* 14,3-8 in which the *sordes nativitatis* seems to deny Mary's virginity and *HLv* 8,2-3 in which her virginity is preserved, on basis of the previous analysis it is likely to argue: a. neither the *sordes* nor the *reseratio vulvae* which occur in the former text deny Mary's virginity; b. not only the *sordes* in the former text is the same as the *immunditia* in the latter, but also they both denote Mary's filth which consists in bearing Christ's preexistent soul in a human body.

### The allegorical meaning of Mary's virginity

Apart from those five main texts on Mary's virginity, there are many texts in which Origen suggests also an allegorical meaning of it. Scholars have usually regarded Mary as image of the *anima progrediens*, namely the soul who is in search for the spiritual sense of the Holy Scripture, on basis of her fear for missing Jesus in *Lk* 2,44,<sup>43</sup> or even

41 See: *HLv* 8,3; *SCh* 287,16-20.

42 See: C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 86-87. Nevertheless, he does not solve the above mentioned contradiction among the two texts.

43 *HLC* 19,5: *Quomodo tu, si quando scripturas legis, quaeris in eis sensum cum dolore quodam atque tormento, non quo scripturas errasse aut peperam quid habere arbitreris, sed quod illae intrinsecus habeant veritatis sermonem atque rationem, et tu*

as an incredulous soul who is astonished at Jesus' death, according to Simeon's prophecy.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, there are at least two main texts in which the Alexandrian clearly suggests to interpret Mary's virginity as the pureness through which the soul bears Christ in herself.

As E. Dal Covolo has recently pointed out,<sup>45</sup> the first text consists in Origen's remarks to Mary's *Magnificat*, in the VIII homily on *Luke*, particularly within his exegesis of *Lk* 1,46-47 («My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior»). As he wonders in his explanation of *Jn* 13,31-32,<sup>46</sup> the Alexandrian submits the *quaestio* whether and how the Lord, who is source of glorification, may be glorified by Mary's soul. He answers that, as better is the image of a king which is created by a painter, more glorified is the king himself who is painted, so purer and more saint is the soul, who is the image of the

*nequeas invenire, quod verum est: ita et illi quaerebant Iesum, ne forte recessisset ab eis, ne relinquens eos ad alia transmigrasset et, quod magis puto, ne revertisset ad caelos, cum illi placuisset, iterum descensurus: SCh 87,276. On this topic see: C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 157-162.*

44 *HLC* 17,7: *Et hoc est, quod nunc Simeon prophetat dicens: 'et tuam ipsius animam', quae scis absque viro peperisse te virginem, quae audisti a Gabriele: 'Spiritus sanctus veniet super te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi' (Lk 1,35), 'pertransibit' infidelitatis 'gladius' et ambiguitatis mucrone ferieris, et cogitationes tuae te in diversa lacerabunt, cum videris illum, quem Filium Dei audieras et sciebas absque semine viri esse generatum, crucifigi et mori et suppliciiis humanis esse subiectum et ad postremum lacrimabiliter conquerentem atque dicentem: 'Pater, si possibile est, pertranseat calix iste a me' (Mt 16,39): SCh 87,258. About this text see: L. Longobardo, *Una spada ti trafiggerà l'anima. L'interpretazione di Lc 2,35 in Origene, «Asprenas»* 36 (1989), 224-232. See also: C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 162-170.*

45 E. Dal Covolo, *Omelia VIII: Il 'Magnificat' di Maria*, in M. Maritano, E. Dal Covolo (eds.), *Omellerie sul Vangelo di Luca. Lettura origeniana*, Rome 2011, 17-26.

46 See e.g.: *CIO* 32,26,328: ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ δοξάζομενος ὑπὸ τίνος δοξάζεται, ζητήσεις ἐν τῷ ἐδοξάσθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ ὑπὸ τίνος; ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ ὁ θεὸς ἐδοξάσθη ἐν αὐτῷ: *SCh* 385,328. On this see: E. Prinziavalli, *Discorsi della cena. La glorificazione del Figlio dell'uomo (CIO 32,318-400)*, in M. Maritano, E. Dal Covolo (eds.), *Commento a Giovanni. Lettura origeniana*, Rome 2006, 147-151.

image of God, *i.e.* Christ, more glorified is Christ himself, of whom the soul is the image. In fact, if the soul is the image of Christ, who is image of God, then purer is the soul, more she participates in Christ, *i.e.* more Christ himself is glorified by her.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Mary whose soul glorifies the Lord means the soul whose pureness and holiness glorify Christ, image of the soul: as Mary, who is a pure and saint virgin, accepts the announcement of the birth of Jesus and bears him, so the individual soul who becomes pure and saint glorifies in herself Christ, *i.e.* bears Christ in herself. Furthermore, Mary's virginal conception and birth of Jesus are allegory of the individual, saint soul who participates in Christ, *i.e.* bears him in her own pureness and holiness.<sup>48</sup>

The second text in which Mary's virginal conception and birth of Jesus mean the soul's conception and birth of Christ in herself is within Origen's exegesis of *Song* 2,3 («I desired his *shadow*, and sat down») in the III book of his *Commentary on the Song*. Here the Alexandrian quotes *Lam* 4,20 («Under his *shadow* we would live among the Nations») and *Lk* 1,35, where Gabriel tells Mary: «The power of the Most High will *overshadow* you», and explains that as both in Jere-

47 *HLc* 8,2: *Si considerem Dominum Salvatorem 'imaginem esse invisibilis Dei' (Col 1,15) et videam animam meam factam 'ad imaginem conditoris' (Gen 1,27), ut imago esset imaginis – neque enim anima mea specialiter imago est Dei, sed ad similitudinem imaginis prioris effecta est – tunc videbo, quoniam in exemplum eorum, qui solent imagines pingere, et uno, verbi causa, vultu regis accepto ad principalem similitudinem exprimendam artis industriam commodare, unusquisque nostrum, ad imaginem Christi formans animam suam, aut maiorem ei aut minorem ponit imaginem, vel obsoletam vel sordidam, aut claram atque lucentem et respondentem ad effigiem imaginis principalis. Quando igitur grandem fecero imaginem imaginis, id est animam meam, et magnificavero illam opere, cogitatione, sermone, tunc imago Dei grandis efficitur, et ipse Dominus, cuius imago est, in nostra anima magnificatur. Et quomodo crescit Dominus in nostra imagine, sic si peccatores fuerimus, minuitur atque decrescit: *SCh* 87,164-166. On this topic see again: C. Vagaggini, *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, 152-156. See also: W. Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*, Tübingen 1931, 120.*

48 See: H. Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, Paris 1956, 148-158.

miah and in the episode of the annunciation the shadow is allegory of Christ who allows the Nations to save and Mary to bear Jesus,<sup>49</sup> so the shadow under which the Church/soul, namely the bride, desires to sit is allegory of Christ, namely the bridegroom, who gives her eternal life.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Mary's virginal conception and birth of Jesus under the shadow of the Lord is such compared with the bride, *i.e.* the Church/soul, who joins the bridegroom, *i.e.* Christ, under his own shadow, that Mary herself who bears Jesus Christ allegorically means the perfect Church/soul who bears Christ in herself, namely participates in him.

Finally, there is also a text in which, though Mary's virginal conception does not mean the perfect soul's conception of Christ, she is concerned as the mother of the perfect soul. It occurs within Origen's exegesis of *Jn* 19,26, where Jesus says to her mother: «Woman, here is your son!», with reference to John the Evangelist:<sup>51</sup> here Origen ex-

49 See *CCt* 3,5,11: *Ait Hieremias in Lamentationibus: 'Spiritus vultus nostri Christus Dominus comprehensus est in corruptionibus nostris, cui diximus: in umbra eius vivemus in gentibus'* (*Lam* 4,20). *Vides ergo quomodo Spiritu sancto propheta permotus vitam de umbra Christi praeberi gentibus dicit; et quomodo non vitam nobis praebeat 'umbra eius', cum et in conceptu corporis ipsius ad Mariam dicatur: 'Spiritus sanctus veniet super te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi'* (*Lk* 1,35). *Si ergo obumbratio fuit Altissimi in conceptu corporis eius, merito umbra eius vitam gentibus dabit: SCh* 376,530.

50 *CCt* 3,5,12: *Et merito sponsa eius ecclesia 'sub meli umbra sedere concupiscit', sine dubio ut vitae quae est in umbra eius particeps fiat. Reliquorum vero lignorum silvae umbra talis est ut qui sederit sub ipsa 'sedere' videatur 'in regione umbrae mortis'* (*Mt* 4,16): *SCh* 376,530.

51 *CIo* 1,4,23: καὶ τηλικούτων δὲ γενέσθαι δεῖ τὸν ἐσόμενον ἄλλον Ἰωάννην, ὥστε οἰονεῖ τὸν Ἰωάννην δειχθῆναι ὄντα Ἰησοῦν ὑπὸ Ἰησοῦ. Εἰ γὰρ οὐδεὶς υἱὸς Μαρίας κατὰ τοὺς ὑγιῶς περὶ αὐτῆς δοξάζοντας ἢ Ἰησοῦς, φησι δὲ Ἰησοῦς τῇ μητρὶ Ἰδε ὁ υἱός σου καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰδε καὶ οὗτος υἱός σου, ἴσον εἶρηκε τῷ Ἰδε οὗτός ἐστι Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγέννησαν. Καὶ γὰρ πᾶς ὁ τετελειωμένος ζῆν οὐκέτι, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῷ ζῆν Χριστός, καὶ ἐπεὶ ζῆν ἐν αὐτῷ Χριστός, λέγεται περὶ αὐτοῦ τῇ Μαρίᾳ Ἰδε ὁ υἱός σου ὁ Χριστός: *SCh* 120,70-72.

plains that, if the perfect soul accesses the knowledge of Christ and participates in Christ, as John does, then Mary is the mother not only of Jesus, but also of John and, thus, every perfect soul like him. Hence, Mary is the mother of the perfect soul, namely the soul who such deeply participates in Christ that she also becomes Christ himself according to *Gal* 2,20. This topic recalls the definition of Mary as ‘mother of virgins’, which occurs in some *Gospels of Infancy*,<sup>52</sup> or as the virgin who has been educated in the Holy of Holies, that both in Gnostic texts, e.g. the *Gospel of Philip*,<sup>53</sup> and in Origen’s *Commentary on the Song*<sup>54</sup> corresponds to the perfect soul who has already accessed the bridal chamber and introduces the other souls, i.e. the *progreddentes*, to her.

52 *Prot.Jas.* 11,1; *Ps.-Mt* 9,1. See also: (Arm.) *Gos.Inf.* 5,13. About Origen’s use of non-canonical texts see: A. Van den Hoek, *Clement and Origen as Sources on ‘Noncanonical’ Scriptural Traditions during the Late Second and Earlier Third Centuries*, in G. Dorival, A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana sexta. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum (Chantilly, 30 août-3 sept. 1993)*, Leuven 1995, 93-113; Ead., *Divergent Gospel Traditions in Clement of Alexandria and Other Authors of the Second Century*, «Apocrypha» 7 (1996), 43-62. See the above note 12.

53 *Gos.Phil.* 61, 76, 87. On Valentinian background of this Gospel: H.M. Schenke, *Das Evangelium nach Philippus: Ein Evangelium der Valentinianer aus dem Funde von Nag-Hammadi*, «Theologische Literaturzeitung» 84/1 (1959), 1-26; E. Pagels, *The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip Revisited*, in B.A. Pearson (ed.), *The Future of Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 1991, 442-454. In *Gos.Phil.* 122 the soul can access the bridal chamber, in which the bride and the bridegroom are, only if she becomes the bridegroom himself: this reminds of Origen’s idea that the soul can access the knowledge of Christ only if she becomes like John, namely she participates in Christ as he does. On this topic see: G. Strathearn, *The Valentinian Bridal Chamber in the Gospel of Philip*, «Studies in the Bible and Antiquity» 1 (2009), 83-103. See also: Clem. Alex., *exc. Th.* 64: *SCh* 23,186.

54 See e.g.: *CCt* 2,5,3: *SCh* 375, 356; 3,14,13: *SCh* 376,664; 3,14,20: *SCh* 376,667-668. About this see in general: G. Lettieri, *Origene interprete del ‘Cantico dei Cantici’*. *La risoluzione mistica della metafisica valentiniana*, in L.F. Pizzolato, M. Rizzi (eds.), *Origene maestro di vita spirituale*, Milan 2001, 141-186.

### Conclusion

The collection of the main texts regarding Mary's virginity and its allegorical meaning in Origen suggests three general conclusions:

- according to the Alexandrian, Mary's virginity is significant in the sense that she had union with a man neither before nor after Jesus's birth;
- particularly with respect to *HLC* 14,3-8 and *HLV* 8,2-3 he attributes to Mary a *sordes nativitatis* or a *immunditia* which consists in bearing the preexistent soul of Christ into a human body;
- with regard to the allegorical meaning of Mary's virginity, in at least two texts Origen conceives her as the soul who has achieved such a spiritual perfection and participation in Christ that she becomes Christ himself, namely she bears him in herself.