



The person of Holy Virgin Mary in Christianity and in Qu'ran (*Koran*)
La persona de la Virgen María en el Cristianismo y en el *Corán*
A pessoa da Virgem Maria no Cristianismo e no *Alcorão*

Eirini ARTEMI¹

Abstract: The Holy Virgin Mary or Theotokos is a very significant person for Christians. She is the mother of the enfleshed (sesarkomenos) Son of God. Theotokos thus refers to the Incarnation, when the Second Person of the Holy Trinity took on human nature in addition to his pre-existing divine nature, this being made possible by the cooperation of Virgin Mary. Theotokos is not only the mother of God, but the mother of every Christian. The Christians and mainly Orthodox and Roman Catholics think that the Virgin is a very significant part of their religion, of their life. Christians do not “worship” the Virgin Mary. They “venerate” her and show her great honor. She has the all-merciful power of driving away from us, at her sign, the sub-celestial spirits of evil—those ever-vigilant and ardent sowers of enmity and malice among men. She is the highest of all creatures, the Mediatrix for the whole race of mankind. Strive to train everyone in the spirit of humility, for she was humbler than any mortal, and only looks lovingly upon the humble. The Quran, the holy book for Muslims honor holy Virgin Mary too. Muslims think that Virgin Mary is the mother of Prophet Christ. For them, Christ is not God. The Archbishop of Albania Anastasios who was teaching about the religion of Muslims supports that Muslims honour Holy Virgin more than some Christian Confessions of Protestants and some “christian” heresies as Jehovah witness. Also, it is indicative of this honorary position, which in the Quran the name of Mary is found in 33 out of 114 chapters (sura). The 33 chapter is devoted to Mary. Of course in this paper, we will examine the texts of the Holy Scriptures for the Theotokos, and the texts of Quran for Her.

¹ MA & PhD of Theology. Bas of Theology and Classical Philology. Member of Orthodox Archdiocese of Athens and all Greece. *E-mail:* eartemi@theol.uoa.gr.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

Resumen: La Virgen María, *Theotokos*, es una persona muy importante para los cristianos. Ella es la madre del Hijo de Dios encarnado (*sesarkoméno*s). Así *Theotokos* se refiere a la Encarnación, cuando la Segunda Persona de la Santísima Trinidad tomó naturaleza humana, además de su preexistente naturaleza divina, lo cual se hizo posible por la cooperación de la Virgen María. *Theotokos* no solo es la madre de Dios, sino la madre de todos los cristianos. Los cristianos, y sobre todo los ortodoxos y los católicos romanos, piensan que la Virgen Santa es una parte muy importante de su religión, de su vida. Los cristianos no le hacen “culto” a la Virgen María. Ellos la “veneran” y la honran. Ella tiene el poder misericordioso de alejar de nosotros, a su signo, los espíritus sub-celestes del maligno, esos malos siempre vigilantes y ardientes sembradores de la enemistad y la mala voluntad entre los hombres. Ella es la más alta de todas las criaturas, la Mediadora para todo el género humano. Ella se esfuerza por capacitar a todos en el espíritu de humildad, porque fue más humilde que cualquier mortal, y solo mira con amor a los humildes. El Corán, libro sagrado de los musulmanes, también honra a la Virgen María. Los musulmanes piensan que la Virgen María es la madre del profeta Cristo. Para ellos Cristo no es Dios. El arzobispo de Albania Anastasios, que enseñaba sobre la religión de los musulmanes, sostiene que los musulmanes honran a la Virgen Santa más que algunas confesiones cristianas protestantes y algunas herejías “cristianas”, como los testigos de Jehová. Además, es indicativo de esa honrosa posición que en el Corán el nombre de María se encuentra en 33 de los 114 capítulos (sura). El capítulo 33 está dedicado a María. Por supuesto, en este artículo vamos a examinar los textos de las Sagradas Escrituras sobre la Madre de Dios, y los textos del Corán sobre ella.

Keywords: Virgin Mary – *Theotokos* – Christianity – Qu’ran.

Palabras-clave: Virgen María – *Theotokos* – Cristianismo – Corán.

ENVIADO: 21.12.2015

ACEPTADO: 06.03.2016

Introduction²

There are very few people in the whole world that they are honored by million people for their virtues, their character and their life. Some of them are admired of their words and their important way of life. There is one person in the whole world, who appeared only few times in the public life and spoke

² This paper was presented in the 3rd International Research Conference “The World of Islam: History, Society, Culture”, 22-24 October 2014, Moscow, Russian.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3* (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

only four, according to the Holy Bible of Christians.³ This person is the holy virgin Maria. For Christians, she is the mother of Christ, the enfleshed Word. She became the bridge that Christ came in the world to bring reconciliation between man and God. Because of Her, the second person of the Triune God became real man and remained real God.

According to Christian tradition and the Holy Bible, Holy Virgin Mary, Theotokos, played an important role in the incarnation. The devout face of the mother of Christ has central position in the mystery of our salvation, because she served the incarnation of the Son of God with her holiness and with her volition.⁴ She is the “great wonder in heaven; the woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars”.⁵

In Qu’ran’s tradition Mary is a respectful person, the mother of the prophet Jesus. She is very righteous and her son Christ was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. Mary is one of the most honored figures in Muslim history, with the majority of Muslims viewing her as one of the most righteous women to have lived, and a minority viewing her as an actual female prophet.⁶

Although these two religious trace their roots to Abraham and both honour the holy Virgin Mary with own way each other. For Christians, Mary the mother of Jesus a chaste and pious human woman who gave birth to Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Triune God, the Son of God, and at the same time “fully” God Almighty in every respect. On the other hand, for Islam a chaste and pious human woman who was chosen, purified, and preferred over all of the women of creation to be the one to give birth to Gods elect messenger Jesus through the command of God without any father whatsoever.

³ Lk. 1:26-38, in the Annunciation of the Holy Virgin. Lk. 1:46-55 during the visit to Elizabeth.

⁴ Kallistos Ware, Bishop of Diokleias, “Image of the human freedom”, *Vimothiro*, 1 (2009-2010) 42-46, p. 42.

⁵ Revelation 12:1.

⁶ Amira El-Azhary Sonbol ed., *Beyond The Exotic: Women's Histories In Islamic Societies*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2005, p. 402



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

I. Maria, the mother of God for Christians

For Christians, believing Mary to be the Theotokos (Greek, “God-bearer”) or Mother of God, is an area of agreement with Catholics, most of Protestants and Orthodox. If Jesus Christ is truly God, then Mary is truly the Mother of God. But there are some people who are sometimes horrified when the Virgin Mary is referred to as the Mother of God of Christians.

A woman is a man’s mother either if she carried him in her womb or if she was the woman contributing half of his genetic matter or both. Mary was the mother of Jesus in both of these senses; because she not only carried Jesus in her womb but also supplied all of the genetic matter for his human body, since it was through her –not Joseph– that Jesus “was descended from David according to the flesh”.⁷ Since Mary is Jesus’ mother, it must be concluded that she is also the Mother of God: If Mary is the mother of Jesus, and if Jesus is God, then Mary is the Mother of God. There is no way out of this logical syllogism, the valid form of which has been recognized by classical logicians since before the time of Christ.⁸

In Bible, there is less information about the life of Holy Virgin Mary. But there are significant reports to her face. The Church depends heavily on its Tradition other than Holy Scripture, Ecumenical Councils, liturgical books, and the writings of the Fathers, for details and the precise definition of the nature of the veneration of the Virgin Mary, there are several passages of the New Testament that really form the basis for Christians’ practice.⁹

In the Old Testament, she is indirectly referred as the woman that her “seed” would be threat for the devil: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”.¹⁰ It is the first promise of a Redeemer. It is the beginning of a long line of prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. The Promised One would be from the woman’s seed an indication of the eventual

⁷ Rom 1:3.

⁸ Eirini Artemi, “Cyril of Alexandria’s critique, of the term *Theotokos* by Nestorius Constantinople”, *Acta Theologica* 32(2) (2012) 1-16.

⁹ Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South, “The veneration of the Virgin Mary in the Orthodox Church”, *The Dawn*, Newspaper of the Diocese of the South Orthodox Church in America 2007, p. 4.

¹⁰ Gen. 3:15.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3* (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

virgin birth of Christ. So, the Holy Virgin Mary was part of the pre-eternal salvation of the human race. Mary's life and role in the history of salvation is prefigured in the Old Testament, while the events of her life are recorded in the New Testament.

In Old Testament, besides the promise of God to Adam and Eve about the Redeemer, many other prophets spoke about her. Isaiah argued about the virginity of the woman that she would give birth of Immanuel, God be with us¹¹, Christ the enfleshed God. This prophesy was verified in the Immaculate Conception through the words of the archangel Gabriel to Mary.¹² For this reason, the evangelist Matthew explain in his gospel that the birth of Christ was happened according to the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophesy: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us".¹³

In another book of the Old Testament, "Ezekiel", is written that "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut".¹⁴ Expounding these words, St. Ambrose of Milan explained that Mary is the gate through which Christ entered this world, when He was brought forth in the virginal birth and the manner of His birth did not break the seals of virginity.¹⁵ "The gate is closed because Mary is a virgin; she is a gate, because Christ has entered through her... This gate faces east, because she has given birth to him who rises, the sun of justice... Mary is the good gate that was

¹¹ "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel", Is. 7:14.

¹² "And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end". Lk. 1:30-33.

¹³ Matt. 1:21-23.

¹⁴ Ezek. 44:2-4.

¹⁵ Ambrose of Milan, *The Consecration of a Virgin and the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, 8:52, PL 16, 330.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3 (2015/2)*

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

closed and was not opened. Christ passed through it, but did not open it”.¹⁶ The same things as explanation for the prophesy of Ezekiel for Theotokos, are underlined by another father of the Church St. Hieronymus: “Some quite emphatically understand this closed gate through which only the Lord God of Israel passes ... as the Virgin Mary, who remains a Virgin before and after childbirth. In fact, she remains always a Virgin, in the moment in which the Angel speaks with her and when the Son of God is born”.¹⁷ And in another work Hieronymus added that Only Christ opened the closed doors of the virginal womb, which continued to remain closed, however. This is the closed eastern gate, through which only the high priest may enter and exit and which nevertheless is always closed.¹⁸

In the book of psalms, psalm 44 (45) there is the prophesy of David about the Holy Virgin Mary. David says: “Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him”.¹⁹ Athanasius the great explained this phrase of the psalm in his epistle to Marcellinus and underlined that the word “daughter” is referred to Theotokos and it has the same meaning with the vocative case of the name Maria that the angel Gabriel used to speak to Mary.²⁰ The only difference being that Gabriel addressed Mary by an epithet, because he is of another race from her, while David fitly calls her his own daughter, because it was from him that she should spring.²¹

Finally, in the proverbs of Solomon, the King of Israel said many women obtained cosmic power, money, honor but one (the mother of Christ) excel them all. All the others were in vain, but the woman who feared the Lord, she shall be praised.²² The Holy Virgin had an incomparable purity and chastity and immaculate virginity. She represents the humanity with which God wants to open dialogue respecting fully the gift of freedom that gave it from the first time of its creation.

¹⁶ Ibid. 8:57, PL 16, 334.

¹⁷ Heironymus, *Commentarium in Evangelium Lucae*, PL 25, 430.

¹⁸ Heironymus, *Dialogus contra Pelagianos* 2, 4.

¹⁹ Psalm 44 (45): 10-11.

²⁰ Lk. 1:28-30.

²¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *To Marcellinus on the interpretation of the Psalms*, PG 27, 16B.

²² Prov. 31:29-30.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3* (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

In the New Testament, there are some details about the representative of the human race with God. Also for the life of the Holy Virgin, we accept the text of the apocryphal gospel of Apostle James or Protoevangelium of James.²³ According to the story found in this book, Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, were childless for many years. They remained faithful to God, but their prayers for a child were unanswered. One day, when Joachim came to the temple to make an offering, he was turned away by the High Priest who chastised him for his lack of children. To hide his shame, Joachim retreated to the hill country to live among the shepherds and their flocks.

As Joachim was praying, his wife Anna was praying at the same time at their house in Jerusalem. An angel appeared to both of them and announced that Anna would have a child whose name would be known throughout the world. Anna promised to offer her child as a gift to the Lord. Joachim returned home, and in due time Anna bore a daughter, Mary. This girl was devoted to serve God. According to this Tradition, the Virgin Mary was taken – presented– by her parents Joachim and Anna into the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem as a young girl (3 years), where she lived and served as a Temple virgin until her betrothal (almost 13years) to St. Joseph. Holy Virgin Mary was in constant prayer while she was in the temple. She was praying all the day and angels took care of her and her food.²⁴

When She became thirteen the priests of the temple chose Joseph for her fiancé, after God's illumination. Joseph according to the gospel of James was eighty years old. He was widower and had seven children. This man was elected by God to protect Mary, until the time of the birth of enfleshed God, Christ, came. Under the protection of Joseph, Mary had a “father” for her child in the eyes of the other people.²⁵ So Joseph, the righteous man²⁶, became the earthly father of Jesus Christ.

²³ The Gospel of James, is known as the Infancy Gospel of James or the Protoevangelium of James. It is an apocryphal Gospel probably written about the half of the second century, 150 AD. It is the oldest source to assert the virginity of Mary not only prior to but during (and after) the birth of Jesus. Cf. Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the fathers of the church: the Blessed Virgin Mary in patristic thought*, Ignatius Press 1999, pp.35-41.

²⁴ Protoevangelium of James, 2-7.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Matt. 1:19.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3* (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

In the New Testament and mainly in the gospel of Luke, Mary appeared to accept the visit of angel Gabriel. In the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Annunciation of Our Lady. Gabriel informed Her that she would conceive and become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, marking his Incarnation. Gabriel told Mary to name her son Jesus, meaning “Saviour”.²⁷ Theotokos had the objection of how such a conception could take place, because She didn’t see not a man.²⁸ After Gabriel’s explanation to her objection, She accepted God’s will with humiliation: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”.²⁹

Later, the holy Virgin appeared in the house of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. There, she recognized the great honour that she had from God:

My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.³⁰

In other fact, the holy Virgin asked the twelve-year-old Jesus, where he was, because she was anxious about Him.³¹ Then She appeared and spoke for the last in the wedding of Cana. She asked Christ to turn water into wine. And then She advised one of the servant to do whatever her Son asked.³² In the whole New Testament except these four times that we argurd, the holy Virgin Mary, most of the times, was near Her Son silently. She saw Her Son on the Cross with saying anything, and she suffered the pain.

According the Tradition of Orthodox and Roman Catholics, Mary lived fifteen years after the death of Her Son. She was living as a nun. When she

²⁷ Lk. 1:26-38.

²⁸ Lk. 1:34.

²⁹ Lk. 1:38.

³⁰ Lk. 1:46-55.

³¹ Lk. 2:48.

³² Jo. 2:3, 2:8.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3 (2015/2)*

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

realized that she was time for her death. She blessed people who were around Her and died, but as the hymns says: “In failing asleep you did not forsake the world”.³³ By this words, it is cleared that for Christians and mainly for the Orthodox Greeks the Holy Virgin Mary is the pained mother, the comforter and the protector, who stands by us in every circumstance and pray for us to her Son.

In the end it should be underlined that Panagia (most holy above all saints) is a holy figure for Greeks not only because she gave birth to Jesus but because worshipers have connected Her with the Greek nation’s freedom during some hard times, apart from the miracles recorded in many personal cases as well. So Greeks thank the Virgin Mary for her aid in some of the woes they faced.

The best known and most significant historic event occurred in 626, when Constantinople was besieged by the Avars while Emperor Heraclius and his troops were campaigning against the Persians in Asia Minor. The icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa was carried along the battlements in a procession headed by the son of the absent Emperor and Patriarch Sergius (610-638). The Avars raised the siege and the saving of the City was attributed to the direct intervention of the Mother of God. The entire population gathered at the church with the famous icon and in an all-night vigil they sang standing the Akathistos Hymn in praise of the Virgin Mary.

In modern times, Panagia helped Greeks to defend the enemies successfully during the two world wars. Every Greek mother pray to Her and ask health and happiness of her Child. Theotokos is the mother of All, so everyone trusts her, his dreams, his prayers, his sadness, his happiness. She listens carefully to everyone’s prayer and she begs her son for us.

To God and the Savior you’ve given birth; I ask you, O Virgin, From the dangers deliver me; For now I run to you for refuge, With both my soul and my reasoning. Now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

II. The use of the term *Theotokos for the mother of Jesus by Christians*

Through the disobedience of Eve, death and sin were introduced to the world, but through the obedience of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God, the

³³ Kontakion for the dormition feast of Theotokos.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

Theotokos, the Son of God overthrew the power of the devil and liberated us from sin. *Theotokos* is a powerfully evocative term which belonged to the “language of devotion”. The word “Theotokos” is Greek and literally means “God-bearer”, although in more general terms it can be taken to mean “Mother of God”. Mary is the *Theotokos*, the one who gave birth to God. This single word sums up the meaning of Luke’s phrase: “Mother of the Lord”³⁴ and represents a counterpoint to John’s teaching that the “Word was made flesh”.³⁵ Usually the term *theotokos* is translated into English as “Mother of God”. However, Greek-speaking Christians also used the equivalent *Meter Theou*. The latter form offers a more comprehensive vision of Mary’s motherhood in line with a personalist point of view. The Fathers of the Church saw in this name, Theotokos, a compendium of the Church’s faith in the Incarnation.³⁶

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries we find the term Theotokos for the Holy Mother in the texts of Ignatius of Antioch. He had created the concept of Mary as God-bearer when he wrote in his second epistle to John that the Mother of Jesus was honorable, affable, and aroused wonder in all people who came in Jerusalem, and all wished to see her. The Virgin bore the true God. Also in his letter to Ephesians, he underlined that Mary is glorified as the Mother of God and the Virgin is full of grace and virtue. She is joyful in troubles and persecutions, does not grieve in poverty and want, and not only does not get angry with those who offend her but does good to them still more... because our enfleshed God (sesarkomenos), Jesus Christ, was carried in Mary’s womb”.³⁷

Some years later another patristic writer of the Church, Origen used the term Theotokos. According to the early Church historian Socrates Scholasticus, Origen defended the term Theotokos –God-bearer or Mother of God– in a commentary on Romans a full two centuries before the Council of Ephesus defined the term.³⁸ Origen underlines that the name Mariam is the name of Mary, who will be called Theotokos.³⁹ In another passage of the Homily on

³⁴ Lk 1:43.

³⁵ Jn 1:14.

³⁶ J. Saward, *Christ is the Answer: the Christ-Centered Teaching of Pope John Paul II*, Alba House, New York 1995, p. 65.

³⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistula ad Ephesios*, XVIII, 2, PG 5, 560B.

³⁸ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 32, 2.

³⁹ Origen of Alexandria, *Homily on Luke*, fragment 26,1, 41,1, 33, 2.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

Luke's gospel, Origen supports that the seeds of David are the ancestors of Mary, Theotokos, and of Christ.⁴⁰ Origen also in the first volume of his Commentaries on the apostle's epistle to the Romans, gives an ample exposition of the sense in which the term Theotokos is used.⁴¹

More problematic seems to be the evidence of the use of the term Theotokos by Gregory the Wonderworker (213-270), the most disciple of Origen. Indeed, it is not known who wrote the oration for Annunciation. This text which uses the specific term is attributed to either Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-390) or an unknown writer of the 5th century. But in no case in a Cappadocian Fathers.⁴²

Some years later the term Theotokos is used by Alexander of Alexandria underlines that "our Lord Jesus Christ assumed flesh in reality (not by illusion) from Mary the Theotokos unto the end of the ages and came unto the race of men to destroy sin". The way that the term is used declares that it was a common word for the mother of Christ that period of time.⁴³ Alexander tried to defend the teaching of Arians with the use of the term Theotokos, and with his whole theology.

His successor in the throne of Alexandria, Athanasius the great uses the word *Theotokos* in his teaching against Arianism too. This characterization for Virgin Mary always arises in his Christological context declares that Christ was truly man, homoousios to God and coeternal to Father.⁴⁴ Athanasius used this term only a few times to show that Arius' falsehood for the Christ. The latter was the only real and coeternal God with the Father.

On the other hand, a Cappadocian Father, the Basilus the Great uses the noun Theotokos for Mary a lot of times in his writings to show that Mary

⁴⁰ Origen of Alexandria, *Homily on Luke*, fragment, 7.

⁴¹ Origen of Alexandria, Commentary in Romans, I, 1. 5. See Socrates *Scholasticus*, *Ecclesiastic History*, 7, 32, 2.

⁴² F. Winkelmann, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum, qua optimae quaeque scriptorum patrum graecorum recensioes a primaevis saeculis usque ad octavum commode recluduntur*, vol. I: *Patres Antenicani Patres antenicani, schedulis usi quibus rem paravit*, Turnhout 1983, p. 243.

⁴³ F. Mercenier, «L'antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne», *Le Muséon* 52 (1939), p. 233.

⁴⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four discourses against Arians 3: 29. On the incarnation of the Word* 8, 2-3; 19,5 and 37,3.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

gave birth truly God and truly man.⁴⁵ Through his works, Theotokos is presented as an honorable temple of God and a shrine made pure, and a golden altar of whole burnt offerings. By reason of her surpassing purity [she is] the Divine incense of oblation, and oil of the holy grace, and a precious vase bearing in itself the true nard; [yea and] the priestly diadem revealing the good pleasure of God, whom she alone approach the holy in body and soul.

Basilus' favorite friend, Gregory the Theologian in his Letter to Cledonius says the following: "Whoever does not accept Mary as the Theotokos is godless. And whoever asserts that God the Word passed through the Virgin as one passes through a tube, and, consequently, He was not formed inside her simultaneously in a divine and human manner –in a divine because there was no mediation of a man, and in a human manner because He was no subjected to the law of gestation– is equally godless".⁴⁶

Epiphanius of Cyprus, in his attempt to exalt the Theotokos who is above all exaltation, underlines with emphasis the following: "How can I call blessed the glory which is the root of all glory, given that she is above all, except God, and that she is better than the Cherubim and the Seraphim and every other Angelic order? No language is sufficient for this, neither in heaven nor on the earth, and not among the Angels, since they, too, offered hymns and praise, honor and glory, but did not succeed to speak commensurable with her worth".⁴⁷

Another Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa uses the term Theotokos to distinguish the holy Virgin from other women. In his Epistle 3, 19-24, he explains that the word of *theotokos* is incompatible with that of anthropotokos. The explanation of the differences between the terms theotokos and anthropotokos, we can say, that there is an early response to the falsehoods of Nestorius in the fifth century.

In fifth century, Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, rejected Nestorius' of Constantinople blasphemy that Holy Virgin is only Christotokos and not

⁴⁵ Basilus of Caesarea, Sermons, 39, PG 85, 425, 3, 34, 44. 428, 43, 16. 429, 23. 448, 5, 28. 429,23. 436,8. 437, 50. 441, 38, 47. 449, 18, 27. 452,6. Basilus of Caesarea, *De vita et miraculis sanctae Theclae libri ii*,

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Epistle to Cledonius*, 101,5.

⁴⁷ Epiphanius of Cyprus, Panarcion 78.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

Theotokos. Nestorius supported that Mary gave birth of a man, Jesus Christ, who was not identical with the Son but personally united with the Son, who lived in him, was one hypostasis and one nature: human. Cyril stressed that the Only-begotten Word of God was incarnate and made man: That was, taking flesh of the holy Virgin, and having made it his own from the womb, he subjected himself to birth for us, and came forth man from a woman, without casting off that which he was; butal though he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in essence and in truth.⁴⁸

He was a perfect man with a body (*sarx*) and a soul (*nous*), and he was borne by the Virgin Mary. It was obvious that the holy Virgin Mary did not give birth to a common man in whom the Word of God dwelt⁴⁹, lest Christ be thought of as a God-bearing man. For all this, the holy Virgin should be called Theotokos and She is Theotokos.⁵⁰

Theotokos is the most important person after Christ in Christianity. She is thought as the mother of all Christians, for this reason many temples are devoted to them, because it is said during the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great: “All of creation rejoices in you, O full of grace, the ranks of Angels and the human race; hallowed Temple and spiritual Paradise, glory of Virgins; from you God was incarnate, and He, who is our God before the ages, became a little child. for He made your body a throne and made your womb more spacious than the heavens. All of creation rejoices in you, O full of grace; glory to you!”.

⁴⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, PG 77, 109C

⁴⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, PG 77, 112A.

⁵⁰ Eirini Artemi, “The Virgin Mary, *Theotokos*, and Christ, true God and true man. The mystery of Incarnation according to Cyril of Alexandria” *Mirabilia* 17 (2013/2) 52-74, Jun/Dez 2013/ISSN 1676-5818. Eirini Artemi, “The rejection of the term Theotokos by Nestorius Constantinople and the refutation of his teaching by Cyril of Alexandria”, *De Medio Aevo* 2 (2012 / 2) ISSN-e 2255-5889, σελ. 125-149. <http://capire.es/eikonimago/index.php/demedioaevo/article/view/55/96>. See. E. Artemi, Cyril of Alexandria's critique of the term Theotokos by Nestorius Constantinople, *Acta Theologica* 2 (2012) 1-16, *Acta theologica* vol.32, no.2, Bloemfontein Dec.2012, University of the Free State, Print version ISSN 1015-8758.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

III. The position of Holy Mary in Qu'ran (*Koran*)

Mary was honoured by Muslims as mother of Jesus, Isa. Muslims believe that Jesus peace be upon him according to the Holy Quran is a wonderful, humble, generous messenger of God who came down and revealed God's words to his people, the people of Israel. Muslims do not believe that Jesus is God, nor they believe that God ever chose to come down to earth in a form of a man to die for human beings' sins to purify them and forgive them. So the Holy Virgin is the mother of one the prophet, but not of God of Son.⁵¹

The Qur'an speaks of Mary, who is called Miriam in Arabic, not only as the mother of Jesus, but as a righteous woman in her own right. There is even a chapter of the Qur'an named for her.⁵² The third chapter in the Quran is named after her father, Imran.⁵³ Chapters Mariam and Imran are among the most beautiful chapters in the Quran. Of the Quran's 114 suras, she is among only eight people who have a chapter named after them. Mary is specifically mentioned in the Quran, alongside Asiya, as an exemplar for all righteous women.⁵⁴ Mary is the only woman specifically named in the Quran. The Virgin Mary plays a very significant role in Islam. She is an example and a sign for all people. Mary's father is called Amran –Imran in Arabic– in tradition and is the equivalent of Joachim in Christian tradition. Her mother is called Anne –Hannah in Arabic–, which is the same name as in Christian tradition, Saint Anne.

⁵¹ Quran 3:59. The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He (Allah) created him (Jesus) from dust. Then, he said to him: Be. And he was". After a description of the high position which Jesus occupies as a prophet, we have a reputation of the dogma that he was Allah, or the son of Allah, or anything more than a man. If it is said that he was born without a human father, Adam was also so born. Indeed Adam was born without either a human father or mother. As far as our physical bodies are concerned, they are mere dust. In Allah's sight Jesus was a dust just as Adam was or humanity is. The greatness of Jesus arose from the Divine command "Be", for after that he was. He also was a great spiritual leader.

⁵² Quran 19.

⁵³ Quran 3: 35-37.

⁵⁴ Quran 66: 11-12: "And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh: Behold she said: «O my Lord! Build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong; And Mary the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants)»".



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars 3* (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

In the Quran, it is supported that Mary's mother, Hannah, dedicated her into Allah when she was in her mother's womb.⁵⁵ By this way the baby would serve only the Creator as a scholar or religious teacher. Of course, Mary's mother was hoping that the baby would be a boy. Delivering a female child, she realized that things did not go according to her plan, but decided to fulfill her vow, and Maryam was the name of the child. And she made a prayer for her newly born asking God to protect her and her offspring from Satan, "I have named her Mariam, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from Satan, the Rejected".⁵⁶ So the name Mariam literally means "maidservant of God".

Although Hannah wanted to have a boy to serve God, Mary was accepted by God, and was brought up in a good manner after she was put under the care of Zachary. Through her devotion and righteous upbringing and the prayer from her mother, Mary became the best woman to ever live as depicted in the Quran in the verses: "“And (remember) when the angels said: ‘O Maryam (Mary)! Verily, Allah (God) has chosen you, purified you (from polytheism and disbelief), and chosen you above the women of the world (of her lifetime)’”".⁵⁷

This is from Allah. Verily, Allah provides sustenance that He wills, without limit. So her Lord accepted her with good acceptance. He made her grow in a good manner under the care of Zachary. Every time he entered Al-Mihrab in the praying place to visit her, he found her supplied with sustenance –food.⁵⁸

The Qu' ran speaks about is described how the pious Virgin Mary is visited by angel Gabriel, who appears before her in a form of a man. Not knowing who he is, she fears for herself, but he asserts to her that he is an angel, a Messenger from her Lord, and announces to her news of her miraculous conception of a son. In shock, she questions, affirming her chastity. The angel answers that such a conception, though miraculous, is easy for The Lord, all

⁵⁵ The mother of Mary, said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate into Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: So accept this of me: For Thou hearest and knowest all things", Quran 3:35.

⁵⁶ Ibid 3:36.

⁵⁷ Ibid 3:42.

⁵⁸ Zachary said: "O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you?' She said: "From God. for God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure". Upon hearing Mary's answer, "There did Zakariya pray to his Lord, saying: 'O my Lord! Grant unto me from Thee a progeny that is pure: for Thou art He that heareth prayer!", Quran 3: 37- 38.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

He needs to say is “Be.” and it is. And that these are matters decreed by Him, for greater purposes and to the benefit of mankind.⁵⁹ And the miracle happened, Mary’s miraculous conception.

In the chapter 19th of the Qu’ran, the story of her pregnancy and the birth of Jesus are described. When the time of giving birth of Jesus came, Mary, driven out of town, out of sight to Bethlehem valley 4-6 miles from Jerusalem, in the pain of labor, and in fear of what is going to happen to her. It is her first child, she has no husband. She was wondering what would her neighbors the Jews, say and do for her baby which had no father. How would she react? With all that, she wished that she was dead, but the God who gave her the miracle, the God to Whom she worshipped, to Whom she devoted her life, did not forsake her. A voice came from beneath her, soothing and comforting her, and guiding her. And when she gave birth, the voice instructed her not to speak or explain, but make a vow of silence and everything would work out.⁶⁰

After the birth of Jesus, Mary returned to her village with the new born baby. She managed to face up the charges of her neighbors with her silence, as God advised her: “Then she brought him (the baby) to her people, carrying him. They said: ‘O *Maryam!* Indeed you have brought a thing which is greatly evil! O sister of *Haron* - O you who we consider the like of *Haron*, who was a pious man at the time of Mary- Your father was not a bad man (adulterous), nor was your mother an unchaste woman”. Then she pointed to him (to the baby). They said: “How can we talk to one who is a child, in the cradle?”⁶¹

Finally, we can say that there is a great respect for Mary into Quran. The respect comes from the acceptance of her virginity, her pious character and the miraculous way of pregnancy and birth of Jesus, one of the prophets in Islam. Mary receives the most attention of any woman mentioned in the Quran even though all the Prophets with the exception of Adam had mothers.

Conclusions

It is undoubtful that for all of the esteem and honor which Muslims and Christians have for Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her role in separate ways of

⁵⁹ Ibid 19: 16-21.

⁶⁰ Ibid 19: 22-27.

⁶¹ Ibid 19: 27-29.



SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ, José María (org.). *Mirabilia Ars* 3 (2015/2)

Ars moriendi. Ideas, ritos e imágenes de la muerte

Ars moriendi. Ideias, ritos e imagens da morte

Ars moriendi. Ideas, rites and images of death

Jan-Jun 2015/ISSN 1676-5818

prayer. For Christians she is the all-holy “Theotokos”, the mother of God, the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. For Muslims she is the mother of Jesus, the Messiah, “who was no more than God’s apostle and his Word, which he cast to Mary: a spirit from him”.⁶² There are many common references for Theotokos in Qu’ran and in Bible such as the virginity, her annunciation with different promise of the angel Gabriel according Muslims and Christians. For the firsts the promise that was given to Mary was for a pious Messenger of God, Jesus. For the seconds the promise to Mary was about the incarnation of the second Person of the Triune God, Jesus Christ.

Finally, It should be underlined that Holy Virgin is one of the most respectful woman for Muslims and Christians and for this reason Christians can praise to her as:

More honourable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without corruption Thou gave birth to God the Word: True Theotokos, we magnify Thee.

and Muslims also say:

O Mary! Allah has chosen you and purified you – chosen you above the women of all nations.

Let the Holy Virgin Mary praise to God for us and give peace, love to all the world. Then as mother, I beg her to protect all the children of the World to became good and peaceful men and women. Amen.

⁶² Ibid 4:171. W. Keeler, “How Mary Holds Christians And Muslims In Conversation”, *CNS Documentary Service* 25, 36 (1996) 5-10.