



***PORTA CLAUSA ES, VIRGO. EXEGESES ON EZEKIEL'S
PORTA CLAUSA BY SOME LATIN CHURCH FATHERS AND
THEOLOGIANS BETWEEN THE 6TH AND 12TH CENTURIES***

***PORTA CLAUSA ES, VIRGO. EXÉGESIS SOBRE LA
PORTA CLAUSA DE EZEQUIEL POR ALGUNOS PADRES DE LA
IGLESIA Y TEÓLOGOS LATINOS ENTRE LOS SIGLOS VI Y XII***

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ABSTRACT

This paper is limited to highlight a selection of exegetical comments through which, from the 6th century until the 12th, many Latin Church Fathers and theologians deciphered the eastern shut door of the temple (*porta clausa*) revealed by Yahweh to Ezekiel in a prophetic vision. This short study's select set of comments is complemented by a plentiful series of similar comments stated by other Greek-Eastern Church Fathers from the Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, the last series not discussed here. This considerable *corpus* of Greek-Eastern and Latin exegeses constitutes a solid centuries-old dogmatic tradition, according to which this Ezekiel's *porta clausa* is unanimously interpreted by all those Christian authors as a double complementary Mariological and Christological metaphor.

Keywords: Latin Patristics; Mary's divine motherhood; Christ's incarnation; *porta clausa*; Ezekiel.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo se limita a resaltar una selección de comentarios exegéticos a través de los cuales, desde el siglo VI hasta el XII, muchos Padres y teólogos de la Iglesia Latina descifraron la puerta oriental cerrada del templo (*porta clausa*), revelada por Yahvé a Ezequiel en una visión profética. El selecto conjunto de comentarios incluidos en este breve estudio se complementa con una abundante serie de comentarios similares declarados por otros Padres de la Iglesia Greco-oriental desde la Antigüedad tardía hasta la Edad Media, serie esta que no analizamos aquí. Este enorme *corpus* de exégesis greco-orientales y latinas constituye una sólida tradición dogmática pluri-centenaria en la que esa *porta clausa* de Ezequiel es interpretada unánimemente por todos esos autores cristianos como una doble metáfora, según una simultánea y complementaria dimensión mariológica y cristológica.

Palabras clave: Patrología Latina; maternidad divina de María; encarnación de Cristo; *porta clausa*; Ezequiel.

I. INTRODUCTION

During our assiduous consultation of the Christian primary sources, we discovered a growing number of exegeses through which many Church Fathers and medieval theologians interpret the eastern “shut door” (*porta clausa*) of the temple revealed to the prophet Ezekiel as a simultaneous metaphor for Christ and the Virgin Mary. All these Christian thinkers coincide in considering this mysterious shut door as a clear symbol or metaphor that essentially alludes to several crucial Mariological and Christological dogmas.

Stimulated by such a surprising discovery, we set out to register and analyze as many exegetical comments as possible formulated with this double doctrinal projection by the thinkers of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches. Such a purpose resulted in a bountiful harvest of glosses on that prophetic “shut door” expounded in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages by countless Eastern and Western Christianity writers.

From the outset, it would seem evident that these interpretations by Christian thinkers would have arisen as a result of the Christological and Mariological disputes that raged in the Greek-Byzantine East during the 4th and 5th centuries, as a reaction to certain heretical currents, especially those promoted by Nestorius (c. 386-c. 451) and Eutychius of Alexandria (c. 380-c. 456). Nestorius and his followers held that two wholly separate and independent natures—and therefore two different persons—coexist in Christ without a true essential union

in a single person. On the contrary, Eutychius and his followers defended that Christ has only one nature, the divine (monophysitism) because he is not truly human.

To counteract these heterodox positions, in the first half of the 5th century, the Church had to fix the orthodoxy on the condition of Christ and Mary in the three decisive Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus (431), Constantinople (448), and Chalcedon (451), which established the fundamental Christological and Mariological dogmas.

Under the leadership of Saint Cyril of Alexandria (c. 340/43-444), and in direct opposition to the Nestorians, the Council of Ephesus (431) established that Jesus Christ holds two true natures (duophysism), intimately and indissolubly united in one single person, Christ, who is simultaneously true God and true man. From this Christological dogma, the Council of Ephesus deduced, as a necessary inference, the dogma of Mary's divine motherhood: such a dogma proclaims that Mary is not only the mother of Christ-man (*Christotókos* or *anthropotókos*) but that she is the true mother of God the Son incarnate (*Theotokos*). The Council of Constantinople (448) endorsed –against the Monophysitists led by Eutychius— the duophysitism of Jesus, reaffirming that his two real natures, divine and human, are indissolubly united in one person, that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate as a man. Finally, the Council of Chalcedon (451) confirmed all the Christological and Mariological dogmas established by the Councils of Ephesus and Constantinople.

Now, although it could be thought that the anti-heretical debates just discussed were the stimulating motives that provoked these patristic exegeses on the closed door revealed to Ezekiel, this could only be valid for those presented after the three Councils above. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that many decades before those Councils, several Church Fathers from the East and West expressed many comments on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* with a clear Mariological and Christological projection. In our opinion, those early Eastern and Western thinkers took up the original doctrine on the divinity of Christ, which He affirmed in life when proclaiming himself the Son of God, a doctrine that the books of the New Testament established, and that the apostles and disciples (especially Saint Paul) and early Christians reaffirmed with unrestricted faith.

Thus, thanks to such explicit statements by Christ himself and his direct disciples, the hypothesis that, throughout the first three centuries of the Christian era, there have been some Christological interpretations of Ezekiel's *porta clausa* cannot be ruled out, although they have not been preserved or have not

reached us. It is true that the first exegetical testimonies in this regard that we have been able to document so far only dated from the middle of the 4th century. However, nothing invalidates the possibility that other similar exegeses could arise in the previous three centuries. These could have manifested themselves perhaps only as an oral tradition, not expressed in written documents, or have materialized in some manuscripts that we have not yet discovered, or disappeared forever as a consequence of voluntary destruction (heretical reactions) or involuntary ruin (physical-chemical deterioration, floods, fires, ruins, etc.).

Our initial intention was to present all the findings that we obtained on this subject in an integrated way both in the Greek-Eastern and Western exegetes. However, due to the significant restriction in the number of pages required by academic journals in their articles, in the present work we will analyze, by a practical methodological strategy, only the exegeses on the Ezekiel's shut door exposed by the Latin Church Fathers and theologians between the 6th and the 12th centuries.

Therefore, we exclude many other Latin thinkers who, before or after that period of six hundred years, interpreted Ezekiel's closed door in a Christological and Mariological sense. The reason for this double exclusion is because we have already studied in a first article the Latin authors who wrote on the subject in the 4th and 5th centuries;¹ we now also exclude the Latin writers of the late Middle Ages (13th-15th centuries) because they propose –with such conspicuous teachers as Saint Albert the Great, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bonaventure or Duns Scoto, to name just a few— a such deep exegetical density that it is worthy of another exclusive article for those three centuries. In addition, a chapter of our authorship on the same topic was published a couple of weeks ago in a collective book on the origins of Christianity.²

On the other hand, we leave out of our current article the exegeses on Ezekiel's shut door offered by the Greek-Eastern Church Fathers because we have already analyzed them in two previous articles: the first dedicated to the period of the 4th-5th centuries; the second focused on the glosses produced by the

1 José María Salvador-González. "Christian exegeses on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* before the Councils of Ephesus, Constantinople, and Chalcedon", *Konstantinove Listy (Constantine's Letters)* 14/2 (2021): 3-13. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17846/CL.2021.14.2.3-13>

2 José María Salvador-González. "Interpretaciones cristianas sobre la *porta clausa* de Ezequiel y su influencia en algunas imágenes de la Anunciación en los siglos XIV y XV", in *En los albores del cristianismo*, edited by Mercedes López Salvá (Madrid: Rhemata, 2021), 459-476.

Greek-Eastern Fathers from the 5th to the 9th centuries.³ That is why, in the current paper we entirely omit the abundant similar exegeses on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* that we discover in the Greek-Eastern Fathers, among which authors of such high prestige as Ephrem of Syria (c. 307-373), Amphilochius of Iconium (c. 339/340-c. 395/403), Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370/73-444), Proclus of Constantinople (*ante* 390-446), Hesychius of Jerusalem († *post* 450), Theodotus of Ancyra (5th century), Theodoret of Kyros (393-465), Jacob of Serug (c. 451-521), Philoxene of Mabug (c. 440-523), Severus of Antioch (456-538), Romanos the Melodist (c. 485-c. 555/562), Gregory of Antioch († 593), Leontius of Naples (c. 600-c. 670), Theoteknos of Livias (7th century), Germanus of Constantinople (c. 650/60-c. 730/33), Saint Andrew of Crete (c. 660-c. 740), Saint John Damascene (675-749), Saint John of Euboea (8th century), Epiphanius the Monk (9th century), Joseph the Hymnographer (c. 816-886) and Peter of Argos († *post* 922).

Moreover, it is helpful to emphasize that these researches on the exegeses by the Fathers and theologians on the metaphor of Ezekiel's *porta clausa* complement and agree in their scientific interests with other studies that we have done and continue to do on similar Christological and Mariological interpretations given by many Fathers and theologians on other metaphorical expressions, such as *templum Dei*,⁴ *thalamus Dei*,⁵ or *domus Sapientiae*.⁶

Now, before exposing in the current paper the exegeses of the selected Latin writers from the 6th to the 12th centuries on Ezekiel's "closed door", it is necessary to quote the excerpt in which the prophet describes it. Ezekiel tells in his book that, in the 25th year of Jewish people's captivity in Babylon, Yahweh revealed to him the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. By describing minutely

3 José María Salvador-González. "Haec porta Domini. Exegeses of the Greek-Eastern Church Fathers on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* from the 5th to the 10th century", *Cauriensia* XV (2020): 615-633. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.17398/2340-4256.15.615>.

4 On this subject we have published, among others, the article José María Salvador-González. "The temple in images of the Annunciation: a double dogmatic symbol according to the Latin theological tradition (6th-15th centuries)", *De Medio Aevo* 9 (2020): 56-68. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5209/dmae.69014>

5 We have addressed this issue in the article José María Salvador-González. "The bed in images of the Annunciation (14th-15th centuries): An iconographic interpretation according to Latin Patristics", *De Medio Aevo*, 10-1 (2021): 77-93. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5209/dmae.70663>

6 We have discussed this subject in the articles José María Salvador-González. "The house/palace in Annunciations of the 14th and 15th centuries. Iconographic interpretation in light of the Latin patristic and theological tradition", *Eikón Imago* 10 (2021): 391-406- Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5209/eiko.74161>; and "Greek-Eastern Church Fathers' interpretations of *Domus Sapientiae*, and their influence on the iconography of the 15th century's Annunciation", *Imago. Revista de Emblemática y Cultura Visual* 13 (2021): 7-31. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.7203/imago.12.17155>

all parts, measures, ornamentation, and ceremonies that would distinguish the future temple,⁷ Ezekiel points out on its eastern gate the following remarks:

1Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east. And it was shut. 2And the LORD said to me, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it. Therefore it shall remain shut. 3Only the prince may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD. He shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate and shall go out by the same way."⁸

At first glance, the information of the prophet on that unique gate would seem merely factual and inconsequential. But, despite that, from very early many Church Fathers and medieval theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches interpreted this cryptic quotation from Ezekiel in a double key, at the same time Christological and Mariological. All these Christian thinkers assumed that this mysterious Eastern closed door revealed to the prophet constitutes a clear and eloquent double dogmatic metaphor: first of all, a metaphor for Virgin Mary's womb in conceiving and giving birth to the Son of God incarnate (Jesus) preserving her virginity forever, thanks to the divine intervention; secondly, a metaphor for the conception and birth of God the Son incarnate in Mary's virginal womb. In other words, the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers and theologians unanimously interpreted this temple's shut gate as a complementary symbol of both Mary's virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity, as well as of the conception and birth of God the Son made man.

Whatever the circumstances in which they arose, the numerous Christian exegeses on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* flourished for more than a millennium, from at least the middle of the 4th century until the end of the Middle Ages, thus consolidating a unanimous doctrinal tradition, with its double and complementary Christological and Mariological scope. These dogmatic meanings about the miraculous conception of God the Son in Mary's virginal womb, brought to light by this millenarian doctrinal tradition around the figure

7 Ezek. 40-42. In *Biblia de Jerusalén. Nueva edición revisada y aumentada*, edited by José Ángel Ubieta López (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998), 1293-1298.

8 Ezek. 44,1-3. English Standard Version (online). <https://biblehub.com/esv/ezekiel/44.htm> (Last access: June 12, 2021). "Et convertit me ad viam portae sanctuarii exterioris, quae respiciebat ad orientem; et erat clausa. Et dixit Dominus ad me: Porta haec clausa erit; non aperietur, et vir non transibit per eam, quoniam Dominus Deus Israel ingressus est per eam; eritque clausa principi. Princeps ipse sedebit in ea, ut comedat panem coram Domino; per viam portae vestibuli ingredietur, et per viam eius egredietur." (Ezek. 44,1-3. In *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, Nova editio*, 12^a ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2005), 847.

of the “shut gate” of the temple, will be illustrated much later, during the 14th and 15th centuries, through a suggestive iconographic variant of the Annunciation to Mary, in whose scene a shut door appears. It was more than foreseeable such an iconographic representation because the primordial episode of the Annunciation constitutes the high point of the incarnation of God the Son.

That is why it is surprising that such significant exegeses on Ezekiel's *porta clausa*, despite the effusive emphasis with which many influential Christian doctrinal authorities supported it with Mariological and Christological meanings, have had a slight echo among modern authors. In fact, these exegeses have been silenced or eluded by many scholars of the history and doctrine of Christianity, such as Alfred Vacant, Eugène Mangenot & Émile Amann,⁹ Giuseppe Pizzardo & Pio Paschini,¹⁰ Fernand Cabrol & Henri Leclerq,¹¹ or José C.R. García Paredes,¹² as well as by experts in symbols, such as Georges Ferguson,¹³ Hans Biedermann,¹⁴ Michel Feuillet,¹⁵ or Udo Becker,¹⁶ and most iconographers, as Émile Mâle,¹⁷ Louis Bréhier,¹⁸ Louis Réau,¹⁹ André Grabar,²⁰ and Gertrud Schiller,²¹ including those specialized in Marian iconography, such as Maurice Vloberg,²² Philippe Verdier,²³ or Dominique Iogna-Prat, Éric Palazzo & Daniel Russo.²⁴ Such silence or omission is likely explained by a certain inability of

9 *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, edited by Alfred Vacant, Eugène Mangenot & Émile Amann (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1898-1950), 30 vols.

10 *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, edited by Giuseppe Pizzardo & Pio Paschini (Città del Vaticano: Ente per l'Enciclopedia Cattolica e per il Libro Cattolico, 1948-1954), 12 vols.

11 *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, edited by Fernand Cabrol & Henri Leclerq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1924-1954), 12 vols.

12 José C. R. García Paredes. *Mariología* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2015).

13 Georges Ferguson. *Signos y símbolos en el arte cristiano* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1956).

14 Hans Biedermann. *Diccionario de símbolos* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1993).

15 Michel Feuillet. *Lessico dei simboli cristiani* (Roma: Edizioni Arkeios, 2007).

16 Udo Becker. *Enciclopedia de los símbolos* (Barcelona: Swing, 2008).

17 Émile Mâle. *L'art religieux du XIIe siècle en France. Étude sur les origines de l'iconographie du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Armand Colin, 19667 [1924]).

18 Louis Bréhier. *L'art chrétien. Son développement iconographique dès origines à nos jours* (Paris: Renouard-H. Laurens, 1928).

19 Louis Réau. *Iconographie de l'art chrétien. Tome 2, Iconographie de la Bible. Part II, Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957).

20 André Grabar. *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne: Antiquité et Moyen Âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

21 Gertrud Schiller. *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst. Band 4,2, Maria* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher VerlagHaus, 1980).

22 Maurice Vloberg. *La Vierge et l'Enfant dans l'art français* (Paris: Arthaud, 1954).

23 Philippe Verdier. *Le couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique* (Paris: Vrin, 1980).

24 Dominique Iogna-Prat, Éric Palazzo & Daniel Russo. *Marie. Le culte de la Vierge dans la société médiévale* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996).

these experts to document that doctrinal tradition with reliable texts, or perhaps because those texts are utterly unknown to them. Thus, as a partial response to this inadvertence on modern scholars, we will intend now to expose some interpretations made by many Fathers of the Latin Church about Ezekiel's *porta clausa* from the middle of the 6th century until the end of the 12th.

II. THE LATIN EXEGETICAL TRADITION ON EZEKIEL'S *PORTA CLAUSA* FROM THE 6TH CENTURY TO THE 8TH

In the second half of the 6th century, Pope St. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) resumed the already well-known parallelism between the birth of Christ of a virgin mother and his appearance, already resurrected, before his disciples in the cenacle. According to this holy author, the body of Jesus that entered through the shut doors of the cenacle where his disciples were sheltering is the same that at birth came out of Mary's closed womb. Therefore, in a suggestive pair of antitheses between living/dying and being born/resurrect, Gregory wonders why one can be amazed if, after resurrecting through the closed doors of the tomb, Christ entered now to live forever, the same who, coming to the world to be killed, came out of Virgin's closed uterus.²⁵

More or less by the same years Venantius Fortunatus (c. 536-610) points out that affirming the birth of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit means that the one was born of God the Father before all ages was born of the Holy Spirit, whose temple was made in the Virgin. And, just as there was no fragility in the sanctification of the divine Spirit, so no cause of corruption (of Mary's virginity) appeared in Christ's birth, since the one who is only One in heaven is also unique (only begotten) on earth, after deigning to enter the world through the (closed) door of the Virgin.²⁶ Venantius goes on to say that while the prophets announced many things about Jesus' conception and delivery of the

25 "Illud enim corpus Domini intravit ad discipulos januis clausis, quod videlicet ad humanos oculos per nativitatem suam clauso exiti utero Virginis. Quid ergo mirum si clausis januis post resurrectionem suam in aeternum jam victurus intravit, qui moriturus veniens non aperto utero Virginis exivit?" (Gregorius Magnus. *Homilia in Evangelia. Liber II. Homilia XXVI.1-7. Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857), vol. 76, col. 1197). Thereafter this collection of Latin Patrology will be cited with the abbreviation PL.

26 "Qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine. Ille qui de Patre ante saecula natus est, postea de Spiritu Sancto, cujus templum in Virgine fabricatum est intelligendum. Nam sicut in sanctificatione spiritus nulla fragilitas exstitit, sic nec in partu ejusdem causa corruptionis apparuit. Qui in coelis unus, in terris unicus, per portam Virginis ingredi mundum dignatus est." (Venantius Fortunatus. *Miscellanea. Liber XI, Caput Primum. Expositio Symboli*. PL 88, 1862, col. 348).

Virgin, he prefers to comment on what Ezekiel said about the temple's eastern shut door in these terms: the Creator of Christ's flesh is the Holy Spirit, in which Christ's majesty is shown, while God of majesty was born in Virgin's flesh without being stained.²⁷ In a hymn in honor of Jesus and Mary, Venantius Fortunatus expresses poetically that the temples of the Creator are the modest members of the Virgin, in which God lives as in his refuge, and that, to the extent that a wife can please because of her virginity, the mother of God pleases precisely for being a virgin (mother).²⁸ And in another poem in praise of the Virgin, he proclaims about her: "This door is closed, through which no man enters or leaves, / But only the Lord, to whom all closed (doors) also open."²⁹

Towards the end of the 6th century or the beginning of the 7th century, St. Isidore of Seville (c. 556-636) interprets Daniel's extract about the cut stone of the mountain without human intervention and the vision of Ezekiel over the closed eastern gate of the temple as symbolic shreds of evidence that confirm that Christ "was born of the Virgin Mary, of whom we believe without any doubt that she was a virgin before giving birth and that after childbirth she remained a virgin."³⁰ Thus, according to the bishop of Seville, this testimony of Ezekiel shows that Mary conceived being a virgin and remained a virgin; and, as the female genitals are called doors because their closings are opened at childbirth, Christ in his birth came out as a husband from his marriage-bed, that is, from

27 "Hinc plurima prophetae de conceptu Virginis et de partu locuti sunt. Unum tamen exemplum pro brevitate proponemus, de quo Ezechiel dixit: Porta quae respicit ad Orientem clausa erit, et non aperietur, et nemo transibit per eam, quoniam Dominus Deus Israel ipse transibit per eam, et clausa erit (Ezek 44, 2). Hoc tamen notandum est, quia Spiritus sanctus est dominicae carnis Creator: Spiritus sancti hinc majestas ostenditur." (Venantius Fortunatus. *Miscellanea*, 348).

28 "Templa Creatoris sunt membra pudica puellae,
et habitat proprius tale cubile Deus.
Quantum sponsa potest de virginitate placere,
ipsa Dei genitrix non nisi virgo placet."

(Venantius Fortunatus. *Miscellanea. Liber VIII. Caput VI. In nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi et Dominae Mariae Matris eius de virginitate*. PL 88, 1862, col. 268-269).

29 "Haec porta est clausa in quam intrat vir nemo nec exit,
ni Dominus solus, cui quoque clausa patent."

(Venantius Fortunatus. *Caput VII. In laudem sanctae Mariae Virginis et matris Domini*. PL 88, 1862, col. 277-278).

30 "Hunc enim vidit Daniel abscissum de monte, id est, de populo Judaeorum, sine manibus, hoc est sine operatione virili, ex Maria virgine natum, quam sine dubio virginem fuisse credimus ante partum, virginem permansisse post partum, Ezechiele propheta testante". (Isidorus Hispalensis. *De fide Catholica contra Judaeos. Liber Primus* X.9. PL 83, 1862, col. 470).

Virgin's womb, after whose delivery Mary did not beget any son through intercourse.³¹

Some three decades later, St. Ildefonsus of Toledo (607-667), in a treatise on Mary's perpetual virginity, reproaches the infidel Elvidius for denying the virginal birth of Christ and the sacred union and integrity of his two natures, divine and human.³² Then he asks him not to vex the dwelling of God (Mary) with the insults of corruption, nor to pretend that anyone can enter through the door of God's house (Mary's womb), which is closed after He came out.³³ Ildefonsus insists emphatically:

The God of virtues is the Lord of this possession [Mary]. The king of heaven is the possessor of this right. The Almighty is the architect of this building. He is the only one who comes out and guards the door of his exit. No one entered with him, and no one came out with him; entering, nobody is his partner, and going out, nobody is his partner.³⁴

After pointing out that no one knew how Christ entered (was conceived) in Mary's womb, while only the exit knows how He came out (was born), the bishop of Toledo asserts that, when conceived, God entered without any dress – a metaphor for “flesh” or “human nature”— the same who, at birth, came out covered with flesh.³⁵ Thus, according to this author, the Son of God came to the house of his work (Mary's womb), and here he clothed himself only with the garment of the flesh (he became incarnate), so that He who entered came out, although He came out in a different condition from that with which He entered; and, upon entering this house (Mary's womb), He did not destroy her modesty

31 “Quo testimonio sanctam Mariam et virginem concepisse et virginem permansisse confitetur. Genitalia namque feminea, pro eo quod claustra partus aperiunt, portae dicuntur [...]. Dominus enim noster Jesus Christus mirabiliter et potentialiter natus, tanquam sponsus processit de thalamo suo, id est, ex Virginis utero, post cujus ortum nullum cum Maria convenisse, nullum ex ejus utero genitum existisse profiteamur.” (Isidorus Hispalensis. *De fide Catholica*, 470).

32 “quid sine reuerentia occurris [Helvidius]? quid sine pudore uexaris? quare uirginis nostrae principia corruptionis fine coartas? quamobrem initia pudoris exitu actae procreationis infamas? cur integritatem diuinitate sacram humana conuentione deturpas?” (Ildefonsus Toletanus. *De uirginitate Sanctae Mariae contra tres infideles, II, Contra Heluidium*. In *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, CXIV A* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 159).

33 Ildefonsus Toletanus. *De uirginitate Sanctae Mariae contra tres infideles, II, Contra Heluidium*. In *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, CXIV A* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 159.

34 “Virtutum Deus est Dominus possessionis huius; caelorum rex est possessor iuris istius; omnipotens est artifex aedificii huius; solus egressor et custos est portae egressionis huius. Nemo cum illo ingressus est, nemo egressus; in adeundo eam nemo socius, in egrediendo nemo sodalis.” (Ildefonsus Toletanus. *De uirginitate Sanctae Mariae*, 159).

35 “Qualiter ingrederit nemo nouit; qualiter egrederit egressio sola cognoscit. Absque ueste Deus, ut ita dicam, ingreditur; qui, ut certe dicam, carne uestitus egreditur.” (Ildefonsus Toletanus. *De uirginitate Sanctae*, 159-160).

(virginity), and upon coming out He enriched her with integrity (making her remain perpetually virgin).³⁶

In that same book Ildefonsus, taking up Ezekiel's vision insists that Mary is the facing East door of the temple and that it will permanently be closed because the locks of her virginity are perfectly intact. In fact, neither before nor after the birth of her son Jesus did she know the access or the passage of any other man, because only the Lord God passed through her at birth, for which she is always closed, for always remaining a virgin.³⁷ And in another excerpt of this treatise, the bishop of Toledo clinches an idea repeated by him and by other interpreters: this door will remain closed, because the lock of the virginity is closed forever so that, according to Ezekiel, God will exit the house of his mother's womb through the door of her virginity, and neither before nor after her childbirth Mary's integrity knows ever again the access of corruption (intercourse).³⁸

Towards the middle of the 9th century, Paschasius Radbertus (c.772-865) reformulated some arguments already consolidated in the interpretive tradition on Ezekiel's prophecy, returning to the triple analogy of the closed doors of the Marian womb, the sepulcher, and the cenacle. In a treatise on the birth of Mary, he points out that Christ at birth "opened" by his power in a prodigious way the vulva of his mother (in the sense of "passing through"); and opened it miraculously to open a path accessible through it, even if He did so in such a way that the uterus remained closed, as the doors of the cenacle were closed by which He entered before his disciples, and as closed and sealed was the grave when He, resurrected, came out of it.³⁹ According to this thinker, this idea is said for understanding that Jesus was born from and passed through the womb of Mary, making himself an accessible path by "opening" her vulva. Still, Christ only "opened" it for himself, because, even if the vulva of Mary was closed, it was

36 Ildefonsus Toletanus. *De uirginitate Sanctae Mariae*, 160).

37 "Haec in Ezechiele domus Dei est, cuius pudoris integerrima claustra, ad orientem consistens porta semper est clausa. Quae neque ante natum, neque post natum hunc filium alterius accessum uel transitum nouit, quia solus ipse Dominus per eam nascendo transiuit. Vnde et semper est clausa, quia semper est uirgo." (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *De uirginitate Sanctae Mariae*, 170-171).

38 "Item iuxta Ezechielem ait ut de hac materni uteri domo per pudoris uirginei portam idem Dominus Deus Israel egrediatur, ac dum nec ante natiuitatem, nec post natiuitatem eius ullum unquam integritas corruptionis nouit accessum; eadem porta sit clausa, quia semper est uirginitatis sera conclusa." (Ildefonsus Toletanus. *De uirginitate Sanctae Mariae*, 189-190).

39 "Hic ergo inquit [Saint Ambrose] *solus sibi aperuit uuluum; nec mirum*. [...] Aperuit siquidem sibi sua potentia mirabiliter, ut esset et peruium iter, ita ut uirgineus clausus maneret uterus sicut fuerunt ianuae clausae, et tamen per easdem ingressus est ad discipulos, sicut etiam *sepulcrum signatum* et clausum quando resurgens egressus est per eum". (Paschasius Radbertus. *De Partu Virginis. Liber Primus*. In *Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Medaevalia LVI C* (Leuven: Brepols, 1985), 81.

manifested to him penetrable, although, after entering the world picking his way through it, He left it closed and sealed with the seal of the virginity.⁴⁰

In another excerpt of the same work, Paschasius Radbertus points out that, when St. Ambrose says that Mary became an accessible door, he refers to the fact that it allowed Jesus to pass through at birth, and, when he says that this door remains closed, he states that it has fulfilled what was announced by the prophets.⁴¹ Thus, Mary could not be called a “closed gate” if her physical integrity suffered any injury; but, as her virginity was not violated in any way, it is evident that Christ was born from a closed womb, just as He entered before his disciples with the doors of the cenacle being closed.⁴² And, as the disciples verified that Jesus appeared before them entering through the closed doors, thus the faith guarantees the certainty that, when Jesus was born, Mary’s bodily integrity was made accessible to him without her uterus being opened.⁴³

III. LATIN INTERPRETATIONS ON EZEKIEL’S *PORTA CLAUSA* FROM THE 10TH TO THE 12TH CENTURY

Towards the middle of the 11th century, St. Peter Damian (1007-1072) avers that, just as the ray is born of the star leaving it intact, so the son Jesus is born of the Virgin, making her virginity inviolable, as Ezekiel announced when he prophesied that the door facing East will always be closed and no one will pass through it.⁴⁴ In another sermon on the Virgin’s Birth, he asserts that Mary is this permanently eastern shut door of the temple, since she is always closed, incorrupt before and after childbirth when conceiving a man (Christ) without intercourse.⁴⁵ Then Peter Damian states that, as Mary remained a virgin when

40 “Non hoc sic dicit, ut intelligas quod contra se sentiat, sed sic utique ut plenissime cognoscas eum de utero et per uterum uirginis natum, quem ipse sibi fecit peruium. Ac per hoc ipse sibi uuluum aperuit. Sibi quidem, quia uulua uirginis licet clausa ei penetrabilis patuit, tamen cum enixus intraret mundum clausam reliquit et signatam sigillo pudoris.” (Paschasius Radbertus. *De Partu Virginis*, 81-82).

41 Paschasius Radbertus. *De Partu Virginis*, 68.

42 “*Clausa* igitur non diceretur, si in aliquo laesa esset eius integritas, sed quia in nullo est uiolatus pudor uirginis, neque *fons* in aliquo *resignatus*, procul dubio patet sensus, quia clauso utero ad nos uenit sicut *ianuis clausis* ingressus est ad discipulos.” (Paschasius Radbertus. *De Partu Virginis*, 68).

43 Paschasius Radbertus. *De Partu Virginis*, 68.

44 “Et sicut radius processit a stella, stella integra permanente; sic filius ex Virgine, uirginitate inuolabili perdurante, secundum quod et propheta Ezechiel inquit: ‘Porta, quam uides, semper erit clausa, et nullus transibit per eam (Ezek. 44).’” (Petrus Damianus. *Sermones. Sermo Primus. In Epiphania Domini (VI Jan.)*. PL 144, 508).

45 “Haec est denique porta illa, de qua Ezechiel testatur, dicens: [...]. Vere semper clausa, quia semper incorrupta. Incorrupta ante partum, incorrupta post partum, concipiens uirum, nesciens uirum”. (Petrus Damianus. *Sermo XLVI. Homilia In Natiuitate B. V. Mariae*. PL 144, 753).

conceiving, she could not experience pain when she gave birth, because whoever was born of her so ineffably did not corrupt the enclosure of her virginity; in short, Christ, coming to a virgin, entered her when He was conceived, and, nevertheless, He left her a virgin when coming out from her at birth.⁴⁶

Three or four decades later, the Benedictine theologian St. Anselm of Aosta (1033-1109), archbishop of Canterbury, poetically echoes the dogmatic thesis studied here when he proclaims in a hymn in honor of the Virgin Mary:

Hail, heavenly door.
Where Emmanuel came from,
Whose light is justice,
And the judgment noon.⁴⁷

Several verses later, he insists:

Hail, heavenly door.
Through which came out
The unique saving joy of God the Father
That was restored to us.⁴⁸

Some thirty years later, the Benedictine theologian Guibert of Nogent (1055-1124), abbot of the Monastery of Nogent-Sous-Coucy, in a book in honor of the Virgin Mary, says that she is the eastern gate of the temple revealed to Ezekiel, by which the God of Israel passed; that is why she is the door by which He reaches us (by incarnating himself as a man), a door through which the city of God (heaven) opens to us, a door facing East that reveals the action of the divine light.⁴⁹ A few lines later, he insists that this way of the door by which

46 “Quae enim Virgo permansit concipiendo, dolorem sentire non potuit patiando. Ille quippe, qui ex ea ineffabiliter prodiit, claustrum virginalis pudicitiae non corrupit. Virginem denique veniens, introivit, Virginem nihilominus exiens, dereliquit.” (Petrus Damianus. *Sermo XLVI. Homilia In Nativitate B.V.Mariae*. PL 144, 1853, col. 760-761).

47 “Ave coelestis janua.

Qua processit Emmanuel,
Cujus lumen justitia
Judicium merities.”

(Anselmus Cantuariensis. *Hymni Et Psalterium De Sancta Virgine Mariae*. PL 158, 1864, col. 1039).

48 “Ave coelestis janua.

Qua Dei Patris unica
processit nobis reddita
Salutaris laetitia.”

(Anselmus Cantuariensis. *Hymni Et Psalterium*, 1040).

49 “Haec [Mary] est apud Ezechielem etiam porta illa, quae respiciebat ad viam orientalem, et ecce gloria Dei Israel ingrediebatur per viam orientalem. O porta, per quam Deus ad nos ingreditur! o porta, qua fidei mysteria relegenduntur! Speciosa, inquam, porta per quam Dei civitas aperitur. Haec respicit ad viam

God passes identifies Mary, and the outer sanctuary signifies her virginity; and the fact that this door is closed indicates that she keeps her purity intact; and that it will not be opened indicates that she does not yield to any seduction, while the affirmation that “God passed through it and it will be closed” shows that the divinity entered her, and at birth, Jesus did not break the seal of her purity.⁵⁰ A couple of pages later, Guibert of Nogent points out that the outer door of the temple refers to the virginal entrance (when being conceived) and exit (when giving birth) of Christ, just as the inner door means the exit (the birth) of the divinity of the Son of God incarnate as a man; and the fact that the Prince (God the Son) entered through the vestibule of the outer door reveals both the substantial union between the divine and human natures, and the truth of the virginal conception of the incarnate Son of God.⁵¹

Some years later, the Benedictine cardinal and abbot Geoffrey of Vendôme (c. 1070-1132), in his first sermon on the Nativity of Jesus, urges to celebrate with joy and faith this wonderful birth, since Mary, after conceiving during the announcement of the angel, gave birth to the Savior through her closed uterus.⁵² This writer emphasizes the fact that, in such a prodigious birth,

a woman conceived without intercourse, was pregnant without the inconveniences of pregnancy, gave birth without pain, and is holy before childbirth, even more, holy in childbirth and most holy after childbirth, the only one who deserved to obtain the joy of motherhood and glory of virginity: from whose chaste viscera God made man came to us.⁵³

In his second sermon for the same festivity, Geoffrey emphasizes that in Jesus’ birth, an exceptional operation occurs, since the same person who was

orientalem, quia quidquid ipsa est, quidquid in ea actum est, nil aliud quam divini luminis indicat actionem.” (Guibertus de Novegento Abbas. *Liber de Laude Sanctae Mariae*. PL 156, 1853, col. 543).

50 “*Converti[t] me ad viam portae sanctuarii exterioris, et erat clausa (Ezech. XLV, 1)*. Via portae consideratio est Mariae; sanctuarium exterius, corporeae virginitatis ipsius decus. Haec clausa est, omnis pudicitiae circumstantia communita: quae non aperitur, quia nulla illi titillationi ex parte discingitur. *Vir non transit per eam (Ibidem, 2)*, quia nulla maritalis intentio cadit in eam. *Dominus Deus ingressus est per eam, eritque clausa principi (Ibidem)*, quia etsi divinitas penetrat matris conscientiam, ipse idem, qui nascendi de Virgine princeps est, non imminuit castitatis custodiam.” (Guibertus de Novegento Abbas. *Liber de Laude*, 544).

51 Guibertus de Novegento Abbas. *Liber de Laude*, 546.

52 “Hodie, dilectissimi, venerabilis et universalis regina angelorum et hominum virgo Maria, quem verbo concepit angelico, clauso utero natum mundo edidit Salvatorem. O cum gaudio et fide admiranda natus!” (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo I. In Nativitate Domini I*. PL 157, 1854, col. 237).

53 “Ecce mulier sine coitu concipit, gravida sine gravitate efficitur, parit sine dolore, virgo sancta ante partum, in partu virgo sanctior, sanctissima virgo post partum, haec sola laetitiam matris simul obtinere meruit, et gloriam virginitatis: de cujus castis visceribus, Deus homo factus ad nos venit, in sinu Virginis matris beata ubera quibus pie nutriebatur dilectione appetere non dedignans.” (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo I.*, 237).

born of a mother without a father in this temporary world was born of Father without a mother in eternity; for He was born of a virgin woman, transgressing with his divine omnipotence the order of nature, and safeguarding the honor of his most chaste mother by preserving intact the seal of her purity and virginity.⁵⁴

In his third sermon on the Birth of Christ, the abbot of Vendôme displays an eloquent antithesis between the birth of humans and that of Christ: according to human law, ordinary people are born with original sin and producing pain and corruption in their mother; instead, Jesus Christ, God, and man, indeed was born according to the human law of a woman, with which He manifested himself as a true man; but He did it even more according to the divine law because He was born without sin and without causing pain or corruption to his mother, through which He manifested himself as true omnipotent God.⁵⁵ The author insists that the Almighty did not find it impossible to create himself as a man of a mother while preserving her virginity. He could and wanted to become a man and be born of a virgin, so that, by becoming man, He could show the reality of his flesh (body), and by preserving the seal of the maternal womb inviolate, He would show his divine omnipotence.⁵⁶

Finally, in his fourth sermon on the Nativity of Jesus, Geoffrey subscribes to the unanimous exegetical tradition on the virtues of the Virgin. He points out indeed that the closed garden and the sealed source of the *Song of Songs*, and the eastern shut door of the temple of the Lord revealed to Ezekiel “is the most beautiful and incomparable Virgin Mary, from whose womb comes the image of God the Father.” He then stresses that Mary, upon receiving the announcement of Gabriel, conceived with loving faith; and, being closed the door of her uterus, gave birth to a son, who is at the same time man in God and God in man, that is to say, God made man.

Shortly afterward, he affirms that Mary, in conceiving with faith and love after the announcement of the angel, gave birth with the closed door of her uterus to a son who in God was a man and in man was God.⁵⁷ Explaining how, in an

54 Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo II. In Nativitate Domini II*. PL 157, 1854, col. 240.

55 Goffridus Vindocinensis- *Sermo III. In Nativitate Domini III*. PL 157, 1854, col. 245.

56 “Nec credendum est impossibile fuisse ei qui omnia potest, et seipsum in matre, et de matre creasse hominem, et matris suae servasse virginitatem. Potuit itaque et voluit Deus et homo fieri, et de virgine nasci, ut per hoc quod factus est homo, veritatem ostenderet carnis: per hoc autem quod inviolato virginitatis sigillo prodiit de matris utero, omnipotentiam divinitatis monstraret.” (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 245).

57 “Illa autem sanctissima terra dedit fructum suum (Psal. LXVI, 7), virgo videlicet Maria, quem angelo nuntiante fide et dilectione concepit, clausa ejus uteri porta peperit filium, in Deo quidem hominem et in homine Deum.” (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249).

unthinkable and ineffable way, “the Word of God became flesh,” Geoffrey of Vendôme adds that the Son of God the Father became the son of a virgin woman, being born at the same time natural and potential: in natural form because Christ was born from the body of his mother the Virgin Mary; but also in possible form, because the doors of the womb of the Virgin remained closed, in such a way that the divine omnipotence preserved in one the human nature (making Christ a true man), and in the other surpassing the human nature (making him born of a virgin mother against natural laws).⁵⁸

A few paragraphs later, Geoffrey contradicts some “fools” who, even claiming that the mother of God kept her virginity before and after the childbirth, affirm that at childbirth the door of her womb was opened, before being closed again after the childbirth, as if in a moment she was a virgin and at another time she lost her virginity.⁵⁹ This author highlights that if you believe this craziness, you contradict the Holy Spirit, who, speaking through Ezekiel, said that “the door in the temple of the Lord is closed and will not be opened.”⁶⁰ The abbot of Vendôme proclaims to believe and confess without any doubt that Mary was a virgin before childbirth, in childbirth, and after childbirth; and that, without opening her vulva and without corruption in her body or her soul, she gave birth to only one person, who is at the same time God and true man.⁶¹

Based on the Catholic faith and the Christian doctrine, Geoffrey repeats once more his previous statement that “the Virgin was holy before childbirth, even holier during childbirth and holiest after childbirth, since the divine intervention was greater in her, the more holiness and religion grew in her.” Then, as a corollary, he infers that the door of the womb of Savior's mother was never opened, but was always closed and sealed, and despite that, the God made man came out through her “as the husband comes from his marriage bed.”⁶² Geoffrey

58 Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249.

59 “Hoc ideo dixerim, quia quibusdam personis ascribitur quod matrem Domini et ante partum et post partum praedicant quidem virginem, sed portam ventris ejus apertam in suo partu, et post partum statim clausam fuisse fatentur, quasi ad horam fuerit virgo, et ad horam perdidit virginitatem. Insanum est hoc dicere, et credere profanum.” (Goffridus Vindocinensis, *Sermo III. In Nativitate Domini III*. PL 157, 249).

60 Goffridus Vindocinensis, *Sermo III. In Nativitate Domini III*. PL 157, 1854, col. 249-250.

61 “Ego autem in Spiritu sancto firmiter credo, et indubitanter profiteor, et ad horam, et ad moram, et ante partum, et in partu, et post partum eam fuisse virginem, et peperisse in una persona Deum et hominem, et sine carnis apertione, et sine corporis et anima corruptione. [...] Sed fieri minime potuit ut nasceretur de virgine homo, nisi ille solus, qui est Deus et homo.” (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249-250).

62 “Nunquam itaque aperta, sed clausa semper et sigillata fuit uteri matris nostri Salvatoris janua, per quam exivit ipse Deus homo, *tamquam sponsus procedens de thalamo* (Psal. XVIII, 6).” (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249-250).

then clarifies that the bodily door, which in all other women opens when the child comes out (being born), only in the mother of the incarnate Son of God, at childbirth and after childbirth, remains closed forever, as the prophet Ezekiel testifies.⁶³ That is why Mary is the worthy house of God, in which her closed eastern door always manifests.⁶⁴ Mary is the temple of God, in which He lived thanks to the sanctification of the divine Spirit and by his human conception, by incarnating as a true man in the truth of his body and of his soul in the womb of the Virgin. And, both when conceived and when being born, the Lord entered and left through that eastern door of the virginal maternal vulva, which, without being opened by him or by any other man, allowed the passage of Christ as if it were really open.⁶⁵

To round off his argument, Geoffrey explains this double wonder of the virginal motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity thanks to God's omnipotence, who created the universe without any difficulty, and who, by his omnipotent power, can revert at will the natural properties of things.⁶⁶ Thus Jesus, in the same way that He entered before his disciples with the doors of the Cenacle closed and locked for fear of the Jews, so He went out through the closed and sealed door of the virginal womb of his mother: with the same divine omnipotence, Christ manifests himself in his resurrection by entering before his disciples through the closed doors of the cenacle, as in his birth leaving through the closed door of the womb of his mother.⁶⁷ Finally, Geoffrey of Vendôme concludes by reiterating his previous claim that God wanted to be conceived and born as a man of a woman so that, when He became a man, He showed the truth

63 "Uterus bonae et beatuae virginis Mariae thalamus dicitur, quia in eo sociata sunt et divinitas carni, et caro nostra divinitati. Vulva mulieris, porta ventris ejus recte dicitur, quia per illam exit homo, et venit in hunc mundum cum ipse nascitur. Quae in aliis quidem mulieribus, prole exeunte, aperitur, in sola autem matre Domini, et eo nascente, et ante, et postea clausa fuisse legitur veraciter, et firmiter creditur, Ezechiele propheta attestante, qui dicit: *Est porta in domo Domini clausa, quae non aperietur* (Ezech. XLIV, 2)." (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249-250).

64 "Honorabilis et praedicabilis femina, digna Deo virgo Maria domus Domini appellatur, in qua porta orientalis clausa semper esse perhibetur." (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249-250).

65 "Recto nomine Maria, domus, id est templum Domini dicitur, quia Deus ipse habitavit in ea, et per sanctificationem Spiritus, et per humanam conceptionem. Servata itaque divinae proprietate naturae, in utero virginis factus est caro, et perfectus homo in veritate carnis et animae, et per portam templi quae respicit ad Orientem, quae nec per se patuit, nec ab alio aperta fuit, processit de virgine matre. Eadem quippe possibilitate vulva suae matris clausa processit, ac si fuisset aperta." (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 249-250).

66 Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 250-251.

67 "Et sicut ad discipulos januis clausis intravit (Joan. xx, 16), licet per ipsas januas clausas, et propter metum Judaeorum etiam obseratas intraverit, ita per illam beatitudinis, et uteri virginalis portam clausam pariter et obseratam exivit, et mundo apparuit, una eademque divinitatis omnipotentia, et ad discipulos clausis januis ingrediens in sua resurrectione, et clausa suae matris uteri porta in sua nativitate egrediens." (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 250-251).

of his human material (flesh), and that being conceived and born of a virgin manifested himself as omnipotent God, creator of the universe.⁶⁸

More or less by the same decades the scholastic philosopher Peter Abelard (1079-1142) exposes in his second sermon on the Nativity that Mary was consecrated in Jesus' birth as a perpetual virgin, like this always eastern shut door of the temple, prophesied by Ezekiel: a Virgin/door through which the Lord entered to us as to his temple, taking in it, when incarnating, our human nature.⁶⁹ This author also assumes the traditional thesis of Mary's perpetual virginity by emphasizing that this door (Mary's womb) remains always closed, and no man will go through it because it will not be the object of any intercourse.⁷⁰ And, in his fifth sermon on Virgin's Purification, Peter Abelard reiterates the already widespread claim that the law of Moses concerning the consecration to God or the rescue of the firstborn male who opens his mother's vulva does not apply to Mary, whose bodily integrity was not broken at the birth of Jesus; for He was born keeping closed his mother's uterus, in the same way that later He entered before his disciples by cenacle's shut doors.⁷¹

Around the same dates, the hymnographer Adam of Saint-Victor († 1146), composer of some fine liturgical songs in Latin, proclaims in a canticle in honor of the Purification of the Virgin: "This [Mary] is that closed door / which was accessible to God while closed / and that He had closed for men."⁷² In another liturgical hymn on the Assumption, he qualifies the Virgin as "Closed door,

68 "Voluit Deus et homo concipi in femina, et homo de femina nasci, ut per hoc quod factus est homo veritatem ostenderet carnis, et in eo quod in virgine homo conceptus est, et homo de virgine natus, se Deum monstraret omnipotentem: qui omnia creavit ex nihilo." (Goffridus Vindocinensis. *Sermo III*, 251).

69 "Haec igitur mulier sexu, sed informitatis ignara muliebris, quae virgo perpetua divino consecrata est partu, porta illa est orientalis semper clausa, quam Ezechiel sibi per Spiritum revelatam describit, dicens: *Porta haec clausa erit, non aperietur, et vir non transibit per eam, quoniam Dominus Deus Israel ingressus est per eam* (Ezek. 44.2). Per hanc quippe Virginem quasi portam quamdam ad nos quasi in templum suum Dominus ingreditur, dum se in ea nostrae copulat naturae." (Petrus Abelardus. *Sermo II. In Natali Domini*. PL 178, 1865, col. 393).

70 "Sed haec eadem porta semper clausa permanet, et vir per eam non transiet; quia nullus virilis coitus. Quae bene porta ad orientem respicere dicitur, secundum quod ipsa orienti congrue comparatur." (Petrus Abelardus. *Sermo II*, 393).

71 "Quod insuper dicitur, *adaperiens vulvam*, nihil ad eam pertinere censetur, cujus integritas nulla est apertione dissoluta. Ille quippe clauso utero matris est natus, qui clausis januis, posmodum ad discipulos est ingressus." (Petrus Abelardus. *Sermo V. In Purificatione Sanctae Mariae*. PL 178, 1865, col. 419).

72 "Haec est illa porta clausa, / Quam latente Deus clausa / Clauserat hominibus." (Adamus S. Victoris. *Sequentiae. XIX. In Purificatione Beatae Mariae*. PL 196, 1855, col. 1485).

source [sealed] of the gardens, / Guardian cell of the ointments, / Cell of the pigments.”⁷³

Not many years later, the German Benedictine philosopher and theologian Honorius Augustodunensis (Honoré d'Autun, 1080-c. 1153) establishes in a discourse on the *Song of Songs* an eloquent parallelism/identification between Mary and the Church. In his opinion, the Virgin manifests herself as the type or model of the Church, because, like Mary, the Church is a virgin and mother at the same time: mother, because, impregnated [like Mary] by the Holy Spirit, she begets daily children for God through baptism; and virgin, because, inviolably preserving the integrity of the faith, it is not corrupted by the evil of heresy.⁷⁴ That is why just as Mary became mother engendering Christ and remained a closed virgin after childbirth, so everything that is written about the Church is in complete agreement with what is said about Mary.⁷⁵ The author states in another paragraph of this treatise that the Blessed Virgin was the door through which Christ entered the world.⁷⁶ A few pages later, he reiterates that the perpetual Virgin is the door through which, being closed, the King of Heaven entered the world towards us.⁷⁷ Then, in writing about Mary's Purification, Honorius Augustodunensis points out that Ezekiel prophesied the Virgin Mary full of grace when the Spirit of God led the prophet to a mountain, where he saw the building of the future temple of the city and its eastern door that would remain forever closed because only the King of Kings had passed through it.⁷⁸ This thinker then asserts that the city seen by the prophet in the mountain is the Church that firmly trusts in Christ, while the never open door of the temple is

73 “Porta clausa, fons hortorum,
Cella custos unguentorum,
Cella pigmentaria.”

(Adamus S. Victoris. *Sequentiae. XXV. In Assumptione Beatae Virginis*. PL 196, 1855, col. 1502).

74 “Gloriosa virgo Maria typum Ecclesiae gerit, quae virgo et mater exstitit, etiam mater praedicatur, quia Spiritu sancto fecundata, per eam quotidie filii Deo in baptisate generantur. Virgo autem dicitur, quia integritatem fidei servans inviolabiliter, ab haeretica pravitate non corrumpitur.” (Honorius Augustodunensis. *Sigillum Beatae Mariae Ubi Exponuntur Cantica Cantorum*. PL 172, 1854, col. 499).

75 “Ita Maria mater fuit Christum gignendo, virgo post partum clausa permanendo. Ideo cuncta quae de Ecclesia scribuntur, de ipsa etiam satis congrue leguntur.” (Honorius Augustodunensis. *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, 499).

76 “Sacra namque Virgo ostium fuit, per quod Christus in mundum introivit.” (*Ibidem*, 509).

77 “Porta est perpetua Virgo, per quam clausam Rex coelorum ad nos intravit in mundum.” (Honorius Augustodunensis. *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, 513).

78 “De hac Virgine omni gratia plena praedixit Ezechiel propheta. Hunc prophetam Spiritus Domini in montem duxit, ubi quasi aedificium civitatis fuit, et ibi portam perenni clausura obseratam conspexit. Et sic Dominus ad eum dixit: *Porta haec in perpetuum clausa erit, et solus Rex regum per eam transiverit (sic) (EZECH. XLIV).*” (Honorius Augustodunensis. *Speculum Ecclesiae. In Purificatione Sanctae Mariae*. PL 172, 1854, col. 849).

the Mother of God: for, without ever having intercourse, only Christ passed through her at birth, leaving her closed with perpetual virginity.⁷⁹

Honorius Augustodunensis changes later the focus because, after emphasizing the privilege of Mary as a *closed* door for her perpetual virginity, he highlights the privilege of Mary as an *open* door in her salvific role as co-redeemer and mediator. This idea is proclaimed by this German theologian by ensuring that the Virgin manifests herself as the door of heaven (*ianua coeli*), always open to all who live piously, and through which the penitents and those who wish to reach Christ have access to eternal life.⁸⁰ Finally, in a speech on the Annunciation, after repeating the well-known fact that Ezekiel saw the door always closed by which only the King of Kings passed, leaving it closed, this German writer avers that the Virgin Mary is the door of heaven, that she was a virgin before the childbirth and in the childbirth, and that after the childbirth she remained a virgin.⁸¹

Around the same years, the influential Cistercian reformer St. Bernard (1090-1153), abbot of Clairvaux, takes up in his third sermon on Mary's Purification the well-known thesis, already turned into a dogmatic statement in official Christian thought: the aforementioned Mosaic Law demanding to consecrate God the firstborn male who opens his mother's vulva is not applicable to Mary, because, as Jeremiah prophesied, she conceived and gave birth to a son without human intervention; that is why her bowels remained intact and pure, as Ezekiel prefigured it by saying that "the Lord enters and leaves, and the eastern gate is permanently closed."⁸²

79 "Civitas quam propheta in monte vidit est Ecclesia quae in Christo firmata confidit. Porta nunquam aperta est sancta Dei Genitrix, nunquam virile consortium experta. Per quam solus Rex regum Christus nascendo in mundum transivit, et perpetua virginitate clausam reliquit." (Honorius Augustodunensis, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, 849).

80 "Haec eadem Virgo scribitur coeli porta omnibus pie viventium semper aperta. Per hanc habent transitum ad vitam paenitentes et cuncti Christum adire cupientes." (Honorius Augustodunensis, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, 849).

81 "Ezechiel quoque portam semper clausam, vidit, per quam solus Rex regum transivit et clausam reliquit (*Ezech.* XLIV). Sancta Maria est coeli porta quae ante partum et in partu virgo fuit et post partum virgo permansit." (Honorius Augustodunensis. *Speculum Ecclesiae. In Annuntiatione Sanctae Mariae*. PL 172, 1854, col. 905).

82 "Patet itaque quod lex ista Matrem Domini non includit, quae, non suscepto semine, filium peperit [...]. Non ab altero viro virum suscipiet, non humana lege concipiet hominem, sed intra viscera intacta et integra virum claudet, ita sane ut, intrante et exeunte Domino, iuxta alium Prophetam, porta orientalis clausa iugiter perseveret." (Bernardus Claraevallensis. *In Purificatione Sanctae Mariae. Sermo Tertius* 1. In *Obras completas de San Bernardo. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. III. *Sermones litúrgicos (1º)* (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1985), 380).

A few decades later, the Scottish mystic theologian Richard of Saint-Victor (c. 1110-1173), prior of the Augustinian abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris, paraphrases several quotations from the Old Testament that prefigure the Virgin Mary: in this sense, he expresses that Mary is the tree that burns without being burned (like the burning bush of Moses), the procreated star of Jacob, the announcer of the true Sun (Christ), the door always closed, only accessible to the King (revealed to Ezekiel), but she is also the ark of the covenant, carried on the shoulders of David and translated with great joy.⁸³

Some years later, Peter Cellensis (c. 1115-1183), bishop of Chartres, reiterates the already consolidated thesis that the Virgin Mary, the only woman who pleased God the Father and deserved to be the Mother of her divine Son, “is the door through which Christ entered into this world for our redemption, and she is the Virgin through whom we find God and man [in Christ].”⁸⁴

A couple of decades later, the French poet and diplomat Peter of Blois (1135-1204), recalling still other biblical formulas, exalts the joys of the Virgin Mary for being “the beloved of the Lord, preannounced by the prophets, desired by the patriarchs, greeted by the angel [Gabriel], fecundated by the Holy Spirit,” which “is meant prophetically in the rod of Aaron, in the fleece of Gideon, in the door of Ezekiel, in the burning bush of Moses.”⁸⁵ It “means that Mary is fruitful without intercourse, is pregnant without discomfort and gives birth without pain, as she is also the door of life, the beauty of the virgins and at the same time friend of the eternal God.”⁸⁶

In short, from the ideas exposed in this paper, it is possible to deduce that for more than eight centuries (from the 6th century until at least the 12th), many Fathers and theologians of the Latin Church –in perfect parallelism and total

83 “Haec est arbor inflammata, sed comburi nescia, stella Jacob procreata, veri solis nuntia, porta semper obserata, soli regi pervia, sed et arca foederis, alata David humeris, magno translata iubilo.” (Richardus S. Victoris. *Explicatio In Cantica Canticorum*. PL 196, 1855, col. 522).

84 “virgo Maria [...] sola placuit Deo Patri, ut Filii sui mater fieri mereretur; sola sine exemplo placuit Christo, ut ex ea nasceretur et Spiritui sancto, ut ejus templum fueret et eo repleretur [...] ex qua pro nobis Salvator nasci dignatus es. Haec est porta per quam Christus ingressus est mundum ad nostram redemptionem, et haec est Virgo per quam reperimus Deum et hominem”. (Petrus Cellensis. *Sermo LXVII. De Assumptione B. Mariae Virginis I*. PL 202, 1855, col. 848-849).

85 “Delicias in Virgine voco, quia est a Domino praelecta, et prophetis praenuntiata, a patriarchis optata, ab angelo salutata, a Spiritu sancto fecundata: quod in virga Aaron, quod in vellere Gedeonis, quod in Ezechielis porta, quod in rubo Moysi praesignata”. (Petrus Blesensis. *Sermo XXXIII, In Assumptione beatae Mariae*. PL 207, 1855, col. 662-663).

86 “sine corruptione fecunda, sine gravamine gravida, sine dolore puerpera, quod ipsa est vitae janua, quod virginum primiceria, quod simul est Dei aeterni amica. Non miretur angelus si assumatur in splendore et gloria Mater Dei et ancilla, soror et sponsa, mater et filia.” (Petrus Blesensis. *Sermo XXXIII*, 662-663).

agreement with Greek-Eastern Church Fathers— interpreted the biblical figure of Ezekiel's *porta clausa* in simultaneous Christological and Mariological terms.

As a logical consequence, based on the solid foundation of the centuries-old patristic and theological tradition on Ezekiel's shut door, some liturgical texts dedicated to the Virgin Mary echoed this suggestive biblical metaphor. Without wishing to exhaust in this sense the catalog of liturgical excerpts, the author proposes only a couple of examples. Thus, an Advent Responsory expresses:

A long time ago, Ezekiel prophesied: I saw a closed door; and behold, the eternal God passed through it to save the world: And it was again closed, thus showing the Virgin [Mary], because after the childbirth remained a Virgin. The door you saw, only the Lord will go through it.⁸⁷

In the same way, the medieval anthem *Ave Regina Coelorum* (c. 12th century)⁸⁸ praises the Virgin Mary in these terms: *Salve radix - salve porta / Ex qua mundo - lux est orta.*⁸⁹ (Hail root [of Jesse] – hail door [of Ezekiel] / From which light – was born to the world.)

Similarly, a prayer recited *In Missa sanctae Mariae or In sanctae Mariae solemnitate* urges to celebrate the sacred privilege of Mary,

in whom chastity remains intact, purity [remains] integral, awareness [remains] firm [...]. Rejoice, therefore, because a virgin conceived, because she carried in

87 “Ante multum tempus, prophetavit Ezechiel: Vidi portam clausam; ecce Deus ante saecula ex ea procedebat pro salute mundi: Et erat iterum clausa, demonstrans Virginem, quia post partum remansit Virgo. Porta quam vidisti, Dominus solus transibit per illam.” (*Resp. Lez. II Fer. IV intra Dom. II Adv.* Quoted by Giuseppe Maria Toscano. *Il pensiero cristiano nell'arte* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1960), vol. 2, 130, n. 1).

88 The *Ave Regina Coelorum* is one of the four main Marian antiphons, along with the other three: *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, *Regina Caeli* and *Salve Regina*. The *Ave Regina Coelorum* traditionally is prayed or song after each of the canonical hours of the liturgy of the Hours. This prayer is especially used after Completes, the final canonical hour that is prayed before going to sleep. It is prayed between the Feast of Jesus' Presentation to the Temple (February 2) until Wednesday of Holy Week. Although the origin of this hymn is unknown, it is already found in a manuscript of the 12th century.

89 From the antiphon *Ave Regina Coelorum*, by an unknown author, already present in codices of the 12th century. Quoted by Toscano. *Il pensiero cristiano*, vol. 2, 130, n. 3. The full text of the antiphon *Ave Regina Coelorum* says:

“Ave, Regina Caelorum,
Ave, Domina Angelorum:
Salve, radix, salve, porta
Ex qua mundo lux est orta:
Gaude, Virgo gloriosa,
Super omnes speciosa,
Vale, o valde decora,
Et pro nobis Christum exora.”

her closed bowels the Lord of heaven, because she gave birth to a virgin, [...] she knew no man and is a mother, and after having the son she is still a virgin.⁹⁰

When concluding this synthetic panoramic view on the patristic and theological sources produced in the six centuries studied here, it is worth highlighting this evidence: the coincident exegeses of the Latin thinkers from the 6th to the 12th centuries over the text of Ezekiel, along with many others similar glosses of countless Greek-Eastern Christian writers until the end of the Middle Ages, contributed to establishing for more than a millennium a firm and concordant doctrinal tradition. This unanimous tradition proclaims that the *porta clausa* revealed to the prophet is a double metaphor of Christ and the Virgin Mary, in the various Mariological and Christological meanings already explained. Furthermore, this doctrinal tradition will be visually illustrated in some images of the Annunciation during the 14th and 15th centuries –when the iconography of this Marian theme becomes increasingly detailed and complex— that include a symbolic “closed door” in the home of Mary.

In this order of ideas, a careful comparative analysis between the exegetical texts of the religious writers and the figure of the closed door included in those exceptional images of the Annunciation would have allowed to confirm the following hypothesis: the artistic representation of this closed door in such images of the Annunciation constitutes an eloquent *visual metaphor* by which the intellectual authors of these works of art seek to illustrate the Mariological and Christological meanings brought to light by the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers and theologians when interpreting the *textual metaphor* expressed through the Christian exegeses on Ezekiel's *porta clausa*. However, we were forced to renounce here this bidirectional text/image comparison since it is a task that far exceeds the narrow limits of extension allowed in the current article.

90 “V.D. Sacramentum [...] in qua manet intacta castitas, pudor integer, firma conscientia [...]. Laetatur ergo quod virgo concepit, quod caeli Dominum clausis portavit visceribus, quod virgo edidit partum [...] virum non novit et mater est, et post filium virgo est.” (*Musaeum Italicum*, t. I, 298-299. Quoted by Fernand Cabrol, “Annonciation (Fête de l’)”. In *Dictionnaire d’Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, edited by Fernand Cabrol & Henri Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, Tome I, 2e Partie, 1924), 251.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The research exposed in this short paper seems to allow the following conclusions:

Although fully representative, the exegeses presented here correspond only to some of the many ecclesiastical thinkers of the Latin Church who interpreted the excerpt of Ezekiel between the middle of the 6th century and the end of the 12th. Along with them we could have added the extensive *corpus* of similar exegetical comments that we have registered on this Ezekiel's *porta clausa* in many Greek-Eastern Fathers from the Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, however, due to editorial restrictions of the journal in which it was published, this article could not include any of the comments of this latter group of Christian writers.

All these exegeses –both those explained in this paper and the numerous Greek-Eastern glosses that did not fit in it— coincide in interpreting Ezekiel's *porta clausa* according to two complementary extents, Christological and Mariological: as a symbol of both the virginal divine maternity of Mary and her perpetual virginity, as well as the supernatural conception and birth of God the Son made man.

Those plentiful and concordant exegeses that the Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches formulated on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* framed a solid and unanimous dogmatic tradition, with this ambivalent and indissolubly interconnected Christological and Mariological scopes already explained.

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